



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

ECOLOGICAL FACETS DEEP-ROOTED IN INDIAN SAGA IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE MISTRESS OF SPICES AND THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS

M. SAKTHI VARMAN¹, S. NITHYA DEVI²

¹M.Phil. Research Scholar, Dept of English, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore

²Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Dr.N.G.P. Arts and Science College, Coimbatore



M. SAKTHI VARMAN

ABSTRACT

In 1970 a novelistic study starts and coins as Ecocriticism. Cheryl Glotfelty, one of the chief originators in the study defines Ecocriticism as, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". The word Ecocriticism coined in 1978 by William Rueckert. Many Indian writers like Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Arundhati Roy contribute in their works to this branch of ecocriticism. Chitra Banerjee uses the diverse basics of nature like fire and water in the first novel, The Mistress of Spices. She makes use of aquatic life as the integral part of setting in the work. Indian Spices are entwined in the novel that is used by Tilo skilfully to cure and restore to health the Asian community in Oakland. Nature is presented in all its forms and the full cycle of creation, preservation and destruction is deployed. In the second novel, The Palace of Illusions she presents man as a self-centered egotist and how he surpasses Nature. Also highlights man with adopted attitude of subjugation, exploitation and destruction towards Nature. The Palace of Illusions is a re-reading of the Mahabharata, from an ecocritical standpoint. Divakaruni re-tells the Indian epic Mahabharata venturing Draupadi as protagonist and narrator. She censures men whose ego and insatiable greed resulted in the destruction of both his kind and nature in the War of Kurukshetra. This present paper aims to study multi-faceted ecological aspects in the myths of India from the perspective of The Mistress of Spices and The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

Keywords: Ecological, Ego Vs. Eco, Existentialism, Exploitation, Myth.

Ecocriticism is the study of relation between environment and living organisms. The word ecocriticism used since last few decades, not very popular. This term involves the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment and their relationships with that environment. It also concerns man's relationships with his physical environment are mirrored in literature.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is born on July 29, 1956 in Kolkata. She is one among the most talented women writers of Indian Diaspora. She is an Indian-American author, Poet, Novelist, Short Story writer, Children's fiction writer, Book Reviewer and Columnist. Her works mostly deal with the themes of diaspora, gender discriminations, magic realism, fantasy, identity, and ecofeminism, etc. She is known for her unique style of narration. The Mistress of Spices (1997) is her debut novel shortlisted for Orange Prize in 2000. It depicts the

daily life of immigrants living in California. In the novel, Chitra Banerjee employs a lot of natural elements to make the descriptions more vivid. Indian Spices play a key role in the novel which is equivalent to the protagonist. The whole novel revolves around the relationship of the protagonist with spices. Tilo, the heroine endorses the power of sensing spices. Spices are personified to showcase their foreseeable role in the novel. This paper aims to analyze the effects of spices on the pivotal character from an ecocritical perspective. Nature is God's gift to Mankind. It is omniscient and consider as a creator, preserver, protector as well as destroyer. Nature holds an unsurpassable place in one's life. The Life of human beings is highly interlinked with the environment they live in. As literature scrutinizes human life it has recorded the importance of nature in it.

Ecocriticism serves as a bridge between literature, nature and human beings. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Tilo, the protagonist is a trained expert in perceiving the secret powers of spices, and dedicates her life to it. Her expertise helps her in sensing the problems of people. Tilo (Nayan Tara) was born in India. She as a girl child gets neglected by her family members. During her childhood when her mother fails to feed due to fever nature becomes Tilo's mother and feeds her. Nature has the eminence of aiding people in the crisis. Tilo becomes closer to nature and entangles her whole life with varied elements of nature from her birth. She is considered a special child as she has an inborn magical power of predicting the future which she uses for solving the problems of the villagers. Nature brings change in her life. As her fame goes beyond seas and mountains pirates kidnap her and make her as queen of pirates and call her as 'Bhagyavathi', who brings luck in their life.

She does not liked to be as a pirate queen. In order to flee from the pirates she sends her calling thought over the water and it helps her with a typhoon. She gets released and is saved by the serpents of under water. Water and fire become an integral part of her life and brings forth change in her life and takes her to an unknown world of spices and magic led by the serpents. She is engaged to a mystifying island where she is trained by the First

Mother to use spices as healing elements. She gets elected by the First Mother as the spice girl and named as Tilo after sesame, the spice of nourishment. It means life -giver, and restorer of health and hope.

Tilo's life is highly tangled with nature as she has the unique power of understanding the spices. She discovers herself as a mistress of spices. She acts according to the instruction given by the spices around her. Later, Tilo runs a famous spice bazaar in California. All spices in her shop bow to her command and surrender their magic powers and their properties. Every Indian spice found in her store could interact with her. It serves as a companion to Tilo it has the rights to warn and punish her. As red chilli is a symbol of danger it warns her when she thinks about the American guy, Raven. In order to give importance to spices, Chitra Banerjee has personified the spices. Spices are depicted as an embodiment of the native culture.

The novel *The Mistress of Spices* is divided into fifteen chapters of which thirteen chapters are named after different spices and also presented an astounding story on spices with a mix of nature. Thus, Nature becomes an essential part in the setting of the novel. It helps her to describe her thoughts in grandeur. It also helps her in portraying the emotions and the feeling of the narrator. It also reflects the tradition of the land the spices belong to. The First Mother lives on the island where Tilo lands and spends her time in the mystical island to learn from the old one. From the magical island Tilo is transported through the fire of Shampati (the Eastern Phoenix) to Oakland. Chitra Banerjee uses the rudiments of nature to surpass the world of nature. The novelist uses similes, metaphors, and adjectives from the nature to bring depth to her narrations and descriptions.

Nature is filled with colours and has its own significance. Chitra Banerjee employs colours to describe certain things. Yellow colour signifies the new-year where green suggests harvest, and red denotes the luck of bride. The five elements of nature the air, water, earth, space, and fire are masterly interwoven in the story. Nature serves as a deciding authority in the novel. Raven, the lover of

Tilo is a wealthy alcoholic man. His life is renewed by the guidance of a raven which he sees in a hospital. Raven is instructed by the raven to meet Tilo which brings him the joy of life. Maya, the name given by Raven to Tilo, reveals the reality of her thinking over earthly paradise. However, they apprehend that a new world can be created from the vestiges of the distraught world.

Thus the nature's cycle comes beside with the whole story from the beginning to the end. From the birth of Nayantara alias Tilo as a foreseer, Nature is preserved and re-established towards the end of the novel. The powers given to Tilo are taken back and is shattered as she over crosses the rules of getting emotionally and physically attached to Raven. Towards the end, the overwhelming earthquake signifies the Indian philosophy of creation, preservation, and destruction completing the nature's cycle. The earthquake comes to determine the critical situation of Tilo. The earthquake destroys everything but not her faith. Nature is the great healer of life. It can protect, it can demolish, and it can rejuvenate life from the destruction.

In the second novel *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) is a re-reading of the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*, from an ecocritical perspective. It is half-history, half-myth, and wholly magical which is narrated by Draupadi, the protagonist. An investigation of the narration highlights the novel as a review of war and environmental destruction. She reproaches men whose ego and unquenchable greed effected in the massive destruction of both his class and nature in the War of Kurukshetra. In her mythic tale, Divakaruni clearly voices her concerns for nature and criticizes man's anthropocentric attitude.

The novel traces Draupadi's life from her birth to her the path of the great departure and presents the entire chain of events that led to the War of Kurukshetra resulting in death of millions and widespread destruction of man and his environment, and thereby marking the end of Dvapara Yuga. This novel gives acute awareness of Nature, its relationship to humankind and the human attitude towards it. The Great War causes

enormous havoc to human civilisation leaving behind rotting corpses, wailing mothers, widowed brides and orphaned children, and also overlooks the destruction it caused to nature. The entire story revolves around Man's ego and its subsequent war, Divakaruni brings in the attention to nature. War from prehistoric times has confounded nature and by time its devastation has increased manifold.

The author recounts how Yudhisthir went into depression after his victory in Kurushetra. This objection against man-made damage finds its most indisputable tone in Vyasa, the author of the epic itself. Divakaruni is also decisive of the greed and abusive vein in man that destroys, subjugates and exploits nature for his selfish needs and to satisfy his ego. Arjun's act of setting fire to the entire forest in Khandav is an evidence of it. So extensive is the demolition that scarcely any cries of animals are heard when the Pandavas came to build their kingdom, Indrapastha, in it. Any type of settlement in the backwoods is anthropocentric while by using natural resources according to their whims and fancies, man reduces nature in a hierarchy, as if they survive for humans. This human attitude that regards nature as its subsidiary is strongly condemned by Ecocriticism. During their exile in forest, the Pandavas thoughtlessly used forest resources for their survival. In the novel, Draupadi relates how Nakul and Sahadev brought fawns for her to pet. They feel no regret to separate a new born from its mother thereby reflecting their anthropocentric attitude.

Nature brings the ideas of freedom from the constraints of life. Draupadi often dislikes her existence within the concrete palace walls of Kampilya and Hastinapur. She wants to escape to a world of flowers, trees and birds for her company. Even when Dussasan tries to unclthe her after her husbands, the Pandavas lost her in the dice game; she thinks of Krishna and finds herself in a tranquil garden.

Nature is a healer of pain as well as a residence of freedom. Draupadi after witnessing the ravages of cruel war, the horrible ends of her loved ones as well as her foes. She learns to let go of her ego. She no longer tries to administer over affairs

but discusses things with her elders, even with Kunti whom she has detested ever since she gets married to her sons. Thus, this change is obvious in her attitude towards nature for she no longer tries to tame neither men nor nature.

Additionally, the relationship of Bheeshma with Nature justifies a critical investigation in the novel. Bheeshma is the son of the river-goddess, Ganga, so an intimate relationship between him and Nature is perfectly suggested. The depressions and hesitations resulting from court affairs and chiefly the enmity between the Kauravas and Pandavas often led him to find peace and comfort in nature. Divakaruni's retelling of the epic raises serious concerns about environment. The author seems to emphasize that the root of the problems of man and environment is the same and it is human ego. She attempts to bring out the issues of environment as voiced and treated as serious issue in this novel.

Thus, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's both the selected novels are filled with the diverse facets and the elements of nature and its inevitable role in the life of the people and in the Indian Myths.

Works Cited

- Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Mistress of Spices*. Great Britain: Doubleday. 1997. Print.
- _____. *The Palace of Illusions*. Noida: Picador. 2009. Print.
- Glofelty, Cheryl and Harold Fromm. (ed.) *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.1996. Print.
-