

**SUBJUGATED VOICES—AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

**Roopashree U**

Department of English,  
Seshadripuram Academy of Business Studies,  
Bangalore

The legacy of subjugation of nature and its resources is more blatant in the present day scenario of neo colonial tendencies associated with unbridled capitalism; so is constant displacement and marginalization of the people associated with and sustained by nature. It is always those people existing on the periphery of the socio economic spheres who are affected as their voices can be effectively silenced by the dominant power structures. Degradation of women and degradation of nature being very typical in today's capitalist world, we have reached a stage where Mother Nature Herself is in need of a Mother who could fortify her. But the irony here is that, the mother also needs a fortification in a Patriarchal society.

The woman is doubly marginalized as she is subjected to prevalent patriarchal norms cutting across socio economic classes as well as the state machinery. Thus her voice is muted by the power structures of her class as well as of the state. Both nature and woman are thus reduced to the state of being manipulated by the socio economic exigencies of the dominant classes.

Women Writers like Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and Vandana Shiva have been radically articulate in countering and exposing the strategies adopted by the

dominant forces to effectively marginalize the already marginalized. The paper intends to look at the views of these writers through an ecofeminist perspective as they are concerned with blatant disregard shown to both nature and woman.

Like the lower stratum of the rocks getting eroded due to erosion and in course of time being replaced by fresh layer of rocks, so are the troubles of the marginalized going unnoticed amidst the strong and powerful upper stratum of the society. The voice of the marginalized that has to traverse the political and power structures are often unheard more so when it is a woman in question. The women and nature have been the easy targets of the male dominated societies from time immemorial. Hence the assertion *Mother Nature Herself is in need of a Mother who could fortify her* has been overtly expressed through the writings of activists like Vandana Shiva, Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy.

"Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

*ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue*

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women" [1].

The ecofeminist perspective portrays women as the producers of life. All the three writers being social activists try to raise their voices pro the peripheral voices in nature striving to bring global equality in the acceptance of women.

Both Mahasweta Devi and Arundhati Roy have been enrapt towards the Naxalbari movement that gained impetus during the year 1967. There was a successful peasant rebellion in the Naxalbari area of the northern part of West Bengal. An alliance of peasant and intellectual sparked off a number of Naxalbaris all over India. This movement targeted the long-established despotism of the landless peasantry and peripatetic farm workers, sustained through an unofficial government-landlord connivance that too easily evaded the law. Indeed, one might say that legislation seemed to have an eye to its own future circumvention. It is worth remarking that this coalition of peasant and intellectual-with long histories of apprenticeship precisely on the side of the intellectual-has been recuperated in the West by both ends of the polarity that constitutes a 'political spectrum.'

"Dopdi" [2] (the original title of the story in Bengali dialect) is a famous story by Mahasweta Devi that borrows its name from one of the characters in Mahabharata

i.e. DRAUPADI where Draupadi's Vastra apaharan by Dushyasana fuelled the war of Mahabharata. Mahasweta Devi's 'Dopdi' is set against the backdrop of the Naxalbari movement among the tribal of west Bengal. The story is of a mutineer, Dopdi who is hunted down by the government in the attempt to subjugate the tribal groups. The government exercises tyranny at its best in the form of Kidnapping, murder and rape, and any tribal death in custody is inevitably made to appear an accident. But Dopdi who like the Draupadi in the Mahabharata is raped and abused and deprived of food and water, does not capitulate. The climax of the story sees a bold and vicious Dopdi confront her offenders naked and bloody. Unlike the Draupadi in the epic, who is rescued by lord Krishna, Mahasweta Devi's Dopdi evinces deviance with an unclad appearance challenging the reprobates to outdo the solidity not of her body but her rebellious soul.

Arundhati Roy in her essay "Walking with the comrades", [3] also addresses the issue of the Naxal movement. She writes, "The antagonists in the forest are disparate and unequal in almost every way. On one side is a massive paramilitary force armed with the money, the firepower, the media, and the hubris of an emerging Superpower. On the other, ordinary villagers armed with traditional weapons, backed by a superbly organized, hugely motivated Maoist guerrilla fighting force with an extraordinary and violent history of armed rebellion. The Maoists and the paramilitary are old adversaries and have fought older avatars of each other several times before:



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

*ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue*

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

Telangana in the 1950s; West Bengal, Bihar, Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh in the late 1960s and 1970s; and then again in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra from the 1980s all the way through to the present. They are familiar with each other's tactics, and have studied each other's combat manuals closely. Each time, it seemed as though the Maoists (or their previous avatars) had been not just defeated, but literally, physically exterminated. Each time, they have re-emerged, more organized, more determined and more influential than ever. Today once again the insurrection has spread through the mineral-rich forests of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal—homeland to millions of India's tribal people, dreamland to the corporate world.

Arundhati Roy brings to the fore the subjugation of the marginalized in today's capitalist world.

The famous ecologist Vandana Shiva in her book "Staying alive" [4] writes, with the destruction of forests, water and land, we are losing our life-support systems. This destruction is taking place in the name of 'development' and progress, but there must be something seriously wrong with a concept of progress that threatens survival itself. The violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to the dominant development model, is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance for themselves, their families, their societies. This violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both, and forms the basis of the

current development paradigm. Seen from the experiences of Third World women, the modes of thinking and action that pass for science and development, respectively, are not universal and humanly inclusive, as they are made out to be; modern science and development are projects of male, western origin, both historically and ideologically. They are the latest and most brutal expression of a patriarchal ideology which is threatening to annihilate nature and the entire human species. The rise of a patriarchal science of nature took place in Europe during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as the scientific revolution. During the same period, the closely related industrial revolution laid the foundations of a patriarchal mode of economic development in industrial capitalism. Contemporary science and development conserve the ideological roots and biases of the scientific and industrial revolutions even as they unfold into new areas of activity and new domains of subjugation.

Be it through science, technology or economy the subjugation of nature has an impact on the lives of the marginalized and especially the women who are doubly marginalized. All the three writers have voiced their concerns to foster the Mother Nature (also symbolizing the subjugated women) who has till today been evaded by a strong patriarchal fortification.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- [1] Mary Mellor 1997 From the introduction to "Feminism & Ecology" (New York: New York University Press) p1



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

*ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue*

*ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3*

[2] Mahasweta Devi 2010 *National Journal on Advances in Computing and Management* vol 1

[3] Arundhati Roy 2013 *Broken Republic* (England: Penguin Books)

[4] Vandana Shiva 2010 *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited)