

Reverberations of Capitalist Power Politics: An Ecofeminist Reading of ‘The Spurned Goddess’ and ‘A Requiem to Mother Earth’

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Abstract: This paper attempts to discern the reciprocal relationship between women and nature and how the ego-centric attitude of men become detrimental to the whole humankind. The values attributed by the patriarchal society have belittled the roles of nature and women as mere ‘objects’, whose significance lies in connection with their usefulness to the masculine. In this paper I try to look into the unjust subjugation of women and nature in the guise of ‘development’ marks a difference from the ‘assured’ Quality of Life. The poems selected for the application of ecofeminism ‘The Spurned Goddess’ by the ‘Policeman Poet’ Ted Walter and ‘A Requiem to Mother Earth’ by the Pink-Era poet O.N.V Kurup explores marginalization of ‘Mother’ Earth and the oppressions suffered by womenfolk.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Gender inequality, Deep Ecology

Full Paper

Ecofeminism emerged as a response to the overexploitation of nature and its normalization by the humanity. The gendered binary of nature versus culture is a reflection of the overarching authority of masculine civilization over the feminine nature. ‘Naturalisations of women’ and ‘feminizations of nature’ are two entwined areas of interest that are laboriously deconstructed and dismantled by the ecofeminists quite recently. The androcentric as well as anthropocentric attitude of the mankind created a hierarchical existence that contemplates man as ‘the Self’ and women/nature as ‘the Other’. The sustaining gender inequality and capitalism triggered the issue of representing women and nature as pure commodities for consumption. Consequently, the notion of femininity as well as motherhood also became commercialized and this socio-cultural dimension has always been influenced and interrogated by the power politics of patriarchy.

Barry Commoner's First Law of Ecology that "Everything is connected to everything else" reminds one of the fact that nature and mankind are inseparable elements. The prominent poet Mary Oliver considers herself as an ally of nature:

"I believe in the soul – in mine ,and yours and the blue jays, and the pilot whales. I believe each goldfish flying away over the coarse ragweed has a soul , and the ragweed too, plant by plant, and the grains of earth as well. Not romantically do I believe this, nor poetically, nor emotionally, nor metaphorically ...but steadily, lumpishly , absolutely". (*Winter House*)

But with the advent of technology, the coalition of nature and mankind got deranged. Until then, mankind was a part of nature. But gradually, they occupied the central space and disconnected themselves from the nature. The impact that such a shift created was so immense that the mankind became all the more dominating and actualized themselves as the potentates of the physical world. According to Arne Naess, humans are not the "crown of creation", but just one of the members of the 'biotic community'. Deep Ecology, his significant contribution to Ecocriticism, further exemplifies this notion. It believes in the interconnectedness of all life forms and the need for being eco-centric. But human actions are so reckless that they take the natural world for granted as if this earth is inherited from our ancestors.

Nature became vulnerable in the hands of humans to the same degree as women to man. There is always an interconnectedness between women and nature because of the life promoting powers. The procreation ability and nurturing capacity ensured the nature-woman continuum. Even in this present society, there are states that celebrate rituals which acknowledge the fertility power of women and nature together. But the capitalist society disrupted this close relationship in multifarious ways. The anthropocentric and egocentric mentality of mankind viewed women and nature as mere commodities. This further exacerbated the hitherto existing inequality. The significant roles that the nature and women perform were undervalued and remained as mere products in the hands of patriarchal developed world. The exploitation of nature for commercial benefit has actually disrupted the ecological balance and sustainability. The poems 'Spurned Goddess' and 'A Requiem to Mother Earth' provide a warning against commercializing Mother Earth.

The rampant technological advancement tolls a death knell not only to nature, but also to all the life forms living here. The sons of Nature's bosom neglects the ache of the Mother Earth and lacerates themselves from their roots. In the poem *Spurned Goddess*, Ted Walter writes:

“Let us consider earth, explore the ache
That comes from losing touch with where we've been.
Fifteen billion years it took to make
the Earth from star-stuff, us.”

The antiquity of the Earth is not anymore worthy enough to her children. Capitalist economy treated nature, just like how they treated women, as a means to improve their economical status by overutilizing the renewable and non-renewable resources without proper sustainable management. The power to overexploit is vested in the hands of industrial sectors and as a result the natural resources are distributed unequally among the people. However, there are serious global environmental issues associated with the unequal distribution of resources and its mismanagement. According to MadhavGadgil:

“Society is therefore so organised that those with decisive influence upon the use of resources do not suffer from the consequences of their profligacy, in fact they often benefit from it”.

But if the same situation continues, the world will sooner get the apocalyptic call. This echoing of complete destruction is reverberating in O.N.V Kurup's *Requiem* where he laments:

“This Earth not yet dead
In the imminence of your death,
May your soul rest in peace!
This song I inscribe in my heart today
Is a requiem to you (and to me)!”

The “devouring” sons of Mother Earth had torn her into shreds in the guise of development. Development which initially came as a part of postcolonial project aimed at the welfare of all mankind so that their lifestyle would advance a great deal. But the project was not so impeccable as it seemed to be. Bacon's opinion that scientific

inquiry is “penetration of nature’s womb” underscores the fear that development leads to annihilation of nature. The rift between mankind and nature got aggravated with the arrival of technological development. The first developmental model was marked by the first social division of labour, that is male hunters and female gatherers.

According to Maria Mies,

“The object-relation to nature mediated through arms constitutes a relationship of dominance and not of cooperation. This relationship of dominance has become an integral element in all further production relations which men have established. It has become, in fact, the main paradigm of their productivity. Without dominance and control over nature, men cannot conceive of themselves as being productive.”

This suggests the possibility of specialized technologies to exploit and dominate the female and nature.

Here we can connect how the unjust subjugation of women and nature occurs in the guise of development. The natural world is sliced up by humans for their selfish motives. In the poem ‘Requiem’, the poet expresses his plight over the doings of the mother-ravishers:

“Then even as they danced merrily,
Gorging you slice by slice
All-suffering, you stood
Unprotesting!”

This marked a radical distinction from the ‘imagined’ quality of life. Without thinking about the repercussions that their deeds might engender, mankind indulges in endangering the natural resources furthermore. The profit-centered capitalist society fails to recognize the significance of mutual coexistence. Even the scientific modes of development resulted in transition from production to destruction. Ted Walter asks:

“we overfish, we tamper with the gene.
Let us consider Earth, explore the ache.
Residual pesticides, a lifeless lake.
A forest burns to ash. Remember green?
Fifteen billion years it took to make.

Forged first in cosmic fire we cannot fake
a species. Dead, it does not rise again.”

Overfishing, cloning, use of pesticides, slash and burn agriculture and other new modes of production are symbolizing in a way the rashness of destruction. The poet painfully asks: “Remember Green?” on seeing the cruelties of the capitalist class. Forests are “the matrix of rivers and water sources, and their destruction in tropical regions amounts to the desiccation and desertification of land” (Vandana Shiva). In *Staying Alive*, Vandana Shiva questions the meaning of progress at the stake of survival. She exhorts,

“The earth is rapidly dying: her forests are dying, her soils are dying, her waters are dying, her air is dying. Tropical forests, the creators of the world's climate, the cradle of the world's vegetational wealth, are being bull-dozed, burnt, ruined or submerged. In 1950, just over 100 million hectares of forests had been cleared -- by 1975, this figure had more than doubled.....Each year, 12 million hectares of forests are being eliminated from the face of the earth. At current rates of destruction, by the year 2050 all tropical forests will have disappeared, and with tropical forests, will disappear the diversity of life they support.”

In the poem ‘Requiem’ O.N.V Kurup censures the insensitive approach in which nature is commodified:

“ Parting our soft green mantle,
You suckled them at your breast-
As they grew, they discovered
A strange thirst (their last!)-
A thirst for the blood
Of your sacred heart!”

The children of Earth has the least respect for her. When they irreverently calls her the ‘spurned Goddess’, Ted Walter decries that

“Fifteen billion years it took to make
this peopled planet. Was it a mistake?
Will we find the slate can be wiped clean?”

Man forgot to revere the ancestral glory of nature when he advanced technologically, industrially and scientifically. What he fails to understand is that once the natural order is disturbed, humanity is helpless to restore it.

Although the poems are written from dissimilar geographical settings, the similar concerns in their voice is a warning to the mankind. It is the duty of the humanity to preserve the nature for all the future generations to come. Here, the main obstacle is that man fails to realize his own insignificance and triviality when compared with the all-embracing standpoint of nature.

Earth is plunging deeply into an unprecedented environmental crisis at an alarming rate. The only thing we can do about it is to change our behavior. As Cheryll Glotfelty reminds us in the Introduction to *Ecocriticism Reader*: “If we’re not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.”

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