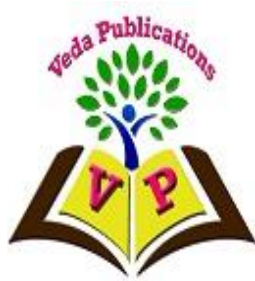


**ECOFEMINISM AND DECONSTRUCTION –A MELDED STUDY OF SCHISM**

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Nature and women are inseparable entities. Both share common characteristics in general. Though appear to be weak and meagre, they have latent power and magnitude if disturbed, uprooting the host of trouble. From time immemorial, right from Vedas it is defined that man is the supreme Almighty i.e., God. Whereas all the remaining existence is feminine only (Vedas).

Ecofeminism is a study of both nature and women. It emphasises that both Nature & Women must be respected. At times there is an astute situation where nature too takes its chance to morose its counterpart, making ecofeminism to manifest itself in a deconstructive way. My perusal aims to focus on this perspective, along with other factors and bring to fore how this weaker sex suffered and got affected by the interference of nature. To facile this task, I, herewith, have taken the role played by ecofeminism and its deconstruction in the novel, '**sila nerangalil sila manidhargal**' by **D.Jayakanthan**. The portrayal and disquisition of women characters looking through the glasses of this novel clearly depicts the zeitgeist of their time, thereby insinuating the subtle role of deconstructive ecofeminism played on the women characters.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism, Deconstruction, Schism.*



INTRODUCTION

Nature and women are inseparable entities. Both share common characteristics in general. Though appear to be weak and meagre, they have latent power and magnitude if disturbed, uprooting the host of trouble. Just as nature suffers from human intervention disturbing its sanctity, in the form of cyclones, famine, earthquakes, forest fire etc, women too suffers due to its other gender (men) intervention, where their sanctity is disturbed on all fronts namely socially, biologically, psychologically, culturally, economically and left completely doomed and devastated. Being vestige as mother, giver and caretaker at the surface, both nature and women, are finessed at the deeper level thereby left unidentified and sullen. Nevertheless, agony and distress is a lynchpin for both nature and women, perceived from different perspectives and personalities

FEMINISM

The destiny of women, having undergone struggle for ages, got some liberty through the ism called feminism. This school of thought fought for the emancipation of this so called weaker sex ,physically,biologically,emotionally,intellectually, psychologically,by the OTHER gender. This ism slowly turned into a movement and looked into the issues women underwent and achieved to

solve some and divided itself into three or four according to the milieu.

Feminist movement have campaigned and strived to achieve liberty for various rights of women like right to vote, receive equal education and wages, to monitor and work in public sectors and even for reproduction rights.(citation from Wikipedia)

Thinkers of Feminism have produced different kinds of theories based on different disciplines to explore and enhance women rights.(citation from Wikipedia).Diverging itself as first, second and third waves focusing on liberal, socialist and radical perspectives usually called the 'BIG THREE' schools of feminist thought.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Nature and women are inseparable entities. Both share common characteristics in general. Though appear to be weak and meagre, they have latent power and magnitude if disturbed, uprooting the host of trouble. From time immemorial, right from Vedas it is defined that man is the supreme Almighty i.e., God. Whereas all the remaining existence is feminine only (Vedas).

Just as feminism evolved for the uplift meant of women, environmentalism confines itself to the conservation of nature. It deals with the relationships between living organisms and has wider applications with the conservation of



nature.(encyclopaedia Britannica).With the growing urbanisation and industrialisation Neo-rich class/money making class has shown little regard to environment and began to cause harm to its flora and fauna. Nature is represented as motherland, mother earth as it produces and gives food to living beings. . Nevertheless, agony and distress is a lynchpin for both nature and women, perceived from different perspectives and personalities.

Environmentalism or environmental rights is a broad philosophy, ideology, and social movement regarding concerns for environmental protection and improvement of the health of the environment, particularly as the measure for this health seeks to incorporate the impact of changes to the environment on humans, animals, plants and non-living matter. While environmentalism focuses more on the environmental and nature-related aspects of green ideology and politics, ecologism combines the ideology of social and environmentalism. It advocates the preservation and restoration of nature. Environmentalists attempt to conserve nature and preserve it over to posterity.

FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM –BIRTH OF ECOFEMINISM

Feminism and environmentalism synthesised to a common standpoint, as both focus on the liberation of the weaker phenomena. Both isms came up with their

agenda on the restoration and realisation of values and their nuances. Just as nature is exploited, the same treatment was meted out in the case of women. Male Chauvenism relegated her to be second rate citizen or “Second Sex”. Indiscriminate exploitation of resources causing heavy and inseparable damage to the environment the same is reflected towards the opposite sex of God’s creation. A Plethora of feminists raised their voice against the atrocities on women and compared her position to the recent degradation of nature/environment. The oppression meted out to the feminine gender is taken in par to the destruction of nature. The genderisation of nature occurred as the exploitation of nature coincides with the exploitation of women. The naming and descriptions of nature’s incarnations like rivers, mountains, peaks with feminine eloquence unintentionally paved its way to view nature undergoing the same atrocities as its counterpart. Male Patriarchy and male dominated mindset forced and made to confine herself to kitchen room or to meet the needs of his desires. She is one of Gods beautiful creation like nature to execute his plans to recreate his likeners. But the perverted thinking of masculinity subjugated her and usurped her privileges of being a human. The then feminist critics intervened to protect her rights and compared her position to the recent plunders and ravages of nature which amounts to



exploitation. The male patriarchal domination was extolled for both nature and women. Henceforth, many feminist critics were placed in a position to look upon nature as a meek, oppressed along with their weaker sex and viewed the parallel between the environmental degradation and oppression of women in the world and fused both nature and women into a single concept, which paved the way for the off shooting of the so called melded school of thought namely "Ecofeminism".

ECOFEMINISM

Ecofeminism is a study of both nature and women. It emphasises that both Nature & Women must be respected. At times there is an astute situation where nature too takes its chance to morose its counterpart, making ecofeminism to manifest itself in a deconstructive way.

The concept of gender became the prime focus of many thinkers to analyse the traits and nuances of women and nature. Some phenomenon like climate change, degradation and exploitation of natural resources and beauty of nature were viewed in par to the exploitation of women. Both share common characteristics, in which the consequences of the atrocities meted out from the louts is a form of decimation per se. The exploitation of the passive nature is overlapped with the oppression and suppression of women.

Henceforth, some feminists began to analyse the relationships between human and the natural world and projected their perspectives in myriad ways for the protection of both nature and women. It uses the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders, a revaluating of non-patriarchal or non linear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections and the merits of intuition and collaborations (reference from Britannica).

To these traits ecofeminism develops a kind of dedication to nature and creates an understanding the concepts between women and nature. Particularly, it focuses on the oppression and exploitation meted out to nature and women in common. It also investigates the unjust treatment of male patriarchy on women in general and natural world in particular. It also advocates the importance of the existence and preservation of equality of gender and avoid gender bias of all forms and sorts and emphasises on the conservation of nature to the posterity by the humans.

DECONSTRUCTION IN ECOFEMINISM

A harkback and nethermost analysis of ecofeminism paves way to deconstruct its approaches and concepts. An attempt to deconstruct the etymological fallacy of ecofeminism, as marked in deconstruction theory, the objectives of ecofeminism makes



necessary to learn about the basic theory and concepts. Some of the rudimentary concepts of deconstructive theory helps for the interpretation and analysis of basic tenets of ecofeminism thereby enabling to understand ecofeminist theory from a different perspective. The theory of deconstruction, though a little flummox, for its discernment of structure and meaning of literary texts and other phenomenon, aids in understanding the agenda of ecofeminism in a varied angle.

The theory of deconstruction was proposed by French Philosopher, Jacques Derrida who insisted on the discernment of text and meaning. He uses the word 'deconstruction' from Martin Heidegger's 'Destraktion', for a concept which he implemented for the reading of any text. Extremely contrary to the approaches and views of western philosophy which depends on logocentrism and the belief on platonic forms. Derrida proceeds to explain the immanence of meaning within the theory and text per se. The most famed phrase, '*there is nothing outside the text*' conveys the concept in a credulous way, that the meaning and its interpretation lies in the hands of the reader itself. Drawing most of the thoughts from the principles of Saussure, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Derrida puts forth his theory of deconstruction labelling his arguments like '**difference** (a portmanteau word of differ and defer), **binary opposition**, **metaphysics of presence** etc.,.

Deconstructive readings, on the other hand, viewed any literary piece as a melded work on the surface and symbolic images and interpretations but as examples of the text showing difference between meanings of different types, whenever the text is under interpretation. Any work is scrutinized with its relation and connectivity with other works or discourses, thereby refining and redefining its meaning again and again, and presenting new perspectives and ideas in different ways. The theory of deconstruction played a vital role for most of the critics who tried to find out undefined answers to the nature of language, how meaning is related to the language and how language and literary discourses are interconnected.

INFLUENCE OF THE TERM "DIFFERENCE" AND BINARY OPPOSITIONS ON FEMINISM AND ECOFEMINIST THEORIES

The term 'difference' was coined by Derrida to define the basic concept of differences underlying in the text and its meaning. The term expresses to show both difference and to defer its meaning...knowing both the difference and deferral of meaning enables the reader to understand deeper meaning of the text and also understand the relationship with the meaning of other words opposite to the meaning of the word. The meaning of the word or a text is better understood with its opposites. This attempt of



finding different meanings with different interpretations stresses the discernment of the text and its meaning and assures that meaning is not fixed. Incidentally, the meaning of a literary text or a concept is better understood with its opposites. The system of dualism like public/private, man/woman, institution /nature ,animal/(wo)man, enables for the understanding and analysis of concepts and theories. The concepts of binary opposites becomes the bottom-line for feminists in general and ecofeminists in particular. The dualism of man/woman as binary opposition made many feminists to explain the characteristics and traits of the weaker gender in terms of the absence of the notions of the stronger one as assumed generally. The essential and critical notions of the gender identity were clearly viewed with the deconstruction theory. The presence of characteristics in one gender is defined clearly with the absence of the same in the other, thereby clearly identifying the concepts of femininity for which the feminists are fighting for generations. The claims of feminist political demands were challenged with the undercut of deconstruction as seen in the works of Judith Butler's concept of **Gender Performativity**. Similarly the notable quote of Simone de Beauvoir, *One is not born, but becomes a women* by deconstructing the biological and social aspects of women also proves evidence for the discernment of gender and its notion.

The application of deconstructive concepts of inversion, opposites and explanation is eminent in the concept of ecofeminism as well. Thus the concepts in the theory of deconstruction find ways for the understanding and analysis of feminism to challenge and support its traits.

WOMEN'S PRACTICES AND KNOWLEDGE IN AGRICULTURE-VIEWED THROUGH THE GLASS OF DECONSTRUCTION AND ECOFEMINISM

Some ecofeminists consider that women possess wide knowledge in agriculture than men, extremely contrary to the prevailing notion that men are able agriculturalists. According to Vandana Shiva, a renowned ecofeminist from India traces the practices followed in agriculture were more of women knowledge than men. She proceeds on to say that just as male dominate women in agricultural techniques, even crops follow the same gender bias. According to her, the cash crops cultivated with technological innovations dominate and drive away traditional crops which are meant for food. She attributes the concept of gender bias to nature and crops as well. She cites the example of the eucalyptus (cash crop) standing as a symbol for the marginalisation of women's ecological knowledge. In this context ,the theory of deconstruction of binary oppositions can be applied to interpret the concept of gender bias. The presence of the characteristics of one paves way for the understanding with its absence of



the same in the the other. Here the cash crops/food crops (concepts related to nature) are viewed as binary oppositions, and these concepts are genderised and stands as an illustration on the basic tenets of ecofeminism. Shiva proceeds to say that even the herbicides kill gentle grasses which are used to make household articles expresses the strand of gender bias. The genetically engineered plants produced for economical purpose spoiling the organic quality of the natural crop shows the gender bias. Even the cultivable and arable land are developed in the name of industrialisation it is also the gender bias. In this way, the concept of gender bias, the feminist trait, inserted into nature by genderising and analysed the features through the theory of dualism, binary oppositions paves way for the understanding the melded concept deconstruction and ecofeminism.

OBSERVING THE NOVEL OF D. JAYAKANTHAN AS A MELDED PLAY OF ECOFEMINISM AND DECONSTRUCTION.

D.Jayakanthan, a prolific writer in Tamil literature is well-known for his novels portraying kaleidoscopic feminine personalities. He was awarded Sahitya Academy (1972), Jnanpith Award (2002), PadmaBhushan (2009) and many prestigious awards to his credit. Most of his novels revolve around characters, particularly women from different strata of the social hierarchy, class and community.

The novel, "**Sila Nerangalil Sila Manidhargal**" (1972) gained him wide accolade and earned the prestigious Sahitya Academy award to his credit. The novel revolves around 'Ganga', the female protagonist, the incidents happening in her life with some expected and unexpected twists and turns and being entangled in the cobwebs of her orthodox Brahmin customs and traditions and her final deviation and addiction to alcohol as a panacea to her sufferings, her transformation from the old orthodox Brahmin lady and emerging as a helpless radical woman. The postulates of ecofeminism play a subtle role in this novel when viewed with the perspective of deconstruction. The protagonist name, Ganga, an icon of nature famed for its purity, sanctity and heritage is decimated in the hands of Prabhu, with the intervention of rain, a very important natural phenomena to be observed, also as phenomena of nature. The downpour on that day created an atmosphere for the protagonist to get raped in the car and spoiled in the hands of Prabhu, the male protagonist. The entire novel gets started to portray its proceedings with this act, paving way for the twists and turns in the life of Ganga. This concept, forming the basic plot of the novel demonstrates the deconstructive approach of ecofeminism. Nature which is viewed and gendered as female acted as an opponent to its counterpart instead of rendering support and



aid. The binary opposition of same ecofeminist images of Nature/women in this context, acts as an upper gender like the male, the former dominating and suppressing the latter, can be witnessed in the very beginning of the novel. The concept of dualism and then the inversion can be sensed with this incident in the novel. The typical deconstructive binary opposites of nature/women can be seen alternatively with the conventional male/female concepts in this novel.

CONCLUSION

The struggles of weaker gender paved way for the emergence of many movements and waves of feminism, which stood for their rights, emancipation, liberty, freedom and individuality. With the changing milieu, ecofeminism began to view nature's exploitation at the same strand as injustice to women. The genderisation of nature enabled them to place nature and its oppression in the line of the weaker sex, paving way for a different school of thought namely ecofeminism. The views of gender bias as put forth by many feminists and ecofeminists of bygone and present periods slightly deviated its way to analyse the concepts in a contrary view making the use of "Deconstruction". Thus the theory of deconstruction with its concepts of dualism and binary opposites is instrumental to present the traits of ecofeminism in an unconventional and deviated approach. The

incident in the Tamil novel, 'Sila Nerangalil Sila Manidargal' is taken as a mild illustration to depict the above melded approach and justify the schism of Ecofeminism and Deconstruction

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