

Woman-Nature Interconnection in Titas Ekti Nadir Naam (A River Called Titas)

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ABSTRACT: Women and nature are related to each other through a patriarchal system of dominance. Both the human and natural worlds are interconnected and humans can influence nature and also natural changes influence the human world. Due to the hierarchy based patriarchal dualistic social structure, women along with the minor social groups fall prey to the oppressive treatment by the patriarchy. Ecofeminism focuses on the oppression and subordination done to both nature and woman because according to ecofeminism these are related to each other. Natural disasters affect humans but the effect is not equal. As women hold lesser position in the society they face most of the harmful consequences. Focusing on the idea of disharmony between social and natural world this paper discusses the subordination portrayed in Ritwik Ghatak's Bengali film *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam (A River Called Titas)* and the unequal effect of natural disaster faced mainly by the women and people of minor class, the Malo to understand the women-nature interconnection ecofeminism talks about.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, woman-nature interconnection, social disharmony, patriarchal dualistic structure.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Human history is a part of the natural history of the planet. Any natural history that is devoid of human history is impossible. Because humans can influence ecological change as they "have an agency in determining" the change, the history of climate change is neither purely "natural" nor "human" (Chakrabarty, 2012). It is really important to look into this issue of natural change because, "Humans today are not only the dominant species on the planet, they also collectively constitute...a geological force that determines the climate of the planet [which puts] 'survival of the species' on a 'world-wide scale'...largely in question" (Chakrabarty, 2012, p.15). The global climatic change is human induced and humans have become a geological force that causes natural changes. Though the negative change in nature is human made, everyone is not equally impacted within them. Ecofeminism stresses on this unequal impact of natural change relating it to the women.

Though rooted in western ecological and feminist philosophical thinking, ecofeminism is very much relevant to the study of subordination and degradation of both women and nature in Bangladesh. Neither of the oppressions is only a western issue. Both are universal and struggles of women and minor social classes based on ecology in third world countries are far more acute and urgent (Gaard, 1993). The subordination, oppression and degradation that ecofeminism discusses about can easily be traced in Ritwik Ghatak's film *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam (A River Called Titas)* (Ghatak, 1973). The film is about a Malo fishing village and it captures the songs, rituals and rhythms of a once self-sufficient community and culture. It documents a way of life that has disappeared because of natural catastrophe, modernization and class conflict. This film shows a harmonious society where Hindu fishermen and Muslim peasants coexists peacefully till the drying up of the river. This film does not capture the causes of the natural disaster directly rather it focuses on the interconnection of nature and women. It portrays the struggle and subordination of the women and minor class by the social superiors and through this shows the destruction people causes on nature and also its subsequent effect on human life.

A film is the visual representation of human world and the interactions within it. Nature doesn't act as an active performer in these interactions rather it provides a "physical backdrop to be acted upon" (Seager, 1993). To understand these interactions ecocriticism can help largely as it discusses the connection between human and nature. Furthermore, ecofeminism being a branch of ecocriticism argues that there are connections between women and nature and by observing one the other can be understood because both are subject to the oppressive treatment of patriarchy and "Filmmakers are doubly responsible for what they present in nature films, if ignored they only contribute to the earth's destruction through a patriarchal view" (Graziano, 2005, p.19). To discuss a film from ecofeminist point of view helps to understand how the women in the film are

related to nature, and also, the different dramatic events happening in their lives are influenced by and influence the course of nature.

Ecofeminists incorporates feminist philosophies with the ecological philosophy of preserving and destructing. Ecofeminism is an intersection of environmental theory and feminist theory (Casselot, 2016, p.75). Like feminism's different beliefs and discourses, ecofeminism also has several discourses. This paper discusses several of the discourses from works of some prominent ecofeminist critiques and in light of those arguments try to understand the ecofeminist relation between women and nature portrayed in the movie.

The movie's focus is not only the subordination of women or nature but also it portrays the atrocities done by the upper class on lower class and the consequences of natural disaster on the entire Malo community. This film is about the dependence of human on nature and also the result of natural disaster on human life. Besides, it also focuses on the violation of nature by human. This paper will use different ecofeminist explanations to discuss the film's portrayal of women's subordination as a way of understanding the interconnection between the women subordination and destruction of nature and the consequence of natural destruction on human life specially the underprivileged part of it.

Social Hierarchy and Disharmony

Nature is continuously used by humans for generating manifold benefit. While getting the best out of nature humans are continuously harming it as the necessity to maintain any regulation in consuming the natural properties is completely ignored. To build civilization and improve and upgrade the civilized stature we are continuously dominating nature without being concerned about the effect it will create on nature; in turn on human lives. Ecology, a study of natural organism and their relations with nature is concerned with this ecological crisis as well. Social ecology, a branch of ecology explores the disharmony between human and nature. According to the social ecological philosophy this disharmony comes from the disharmonious relationship within humans and the society and humans are the product of both natural and social evolution (Best, 1998). Human society has developed a hierarchal social institution where to satisfy the developmental tendencies it has degraded the social and natural world. The antagonism humans show towards nature does not stem from the nature-human relationship rather from human-human relationship and dominating nature was never a necessity rather, human dominated nature to attain power and control over other human (Bookchin, 1991 from Best, 1998).

Society is constructed of hierarchies and these hierarchies are not natural or biological phenomena; they are social. As Bookchin (1991) defines it is-

“ the cultural, traditional, psychological systems of obedience and command, not merely the economic and political systems to which the terms *class* and *state* most appropriately refer...[hierarchy is] historically and existentially...a complex system of command and obedience in which elites enjoy varying degrees of control over their subordinates...(Bookchin,1991 from Best, 1998, p.341).

This definition of hierarchy inspires the ecofeminists' effort to understand the domination of women and nature in relation to one another. To reach a theoretical standpoint for finding the causes of different social domination and their relation with environmental issues ecofeminism argues that “nature is a feminist issue” (Warren, 2000). In ecofeminism nature includes nonhuman animals, plants, water and ecosystem. By understanding the subordination of women ecofeminism seeks to understand all other forms of oppression like, racial oppression, class oppression and colonial oppression. Ecofeminist investigation includes not only the problems of women within a society but also other human subordinate groups and nature and it does it through an ecofeminist lens (Warren, 2000, Legler 1997). It is an exploration of the interconnection between this subordination by the social hierarchy. It operates on the theory that the ideologies which authorize “injustice based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies which sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment” (Sturgeon, 2016, p.260 from Belmont, 2001, p.351)

Ecofeminism chooses women's subordination to understand all other types of subordination for two reasons. It argues that gender domination is not prominent than other form of domination but in any given condition women undergo the burn more than all other (Gaard, 1993, Warren, 2000, Jackson, 1993) and also the gendered roles of women overlaps with particular environmental issues (Warren, 2000). Ecofeminism connects the movement and philosophies linked to ‘ecology’ and ‘feminism’ and aims to remove all forms of social injustice by linking these oppression to the oppression of nature. Women are related to nature not because they are feminine or nature is feminized. They are similar because they are both male dominant force (Stoddart & Tindall, 2011).

The human world and natural world are interconnected. Ecofeminism argues that to understand environmental change it is a must to understand social change because these natural problems ‘stem from the mutually reinforcing oppression of humans and of the natural world’ (Gaard, 1993) and the domination of nature is specifically related to the oppression of women and environmental issues are feminist issues (Warren, 1996) because it is women who are the first to suffer the consequences of injustice and environmental destruction. All

ecofeminists agree on the same point that there is a connection between the domination of women and the repression of nature.

Patriarchal Conceptual System: The Root Cause of Women's and Nature's Oppression

Ecofeminism focuses its discussion not just on the oppression of women and degradation of nature. It also discusses this “conceptual system” which “relies on a process of alienation of self from other, and the associated identity formations that emphasize a valued feature possessed only by the self” (Gaard, 2010, p.119). It is a “patriarchal conceptual framework” (Warren, 1990). This is a dualistic system of conceptualization where everything related to women and nature is devalued and everything related to men and culture are given more value. Ecofeminism aims to expose how these dualistic systems justifies the domination of women, nature and the earth because to ecofeminism “life is an interconnected web not a hierarchy” where human life is not of greater value than forms of nature (Jackson, 1993, p.397). Ecofeminism says, a disconnected sense of self is the root cause of all oppression based on violence. Agreeing with the social ecologists that the root cause of oppression is social hierarchy, ecofeminists further elaborate that the hierarchy takes place as a result of the self other oppression (Gaard, 1993, p.3) and the root source of ills happening towards nature is the separation between nature and culture (Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen, 1993). The culture and nature dualism creates the illusion that the “One” exists independent of the “Other” and the “Other becomes disposable and a commodity of the One” (Graziano, 2005, p.2). Due to this separation nature has been reduced to mere resources to be used for one's benefit and the concept of Mother Nature is no more prevalent. From this is born the capitalistic need of exploitation where everything including people and nature turns into a means of creating wealth. Patriarchal social system fails to understand the interconnectedness of nature and women or the connection among women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth (Shiva, 2009). Productivity and growth are restricted patriarchal categories which are destructive for nature and create gender inequality. For this reason in a patriarchal society women, nature and other minor groups are considered unproductive and this concept “is the basis of human culture and subordination of nature” (Jackson, 1993, p. 393).

The notion of dualisms is the common ground on which the different notions of ecofeminism are combined. The dualistic framework joins all the different stances and perspectives in ecofeminist theory. All of these different stances focus on this patriarchy and patriarchal epistemological framework. This framework creates the knowledge of the human and natural world where the world is understood through the hierarchy based dualistic structure. Ecofeminists contrast these dualisms, such as “the subject/object split associated with patriarchal epistemologies, and the oppression of women and nature, with connectedness and mutualism perceived to be inherent in women's ways of knowing” (Kaur, 2012, p.386).

For a healthy world and society harmony between the social and natural world is obvious but this patriarchal perspective destroys this harmony. The co-operative unity between men and women and humans and nature gives the world the harmony that gives it integrity. But the dualistic perspective of hierarchal structure damages this harmony and places men over women and nature, and separates them from both (Gaard, 1993, P.6). Destruction is the result of this separation which happens by means of domination of nature and woman by man. As a result, status of woman and nature is reduced to mere resources from the status of creator of life and sustainers of life.

What patriarchy considers wealth, ecofeminism argues, is not real wealth. Real wealth is the wealth of nature and the nature's produce done by women (Gaard, 1993). Women using the nature's resources play the part of the major providers of food, fuel and water. They collect water and wood, cook food, feed the family and also helps in harvesting. Patriarchy disregards this real wealth and devalues women and their work that operates with nature in its development process of wealth creation. Thus, in patriarchal development process more development means more destruction to nature.

Ecofeminism emphasizes on understanding the self with relation to other. One can get self realization through the understanding of relationships with others. At the same time it emphasizes on giving importance to other consciousness. Thus it denies the patriarchal dualistic system of hierarchy where the former in the duo is considered superior to the latter. In this way the ecofeminist image of nature is also an image of society because they are intrinsically linked (Sydee & Beder, 2001).

Titas Ekti Nadir Naam and Woman-Nature Interconnection

The film shows the interconnection between women and nature and degradation of human life resulting from the disaster in nature which is shown mainly through the women from a lower social class. As ecofeminism says, to get realization of the causes of destruction of nature the subordination and oppression of women is to be realized because the image of the society is also the image of the nature surrounding it. This paper focuses on the social images of oppression documented in the film and in light of that tries to understand the causes and effect of natural destruction. In the very beginning of the film the interconnection is stated clearly by the character Ramproshad Jetha when he says that both Bashonti and Titas are at their youth now and soon

they will decay as nothing stays the same which actually comes true in the end of the film. This dialogue foreshadows the resolution of the film which actually is the decaying of the river Titas and the consequent destruction of a whole community living around the river. The women in the film are connected to the river and are subordinated by the male dominant society. The film does not directly address the exploitation of nature but it focuses completely on the relation between women and nature which is the basis of ecofeminism. Thus the film deals with the “concept of domination of nature” not directly the “domination of nature” (Best, 1998, p.339). As several ecofeminists have said that subordination and degradation of women and nature are interconnected and understanding one can help to understand other, the film's portrayal of women subordination can help to understand the events leading to degradation of the river and finally the drying up of it.

In a society completely revolving around a river drying up of the river is a planetary ill because ecological crisis and the subjugation of women are two symptoms of the same illness (Sydee & Beder, 2001). The destruction of nature and emergence of culture is the main focus of the film. Nature and culture cannot exist side by side because of the patriarchal value dualism. In this dualistic structure of society man is understood not only disengaged from nature but also antagonistic and superior to it. This dualism places women against men, nature against culture and deem both women and nature to the inferior position. The basis of cultured society is based on “patterns of domination and Exploitation” (Iriart, p.5). Patriarchy justifies their domination through dualistic hierarchy. Ecofeminism argues that as long as this dualism exists in forming social structures they will create a justifiably superior status for patriarchy. To eliminate all forms of domination these dualism must be dismantled. The film shows the life of the Malo community where the women are dominated within and also this fishing community is dominated by the upper class Thakurs.

For ecofeminists the domination of women and nature is basically rooted in ideology. Women are deprived of several rights in society like social, economical and reproductive rights. It is the result of “masculinist mentality” which denies women their right to their own bodies and sexuality and which depends on multiple systems of dominance (King, 1983). To promote equality, non-violence, non-hierarchical forms of organization it is important to reconstruct and reconceptualize the underlying patriarchal values and structural relations within a culture. In the film we can see this deprivation happening towards several female characters. Rajar Jhi on reaching Gobindopur is deprived of the right to stay in a society and the patriarchal agents, the village council denies her this right from which she is salvaged by the women when together the women declares of forming their own society including her. Similarly, Bashonti is deprived of reproductive right as she is married off at a very young age and her husband dies the day after their marriage. The patriarchal society does not allow her to remarry or have a child out of wedlock. She craves for a child throughout her life and tries to find a sense of motherhood in caring for Ananta which is also scattered when he leaves her.

Ecofeminism says that, in order to overcome this hierarchy based suppressive system one needs to bring about new social forms. Humans should not try to control nature, but work along with it and must try to move beyond power-based relationships. In the film the Malo society at the beginning is a society of equality, and harmony which reflects the natural harmony also as the river also flows with abundance and provides for the people. But as the film advances and the Malo society is turning into one chaotic, quarrelsome, violent and hierarchal one divided by the Thakurs and adulterated by Jatra and alcohol. The river also starts to degrade and eventually stops flowing with the live rearing water. Thus the social degradation symbolically presents the natural destruction resulting from human exploitation of nature.

The social harmony ecofeminism talks about also finds voice in the film as well. The Malo society in the film at the beginning is a society based on cooperation and mutual care. This cooperative nature of the society helps them to sustain even in a dire condition. The idea of self and other is absent in the Malo society. In a scene, we see the young men from the village ask Kishore's mother to make “pitha” (rice cake) and Bashonti, Mungli and Raajar Jhi helps her to make those. The ides of relationship that Bashonti expresses to Raajar Jhi also echoes this concept of harmony when she says “মানুষ এর কুটুম আওনে জাওনে গরুর কুটুম লেহনে পোষণে” (maanusher kutum aaone jaone, gorur kutum lehone poshone; meaning, humans become relatives through interactions and cows [animals] become close to one who cares for them). Also everyone shares their belongings with others. The relation between natural degradation and human action is represented through the change in this harmonious social structure. First change that we see happens when the village council rejects Raajar Jhi a place in the village. The Malo women led by Mungli and Bashonti protests and allows them place by declaring, together they form their own society. This also shows the closeness of woman with nature. Like nature women also believes in providing everything to anyone who needs it.

Drought or drying up of a river is a natural disaster but the causes are not natural entirely. The occurrence and location of drought is affected largely by a complex set of human induced economic, cultural and political factors like economic and class interest (Wijkman & Timberlake, 1984 from Warren, 2000). The Thakurs, in order to prove their superiority over the Malo for which they brought obscene culture like Jatra to insert impurities in the Malo community and weaken them ethically. The purpose is clearly to create division among them and break the unity by instilling impure values and replace the religion based cultural value system

which is stated by the indication of performances of “Ramayana”(which is related to Hindu beliefs) and the telling of the story of “Karbala” (a story of sacrifice and devotion towards Allah mainly told by Muslims). The Thakurs also destroy the Malo boats and introduce engine driven boats to create loss of livelihood among the community and economically destabilize them by lending money on high interest rate.

These social and natural factors are interrelated. The way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat women. Like nature women nourishes with her femininity. Nature is historically and culturally associated with motherhood. But, the image of nature as mother earth does not stop the degradation of nature. Women give birth to a child but after birth the child is known by its father’s identity. This system of identifying through the superior part in the hierarchy further subjects women and nature to subordination and degradation. Ananta, son of Rajar Jhi and Kishore faces the social scrutiny because his mother fails to reveal his father’s name.

While understanding nature historically, as Hekman (1990) says, two contrasting images of nature has been talked about in most cultures; first one is of nature as a revered mother and other sees and fears it as a wild, mysterious spirit of a temptress which has to be tamed in order to progress. The second image of nature justifies patriarchy’s act of violating nature and woman in parallel. In an attempt to tame the unruly spirit of the temptress woman, the Thakurs destroys the entire Malo community. When Bashonti rejects their unethical approach and protests against it, they decides to teach a lesson, not just to her but the entire Malo community to prove that they have power as they are superior to them. They do it by inflicting damage on them through cultural exploitation, social disintegration and economic damage.

Bhogavati is a good example of mother and goddess image of nature. The name means The Eternal Mother. When Rajar Jhi is found by some fishermen after the abduction by a group of Dacoit and her consequent escape by jumping into the river she is given this name by the fishermen. This portrayal of her as the Eternal Mother resonates ecofeminist argument that the degradation of nature is the result of people’s switch from nature reverence to the effort to control her. The woman who is considered by some as the Bhogavati faces the social resistance after she reaches Gobindopur. This village and the people thus, become the representatives of nature’s violator whose acts results in the decadence of the river and those who depended on it.

The natural disasters like drought, flood or deforestation are the results of maltreatment done by people on nature. The result of these disasters is largely felt by the marginal people of class, race and gender and they are the one who suffer most. As Warren (2000) says, the people from the upper class do not suffer the consequences the way the lower class does “no rich man died of famine”. Disaster also becomes a gender and age issue because they are affected most by these disasters (Warren, 2000). Though the film does not show any direct human involvement in the drying up of the river, it shows how the women and old people in Malo society are affected by the drought largely. Kalur maa, who was a very rich wife of a fisherman and used to provide work and accommodation to others, becomes a beggar. Kishore’s old father like many other aged people dies due to prolonged starvation. A large number of them leaves their birthplace and moves to nearby towns and lives the life of homeless people. In the film the fisherman clan “Malo” loses their livelihood after the river dries. Moreover, as ecofeminism argues that women suffer the most when faced with a natural disaster the Malo women suffers the most of the consequences.

This interconnected phenomenon of natural destruction and degradation of human life and society is the focal point of the film. The same foretelling of Ramproshad Jetha with which the film starts is repeated at the end just before Bashonti dies. Remembering what he said about the interconnection between her life and Titas’s water she emerges to dig into the womb of dry Titas, with whatever spirit she is left with from the continuous starvation and illness, for the last drop of water to fulfill the custom of drinking Titas’s water before dying. In her death she celebrates this interconnection.

II. CONCLUSION

Human beings are not merely a part of ecology rather they actively influence the changes happening within it. Because the human society is a male dominant society and the value system is based on the dualism of self and other where everything associated with other is considered inferior to the Self, women and nature, both goes through the similar exploitative subordinating treatment of the patriarchy. Ecofeminism emphasizes on observing the subordination of women in society to understand the idea of natural degradation done by patriarchy because both are interconnected. Nature is destroyed by patriarchy to serve the purpose of development and women are oppressed by the same because they are less important according to the dualism. In both of the cases, patriarchy completely ignores their opinion or feeling about being used and abused. The sole purpose is to gain profit by means of imposing its opinion and domination over nature and women. But, the result of such treatment is not good. Both of the oppression brings about destruction and the effect of this destruction is mostly felt by the marginal people like women, people of lower class, aged and children. While observing the nature and effect of this destruction, ecofeminists argues that observing one can help the understanding of the other. In the film, such interconnection is evident throughout the film. People of the lower

class Malo, specially the women entirely relies on the river Titas. Their lives take a drastic and destructive turn even before the destruction happens in the nature. This destructive turn is manmade. The social hierarchy, the Thakurs exploits and brings this destruction on the women and Malo community. This film documents this subordination done through the patriarchal dualistic social structure. By showing the drastic effect the drought creates on the women and Malo it also makes a clear statement that, both nature and women are interconnected and because both are considered inferior and less important in patriarchal ideology it is really important to understand this connection to stop the subordination and destruction of women and nature.

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