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B.G. Road (New Balibat), Jorhat.*Editorial***“SUSTAINING GAIA: WOMEN, ECOLOGY, DEVELOPMENT.”**

The contemporary world is facing an imminent global environmental crisis and it has become imperative for us to address it. Women have been traditionally associated with nature and its reflection can be seen in widespread use of the terms- Mother Earth and Mother Nature etc. Moreover women are more intimately involved with nature, harbouring centuries old home remedies. With the challenging role of nurturers and providers, women have to bear the brunt of the changing dynamics of the environment. From rural to urban centers, from gathering firewood to providing sustenance to the family amidst new threats to the environment. Family health has also deteriorated due to the increasing levels of toxins in the environment. Women have been proactive in leading campaigns against climate change like Greta Thunberg and Medha Patkar closer to home. Development is inevitable but it should be compatible with sustainability. The theme of 2022 International Women’s Day as declared by UN is “Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow”. We would like to extend this theme to explore possibilities for a sustainable road map in which women play an integral part. The proposed volume would try to suggest and look into the relationship between women, ecology and development which would be sustainable. The research articles in this journal highlights the different aspects of the broad theme in a very comprehensive manner.

Dr. Preetinicha Barman in *Environmental Ethos in Koch Rajbangshi Poems* presents the Koch Rajbangshi ethos regarding ecological sustainability through a reading of certain select poems written in Koch Rajbangshi language. The poems of Kamalesh Sarkar, Nikhilesh Ray, Alalladin Sarkar, Dipak Kumar Ray, Jyotirmoy Pradhani and others is analysed to examine how nature has been a common heritage of the Rajbangshi poets.

*Sustainable Women Entrepreneurship: A Study on Muga Silk Entrepreneurs in Sualkuchi Village of Assam* by Sabita Bhagawati and Dr Sanjeeb K Jena studies the sustainability of women entrepreneurs engaged in muga silk production at Sualkuchi village. The findings indicate a gap between demand and supply of muga silk, which can be reduced

with adequate steps. There is profitability to the producers and value addition in each stage of value chain. It has economically empowered the women entrepreneurs, even during the tough pandemic period and the business proves to be sustainable.

Priyanka Bharali in *A Midsummer's Nightmare, a May-queen in Mayhem: Channelling Ari Aster's Movie Midsommar from an Eco-Horror Perspective* deals with a group's disturbing encounter with a Pagan cult of Scandinavia in a midsummer celebration festival. The paper not only portrays the gruesome bloodbath that occurs in the ritualistic celebration, but, also interrogates into the question of identity, power and ecofemininity. This paper intends studies this very site of power that resides both within the natural world and humans, but, within the realms of terror and horror.

In *Negotiating Coleridge's Poems from an Ecofeminist Perspective: A Select Study*, aims for an ecofeminist reading of three selected poems of the Romantic poet, S T Coleridge namely, "Christabel", "Frost at Midnight" and "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie: A Fragment". The poems taken up for study argues for a rethinking and realignment of gender roles that impose patriarchal hegemony on the marginalized sections of society that include women and the environment

Farzia Yashmeen Chaliha's research on *Brahmaputra River and Its Significance to Mising Tribal Women's Socio-Economic Status and Sustainability: A Case Study of Botiamari and Dhapak Village of Majuli District of Assam* reveals that during floods, the standing crops and poultry of the respondents are damaged and 60 percent of the flood affected have to take shelter in relief camps with unhygienic conditions and scarcity of drinking water. Nearly 58.8 percent sampled women have been forced to work as agricultural labourers after flood recedes. The women also lacked skill and knowledge regarding preservation of fish which are abundant during floods and other herbal plants which can be sold dry and supplement their household income.

*Women Activists as Vanguard against threat to Environment* by Aparna De tries to uphold the life and work of renowned Indian women environment activists starting from Gaura Devi to Medha Patkar, who played a significant role and contributed towards protecting the environment. With the sacrifices of women vanguards in India, mass awareness regarding significance of environment protection and nourishment of nature was developed.

*Fisherwomen of Loktak Lake, Manipur: A Social and Economic Analysis* by Sagolchem Sophia Devi reveals that 90 percent of the sampled respondents are engaged in fishing industry. Loktak lake is the lifeline of the people of Manipur with 9 percent of the

population of Manipur residing by the lake. Besides fishing, the lake also provides drinking water for domestic use, power generation and promotes tourism activity.

Rituranjan Gogoi in *Women, Magic, and Environment: An Eco Feminist Reading of Rachel Griffin's The Nature of Witches* shows how this trope of women and nature is deconstructed and redefined, in order to explore nuanced ways of depicting the environment, ecology, climate change and their interconnectedness in fiction, especially fantasy literature. The paper explores a new way of seeing and perceiving the consequences of the destruction of the natural world, humanity's impact on environment, and the possible solutions to ecological degradation.

Ragini Mahanta in *Tracing Affinities between the 'Nature-Nurture' Continuum: An Ecofeminist Reading of L.M. Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables* reads the patterns of nature overlapping and at most times being one with that of the idea of nurture. The paper studies whether the experience gathered by the protagonist through her association with nature has indirectly nurtured her persona into a confident young lady and also underlining the possibilities of observing the relationship between woman and nature in its intrinsic totality.

Deepa Bhagawati in *Prakriti aru Nari : Prakriti Naribador Aadharot Mamoni Roisam Goswami Neela Kanthi Broja* presents an ecofeminist reading of the novel in the context of the writer's other works.

Rimjhim Gogoi in *Luko Sanskriti Joriyote Tholua Gyanor Hosgroikhyonot Narir Bhumika* explores how women have been instrumental in presenting traditional folk knowledge through various rituals.

Tarun Loying and Anwesha Mahanta in *Mising Jonojatir Luko Khaadya Hongroikhonoyt Narir Bhumika* explores how women have carried out traditional methods of preservation of food in Mising community

Lalsanlevis Nampui in *Merging Identity with Nature: Reading Mamang Dai's The Legends of Pensam from an Ecofeminist Perspective* underlines the perspectives of identity conjoined with nature and also to highlight the ecocritical perspectives and more of ecofeminism through an analytic study of *The Legends of Pensam*

*Women Agripreneurs in Mushroom Cultivation and Food Processing: A Step Towards Sustainable Agricultural Development* by Purnima Newar and Mayuraxee Barman analyses how micro ventures like mushroom cultivation can contribute towards agricultural development and sustainable business for women in rural areas. The study reveals that higher the educational qualification of the women, higher is their annual turnover in their business. There is also significant difference in the mean score of annual turnovers between trained and untrained women agripreneurs.

Namrata Pathak in *Of 'in-between' Spaces and Varied Transgressions: Reinterpreting Women-Nature Relationships in Tamsula Ao's Writings* ropes in instances from Ao's collection of short stories, *Laburnum for My Head* and looks at women-nature relationships which unfurls a fertile site for developing a praxis of 'in-betweenness'; a node of intersection between the human and non-human that relies deeply on shared nourishment, love and sustenance.

Ms Ananthi Pillai and K Sambathrani's research article on *Special Education Teachers' Knowledge on Universal Design for Learning Skills in Inclusive Education*, conducted in selected rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu clearly states that the special education teachers for diverse learners are aware of universal design for learning for a successful inclusive education program. Its main findings are that there is no significant difference between male and female special education teachers and also between rural and urban teachers for inclusive education. However, the special education teachers with less than 10 years experience has more knowledge than the teachers with more experience. This is due to innovative curriculum and teachers upgradation through training of the new teachers.

In *Nature is My Temple*: *Revisiting the contours of Ecofeminism in Alice Walker's The Temple of My Familiar* Ritushmita Sharma explores the contours of ecofeminism as projected by Walker especially in her novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). This paper considers Karen Warren's theoretical interpretations of Ecological Feminism in order to investigate Walker's conceptualisation of the non-human 'other'

Barnali Sikdar's *The New Narrative of Green Women Influencers* shows how in achieving the goal of circularity in the fashion industry many committed women influencers are leveraging social media as a platform to influence people and educate them on how we can minimise the human footprints on the environment while adopting sustainable ways of producing and retailing fashion.

The article on *Linkages between Women's Education and Environmental Quality: Evidence from India* by Dr Anup Sinha and other authors shows that there is a positive association between girl's education and environmental performance and hence environmental quality. Using a scatter diagram, regression analysis and coefficient of correlation, the model displayed that if the girl's gross enrolment in higher education increased by 1 percent, environmental quality will improve by 10 percent. Thus educated women can make sustainable choices which will help manage and preserve natural resources.

*Entrepreneurship, Sustainability and Economic Empowerment: A Study in the Context of Bishnupriya Manipuri Women* by Tapsi Sinha tries to establish a link between women entrepreneurs for economic empowerment keeping in mind sustainability of the

environment. Her findings reveal that these women face problems of financial access and are dependent on their male counterparts for any major decision relating to property or business. There are also clearly defined gender based roles and problems of infrastructure to start any business.

Kirtika Uzir and MK Chowdhury's article on *Factors Affecting Potential of Ecotourism* influence on the development of places in Assam. The results indicate that preservation of environmental assets should be rigorously taken to optimize the strengths. At the same time unmanaged ecotourism, trash disposal, pollution act as threats which should be taken into account by legal reforms and stringent enforcement and preservation measures. Opportunities like awareness, training of local workforce and creating indigenous handicraft etc. can boost employment.

The compendium of research articles in this journal bears the prospect of providing incentives to students, research scholars and academicians to initiate new ways of reasoning and research in the concerned area. With this hope the editors and the editorial board has brought together well researched articles under the broad theme "Sustaining Gaia: Women, Ecology, Development."

The articles pertaining to literature follows the MLA 8 edition whereas the articles related to social science follows the APA format of citation.

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#### Disclaimer :

The views expressed in the articles are entirely the author's own perspective and the editors and the editorial board are not responsible for them.



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# Environmental Ethos in Koch Rajbangshi Poetry

*Dr. Preetinicha Barman*

## Abstract

The Koch Rajbangshi ethos has always been in accordance with ecological sustainability reflected through its rich folk culture. A number of Koch Rajbangshi folksongs, folk tales as well as the rites and rituals manifest this worldview through seemingly simple community practices based on oral traditions. In the literary sphere the same concept gets reflected through various genres, poetry being one such major arena. There are poems written on man-nature relationship where a human is placed essentially as a quintessence of the far greater natural world. Some other poems speak of the havoc created by man-made machines which flaunter nature to the extent of victimization. Yet, nature appears as the soothing mother, nurturing and nourishing with incessant care. The community practice of attributing nature the status of a mother or the even a goddess inspire the poetic outbursts of the poets who intend to spread the message of securing the ancient status of mother nature. In some poems nature in the form of land hoards promises, the loss of which bewilders the indigenous entity.

The proposed paper attempts to present the Koch Rajbangshi ethos regarding ecological sustainability through a reading of certain select poems written in the Koch Rajbangshi language. The translated versions of these poems would be analysed for a closer view of the embedded ecological concern that the poems connote. The paper would take up select poets from Assam and Coochbehar such as Kamalesh Sarkar, Nikhilesh Ray, Alauddin Sarkar, Dipak Kumar Ray, Jyotirmoy Prodhani, Gauri Mohan Ray, and others to examine how nature has been a common heritage of the Rajbangshi poets, at times appearing as the mother archetype, across the borders. It would also look into how the poets have responded to negotiate with this crisis caused by the brutal disfiguration of their bucolic landscape.

**Key Words:** *Ecology, environmental ethos, heritage, mother archetype, landscape.*

**Introduction :**

The intimate relationship between culture and environment can be taken as the most tangible basis of human ecology. The indigenous man has been existing as a part of the cosmos and contributing to the ecological sustainability since times immemorial, whether consciously or unconsciously. Man's accordance with the ecological balance had given rise to rites and rituals which gradually evolved and synchronized into indigenous knowledge paradigm. The practical expressions of this paradigm are what can be comprehensibly termed as folk culture which tends to reflect the worldview and ethos of the community.

The Koch Rajbangshi folk culture reflects this tendency to transmit the indigenous ethos. A number of Koch Rajbangshi folksongs, folk tales as well as the rites and rituals manifest this worldview through seemingly simple community practices based on oral traditions. In the literary sphere the same concept gets reflected through various genres, poetry being one such major arena. There are poems written on man-nature relationship where a human is placed essentially as a quintessence of the far greater natural world. Some other poems speak of the havoc created by man-made machines which flaunt nature to the extent of victimization. Yet, nature appears as the soothing mother, nurturing and nourishing with incessant care. The community practice of attributing nature the status of a mother or even a goddess inspire the poetic outbursts of the poets who intend to spread the message of securing the ancient status of mother nature. In some poems, nature in the form of land hoards promises, the loss of which bewilders the indigenous entity.

**Objective :**

The article attempts to present the Koch Rajbangshi ethos regarding ecological sustainability through the reading of certain select poems written in the Rajbangshi language. The translated versions of these poems would be analysed for a closer view of the embedded ecological concern that the poems connote. Many of the poems discussed in this paper are taken from the anthology, *This Land This People: Rajbangshi Poems in Translation* (2021), translated and edited by Pradip Acharya and Jyotirmoy Prodhani. Regarding the poems of this volume, Bandita Baruah writes, "Nature is an essential component to be found in abundance in the collection. In all its grandeur and furor, nature has deeper associations to the life of people. Besides the sun, moon, winds, storms, trees, paddy fields, local fruits and nuts, birds and animals, the presence of water bodies like ponds and rivers find manifestation in many poems" (thetranscript.in). This assertion is found reflected through the poems which speak of a landscape unique in its own way where man exist as a component of the whole gamut of the ecosystem. The article would take up select poets from Assam and Coochbehar such as Kamalesh Sarkar, Jatin Barma, Santosh Singha, Nikhilesh Ray, Dwijendra Nath

Bhakat, Alauddin Sarkar, Dipak Kumar Ray, Jyotirmoy Prodhani, Gauri Mohan Ray, and others to examine how nature has been a common heritage of the Rajbangshi poets, at times appearing as the mother archetype, across the borders. It would also look into how the poets have responded to negotiate with this crisis caused by the brutal disfiguration of their bucolic landscape.

**Text Analysis :**

The poems of Kamalesh Sarkar celebrate the natural bounty while at the same time rue the gradual disappearance of nature's abundance. Environmental issues are addressed from the vantage of an insider who has grown and lived amidst nature. His dwelling habitat places him very close to natural flora and fauna, so much that a fox becomes a familiar individual to him whose gradual disappearance he mourns:

"Woods are gone, just trees, one or two

No fox in the woods though the foxy people around".

("Days Pass in Pangs", in Acharya and Prodhani 65)

The two lines highlight the anthropocene dimensions where the humans have displaced the foxes, who were the original inhabitants of the place. In the poem the human-animal binary is addressed both literally and metaphorically. Another of his poems titled "The Jungle" talks of a poet's obsession with the lost ways of life when 'the birds kept flying all around' and he had 'discovered the familiar land of doves' (Acharya and Prodhani 62). The loss is reflected through the tale of 'the cowherd' who has 'vanished in the hearth' (Acharya and Prodhani 62). The poet too, decides to leave civilization and take refuge in a jungle "After a prolonged battle/ Against the shadows of masquerading men" (Acharya and Prodhani 62). The loss of the ancient ways, nevertheless, leads to the loss of the very tune of life as expressed in the poem, "Bena Bairagi". The poem is in the form of a reminiscence of the hermit who played the *benā* (a folk instrument with strings). As the natural surroundings changed their ways, the hermit had forgotten how to play his tune. So, the poetic persona laments: "The tales of the gardener and his wife came to an end./ The palms in the garden turned ripe and went dry, / All sparrows flew back home./ Then strings of the *benā* got snapped" (Acharya and Prodhani 61). The ineffectual state of the *benā* player is reciprocal to the sterility of the land as things are interconnected in a natural world. So, these poems not only present the ecological change but also point towards human responsibility through the consciousness of the artists.

The concern for the native ecology has been a universally approached in the recent times, while the land, its inhabitants and the knowledge which emerge from their harmonious co-relationship have drawn much attention. The activists of traditional ecological knowledge

have always acknowledged this concern to be the prime focus of their studies. In “Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Wisdom of Peoples of British Columbia”, Turner, Ignace and Ignace highlight the threat to the traditional ecology and the knowledge emerges from it. They reflect on the impending intimidation which may threaten the existence of the same, at the intrusion of the modern technology and economic expansion. As they argue,

Indigenous people are uniquely positioned in their close and strong standing environmental relationships, yet the survival of many indigenous cultures is severely threatened by the insensitive economic development, by coercive education system, by assimilation into modes of production and inexorable movement towards market economies of the dominant society and by the escalating ecological destruction of peoples’ homelands and resources (Turner, Ignace and Ignace 1276).

The same thought reverberates in the Rajbangshi poems which reflect apprehension for the land and her natives who are at the verge falling prey to modern civilizational monoculture. Jatin Barma’s poem “The Face of a Child” dwells on the crisis of the plantation labourers of a tea estate. The speaker of the poem starts by saying, “For how long these tea gardens are to be? / The world drinks tea/ When the garden owners are in junket spree” (Acharya and Prodhani 75). The next part of the poem highlights the predicament faced by the poor workers while the gardens close for some months. It is the same predicament faced by the farmers when uniform plantations are imposed upon at the cost of the local diversified farming as both the method and its marketing remain alien to the farm workers. This hegemonic imposition has been a reality in India since the colonial era when tea, indigo, and poppy were grown in profusion at the cost of replacing indigenous trees, over huge areas of vegetative landscape. The ecofeminist critic Vandana Shiva in her book, *The Violence of Green Revolution: The World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics* (1993), highlights a similar kind of crisis brought into by systematic cultivation during the Green Revolution in Punjab. As she says,

The ecological costs and natural conflicts associated with Green Revolution were rooted in replacement of cropping systems based on diversity and internal inputs with systems based on uniformity and external inputs. The shift from internal to external purchase input did not merely change ecological process of agriculture. It also changed the structure of social and political relationships... (Shiva 171).

The same concern is found in Jyotirmoy Prodhani’s poem “Farmstead” where the old farmer’s talk about traditional paddy seedlings, *phoolpakri* and *manoharshail* are ignored by a young farmer as the very seeds are replaced by the new variety of *aijong* (Acharya and Prodhani 206). Vandana Shiva points out how the old variety of seeds is called ‘primitive’

while the new variety has gained the prestige of being called ‘elite’ or ‘advanced’ and hence scientific. As she comments, “The mechanistic thinking underlying the new seed industry is anthromorphic and also culturally chauvinistic” (Shiva 67-68). In another poem titled, “The Plough and the Saplings” the same poet refers to a farmer’s father’s advice to his son to plough and plant. The father instructs the son about how to hold the plough and till the land as well as how to dig up and plant saplings. The father’s instructions are the age-old methods of agriculture, the knowledge of which he passes on to his son as a legacy. Alauddin Sarkar’s poem “Plant a Tree” echoes a similar concern where the speaker advises to ‘Plant ten saplings’ which would make ‘a green dream flourish’ with ‘*sal* and *satian*’, ‘Debdur, shisav, mango and jackfruit’ (Acharya and Prodhani 44). Ramakanta Ray’s “This Land, This People” wants the same landscape back as it has vanished behind the curtain of civilization: “No I don’t want anything else/ The fecund field of my adolescence/ The green expanse of emptiness/ In the dew cold of a Sunday/ The bathing and the unease of the shiver/ Yes I want that/ the trees and blossoms/ Where the *sajana* flowers like earrings/ Where the coral blossoms as my beloved/ Blowing through the *shindas* to make the amber sparkle” (Acharya and Prodhani 78). Land as the mother of bounty emerges also in the poem of Satya Ray. In “This Our Land” Ray says: “We are ploughman’s sons, we are of land/ Land we must have/ We make gold sprout in the land/ And fill the barns” (Acharya and Prodhani 80). The lines breathe the feelings that the land is the only source; tilling the land is the only purpose. This has been a truth to most of the people of the Koch Rajbangshi community whose indigenous identity is integrally related to the soil.

This kind of intimate bond to the soil is common in most of the Rajbangshi texts. Here land becomes the source of pedagogy. It must be inherited and cherished as the source of livelihood. In her essay, “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation”, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson speaks of the indigenous pedagogy of the Nishnaabeg natives who rely on their land as the source of knowledge. Considering land itself as pedagogy she says, “Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes” (Simpson 9). The knowledge that comes from the lived experiences of the land can be the sustainable legacy that the natives must imbibe and share. As the critic affirms, “The native elders would always guide with statements which ‘position them as learners, that position their ideas as their own understandings, and place their teachings within the context of their own lived experience’” (Simpson 11).

The same kind of pedagogy is found reflected in the poems which connote the passing on of indigenous wisdom about the environment around the native entity. Santosh

Singha's poem, "Sada Bhuikhan" (The white land) speaks of the golden crops which would give rise to *Bhawiya* songs. The land appears as the source of sustainability. The same imagery of the golden crops with the ears of rice flowing on the trails emerges in Abhijit Barman's poem "AshinatUak Fam" (Remembrance in Ashin) (Barman 43). Dipak Kumar Ray's poem, "Bison" (Seeds) speaks of the birds' ecstatic songs after feeding on grains, which takes up the tune of *dotara* accompanying *Kushan* songs (Ray 2012: 29). Prasenjit Ray in his poem, "Phal Daan" (Fruit Giving) speaks of the abundance of food in the form of yams, rice and fruits that the land provides, while another poem "Sonar Dhan" (Golden rice) celebrates the flourishing the ears of rice (Ray 2010: 26). Yet in another poem "Sakto Haya Thako" (Be Strong) the poet advises a pedestrian to seek relaxation under the jackfruit tree which has sheltered birds, borne nests and offered fruits to all though it has weak roots. He urges the passerby to learn endurance and sustenance from this tree. Land also produces the cures to diseases. The poem "Asukh" (Sickness) of Kumar Sauvik (Gauri Mohan Ray) speaks of 'Jaigan Bibi' and 'Phulmati' who could cure the disease suffered by a certain man, Jatinda, though they do not know nursing (Sauvik in Barma 27). Contrary to the modern medications their old knowledge about charms and herbs belonging to the land would come handy. They tend to acquire this knowledge from the land they are born in. As Ranjeeta Mukherjee says about the intimate relationship of women with land, "(the)extensive and intimate relationship with the land means that women, often exclusively, have extensive knowledge of traditional remedies and plants, indigenous farming practices and local methods of crop cultivation" (Mukharjee 7). This relationship is an important component of ecofeminism which places women very close to nature, often sharing with and caring for as well as learning from its elements.

Yet, this land is snatched away in Nikhilesh Ray's "The Anthem to Wake Us Up": "The land you snatched away/ And turned into acres of weeds/ Would bloom one day/ With flowers and grains/ Mellow winds will blow that day" (Acharya and Prodhani 120). Ray's "The Midday Poem" speaks of the havoc of a drought-stricken weather: "The soil cracks into lumps of clod/ All over/ At midday the noon settles/ On the head of the sky/ Creepers get dried/ Even in the three-fold bamboo rack/ Cows and calves are tired to the brim" (Acharya and Prodhani 117). Pijush Sarkar's "Bhabatosh" highlights the same crisis at a symbolic level as the granaries are washed away by the erosion (Sarkar 56). Another poem of Santosh Singha "Mor Gaon Mor Maon" (My Village, My Mother) speaks of the catastrophe of the natives as the river has dried. As he says, "*Nadisukiyahoishaidda/ Dhan sukiyahoisheshukati/ Jaminermatihoisebala/ Din duniyahoiseati*" (Singha 2012: 10). This can be translated as "The River has turned to dry shells/ Paddy grains have become

dry leaves/ Soil has turned into sands/ The day has changed into the night (translations mine). The perched land in the same poem turns into his mother and also to his village. Salil Panchanan's poem "A Patch of Green" puts the complaints of a wailing mother: "Look, my breast is empty meadow... A patch of green someone, do get me" (Acharya and Prodhani 81). In this poem it is the mother who has lost her village and her green. But, a close look into the poem shows that the mother has merged her self identity with that of the village and its green landscape. Prasenjit Ray's poem "MorAii" calls the land as mother, as well as uses the emotions relation to the land and the biological mother interchangeably (Ray 2010: 16). The marsh wears a bun adorned with hyacinth in Abhijit Barman's "Jonak-Chan-Nadi" (Barman 2010: 27). This identification of ecological entities with that of a woman and looking into the ecological crisis from a feminist perspective have been the prime concerns of ecofeminism. As Chen Ling says in her essay, "The Background and Theoretical Origin of Ecofeminism":

The generation of Ecofeminism is closely related to the ecological crisis caused by modernization and industrial civilization. As the industrialization improves in modern society, people's demand for resources and energy is increasing in social production and life. Meanwhile, the total amount of production and life waste discharged to the nature is also increasing. When the usage of resources and energy and the waste emissions are beyond the ecological capacity of the natural ecosystem, it produces ecological crisis. (Ling 105)

Jahira Hossain's essay on the poetry of Temsula Ao reflects on the ecofeminist perspective of the poet. She says :

Ecofeminism, as an academic discipline, results from the intersection of myriad forms of feminist and environmental studies. It claims that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are inherently bound up with the notions and workings of class, race, colonialism and neo-colonialism which result from the patriarchal order of society... Temsula Ao, a formidable poetic voice from the North- East India, expresses her concern over the gradual degradation of the natural surroundings of the North- East India and the cultural transformation taking place in the region. (Hossain 13)

A number of Rajbangshi poems reflect the same attitude towards environment and the women self associated with it where natural objects are identified as women. Apart from the land, the river appears as a feminine entity ever present in the native imagination of the Rajbangshis. The poem, "Old Mother Teesta" by Preetinicha Barman Prodhani speaks of such a man-made crisis that threatens nature. The construction of dams has turned the mythical river into a victim of civilization. At the beginning of this poem Teesta appears as a beautiful woman in love, and then as a mother. The image of Teesta in Koch Rajbangshi imagination is quite vivid as her myths suggest. The river can be taken as a mother archetype



as she is worshipped by the natives as a river deity who nourishes and provides. The same image is found in Dipak Kumar Ray's poem "I am Teesta". In his poem, the river appears as a primordial archetype, omnipresent in the course of the native psyche. As Erich Neumann speaks of the mother archetype, "We employ the concept of archetype as Jung has clearly defined it in most recent writings – as a structural concept signifying 'eternal presence'" (Neumann 7). This image of the 'eternal presence' is found to be eroding in the poem "Old Mother Teesta" while Teesta has been continually shrinking under the pressure of the dam. She has to crawl into surrender as "The gluttonous dam swigged in a drought" (Acharya and Prodhani 165). It is as if the river 'full of waves' (Acharya and Prodhani 130), as it appears in Dipak Kumar Ray's poem, had shrunk into an old dammed river with 'mouth dry' and 'arid mind' (Acharya and Prodhani 164). Dwijendra Nath Bhakat's poem "Gadadhar" identifies the river Gadadhar as a married woman with a vermillion dot. She appears as a humble streamlet quenching the thirst of mankind as well as the source of profound knowledge. This rivulet has survived the pangs of modernism and is still breathing life. The mythification of rivers as well as the emotive reciprocation with the water bodies has been a continuing preoccupation of the Rajbangshi ethos. As Dipak Barman puts it, "From the time immemorial the rivers Teesta, Torsha, Mechi, Kaljani and Mujnai are sharing and emphasizing the grief and pain of Rajbangshis" ([http:// www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com), 24). As an example Barman refers to Basanta Barman's poems "The Blue Water of Teesta" "The Riverbed of Mechi" and "The Spot of Water". In the first poem the poet refers to the empathetic feelings of river Teesta for the fellow Rajbangshis who reside on her banks. The other two poems represent the poet's conscious identification of himself to the rivers of his land (<http:// www.the-criterion.com>). Pijush Sarkar too, imagines a virtual river that overflows his bed and waters his pillow, in his poem "MichhangNadi" (Sarkar 34). Abhijit Barman's poem "Tor KatharNadi" (The river of your words) identifies even his beloved and her words to the river. He sees the moonlit river on her face and keeps optimistic attitude that the river near the crop field would never dry up (Barman 2010: 11).

### Conclusion :

The representation of ecological concern in poetry had been an age-old tradition. In English Literature the Romantics had a unique claim over the natural environment. The same is true of German Romanticism, American Transcendentalism, Japanese senryus, Classical Chinese poetry as well as Sanskrit poetry. Regarding 'eco-poetics' Forrest Gander and John Kinsella say that the term connotes, besides others, a unique concept that the originality of the poem is not the self but the surrounding landscape (<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/inflibnet-ebooks/reader.action>, 11). In the recent years, the advocates of indigenous

ontology put much effort to bring forth the ontological perspective to look at the land from the point of view of its natives who have been living on it for generations. Theorists and critics like, Walter Mingolo, Catherine E. Walsh, Anibal Quizano, Nicole Fabricant, Nancy Postero, Bruno Latour and Philippe Descola have been working in support the indigenous ontological approach as against the modern ontological approach. The former sees nature and culture to be one and the same, while for the later they stand in a binary relation. So, the landscape becomes the begetter of poetry which echoes its elemental forms and their relationships. In the Koch Rajbangshi tradition poems on ecology may be said to have a long genealogy. The poems discussed in this article are all contemporary poems written in a recent time and are concerned with the recent predicaments. As Rini Barman says about the Rajbangshi poems of the recent time, "For the modern poems, the emphasis is visibly on retaining the flavor of contemporaneity" ([www.himalmag.com](http://www.himalmag.com)). This 'contemporaneity' is reflected through the ecological concerns of the Rajbangshi poets who endeavour to present the latest environmental issues from different perspectives ([www.himalmag.com](http://www.himalmag.com)).

However, it does not imply that ecology is a new concern for the Rajbangshis, for the community has been practicing a number of naturalistic rites since times immemorial. The abundance of nature deities like, *Sonaray* (the tiger deity), *Hudum* (the rain deity), *Baruni* (the river goddess), *Teestaburi* (river goddess *Teesta*), *Maish Thakur* (buffalo deity), *Madan Kaam* (deity of eroticism and fertility) etc. and the particular rituals associated with them justify that the community has deep rooted dependence on and reverence for the natural world. The tiger deity *Sonaray* is apparently a malevolent deity who protects the forest from human interference. The myths and rituals associated with him reflect the abundance of forests in the Rajbangshi localities as well as the forbearance of the community against intrusion into the forest ecosystem. In the folk world of the Rajbangshis man exists just as a part of nature, ever paying homage to the natural world. Invocation to the nature deities reflect the reverence and dependence of the community on nature. Besides, the sheer number of fertility cults, rooted in Rajbangshi tradition highlight on the close association of human, natural and the spiritual worlds. The cults of *Hudum Deo* (the god of rain and thunder) as well as the cult of *Kati*, which are fertility cults exclusively carried out by women tend to underlinethis particular aspect of the Rajbangshi tradition in general, while specific analyses of these rituals show a deeper concept of identification of nature and ecology with women. The role of women as priestesses positions them as interlinkages between the human world and the spiritual world identified with nature (according to their indigenous belief). These rituals are always accompanied by a number of chants and songs which narrate the myths associated with the deities as well as highlight on the human-nonhuman relationship. They form the

gamut of folk literature which later has inspired poetry coming out from the people of this tradition.

Thus, in Koch Rajbangshi tradition Nature is something that is not outside the community life, but an integral part of it. The poems written in the contemporary times echo this ancient wisdom where love for the vegetative landscape as well as riverine site remains the prime concern. So, the Rajbangshi poems reflect ecology as an embedded entity with that of the native consciousness where the landscape, the animals and the primacy of land emerge as the lasting metaphors of their folk imagination.

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## Sustainable Women Entrepreneurship: A Study on Muga Silk Entrepreneurs in Sualkuchi Village of Assam

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### Abstract :

To achieve inclusive development, the sustainability of the women entrepreneurship has become a necessity which is related to the needs of the environment, the economic resources, and the community; and their association with the present and the future. In India, ‘gender disparity’ plays a spoilsport in the realm of inclusive economic development as it constricts the women to take economic decisions, to have economic ownership, to avail equal opportunities for economic growth, and above all the economic independence and sustainability. The present paper has studied the sustainability of the women entrepreneurs, engaged in the *muga* silk production in Sualkuchi Village of Assam, through the marketability, profitability and value chain analysis. It also studies its impact on environment, livelihood and study of attitude of the entrepreneurs and their succeeding generations.

**Keywords :** *Sustainability, Muga Silk, Entrepreneurship, Women*

### Introduction

As per Census 2011, Indian workforce includes about 48.5 percent women population. Thus, a proper and effective augmentation of women in the workforce can contribute towards an inclusive economic growth of the country. For a realistic growth of women in the society, the sustainability of their livelihood is crucial and important. Similarly, out of total population in Assam, 48.92 percent constitute female as per Census 2011. The work participation rate of men is 57.1 per cent and that of women is 12.7 per cent which signifies an unembellished gender disparity (Census, 2011). It is clearly evidenced that

participation of women in workforce and entrepreneurship as an option of livelihood can boost the inclusive economic growth by reducing unemployment and societal vulnerability of the women (Thomas & Hedrick-Wong, 2019). Entrepreneurship is considered as a key to enhance economic growth, productivity and employment opportunities with the help of creativity and competitiveness. Economic growth with sustainability and entrepreneurship has a strong positive relationship. Many researches are also indicative of the fact that by introducing woman as an entrepreneur, the inclusive growth can be achieved sans gender discrimination at a sustainable rate (Özyol, 2020; World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2018, UNGC, 2018). The Indian women entrepreneurs have an edge over their male in creating employment opportunities and increasing productivity, thus playing a significant role in poverty reduction, human development and health and education (Dutta & Gailey, 2012; World bank, 2012). Women entrepreneurship, which is still in its nascent stages, is the most appropriate and viable solution to improve female work participation (Dayal et.al, 1993). Women enterprises account for only 7.36% of the total enterprises (MSME Census 2006-07 published in 2011-12) reflecting the scope for their growth. Studies reveal that though a larger number of women are starting business ventures as a means of self-employment and financial empowerment, the size of their business remains small. To sustain and grow in business, the ventures should be viable enough to ensure commercial sustainability (Yadav & Unni, 2016; Gupta et.al., 2009).

### Background of the study

The development of women is a holistic concept, stretching across economic, social and cultural fields (Mehta & Sethi, 1997; Ahl, 2006). Participation of women in economic development is possible if they engage in entrepreneurial activities (Akehurst et.al., 2012) by excavating their hidden entrepreneurial capabilities, skills, knowledge, adoptability, and sensitizing them towards socio-economic status in the society (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Jennings & Brush, 2013; Bruni et.al, 2004; Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1996; Kelley et.al, 2013). In India women entrepreneurs are found as garment manufactures, farm owners, business women with many commodities, establishing firms like tiffin centres, milk centres, petty shops, vegetable vendor owner, food stall owner, sericulture farmers, weavers, textile designers etc. (York & Venkataraman, 2010; OCED, 2012; Buvinic et.al., 1996). Sustainability of women entrepreneurship can be achieved by augmenting the formation of capital through micro credit and indigenous skill development (Brush & Cooper, 2012; World Bank, 2012).

India enjoys a distinct position in the world silk map producing all four varieties of silk viz. eri, *muga*, tassar and mulberry. It is the second largest producer in the global silk market. Assam has a global monopoly in the production of muga silk. Muga silk is organic

and natural and has the tough natural fibre with durability. With golden lustre rises it with ages and flexibility of using any type of embroidery and colour dying, it becomes one of the costliest silks in the world (Paul & Jena, 2017). Spinning and weaving of silk in Assam has traditionally been a women-oriented occupation which was done at home. This weaving skills of Assamese women is a sustainable source of earning livelihood. Thus, the sustainability of women entrepreneurship in the area of *Muga* silk production and its marketing has placed an important position for contributing towards the economic growth of the state of Assam.

### Literature Review

Sustainability is a concept with three dimensions: environment, economic and social, associated with long term goals without negative impact on them as discussed in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development held at Geneva (UNCTAD, 2015<sup>25</sup>). Entrepreneurship is a tool to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) by creating values and sustainable source of earning and to address the problems of unemployment and poverty (York & Venkataraman, 2010). Sustainable entrepreneurship involves creation of business policies, initiatives and strategies without harming economy society and environment with value creation and sustainable future as discussed by Hall et.al in their article on Journal of Business Venturing (Hall et.al., 2010; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011; Choudhary, 2018).

Women entrepreneurship which creates employment, reduces poverty, better the standard of living by providing health and education support to the households (HHs) and the society as stated in the International Entrepreneurship management Journal (Noguera et.al., 2013; Kelley et.al., 2017; Hechevarría et.al., 2019; Cardella et al., 2020), faces an array of gender discriminations, work-family conflict, poor access to resources, lack of HRD and personality differences. This leads to an inferior mindset and isolation in entrepreneurial concourses with lack of self-confidence and insecurity (Hechevarría et.al., 2019). Some studies revealed that self-confidence, the provision of assistance and institutional support and the ability to access the credit service and social networks are factors that stimulate female entrepreneurs (Mishra, 2015; Alamet.al., 2011). Women lead with assertive, persuasive mindset, willing to take risks to survive and have succeeded during competition with their hard work, diligence and perseverance (Saraswat&Lathabhavan, 2020; Amrita et.al., 2018). Women's environment friendly behaviour in various spheres are more likely to take sustainable decisions for their households and businesses. Gender comparison shows that the way of living, lifestyle and the consumption pattern of women are much less resource intensive and sustainable than that of men (Smith, 2010; Sumathiet.al., 2014; Latham, 2006; Bhatia & Jain, 2013).

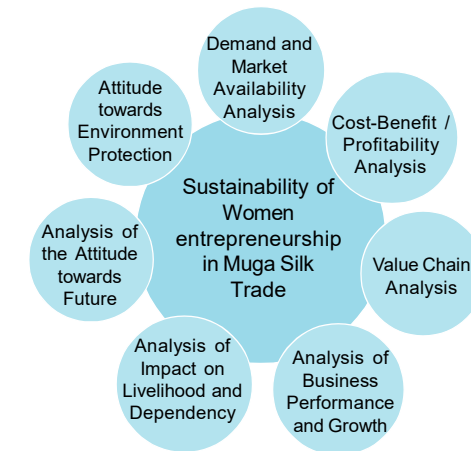
Thus, sustainability is the key issues for a women entrepreneur which can be attained by achieving profitability with a stable market and protection of environment.

### Objectives

The objective of the present paper is to analyse the sustainability of the women entrepreneur, engaged in the *Muga* silk production in Sualkuchi village of the state of Assam.

### Methodology

For the purpose of present study, the Sualkuchi Village of Kamrup District of Assam is selected. Women who are engaged in *Muga* Silk weaving and production with the entrepreneurial ownership are the target group. Primary data were collected from 35 randomly selected women entrepreneurs out of the universe consisting of 76 entrepreneurs who are directly engaged in the production of *Muga* Silk and its marketing, for a minimum period of 10 years. In this study seven domains have been included as presented in the figure 1.



**Figure-1: Sustainability of Women entrepreneurship in Muga Silk Industry**

Analysis of demand and market availability has indicated the presence of market, supply, and demand for the *mugasilk* products at present and in the future, along with the growth in the supply factors and customers' demand and presence of market infrastructure. The marketing chain includes various players at various level. Sustained involvement of each player depends on the value addition at each level which gives rise to profit, which has been analysed through value chain analysis. The analysis of business performance and growth has studied the sustained and consistent growth of the business with respect to the volumes of

working capital, average sales volume, the profit earned, utilisation of capacity in terms of number of looms owned and used, and number of workers engaged over a period of time. The analysis of impact on livelihood and dependency has analysed the trade sustainability through the dependency of the entrepreneur on the business for her livelihood which has been emulated through a steady rise in the expenditures over a period of time. The analysis of the attitude towards future and the analysis of attitude towards environment protection have judged the future of the trade as the propriety, which can be extended, if the future generation accepts the trade to continue with a sustainable physical environment.

**Analysis**

The muga silk plays vital role in the socio cultural life of Assamese people mostly in marriages and different festival. The muga silkworm are semi wild in nature. One more variety of silk worm the oak tassar (muga silkworm) is found in Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong districts which is completely wild in nature. The silk worms feed on leaf of the *som*, and oak plants. After harvesting the cocoons, the weavers prepare the threads and put them in looms to produce various garments and clothes. The weavers either markets the produces directly through their outlets or through middlemen. The sustainability of the *muga* silk trade can be analysed through the following analyses, based on the primary data collected from the responding women entrepreneurs and from the secondary statistical data collected from various sources.

**Demand and Market Availability Analysis**

The Indian sericulture market in 2017 was worth INR 205 billion and the market is projected to reach INR 535 billion by 2023, approximately 18% between 2018 and 2023 (IMRC Group, 2021). Currently, India is the world’s second-largest producer of raw silk and the largest consumer of raw silk and silk fabrics. This is divided into Mulberry and Vanya, based on market segmentation. The Vanya segment of silk market was further sub-divided into Tasar, Eri, and *Muga*. Though India is the second largest silk producer, the domestic demand for silk exceeds the supply and the gap is being met by imports. Based on the demands, the market is again divided into natural silk yarns, fabrics and made-ups; readymade garments; silk carpets; and others. Silk yarns, fabrics and made-ups have the largest areas of demand. In India, Karnataka is the leading producer of mulberry silk whereas Assam is the largest producer of Vanya silk. Assam produced 587.47 metric tonne of *Muga* silk and 106.82 metric tonne of pat mulberry silk during 2011-16. The following table shows a constant rise in the production of muga silk in India. As the gap between demand and supply is quite high, the marketable opportunities for the silk-producers are also high.

**Table 1: Production of Muga Silk in last Five years in India**

Years	Production of Muga Silk (in MT)	Change in %	Years	Production of Muga Silk (in MT)	Change in %	CAGR 2011-12 to 2020-21
2011-12	114.56	-	2016-17	166	30.97	7.721%
2012-13	104.12	-9.11	2017-18	170	2.41	
2013-14	118.04	13.37	2018-19	192	12.94	
2014-15	124.00	5.05	2019-20	233	21.35	
2015-16	126.75	2.22	2020-21	241	3.43	

Source: Statistics presented in Business standard and [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com).

The weavers/entrepreneurs engaged with silk production in Sualkuchi exports few of their products to national (18.56%) and international market (12.11%), and at present, their production is mainly for the purpose of the domestic (local) market. In addition, the weavers take orders from different tribes of north-east region for weaving traditional garments with pat-*muga* silk. The silk market of Sualkuchi is a direct market i.e., *consumer to producers*. The producers with retailing stores directly take orders from the customers during the season of marriage and festivity and produce ready-made garments based on recent customer choices and fashion-trends. Recently, online shopping process, with a sales volume of 4.12%, has initiated and given a wider scope. The cheap machine made and duplicate silk garments present in the market from Assam possess a threat for the *muga* silk market. Thus, innovation in designs and fashion, patenting and geo-tagging the products with an incentivisation for production of pat-muga silk and garments are the need of the hour for its development and growth.

**Cost-Benefit / Profitability Analysis**

A silk producer (seri cultivator) needs at least one acre of land to cultivate about 400 grams of Muga silk in one time. In addition, a single piece of Muga *mekhela sador* requires at least 1000 grams of Muga silk. 1000 cocoons can generate about 125 grams of silk. From rearing the silkworm to obtaining a finished product in terms of a piece of Muga *Mekhela Sador*, it takes almost two months. In order to determine the cost-benefit of one set of muga *mekhela-sador* and one piece of muga-silk saree, five factors are considered, which is presented in the table 2. The cost benefit or profitability analysis shows a profit of 14.39% for the producer for making a *Mekhela Sador* and 14.92% for producing a muga-



silk saree. So also, a profit of 15.38% and 16.36% has been earned by the wholesalers for a *MekhelaSador* and a muga-silk saree whereas the retailer earned a profit of 16.67% and 17.19% respectively. The cost-benefit analysis has been made with a presumption that the time lag between production or purchase and sale of the product is 15 days, and the carrying cost and holding cost is very negligible.

**Table 2: Profitability / Cost-Benefit Analysis of one set of Muga*MekhelaSador* and one piece of Muga-silk Saree (Amounts in INR)**

Particulars	Rupees (Quantity Wise/ Labour Cost)	Unit/ Quantity required for a Set of <i>Mekhela Sador</i>	Per Set of <i>Mekhela Sador</i>	Unit/ Quantity required per Saree	Per Saree in INR
DighSuta/Warp thread(Length Wise)*	Rs.28000 per kg	300 g	8,400	250g	7,000
BaaniSuta/Weft thread (Breadth Wise) **	Rs.26000 per kg	350g	9,100	450g	11,700
For Design i. Guna (Suta)	Rs.500 per kg	500g	250	500g	250
ii. Mina (Suta)	Rs.200/kg	500g	100	500g	100
BobinBota Price	Rs.30/250g	1500g	180	1500g	180
Bati Karha Price	Rs.700/ Wrap Rs.600/ Weft	-	1,300	-	1,300

Particulars	Rupees (Quantity Wise/ Labour Cost)	Unit/ Quantity required for a Set of <i>Mekhela Sador</i>	Per Set of <i>Mekhela Sador</i>	Unit/ Quantity required per Saree	Per Saree in INR
Labour cost (BobinGhura, Cost MohuraFurua, Per Day Cost, Boo Cost, Loom charge)	Rs. (2000 + 1400) per set	-	3400	-	3,400
<b>Total Cost of Production</b>			<b>22,730</b>		<b>23,930</b>
<b>Estimated Selling Price (by the producer)</b>			<b>26,000</b>		<b>27,500</b>
<b>Profit % of the Producer</b>			<b>14.39%</b>		<b>14.92%</b>
<b>Estimated selling price (by the wholesaler)</b>			<b>30,000</b>		<b>32,000</b>
<b>Profit % of the wholesaler</b>			<b>15.38%</b>		<b>16.36%</b>
<b>Estimated Market Price</b>			<b>35,000</b>		<b>37,500</b>
<b>Profit % of the Retailer</b>			<b>16.67%</b>		<b>17.19%</b>

Source: Field Survey data 2022

*\*The vertical arrangement (length) of Muga silk to make any cloth is called ‘Wrap’ (DighSuta); \*\*The horizontal arrangement (breadth) of Muga Silk to make any cloth is called ‘Weft’ (BaaniSuta)*

**Value Chain Analysis**

The value chain analysis has been undertaken by averaging the expenditure incurred and revenue earned at each level of activities (rearers, reelers and dyers, weavers, workers engaged in bleaching, design and dyeing; textile producers, wholesalers and retailers) to produce a set of *Mekhela-sador* and a muga-silk saree. The value chain and the value added at each chain-player is prepared and presented in table-3. The value addition throughout the supply-chain up-to the point of selling shows that each player has added some values to the produces and in that way earn their livelihood. But the weavers/producers control the pre-weaving

value addition (39.50% in case of a *mekhelasador* and 38.01% in case of a muga-silk saree) whereas the middlemen control the post-weaving value addition (around 15 to 17% of the value). Further other chain actors spinning workers, dyers, knitting workers, design workers contribute in the value chain on the basis of ‘work per meter square’ but earn comparatively at a lower proportion. The main players in this industry are the weavers, producers (owners), wholesalers, retailers and middlemen. They are the ultimate value addition players who can decide the selling price of a set of muga-silk saree and a set of *mekhelasador*.

Table 3: Values across the Value Chain for Muga Silk (in Rs.)

Chain Actors	Value	Added Value	% of Value added	Value	Added Value	% of Value added
	<i>Mekhela-sador</i>			Muga-silk saree		
Producers of Silk Fibre	11,336	255	2.25%	12,225	275.063	2.25%
Spinning Workers	11,543	208	1.80%	12,449	224.084	1.80%
Silkworm boiler dyers	11,716	172	1.47%	12,635	185.732	1.47%
Knitting ( <i>Bobin-Bota</i> ) Workers	11,894	178	1.50%	12,827	192.409	1.50%
Weavers / producers	19,660	7766	39.50%	20,692	7865.21	38.01%
Bleaching	20,061	401	2.00%	21,115	422.295	2.00%
Dying	20,575	514	2.50%	21,656	541.404	2.50%
Design and Finishing	20,995	420	2.00%	22,098	441.963	2.00%
Textile Producers	24,680	3685	14.93%	25,973	3875	14.92%
Wholesaler / Middlemen	29,166	4486	15.38%	31,054	5080	16.36%
Retailers (Sales Price)	35,000	5835	16.67%	37500	6446	17.19%

Source: Field Survey data 2022 (based on approx. value)

Analysis of Business Performance and Growth

One of the aspects to study the sustainability of the entrepreneurship is to analyse the growth of the business in terms of uses of working capital and the profit earned. The table -4 indicated a rise in the working capital investment by the women entrepreneurs

engaged in muga-silk production. The growth in the working capital investment has been experienced till early 2020 but shows a decline during the first-phase of COVID pandemic. Though the amount of investment in working capital varies among the individual entrepreneurs but similar trend of growth and decline has been indicated while analysing the books of the respondents. The net profit also shows a rising trend during the pre-COVID period but again declined during the pandemic. Analysing the working capital to net profit ratio, it is found that it is highest during the pandemic period as the entrepreneurs had tried to earn the most of the profit (% of profit to sales is 17.83% in FY 2020-21) though the sales declines to the extent of 20.05% than the previous financial year. Due to covid lockdown there is an unexpected price hike on muga silk thread and weaver’s charge due to which they have discontinued their part of work until they can recover a good amount of revenue. To sustain the business, the entrepreneurs have adjusted their profit percentage and expenditure with respect to the working capital, which is a sign of sustainability.

Table 4: Average Sales, Working Capital invested and Profit Earned during the last five FYs (in Rs.) and the change (in %) from the Previous FY

Particulars	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Average Sales	11,81,220.65	13,78,271.23	15,69,106.70	16,59,211.04	13,26,542.64
Change	-	16.68%	13.85%	5.74%	-20.05%
Average WC	7,95,434.78	9,21,304.30	10,80,652	11,25,652	9,27,652.20
Change	-	15.82%	17.30%	4.16%	-17.59%
Average Net Profit	1,84,506.67	2,35,960.03	2,64,080.66	2,74,267.58	2,36,522.55
Change	-	27.89%	11.92%	3.86%	-13.76%
WC to NP Ratio	4.31	3.90	4.09	4.10	3.92
NP to Sales	15.62%	17.12%	16.83%	16.53%	17.83%

Source: Field Survey data 2022 (based on approx. value)

Analysing the capacity utilisation, in terms of average number of looms used, it is found from the table – 5 that the entrepreneurs have also reduced or increased the uses of

the looms on the basis of the demand and investment. The capacity utilisation has been declined during the pandemic period. Otherwise, the average capacity utilisation rate is within 76% to 89% which is very good for a small-scale women entrepreneur. Higher price of raw material and labour cost are the reason behind decrease in the number of weavers and looms in this industry.

**Table 5: Number of looms owned and used by the Respondents over the last five years**

FYs	Average Number of looms owned	Average Number of looms used	Used Capacity in %
2016-17	6.8	5.2	76.47%
2017-18	7.2	6.4	88.89%
2018-19	8.7	7.1	81.61%
2019-20	9.0	7.5	83.33%
2020-21	9.0	5.6	62.22%

Source: Field Survey data 2022

Post-lockdown period has experienced a steady growth in the average number of workers per month and the average number of man-hours per month, for the responding women entrepreneurs. However, during the pandemic it has reduced drastically. In pre-pandemic period the percentage of non-wage workers (members from the family) constituted around 38.02% to 39.67% but the ratio changed during the pandemic to 56.03% to manage the cost. Except three entrepreneurs in all other cases the number of hired weavers are decreasing because of high price of muga silk thread, high charge by weavers and sometime ‘run off’ by the weavers after advance charge by the them. The growth in the manpower employment and the rise in the number of man-hour used have indicated the steady growth in the business.

**Table 6: Number of Workers engaged during the last five years**

FYs	Average Number of workers used per month	Average Number of Man-hours per month	Average Number of family members worked per month	Average Number of Man-hours per month done by the family members	% of work done by Family workers
2016-17	15.43	2701.09	5.87	1026.95	38.02%
2017-18	16.96	2967.39	6.71	1174.20	39.57%
2018-19	20.09	3515.22	7.96	1392.73	39.62%
2019-20	21.39	3743.48	8.49	1485.04	39.67%
2020-21	14.35	2510.87	8.04	1056.83	56.03%

Source: Field Survey data 2022

**Analysis of Impact on Livelihood and Dependency**

The business is said to be sustainable if the entrepreneur has dependency on it for his livelihood and due to the business, the income as well as his expenditures have been steadily increased over a period of time. In this regard, the responses were collected from the responding entrepreneurs engaged in the muga-silk production, which has been summed up and presented in the table 7. The average share of income from the muga-silk business to the total HH income (68.32%) indicates a low-level livelihood-diversification among the respondents and thus, the dependency on the muga-business is high. The respondents also opined that their income has been increased and so as the HH expenditures along with acquisition of HH assets, education for the children, medical and sanitation at an increased rate whereas the expenditure for food and clothing, and housing has been increased at a lower rate. They also used an average of 44.88% of the business return for the working capital and reinvestment. The use of 10.22% of the return for general savings and 19.56% for acquisition of HH assets is the indicative of their future-orientations. An average income of 4.89 percent has only been utilised for development of skill purposes though the venture needs a high degree of innovation, skill acquisition and specialisation. According to them, the traditional looming does not require additional skill and expertise as they have possessed the expertise in their work due to the presence of the traditional knowledge and skill.

Table 7: HH Income and Uses of Return/Income from the Muga-Silk Business

Purposes	% of the Revenue	Purposes	% of the Revenue
Composition of Household Income (in %)			
Muga Silk	68.32%	Other Businesses	12.34%
Agriculture & allied	14.43%	Any other sources	4.91%
Increase in the HH Income		Increase in the HH Expenditure	
0 – 20% Increase	21.74%	0 – 20% Increase	13.04%
20 – 40% Increase	52.17%	20 – 40% Increase	60.87%
40 – 60% Increase	13.04%	40 – 60% Increase	17.39%
More than 60% Increase	8.70%	More than 60% Increase	4.35%
Use of Return/Income from the Muga-Silk Business (in %)			
HH Consumption	20.45	Working capital Uses	23.12
Purchase of HH Assets	19.56	Re-investment in business	21.76
Savings and investment	10.22	Other purposes (Training etc.)	4.89

Source: Field Survey data 2022

Analysis of the Attitude towards Future

A five-scale questionnaire, based on Likert Scale, were administered on the respondents to analyse the attitude of the women entrepreneurs, who are engaged in weaving and marketing of muga silk. The descriptive statistical analysis has indicated that they can face future eventualities with confidence, can transact with suppliers and traders from the state of Assam and other states easily, and also transact and negotiate with government officials (Table 8). They also take necessary measures for the future as they save and spend for children’s education but adapt low level of preventive health measures. Putting to test the views for the test of Ch-square, it is found that the difference between the views of the respondents are not varied, which is also been confirmed due to a low score of standard deviation for all statements.

Table 8: Confidence to face the Future: Descriptive Statistics

Statements .... I plan for	Mean	SD	□ <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
face any eventualities in future	4.11	.793	72.199	.000
preventive health measures	2.96	.825	64.547	.004
children education	3.89	.656	63.331	.000
savings/investment	4.13	.815	69.429	.000
I can transact with supplier/traders	3.98	.850	93.650	.000
I can transact with govt. officials	3.61	.988	73.681	.000

Source: Field Survey data 2022 (based on approx. value)

With respect to the attitudes of the women entrepreneurs, as responded under a 5-scale response, from Sualkuchi silk village, the respondents had opined equivocally to continue their muga-silk business at a higher scale in the future and also opined to opt for some diversification of business,as a secondary option, along with a step up in present muga-business. They denied to continue the business with lower volume in future with a change and diversification of business or continue with the same scale or to discontinue the muga-business fully. The low standard deviation score and the chi-square test have confirmedthe no variance of opinion among the respondents.

Table 9: Attitude towards Muga Silk Production and selling in future

Statements .... Continue muga silk activities	Mean	SD	□ <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
as it is	1.89	.340	57.894	.000
with larger volume	4.26	.137	54.693	.004
with larger volume and to diversify to other business	4.17	.188	49.892	.000
with lower volume and to diversify to other business at a higher scale	2.14	.445	69.211	.000
Discontinue muga activities fully	1.04	.825	57.513	.004

Source: Field Survey data 2022 (based on approx. value)

Analysis of Attitude towards Environment Protection

Respondents under the present study, responding to a five scale questions about with respect to their views on the environment protection and the attitude of the future generations, which revealed that their use of traditional skills and knowledge in the cultivation of silkworm and the *som* trees, handling the handlooms for weaving, materials they used, and production of textiles are always environment friendly. Therefore, they want to adopt this traditional skill which do not have any harmful impact on environment and also helps in maintaining the forest ecosystem. Hence, they are aware about that there is no any harmful side from cultivation culture and weaving culture of Muga Silk (Table 10). With respect to the continuation of the trade through next generations, a divided opinion is formed among the respondents. Some of the respondents are highly agreed that their business should continue but a divided in their views with respect to involvement of their next generation or upsprings. The divided of opinion, as indicated through the test of Ch-square, about the introduction of innovative modules in muga production with respect to the designs, colour, fibre-mixing, motifs, upgradation of their looms etc.

Table 10: Attitude towards environment protection and their succeeding generation

Statements .... I am aware about	Mean	SD	χ <sup>2</sup>	Sig.
environmental degradation and its protection	4.17	.576	56.192	.000
the measures to retain the forest cover for silk moth rearing and the cultivation of <i>som</i> trees	4.65	.832	58.001	.000
the uses of non-chemical raw materials	4.13	.694	52.579	.000
the teaching to other weavers about environment protection	3.08	1.087	43.091	.004
I want my children must continue the same business	4.13	.339	51.004	.000
I want the traditional knowledge and skill should continue to next generation	4.06	.381	52.785	.000
My children want to continue the same business	2.89	.429	<b>1.005</b>	<b>.711</b>
I want that the muga business should not stop in future	4.44	.189	57.892	.004
I want the innovation in muga silk production	2.09	1.691	<b>1.792</b>	<b>.672</b>

Source: Field Survey data 2022

Findings

The findings of the above analysis indicated the presence of a gap between the demand and supply of *mugasilk* with a well-developed market-infrastructure. There is opportunity for the growth and sustainability of the trade, which has been demonstrated through the analysis of business performance and growth. The present trade has not only provided an acceptable degree of profitability to the producers but also indicated the presence of value addition in each stage of the value chain. The dependency on the *mugasilk* trade for the livelihood by the women entrepreneurs has increased. The *Muga*-silk business has not only empowered the women entrepreneurs in terms of economic happiness as the business is flourishing and growing during the pre-pandemic period and provide a substituted means of livelihood by the use of indigenous knowledge and skill, raw materials, and machinery and tools. The agrarian economy successfully satisfies hungry stomachs of the deprived lots in the state of Assam. They are not only successful in carrying their business for years together but also negotiated the tough periods of COVID pandemic which affects the whole of handloom sector in India. They manage through their limited entrepreneurial capabilities, the challenges of tough competitions in the garment market, higher cost of silk thread and other raw materials, higher labour cost and scarcity of indigenous labour etc. With a futuristic resiliency, the women-led *muga*-silk business proves to be sustainable.

- The concerning fact of sustainability of this trade is due to the following reasons:
- i. Lack of interest of the next generation to adopt the current *muga*-trade,
  - ii. A feeling of alienation towards innovation in *muga* silk production and adaptation of new and sophisticated technology by the indigenous weavers,
  - iii. Lack of upgradation of indigenous knowledge, skill and technology among the weavers as the localised R & D on the indigenous knowledge is absent completely,
  - iv. Adaptation and flexibility of the entrepreneurs to handle the future abrupt eventualities like the recent COVID pandemic.

Conclusion

The sustainability of women entrepreneurs engaged in *muga*-silk production in the Sualkuchi Village of Assam is present but is very much localised. It can be globally achievable as the perpetual demand for the seri-products in a healthy and organic lifestyle augments the pace of the progress in an optimistic course. The lone way for attainment is a scientific assortment of the indigenous knowledge and skill with contemporary marketing innovations and augmentation of human resources.



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## A Midsummer's Nightmare, a May-queen in Mayhem: Channeling Ari Aster's movie *Midsommar* from an Eco-Horror Perspective

*Priyanka Bharali*

### Abstract

As much as ecocriticism dwells in the forefront of attention in the present era, the subgenres of the same are similarly gaining prominence for its multiplicity and inclusivity of different aspects and issues. Eco-Horror is one such idea that strays away from and at the same time stays within the frame of ecocriticism by adding new elements of the gothic and the horror to its cradle. From representing explicit human fears at its peak to aligning human resemblance to the natural world, Eco-Horror let us visualize the necessity to acknowledge an ecosystem that can be a harbinger of both peace and destruction. This paper would be an attempt to analyse this very concept through the American film director Ari Aster's 2019 folk horror film, *Midsommar*. This horror masterpiece which deals with a group's disturbing encounter with a Pagan cult of Scandinavia in a midsummer celebration festival, not only portrays the gruesome bloodbath that occurs in the ritualistic celebration, but also interrogates into the question of identity, power and ecofemininity. The crowning of the "may-queen" which is central to the celebration is deeply ecological, and simultaneously political in terms of the woman protagonist and her voyage towards a self-awakening. She is ecologically conscious, and ecologically dangerous; there is a wilderness within her, a spark of power that reaches redemption in the bounty of nature no matter how deadly it becomes. The movie is an all powerful statement of a female's mingling with the ecosystem; a recitation of the horror that dwells among the trees, the sky, the river and the flowers. This paper intends to study this very site of power that resides both within the natural world and humans, but, within the realms of terror and horror.

**Keywords:** *Ecology, Horror, Power, Nature, Ecofeminism, Women*

### Introduction :

There is a pattern that runs through the movie and the grotesqueness and gory cult fictionalization of the plot makes it more obvious as Aster's one of the most mind-boggling creation alongside *Hereditary* (2018). The viewers are already introduced to the emotional wreckage that the protagonist Dani (Florence Pugh) is going through; she is a psychology student, and her sister Terri (Kludia Csányi) is a bipolar to make matters worse. The other characters Christian (Jack Reynor), Josh (William Jackson Harper), Mark (Will Poulter) and Pelle (Vilhelm Blomgren) appear to be a bunch of anthropology students which again signifies another angle that binds the plot to a very structured ecological framework. In a review by Richard Brody in *The New Yorker*, the critic comments on the Swedish cult of the film and their rigidity of living as a natural phenomenon involving an "essence of autonomy". The movie begins with still lifeless landscape covered in frost and snow, an air of silence accompanying the views with only a folk tune carrying off the shifts in scenes. The emotionally vulnerable Dani, who is struggling in her relationship with an equally emotionally distant Christian, is yet to receive the shock of her life. Her bipolar sister commits suicide in her home by using car exhaust, and in the process their parents also get killed. Dani's trauma is fuelled, as she is left orphaned only to lean onto Christian who treats her as an obligation. It is incredibly commendable how Aster will make a heroine out of this poor girl who is yet to get any kind of genuine sympathy and appreciation from Christian and his friends, the only circle of people with whom she is left now. The use of symbolism is very explicit in the story from the very beginning, which have many times even served as an act of foreshadowing. The sinister ecological connotations on display from the very beginning including the yellow floral wallpapers, the yellow floral bed-sheet and blanket in Dani's parents' room where they were lying as corpses is chilling, as we would later be familiarized with similar instances inside the Swedish Harga community. The yellowness even in death of Terri i.e. the yellow pipe through which she suffocates herself and the yellow top she wore while committing the act is significant too. An all-pervading natural insight to these gruesome acts has been brought about through the play of flora and fauna. Flowers which are often associated with fertility, innocence, and rebirth will be recurrent all over again. Later, Dani mourning their deaths in the arms of Christian equally comes off as a passive act, as we already witnessed his indifferent affection towards her through the phone-call and his little chit-chat with his friends. They were almost intimidating when they said, "You don't want her back" (07:22) and "She's abusing you" (08:25); But Dani seems otherwise genuine when she tells her friend that she always leans on him. The cycle of seasons is mirroring Dani in her every plight. The fierce snow-storm that creeps inside her parents' home and her confrontation with Christian after the homicide will eventually turn into a spring-summer reality,

once they enter the Harga community in the remotes of Halsingland. It is as if the sudden shifts are phases of Dani's soul that transformed from a dim, dull and remorseful period to a bright, optimistic and extraordinary future.

### **Methodology :**

Barbara Creed theorizes in her seminal work *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, the role and representation of females in horror films. Creed's seven archetypes of monstrous women i.e. archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, monstrous mother and castrator, has been duly studied in order to bring forth an argument regarding the role of Dani, the central female character of *Midsommar*. These archetypes can be inserted significantly into the purely matriarchal space of Harga where the female empowerment and female emotional sensibility coexists. The element of horror, gore and grotesqueness mildly nourishes its way through more emotional themes of love, sacrifice and empathy. Dani hasn't recovered; the trauma of separation and death still haunts her. When the mysterious Swedish friend of Christian, Pelle, confronts her and expresses sorry about her family tragedy, she immediately withdraws and hyperventilates. Pelle, in a way, opens a gateway for her to escape this worldliness, this attachment by letting her step into a merciless but structured world of Harga. Her journey to Harga is important as it promises her a new world full of autonomy and spiritual awakening with nature. She will finally see the manipulative and emotionally abusive Christian and would gift him the most "lavish garish vindication". Creed's theory of the "monstrous feminine" is applicable here in the sense that Dani, the protagonist, emerges as a full female consciousness amidst the bounty of nature, subverts typical feminine stereotypes, and usurps as an ecologically monstrous women defying and leaving behind her trauma. As a whole, *Midsommar* becomes an elevation of nature, the monstrous, the feminine and the horror, and Creed's theoretical method of looking at women in the visual arts as part of a larger body of archetypes becomes a cherry on top to further substantiate Aster's folk-horror masterpiece.

### **Discussion :**

The cinematography absolutely changes in a blink of an eye once they start for Halsingland. From the previous dark and terrifying bedlam of an atmosphere to pleasingly eye-catching greenery brings change of mood and vibe altogether. Now, their first association with Harga community, especially Dani, is extremely eco-centric and mystical at the same time. They were offered hallucinogenic mushrooms which served its immediate effect upon the group. Dani hesitatingly felt obliged to "take" them because she feared that Christian's friends might judge her. The mushroom tea is Dani's first taste of nature outside of her previous catastrophic world and her first feeling of "oneness". She suddenly felt a rage, an

all-powerful fit of emotional gravity that made her hysterical for a few moments. She could see the trees breathing, alive with their veins, and even encountered her sister's visage in the mirror of a wooden chamber. The whole distorted moment led her to travel through the forest where she came across a vision of her dead family again. This particular scene asserts the power and dominance that the Harga space is thrusting upon Dani which will subsequently lead her to one kind of redemption. Harga is enclosed and sheltered by the bounty of nature, but is ready to provide a limitless space to Dani her secluded spirit. They felt no sense of time in Harga i.e. it's a never ending stretch of daylight signifying positivity and hope. This heaven-like abode is not for all though; it is a harbinger of doom for everyone else but Dani. Yellow flowers make a return to the scene as Dani uncovers patches of them that lead to the interior entrance of Harga. The colour is symbolical as it is embedded with Dani's past, and seems like it has followed her to this new Swedish shelter. There is a different kind of energy she feels, as if she has jumped from one dimension to another. The flowers guiding their paths are quite ironical; some will meet their end while Dani would revive. This cult of a community has a female-oriented authority with their women being involved in every task and action. Dani saw a new family rising in front of her eyes, and she is mesmerized by their vitality. The old woman from the community shouts, "Spirits! Back to the dead!" and inaugurates the nine-day sacrificial midsummer festival. Harga appears to be a metaphorical site of sacrifice, as it seems that Dani's relationship with Christian shall be compromised for the sake of another birth i.e. Maja (Isabelle Grill) and her desire to get impregnated by Christian. This delicate looking red-haired girl, who had just got the "license" to indulge in carnal pleasure, as told by Pelle, appears as a "monstrous female" who will assert her dominance over Christian no matter what. She flirts with him and resorts to use spells in the form of love-potions to bewitch him. Her power is bigger than Christian and Dani, and she overpowers and succeeds in driving him to have sex with her. She isn't interested in him, but in what might come from him. She harbours fierce power in the form of spells and potions and is determined and devoted towards attaining motherhood. Dani seems futile in front of her because she is confused and bewildered; in the meantime, Maja is stubborn and knows her destination.

Aster incredibly depicts many of the different plotlines of the movie by the use of traditional art inscriptions. We are allowed to see the community's entanglement with the natural forces of the sun, the moon, the animals, the flowers, the seasons and the circle of life, love and death through many paintings. Maja's making of the love potion is not shown, but depicted in the canvas art. As Creed's one of the monstrous feminine archetypes i.e. "witch", she arises as someone who knows and is intellectual enough to turn the tables to her own side, thus empowering the concept of the witch in light of a powerful female autonomy.

Again, in the distant clearing stands the yellow pyramid shaped temple which will eventually be the ultimate dead end for many characters. The yellow-coloured triangular temple is the marker of death that stands far away and is waiting for its final ignition. The community is quite structured in its divisions of spaces and regulations. There is a kitchen, a guest house, a church to keep the secret scriptures, stables, poultry and other chambers per se. The runic guest house is a big communal room for the visitors to stay, full of art inscriptions and engravings on the wood. Aster portrays almost the entire plot through the traditional paintings on the tapestry, but one has to have a very keen eye to figure it out. It is important how Pelle, the Swedish native, explains the community's affinity with the cycle of seasons that is responsible for sealing their fate in the long run. He says:

We think of life like the seasons. You are a child until you are sixteen, and that is the Spring. At some point we all do our Pilgrimage, and that's between seventeen and thirty-two. That's Summer. Then, from thirty-three to fifty-two, you are of working age: Fall. And finally from fifty-three to seventy-two, you become a mentor. (*Midsommar* 46:48-47:06)

One must already feel how every action from Christian's side is already propagating a push towards Dani's liberation. She will become the nature itself, and would take a toll on Christian for good. The scene where he brings a piece of cake for Dani, between them stands a group of females from the community nurturing a baby. The rebirth is closer it seems. An avid watcher can never disregard the *Attestupa* ceremony that comes off as one of the horrendous part regarding the practices of the Harga community. The ceremony of two elders voluntarily ending their life by jumping off a cliff while everyone witnesses and mourns is definitely something exotic that keeps the "outsiders" on edge. They protested but also submitted as they couldn't overpower the community's charm and "otherness" on being one of a kind. Dani feels numb witnessing two deaths but somehow adapts and merges. Awareness rises on her side; she feels the reality that the spiritual nature of Harga is making her sense; she runs and cries again. Pelle explains that the community is his family and after his parents died, he always felt "held" by them. This seems feasible in part of Dani too, as she dreams about her dead parents and the elderly couple from *Attestupa* ritual as similar nuances of her life. The community can be objectified as a portal for her to embrace a new side by leaving the past; this is constantly manifested through her dreams and flashbacks where she meets the ghosts from her past.

Harga seems to have an otherworldly affinity with nature; in fact, the people actually preserve themselves as "back to nature" descendants. The place and its scenic environment not only mesmerize the audience from an artistic side, but the rituals, the liberal sexual

conceptions and their concern for the flora and fauna itself augments the argument. The painting enumerating maypole competition is full of homosexual vividness, an all-female bonding to revitalize oneself to the fullest. The ash of the dead is put into the root of the fallen ancestral tree, and Mark was severely rebuked for pissing over it:

Your little f\*cking American friend! He has pissed on the *Rotvalta*!  
(*Midsommar* 1:20:14-1:20:17)

The place is an endless search of possibilities for Dani who is struggling to overcome a hysterical episode of death and decay from her past. Harga offers opportunity to the different but the willing ones. The inbred Ruben (Levente Puczkó-Smith) is solely responsible in crafting the runic language and the secrets of the community, which however ended up Josh in the death pit as he crossed the threshold to violate the guidelines protecting the communal origins. The priest calls Ruben different and not normal which makes him "open" and unbiased to all sorts of actions. In a similar manner, the place wants Dani, her emotions, and her past, and shoves sympathy to her in supernatural ways and eventually waits for her verdict. The eco-consciousness in her is alive; it is just dwindling inside her to nourish her more into maturity. The sexual power is alive too, as we see it getting bloomed in part of Maja who made a pie following the love-spell ingredients which includes pubic hair and menstrual blood. The grotesqueness of the scene when Christian finds the hair in his pie is one kind of a beginning of separation both for Dani and Maja. Maja would distance herself from everything to gain motherhood, while Dani would slide away from the shackles of unrequited-love.

One after another the elimination of the outsiders results in Dani and Christian sinking deep into the hypnotizing nature of Harga. After almost every other character gets killed secretly, Dani is given community clothes i.e. pure white frock sealed with floral embroidery. This marks the beginning of her assemblage into the deep recess of Harga's nature. The yellow energy drink was offered to her before the maypole dancing competition i.e. a competition of females. The scene where she looks at her feet and sees them getting camouflaged with the grass is metaphorical. This signifies her transformation into a full-fledged Harga figure even before she realizes. Her union with nature is invincible as she's a force herself to be reckoned with. The maypole itself is significant in resembling the penis, and as such the females would dance around it showing excessive energy and stamina until they fall. This again takes us back to Creed's archetype of the "castrator" where women will ultimately castrate or demolish the men and will reign supreme independently. One old woman (Anki Larsson) announces the origin of the dance:

It was here long ago that the Black One lured the youths of Harga to the grass and seduced them into dance. Once they began, they couldn't stop, and they danced themselves to death. Now, in life-holding defiance of the Black One, we dance until we fall. (*Midsommar* 1:38:40-1:39:02)

Two simultaneous acts with two different after-effects happen, as Dani dances to her fullest and Christian gets lured by Maja. The May-queen competition comes as a climax for the whole movie, where Dani seems to be in her full potential by absorbing all the collective energy, she could maintain. She becomes the may-queen amidst all mayhem; she is adorned with overarching blossoms; she was on the side of the crowd of Harga whereas Christian stands alone facing them. She is ready to castrate Christian to emerge as a mother nature's empowering daughter. The rhetoric of that scene is extremely well executed as it shows Dani's final amalgamation with nature. She has found her "place" away from the passive and superficial Christian. The ecology seems to reverberate with her, telling her to be a part of this new-found land. Time and again her past flashes back, as even after the competition she visualizes her mother in the crowd drifting away without greeting her. Dani stands now in a pedestal higher than others; the crowd carries her away from a bleak and hallucinating Christian who is perplexed and has lost his purpose. It is striking how the audience is allowed to see a visage of Dani's sister formed by the trees, as she is seen getting carried away by the crowd. The past will perhaps stay, but will definitely be more tolerable now. Dani's crowning as the may-queen subjects her to a more spiritual bond with the nature of Harga. She can see the food, the flowers, the trees and the ground pulsating with life. She is now the force of nature. She sits, everyone sits; she eats, everyone eats. She is the enigma, as one of the members says, "The Queen must ride alone!" (1:54:40), when Dani asks if Christian can accompany her to bless the land. The traditional folk rituals in part do the job of comprehending the much spiritual and pagan lifestyle of Harga. The ritual of the may-queen blessing the land is itself communicative of the matriarchal freedom of Harga, where female bonding, connection with Mother Nature and shared empathy is valued over everything else. Men from inside the community are only on the side-lines, watching their women illuminating the way; while men from outside are being watched carefully, and are just scapegoats to fulfil Harga's cult needs. The may-queen going off in a pretty chariot full of embellished flowers and creepers to bless the land is a sight of power and benevolence. On the other hand, Christian will transgress to his ultimate doom as he walks over the yellow flower path that leads to Maja. She lures him to satisfy her sexual desire through which she will attain the blessing of motherhood. Christian changes into the traditional Harga clothing in almost a state of trance, and is provided smoke by two elders for vitality. The sexual act of Maja and Christian is the final blow that liberates

Dani from all worldly misfortunes. She witnesses the mating ritual through the keyhole where he and Maja indulge sexually surrounded by naked women of different ages.

The communal sharing and partaking heighten here, where two different reactions avail at the same time. The naked women share Maja's pain by mimicking her moans and outside, Dani wails with wrath and pain after finding out Christian's betrayal only in turn to get mobbed by another group of women mimicking her cries. Sandra Huber in her article "Blood and Tears and Potions and Flame: Excesses of Transformation in Ari Aster's *Midsommar*", talks about this particular mime scene which stands out from the rest of the movie. She expresses that Harga women mirrored Dani's rage and helped her to conjure it up and push it away into exteriority. One can observe all these women as part of one single "possessed body" which again, adheres to Barbara Creed's archetype of monstrous women. The scene inside contrasts the scene outside i.e. a final battle between Dani and Christian will prevail. Dani releases her anger and the women from the community shares it along with her. The females here with their overarching influence and strength come straight into the limelight. As Maja is contented in achieving a hope for motherhood, Dani is relieved from a great burden of being dependent and docile. The final rite for the nine-day sacrificial midsummer ceremony nears completion with Christian coming back to his senses and realizing that all his friends have been murdered. The gruesome deaths and the preserving of the corpses in the most atrocious way reflect Harga's consumption of a particular pattern of thinking and behaviour. It was later revealed that Christian, Mark, Josh and others are the "new-bloods" who are supposed to be the human sacrifices that Pelle brought from outside. Dani's ultimate form is seen as a lush overgrowth of flowers which is campy and grotesque; she is unfeeling and cold and is engulfed by her natural instincts as a whole. She is an expanse larger than her surroundings and the structures around her. She looks larger than life and almost mythical; her pain is allowed to get shared and is given a room to flower. Her attire resembles the shape of a pyramid i.e. an entire structure that she will perhaps be a part of now. The final powerful predicament comes with Dani's decision of choosing none other than Christian as the ninth and the last sacrifice instead of one random community folk. She locked his fate and released herself from her disrupted past. Christian is stuffed into the bear that we previously saw captured in a cage, and it also immediately takes us back to the painting in Dani's home which resembled a bear being tamed by a crowned nymph-like female. He meets his end in that distant yellow triangular temple where the priest says,

Mighty and dreadful beast. With you, we purge our most unholy affects. We banish you now to the deepest recesses, where you may reflect on your wickedness. (*Midsommar* 2:17:23-2:17:35)

**Conclusion :**

The temple as a funeral pyre with Christian and his friends inside appears to be the final purgation and exorcism of all the bonds that was tied to Dani. As it burns, the Harga community cries, wails, beat their chests and again participates in a collective agony. Dani screams and cries too but recovers, and immediately drops a sinister smile drenched in outrageous blossoms as the screen slowly cuts to black. YouTube channel *BabyBerg* in her analysis video of *Midsommar* titled “Midsommar: Womanhood and the Monstrous Feminine” brings about the concept of a cult that is built upon “landscape, isolation, and skewed moral beliefs”. The pagan cult of Harga similarly entrusts upon spirituality and nature, and one can examine the community as a celebration of womanhood in general. Dani suffered grief alone in isolation in the patriarchal world of Christian, but now in Harga she shares her sorrow and feels enlightened. Her vengeance is poetic. Her journey went through loss and a search, then a descent and finally ended in a complete metamorphosis. She finally understood the connection between nature and womanhood by going through an explicitly terrifying stage of shock, horror and dejection. Ari Aster picked up the theme of “emotional burden” of women folk and made it the centre of the movie through which the whole two-and-a-half-hour tour of the cult of Harga was witnessed. The killing spree, the bizarre rituals, the grotesque figures, the jumpscare, the suspense and the psychedelic moments are beautifully pinned in *Midsommar* over the more delicate surface of matriarchy, sex, Mother Nature and empathy.

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## Negotiating Coleridge’s Poems from an Ecofeminist Perspective: A Select Study

*Dr. Nandini Choudhury Bora*

**Abstract**

Among the various ecosophies providing a variety of analytical standpoints, influencing and propelling the ecocritical discourse in different directions, ecofeminism is a key ecosophy that seeks to engage a comprehensive inquiry into the values guiding human interaction with the environment. At the core level, ecofeminism may be defined as a philosophy that represents a union of feminist thinking with radical ecological thinking. Ecofeminists like Rosemary Ruether in *New Women and New Earth* (1975) and Karen Warren in *Ecological Feminism* (ed) 1994 argue that in such societies where the primary model of relationships is one of domination, liberation for women as well as ecological resolution will remain a distant dream. Ecofeminism thus identifies the androcentric dualism of man/woman as the source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices. Eco feminists all across the world argue that the goal of these two movements are mutually reinforcing as they involve the development of world views and practices that are not based on male biased models of domination. As opposed to patriarchal notions of domination, eco feminists espouse the “ethics of care”, a philosophy promulgated by Karen Warren in *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (2000) that refer to the practices of care associated with ‘mothers, nursing and friendship’ based on sensitivity and moral inclination as opposed to patriarchy involving violence and oppression. In the backdrop of the above discussion, the present paper aims for an ecofeminist reading of three selected poems of the Romantic poet, S T Coleridge namely, “Christabel”, “Frost at Midnight” and “The Ballad of the Dark Ladie : A Fragment”. The aforementioned poems will argue for a rethinking and realignment of gender roles that impose patriarchal hegemony on the marginalized sections of society that include women and the environment. The methodology will be analytical in nature and primary and secondary sources will be consulted.

*Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Feminism, Ethics, Care, Patriarchy, Gender.*



Ecofeminism, also referred to as ecological feminism is an important ecosophy of the Ecocritical Discourse that seeks to unearth the connections between women and nature and analyse the treatment meted out to both in patriarchal societies. As a philosophy it is grounded in the basic feminist tenets of equality between genders seeking to assert non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures. While seeking to maintain these notions of equality between genders ecofeminism is committed to protection of the environment and is grounded on the awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Practitioners of the ecofeminist philosophy assert the need for an alternative world view that values the earth and all the living creatures as sacred while also recognizing humanity's dependency on the natural world. In the present times, needless to say, given the precarious condition of the planet the ecocritical discourse is assuming a position of utmost importance. The ecocritical discourse termed as ecocriticism may be defined as the application of ecological concepts to the study of literature in relation to the ecosystem. The various ways in which literature treat the subject of nature and problematizes landscape and environment with special emphasis on season, climate, weather, region and a healthy continuation of biotic and abiotic elements is examined within the broad area of the ecocritical discourse. Moreover, it highlights a holistic approach to texts that examines the perceived relationship between man, nature, ecology and environment. In the backdrop of the postcolonial scenario together with the other paradigms such as race, gender, class and identity as represented in literary texts, the study of the ecology or environment has gained much prominence. Ecocriticism maintains that literature may be approached in a way that examines man as part of the ecosystem and explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between mankind and the environment in all areas of cultural production. At the same time, Ecocriticism seeks to give a voice to the ecological rights of nature so that a balanced ecosystem is maintained( Choudhury 1).

Among the various ecosophies providing a variety of analytical standpoints influencing and propelling the ecocritical discourse in different directions, ecofeminism is a key ecosophy that seeks to engage a comprehensive inquiry into the values guiding human interaction with the environment . The term 'ecofeminisme' was first coined by Francoise d'Eaubonne (Merchant Earthcare 5) who drew an analogy between the male driven urbanized society that has reduced the earth's fertility and over breeding that has resulted in the ever increasing population and exploitation of women (qtd in Gates 17). Ecofeminist Rosemary Ruether in *New Women, New Earth* (1975) argues that in such a society where the primary model of relationships is one of domination there can be neither liberation for women nor ecological resolution. The demands of the women's movement need to be united with the ecological movement in order to recreate a society that is equal (204).

Ecofeminist philosopher Karen Warren takes a similar stance when she contends that Ecofeminism involves the recognition that both Feminism and the ecological movement share a common "logic of domination" (Warren 1994:9) an underlying 'master model' while ecofeminist Davion observes women have come to be associated with nature, the material, the emotional , and the particular, while men have been associated with culture, the non-material, the rational and the abstract' because of this "master model" (Davion 1994: 4). Critic Val Plumwood states that merely differentiating men from women, humans from nature and reason from emotion does not itself constitute problematic anthropocentrism or androcentrism. It is the underlying model of mastery shared by these forms that is important. She advocates a recognition of both similarity and difference in the human-nature continuum. "We need to understand and affirm both otherness and our community in the earth" (Plumwood 1993: 137). She does not argue for a rejection of either science or reason, but rather a qualification of the philosophies that would polarize reason and nature in opposition. It is possible, according to her, to distinguish reason and emotion, man and woman, human and animal, but without the obsessiveness of the mainstream philosophical tradition thereby helping to undermine that mastery model that legitimates anthropocentrism and androcentrism (qtd in Garrard 28).

The above theories as propounded by the various Ecofeminists make it clear that they are all unanimous in their opinion that the dominion of women and dominion of nature are fundamentally connected and this understanding is crucial to feminism, environmentalism and environmental philosophy (Garrard 26). Ever since the publication of Jonathan Bate's seminal works, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000) critics and scholars have started recognizing the contribution of the Romantic poets towards the modern concept of ecology and environmental discourse. With his illustrious contemporary William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge too holds a unique position as a poet with a strong environmental consciousness. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge too was not a mere on-looker of nature's picturesque beauty and instead adopts the persona of a speaker whose voice is largely conditioned by "the local and personal history of the place he inhabits" (McKusick, Green Writing 28-29) His works consistently express a deep and abiding interest in the Earth as a dwelling place for all living things and in such a perspective one may locate the origins of ecological thinking and a "holistic conception of the earth as a household, a dwelling place for an interdependent biological community" (McKusick, Green Writing 29). Such a perspective negates the claim of mankind's superiority over other life – both biotic and abiotic which contribute to a sound ecosystem. Viewed from this perspective, Coleridge undoubtedly foreshadows the modern concept of ecology and environmental discourse (Choudhury 164).

It is possible to negotiate Coleridge's works from the standpoint of the various theories of the Ecocritical discourse such as Deep Ecology, Bioregionalism, Romantic Ecology, Ecotones and Ecofeminism. The present paper seeks to analyse the Ecofeminist perspective from a reading of three of his poems, namely "Christabel", "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie" and "Frost at Midnight." The paper is analytical in nature and primary and secondary sources have been consulted.

The poem "Christabel" offers an ecofeminist reading in terms of the violence faced by the maiden named Christabel from an intensely patriarchal society and an analogy may be drawn with a similar kind of oppression faced by the earth. "Christabel" is an incomplete gothic ballad written by Coleridge in two parts - in 1797 and 1800 respectively. The poem seeks to explore the oppressive patriarchal forces as represented by Sir Leoline and Geraldine on one hand and the feminized earth as symbolized by Christabel on the other. In her work, "A Girlish Nature: Ecofeminism in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Christabel" writer Kristin E Kawecki asserts that in the long history of feminine figures, Christabel may be seen as one who experiences exploitation similar to the earth (Kawecki 1). This is in direct opposition to the "Ethics of Care" as espoused by Karren Warren in Ecofeminist Philosophy (2000). The "Ethics of Care" involves the idea of "mothers, nursing and friendship" sensitivity and moral inclination in direct contrast to patriarchy which is based on violence and oppression (quoted in Kawecki 7).

The poem deals with the adventures of Christabel and her encounter with an evil sorceress named Geraldine whom she meets in the darkness of the woods where she is seen praying and seeking spiritual solace. Taking advantage of the innocent Christabel, Geraldine gains access to the inner chambers of Christabel's castle and casts an evil spell on her. Though Christabel finds out about the deception she is unable to reveal it to her father Sir Leoline because of the magical powers of Geraldine. Ultimately, she discloses the truth about Geraldine to her father but he rejects her entreaties and instead offers the hand of friendship to Geraldine and her so-called family. The narrative ends abruptly before the truth of Geraldine can be revealed.

Several examples from the text make it clear that Christabel may be viewed as a representative of the natural world. The analogy is drawn very clearly when it is seen that she is very much at ease with the natural world, she goes out to the woods to pray at midnight rejecting the inner confines of her room or the castle chapel. "She kneels beneath the huge oak tree" (Coleridge I lines 37), and the oak tree is symbolic of the Celts' belief in natural deities who provide "the essence of assuredness, love and care for her offspring" (The Goddess Tree, qtd in Kawecki 3). She is compared to a flower, as beautiful and lovely, "so

fair", "so innocent, so mild", a gentle and sweet maid. At the same time reference to her face as "fair/ not pale/and both blue eyes more bright than clear" (II lines 277-8) signifies her beauty as a charming maiden. The reference to the spring season in which the poem is set is also a signifier to the natural world- like the spring season that is associated with growth and fertility, Christabel is also a maiden on the brink of fertility. This association of Christabel with the spring season is indicative of the risks that both the virgin maiden and the virgin earth are subjected to. Both may be seen as commodities, valuable for their utility and at risk to be exploited by the masculine and dominant forces of society. In this context, Kate Soper in her work, "Naturalised Woman and Feminized Nature" (2000) opines that both woman and nature may be seen as spatial territory, as the land or earth, which is tamed and tilled in agriculture (qtd in Kawecki 2). In the poem a similar parallel is discernible when Christabel is instantly betrothed to a knight the moment, she attains reproductive capacity by her father thus transforming her to a valuable commodity. Her initiation into the culturally dictated realm of womanhood is analogous with her subjugation for the sake of utility and this links her to the earth, exploited and oppressed to satisfy the unlimited needs of mankind. Other examples in the text point to the oppressive and stifling nature of her father's castle. The castle is described as "ironed within and without" (I lines 122), it is a place where not a single moonbeam enters (I lines 170). Her position may be compared to the showpiece in her father's castle of a "twofold silver chain fastened to an angel's feet" (I lines 177-78). She too is shackled by the chains of patriarchy (Choudhury 183).

Geraldine may be identified as the alter ego of Christabel who without the proper guidance of her mother projects into creation the fellow maiden Geraldine as a result of her neurosis regarding her sexual maturity (Kawecki 3). As the evil Geraldine casts her spell on Christabel she not only replaces her mother or guardian spirit but also removes her from the natural and ordains her into sexual maturity. Geraldine here assumes the role of the corrupter and Christabel is initiated not only to physical corruption but also psychological corruption as she begins to absorb this view of the feminine as commodity herself (Kawecki 3). In contrast to the characters of Geraldine and Sir Leoline, one may discern in the character of Barcy the bard an alternate model of care and concern upholding the "Ethics of Care". He is the only one who suspects the real identity of Geraldine while recalling a prophetic dream the earlier night of a serpent strangling a dove. In the response of Sir Leoline that he will "crush the snake" and ensure the safety of his daughter one may further locate the link of patriarchy and furtherance of militarism which is opposed to the "preservation and care for life and the living" (qtd in Kawecki). Barcy's resolve to live with nature and protect the innocent, "To wander through the forest bare/lest aught unholy loiter there" (lines 563-64) makes him a

model of care and protection. Thus, viewed from an ecofeminist perspective this narrative may be read as a tale of oppression common to both the earth and women illustrating Vance's statement that women and nature are seen as "the known and shaped objects while the knowers and shapers are the men" (133). Ecofeminists suggest that the domination of both goes hand-in-hand and unless such inequalities are removed the dream of ecological restoration as well as women's liberation will remain a distant dream.

The second poem taken for discussion is "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie: A Fragment" (written in 1797) and as the title of the poem suggests, the narrative revolves around the tale of a dark lady who represents a colonized group. As a form of critical discourse ecofeminism is grounded upon the representation of colonized groups which include nature/environment, women, the poor, the natives, and the dark and coloured people to name a few. Viewed from the standpoint of ecofeminism the two women characters, the dark ladie and her mother represent the orient and they experience colonial hegemony at the hands of the white lords. It is to be remembered that during the Romantic age, the British Colonial powers were at their zenith and this age was marked by remarkable expansion of colonies all across the globe. The predicament of the mother introduced at some unspecified moment in the past of British Culture is not even narrated, her tale is taken for granted (Sadiq 13). Her story may be equated in terms of exploitation of the virgin colonies that Britain was hegemonising at that period of time. She represents the spoils of annexation, a commodity that comes along with annexation of the lands in the far east.

It is the daughter, the dark ladie who stands up against this kind of hegemony voicing her protest in forceful terms. That the lady represents the natural world is made amply clear when the poet identifies her as a part of the natural world- she sits beneath the tree right in the green moss where the brook flows- she is happy and at ease with the sloping rays of the sun as she has lingered the whole day there. Her tears as she awaits the arrival of her betrothed are seen as one with the waters of the brook (Sadiq 8). When the knight arrives she implores for his protection and shelter as she recounts to him the unkind and rude words of her friends, this protection is important to her because of her precarious social position- a doubly marginalized one in terms of gender as well as race. The knight responds to her pleas with love and care as he promises to gift her the fairest of his sire's castle to her. However, his plans of moving her there in the darkness of the night speak of elopement and clandestine joy which she is unwilling to accept. He symbolizes masculine hegemony and shows no interest in a legitimate marriage probably because of her race. In response to this offer she expresses her desire to be led from her "mother's door" (lines 50) in the "eye of noon" (lines 49) in a proper marriage ceremony. The poem ends by the poet describing the charm of her

Oriental beauty of "jet black hair in pearly braids" (lines 58 Sadiq 7-8) This assertion of her dark beauty and in her rejection of a clandestine affair and her refusal to be appropriated as a mere mistress is a reflection of her spirit of resistance. Unlike her mother who has silently accepted her fate, she voices her protest and refuses to be seen simply as a trophy of the Orient and demands her own social position. This spirit of resistance is a reminder of the dichotomy and cultural encounters of the East and the West. From the ecofeminist perspective the poem points to the damage inflicted on the natural world represented by the two women, by the hegemonizers who exercised their colonial rule over the virgin lands they were conquering all over the globe.

The above discussion vindicates the fact that Coleridge in the manner of a true ecologist makes a plea to abolish all kinds of oppression and exploitative policies while asserting the need for equanimity. Undoubtedly the poet stands tall as a dominant ecofeminist voice by advocating practices that are free from patriarchal, male based models of domination. The poems "Christabel" and "The Ballad of the Dark Ladie: A Fragment" throw insight into the harm and violence that is innate to patriarchal bodies of oppression. In contrast to such violence and patriarchy Coleridge advocates the need for equality and this is clearly vindicated in the ecofeminist language of nurture and care as observed in the poem, "Frost at Midnight". In his seminal work, *The Song of the Earth*, Bate opines that the most radical aspect of the poem, "Frost at Midnight" by Coleridge is the poet's portrayal of himself in the maternal posture of watching over a sleeping baby (Bate, *The Song* 112). The poem begins with the image of frost creeping through the night and as the entire world sleeps the poet is at peace with his infant baby close to him in his cradle. In this serene and quiet atmosphere the poet goes on to contemplate baby Hartley's future. This change of image from the stereotypical masculine father to that of the maternal role is significant (Choudhury 188). Such a realignment of gender roles paves the way for a caring and nurturing relationship with the world as opposed to an exploitative relationship. One cannot miss the poet's call for a rethinking of our bonds with each other as well as with the environment.

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## Brahmaputra River and Its Significance to Mising Tribal Women’s Socio-Economic Status and Sustainability : A Case Study of Botiamari and Dhapak Village of Majuli District of assam

*Farzia Yashmeen Chaliha*

### Abstract

Man and nature shares a strong bond with each other since the inception of this world. The nature or the mother earth feeds their children with all the necessary resources that could help men to live a healthy life and reciprocally they also contribute towards its preservation and restoration, although with time this has turned one sided. Amongst the various natural resources- water is one of the most important life source for all living beings of this world, especially for the river dwellers. In Assam, the river Brahmaputra is the lifeline of the tribal people who mostly settle along its various banks, like Mising, Deori, Rabha and Kachari etc. The river Brahmaputra is the main source of their livelihood, culture and tradition. However, with increasing urbanisation, deforestation and other related human exploitative practices has resulted into a man-nature conflict. Both the river and its dwellers have to face various challenges in order to restore peace and harmony and enjoy their respective socio-political rights and opportunities. Therefore, through this article an attempt would be made to understand and analyse the socio-economic and cultural life of the river dwellers, especially Mising tribal women in two villages of the Majuli District of Assam. It focuses on their coping strategies with the changing dynamics of environment specially, dwelling along the river bank of the mighty Brahmaputra. It tries to understand the challenges and uncertainties of the various governmental and legal reforms being undertaken and the means being formulated towards their growth, sustainability and human security.

**Keywords:** *Mising Tribe, Mising Women, Socio-economic Status, Sustainability and Brahmaputra River.*

**Introduction:**

In the era of globalisation the world has turned more modernised affecting both men and women differently. Women specially their socio-economic status, educational opportunities, health, political rights are changing with time and region. In this direction, women's empowerment is becoming one of the prime priorities around the world. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) number 5, clearly aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. As such, gender equality by 2030 which is integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development requires urgent action in order to eliminate the root causes of discriminations which still curtail women's rights in both private and public spheres.

In India, the Constitution is the very principal and guardian providing equality to women at all levels and fields. Both the Fundamental rights and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act has been instrumental in providing economic empowerment and active participation of women in decision-making at various levels of the administrative hierarchy. In this regard, at the grass roots level of Gram-Panchayat, 33 per cent reservation of seats for women at all tiers of Panchayats have made a significant political change in the life of every Indian women. However, India as a whole is characterised by sharp gender disparities virtually on all frontiers of human societal pursuits. This is because gender roles are socially constructed and it therefore knows no boundaries. As such, in regard to the tribal population in India that constitutes 8.6 per cent of India's population (as per 2011 census), is amongst one of the most disadvantaged due to various contributing factors such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, lack of health care, geographic isolation and lack of access to various welfare services and schemes of the government. The Scheduled tribes of India are further internally differentiated-while 86 percent of ST's belong to Central India and only three percent are found in the North and South India in dispersed groups. In contrast, 11 percent of the ST's live in Northeast India for which it is called as, 'A Land of the Tribes.' From within the tribal population, the tribal women constitute like any other social group about 47 percent of India's tribal population and possess a profound understanding of their ecological habitat. However, despite their role and contribution to their immediate family and society at large the tribal women in India still remain backward and lack awareness about their rights, which act as barriers towards their self-development and socio-economic upliftment.

In the North-eastern state of Assam there are two types of tribal communities-14 hill scheduled tribes and 9 plain scheduled tribes. Amongst the plain tribes, the Bodos are the largest plain tribes of Assam followed by the Misings. According to the census of 2011 the population of the Mising community in Assam is approximately 6, 80,424 with a sex ratio of

967 per thousand. One of the most common features of the plain tribes is that, they dwell in the riverine regions, mostly near the banks of the river Brahmaputra.

The water of the river Brahmaputra is one of the most essential life-source of all the tribal river dwellers. As such, even for the Mising community the river holds great significance. The river not only enables to cultivate, fish and navigate but it becomes an important issue of water management. When water resources become limited it converts to subjects of political issues. As such, mismanagement of water affects the disadvantaged groups the most. However, it is only recently that emphasis has been given as to how management of water is gendered. As per the new notion, a person's gender correlates with their possibility to impact. Therefore, the connection between those who govern water and those that are governed is not made adequately. As such, it is important to recognise that if the perspectives of the 'governed' are not incorporated in the political decision-makings then it would be difficult to ensure environmentally just and sustainable development of the river dwellers.

In this context, while the socio-economic well-being and status of the tribes of Assam is relatively well articulated, learning about the livelihoods and socio-economic status of the Mising women has been accorded far less importance. The knowledge originating from such needs is important too, as these lives often belongs to the more marginalised, i.e., the women as against men, women living in the rural areas as against those in urban areas and so on. There are therefore different linkages, in the way the river impacts lives dealing with people, women especially who are commonly 'voiceless' or do not have the agency to articulate their perspectives in relevant forums. This research study therefore attempts to partially bridge this gap. Through this research article an attempt would be made to examine and understand the various socio-economic challenges and issues faced by the 'Mising women' dwelling along the Brahmaputra river of the Majuli district and how they are managing to keep a balance between their culture and tradition on one hand and attaining their rights and ensuring their social security.

**Objective of the Study :**

- To understand the present socio-economic status of Mising women living in two villages Botiamari and Dhapak of Majuli district.
- To identify the ecological challenges towards socio-economic development of the women of the Mising tribal community in these two villages.
- To examine the role of Mising women's participation in river management and decision-making in Majuli.

**Methodology:**

The research study about the gendered roles of the Mising women at Majuli island district is brought down to micro level by taking into account two Mising villages at Majuli, namely- Botiamari and Dhapak village. The research methodology to be applied is descriptive, analytical and qualitative. The villages are located on the banks of the river Brahmaputra because of which they are prone to frequent floods. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data includes, oral and telephonic interview, official documents about the village under study from its village headman, Disaster Management reports on Majuli district, Economic survey reports on Majuli, Statistical Office (Garamur, Majuli), Block Development Office (Kamalabari, Majuli), Census Reports 2011. A total of 68 household where surveyed in the two villages representing 15 percent of the total population. Secondary source materials include published relevant books, journals and newspaper articles.

**The Mising of Majuli District :**

Majuli the world's only and largest river island signifies the cultural heritage of Neo-Vaisnavite culture propagated by the great saint and reformer Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhav Deva in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Surrounded by the mighty Brahmaputra river on all its sides the island is an abode of serene atmosphere and spirituality. It is spread in an area of about 483 sq km at present (before 1950 it was 1250 sq km) along with a population size of 1, 67,304 approximately. The population of the district comprises of Misings, Deoris, Ahoms, Kacharis, Brahmins, Kayasthas, Kalitas, Koch Rajbongshis, Sonowal Kacharis, Kaibartas, Kumars, Banias, potters etc. The Majuli district today comprises of 243 small and large villages, of which 210 are cadastral villages and 33 are non-cadastral villages (villages without revenue maps are mostly resettled or rehabilitated shifted due to flood and erosion in Majuli). Further, because of its peculiar location amidst the active floodplains of the Brahmaputra, the island gets inundated in both severe flood seasons as and also in normal floods.

The Mising population of the Majuli district are Indo-Mongoloid tribe who settled in the plains of Assam and the hills of Arunachal Pradesh during the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The practice of shifting cultivation was continued among the Misings of Assam even during the British period for which W.W Hunter (1879) classified them as 'Nomadic agriculturist.' They were originally from the hills and belonged to the family of 'Tani People' and known to the outside world as 'Miri.' The meaning of the word 'Mising' as narrated by one of my Mising friend means, 'Man (*mi*) of the water (*asi*).' The Constitution of India had regarded the 'Miris' as a scheduled tribe of Assam. They retained their mythological, linguistic and institutional affinity with the Adis and the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh.

At present the Misings are scattered in eight districts of Assam namely- Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Golaghat and Sonitpur. They are also distributed in the Subansiri and East Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Despite vigorous urbanisation and migration in the era of globalisation and modernisation, the Mishing community still inhabit the banks of the river Brahmaputra in Assam. Besides this, their main occupation is fishing, weaving and piggery. Weaving, pottery and mask-making is a traditional activity which is practiced by most communities on the island and predominantly by women.

**The Significance of the Brahmaputra River to the Mising Women in Majuli:**

The Brahmaputra river named after the son of the Hindu deity Brahma is considered sacred and a source of livelihood and sustenance through various socio-economic and cultural practices by those depending on the river in Majuli island. The Mising women folk are the ones who are most dependent on the river, provides them with basic necessities of daily life-water to drink, wash and food to eat. Economically, the Brahmaputra river provides livelihood opportunities in the form of alluvial cultivable lands, irrigation facilities, fishing grounds, cattle wading, generates tourism and employment as boatmen and ferry services etc. In contemporary times the men and women are equally engaged in all such commercial activities for their sustainable development. As such, women along with men travel across the river for selling their animals, agricultural outputs, milk, honey and other forest and bamboo products, vegetables, traditional dresses and other food items etc.

The Brahmaputra River also holds significance to the Mising women of Majuli because they relate their religion and culture with the river. During the sowing and harvesting season the elderly men and women pray for crop abundance and celebrate traditional festivals like Ali-Aye-Ligang and Porag. As narrated by Padmini Mili a resident of Upper Botiamari village, "We offer prayers to the Brahmaputra river every year to appease it, so that it doesn't cause havoc and destroy our crops." Besides this, the river has also been an integral part of their identities. It had guided the women and men during community's migrations. The river had drawn and guided them from the Himalayas to Arunachal Pradesh and finally to Assam and they settled down in Majuli and had been living the rest of their life under the shadow of the Brahmaputra river.

**Flood and erosion as ecological challenges towards socio-economic sustainability of the Mising Women :**

"We were content and happy in our houses with farms and cattle in our village. But in 2007 the river turned against us and took everything away," Anima Chintey from Botiamari village of Majuli district recalls. With this statement of Anima, one could understand and analyse that the river Brahmaputra which is a source of livelihood for the people had also

proved to be the main reason for their misery. In this regard, it is often reiterated that the genesis of the feminine gender role is linked to the nature of terrain and its demand for women's labour. Diversity of terrain has led to a variety in the gender roles for women and the consequent gender relations. Therefore, below are some of the challenges, especially from two basic factors floods and erosion which the Mising women of Alimur Botiamari, Upper Botiamari and Dhapak Goan of Kamalabari Majuli had been witnessing and trying to cope with it.

#### **Impact of Floods on Women :**

The two villages-Botiamari (Alimur Botiamari and Upper Botiamari) and Dhapak together consisted of approximately 645 tribal population out of 1514 tribal population of Kamalabari revenue circle. When questioned about the usage of the river water the 68 households being surveyed, answered that they depend on the river for cleaning, washing and the source of the water to drink is tube well water. However, they also revealed that the tube-well water gets contaminated as flood water enters the tube-wells during the rainy seasons when the Brahmaputra floods their villages. Consequently, around 40 per cent of the women and children suffer from water borne diseases like Cholera and Typhoid.

Recurring floods and erosion have also posed a serious threat to the very existence of the island as well. The enormity of the problem can be gauged from the fact that the island had been reduced to half of its original size due to unabated erosion. During floods which continue for more than a month especially during the rainy season forces the villagers of both Botiamari and Dhapak village to search for alternative sources of livelihoods. They not only lose the vegetables which they grew (crop area affected 2.007 hectares out of 26.09 hectares of the Ujani Majuli district) or poultry that they raised die, but they also have to walk 20 to 30 kms in search of wood and fodder for their pigs and poultry. The schools remained closed or non-functioning during floods and 90 per cent of the villagers are required to take shelter in higher lands/embankments. Amongst them 60 per cent of young Mising women suffer physically when they are undergoing their menstrual cycles. In such places, there is neither any healthcare facility or proper hygiene or sanitation. Consequently, they either fall sick or undergo mental anxiety and irritation.

#### **Migration and Displacement due to Erosion :**

Migration and Displacement are two variables which we often notice under various conditions. Both migration and displacement is due to natural disasters or environment induced. As such, the plight of river bank erosion-induced displacements and migrations is more severe than victims of flood. The flood victims can return to their homes once the flood water recedes whereas those, whose homes are eroded away cannot do so as their land forms

part of the river's new or extended bed. The villages of Botiamari and Dhapak had witnessed heavy land erosion since 1980's leading to displacement and migration as their lands are claimed by the mighty Brahmaputra. Rima Payeng who is a resident of Botiamari village and Mayashree Mili who is from Dhapak village narrated how their family once had two '*puras*' of agricultural land but have been reduced to penury as the river had eroded away most of their land. Pallavi Chintey of Botiamara narrated, "We had built our houses as high as possible yet the river floods our homes every year. We commute by '*bhurs*' (locally made banana tree-boat), still the river won't stop following us." With incessant yearly erosion landlessness had increased manifold. Of the surveyed villages 58.8% women have been forced to work as agricultural labourers on others fields and give away half the harvest. Others work as daily wage earners and fish sellers, though these alternative livelihoods are increasingly becoming difficult over the years. In addition to changes in occupational structures, the shrinking size of the island district with every passing year had been putting acute pressure on the existing land to population redistribution. Likewise, economically poor are facing adverse consequences since they cannot afford to move from their existing places which otherwise would be very expensive for them. In this regard, Botiamari village dwellers are slowly relocating themselves within the island living as environmental refugees while others who could afford are buying land and building houses in the neighbouring towns of Jorhat, Teok, Titabor, Mariani.

#### **Poor Communication Facilities:**

On the way to the villages of Botiamari and Dhapak one could observe that there are poor communication facilities available to reach those villages situated near the river banks from the main town of Kamalabari and vice versa. This is because the villages still lack concrete roads for communication; instead the roads are '*kutchas*' - fair weather roads or foot tracks which become completely uncommutable especially during floods and post-flood seasons. This becomes a great source of suffering and results into financial crisis specially for the women of those villages as they are unable to sell their vegetables due to lack of communication to the Sunday markets or even during weekdays. Even the local transport facilities that are available like 'battery rickshaw' or 'magic' either deny to travel in such roads or they charge high prices to carry the passengers to the local markets or drop them back home. Due to such a challenge, the women sometimes have to travel to 10-20 kms on foot to reach the town area markets or even to reach the ghats to catch ferries. Tragically, one of the Mising women age 25 years from Botiamari village had two miscarriages. Her second child died during the floods due to inaccessibility to healthcare facilities as there were no transport facilities as the road was damaged due to floods. Moreover, the access to the



nearest hospital is very difficult in the entire Majuli district, especially during floods. Moreover, while boys have cycles to commute to schools, most girls do not and hence have to drop out of school at a very early age.

#### **Lack of Large Scale Production Facilities and Technical Know-How:**

After the flood water subsides the land of the flooded village turns alluvial and fertile. The women of the households engages in fishing and also grows herbal plants which are good for the all-round development of human health like wild turmeric, and herbs like '*huglotipaat*', '*bhedailotapaat*', betel nut, wood apple, jackfruit, '*amlā*', '*giloi*' etc. There were no source to harness such natural resources and give it a shape of a small or medium sized cottage industry which would be a source of employment for all. Moreover, during the summer season particularly in the post flood season the women catches sizable quantities of fish and crabs. They keep some of it for immediate consumption and preserve the rest by drying them above their kitchen self-called in local language '*Chouka*' or '*Meram*' for winter months. This again points out that there is enough scope for dry fish business both nationally and internationally if the women are provided modern techniques to start such business. There is a good market of dry fish in the neighbouring states of Assam as well. In addition, the Mising women also rear pigs and poultry not just for domestic consumption but they sell out one or two pigs and poultry for a price of around Rs. 15000-18000 which could again be done at a larger scale if the required resources are made available by the Government. The money which they get selling these food items are used by the women to pay the tuition fees of their children or to purchase books and even household items and thread for weaving. In short, they contribute exclusively towards household income.

Therefore, from the above mentioned factors one could say that environmental and ecological disasters like floods, earthquakes effects women and men differently, because of the differences in their roles and capacities, and vulnerabilities. Therefore, there is a dire need for the tribal women to be heard, and for their invaluable abilities to find wings. In short, it is imperative for the equity lens to be donned and put in action. The stories of the Mising women of Botiamari and Dhapak villages need to find a wider space in the mainstream narrative in order for them to have an adequately high representation at all levels along with opportunities for their voices to emerge during socio-economic and political decision-making.

#### **Role of Mishing women's participation in river management and political decision-making :**

There is a great truth in the adage, "When you empower women, you empower a generation and the nation." Women in any society are always looked down in terms of rights and privileges. Moreover, the development programs being male oriented fails to reach the

women folk and contribution made by women to social and economic progress are often ignored. In this sense, even in the Mising community it is seen that women's participation in regard to decision-making towards management of households especially during floods or management of river and other fields for security are far less than usual. The Mising women of Botiamari and Dhapak villages narrated their stories of how they are being debarred in arriving at any decision concerning the village, specially related to river management although they were allowed to attend the meetings. At times even if they wanted to voice themselves but due to lack of awareness and education they remain quiet or hesitant. In this regard, Babita Chinteya 22 years old, resident of the Botiamari village agreed that gender inequality is rampant in their society, as most of the livelihood sustenance activities are done by the women. Their situation worsens post-flood when the management of the entire households falls into their shoulders. She recalls with lot of emotion, "If I had another life, I would like to be a very powerful man like our village '*Satradhikar*' and change the plight of the women of this village." Therefore, as narrated by Babita who was one of the many voices of Mising women of Botiamari village, gender inequality exists in the form of lack of political participation in Panchayat meetings. The problems and challenges of flood, the girl child not being encouraged for higher education, lack of healthcare facilities and poor livelihood are some of the prime reasons which still needs permanent solutions. In addition, floods had even compelled them to change their occupations, thereby resulting into increased workload. Sometimes the Mising women even have to suffer a lot in the absence of their husbands, since the male members of their family have to migrate to other places in search of work. Although the Central and State Governments had been introducing many policies and plans towards the development of the tribal community but how far they are implemented or has reached the right hands are still dubious. Many even remain unaware of the provisions and initiatives.

#### **Conclusion :**

In conclusion one can say that although the Majuli island consist of the pristine heritage of culture and religion.yet it is characterised by a gender space which is unfavourable for women in many ways. The irony is that the women in the island are aware of this state of nature and would like to respond and act to an external impetus. They want to come together to work in cooperation and manage the river in a way that has not been attempted so far. In this sense, governmental interventions in the form of generating awareness about the socio-economic developmental schemes which also falls under the SDG should be made available through local, ASHA, NGOs, SHG's or *Anganwadi* groups. Besides this, more initiatives should be undertaken to improve the conditions of women, like generating awareness about the regional geography and impact of climate especially during flood time in the Mising

villages. The women during the floods had to face numerous problems owing to damage to their homes and vegetables that they sowed. There is scarcity of hygienic toilets, bathing and washing becomes difficult with the household living in the embankments (or *mothauri*) during the flood time. Therefore, there is dire need to focus primarily on making Mising women's productive work visible, creating a space for their participation in decision-making in regard to management of the river and at the same time creating supportive mechanisms for the entry of Mising women into the public realm like their counterparts from other tribal communities. Only then one could hope to bring a significant shift to the trajectory of India's overall growth 'Sabka Vikas' (everyone's development), when tribal communities with tribal women are placed at the centre of solutions.

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## Women Activists as Vanguard against threat to Environment

*Aparna De*

### Abstract

In developing countries like India, women are most the important users of natural resources like, forest, water and land, though they are not the owner of land in most families. In rural India, women are mostly responsible for collecting food, fuel and fodder and feeding the family members. For fire wood rural women collect the dead and dry branches of trees, which are uprooted by storm or natural disaster, rather than cutting the live trees; women work long hours in the field for farming. Even they use the courtyard as kitchen garden to produce green leafy vegetables for their family. So, they have to spend long hours working on the agricultural firm or forest. It leads them to gather knowledge about preservation of natural resources like, soil, plants, trees, and protect nature from misuse. Any kind of change-natural or man-made in the environment, like deforestation, global warming, affects women the most. So, many Indian women have initiated movements for protecting the environment and natural resources. About 300 years ago Amrita Devi, a woman of Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, India, protested against the felling of trees for building a palace for the Maharaja of Jodhpur. In March 1974, 27 women led by Gaura Devi hug the trees to prevent their cutting at Reni village in Tehri-Garhwal district of Uttarakhand (former Uttar Pradesh), which is popularly known as ‘Chipko Movement’. Medha Patkar initiated the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) in 1989, to protect the Narmada River as well as, to protect human rights of a large number of displaced people affected by the construction of the Sardar Sarobar Dam. Sugathakumari founded ‘Prakriti Samrakshana Samithi’ which participated in the ‘Save Silent Valley’ protest movement in the Palakkad District of Kerala. In this paper, an attempt has been taken to uphold the life and work of renowned Indian women environment-activists who played a significant role and contributed towards protecting the environment.

**Key Words:** *Environment, protection, movement, women, nature.*

### Introduction :

Women play a significant role in managing natural assets of forests, water and soil etc. They have to spend a long time with nature every day in collecting water, fire wood, vegetables and other forest products for livelihood. So, they gain a profound knowledge about Mother Nature. On the other hand, any kind of change-natural or man-made, in the environment, like, deforestation, global warming, has the most effect on women. So, many Indian women have initiated movements for protecting the environment and natural resources. The present paper is an attempt to uphold the life and work of renowned Indian women environment-activists who played a significant role and contributed towards protecting the environment.

### Objectives:

There are two specific objectives of the present paper:

1. To explore and uphold the contribution of women environment-activists of India for environment protection.
2. To find out the impact of ecological movements in India initiated by the women environment activists.

### Materials and methods:

This research is based on qualitative approach. It is biographic and analytical in nature. Historical and content analysis methods have been used in preparing this paper. The required information for this study has been collected from secondary sources of knowledge, such as books, newspapers of print and electronic media, articles, journals, websites and archives etc.

### Discussion:

The role of women in the restoration and conservation of forest has been observed through their role in various ecological movements.

### Supreme sacrifice of Amrita Devi in Bishnoi Movement:

The Bishnoi community has become famous for the Bishnoi Movement carried out for protection of environment in the beginning of the eighteenth century in India. In Bishnoi movement, the technique of embracing trees for their protection was employed for the first time by the leader Amrita Devi (Nepal, et.al. 2009). For the Bishnoi community, preservation of green trees, plants and other living beings is religion and part of their sacred tradition. Common people of Bishnoi community had resisted cutting of khejri trees under the leadership of Amrita Devi in 1700s at Khejarli and Marwar region of Rajasthan state of India. The Bishnoi people have been conserving the flora and fauna of western Rajasthan adjacent to the ‘Thar Desert’, for centuries. In the fifteenth century, a saint in a village near Jodhpur

named Sombaji alias Jambhoji, popularly known as Swami Jambheshwar Maharaj had envisaged that the cause of drought and extreme heat of that region was people's wrong interference with nature. He started a movement to protect the environment creating awareness among the villagers. He laid down 29 tenets to follow for the people of that region (Mangilal, 2020), most of which are dedicated to prevent harm to the Mother Nature. In local language of that region 'Bish' denotes 'twenty' and 'Noi' denotes 'Nine'. Thus, 'Bishnoi' denotes Twenty-nine principles. Those who follow twenty-nine principles from their heart are called 'BISHNOI'. Thus the sect 'Bishnoism' was founded by Guru Jambheshwar.

According to Indian Lunar calendar on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Bhadrapad 1730 A.D., while engaged in household activities (Mangilal, 2020), Amrita Devi was informed that a group of men were attempting to cut Khejarli trees for construction of a new palace for the Maharaja of Jodhpur. Instantly Amrita Devi reached there and embraced a tree. She instructed others to embrace trees to protect from felling down. Amrita Devi proclaimed that "A chopped head is cheaper than a felled tree" (Alam, et.al. 2018). A large number of people of the Bishnoi community from Khejrl and neighbouring villages came to the spot and each one embraced a tree to protect them. Each person embracing a tree, were brutally beheaded by the soldiers of Maharaja. A total of 363 Bishnois including three daughters of Amrita Devi namely, Asu, Ratni and Bhagu Bai became martyrs to prevent the felling of Khejari trees (Mangilal, 2020). When the king came to know about this incident, he immediately reached the village and apologized. He ordered his soldiers to stop logging operations and declared it as a protected area. The supreme sacrifice of Amrita Devi and 363 Bishnois is an unforgettable instance of their devotion to protect nature. The strategy of hugging trees to protect them is still in existence and once again vibrantly practiced in modern Chipko movement in another region of India.

The major objectives of the Bishnoi movement was against deforestation; to preserve bio-diversity for protection of human species and other living beings; and to protect their forest rights for their livelihood.

#### **Contribution of Gaura Devi in 'Chipko' movement:**

One of the popular environment movements of 20<sup>th</sup> century India is the 'Chipko' movement in Garhwal Himalayan region, against deforestation. 'Chipko' is a Hindi word which means 'embrace'. The astonishing event of the movement took place on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1974. On that day, a group of women in Reni village of Uttarakhand, took the responsibility to prevent cutting of trees and embraced trees. They remained fixed to guard the trees constantly for some days until the wood cutters left.

The 'Chipko' movement has its roots during British rule in India. Many protest

activities were initiated by dwellers of Himalayan forests against the British forest policy. Their primary demand was to get forest rights, which continued up to the post-independent era. An almost similar British forest policy continued after independence of India. The origin of 'Chipko' movement was in 1973. In the same year, the forest department allotted 'ash' trees to Symonds Company, a private foreign company which referred to allot to a local cooperative organisation-'Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangha' (DGSS), for making agricultural equipment. They protested against the injustice with local people. Chandi Prasad Bhat, the leader of DGSS suggested embracing trees for protecting them from felling down on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1973. The name 'Chipko' was evolved from the unique strategy of hugging trees as a non-violent means of protest action (Nepal, Padam 2009: 135-136). With this influential protest activity, the Company was forced to give up the contract. The success of the movement spread to other neighbouring areas and became popular nationally and internationally as Chipko movement (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998).

The objectives and demands of Chipko movement were: total stoppage of deforestation for commercial purpose; ensure community rights to natural resources of forests; keeping forests evergreen through tree plantation by the local people; formation of village committees for forest management; and growth of forest-based handicrafts industries etc. (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998).

The credit of the successful modern Chipko movement goes to Gaura Devi to a great extent. Under her leadership the local women had embraced the trees and prevented their cutting. Gaura Devi was the president of the Mahila Mangal Dal of Reni village. When the sawyer was about to start cutting trees, 27 women under the leadership of Gaura Devi stood against them. Almost all men of that village have been diverted intentionally towards Chamoli. Gaura Devi initially tried to talk with them politely to cease cutting trees, but the sawyer started abusing and threatening to the protesters. Gaura Devi instructed the protesting women to hug the trees to protect them. Gaura Devi considered the forest as her mother's house. She alongwith her associates kept guard of trees that night and next three or four days till other villagers joined the protest and the sawyer left. After that an expert committee was formed by the Uttar Pradesh Government to investigate the issue. The committee recommended preserving the ecologically rich Reni forest. The Uttar Pradesh government imposed ban on cutting trees for ten years in that area (Jain, Shobita, 1984).

In 1925, Gaura Devi was born in a small village called 'Laata' at the foothills of the Himalayas. Her family business was wool trading. She used to go with her mother to collect dry branches of trees for fire. Once, while collecting the twigs with her mother, Gaura Devi asked her mother, why they don't cut a big tree so that they need not collect twigs every

day? In reply her mother said, with the roots, the trees hold the earth with mountain sides, like holding the earth with hands. If anyone ever cuts them down, the village will be washed away (Agarwal, Nita, 2013). Words of her mother left a great effect in her mind. She decided to protect trees and she did it throughout her life. At her later age she led the Chipko movement for environment protection. She was married at a young age, but, became a widow at the age of 22. At 66 years Gaura Devi expired in July 1991. In 1987, the Chipko movement won the prestigious 'Right Livelihood Award' for its successful initiative for environment protection.

#### **Great initiative of Medha Patkar for organising the 'Narmada Bachao Andolan':**

The 'Save Narmada River' protest was the most extensive movement in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in India against the Narmada river Valley Project (Reddy, Ratna V, 1998), which is popularised as 'Narmada Bachao Andolan'. The most influential mass movement started in 1985, against the construction of the vast dam over 'Narmada', India's largest westward flowing river.

After independence the Government of India (GOI) carried out an investigation to assess mechanism for using water from the Narmada River by different states through which the river flows, i.e. Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharastra. The GOI also formed Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal to mitigate inter-state disputes in sharing of water, on 6 October 1969. The tribunal investigated the matter and submitted the report after 10 years. The report was released on 12 December 1979. The tribunal approved construction of 30 major, 135 medium, and 3000 small dams over Narmada River including the highest Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat. It was expected that after completion of this project water can be provided to 40 million people; irrigation and electricity would also be provided in the area. Accordingly, construction began.

Medha Patkar alongwith some associates visited the project site in 1985 and found that the construction work of the project was stopped by an order of Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, due to non-fulfilment of essential environmental conditions (Fisher, William, 1995). Without consultation with the people, who were going to be affected, assessment for compensation and rehabilitation were done. Medha Patkar sought clarification from the Ministry of Environment regarding this issue. After numerous survey studies, Medha Patkar and her group realized that the post-project problems were ignored; compensation for Dam-affected people was calculated only for immediate relief, not for permanent settlement of the displaced people.

Medha Patkar was born in 1954 in Bombay, India. Her father, Vasant Khanolkar, was a freedom fighter and lawyer. Her mother, Indu-ji, was a social worker. She completed

her master's degree in Social Work with specialization in community organization and development. Medha Patkar was pursuing her Ph. D. in Tata Institute of Social Studies. However, witnessing the injustice caused to the innocent people living in the Narmada Valley during her visit to the project site, she quit her Ph. D. study and formed and remained engaged with the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

She organized a solidarity march from Madhya Pradesh to the Sardar Sarovar Dam site at Gujrat by foot, through the Narmada valley, which took 36-days (Mehta, Mona G. 12 October 2010). She opined that the march signified the long course of struggle (Fisher, William, 1995). The march was resisted by the police by beating, arresting the marchers and even tearing off clothes of women activists (Fisher, William, 1995). But, the protesters continued protest activity to stop the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

Alongwith other protest activities, she undertook hunger strike several times, among which, the longest hunger strike was a 26-day long one (Leslie Jacques, 2006). Patkar-led movement had forced the World Bank to constitute 'Morse Commission' for reviewing the project (Yurchak, Kathleen D. & Rosencranz, Armin, 1996). The Commission reported that the environment and resettlement (of displaced people) policy of the World Bank was being violated by the project (Clark, Dana 2002). The World Bank's financial involvement in the project was cancelled in 1993 (Caufield, Catherine, 1996) by the Indian Government (Kumar, Sanjay & Miller, Susan Katz, 10<sup>th</sup> April 1993). Again, Medha Patkar undertook hunger strike in 1993 to resist mass departure from the dam construction site. Some political party workers attacked the office of 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' in 1994, and protesters were physically assaulted. She began fasting again with a few associates against the attack. After 20 days of fasting Medha Patkar and her associates were arrested and forcibly fed intravenously (Rowell, Andrew, 1996).

The court gave verdict to stop the construction work of the Dam immediately and directed all concerned states for quick completion of the rehabilitation process (Kumar, Sanjay & Miller, Susan Katz, 10 April 1993). After several years, considering the benefits derived from the Narmada Project for a large number of people, the Court allowed resumption of construction of the project, with a condition of equal progress in resettlement of displaced people in each state party with the rising height of the Dam. The construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam started again in 1999 and was finished in 2006. Finally, the dam was inaugurated in 2017.

The 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' had addressed multiple issues like, resettlement provisions of the displaced; environmental impact, forceful ouster and violations of civil rights and liberties etc. (Nepal, Padam 2009). The activists of the movement applied various

non-violent techniques of protest like, solidarity march, ‘Satyagraha’, demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes and blockade of projects etc.

Medha Patkar organised community social action and involved the mass people living in the Narmada Valley and beyond. By bringing together hundreds of local groups and organizations, Medha Patkar established and spearheaded one of the largest non-violent social movements, both nationally and internationally of ‘Narmada Bachao Andolan’. She also led to create a coalition of more than 150 mass movements into the ‘National Alliance of People’s Movements’. Medha Patkar’s successful non-violent campaign to save Narmada River and to protect human rights continued for a period of three decades.

Medha Patkar has received a number of prestigious awards: she received the ‘Right Livelihood Award’ (Laureates, 1991) in 1991; the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1993; Green Ribbon Award of BBC; and the Human Rights Defender’s Award from Amnesty International alongwith several other awards. Medha Patkar is an exceptional global citizen. Her courage, sincerity, veracity, and selfless sacrifice inspired the people of the Narmada Valley to fight against the curse of displacement and ecological destruction brought about by the construction of Sardar Sarobar Dam and other several dams over the Narmada River.

#### **Contribution of Sugathakumari in Silent valley Movement:**

The ‘Silent Valley’ is a moist evergreen forest under Palakkad district in Kerala. Kunthipuzha river flows 15 km southwest from the ‘Silent Valley’. As there was no noise of cicadas after dark the valley was named as ‘Silent valley’ by an Englishman.

The Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) proposed a hydroelectric dam across the Kunthipuzha River in 1970. But, the proposed project was not viable in respect of environment protection, as it would threaten a large area of rainforest and the life of rudimentary species of flora and fauna (Nepal, Padam 2009). The proposed dam might destroy 8.3 square km of virgin rainforest by flood. The project plan was expected to generate 240 megawatt of power, to irrigate 10000 ha additional agricultural land and to give employment to 2000-3000 people. The Planning Commission of India approved this project in 1973. But, implementation was delayed for want of necessary fund flow.

In 1976, M.K Prasad inscribed an article in Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad, about the devastating consequence of the proposed hydro-electric project in the ‘Silent Valley’. His article created awareness among people. Many eminent personalities appealed to the central government to disapprove the project. In the same year, a task-force was constituted to review the proposed project. Zafar Futehally was appointed as chairman. This task Force recommended, either abandon the project, or adopt several safeguards before implementation. The Kerala government decided to continue the project work by adopting

recommended safeguards. The central government approved the proposal. A movement was started in 1978 to stop the project. A Public interest litigation case was filed in the Kerala High Court in the year 1979. The ‘Kerala Prakriti Samrakshana Samiti’ and ‘Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad’ initiated protest meetings, rallies and awareness campaigns all over the state, and their protest activities became a mass movement. The ‘Silent Valley movement’ claimed that the benefits of the project would be going to Trivandrum against the disruption of local environment (Karan, P. P. 1994, p. 39).

As a result, a Central Committee was constituted headed by M.S. Swaminathan to re-investigate the issue. In an appeal to the Governor, construction work was stopped again. But, the protest activities continued. The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi again constituted a Committee headed by M.G.K. Menon in 1983, to re-examine the project. The Menon Committee recommended to stop the project. As a result the hydro-electric project was closed and the ‘Silent Valley’ was declared as a National Park in the year 1985.

Famous poet and environment campaigner Sugathakumari played a significant role in the ‘Silent Valley’ movement. Sugathakumari was born on 22 January 1934 in Aranmula, Kerala. Her father Keshava Pillai, was a freedom fighter and eminent writer. Her mother V. K. Karthiyayini was an eminent teacher. Sugathakumari was Founder Secretary of the ‘Kerala Prakriti Samrakshana Samithi’, who strongly participated in the ‘Save Silent Valley’ protest. She had dedicated many of her writings to Mother Nature. A song written by Sugathakumari titled “Marathinu Stuthi” became popular and turned into a symbol of protest against ecological destruction. The song had been sung as the opening prayer in most of “Save the Silent Valley” campaigns (Mohan, Sridevi, 24 April 2004). ‘Padma Sree’ award winner Sugathakumari won several literary and other prestigious awards (Paul, Cithara, 20 December 2020) for her extra ordinary services. She received the first Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra Award for her efforts in environmental protection and afforestation. Renowned personality Sugathakumari breathed her last on 23 December 2020.

#### **Results:**

The main objectives of these movements were to prevent deforestation, to preserve ecological diversity and above all to protect human rights, so as to protect human species. With the sacrifices of women vanguards in India, mass awareness regarding significance of environment protection and nourishment of nature was developed. Several legislations have been formulated for protection of environment forbidding harm to trees, animals and Mother Nature in India. Another aspect of development i.e. protection of human rights has been unfolded with these protest movements. The government development policies as well as the forest policies have been diverted from anti-human rights approach to humane approach.

These movements forced the government to go for environment friendly and less destructive projects.

The 'Chipko' and 'Silent Valley' movements have made people alert regarding value of forest preservation, and importance of sustaining ecological balance. These movements have made people aware about the significance of forest conservation, which has been the most essential source of survival for large number of people living in rural India.

The environmental movements of India removed many socio-cultural barriers and united people of different castes, economic class, social community, political belief and professional variety, sex and age in a common platform for the noble cause of environment protection.

Women are considered as the weaker section in Indian society after the Vedic period. But, it is evident that in major environmental movements, women took the lead, as the organizer and also as participants. Unlike other social movements, Indian environmental movements have given women a platform to realise public authority, which were earlier controlled by their male counterparts. These movements also established the resurgence of woman power and their concern for the mother earth and ecology (Weber, 1988, pp. 12-13). Women, often marginalised and most affected in any negative development trend, had shown an enormous capability to become 'their own leaders, their own decision-makers, their own sources of strength' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p.246).

In almost all the environmental movements, the leaders' as well common activists had adopted 'Satyagraha' - the Gandhian way of protest, which is considered as one of the most powerful weapons of conflict resolution. The non-violent means of protest have inspired many people fighting a similar battle.

Through formation and leading the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Medha Patkar created awareness of environmental and developmental dilemmas, improved the government accountability, and instigated policy modifications.

### Conclusion

To conclude, environmental and ecological movements have grown in popularity in India since the 1970s. These movements were primarily initiated by the affected village people and gradually spread among urban populations of different social categories, different professional and intellectuals.

Major issues of these movements included protecting people's rights to natural assets; to save natural resources; to control environment pollution; to keep biological equilibrium; to rehabilitate displaced people; to uphold human rights and civil liberty among people affected by development projects; and above all to protect 'Mother Nature' from destruction in the name of development.

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## Fisherwomen of Loktak Lake, Manipur : A Social and Economic Analysis

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### Abstract :

An assessment of the socioeconomic status of fisherwomen of 3 villages (Thanga, Ithing, Phubala) and one island (Karang) in the Bishnupur district of Manipur was made during 2019-20. The information was collected from primary sources of information from 350 fisherwomen with a 95 percent confidence level and a 5 percent margin of error. The data was analysed using Engel's coefficient to determine the infrastructure. The study found that the majority of fisher women are between 15 and 65 years of age. Of the sampled women 80 percent of them are highly literate, 84.75 percent belong to the Meitei religion, 70.25 percent live in mud houses with bamboo fencing, tin roofs, and 100 percent utilize lake water directly to drink and for domestic purposes. In fact, 90 percent of the sampled respondents are involved in the fishing industry with 53 percent having more than 10 years of experience but in Engel's coefficients, 59.34 percent of household spending is attributed to everyday expenditures. Thus, their contribution to the fishing industry is necessary for their financial survival. Their nearest hospital is not in proper condition, and their sewage facilities have not been installed yet. A major obstacle to their livelihood is the construction of the 'Ithai' Barrage Dam, the removal of floating mats (*Phumdis*), and encroachment of the lake. This has resulted in a reduction in fish production, which makes it difficult for them. So, workshops and schemes are also needed for their awareness and socio-economic development along with problems regarding hospitality, roads, and transportation etc.

**Keywords:** *Social, Economic, 'Loktak Lake', Livelihood and Fisherwomen.*

### Introduction

'Loktak Lake' is India's largest freshwater lake and a Ramsar site of international importance, covering 287 sq. km. Located on the southern side of Manipur central valley, it

is about 38 km away from Imphal, the state capital. Fisheries play a significant role in socio-economic development, primarily by providing employment to low-income families. As a freshwater lake, this lake is a rich fishing resource and provides nourishment for millions of people who live nearby, making it a vital resource. The majority of their income comes from fishing and fish supplies around 'Loktak Lake'.

Economic prosperity would not be possible in Manipur without the constructive efforts of its women. The agricultural industry is also highly influential, as are food security, horticulture, agriculture, food processing, nutrition, sericulture, fisheries, and other related industries. Agriculture represents the majority of Manipur's economy. Women's role extends beyond childcare and child education to looking after the animals. They also work in the fields and harvest the produce. As women receive higher wages than men, many traditionally male tasks within agriculture are being handled by them (Devi, S., & Singh, L. K., 2016).

Thus, many women are entirely dependent on fishing as one of their primary sources of food and income. But because of lack of resources, such as improper tools, insufficient transportation, poor roads, insufficient health facilities, etc. makes it more difficult for them to achieve their goals.

### Objectives

The purpose of the study is to find out the socio-economic status of fishing women in 3 villages (Phubala, Ithing and Thanga) and one island (Karang) in Bishnupur, Manipur.

### Data Base and Methodology

A field investigation and direct interviews with female fisherwomen at the 'Loktak' Lake community were conducted in 2019-2020. Information has been collected from 3 villages Ithing, Thanga, Phubala and one island Karang of the Bishnupur district. With the aid of a carefully drafted questionnaire, a simple random sampling technique was adopted. Taking 350 female fisher respondents with a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error.

To determine the infrastructure found in these sampled villages, Engel's coefficient was used with the given formula as -

$$\text{Engel's coefficient} = \frac{\text{total expenditure on infrastructure}}{\text{total annual income}} \times 100$$

Engel's coefficient (shown in Figure 5) is used to calculate the rate of change in demand by dividing the rate of change in consumers' disposable income. Many factors, including food, clothing, school, college, cooking gas, electricity, equipment, transportation, cooking fuel, etc., have a role in determining how much money fisherwomen have for their domestic needs.

Due to the fact that the focus of the research is on analyzing basic necessities for domestic use, double-check was done and domestic use was made the focus instead of infrastructure.

Study Area

The term ‘Loktak’ means a stream (‘*Lok*’) and an ending(‘*tak*’), referring to the end of a stream and this lake has an area of 287sq.km., situated between 93°46’E to 93°55’E and 24°25’ to 24°42’N (Fig.1) in the Bishnupur district of Manipur. It appears oval-shaped,measuring 26km long and 13km wide, with the natural catchment area being 1,040 sq. km. The indirect catchment area is 7,157 sq. km. Additionally, this lake is connected with 63 small lakes, and 2 important rivers, namely Nambol and Nambul, as well as a few smaller rivers and channels that flow into the lake (Moirangleima, Kh. and Devi, S. S., 2021).

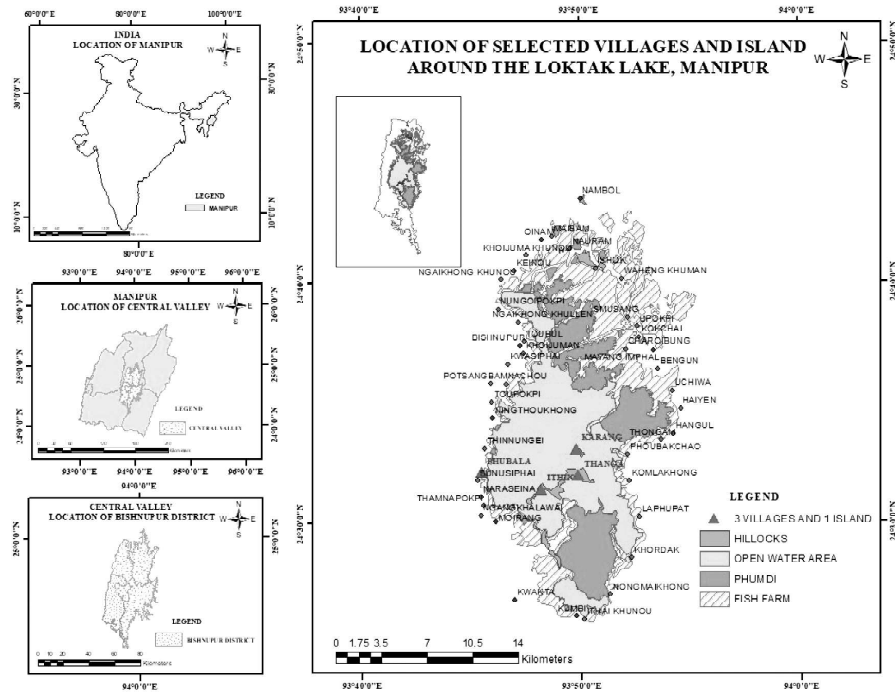


Figure 1: Location of sampled villages in and around Loktak Lake, Manipur

SOURCE: 1. CENSUS OF INDIA, 2011; 2. GOOGLE EARTH, 2019; 3. GOOGLE MAP, 2019; 4. SENTINATAL 2A MSSLIC, ESA 2018.

Although, there are roughly 8 towns and 52 villages surrounding this lake, with a total population of about 2,20,017 people, or 9 percent of Manipur’s total population (Moirangleima, Kh. and Devi,S.S.,2021). Besides fishing and fisheries, the lake provides a wide range of functions in the form of water supply for drinking water, domestic uses, hydroelectric power generation, agriculture as well as for promoting tourism activity – making of homestay on ‘*phumdis*’, boating, rowing sports, habitat for ‘Sangai’ in ‘Keibul Lamjao’ National Park located in the south-eastern part of the lake, raw materials for handicrafts, food, fuel, fodder, thatching materials, medicinal plants etc. That’s why the lake is the ‘lifeline of the people of Manipur’.

So, Manipur, a state in north-eastern India is famed for its freshwater lake ‘Loktak Lake’ with its abundant resources with high biodiversity. This lake has also provided a lot of socio-economic values for the livelihood of people.

Results and Discussions

In the social-economic context, fisherwomen of Manipur have made a significant contribution to the upliftment of rural and urban economies.

Social Background of the Sampled Respondents

According to the results of the field survey, the majority of the sampled respondents are between the ages of 15 and 65years. Table 1 reveals that the majority of the sampled respondents are between the ages of 30 and 45 (i.e., 51 percent), 26.5 percent of respondents are over 45 years old and 22.5 percent are under 30 years old. A substantial number of sampled respondents are married, i.e., nearly 95 percent while the rest 5 percent are unmarried, from this data we can say that these women are taking responsibility for their families by engaging in fishing and allied activities.

Field Surveys revealed that most of the sampled respondents are literate i.e., 80 percent. Among these sampled villages, regarding the education, Thanga village is good as compared to others as we can see that about 16 percent are post-graduates followed by Karang (4 percent) and Ithing (3.7 percent) while phubala is the lowest with only nearly 3 percent graduates. There was no illiteracy, which is notable in these sampled villages (Table 1).

Maximum sampled respondents followed Meitei religion (‘*Sanamahism*’) i.e., 84. 75 percent (90 percent in Thanga; 89 percent in Karang; 81 percent in Ithing; 79 percent in Phubala, etc.) and 15.25 percent in Hindu (21 percent in Phubala; 10 percent in Thanga; 19 percent in Ithing; 11 percent in Karang, etc.) (Table 1).

Nearly 60 percent belong to a family size of 4 - 8 members, 31 percent in less than 4and 10.25 percent have more than 8 members. Maximum sampled respondents i.e., nearly 94 percent live in nuclear families (Table 1).

Table 1: Social Condition of the Sampled Respondents in the Study Area.

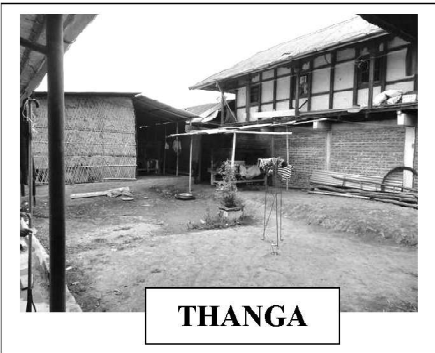
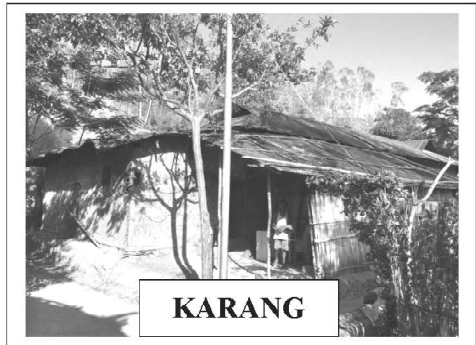
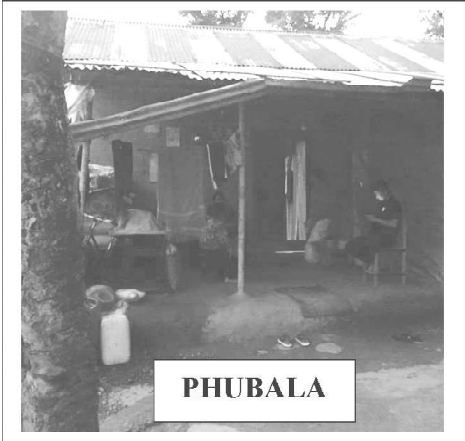
SL. NO.	FEATURES	TYPE	SAMPLE RESPONDENTS (%)				AVERAGES (%)	
			PHUBALA [HUT DWELLERS]	THANGA	ITHING	KARANG [ISLAND]		
1.	Age group	15-30	15.00	10.00	30.00	35.00	22.5	
		30-45	60.00	54.00	40.00	50.00	51.00	
		>45	25.00	36.00	30.00	15.00	26.5	
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	
2.	Married Status	Married	96.00	95.00	98.00	90.00	94.75	
		Unmarried	4.00	5.00	2.00	10.00	5.25	
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	
3.	Education	Illiterate	27.00	7.00	19.00	30.00	20.75	
		Literate	73.00	93.00	81.00	70.00	79.25	
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	
		Levels of Education	Primary	43.84	17.20	37.03	7.14	26.30
			Secondary	53.42	53.76	50.62	60.00	54.45
			Graduate	2.74	12.90	8.64	28.57	13.21
			Post-Graduate	-	16.13	3.70	4.29	6.03
		Total	100	100	100	100	100	

4.	Religion	Hindu	21.00	10.00	19.00	11.00	15.25
		Meitei	79.00	90.00	81.00	89.00	84.75
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
5.	Family sizes	0-4	30.00	35.00	32.00	27.00	31.00
		4-8	62.00	45.00	48.00	70.00	56.25
		>8	8.00	20.00	10.00	3.00	10.25
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
6.	Family Types	Nuclear	97.00	85.00	95.00	98.00	93.75
		Joint	3.00	15.00	5.00	2.00	6.25
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
7.	Houses	Pucca	-	5.00	-	-	1.25
		Semi-Pucca	-	85.00	4.00	25.00	28.5
		Kutchha	100.00	10.00	96.00	75.00	70.25
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
8.	Drinking water	Lake water	75.00	63.00	100.00	100.00	84.5
		Tape-water (Municipality)	-	-	-	-	-
		Pond	-	-	-	-	-
		Hand pump	-	30.00	-	-	7.5
		Loktak Lake & Water Tanker	25.00	7.00	-	-	8.00
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
9.	Drainage	No Drainage	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
		Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey results based on field research, 2019-2020

Regarding the housing condition of the sampled villages, it was found that most of the villages sampled lived in ‘kutchahouses’ made of mud, bamboo fencing, tin roofs etc.i.e., about 70.25 percent followed by 28.5 percent semi-pucca houses and only 1.25 percent

lived in ‘pucca houses’ (Table 1). If we compare these sampled villages, Thanga village has the most better condition than other villages i.e., 85 percent live in semi-pucca and 5 per cent in ‘pucca houses’ but only 10 percent live in ‘kutchahouses’ while 100 percent of Phubala village live in Kutcha houses followed by Ithing (96 percent) and Karang (75 percent) (Photo Plate no.1).



Source : Pictures taken by researcher

Photo plate no. 1: Types of Houses of the sampled Villages and Island.

According to field surveys, the majority of people living around the Loktak lake use the lake water for drinking and domestic purposes (almost 85 percent) i.e., 100 percent in Ithing and Karang, 75 percent in Phubala, and 63 percent in Thanga; roughly 25 percent comes from local water tankers, and 7.5 percent comes from hand pumps (only found in Thanga). Surprisingly, in these sampled villages, there is no water connection for tap water

and no drainage system, so 100 percent of all the domestic wastewater goes straight to ‘Loktak lake’ (Table 1).

A Perusal of Table No.2, figure2 & 3 shows that, season wise average value of physio-chemical characteristics of ‘Loktak lake’, water, from ‘Manipur Pollution Control Board’, 2019-20. We can see from the graphs that the physio-chemical characteristics of the lake water are within the desirable limits of Beureau of Indian Standards (BIS) requirements, thus we can confirm that the drinking water quality of ‘Loktak lake’ meets BIS criteria for drinking and domestic use.

Based on the standard’s stipulation of acceptable ranges, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) approved value for drinking water, if the parameters are within the acceptable range, the material is non-acidic and can be safely consumed; otherwise, it is too strong for human consumption. So, the criteria established by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), a government organization founded in 1986 was used, to evaluate the usefulness of the lake water. BIS’s mandate is to “ensure the orderly evolution of the country’s standardization, labelling, and quality certification of goods and to deal with related issues” (BIS, 2012). However, this BIS claims that human contact with the water is safe.

Table 2: Average value of physio-chemical characteristics of water according to season-wise, 2019 -20)

SL. NO	PARAMETERS	MONSOON 2019-2020		DRY 2019-2020		Limits of BIS STANDARDS (10500:2012)*
1	pH	7.12	7.28	7.12	7.28	8.5
2	Electrical conductivity(μ/scm)	136	190.64	136	190.64	800
3	Turbidity	63.4	80.6	63.4	80.6	100
4	Total Dissolved Solid (mg/l)	83.6	95.8	83.6	95.8	500
5	Total Hardness (mg/l)	30.8	51.6	30.8	51.6	200
6	Ca2+ (mg/l)	16.4	28.2	16.4	28.2	250
7	Mg2+ (mg/l)	3.54	6.46	3.54	6.46	30
8	cl-1(mg/l)	9.12	8.47	9.12	8.47	250
10	Total Alkalinity (mg/l)	64	85.2	64	85.2	200
11	Dissolved Oxygen (mg/l)	7.06	7.14	7.06	7.14	8

Source: Manipur Pollution Control Board, 2019-2020

\*Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) approved value for drinking water and 2012 is the year.

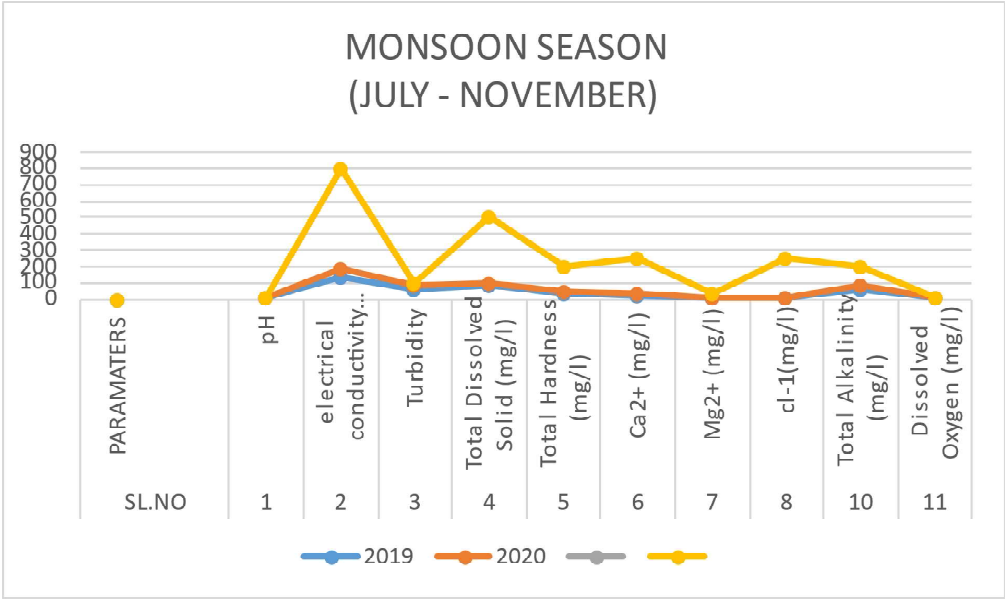


Figure 2: Manipur Pollution Control Board, 2019-2020

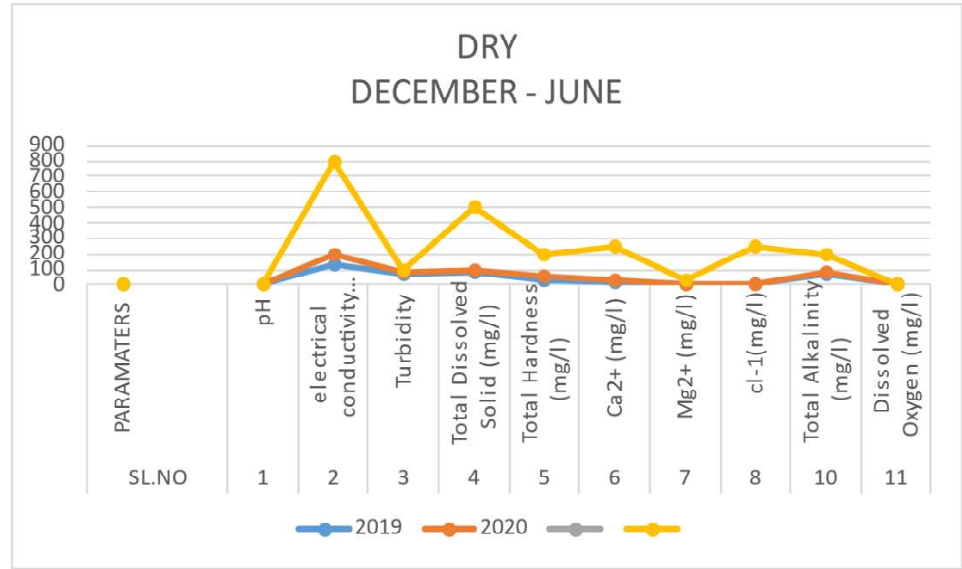


Figure no 3: Manipur Pollution Control Board, 2019-2020

2. **Economic background of the sampled respondents–**

Table 3 and figure 4 show the occupational structure of the sampled respondents. Maximum respondents are engaged in fishing(89.5 percent) and fish marketing (82.5 percent) while fewer percentages are involved in the business (6 percent), government jobs (nearly 5 percent) and private jobs (4 percent). Here, we can see in this table that most of the respondents are involved in fishing i.e., Phubala (100 percent), Karang (98 percent), Thanga (90 percent) and Ithing (70 percent) as well as Fish marketing i.e., Phubala & Karang (100 percent each), Thanga (70 percent) and Ithing (60 percent). Here we conclude that the sampled respondents have a total dependency on the lake for their livelihood.

Table 3: Occupational Structure of the Sampled Respondents.

	Phubala	Thanga	Ithing	Karang	Total
Fishing	100.00	90.00	70.00	98.00	89.5
Fish Marketing	100.00	70.00	60.00	100.00	82.5
Business	5.00	12.00	5.00	2.00	6
Private job	-	9.00	4.00	3.00	4
Govt. Job	2.00	9.00	2.00	6.00	4.75

Source: Based on Field survey, 2019-20.

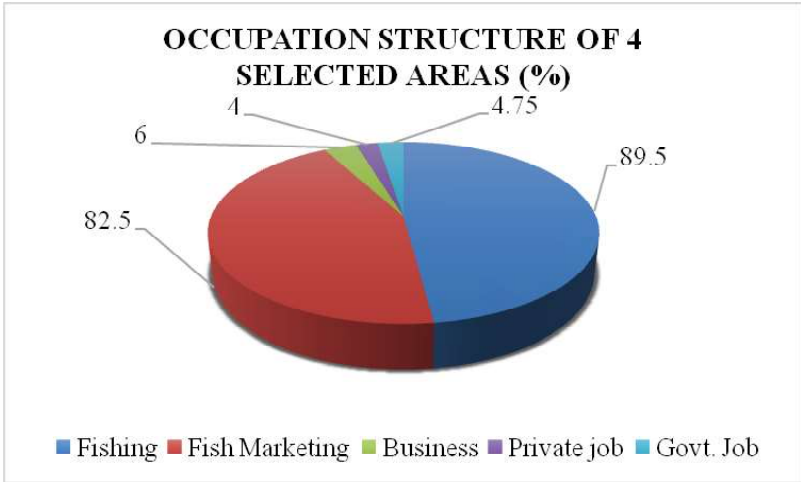


Figure 4 : Survey results based on field research, 2019-2020

Regarding the working experiences, more than 53 percent of the sampled respondents have a long experience of fishing of more than 10 years which is found in Karang (70 percent), Phubala (65 percent), Thanga (60 percent) & Ithing (20 percent) (Table 4).

Table 4: Economic Condition of the Sampled Respondents in the Study Area.

SL. NO.	FEATURES	TYPE	SAMPLE RESPONDENTS (%)				AVERAGES (%)
			PHUBALA [HUT DWELLERS]	THANGA	ITHING	KARANG [ISLAND]	
1.	Experience in Fishing (in years)	<5	10.00	3.00	45.00	2.00	15.00
		5-10	25.00	37.00	35.00	28.00	31.25
		>10	65.00	60.00	20.00	70.00	53.75
		Total	100	100	100	100	100
2.	Earning Members (per family)	1	87.00	90.00	75.00	92.00	86
		2-4	9.00	7.00	21.00	5.00	10.5
		>4	4.00	3.00	4.00	3.00	3.5
3.	Annual Incomes (in Rupees)	Total	100	100	100	100	100
		<50,000	5.00	8.00	7.00	-	5.00
		50,000 – 1 Lakh	25.00	30.00	73.00	-	32.00
		>1 Lakh	70.00	62.00	20.00	100.00	63.00
		Total	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Based on Field survey, 2019-20.

Of the sampled respondents, 86 percent of fisherwomen with one earning member are more involved in fishery management than families with 2 - 4 members (10.5 percent) and above four members (3.5 percent) (Table 4).

Of the total sampled women 63 percent of fisherwomen earn more than one lakh rupees. Among the Ithing, Thanga, and Phubala communities, a minimum of 32 percent earn rupees 50,000 to 1 lakh which is considered normal. As shown in Table 4.

Table 5 : A list of fish prices is shown below

SL. NO.	IDENTIFICATION OF THE FISHES		AVAILABLE PRICES (Rs.)	
	SCIENTIFIC	LOCAL	DRY	FRESH
1.	<i>Amblypharyngodon mola</i>	<i>Muka Nga</i>	Big Size = 400 (Jalou) Small Size = 200 (Jalou)	600 (Kg)
2.	<i>Anabas testudineus</i>	<i>Ukabi</i>	20 (Per piece)	500 - 600 (Kg)
3.	<i>Channa orientalis</i>	<i>Meitei ngamu</i>	800 (Kg)	400 (Kg)
4.	<i>Glossogobius giuris</i>	<i>Nailon nga or ngamu</i>	300 (100 Piece)	300 (Kg)
5.	<i>Ctenopharyngodon Idella</i>	<i>Grass carp</i>	1 Kg = 450 – 500 (Cutting Pieces)	250 - 280 (Kg)
6.	<i>Cirrhinus mrigala</i>	<i>Mrigal</i>	400 (Kg)	250 - 280 (Kg)
7.	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>	<i>Puklaobi (Common carp)</i>	400 (Kg)	Big = 200 – 250 Small = 160 (Kg)
8.	<i>Esomus danricus</i>	<i>Ngasang</i>	Big Size = 400 (Jalou) Small Size = 200 (Jalou)	600 (Kg)
9.	<i>Labeorohita</i>	<i>Rou</i>	400 (Kg)	Small = 170 (Kg) Big = 250 – 300 (Kg)

SL. NO.	IDENTIFICATION OF THE FISHES		AVAILABLE PRICES (Rs.)	
	SCIENTIFIC	LOCAL	DRY	FRESH
10.	<i>Notopterusnotopterus</i>	<i>Kandala</i>	1,200 (Kg)	30-35 (250 g)
11.	<i>Puntius semaphore</i>	<i>Phabou Nga</i>	Big Size of 100 Piece = 200 (Jalou) Medium Size of 100 Piece = 100 (Jalou) Small Size of 100 Piece = 50 (Jalou)	230 (Kg)
12.	<i>Pethia manipurensis</i>	<i>Ngakha Meinga ngbi</i>	150 (Jalou)	-
13.	<i>Trichogaster labiosa</i>	<i>Ngapema / 15</i>	1,300 (Kg)	650 (Kg)
14.	<i>Prawn</i>	<i>Khajing</i>	1,500 (Kg)	750 (Kg)
15.	<i>Medium size of any fishes</i>	<i>Ngaphuk</i>	Weight of single piece fish of 1 kg = 250 Weight of single piece fish of 500 g = 150	80 - 130 (Kg)
16.	<i>Chanda nama</i>	<i>Ngamhai</i>	450 (Jalou)	-
17.	<i>Eel</i>	<i>Ngaprum</i>	800 (Kg)	300 (Kg)

Source: Based on Field survey, 2019-2020.

Consider:

- ‘Jalou’ (Made up of Iron) – a lot of fish come in it (the process of dry fish through firewood or coal).
  - Cutting piece – slide of big fish
- Table 4 indicates that the prices of fresh and dry fish are vastly different. As a result, the dried fish price shot up higher than the fresh fish price, making it more profitable.

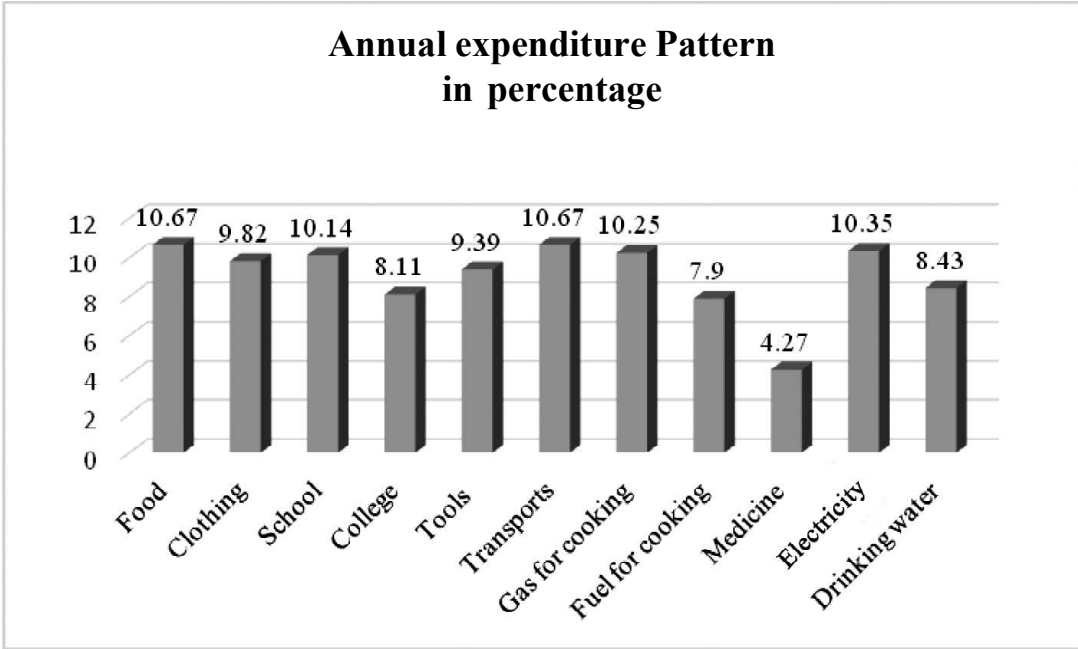


Figure no. 5: “Expenditure Pattern among Fisherwomen on an Annual Basis (according to Engel’s coefficient)”.

Source: Based on Field survey, 2019-2020.

As determined by Engel’s coefficients, the sampled respondents report that 59.34 percent of household expenditures relate to everyday activities (food, clothing, school, college, gas for cooking, electricity, etc.), while 27.96 percent is attributed to tools, transportation, and fuel for cooking (drying process). Based on Figure 5, 10.67 percent of these are used in food, 9.82 percent in clothing, 10.14 percent in schools, 8.11 percent in colleges, 9.39 percent in tools, 10.67 percent in transportation, 10.25 percent in cooking gas, 7.90 percent in fuel for cooking, 4.27 percent in medicine, 10.35 percent in electricity, and 8.43 percent in drinking water (20-liter mineral bottle supplier and 1,500-liter tanker of ‘Sintex’). So, these figures recommend that fisherwomen spend 59.34 percent of their income on infrastructure, and based on Engel’s coefficient, the standard of living is lower (Dahiya & Viswanathan, 2014).



### Conclusion

The consumption expenditures of the 4 selected areas are more affected by lack of income, as they are dependent on fishing, and it has a 95 per cent confidence level. Primary goods such as food are declining in demand as small-scale fisherwomen households focus on secondary needs (education, clothing, health, as well as fishing needs such as fuel and bait) (Rahim, A. et al., 2021).

Overall, most fishing women are literate nearly 80 percent but cannot obtain government jobs. So, their engagement to the fishing industry is essential for their financial survival. The health conditions of these people are not improving and their nearest hospital is not in good condition. Their sanitation facilities are poor. The problem is the construction of the 'Ithai' Barrage Dam, removing floating matelas 'Phumdis', and encroachment are significant obstacles to their livelihoods. Consequently, fish supplies have decreased, which makes it difficult for them. As a result, workshops and programs are necessary to make fishing a sustainable activity. Roads and transportation problem needs to be improved for socio-economic development.

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## Women, Magic, and Environment: An Eco Feminist Reading of Rachel Griffin's *The Nature of Witches*

*Ritu Ranjan Gogoi*

### Abstract :

The hierarchical structure and dualistic basis of the human society breeds oppression and divides the world into the dominant and subordinate binary, which is seen in the exploitation of nature and women. The hegemony of capitalist and patriarchal narrative objectifies both women and nature, and the essence of language that is used to describe nature and women as virginal, pristine, or as a menacing and destructive power that needs to be controlled is justified. The aim of this article is to see how this trope of women and nature is deconstructed and redefined, in order to explore nuanced ways of depicting the environment, ecology, climate change and their interconnectedness in fiction, especially fantasy literature. The purpose is to usher a new way of seeing and perceiving the consequences of the destruction of the natural world, humanity's impact on environment, and the possible solutions to ecological degradation. Humanity's overconsumption of natural resources disturbs the crucial symbiotic relationship of man and nature, and fantasy through the power of allegory gives us an understanding of how we are connected to the natural world, but also of what created our disconnect – the reckless exploitation, commodification and pollution. The ecocritical focus will be directed on Rachel Griffin's novel *The Nature of Witches* (2021) through an ecofeminist perspective, of how the mythopoeic fantasy story with its quasi-religious wonder manages to dismantle the anthropocentric constructions of nature, women, and unveils an ecocentric and biocentric paradigm, along with shifting gender roles and issues of identity.

**Keywords:** *Women, Nature, Environment, Ecology, Climate change, fantasy, Ecofeminism*

## Introduction

The pluralistic approaches in feminist criticism resists generalization regarding its methods and objectives, and this plurality is what embraces the multiple ideologies that inform the broader women's movement, which helps feminists to continue their search for patterns of oppression as well as connection. Ecofeminist literary criticism in this sense can be described as –

Ecofeminism is a perspective that sees social and environmental problems as fundamentally interconnected. Beginning with a recognition that the position and treatment of women, animals, and nature are not separable, ecofeminists make connections among not just sexism, speciesism, and the oppression of nature but also other forms of social injustice – racism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, and colonialism – as part of western culture's assault on nature. (Gaard 323)

After Francois d' Eaubonne's coining of the term "ecofeminism", in literature the intersection of ecology and feminism was a relatively unexplored realm. Now, the ecofeminist perspective in literature unveils the dominant patriarchal dualistic thinking, and at the same time explores emancipatory strategies which is not just confined to critique, but which identifies and articulates liberating ideals that can be actualized in the real world, transforming lives, and help in the emergence of more hopeful ecological narratives. In this regard, two distinguished approaches needs to be adopted to understand the relationship between women and nature – cultural ecofeminism and rationalist feminism, which draws attention to existing binaries of sexual and environmental justice, analyses of power, gender, and ecology, and green queer theories that accounts for diversity as well as the relevance and necessity to generate a feminist perspective in literature, culture, and science to reassess the material and discursive connections between the human and the natural world.

Ecofeminism advocates an ethics-based approach that will necessitate sustainable and effective practices considering the moral accountability regarding the environment, species, and the world, thereby contesting the heteromascularity that perpetuates gendered dualities and bodily boundaries. Rachel Stein, in her 2010 essay "Sexual/Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism of the New Century" says that – "the field of ecocriticism will become more conscious of the need to think through our assumptions about sex and nature" (Stein 103). Recent trends in the eco-literary imagination has used this framework illuminating the varied ways in which gender, class, race mediate the experiences of people in local environments, and how the political and economic power structures are instrumental in shaping and controlling the ecology and its resources. Simply speaking, ecocriticism with a feminist perspective offers a kind of intervention in to the ongoing political narrative authorizing the plunder of the

planet – the people, animals, resources, exploitation and disruption of the ecosystem. In a world where summits on global warming, climate crisis are held regularly, we have failed to humanize the issues, and the voices crying against these problems are either muted or marginalized. There is more to be done and written regarding the disasters modern civilization has brought on this planet – forests that have been cut down or burnt, rivers dammed and polluted, air and soil poisoned by industrial chemicals, oil and gas spills, marine pollution, nuclear power meltdowns which have contaminated the fragile ecology of this world. The eco-justice movements which have sprung around the globe harkening to the responsibility of protecting the earth and its life interrelates to the ideas, words, towards promoting and discovering a peaceful, just, and sustainable way of living on this precious earth.

The ecofeminist movement is also characterized by some quotidian customs of ritual and magic which is discussed by Roger S. Gottlieb when he talks about the aspect of spiritual deep ecology in which he expresses his view that people's "selves are not bounded solely by individuality or social group, but are partly constituted by connections to and at times with the natural world" (Gottlieb 405). This eco-spirituality emphasizes universality and connecting to the cosmic whole, which Starhawk focuses upon in order to conjoin politics, science and the sacred which she terms as "building community" with a pagan outlook and earth-based traditions pointing at the popularized "Gaia hypothesis" acknowledging the belief of the people in tribal cultures, witches, and shamans that the earth is alive. Starhawk defines magic as "the art of changing consciousness at will" (Starhawk 76), and this corresponds to the political and social angle of magic where actions of power and underlying principles of hierarchy are used to manipulate the consciousness of the people on a mass scale. Magic according to Starhawk is akin to politics as it involves the paradigms of moving energy, interconnectedness to sources of power, and changing the basic condition of reality. This conception of magic is appealing as it focuses on the transformation of the self, changing the individual consciousness, but also at the same time acknowledging the fact that changes too can manifest in the social and political sphere, of which the individual is an integral part, and the power of magic emerging from the consciousness is grounded on material and structural reality which can be used to shape a society based on the principle of power-from-within. Herein lies the paradox of magic and power, where magic grants an individual the agency to change things, but is limited to the scope of a conditioned reality where the liberal idea of a free, able individual is restricted. This dual focus on community and individual that focuses on creating an ecological selfhood which is connected with the natural changes of the world with regard for the context of human actions on the environment is what forms the core tenets of Rachel Griffin's Young Adult Fiction *The Nature of Witches*.

J M Karen Warren in *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature* (1997) asks the fundamental question that forms the very foundation of ecofeminism –

Trees, forests and deforestation. Water, drought and desertification. Food production, poverty and toxic wastes. Environmental destruction and women. And women? What do these environmental issues have to do with women? (Warren 3)

She answers her own question, speaking about the subordination, appropriation and exploitation of women and the natural world which are interconnected and extended in case of ethnicity, race, minority, the poor, the aged, differently abled, and LGBTQ communities, and the relationships between these varied aspects exists because of a certain identity logic exemplified as objectively real in discourses and material practices. Such kind of logic rests on hierarchical and dualistic binaries of mind/body, reason/emotion, and masculine/feminine, human/nature that aims to define what truly is human in contrast to the natural and biological sphere. Ecofeminism seeks to dismantle or dissolve these dominant dualisms, the othering and exclusion, striving for new associations of care, responsibility and justice where humanity does not differentiate itself from nature but regards itself as an integral, dependent part of the ecological system, recognizing and thereby acknowledging the difference but rejects the anthropocentrism based on utility values or the human/non-human binary. Hence, the interconnections between gender and ecology, between theory and practice, between spirituality and ethical action, where we can see the patterns, structures of impoverishment regarding the earth and women is a matter that requires continual critique.

### **Objective**

The objective of this article is to find out how the standardized tropes of women and nature is deconstructed in order to unveil the myriad issues of climate change, environment, and ecology. The article analyses Rachel Griffin's Young Adult fantasy novel to explore the dynamics of human/nature, women/nature, and how the fantasy element of magic is used in order to unfurl the interconnectedness that exists between the earth, humans, and the world of nature. The focus is to offer a critical outlook regarding the anthropocentric construction of nature, and find out new sustainable ecocentric and biocentric approach through the ecofeminist perspective.

### **Textual Analysis**

Rachel Griffin's novel *The Nature of Witches* narrates a story that tells about climate change, environmentalism, and the role women has to play in keeping the planet safe and habitable. Griffin's novel tells a story of witches whose powers are connected to the four seasons, and each witch who was born in a particular season can harness its unique elements.

Their power is at the peak during the season of their birth and diminishes when their season passes. The ecological balance which the witches has kept through their power is in crisis because of the climate change, unpredictable weather patterns like heat waves in the winter season which have forced the witches to use off-season magic and which in turn has caused the magic of those witches to deplete and die. The only witch who has the capability to address this problem of escalating natural disasters is Clara Densmore, who is an “everwitch”, a witch who retains her power throughout the year and changes along with the seasons, but Clara is reluctant to use her volatile magic which resulted in the death of her parents and her best friend. She is weary and afraid of her magic, the cause of her trauma and loss, and she lives isolated in a cabin in the woods apart from her school. The authorities of the school pushes Clara to hone her magical potential, but when her uncontrollable magic results in the death of her teacher, she becomes determined to strip herself of the terrifying magic within her. Clara's magic, her emotions, her internal conflict, and her personality is intertwined, and throughout the story she undergoes a beautiful self-transformation accepting who she is and embraces her extraordinary power.

Magic is deeply personal, intertwining itself with all the emotions of its wielder. And, because mine is so fierce, so powerful, my training isn't enough of an outlet for it. It builds and builds and builds, and when the pressure is too great, it searches for another means of escape, gravitating towards the people I'm closest to because it recognizes the emotional connection I have with them. It is the same connection it has to me. (Griffin 30)

The school however thinks that Clara has a much larger responsibility to the world, and in order to push her further, a new teacher and his mentee, Sang, is brought into the fold to help. Sang is a spring witch who loves trees, plants, and growing things, and he is compassionate with Clara's plight which makes her to open up, and as with all humans a wonderful relationship buds between them, and at the same time Clara becomes apprehensive due to her past loss. Sang encourages Clara not to fear her magic and look at the possibilities of her untapped power which could help in restoring balance to a world which is on the cusp of an ecological collapse. The magical element of the novel may be seen as fantasy, but if we analyse it from the perspective of Val Plumwood, who says that the dominant political and economic models are inherently illogical and irrational, incapable of perceiving and recognizing “biospheric nature a unique, non-tradable, irreplaceable other on which all life on the planet depends. Because it has not fully come to terms with its earthian existence, but clings to illusions of identity outside nature, the master rationality is unable to grasp its peril” (Plumwood 194). The fantasy element in the novel thus, reflects the possibility of a meaningful,

equitable, sustainable socio-economic ecology that will bridge the gap between species and generations. Magic therefore is not an easily definable thing and there are a variety of cultural, economic, ecological and sacred aspects to it, and in the context of the novel it can be seen that there exists a Wiccan religious outlook that focuses on an ecopsychology which embraces the goal of planetary healing and rejuvenation for the purpose of sustainability, and magic as a whole denotes the complex processes of change, interdependence, and transformation that draws out the interplay of relations between the natural elements and human beings. Magic in Griffin's narrative can be described in a clear context, that is, controlling the volatile elements of nature due to environmental degradation, and solving the problem of climate crisis, and this context-bound nature of magic can be referred to Edward Evans Pritchard's conception which states that magic –

“Becomes more intelligible when it is viewed not only in relation to empirical activities but also in relation to other beliefs, as part of a system of thought; primarily not so much a means of controlling nature as of preventing witchcraft and other mystical forces operating against human endeavour by interfering with the empirical measures taken to attain an end” (Pritchard 111).

Pritchard's view shows that the ontological space between nature and society itself, the way people connect and adapt to nature, and how we are taught to empathize with all life needs to be re-evaluated in a new space, the space of undefinable magic and spirituality by decentering the overtly rational outlook, which is precisely the essence of deep ecology, as “Deep ecology bemoans our instrumental attitude towards nature and preaches that we cannot be fully human if we do not bond to something outside ourselves” (Gottlieb 378). Hence, in spiritual deep ecology magic becomes a system of communication, a psychological and individual phenomenon connected to nature, and is a form of practical knowledge suffused with different techniques where the practitioners are tied to the cycle of seasons and the changes that occur in the natural realm. In *The Nature of Witches* Clara and her companions are intermediaries who serve as a kind of bridge between the culturally defined natural world and the spiritual realm, and they are minority subjects in a world outnumbered by the non-magical users who view them as others, but they are situated in an institutional paradigm that is designed to promote the usefulness of their magic, controlling them effectively since the witches are people too, that conforms to commendable behaviour as dictated by the schemes of the non-magic users who control the resources and power.

The heart of the novel centres on the hope of a harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature which would help in stopping the prevailing environmental degradation that continues apace. The over exploitation of resources by the capitalist machine of human

civilization has destroyed the natural fabric of the planet that sustains all life, and along with this insidious deterioration of the ecosystem, climate change is now recognized as the most threatening factor with the potential of destroying all life on the planet – even the human species. The effects of deforestation and the rising levels of carbon in the atmosphere have resulted in the effects of global warming, melting of polar ice and glaciers, and desertification even in the temperate regions of the world. It has resulted in extreme weather changes like severe rainfall and storms at some places, and unprecedented drought in others which have become more aggressive and frequent. At one point in the novel, Clara talks about the rapacious greed of human beings that disrupts the balance of nature, the self-interest of rationalized economy which justifies in regarding nature as a resource to be consumed, which in turn has devastating consequences –

The shaders couldn't see past their desire for more, developing land that humans were never meant to touch, requiring control in areas that were only ever meant to be wild. And, now the atmosphere is collapsing around us. (Griffin 13-14)

The intersectional aspect of ecocriticism must be taken into account with other issues such as race, gender, and Griffin's novel well transmutes this eco-pedagogy into eco-fantasy literature which depicts environmental crisis and critiques the fact of how nature is treated as an asset or belonging that human beings try to possess. The seasonal witches in the novel depend on a reciprocal relationship with nature, fundamentally interconnected regarding their shifts and changes in magical power. Griffin constructs the self-identity of the human in relation to nature, especially the witches, but the ordinary humans who don't possess any magic are termed as “shaders” and portrayed as the materialists who exploit resources of nature without paying any heed to the damage they have done to the ecosystem in the name of progress and development. The training school for witches in the novel can be seen as an appropriate strategy for responding to the problems of climate crisis that tries to reject the binaries of men/women, human/non-human, human/nature in favour of a community and a sort of participatory democracy that heralds the rise of an eco-justice movement. The novel's narrative promotes an emotional response to the environmental crisis resisting the dominant paradigms of scientism and it is a counter-cry of resistance to critique how the capitalist scientism has disenchanted the beauty of the world relegating it to a mere source for resources and progress. Starhawk contends that eco-spirituality is rooted in three main ideas of – immanence, interconnectedness, and community, which suggests that the earth is dynamic and alive, a sacred entity of which human beings too are an integral part, and Starhawk's idea of sacred is open to interpretations and can be argued in the novel's context that how

the sacred manifests is not important, rather it opens a discourse of how deep a connection and experience can be established with the earth and the world around us. The magic of the witches reflects Starhawk's notion of interconnectedness which challenges the technocratic rationality and opens up a space for developing a new environmental ethics by joining politics, science, and the sacred aspect of nature where both teaching and healing becomes integral in heralding a change in the anthropocentric attitude of modern capitalism.

Moreover, the history of considering the earth as female, as a nurturing mother at present becomes problematic, rather the view and concern should be based on looking at nature as an autonomous, powerful long-lasting process which will pave way for an ethics of earth-care. Griffin in her novel does not equate women with nature and discards that passive romantic notion, thereby dismantling the commonly held belief that only woman has the capacity for nurturing, special powers of empathy and closeness to nature which is denied to men. She in fact poses a question, as Val Plumwood questions the gynocentric essentialism that idealizes women (certain women like witches, shamans) as the sole provider of knowledge concerning the green and wilderness. However, this doesn't negate women's connection with nature, but it creates space for women to consciously position themselves with nature. In Griffin's novel *The Nature of Witches*, the term 'witch' is used in a gender neutral way, which breaks the archetypal image of witch as rebellious women who have mysterious relationship with the nonhuman world. In the narrative of the novel the witches are both men and women free from the moral ambiguity which the term is tainted with, but they're also controlled by the capitalist power structure who views them as dangerous, but also considers them as a resource who helps in resuscitating the plundered planet with magical interventions. Clara, who is the everwitch in the novel talks about the indifference and callous attitude of the non-magical humans who aren't concerned about the witches and their toils to keep the balance in the ecosystem, and she resents them for destroying the ecology of the world through their unwonted exploitation of resources and contamination of the biosphere.

The shaders insist that magic is our area of expertise and they don't want to get involved, don't want to be in our way. That's what they don't understand – they are in our way, a huge barricade so wide we can't get around them, their indifference so toxic it's destroying the only home we have. Magic is a stopgap, a stabilizer. It isn't a solution. We need the shaders help, but no one wants to hear they're part of the problem – that they are the problem now. (Griffin 24-25)

Griffin's novel is notable in the canon of Young Adult Fantasy Fiction because she has treated the contemporary issues of climate change and environmental degradation

with a deep ecological awareness embracing a biocentric perspective and egalitarianism which calls for a deep respect for all life forms. In the story where witches help in stabilizing the earth's environment, the eco-spirituality that transmutes to magical power contests the dominant view of viewing nature from the outlook of positivism and anthropocentrism. Clara in the novel talks about the shaders' unwillingness to accept that their policies of rapid industrialization and exploitation has harmed the environment. The strategies of 'decarbonization' and 'greening' is left for the witches to revive the destroyed places, restore climate anomalies, which the shaders view as just mere setbacks for the opportunities of further capital accumulation. When warned about the impending disaster, they deemed the witches as overly cautious – "We know you'll figure it out. You always do" (Griffin 29). What Clara and all the witches want is to obtain a new human and social identity that is in harmonious connection with nature eschewing the capitalist instrumentalization of current social and economic life. Both the material and corporeal aspect of nature is embraced into the ambit of Griffin's story where the witches are widely recognized as activists and community groupworking together emphasizing the need for solidarity and coalition between the magic users and the non-magical humans who have a large part in the environmental deterioration of the planet. It calls for a dialogue, a common dialectic that discards the technocratic rationality which views nature as the other. The ecological concerns reflected in Griffin's text thus, not only focuses on a politicized ecofeminist environmentalism, rather it draws attention to the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of activism which explores the individual and community, agency and context, and also a spirituality which has the ability to change energy (consciousness) and enact magic. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati in the essay "From Maeia to Magic: Envisaging a Problematic Concept in the Study of Religion" writes that, "Magic represents the most primitive strategy of the human coping with life and the world: it is the first attempt of man to dominate his hostile environment" (Olgiati 6), which in Griffin's text becomes a concrete aspect tied to real world problems and manifestations, and it acts as not a tool/strategy for domination, rather to control and heal the damage wrought by human greed upon the natural world. Magic is not infinite, it is in fact tied to the natural cycle of life and the seasons, and it acts as the fundamental stabilizing agent in a materialistic world, where men has reached an impasse, a situation where technology and limitations of scientific knowledge is of no help in the crucial moments of planetary climate crisis, and hence, all the actions and emotions, all practical activities are dependent on magical arbitration.

The community-based approach which is integral towards building an egalitarian relationship between human and nature is strongly focused in the novel. It calls for a re-evaluation of the connection between man, woman and nature. The recent wildfires of

Amazon and California resulting due to global warming has caused a lot of destruction and distress to human and wildlife alike, and as per the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) report, these fires are predicted to worsen in the upcoming decades. Griffin gives these examples in the novel to highlight the conditions of climate and weather extremes that the earth has been facing so far. Climate change creates warmer, drier conditions that enhances the spread of wildfires which results in unprecedented damages of human property as well as huge loss of animal life, mostly in case of endangered species. Almost 84 percent of wildfires are due to human carelessness, and this phenomenon has a long-term effect on the environment. The desire of humans to encroach in territories that does not belong to them, exploiting natural resources, polluting the surroundings by leaving waste, have degraded the balance that exists in the ecosystem. In the novel, Clara says that it is the earth's way of pushing back against the greed and violation perpetrated by the humans toward nature. The story of the novel stresses upon looking more deeply at the earth as a living entity, channelling a holistic consciousness to heal the damage through action, not just by mere idealizing and identifying nature as a victim of male oppression. The witches have to train hard to hone their powers and their connection to the earth and its seasons in order to safeguard the world and sustain the atmosphere, preventing any unnatural hazards.

But a training exercise is nothing compared to the unrestrained wildfires burning through California. We're going to graduate this year, and then it'll be up to us to fight the real fires. And, they're getting worse. (Griffin 13)

The eco-pedagogy of the novel reassesses the stereotypical, patriarchal capitalist attitude towards nature rethinking about the human interconnections and interaction with the natural world. Nature is perceived as sentient, active, with needs of its own, without any human influence, though acknowledging the role of humans in the ecosystem. The spatial separation of men and women and the goal of safeguarding and preserving the environment for generations posits an ecotopian ideal. Griffin's novel doesn't locate gendered difference in biological determinations, instead it highlights the fluidity of male and female relationships with nature and each other. This is evident in the character of Clara, who identifies herself as bi-queer in her relationships, as well as in case of the character of Sang, a boy who is a witch, a spring witch, a botanist – who is ascribed the qualities of nurturing, caring, and growing. Sang, in the story discovers a way to weed out unnecessary plants without causing them shock and pain. Also, in the dynamics of change, one cannot ignore the transformative nature of both the human and the non-human, as nature and humans constantly changes and evolves, physically as well as spiritually, which is reflected in the deep connection of the witches to the earth's elements. Griffin has portrayed the power of the witches as

interconnected to the seasons which also shapes their personality – as in, Winter witches are more reserved emotionally, while summer witches are vivacious and passionate. This animistic view of human and nature interdependence is reflected in Griffin's language which she interrelates with the sun, moon, the equinox, with woman's body and tries to express the spiritual transformations of her characters. The story also delves in to the complexities of selfhood and separation, of power and magic, which allows the author for an imaginative intervention, a form of resistance, highlighting the disillusionment of current socio-political realities, and at the same time explores the ecofeminist issues of trauma and exploitation, which is apparent in the character of Clara Densmore who can't cope up with the death of her parents and her dear friend Nikki due to her uncontrollable magic.

*The Nature of Witches* by its merit is a text that can be termed as *écriture féminine* which represents the feminine body towards a mode of thought envisaged by Helen Cixous that questions the male-centric notion of women/nature, nature/culture and enables the female voice to manifest their unconscious hidden self, to write and speak through their bodies breaking the order of binary opposition and explore the beauty of the unconscious, which in the novel's narrative can be termed as magic that is tied to emotion, desire, and intent thereby deconstructing the value hierarchies that dominates the androcentric world. The narrative of the novel is centered around the voice of Clara, the everwitch who inhabits the fantasy and imaginary realm of magic is removed from the fixed meanings assigned by a male oriented discourse, and her character gains an access to power that is denied to any man, wherein she emerges as a source of energy, an identity by herself, "This witch appears as a sudden intrusion of a female subject, who reverses the phallic gaze, contesting the authority of the masculine position" (Sempruch 4). The otherness that Cixous emphasizes in women writing, it becomes a concrete aspect of magic that expresses the primeval, uninhibited desire to be free, to heal, to love and be loved, and Clara's bisexuality in itself deconstructs the binary opposition of masculine and feminine which defies the conventional norms, thereby assuming an identity that moves towards the limitless, which in Clara's case is controlling and harnessing the elemental magic of all the four seasons and she is able to do it through love, love for her friends, and love for her magic, which Cixous equates with the act of writing, and as a result, the narrative voice of Clara opens up space for representing both man and woman in writing which goes beyond the Cartesian dualism of phallogocentric thought as in the words of Abigail Bray, "love is about receiving the strangeness of the other...it is...an openness to the unknown, the unthought" (Bray 75). It can in fact be argued that, Griffin's novel is not just a text, but a *sext* in Cixous's terms in which there is the element of intersexuality, because in the novel we find Clara as a woman, a struggling subject and the authority of the author in the *sext* is

missing which reflects Cixous's idea that writing itself is a bisexual act, each and every identity carried by the author can be traced in the text that is free from patriarchal codes. That is precisely the reason we hear Clara speaking in a story written by Griffin, and Griffin speaking in the language of Clara, and this polyphony of voices in the text is what brings the feminine into the front of discourse where the 'I' is extricated from paternal associations, yet it has a dialogic relationship that enables the conjunction of feminine and masculine values which in relocating the I-she in cultural history becomes an intertextual affair.

By the end of the novel, Clara thinks differently about her powers and the change she could bring to the world, and she transforms from someone afraid, to someone strong confident and autonomous – “Change makes me powerful, and finally, finally, I'm ready to claim that power” (Griffin 232). Throughout the novel, we see Clara fighting against her nature, it becomes clear to us that she is trying to find an identity for herself to experience the life of an ordinary human, but at the same time she rethinks of her position as devoid of her power. She attains harmony with her power, her nature as a witch, as a woman who can restore balance to a deteriorating world. It is through the medium of writing, as she reads the diary of the legendary witch Alice, trying to understand the magic and its power, and she decides to write a memoir of her own struggles and personal conflicts as the everwitch, so that those who come after her is able to understand their magic and its intricate struggles. Clara is able to liberate herself from isolation, fearfulness, and doubt, which compels her to envision how she can bridge the separation between magic and the self, attaining the marvellous connectedness to all things of creation feeling her embodied ties to the natural world, responding with emotion, and opening herself to care. This intriguing facet of Clara as a witch, practitioner of magic reflects Bronislaw Malinowski's discussions about magic and its function, which focuses on psychological aspects, on emotions, which forms the core personality of Clara as the everwitch, because her fears and trauma resulting from her best friend Nikki's death leaves her unable to harness her magic to its ultimate potential, and the rudimentary modes of behaviour, belief in her self-efficiency is engendered and transformed into a permanent form in which she accepts herself truly by embracing the pain and joy, hope and fear, instead of repressing them. Her magic becomes fluid and invigorating, and with a definitive mental strength and technique, she is able to bridge the dangerous gaps in her potential power to fulfil the important and critical pursuit of restoring balance to the degrading environment of earth. Malinowski writes that magic “enables man to carry out with confidence his important tasks, to maintain his poise and his mental integrity in fits of anger, in the throes of hate, of unrequited love, of despair and anxiety” (Malinowski 90) and, Clara reasserts this opinion as a woman at the end by emphasizing that the function of her magic is to enrich humanity's

optimism in healing the world, enhancing a faith based on hope rather than fear, and expresses the greater value for the community of sisterhood with her fellow witches rooting for steadfastness over vacillation in the gradual process of rejuvenating a damaged world.

### Conclusion

The ecofeminist approach in literature, apart from addressing the issues of ecological crisis encourages the fact that nature is intertwined with our corporeal existence, challenging the idea of nature as the 'other' of reason and culture. The ecopolitics inherent in Rachel Griffin's *The Nature of Witches* with regard to the continuity between the human world and the natural world and human dependency on nature denies anthropocentrism, thereby creating space for nature to thrive as an independent entity. Through the mode of fantasy and magic, Griffin shows an animistic representation that celebrates differences rather than reversal of the paradigms of power. Helene Cixous says that writings which engages with matter and bodies has a subversive and transformative power which dismantles binary patterns and phallogentrism, and, the act of writing the body itself that is in touch with the world has the potential to disrupt reason, challenging the domains of culture and knowledge controlled and bound by rationality. The element of magic of the witches in Griffin's novel makes the reader experience the more-than-rational, the transcendental emotion that could reconnect and embody nature within the self, opening the possibilities of bodies human and non-human in tune with the earth.

There are those voices that like a flame lowers, scarcely speaks, but moves still nearer, still nearer to the secrets of things, lowers all the way to the earth, lies down, touches the imperceptibly trembling soil, listens to the music of the earth, the concert of the earth with all things. (Cixous 10)

It is playful and poetic, but also political in the sense that it induces and inspires a practice of activism promoting a reflexive unity as a species in bringing a multidimensional approach that helps in rejuvenating the degrading environment of the planet, resuscitate the deploring climate and its adverse effect upon the human and the natural world.

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## Tracing Affinities between the ‘Nature-Nurture’ Continuum: An Ecofeminist Reading of L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*

*Raginee Mahanta*

**Abstract :**

The colour green has been known for its allusion with the earth and its fecund ways of sustenance. LM Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* centres on the eponymous protagonist’s journey from an orphanage to the lush green precincts of Avonlea, where she is met with her beloved house of Green Gables. Forming a part of the children’s literature, Montgomery’s novel deals with the coming of age of the protagonist through her association with the world of nature as a source of imaginary pleasure and indirect nurture. The ‘green gabled house’ situated amidst the scenic beauty of a nature untarnished by the effects of development, at the expense of ruining the environment, became an abode of hope for her. Anne, a wild, talkative but, kind-natured little orphan has a way with observing the world around her. She fell in love at once with the natural beauty that Avonlea provided and even though her beginnings in Marilla and Matthew’s green gabled home was not very great, she loved her new room inside their home. It was this space within the house and the outer natural expanse that enabled her to survive and sustain a childhood which not only replenished her soul but also made her turn into a compassionate young girl towards the end of the novel.

The present paper is an attempt at reading the patterns of nature overlapping and at most times being one with that of the idea of nurture. The argument in this paper seeks to study whether the experience gathered by the protagonist through her association with nature has indirectly nurtured her persona into a confident young lady and also underlining the possibilities of observing the relationship between woman and nature in its intrinsic totality. Further, the protagonist’s experience in the care of nature as a feminine force facilitates her



to overcome most of the hurdles and that is why nature will be viewed as concrete and nurture as an abstract entity in building up the argument. This paper will also lean towards the theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism, phenomenology and space in building up the argument through a narrative focus on the protagonist and her experiences through nature and from her conversations with the characters within the novel.

**Keywords:** *phenomenology, ecofeminism, ecology, space, nature, nurture*

### Methodology:

As the discussion below aims to understand the protagonist, Anne Shirley's deep love for nature and its apparent contributions in nurturing her person into a confident woman in the novel *Anne of Green Gables*; in this context, the paper takes recourse to the ideas presented in the theories relating to phenomenology, ecological feminism or ecofeminism and spatial theory. The first book which is taken up for research on the idea of the phenomenon or the value of experience is Edmund Husserl's *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1990) wherein Husserl enumerates on the concept of the immediacy of experience as a conscious effort on the part of the observer without any presuppositions or unexamined preconceptions whatsoever. The second book, which is referred to while analysing this paper, is Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) in which Plumwood illustrates the notion of Ecofeminism in relation to other feminist theories and their apparent connections. The third book taken up for the study is *Ecofeminism* by Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva which is a collection of powerful essays commenting on the effects of Ecofeminism as a movement, its beginnings and how its connotations have changed with time making it a much more dominant concern for human beings of the present era. The fourth book which will be looked into for this paper is, Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (1958) wherein Bachelard throws light upon the phenomenological interrogation into meaning of spaces which preoccupy poetry, intimate spaces such as a drawer, a house, a night dresser and spaces of wide expansion like the vistas and woods. Therefore, the methods employed in the present paper will be analytical and qualitative in nature.

### Discussion:

"It's been my experience that you can nearly always enjoy things if you make up your mind firmly that you will."

— Anne Shirley, *Anne of Green Gables*

Nature and women have always been linked in their aspects of nurture giving. While it is in nature that all things living, grow and dwell; in the same manner a women's role as a

bearer of life within her and a nurturer who helps in the growth of the family or the people she is surrounded by is genuinely manifest. Although there are many contentions about the idea that women and environment or nature are linked by their mutual aspects of nurture, nevertheless, women's role as nurturers or caregivers is itself a common trait that most women accomplish be it by societal pressure or innately. In L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, one witnesses the thread of the nature-nurture continuum through the characters of Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, Anne Shirley and the centrality that Nature itself posits in the text. It was in the desire of the Cuthbert siblings to adopt a 'boy' in order that they are helped by his presence in their farming and other chores, which led them to look for a prospective child to adopt from an orphanage. However, the universe had a different plan in store for them as Matthew Cuthbert ended up meeting the awkward and talkative red haired girl, Anne Shirley, who was waiting for him eagerly on the train station. Matthew was surprised to know that the orphanage he contacted for a boy had sent him a girl instead. This event was further intensified by his conversations with the station officer who gave a very brief but clear description about the nature of Anne Shirley. Matthew, who wished his sister Marilla were around to solve the situation actually ended up liking Anne, after listening to her, as it was she, who spoke first and eased the moment. Even though Matthew planned inside his mind to take her home and let Marilla do the talking and explain the error that led them to bring Anne, nevertheless, on the way to the green gabled home, he could make out from the words uttered by Anne that she was someone who observed nature and exercised her imaginations very passionately. This fact itself made her very interesting and also gives away the experiential values that this little orphaned girl wilfully nurtured from nature.

Being an orphan, Anne could never acquire the attention and love that a child should rightfully get from the parents and staying in an orphanage didn't help much as she had to share her space with many others like herself. Therefore, not much acquisition of individual love and nourish were possible for Anne. This however did not deter her from experiencing happiness as from the novel it can be made out that she did strive to teach herself through her imaginative and minute observational skills. She regarded nature to be her tutor and nurturer and this idea is exemplified in the following lines uttered by Anne in Chapter 37 upon the death of Matthew:

I am sure we should not shut our hearts against the healing influences that nature offers us. But I understand your feeling. I think we all experience the same thing. We resent the thought that anything can please us when someone we love is no longer here to share the pleasure with us, and we almost feel as if we were unfaithful to our sorrow when we find our interest in life returning to us. (Montgomery 451)

This in turn, brings one to the theory of phenomenology as propounded by the German Philosopher, Edmund Husserl, wherein he expresses phenomenology to be an approach which aims to describe how the world must appear to the naive observer devoid of all presuppositions and culturally imposed expectations. In simple terms however, phenomenology deals with describing basic human experience or phenomena which is a word derived from Greek, meaning ‘appearance’. Phenomenology proceeds through the concept of ‘bracketing’ which involves a willing suspension of belief. Anne, after having arrived at Avonlea had to face a lot of criticism, the first being her excessive need to assert her inner thoughts verbally, her red hair and freckles and lastly, her personality as a whole. Mrs. Rachel Lynde’s character is one with whom Anne had a conflict after moving in to Avonlea and Marilla later had to make her apologise to Mrs. Lynde. Mrs. Lynde is the town busybody who came to Marilla’s home in order to inspect how she has been bringing the newly adopted Anne up. As she disapproves of an old spinster like Marilla in bringing up a child, she confronts Anne with the following words: “She is terribly skinny and homely, Marilla... And hair as red as carrots!” (Montgomery 97) causing Anne to burst out in anger, stomping her feet and calling her fat, clumsy and devoid of imagination. Anne, here, displays a raw and uncouth behaviour which can be aligned with nature’s inherent rawness. Without thinking about the implications that society would denounce upon her, Anne chose to be her natural self and spoke her heart out thereby challenging existing expectations from society. She however, realises her fault and apologises to Mrs. Lynde which in turn depicts her desire to be generous and kind.

Anne would rather love and wholeheartedly devote and listen to nature than some mere human expectations and this again shows her apparent subversive attitude towards the dictates of society. The novels concern is primarily related with the development of the eleven year old Anne from prepubescent child to a young adult, outlining her development with regards to her academic as well as moral and domestic education into womanhood. Most of the times it is observed that Nature is her instructor and at other times when Anne tells Marilla about what her teacher Miss Stancy imparts to the girls at school, one can only trace the difference that Nature and Human expectations exhibit. In the care and warmth of Nature, Anne observes and practices culture without having any physical conversation with it. Her connection with nature is more emotional and experiential, having to do mostly with her personal and mental space. When she tells Marilla what Miss Stancy teaches to the girls: “that they couldn’t be too careful what habits they formed and what ideals they developed in their teens, because by the time they were twenty their characters would be developed” (Montgomery 363) highlights the expectations that society has for young girls as a whole.

This expectation can be defined as a restricted and controlled pace of living life without forgetting to maintain their calm and reserve, always obedient to the calls of society to be a perfect woman. This is suffocating for Anne as she struggles to control her pace of thoughts, actions and words, but thankfully she finds solace in tolerant characters like Matthew and Miss Josephine Barry. Both of these characters appear inaccessible to Anne at first but, once they opened their hearts and ears to her, she could realise that some people take time to open up and that appearance is not always the criteria for judging a person. This leads her to confide to Marilla about her experience in understanding human beings and their dispositions:

“Miss Barry was a kindred spirit, after all... You wouldn’t think so to look at her, but she is. You don’t find it right out at first, as in Matthew’s case, but after a while you come to see it. Kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It’s splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world.” (Montgomery 241)

Anne’s quick way of judging people has been cured by her encounters and conversations with people and this has enabled her gradual growth into a confident and wise young lady. This became possible for her because she was conscious and willing to value her own experience in the human world. The value that phenomenon or experience had on a person and through their conscious efforts to understand and emulate these notions into their living pattern is exemplified in the following lines from Husserl’s *The Idea of Phenomenology*:

In all of its manifestations, knowledge is a mental experience; knowledge belongs to a knowing subject. The known subject stands over against it... in perception, the perceived object is supposed to be immediately given. There stands the thing before my eyes. I see it; I grasp it. But the perception is nothing more than an experience that belongs to me, the perceiving subject. Likewise, memory and expectations are subjective experiences, along with all the acts of thoughts built upon them, on the basis of which we mediate posit real existence and determine any truth about such existence. (Husserl 17)

Another instance of Anne’s conscious efforts in understanding the world of nature around her through her extended imagination is again an indicator of the experiential values she has for her perceptual knowledge of things she views: “I read in a book once that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, but I’ve never been able to believe it. I don’t believe a rose would be as nice if it was called a thistle or a skunk cabbage” (59). This is an allusion to William Shakespeare’s play “Romeo and Juliet” wherein in Act II, Scene II Juliet speaks these lines on the balcony and Romeo happens to overhear them. In the context of

*Anne of Green Gables* however, it shows Anne's knowledge and intelligence which further showcases her wealth of experience which is also extended to the world of books that provide more scope for imagination.

Ecofeminism in this novel seeps in with the treatment that society in the form of Mrs. Rachel Lynde, and the other characters offer to Anne. It is a view essential to the theory of Ecofeminism that women and nature are related and this is demonstrated by the traditionally feminine values of reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation, which exists in both nature and women. The ecofeminists further highlight the similarities that are inherent in the subordination of women and the degradation of the environment. As Vandana Shiva states in her essay "Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Biodiversity Conservation":

The construction of women as the "second sex" is linked to the same inability to cope with difference as is the development paradigm that leads to the displacement and extinction of diversity in the biological world. The patriarchal worldview sees man as the measure of all value, with no space for diversity, only for hierarchy. Woman, being different is treated as unequal and inferior. Nature's diversity is seen as not intrinsically valuable in itself... The marginalisation of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. (Shiva 229)

Vandana Shiva tries to talk about the links between women and nature and the conservation of biodiversity in general. She tries to point out how women have been closely associated with agricultural practices which are sustainable and therefore, do not destroy the balance in nature. Marilla's occupation with nature is also significant in the text as she and her brother, both worked closely with nature. They were both farmers who worked hard to look after the animals and the greenery that were a part of their territory. Marilla was a strict disciplinarian as she liked to keep her house spotless clean and also never dealt with any nonsensical arguments laid down by others. She was especially critical of Anne's hyperactive personality that never stopped talking and imagining and it was only because Matthew convinced her to keep Anne that she agreed. Marilla believed that men and women were very different from each other and therefore overlapping of their roles in life was a sheer impossibility. According to her, boys and men do farm chores; girls and women cook, clean the home, sew and entertain and this is one of the reasons why the Cuthbert siblings wanted to adopt a boy. Marilla says: "No. We want a boy to help Matthew on the farm. A girl will be of no use to us." (Montgomery 39). Marilla's Victorian ideals were strong when she felt and expected all these things to be normal. It showcases her utilitarian zeal and her inherent need to civilise Anne by stopping her from imagining as she tells Anne in the beginning: "You'd better get dressed and come downstairs and never mind your imaginings." (Montgomery

49). However, Marilla's point of view is seen to change with the progress of the novel as Mrs. Lynde's advice to Marilla about how to punish Anne were rejected which in turn shows Marilla's willingness to challenge mainstream parenting practices. Marilla's transformation into a caring and nurturing mother for Anne enables her to experience motherhood in its purest sense although she was a spinster. Later on in the novel, Marilla becomes compassionate towards Anne as she realises her love for Anne and also expresses distress in sending her to Queens. This transformation of Marilla is important because along with Anne she also experienced growth and a change in attitude towards accepted practices and norms in society.

On the contrary, Anne projects an innate and natural maternal instinct as she is very capable of taking care of children. Anne learns through her experiences in society to choose the correct path of embracing womanhood without being hampered by society's pressures on her thoughts. She in fact, challenges society from the day she steps into Avonlea by questioning and exercising her own opinions as the following lines suggests:

"Why must people kneel down to pray? If I really wanted to pray I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go out into a great big field all alone or in the deep, deep woods and I'd look up into the sky - up - up - up - into that lovely blue sky that looks as if there was no end to its blueness. And then I'd just feel a prayer." (Montgomery 76)

An important scene pertaining to ecology in the novel needs discussion as it depicts how nature is ruthlessly destroyed by the cutting down of Idlewild, Mr. William Bell's little stretch of land having trees which happened to be the quiet meeting place for Anne and her friends. Montgomery here probably tries to show how young girls with their colourful imagination are fascinated by the concept of woods and how the destruction of the woods lead to their eventual doom and emotional breakage:

Anne and Diana had spent most of their playtime that summer on and about the pond. Idlewild was a thing of the past, Mr. Bell having ruthlessly cut down the little circle of trees in his back pasture in the spring. Anne had among the stumps and wept, not without an eye to romance of it; but she was speedily consoled for... big girls of thirteen, going on fourteen, were too old for such childish amusements as playhouses, and there were more fascinating sports to be found about the pond. (Montgomery 335).

These lines occur in the chapter titled "An Unfortunately Lily Maid" wherein the segment of the cutting down of trees, the destruction of woodlands, suggests the deep ecological concern that Montgomery tries to introduce through her young narrator Anne. This incident

of Anne's weeping over the cutting down of the Idlewild trees and the sullen pulling down of her from the wooden post in the pond by Gilbert is a parallel visualisation of Montgomery's apparent and uneasy showcasing of the relationship between virginal girls and ruthless chopping down of the natural world all around. Another aspect which is suggested by these instances is the deep respect that Anne has towards nature and this reflection of her deep love and reverence for nature instigates one to notice how such respect leads to protecting and caring of the environment.

Nature plays an important role in the world that Anne occupied and is treated just like another character in the novel. It is this supposition that makes the assumption proper that Nature can be regarded as a concrete force that Anne worships and cherishes. Anne's connection with nature is such that she acknowledges that connection with the landscapes she sees and is satisfied with everything that the natural world has to offer. Encircled by the exquisite yet simple beauty of Prince Edward Island; *Anne of Green Gables* combines light and freedom, warmth and adventure. A deeper reading of the narrative suggests a prominent and a continuous interaction between Anne and the natural world surrounding her. This can again be justified by the fact that she was an orphan who lacked the loving warmth and protection of a mother and therefore, her deep love for nature further indicates that she regarded Nature to be her mother and a concrete force that helped her survive better. That she constantly tries to imagine Nature as her saviour and caregiver is highlighted at the very beginning when she expresses her opinion in the following lines that if Matthew had not arrived:

I had made up my mind that if you didn't come for me tonight I'd go down the track to that big wild cherry-tree at the bend, and climb up into it to stay at all night. I wouldn't be a bit afraid, and it would be lovely to sleep in a wild Cherry-tree all white with bloom in the moonshine. (Montgomery 18)

Val Plumwood throws light on how Ecofeminism is different from other feminisms in its insistence on "by making an account of the connection to nature central." (39) Plumwood in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* tries to address issues relating to the idea of comparing women and nature. In the very first chapter of this book titled, "Feminism and Ecofeminism", Plumwood asserts that the connection between women and nature is an ancient one and that this particular idea made many feminists believe to be regressive and insulting. She further enunciates the view of women being pictured as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals; making the feminists understand it in terms of being an instrument of oppression and patriarchal dominance. However, she opposes this traditional view of the feminists by stating that the approach of women-nature connectedness is essential and logical

and that it must remain a central issue for feminism to discuss over:

The connection still constitutes the dynamic behind much of the treatment of both women and nature in contemporary society... it is perilous for feminism to ignore the issue because it has an important bearing on the model of humanity into which women will be fitted and within which they will claim equality... this analysis forms the basis for a critical ecological feminism in which women consciously position themselves *with* nature... the inferiorisation of human qualities and aspects of life associated with the necessity, nature and women— of nature-as-body, nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine— continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life. (Plumwood 21)

Plumwood, here, tries to explain the concept of backgrounding or denial of women and nature. This concept of backgrounding according to Plumwood involves a denial of dependence on biospheric processes, and a view that human beings are outside nature, which is in turn treated as a limitless provider of resources without needs of its own. The parallel that runs with the backgrounding of women and nature can be explained with the fact that women are systematically backgrounded and instrumentalised as housewives, as nurses and secretaries, as colleagues and workmates, without any scope of acknowledgement by the patriarchal society. A mother's role in nurturing a child and also her family's needs is never recognised; instead a mother is defined in terms of her relation to her husband and child. Likewise, Nature and its abundance are exploited by the dominance of human beings without any heed to exhausting its resources. Just like in the case of women, Nature is backgrounded and defined in terms of the human beings who regard themselves to be 'the environment'. This anthropogenic attitude of the human beings is what is divulged critically by Ecofeminists.

One element in the novel that needs especial mention is Anne's constant prayers to look pretty. The young Anne would prioritise her prayers with words like "Please let me stay at Green Gables; and please let me be good-looking when I grow up." (78). While her friend Diana tries to convince her that she is "the smartest girl in school" and that it is better than being good looking, Anne nevertheless, responds firmly, "No, it isn't... I'd rather be pretty than clever." (163); this is a worldview which has been centralised by the popular culture that she is aware of. Being beautiful or good looking is one of the traits that the society valued in Anne's world for a woman. Rather than her intellectual abilities, it was the way a woman dressed and behaved that mattered, making things complicated for girls like

Anne to thrive. Her hair colour being red is a part of her identity but, during Victorian times, red hair was synonymous with 'ugly' and no matter how intelligent a woman is if her hair is red she is still considered different. Her experience of this aspect of recognition owing to her red coloured hair makes her competitive and longing for hair which is brown and acceptable in turn transforming her into someone who values what the society opines about them. Thus, her intelligence is back grounded because of her hair colour and she herself is giving fuel to this scope of criticism. However, there was one point in the novel, where she dyes her hair 'green' in order to show her protest against society and immediately afterwards she expresses deep regret for doing so. This act of hers again questions her earlier conviction of being a proper subversive persona, but her regret afterwards throws light on her inherent desire to remain unaffected once again by the norms laid down by society. Her choosing the colour 'green' for her hair also needs scrutiny as this is one colour that she has the most access to viewing, her new home is green gabled and her surroundings are mostly green and it offers a space for her to bloom with freedom. The significance of the colour 'green' is also relevant because Nature is mostly understood from its greenish hues of plenty, a space which can be considered an alternative for the suffocating patriarchal one.

In chapter 5 titled "Anne's History"; it is revealed that Anne's biological mother Bertha Shirley's death excludes her from having a mother/daughter dialogue in the narrative. Since, her mother did not "live long enough for Anne to remember calling her 'mother', therefore, her story remains unspeakable and unspoken. But, upon reaching Green Gable home she found a new hope of belonging and both Matthew and Marilla became her mother figures. This new home also symbolically became her mother, as Anne constantly mentions her love for her new room and home. They present to her a source of care and comfort which she lacked during her eleven years of stay in the orphanage. Therefore, the space she occupied in the Green Gabled home and the green and lush landscapes of Avonlea enabled to nurture her. Another thing worth mentioning is her way of giving imaginary names to things she sees in nature. For instance, "the lake of shining water" for Barry's Pond which was located on the way to Green Gables and Anne gave it her own imaginary name. She calls the apple scented geraniums on the window sill of Green Gables "Bonny", the cherry tree outside her window, "Snow Queen and all these naming shows how personally affected she is with the natural settings around her. This again brings one to Gaston Bachelard's theory of Space wherein he talks about the significance that interior domestic spaces and their components like the various rooms and types of furniture have on the subjective consciousness of the observer. For Bachelard, the house is the quintessential phenomenological object which enables the culmination of the personal experiences to reach its height. He views the house

to be a sort of initial universe, enumerating that "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (Bachelard 5). He further proceeds to examine the home as a manifestation of the soul through the poetic image and literary images found in poetry.

In conclusion, the discussion above tries to trace the significance that the environment and space of the Green Gabled home hold for Anne's education. It can be said that Anne's journey from the orphanage to Avonlea provided her a scope to embrace experience and thoughtfulness in brighter hues. Her imaginative abilities coupled with her deep reverence for nature and all things beautiful, complimented her growth into a wonderful young lady. It is also perceived in the discussion that the theories of Phenomenology, Ecofeminism and Space gets merged in the line of thoughts pertaining to the nature-nurture continuum in *Anne of Green Gables* as it can be seen that Anne's experience in the world of nature enabled her to acquire the skills needed to become a woman, complete with the abilities of nurturing and also understanding the ways of the human world. Nurture as a concept is seen to be interlinked with that of the concept of nature as they both run parallel to Anne's wholesome development. Nurture is more abstract as it takes place more symbolically within Anne's mental faculties and Nature is concretised by its physical presence and overpowering influence on Anne's observation. The notion of denying acknowledgement to women and nature is also touched upon in the discussion above which showcases similarities of treatment meted out to both nature and women. Marilla's choice to become a 'mother' despite her spinsterhood speaks wonders for the change that she embraces by the end of the novel and it is through her and Anne's deep connection with nature that the relationship between nature and women is established to be intrinsic. Thus, through the story of Anne, the urge to humanity for being more compassionate and understanding of the forces and needs of nature is underlined.

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## প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰী : প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ আধাৰত মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’

দীপা ভাগৱতী

### ০.০ অৱতৰণিকা

সৃষ্টিশীল সাহিত্যই বিভিন্ন ৰূপত প্ৰকাশ লাভ কৰে। সাহিত্যৰ তেনে এটা শাখা হৈছে উপন্যাস। আধুনিক সময়ত বাস্তৱবাদী দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী, যুক্তি আৰু আৱেগৰ সংমিশ্ৰণেৰে অসমীয়া সাহিত্যত বহুতো উপন্যাসৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছে। এই ক্ষেত্ৰখনত পৰিচিতি লাভ কৰা নতুনত্বৰ বাৰ্তাবাহী উপন্যাসিক হৈছে মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামী। কাহিনী পটভূমি, আংগিক সকলোতে ব্যতিক্ৰমধৰ্মিতাৰ সূচনা কৰা মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ উপন্যাস সৰ্বজন সমাদৃত। তেওঁৰ প্ৰতিখন উপন্যাসতেই পোৱা যায় ব্যতিক্ৰমী প্ৰকাশভঙ্গী আৰু আংগিকৰ চমৎকাৰিত্ব। তেনে নতুনত্বৰ সোৱাদ থকা এখন উপন্যাস হৈছে ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’। বৈধৱ্য যন্ত্ৰণাৰ মাজত ছটফটাই থকা সৌদামিনীৰ মানসিক দিশৰ চিত্ৰণৰ মাজেৰে উপন্যাসিকে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ একাত্মীয়তাৰ প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। তেনে কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে উপন্যাসখনত প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ তথা পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক নাৰীবাদৰো প্ৰভাৱ স্পষ্ট হৈ উঠিছে। নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ সম্পৰ্কৰ ভেটিত গঢ়ি উঠা প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ জৰিয়তে নাৰীক প্ৰকৃতিৰ লগত তুলনা কৰি পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিয়ে সন্মুখীন হোৱা বিভিন্ন সমস্যাৰ চিত্ৰায়ণ কৰা হয়। এইক্ষেত্ৰত ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’ উপন্যাসখনো ব্যতিক্ৰম নহয়। সৌদামিনী আৰু ব্ৰজধামৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশক উপন্যাসত সাদৃশ্যৰ ভিত্তিত উপস্থাপন কৰিছে। মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ উপন্যাসত প্ৰকাশিত প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীক প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ আধাৰত এই প্ৰবন্ধত আলোচনা কৰা হ’ব। কাৰণ প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ জৰিয়তেহে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ সামগ্ৰিক স্থিতি তথা সামাজিক অৱস্থিতি সম্পৰ্কীয় অধ্যয়ন সম্পূৰ্ণ হয়।

### ০.১ অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰ :

অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰত ‘প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ’ৰ পৰিচয়সূচক বৰ্ণনা আগবঢ়াই মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’ উপন্যাসক ‘প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ’ৰ আধাৰত আলোচনা কৰা হৈছে। এনেদৰে আলোচনা কাৰবলৈ যাওঁতে মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ জীৱন আৰু সাহিত্যকৃতিক চমুকৈ বৰ্ণনা কৰা হৈছে।

### ০.২ উদ্দেশ্য আৰু গুৰুত্ব :

- আধুনিক অসমীয়া উপন্যাসত পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক জগতে কেনেদৰে ভূমুকি মাৰিছে সেই সম্পৰ্কে অধ্যয়ন কৰা।
- প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ পাৰস্পৰিক সম্পৰ্কৰ ভেটিত ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’ উপন্যাসৰ অধ্যয়ন কৰা।
- পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ ওপৰত চলা অত্যাচাৰক সাহিত্যিক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীৰে অধ্যয়ন কৰা।
- মানৱ জীৱন আৰু প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্ক নিৰূপণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বিষয়বস্তুৰ যথেষ্ট গুৰুত্ব আছে।

### ০.৩ অধ্যয়নৰ পদ্ধতি :

উল্লিখিত বিষয়ৰ অধ্যয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বৰ্ণনাত্মক আৰু বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰ লগতে প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ তথা নাৰীবাদী দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীৰ সহায় লোৱা হৈছে।

### ১.০ প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ ধাৰণা :

ইক’ফেমিনিজিম অৰ্থাৎ প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ হৈছে নাৰীবাদৰ এটা শাখা, য’ত মানুহ আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্ক বিশ্লেষণ কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে প্ৰাকৃতিক ধাৰণাৰ লগত নাৰীবাদী দৃষ্টিভঙ্গীক সংযোগ কৰি অধ্যয়ন কৰা হয়। ১৯৭০ চনত মহিলা আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্কৰ বৰ্ধিত চেতনাৰ সৈতে এক সামাজিক আৰু ৰাজনৈতিক আন্দোলন হিচাপে ইক’ফেমিনিজিমৰ উদ্ভৱ হৈছিল। অসমীয়াত ইয়াৰ প্ৰতিশব্দ হিচাপে প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ বা পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক নাৰীবাদ শব্দটো ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা হয়। প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদীসকলে প্ৰকৃতিৰ অৱদমন আৰু মহিলাৰ শোষণৰ মাজত এটা সম্পৰ্ক বিচাৰি পায়, সেই সম্পৰ্ককে সাহিত্যৰ জৰিয়তে প্ৰকাশ কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে সাহিত্যৰ মাজত এই ধাৰণাৰ প্ৰৱেশ ঘটে। ‘ইক’ফেমিনিজিম শব্দটো প্ৰথমতে ফ্ৰান্সৰ নাৰীবাদী লেখক Francoise d' Eaubonne-য়ে তেওঁৰ কিতাপ 'Feminism or Death'-ত ১৯৭৪ চনত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছিল।”” প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদে পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক আন্দোলন আৰু নাৰীবাদ এই দুয়োটা ধাৰণাৰ মাজেৰে বিকাশ লাভ কৰিছে। প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদক দাৰ্শনিক আৰু ৰাজনৈতিক তত্ত্ব তথা আন্দোলন হিচাপে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীক একত্ৰিত কৰি পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ ওপৰত চলোৱা আধিপত্যৰ বিষয়ে অধ্যয়ন কৰে।

প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদে সংস্কৃতি, অৰ্থনীতি, ধৰ্ম, ৰাজনীতি, সাহিত্যত মহিলা আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্ক অন্বেষণ কৰে। লগতে প্ৰকৃতিৰ অত্যাচাৰ আৰু মহিলাৰ অত্যাচাৰৰ মাজৰ সামঞ্জস্যবোৰ অধ্যয়ন কৰে। এনেদৰে অধ্যয়ন কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজে মহিলা আৰু প্ৰকৃতিক সম্পত্তি হিচাপে চোৱা, পুৰুষে কেনেদৰে মহিলা আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ ওপৰত আধিপত্য বিস্তাৰ কৰে, মহিলা আৰু প্ৰকৃতিক কেনেদৰে পণ্য সামগ্ৰীৰূপে বিবেচনা কৰে আদি দিশ সম্পৰ্কে অধ্যয়ন কৰে।

প্রকৃতি নারীবাদে এক সাহিত্য অধ্যয়নৰ দৃষ্টিভঙ্গী হিচাপে পৰিৱেশ, মহিলা আৰু পৃথিৱীৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্ক সাহিত্যৰ মাজেৰে অনুশীলন কৰে। মহিলাৰ শোষণ আৰু প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশৰ ধ্বংস পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজত সহজে দৃষ্টিগোচৰ হোৱা সমস্যাৰূপে বিবেচনা কৰি সাহিত্যৰ মাজেৰে সমাধানৰ চেষ্টা কৰে। পুৰুষসকলে মহিলাক নিজৰ লাভ আৰু আনন্দৰ বাবে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা কাৰ্যৰ বিৰোধিতা কৰে।

সাধাৰণ অৰ্থত ক'বলৈ হ'লে প্ৰকৃতি নারীবাদ হৈছে এক আন্দোলন — য'ত প্ৰাকৃতিক সম্পদৰ অৱক্ষয় আৰু শোষণ প্ৰকৃতিৰ উৎস আৰু সৌন্দৰ্যৰ লগতে মহিলাৰ উৎপীড়ন আৰু দমনৰ বিষয়ে অধ্যয়ন কৰাৰ লগতে পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজত নারী আৰু পুৰুষৰ সমতাৰ অধিকাৰ দাবী কৰে।

## ২.০ মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামী জীৱন আৰু সাহিত্যকৃতি :

মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামী অসমীয়া সাহিত্য জগতৰ এটা চিনাকি নাম। ১৯৪২ চনৰ ১৪ নৱেম্বৰত গুৱাহাটীত জন্মগ্ৰহণ কৰা সাহিত্যিকগৰাকী ইন্দিৰা গোস্বামী নামেৰেও পৰিচিত। মাত্ৰ ১৩ বছৰ বয়সতে গল্প ৰচনাৰ জৰিয়তে মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীয়ে সাহিত্যৰ জগতত প্ৰৱেশ কৰিছিল। সত্তৰৰ দশকৰ পৰা তেওঁ উপন্যাস ৰচনাত অধিক মনোনিৱেশ কৰে আৰু 'চেনাবৰ সোঁত' উপন্যাসৰ পৰা 'য়েংফাথ্ৰী তহচিলদাৰৰ তামৰ তৰোৱাল'লৈকে একেৰাহে উপন্যাস ৰচনা কৰি যায়। তেওঁৰ আন আন সাহিত্যকৃতিসমূহ হৈছে—

## ২.১ চুটিগল্প

চিনাকি মৰম(১৯৬২), কইনা(১৯৬৬), হৃদয় এক নদীৰ নাম(১৯৯০), মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ নিৰ্বাচিত গল্প(১৯৯৮), মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ প্ৰিয় গল্প(১৯৯৯)।

## ২.২ উপন্যাস

চেনাবৰ সোঁত(১৯৭২), নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ(১৯৭৬), অহিৰণ(১৯৮০), মামৰে ধৰা তৰোৱাল আৰু দুখন উপন্যাস(১৯৮০), দাঁতাল হাতীৰ উঁয়ে খোৱা হাওদা(১৯৮৮), সংস্কাৰ, উদয়ভানুৰ চৰিত্ৰ ইত্যাদি(১৯৮৯), ঈশ্বৰ জখমী যাত্ৰী আৰু অন্যান্য যাত্ৰা(১৯৯০), তেজ আৰু ধূলিৰে ধূসৰিত পৃষ্ঠা(১৯৯৪), ভিক্ষাৰ পাত্ৰ ভাঙি(১৯৯৪), দাশৰথিৰ খোজ(১৯৯৯), ছিন্নমস্তাৰ মানুহটো(২০০১), য়েংফাথ্ৰী তহচিলদাৰৰ তামৰ তৰোৱাল(২০০৯), মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ উপন্যাস সমগ্ৰ, ১ম খণ্ড(১৯৯৮) আৰু মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ উপন্যাস সমগ্ৰ, ২য় খণ্ড(২০১১)

## ২.৩ আত্মজীৱনী ৰচনা

আধা লেখা দস্তাবেজ(১৯৮৮), দস্তাবেজৰ নতুন পৃষ্ঠা(২০০৭), অগ্ৰৰা গৃহ(২০০৭)

## ২.৪ গৱেষণা গ্ৰন্থ

*Ramayan from Ganga to Brahmaputra* (১৯৯৬)

## ২.৫ জীৱনীমূলক ৰচনা

মহীয়সী কমলা(১৯৯৫), মা(২০০৮)

## ২.৬ কবিতা সংকলন :

*Pain and Flesh* (২০০৭)

জীৱনৰ শেষ সময়লৈকে সাহিত্য চৰ্চাকে ব্ৰত হিচাপে পালন কৰা মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীয়ে ২০১১ চনৰ ২৯ নৱেম্বৰত শেষ নিশ্বাস ত্যাগ কৰিছিল।

## ৩.০ নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ উপন্যাসৰ কাহিনী আৰু বিশ্লেষণ :

বিংশ শতিকাৰ উল্লেখযোগ্য ঔপন্যাসিক মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ ১৯৭৬ চনত ৰচিত এখন বাস্তৱ অভিজ্ঞতা মিশ্ৰিত উপন্যাস হৈছে 'নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ'। মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ উপন্যাসৰ মাজেৰে সমাজৰ জীয়া ছবি প্ৰকাশিত হয়। নারী জীৱনৰ দুখ-যন্ত্ৰণাৰ ছবিখন তেওঁৰ ৰচনাত অতি সুলভ। 'নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ' তাৰ ব্যতিক্ৰম নহয়। উপন্যাসখনৰ প্ৰধান নায়িকা হৈছে সৌদামিনী। ভাগ্যৰ পাকচক্ৰত পৰি বিয়াৰ সাত বছৰৰ পাছতেই সৌদামিনীয়ে বিধৱাৰ সাজ পিন্ধিবলগীয়া হৈছিল। তাইৰ মাক-দেউতাকেও যেন বিচাৰিছিল বিধৱাৰ কঠোৰ ব্ৰত পালন কৰি তাই জীৱন অতিবাহিত কৰাটো। কাৰণ ৰক্ষণশীল উচ্চ হিন্দু সমাজত সেয়াই নিয়ম আছিল। এনেসময়তে সৌদামিনীয়ে এজন খ্ৰীষ্টান যুৱকৰ প্ৰতি আসক্তি অনুভৱ কৰাত পৰিয়ালটো বাৰুকৈয়ে চিন্তিত হৈ পৰিছিল। তাইৰ মনৰ মাজতে লাহে লাহে পোখা মেলা প্ৰেমৰ ভাবনাক আঁতৰ কৰিবৰ বাবে মাক-দেউতাকে সৌদামিনীক হিন্দুৰ পৱিত্ৰ স্থান ব্ৰজধামলৈ লৈ গ'ল। ব্ৰজধামত ধৰ্মৰ নামত বিধৱাসকলৰ ওপৰত চলা ব্যভিচাৰ অত্যাচাৰ আদিয়ে সৌদামিনীৰ প্ৰতিবাদী মনটোক জোকাৰি যায়। তাই যেন ব্যভিচাৰৰ তীব্ৰ বিৰোধিতা কৰিলে। সৌদামিনীয়ে সমাজত সধৱাৰ জীৱন-যাপন কৰিব বিচাৰিছিল; কিন্তু সমাজৰ বাধা আৰু জৈৱিক প্ৰেমৰ তাড়নাত অৱশেষত 'যমুনা নদী'ত পৰি আত্মহত্যা কৰে। উপন্যাসখনৰ আন এটি নারী চৰিত্ৰ হৈছে 'শশী', সৰুতে আত্মীয়স্বজনক হেৰুৱাই শশীয়ে নিৰাপত্তাৰ বাবে মন্দিৰৰ পূজাৰী আলমগড়ীৰ লগত থাকে। আলমগড়ীৰ মৃত্যুৰ পাছত তাই নিৰাশ্ৰয়ী হয় আৰু এজন পাণ্ডাৰ পৰা অসৎ প্ৰস্তাৱ পায়। সেয়া হ'লেও তাইৰ আত্মবল আৰু সততাৰ বাবে সতীত্বত কোনো দাগ লগা নাছিল। উপন্যাসখনৰ কাহিনী বিকাশত সহায় কৰা এটা নারী হৈছে 'মৃণালিনী' যি মাক-দেউতাকৰ সৈতে ব্ৰজধামলৈ শান্তি বিচাৰি গৈছিল। এখন সুখৰ সংসাৰৰ আশা কৰিছিল তাই, কিন্তু মাক-পিতাকৰ অমনোযোগিতাৰ বাবে অবিবাহিত হৈ জীৱন কটাবলগা হয় মৃণালিনীয়ে। হৃদয়ত তীব্ৰ ক্ষোভ লৈ থকা মৃণালিনীয়ে 'বিহাৰী কুঞ্জ মন্দিৰ বিক্ৰী হৈ যোৱাৰ পাছত অৰ্থৰ অভাৱত মন্দিৰৰ দুৱাৰে দুৱাৰে ভিক্ষা কৰি হ'লেও পিতৃ-মাতৃক সেৱা কৰিছিল।

উপন্যাসখনৰ কাহিনীয়ে ব্ৰজধামৰ মহিলাৰ অসহায় ৰূপটোক দাঙি ধৰে। নারী হিচাপে যেন কোনোটো চৰিত্ৰই নিৰাপদ নহয়। সমাজৰ ৰক্ষণশীলতা আৰু পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজত নারীৰ নিম্ন স্থানে উপন্যাসখনৰ কাহিনীলৈ নারীবাদৰ সুৰ কঢ়িয়াই অনাত সহায় কৰিছে। প্ৰতিটো নারী চৰিত্ৰই নিজ নিজ ধৰণেৰে প্ৰচলিত সমাজ ব্যৱস্থা আৰু মানুহৰ অমানৱীয় মানসিকতাৰ বিৰুদ্ধে প্ৰতিবাদী হৈ উঠিছে।



### ৩.১ নীলকণ্ঠী ব্রজ আৰু প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ :

নাৰী আৰু পুৰুষৰ সমতাৰ অধিকাৰেই হৈছে নাৰীবাদ। এই নাৰীবাদৰ এটা ভাগ হৈছে প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ; য'ত প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীক একাত্ম ৰূপত তুলি ধৰি পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত প্ৰকৃতিৰূপী নাৰীৰ সমতা আৰু প্ৰকৃতি সংৰক্ষণৰ পোষকতা কৰা হয়। মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীৰ ‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্রজ’ উপন্যাসত নাৰীক প্ৰকৃতিৰ অংশ ৰূপত নহয়, প্ৰকৃতি ৰূপেই দাঙি ধৰিছে। উপন্যাসখনত নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ দুয়োটাৰে প্ৰতি লেখকে সহমৰ্মিতা প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে।

তৰুণী বিধৱা সৌদামিনীক মাক-দেউতাকে যেতিয়া মানসিক শান্তিৰ বাবে আৰু খ্ৰীষ্টান যুৱকজনক মনৰ পৰা ত্যাগ কৰি পূণ্যাৰ্জনৰ বাবে বৃন্দাবনলৈ লৈ আহিছিল তেতিয়া সৌদামিনীয়ে বৃন্দাবনত বিধৱাসকলে কটোৱা অভাৱী যন্ত্ৰণাদায়ক জীৱনক ওচৰৰ পৰা দেখিছিল। খাদ্যৰ অভাৱত কংকালময় শাৰীৰিক অৱয়বৰ সেই মহিলাসকলে ভিক্ষা কৰা দেখিছিল। সিহঁতে খাদ্যৰ বাবে সৌদামিনীৰ ওচৰত অনুৰোধ কৰিছিল “আন এজনীয়ে তাইৰ মুখৰ ওচৰলৈ আহি ক’লে : আমাক খাবৰ বাবে কিছু দান কৰি যোৱা তোমালোক খাবৰ বাবে জীয়াই আছা, আমাক জীয়াই থাকিবৰ বাবে খাব দিয়া।”<sup>১২</sup> (নী.ব্ৰ. পৃ-১১৭) খাদ্যৰ অভাৱত সিহঁতৰ দেহ অস্থি চৰ্মসাৰ যেন হৈছিল, চকু দুটা অদ্ভুত ধৰণেৰে ক’ৰবাত সোমোৱা আছিল। তেওঁলোকৰ এই শাৰীৰিক অৱস্থাক উপন্যাসিকে প্ৰকৃতিৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিছে। ক্ৰমে শুকাই অহা ক্ষীণ ডালযুক্ত গছৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিছে। “সৌদামিনীয়ে দুয়োকাষে চালে, ধূলিৰে ধূসৰিত কাঁইটীয়া জোপোহা আৰু কাবুলী ৰমণাৰ জোপোহাৰে ভৰি থকা হাবিখন। কাবুলী ৰমণাৰ ঠানিবোৰ মাজৰ কাঁইটৰ দৰে ঠৰঙা আৰু ইয়াৰ বেঙুনীয়া ফুলবোৰ কোনোবাই গছত গুঁজি থোৱাৰ দৰে দেখা গৈছে।”<sup>১৩</sup> (নী. ব্ৰ. পৃ-১০)

পিতৃতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰী কেনেদৰে অৱদমিত হয় সেয়া উপন্যাসখনত সুন্দৰকৈ প্ৰকাশ পাইছে। বৃন্দাবনৰ বিধৱাসকলৰ অৱস্থা অতি শোচনীয় আছিল। তেওঁলোক পাণ্ডাসকলৰ দ্বাৰা শাৰীৰিক আৰু মানসিকভাৱে নিৰ্যাতিত হৈ আহিছিল। নাৰীসকলৰ দৰে প্ৰকৃতিয়ো সময়ে সময়ে পুৰুষৰ পৰা বিধৱাসকলৰ দৰে অত্যাচাৰৰ সন্মুখীন হৈ আছিল। যেনেদৰে বেপাৰীয়ে জন্তু ক্ৰয় কৰাৰ আগত পৰীক্ষা কৰে, ঠিক তেনেদৰে তৰুণ বিধৱাসকলক উলংগ কৰি সিহঁতৰ শৰীৰক পৰীক্ষা কৰিছিল পাণ্ডাসকলে। টকা, সোণ, ৰূপ যি পাইছিল সকলো কাঢ়ি লৈ গৈছিল। অন্যহাতেদি, সৌদামিনীয়ে মাকৰ সৈতে বৃন্দাবনৰ মাজত ঘূৰি ফুৰোঁতে হঠাতে এদিন মন কৰিলে যে যমুনা নদীৰ পানী কমি আহিছে আৰু মাজে মাজে বালিচৰ দেখা গৈছে। ইয়াৰ মাজেৰে লেখকে বৃন্দাবনৰ বিধৱাসকলৰ আহাৰৰ অভাৱত ক্ৰমে শুকাই অহা শৰীৰৰ ইংগিত দিব বিচাৰিছে। যেনেদৰে বৃষ্টিহীনতা আৰু অতিবৃষ্টিৰ বাবে পৃথিৱীৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰিঘটনাৰ সলনি হৈছে ঠিক তেনেদৰেই এচাম অমানৱীয় লোকৰ বাবেই যে ক্ৰমে নাৰীসকল মৃত্যুৰ দিশে গতি কৰিছে তাকে লেখকে প্ৰতীকধৰ্মতাৰে প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। বৃন্দাবনৰ আন এগৰাকী তৰুণ বিধৱাক যেতিয়া সৌদামিনীয়ে প্ৰশ্ন কৰিছিল যে তাই স্বামীৰ স্মৃতি পাহৰিব বিচাৰেনে? তেতিয়া তাই কৰা আচৰণক লেখকে প্ৰকৃতিৰ বিভিন্ন উপাদানৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিছে এনেদৰে— “চকিত হৰিণীৰ দৰে তাই মূৰ তুলি চালে। নৈৰ কোমল মাটি খহি পৰাৰ দৰে তাই সৌদামিনীৰ বুকুত দৌ খাই পৰিল।”<sup>১৪</sup> (নী.ব্ৰ. পৃ. ১১৬)

বৃন্দাবনৰ প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজতহে সৌদামিনীয়ে সুখ আৰু আনন্দ বিচাৰি পাইছিল। তাই যেতিয়া চৰণবিহাৰীৰ লগত বৃন্দাবনৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰিৱেশৰ মাজত ঘূৰি ফুৰিছিল তেতিয়া তাই মন্দিৰ দৰ্শন কৰাতকৈ এজোপা ফুল গছৰ তলত বহিহে আনন্দ আৰু শান্তি লাভ কৰিছিল। শান্ত পৰিৱেশটোৱে তাইৰ মনত আনন্দ দিছিল আৰু তাই কিছু সময় সেই পৰিৱেশত অকলে অতিবাহিত কৰিব বিচাৰিছিল। ইয়াৰ মাজেৰে লেখকে নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজৰ সম্বন্ধক খুব সুন্দৰকৈ দাঙি ধৰিছে। মানৱ সমাজতকৈ সৌদামিনীয়ে প্ৰকৃতিকে মানসিক শান্তিৰ মাধ্যম ৰূপত বিচাৰি লৈছে। “চৰণবিহাৰীয়ে মালা আৰু প্ৰসাদ আনিবলৈ মন্দিৰৰ ভিতৰ সোমাল। আদিত্য টিলাৰ ফুলি থকা সোণাৰু এজোপাৰ তলত সৌদামিনী বহিল। এইখিনিতে বাঁকে বিহাৰীৰ দৰে মানুহৰ ছলস্থূল নাই। সোণাৰুজোপাৰ তলত নীৰৱতাই বিৰাজ কৰিছে। সোণাৰুজোপা ডাল ভৰি ভৰি ফুলিছে আৰু ওপৰত সোৱা মেঘযুক্ত আকাশ। সৌদামিনীয়ে ভাবিছিল অকলশৰে এইখিনিতে কিছুসময় বহিব, তাইৰ ভাল লাগিব।”<sup>১৫</sup> (নী.ব্ৰ. পৃ-৪২) পুৱাৰ কোমল সূৰ্যৰ পোহৰ যমুনাৰ বালিত পৰাৰ সময়তে সৌদামিনীয়ে যমুনাৰ বালিত খোজ কাঢ়ি আছিল। সেই সময়তো তাই নিজকে অকলশৰীয়া অনুভৱ কৰিছিল। প্ৰকৃতিহে যেন তাইৰ আজন্মৰ সংগী আছিল। সৌদামিনীৰ মনৰ এনে অনুভৱে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ অভিন্ন ৰূপকে প্ৰতিপন্ন কৰে। সৌদামিনীৰ মনৰ মাজত যেতিয়া খেলিমেলি ভাবৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছিল যে তাই খ্ৰীষ্টান প্ৰেমিকজনৰ লগত জীৱন-যাপন কৰিবনে, ৰক্ষণশীল সমাজৰ সিদ্ধান্তক মানি লৈ আন বহুগৰাকী সাধাৰণ বিধৱা তিৰোতাৰ দৰে বৃন্দাবনত দিন কটাব তেতিয়া বৃন্দাবনৰ প্ৰকৃতিয়েও যেন সৌদামিনীৰ মনৰ দৰে অশান্ত হৈ পৰিছিল।

“সৌদামিনীয়ে কৈ গ’ল : মাজতে মই অনাই-বনাই ঘূৰি ফুৰিবলৈ ভাল পাইছিলোঁ। বিশ্বাস কৰক, মই যেন বহু যুগ অতিক্ৰম কৰি এক অচিনাকি যুগত ভৰি দিছোঁ। চব কথাই সলনি হৈ গৈছে। মোৰ আত্মাৰ সৈতে ইয়াত কাৰো সম্বন্ধ নাই। আৰু মোৰ মূৰৰ ওপৰেৰে সেই আকাশখন— সেইখন চাবলৈও মোৰ ভয় হৈছিল। মই সুদীৰ্ঘকাল মোৰ মূৰৰ ওপৰৰ আকাশখন চোৱা নাছিলোঁ। এনেকুৱা অৱস্থাও কাৰোবাৰ হয়— যেতিয়া মানুহে নিজৰ মূৰৰ ওপৰৰ আকাশখন চাবলৈ ভয় কৰে? আপুনি শিল্পী, আপোনাৰ অনুভূতি আছে, মোৰ জৈৱিক স্পৃহা, প্ৰেম, আপুনি বিশ্বাস কৰক সৌ সিদিনালৈকে মই নিজৰ ওপৰতেই গৱেষণা কৰি চাইছোঁ মোৰ জৈৱিক স্পৃহাৰ সেই তৰঙ্গৰাশিৰ কোনো পৰিৱৰ্তন হোৱা নাই, সৌ সিদিনা এহাল দম্পত্তি আহিছিল— সিহঁতে পৰিক্ৰমাৰ পথৰ ডিমৰু এজোপাৰ তলত শুই আছিল। যমুনাৰ পানীত কিহৰ গোন্ধ আছিল সেয়া? যমুনাৰ পানীত সেয়া অস্বাভাৱিক গোন্ধ... কছাইখানাত নতুনকৈ কটা মঙহৰ গোন্ধ.. নহয় কিহৰ যে গোন্ধ আছিল সেয়া... ঠিক যেন বুজাব নোৱাৰি.. বৰ্ণাব নোৱাৰি। আৰু সেই স্বাস্থ্যৱান দম্পতীহাল পৰিক্ৰমাৰ পথৰ ডিমৰুৰ তলত শুই আছিল। মোৰ কি হৈছিল সেই মুহূৰ্তত... এই যমুনাৰ পানীৰ অদ্ভুত গোন্ধ, ডিমৰুৰ তলত সেই দম্পতী... যমুনাৰ বালিত মই বাগৰি ফুৰিব ধৰিলোঁ... এটা সময়ত মোৰ গাৰ কাপোৰ-কানি উচ্ছৃঙ্খল হৈ পৰিল। মোৰ এই নগ্ন দেহত বালিৰ এই অনুভূতি... অদ্ভুত অনন্য—<sup>১৬</sup> (নী.ব্ৰ.পৃ-৭৭)



সৌদামিনী যেতিয়া দেউতাক ডাক্তৰ ৰায়চৌধুৰীৰ চিকিৎসালয়ত ৰোগীৰ শুশ্ৰূষা কৰি ভাগৰি পৰিছিল তেতিয়া তাইৰ মুখত অৱৰ্ণনীয় স্ফোভৰ চিহ্ন দেখা গৈছিল। স্থলিত কণ্ঠৰে তাই চিঞৰি চিঞৰি কৈছিল— “মোৰ গোটেই জীৱনটো মই এনেদৰে আনৰ দয়াপৰৱশ হৈ কটাব নোৱাৰোঁ— মই মহীয়সী নহওঁ যে তোমালোকৰ দৰে জনকল্যাণমূলক কাম কৰি মই মোৰ গোটেই জীৱন অতিবাহিত কৰিব পাৰিম। মই স্বাধীন। মই কাকো ভয় নকৰোঁ... তোমালোকে যদি মই সলনি হোৱা বুলি ভাবিছা তেতিয়াহ'লে...”<sup>৭</sup> (নী.ব.পৃ-৫৪) এনেদৰে দেউতাক ৰায়চৌধুৰীলৈ আঙুলি টোৱাই সৌদামিনীয়ে তেওঁলোকক ভণ্ড আৰু কছাইৰ লগত ৰিজনি দিছে। ইয়াৰ মাজেৰে নাৰীবাদৰ প্ৰকাশ ঘটিছে। ঔপন্যাসিকে সৌদামিনীৰ এই ৰূপক হত কপৌ চৰাইৰ লগত তুলনা কৰি নাৰীৰ দৰেই যে পিতৃতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত প্ৰকৃতিয়ে শোষিত হয় তাক বৰ্ণনা কৰিছে। লগে লগে প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ অনুভূতি উপন্যাসখনত পোৱা হৈছে। “হত কপৌৰ দৰে তাই কিছু সময় ছটফটাবলৈ ধৰিলে।”<sup>৮</sup> (নী.ব. পৃ-৫৪)

উপন্যাসখনত মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীয়ে ৰাধা আৰু যশোদাৰ প্ৰকৃতি প্ৰীতি সম্পৰ্কে বৰ্ণনা কৰিছে। প্ৰকৃতি জগতৰ গছ-গছনি, পশু-পক্ষীৰ লগত থকা ৰাধা আৰু যশোদাৰ আত্মীয়ভাৱে নাৰীয়ে পুৰুষৰ তুলনাত অধিক প্ৰকৃতিৰ লগত সংস্পৃক্ত সেই কথাৰ প্ৰমাণ দাঙি ধৰে। “গকুলচন্দ্ৰই ‘দাবানল ভক্ষণ’ কৰা কেৱাৰি বন, যশোদাই গোদান কৰা গোপাল বন, ৰাধাই সৰীসকলৰ সৈতে নিজ হাতে পুৰুষৰূপ ৰোপণ কৰা ৰাধাবাগ। হৰিদাস স্বামীৰ মানসবন-নিধুবন। আৰু সেই অতীৰ ৰমণীৰ নিকুঞ্জবন। য’ত বগা ফুলৰ জোপোহাবোৰে তলমূৰ কৰি ব্ৰজৰ অমূল্য ৰজ সাবটি আত্মহাৰা হৈ আছে। এটা সময়ত এই জোপোহাবোৰে ৰাধাৰ ভৰিৰ নুপুৰৰ দৰে ফুল প্ৰসৰ কৰে আৰু গভীৰভাৱে কাণ পাতি থাকিলে ভাব হয়— সেই ‘বান বান অলৌকিক শব্দেৰে যেন ব্ৰজৰ চৌদিশ মুখৰ হৈ আছে।’”<sup>৯</sup> (নী.ব. পৃ-৫৩)

ধৰ্মীয় দিশৰ পৰা চালে উপন্যাসখনত আমি মা লক্ষ্মীৰ অৱতাৰৰূপে ৰাধা আৰু যমুনা নদীক পূজা কৰাৰ প্ৰমাণ পাব। ৰাধাঅষ্টমীত ৰাধাক পূজা কৰিবৰ বাবে বৃন্দাবনবাসীয়ে যথেষ্ট আয়োজন কৰে। ‘জয় ৰাধাৰাণী জয়’ শ্ল’গানেৰে বৃন্দাবন মুখৰিত হয়। কিন্তু সেই দেৱীসকলৰে নাৰীৰূপক তেওঁলোকে নানা অত্যাচাৰ কৰে। পেট ভৰাই এসাজ খাদ্যৰ বাবে বৃন্দাবনৰ বিধৱাসকল হাহাকাৰ কৰিব লগা হয়। এফালে ধৰ্মৰ নামত পুৰুষ সমাজে নাৰীৰূপী দেৱীক পূজা কৰে আৰু আনফালে ধৰ্মৰ নামতে বৈধৱ্য যন্ত্ৰণাত কৈঁকাই থকা নাৰীক মানসিক অশান্তি দিয়ে। ইয়াৰ মাজেৰে লেখক সমাজত নাৰীস্থান সম্পৰ্কে ক’ব বিচাৰিছে। সৌদামিনী আৰু শশীৰ কথোপকথনৰ পৰা জানিব পৰা যায় যে বৃন্দাবনত কেৱল দৰিদ্ৰগ্ৰস্ত বিধৱাসকলৰ ওপৰতে অত্যাচাৰ হোৱা নাছিল, প্ৰাণী জগতৰ ওপৰতো অত্যাচাৰ চলিছিল। অৰ্থৰ বাবে যেনেদৰে বিধৱাসকলক মৃত্যুৰ পাছতো নিৰ্যাতন কৰিছিল ঠিক তেনেদৰে প্ৰাণীজগতকো অৰ্থৰ বাবেই ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছিল।

“ঃ কি বিচাৰিছে সি ?

ঃ সাপ।

শশীয়ে আকৌ এবাৰ হাঁহি মাৰি ক’লে : সাপ। এৰা, সাপ বিচাৰিছে সি। সাপ ধৰিব আৰু মনে

মনে মানুহৰ ঘৰত সুমুৱাই দিব। তাৰ পিছত সিহঁতে নিজেই বেজ হৈ জাৰিব অৰ্থাৎ সাপটো ঘৰৰ পৰা উলিয়াই দিয়াৰ পুৰস্কাৰস্বৰূপে মালিকৰ পৰা মুদ্ৰা সংগ্ৰহ কৰিব।”<sup>১০</sup> (নী.ব. পৃ-৪৭)

তদুপৰি সৌদামিনীয়ে বৃন্দাবনৰ সিংহদুৱাৰৰ সন্মুখত এজন ব্যক্তিয়ে বিভিন্ন জন্তুৰ পৰা সংগ্ৰহ কৰা সামগ্ৰী বিক্ৰী কৰি থকা দেখিছিল। ইয়াৰ পৰা বুজিব পাৰি যে ব্ৰজধামত নাৰীৰ দৰে প্ৰকৃতি তথা প্ৰাণীজগত সুৰক্ষিত নাছিল। উপন্যাসখনত কেইবা ঠাইতো সৌদামিনীৰ মানসিক অৱস্থাৰ প্ৰতীকাত্মকভাৱে এডাল সাপৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিছে। সমাজৰ নিষ্ঠুৰতাই যেনিবা সৌদামিনীক হত্যা কৰি তাইৰ ছাল চেলাই পেলাইছে, এনে ইংগিত বহন কৰিছে উপন্যাসৰ অ’ত ত’ত সৌদামিনীয়ে দেখা পোৱা সাপৰ অৱস্থাবোৰে। “এদিন পুৱা শুকান কাগজত খৰ খৰণিৰ দৰে শব্দ এটি শুনি সৌদামিনী সাৰ পাই উঠিল। ...ওপৰত কাঠ আৰু ভগ্ন ইটাৰ সুৰঙ্গৰে বাহিৰলৈ ওলাই আহিছে এডাল গোস্কুৰ সাপ।”<sup>১১</sup> (নী.ব, পৃ-৭৩) কেতিয়াবা আকৌ সাপডাল সৌদামিনীৰ জৈৱিক লিঙ্গাৰ অবিৰত প্ৰৱাহৰ প্ৰতীক হৈ ধৰা দিছে। “আজি পুৱাই মাখন বৰণীয়া সাপটোৱে সৌদামিনীৰ কোঠাৰপৰা ওলাই গৈ আখৰাৰ মানুহক ভ্ৰক্ষেপ নকৰি পানী খোৱা কুঁৱাৰ ওচৰলৈ গৈ আকৌ উভতি আহিল।”<sup>১২</sup> (নী.ব. পৃ-১১৬) উপন্যাসখনত সৌদামিনীক শাৰীৰিক আৰু মানসিকভাৱে সমাজে বাৰে বাৰে অত্যাচাৰ কৰিছে। তাইৰ এই অৱস্থাৰ ঔপন্যাসিকে ছাল এৰোৱা এডাল সাপৰ লগত তুলনা কৰিছে। “মন্ত্ৰমুগ্ধ হোৱাৰ দৰে তাই মানুহটোৰ ওচৰলৈ আগবাঢ়ি গ’লৈ। মানুহটোৱে মৰা সাপটোৰ ছাল এখন একুৱাই আছে। ছাল নোহোৱা সাপটোৰ দেহ আঁৰি মাছৰ দেহৰ দৰে ওলমি পৰিছে। কোনোবাই যেন তাইৰ দেহত চাবুকৰ কোব বহুৱাই দিলে। ক’ৰ সাপ এইটো? ক’ৰ সাপ? : মই চিনি পাইছো— এইটো দশৰথ আখৰাৰ বুঢ়া সাপ। গোস্কুৰ সাপ।”<sup>১৩</sup> (নী.ব. পৃ-১১৯)

এনেদৰে চালে দেখা যায় যে পবিত্ৰ ব্ৰজধাম য’ত নাৰীক দেৱীৰূপে পূজা কৰে আৰু আনফালে অসহায় নাৰীক নিজৰ স্বাৰ্থৰ বাবে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰে। ঔপন্যাসিকে ইয়াত নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিক দুটা ভিন্ন সংজ্ঞাৰে নাবান্ধি নাৰীকে প্ৰকৃতি বুলি কৈছে। সেই নাৰীৰূপী প্ৰকৃতিক পুৰুষপ্ৰধান সমাজে কৰা অৱহেলা আৰু আঘাতক মৰ্মস্পৰ্শী ৰূপত প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে।

### উপসংহাৰ :

‘নীলকণ্ঠী ব্ৰজ’ উপন্যাসখনৰ জৰিয়তে মামণি ৰয়ছম গোস্বামীয়ে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ প্ৰতি সহমৰ্মিতা প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। পিতৃতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত সময়ে সময়ে পুৰুষে নিজৰ লাভালাভৰ বাবে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীক যে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰি আহিছে সেই কথা উপন্যাসখনত সুন্দৰকৈ ফুটি উঠিছে। সৌদামিনীৰ চৰিত্ৰৰ জৰিয়তে ঔপন্যাসিকে বিধৱা নাৰীৰ যন্ত্ৰণাকাতৰ জীৱনৰ জীয়া ছবি প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। মানৱ সমাজত থাকিও সৌদামিনীয়ে প্ৰকৃতিৰ মাজতহে সুখ অনুভৱ কৰিছিল। কাৰণ প্ৰকৃতিয়ে ধৰ্ম, হিংসা, কপটতা নুবুজি, বুজি কেৱল আত্মীয়তা। ধৰ্ম, বৰ্ণ আৰু জাতিৰ নামত সৌদামিনীৰ ওপৰত যি অত্যাচাৰ চলিছিল সেয়া যেন প্ৰতিখন সমাজৰে নিষ্ঠুৰ বাস্তৱতা। সৌদামিনীৰ দৰেই মৃণালিনী, শশীয়েও পুৰুষৰ বৰ্বৰতাৰ বলী হৈ দিন কটাবলগীয়া হৈছিল। নিজৰ সত্যত্ব ৰক্ষাৰ বাবে শশীয়ে কৰা যুঁজখন আজিৰ প্ৰতিগৰাকী নাৰীৰেই যুঁজ।

**সিদ্ধান্ত :**

- সাহিত্য আলোচনাৰ এক তাত্ত্বিক দৃষ্টিভংগী হিচাপে প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদ বা পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক নাৰীবাদে আধুনিক অসমীয়া সাহিত্যত ক্ৰমে বিকাশ লাভ কৰি আহিছে — যাৰ জৰিয়তে প্ৰকৃতি আৰু নাৰীৰ অভিন্ন সম্পৰ্ক আৰু প্ৰকৃতি তথা নাৰীৰ ওপৰত চলা শোষণ আৰু তাৰ প্ৰতিবাদ সম্পৰ্কে জানিব পৰা গৈছে।
- বহু পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজত যে এতিয়াও নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতি সুৰক্ষিত নহয়; মানুহৰ স্বাৰ্থৰ বলি হ'বলগীয়া হৈছে সেয়া উপন্যাসখনে সোঁৱৰাই দিছে।
- ঔপন্যাসিকৰ ব্যক্তিগত অভিজ্ঞতাৰে নাৰী হিচাপে নাৰীৰ মনোজগতৰ যি বৰ্ণনা কৰিছে সেয়া অতি মৰ্মস্পৰ্শী। লগতে ঔপন্যাসিকৰ প্ৰকৃতিপ্ৰীতিৰো উমান উপন্যাসখনত পোৱা যায়।
- প্ৰকৃতি নাৰীবাদৰ মূল উদ্দেশ্য হৈছে সাহিত্যৰ মাজেৰে নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ সম্পৰ্ক নিৰূপণ কৰা আৰু পুৰুষৰ অত্যাচাৰৰ বিৰুদ্ধে প্ৰতিবাদ কৰা। উপন্যাসখনত নাৰী আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ সু-সম্পৰ্ক প্ৰকাশ পাইছে যদিও প্ৰতিবাদী কণ্ঠ কিছু স্তিমিত যেন অনুভৱ হয়।

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## লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ জৰিয়তে থলুৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা

*ৰিমঝিম গগৈ*

**বিষয়ৰ পৰিচয় :**

লোক-সংস্কৃতি লোকজীৱনৰ সংস্কৃতি। এটা জাতিৰ স্বকীয় বৈশিষ্ট্যসূচক ৰীতি-নীতি, পৰম্পৰা, আচাৰ-বিশ্বাস, উৎসৱ-পাৰ্বণ, খাদ্যাভ্যাস, সাজপাৰ, এই সকলোবোৰেই লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ অন্তৰ্গত। লোকসংস্কৃতি প্ৰবাহমান। এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ নিৰৱধি গতিত প্ৰবাহমান হয়। অৱশ্যে সময়ৰ সোঁতত ইয়াত পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ সংযোগ-বিয়োগ হ'লেও স্বকীয়তা বৰ্তাই ৰাখিবলৈ সক্ষম হয়।

লোক-সংস্কৃতি লোকজ্ঞানেৰে ভৰপূৰ। প্ৰকৃতিৰ সন্তানসকলে প্ৰকৃতিৰ সৈতে সহবাস কৰি প্ৰকৃতিৰ বুকুৰ পৰা কিছুমান জ্ঞান আহৰণ কৰে। তেনে জ্ঞানসমূহেই প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰূপে পৰিচিত। এই জ্ঞানসমূহক দৈনন্দিন জীৱন-যাপন প্ৰণালীত প্ৰয়োগ কৰাৰ লগতে এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ কঢ়িয়াই লৈ ফুৰে। এনেধৰণৰ থলুৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহক প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা প্ৰজন্মলৈ গতিশীলতা প্ৰদান কৰি সংৰক্ষণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এটা সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ নাৰীসকলে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। বিশেষকৈ গ্ৰাম্য সমাজত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষক হিচাপে নাৰীৰ অৱদান উল্লেখনীয়। কৃষি-কাৰ্য, উৎসৱ-পাৰ্বণ, পৰম্পৰাগত খাদ্যাভ্যাস, চিকিৎসা ইত্যাদি জীৱন নিৰ্বাহৰ লগত জড়িত ক্ষেত্ৰসমূহত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ প্ৰয়োগেৰে নাৰীসকলে এই জ্ঞান সংৰক্ষণ কৰি আহিছে। উল্লিখিত বিশেষ ক্ষেত্ৰসমূহত প্ৰযোজ্য হোৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰো গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ অংগ। এই প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানবোৰক নীতি-নিয়মৰ মাজেৰে প্ৰতিটো ক্ষেত্ৰত প্ৰয়োগ কৰি একোখন সমাজৰ নাৰীসকলে বৰ্তমানেও সংৰক্ষক হিচাপে দায়িত্ব পালন কৰি আহিছে।

প্ৰদত্ত গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনিত উল্লিখিত বিষয়সমূহৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহ কি, কেনেদৰে প্ৰয়োগ কৰি আহিছে আৰু লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ আলোকেৰে কেনেদৰে নাৰীসকলে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি আহিছে সেইসম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰাৰ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হ'ব।

**উদ্দেশ্য :**

“লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ জৰিয়তে থলুৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা”— শীৰ্ষক গৱেষণাপত্ৰখনিৰ একমাত্ৰ উদ্দেশ্য হ’ব লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ জৰিয়তে নাৰীয়ে কেনেদৰে থলুৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণ কৰে সেই সম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰা। ইয়াকে অধ্যয়ন কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে মূল উদ্দেশ্যক কেইটামান উপভাগত ভাগ কৰি লোৱা হৈছে—

- ১। কৃষিৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষক হিচাপে নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা অধ্যয়ন কৰা;
- ২। উৎসৰ লগত জড়িত থকা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহক নাৰীয়ে কেনেদৰে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি আহিছে সেই সম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰা;
- ৩। লোকখাদ্যৰ লগত সম্পৰ্কিত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহৰ সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ অৱদান বিচাৰ কৰা;
- ৪। পৰম্পৰাগত চিকিৎসা ব্যৱস্থাৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষক হিচাপে নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা অধ্যয়ন কৰা।

**উৎস আৰু পদ্ধতি :**

প্ৰস্তাৱিত গৱেষণা কৰ্মটি উপস্থাপন কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে কিছু তথ্য আহৰণ কৰাৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আহি পৰিব। গৱেষণা কৰ্মটিৰ মূল উদ্দেশ্যত উপনীত হ’বৰ বাবে দুইধৰণৰ সমল উৎসৰ সহায় লোৱা হ’ব—

- ক) **মুখ্য উৎস :** মুখ্য উৎস হিচাপে ‘লোক-সংস্কৃতি’ বিষয়ক গ্ৰন্থসমূহৰ সহায় লোৱা হ’ব।
- খ) **গৌণ উৎস :** গৌণ উৎস হিচাপে বিভিন্ন প্ৰাসংগিক গ্ৰন্থ গৱেষণা গ্ৰন্থ, সম্পাদিত গ্ৰন্থ, আলোচনী, ইণ্টাৰনেট আদিৰ সহায় লোৱা হ’ব।
- প্ৰদত্ত গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনি প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে বৰ্ণনাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰ সহায় লোৱা হ’ব। প্ৰয়োজন অনুসৰি বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰো সহায় লোৱা হ’ব।

**মূল বিষয়ৰ আলোচনা :**

প্ৰকৃতিৰ সন্তানসকলে তথা থলুৱা সম্প্ৰদায়সমূহে জ্ঞানৰ ভঁৰাল টনকিয়াল কৰে পৰিৱেশৰ পৰা লাভ কৰা অভিজ্ঞতাৰ জৰিয়তে। প্ৰকৃতিৰ প্ৰতিটো দিশৰ যেনে প্ৰকৃতিৰ ব্যৱহাৰ, প্ৰকৃতিৰ লালন-পালন, সংৰক্ষণ আদিৰ জ্ঞানেৰে তেওঁলোক পৰিপুষ্ট। জীৱন নিৰ্বাহৰ বাবে প্ৰয়োজনীয় সকলো সম্বল প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰাই আহৰণ কৰে। যেনে খাদ্য, বস্ত্ৰ, বাসস্থান নিৰ্মাণৰ আহিলা, ইন্ধন, ঔষধ আদি সকলো। প্ৰকৃতিৰ লগত একাত্ম হৈ জীৱন ধাৰণ কৰোঁতে প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰাই কিছুমান জ্ঞান আহৰণ কৰে আৰু সেই জ্ঞান বিশেষ সম্প্ৰদায়টোৰ জীৱনৰ অপৰিহাৰ্য অংগ হৈ পৰে। এনেদৰে আহৰণ কৰা জ্ঞানকে থলুৱা জ্ঞান বা পৰম্পৰাগত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞান বুলি কোৱা হয়। লোকজীৱনৰ অন্তৰ্গত এই জ্ঞানসমূহ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰো অন্যতম অংগ হৈ পৰে। যিহেতু সংস্কৃতি গতিশীল। তাৰ আওতাৰেই প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহো গতিশীল।

স্বকীয় ঐতিহ্য-পৰম্পৰাৰে সমৃদ্ধ যিকোনো সম্প্ৰদায়ৰ, বিশেষকৈ গ্ৰামাঞ্চলত বসবাস কৰা সম্প্ৰদায় এটাৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণ আৰু পালনৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এগৰাকী নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা উল্লেখযোগ্য। পৰিৱেশৰ লালন-পালন কৰা আৰু সযতনে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি পাছৰ প্ৰজন্মৰ হাতত তুলি দিয়াৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এগৰাকী নাৰীৰ অৱদানো অতুলনীয়।

**(১) কৃষিৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞান আৰু নাৰী :**

লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ এক বিশেষ অংগ হৈছে পৰম্পৰাগত কৃষি পদ্ধতি আৰু তাৰ লগত জড়িত পৰম্পৰাগত ৰীতি-নীতিসমূহ। এই ৰীতি-নীতিসমূহ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ সম্পদ। খেতি কৰিবলৈ আৰম্ভ কৰাৰ পৰা খেতি চপোৱালৈকে থলুৱা সমাজ এখনত পৰম্পৰাগত কিছুমান লোকাচাৰ পালন কৰে। এই লোকাচাৰসমূহত প্ৰতিফলিত জ্ঞানবোৰ প্ৰকৃতিৰ বুকুৰ পৰা আহৰিত বিশ্বাসৰ জ্ঞান। এই জ্ঞানসমূহ বিশেষ সম্প্ৰদায় বা সমাজখনে নিজৰ সংস্কৃতিৰ মাজত কঢ়িয়াই লৈ ফুৰে।

কৃষিকাৰ্যৰ লগত জড়িত এনে কিছুমান নিয়ম বা লোকাচাৰ আছে যিসমূহ পূৰ্বৰে পৰা কেৱল নাৰী সকলেহে পালন কৰি আহিছে। যেনে- কঠীয়া সিঁচিবৰ বাবে বাছকবনীয়া ভাল চাই ধানখিনি তিয়াই, গজালি উলিয়াই কঠীয়া সিঁচিবৰ উপযুক্ত কৰা পৰ্যন্ত সকলোখিনি ঘৰখনৰ মহিলাগৰাকীয়েহে কৰে। পথাৰত প্ৰথম গোছ ৰোৱাৰ দিনা প্ৰত্যেক থলুৱা সমাজে নিজা কিছুমান নীতি-নিয়ম পালন কৰে। গোছ ৰোৱা দিনটো থলুৱা সমাজ এখনৰ বাবে সৰু-সুৰা এটি উৎসৱতকৈ কোনো গুণে কম নহয়। কৃষিকাৰ্যত পুৰুষ-মহিলা উভয়ে ভাগ লয় যদিও নীতি-নিয়মসমূহ পালন কৰাৰ দায়িত্ব সদায় নাৰীয়ে লৈ আহিছে। গোছ ৰোৱাৰ দিনা ঘৰখনৰ মূল নাৰীগৰাকীয়ে এখন আগলি কলপাতত এখনি থুৰীয়া তামোল, ক’লা কচুৰ পুলি, হেলচ গছৰ ডাল সহিতে ন কঠীয়া এমুঠি লৈ ৰুবলৈ লোৱা মাটিডৰাৰ একোণত কচু গছ আৰু হেলচ গছৰ ডাল গুজি দিয়ে। কচুগছে খুব সোনকালে বংশবৃদ্ধি কৰে। তেনেকৈয়ে কঠীয়াবোৰো যাতে লহপহকৈ বাঢ়ি বংশবৃদ্ধি কৰে তাৰেই কামনা কৰি কচু গছ ৰোৱা হয়। আনহাতে হেলচ গছৰ গুটিৰ যেনেকৈ লমালমে লাগি ডাল ভৰি পৰে তেনেকৈয়ে ধানৰ থোকবোৰো গুটি ধানেৰে ওপচি পৰাৰ বাবে প্ৰাৰ্থনা কৰি হেলচ গছৰ ডাল ৰোৱে। হেলচৰ পৰিৱৰ্তে যিকোনো সৰহকৈ গুটি লগা গছৰ ডাল ৰোৱাও দেখা যায়।

আকৌ ধান কাটি খেতি চপোৱাৰ সময়তো ঘৰৰ গৃহিণীগৰাকীয়ে নীতি-নিয়মৰ মাজেৰে লখিমী ঘৰলৈ আনে। খেতি চপোৱাৰ শেষৰ দিনা ঘৰৰ গৃহিণীগৰাকীয়ে কেইমুঠিমান ধান আৰু ধান দাওঁতে নৰানিৰ মাজে মাজে বৈ যোৱা ধানৰ আগসমূহ (যাক লেছেৰি বোলা হয়) কাটি চপাই এখন গামোচাত বান্ধে। গামোচাত বান্ধা লেছেৰি আৰু ধানৰ মুঠি মূৰত তুলি আনি ভঁৰালত থয়হি। এনেকৈ লখিমী আনোতে তেওঁ বাটত কাকো মাত-বোল নকৰে আৰু পিছলৈও উভতি নাচায়। সেয়া অশুভ বুলি জ্ঞান কৰা হয়।

কৃষিকার্যৰ লগত জড়িত এনেধৰণৰ পৰম্পৰাগত ৰীতি-নীতিসমূহ থলুৱা সমাজ এখনৰ স্বকীয় লোকাচাৰ। এই লোকাচাৰসমূহ পালনৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত কোনো বাধ্যবাধকতা নাই। অথচ তেওঁলোকে স্বকীয়তা বৰ্তাই ৰাখি প্ৰতিবছৰে কৃষিকৰ্মৰ সময়ত পালন কৰি আহিছে। উল্লিখিত নিয়মসমূহ থলুৱা সমাজখনৰ নাৰীসকলে লোকাচাৰৰ মাধ্যমেৰে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি আহিছে। এই নিয়ম তথা বিশ্বাসৰ জ্ঞানসমূহ কোনো গ্ৰন্থত লিপিবদ্ধ জ্ঞান নহয়। এনে জ্ঞানসমূহ মাকে জীয়েক বা শাহুৱেকে বোৱাৰীয়েকক প্ৰদান কৰি এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ কঢ়িয়াই আনিছে আৰু এনেভাৱেই প্ৰকৃতিৰ লগত জড়িত জ্ঞানৰো সংৰক্ষণ কৰিছে।

### (২) পৰম্পৰাগত উৎসৱৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞান আৰু নাৰী :

পৰম্পৰাগত উৎসৱ লোকজীৱনৰ দাপোণস্বৰূপ। উৎসৱৰ লগত জড়িত বা উৎসৱৰ সময়ত পালন কৰা ৰীতি-নীতিসমূহ সেই বিশেষ সম্প্ৰদায়টোৰ স্বকীয় সম্পত্তি। এখন সমাজৰ এই নীতি-নিয়মসমূহ পুৰুষ-মহিলা উভয়েই পালন কৰি আহিছে। সময়ৰ বুকুত এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ কঢ়িয়াই লৈ ফুৰিছে; কিন্তু এইখিনিতে উল্লেখনীয় যে উৎসৱৰ লগত জড়িত এনে কিছুমান পৰম্পৰা আছে যিসমূহ কেৱল একোখন সমাজৰ নাৰীসকলেহে পালন কৰে। তেওঁলোকেই ইয়াৰ সংৰক্ষণৰ দায়িত্বভাৰো গ্ৰহণ কৰি আহিছে।

উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে, অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনৰ আয়ুসৰেখাস্বৰূপ বাপতিসাহোন বঙালী বিহুটিৰ কথাকেই ক'ব পাৰি। গৰু বিহুৰ দিনাখন গৰুক গা-ধুৱাবৰ বাবে মাহ-হালধি বটি তৈয়াৰ কৰাৰ দায়িত্ব সদায় ঘৰখনৰ নাৰীগৰাকীয়েই কৰি আহিছে — যাতে বছৰটোৰ বাবে গৰুৰ গাত কোনোধৰণৰ বেমাৰ-আজাৰে লগ দিব নোৱাৰে। সন্ধিয়া আকৌ গৰু-গাই ঘৰলৈ ঘূৰাৰ পৰত পদূলিত যাগ দিয়া, নতুন পঘা কেইডাল যতনোৱা এইবোৰো ঘৰখনৰ মূল নাৰীগৰাকীৰেই কাম। “বেলি লহিয়ালেই। যাগকেইটা গোটাৰো সময় হ'লহি, বুঢ়ীয়ে ভাবে। তুঁহগুৰি, বিহলঙনি, জেটুলীপকা, ধান খেৰৰ জুমুঠি আদিৰে পদূলিত এটা, চোতালত এটা, গোহালিৰ মুখত এটা তিনিটা যাগ গোটাই থৈ নতুনকৈ বটা তৰা পঘা কেডাল ধোঁৱা-চাঙখনৰ পৰা নমাই আনি দীঘলতী, মাখিয়তীকেইডালেৰে সৈতে বুঢ়ীয়ে যতনাই থয়। গৰুকেইটা আহিলেই পিঠা খুৱাই ন পঘা দি দীঘলতী, মাখিয়তীৰে কোবাই যাগকেইটা যে জ্বলাই দিব লাগিব আৰু সপভয় নিবাৰণৰ কাৰণে যে আজি ঘৰটোৰ চাৰিওপিনে নহৰু পানী ছটিয়াই দিব লাগিব, এই জনা কথাকেইটাৰো বুঢ়ীয়ে বোৱাৰীয়েকক আকৌ সোঁৱৰাই দিয়ে।”<sup>১১</sup>

### (৩) লোকখাদ্যৰ লগত জড়িত প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞান আৰু নাৰী :

লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ অন্যতম উপাদান লোকখাদ্য। পৃথিৱীত বসবাস কৰা প্ৰত্যেক জাতি-জনগোষ্ঠীৰে স্বকীয় খাদ্যাভ্যাস আছে। এই খাদ্যাভ্যাস তেওঁলোকৰ সংস্কৃতিৰ পৰিচায়ক। লোকখাদ্য প্ৰস্তুতৰ বাবে যিসমূহ সামগ্ৰীৰ প্ৰয়োজন হয় সেই সকলোবোৰ প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা আহৰিত আৰু প্ৰকৃতিৰ বুকুত ই সহজলভ্য। এই থলুৱা খাদ্যসমূহ স্বাস্থ্যৰ পক্ষেও অতি উপকাৰী। লোকজীৱনৰ লগত এনে লোকখাদ্য বিশেষ একোখন সমাজৰ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ পৰিচায়ক।

খাদ্য প্ৰস্তুত বা বন্ধন প্ৰকৰণ বুলি ক'লেই এই কামৰ যেন উত্তৰাধিকাৰী নাৰীসমাজ। খাদ্যবস্তু সংগ্ৰহ আৰু সংৰক্ষণৰ লগতে খাবৰ উপযোগীকৈ প্ৰস্তুত কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এখন সমাজত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা সদায় প্ৰথম। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে— অসমীয়া সমাজখনৰ লোকখাদ্যলৈ মন কৰিলে পৰিলক্ষিত হ'ব যে অসমীয়া সমাজৰ লোকখাদ্য অতি ব্যাপক আৰু বিচিত্ৰ। গতিকে গৱেষণা কৰ্মৰ মূল বিষয়ৰ প্ৰতি লক্ষ্য ৰাখি বিশেষ দুবিধ লোকখাদ্যৰ সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা সম্পৰ্কে তলত আলোচনা কৰা হ'ল—

### (ক) এশ এবিধ শাকৰ আঞ্জা :

অসমীয়া সমাজ জীৱনৰ এক এৰাব নোৱৰা লোকখাদ্য এশ এবিধ শাকৰ আঞ্জা। গৰু বিহুৰ দিনা ৰাতিলৈ প্ৰতিঘৰ অসমীয়া মানুহৰ ঘৰত এশ এবিধ শাকৰ আঞ্জা ৰন্ধা হয়। এই আঞ্জাখন প্ৰস্তুত কৰিবৰ বাবে প্ৰয়োজনীয় এশ এবিধ শাক প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা সংগ্ৰহ কৰা আৰু তাক খাবৰ উপযোগীকৈ প্ৰস্তুত কৰাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ঘৰখনত মূল নাৰীগৰাকীয়ে আগ-ভাগ লয় বা সেয়া তেওঁৰ পৰম্পৰাগতভাৱে লাভ কৰা দায়িত্ব, এশ এবিধ শাকৰ প্ৰতিবিধ শাকেই স্বাস্থ্যসন্মত আৰু ঔষধি গুণসমূহ। বিশ্বাস কৰা হয় যে এই আঞ্জা খালে বছৰটোৰ বাবে দেহত ৰোগ-ব্যধিয়ে অপকাৰ কৰিব নোৱাৰে। এই পৰম্পৰা যুগ যুগ ধৰি অসমীয়া সমাজে পালন কৰি আহিছে। এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ নাৰীয়ে পৰৱৰ্তী প্ৰজন্মক এশ এবিধ শাকৰ লগত পৰিচয় কৰায়। ৰন্ধন প্ৰণালী শিকাই অজ্ঞাতসাৰেই প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষকৰ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। আজিৰ সমাজত নাৰীয়ে হয়তো সম্পূৰ্ণ এশ এবিধ শাকৰ নাম মনত ৰাখিব নোৱাৰিব পাৰে; কিন্তু আইতা, আজো আইতাহঁতৰ মুখত আজিও এশ এবিধ শাকৰ নাম সুস্পষ্ট। আনফালে অসমৰ প্ৰকৃতিৰ বুকুত উপলব্ধ এশ এবিধ শাকে অসমৰ জৈৱ বৈচিত্ৰ্যৰ বিচিত্ৰতাকো প্ৰতিফলিত কৰিছে। সেই শাকসমূহ হৈছে “সৰু মাগিমুনি, সৰু পুৰৈ, বৰ পুৰৈ, নৰসিংহ, নেফাফু, ভাতমেটেকা, তিতাফুল (বাহক), জিলিমিলি, পচলা, জেতুলীপকা, মচন্দৰী, পানোনোৱা, বনজালুক, কলমৌ, তংলতি, ঢেকীয়াশাক, পদিনা, মাটিখুটুৰা, কটাৰী দবোৱা মাহ, পাটখুন্দা, চেংমৰা, ভেদাইলতা, হেলচী, খুটীয়া লফা, দোৰোণবন, তৰা গজালি, মেজেঙা, তিতাবাহক পাত, মেচাকি, লংকচি, তিতাকুচি, ভেকুৰি, হাতীভেকুৰি, উৰহী, হাতী উৰহী, ৰঙাপুৰৈ, নেঠেঙীয়া, ঢেকীয়ালতি, কপৌঢ়েকীয়া ইত্যাদি।”<sup>১২</sup> অৱশ্যে ঠাইভেদে শাকসমূহৰ নামো বেলেগ হোৱা দেখা যায়।

### (খ) পৰম্পৰাগত পানীয় প্ৰস্তুত আৰু তাত ব্যৱহাৰ ঔষধ বা পিঠা :

প্ৰত্যেক জনগোষ্ঠীয় সমাজৰে নিজা পৰম্পৰাগত ‘পানীয়’ থাকে। এই পানীয় লোকখাদ্যৰ লগতে লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰো বিশেষ পৰিচায়ক। জনগোষ্ঠীয় সমাজত পূৰ্বৰে পৰা বৰ্তমানেও পানীয় প্ৰস্তুত নাৰীয়েহে কৰি আহিছে। পানীয় প্ৰস্তুত কৰিবৰ বাবে যি বিশেষ ঔষধৰ প্ৰয়োজন হয় সেই ঔষধো মহিলাসকলে প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা আহৰিত সামগ্ৰীৰে নিজেই ঘৰতে প্ৰস্তুত কৰি লয়। সময়ৰ স্তৰে স্তৰে এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ সংৰক্ষণৰ ধাৰা অব্যাহত ৰাখি এই পৰম্পৰাগত পানীয় প্ৰস্তুতকৰণৰ প্ৰথা নাৰীসকলে আজিও পালন কৰি আছে। সমাজভেদে পানীয়ৰ নাম বেলেগ বেলেগ। আহোমসকলৰ

পৰম্পৰাগত পানীয়ক ‘লাওপানী’, ‘সাজ’, ‘দেওৰস’, ‘সোমৰস’ আদি নামেৰে জনা যায়। “তদুপৰি ভাতৰ লগত বিশেষ ‘দৰ’ সানি লাওপানী তৈয়াৰ কৰা হৈছিল। পিঠাৰ লগত জালুক, কপৌটেঁকীয়া, পাতি সোন্দাৰ পাত, বনজালুক, টংলতিৰ পাত, জেতুলিপকাৰ পাত আদি খুন্দি ‘দৰ’ তৈয়াৰ কৰে। এই দৰৰ বৰা চাউলৰ ভাতৰ লগত সানি তিনিদিন গাপ দি থয়। তিনিদিনৰ মূৰত বহী পকিবলৈ ধৰে। তেতিয়া গাপ দিয়া ভাতখিনি জোখাৰে কলহত ভৰাই থয়। দিনচেৰেকৰ পাছত কলহটো বসেৰে উপচি পৰে।”<sup>৩০</sup> থলুৱা সমাজ এখনৰ লোকখাদ্যাভ্যাস পৰম্পৰাগত পানীয় অবিহনে অসম্পূৰ্ণ। নাৰীসকলেই প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা সংগ্ৰহ কৰা বনৌষধিৰে স্বাস্থ্য উপযোগী পানীয় প্ৰস্তুত কৰি পৰম্পৰা ৰক্ষা কৰি আহিছে।

#### ৪। পৰম্পৰাগত চিকিৎসা পদ্ধতি আৰু নাৰী :

আধুনিক চিকিৎসা বিজ্ঞানৰ আৰম্ভণিৰ পূৰ্বে একোখন সমাজৰ চিকিৎসা ব্যৱস্থা পৰম্পৰাগতভাৱেই প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা আহৰিত বনৌষধেৰেই কৰা হৈছিল। বহু অঞ্চলত বৰ্তমানেও ইয়াৰ ব্যতিক্ৰম হোৱা নাই। থলুৱা লোকসকলে প্ৰকৃতিৰ ৰক্ষাৰ পৰা চিকিৎসা-শাস্ত্ৰৰ জ্ঞান লাভ কৰিছিল। প্ৰকৃতিৰ সৈতে সহবাস কৰি মানুহ তথা অন্যান্য জীৱ-জন্তুৰ বাবেও চিকিৎসাৰ উপযোগী ঔষধৰ সন্ধান প্ৰকৃতিতেই পাইছিল। যুগ যুগ ধৰি প্ৰাকৃতিক পৰম্পৰাৰেই চিকিৎসা চলি থাকিল। প্ৰাকৃতিক চিকিৎসা পদ্ধতি দুই ধৰণৰ। এবিধ খোৱা আৰু এবিধ প্ৰলেপ লগোৱা। আজিও একবিংশ শতিকাত চিকিৎসা-বিজ্ঞান প্ৰযুক্তিৰ ক্ষিপ্ৰ প্ৰয়োগৰ সময়তো বহুতো ক্ষেত্ৰত প্ৰাকৃতিক চিকিৎসাক অগ্ৰাধিকাৰ দি আহিছে।

দৈনন্দিন জীৱনত প্ৰয়োগ হৈ থকা চিকিৎসাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বৰ্তমানেও নাৰীসকলে এক প্ৰকাৰৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক চিকিৎসকৰ ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আছে। গ্ৰাম্য সমাজৰ প্ৰায়বোৰ মহিলাই যিকোনো ৰোগৰ লক্ষণ, তাৰ প্ৰতিকাৰ আৰু প্ৰতিৰোধ কি বেমাৰত কি ঔষধে আৰোগ্য কৰিব সেই সম্পৰ্কেও ভালদৰে অভিজ্ঞ। সৰু ল’ৰা-ছোৱালীৰ কাহ হ’লে মাক বা আইতাকে প্ৰথমে তুলসী আগৰ ৰসৰ লগত মৌ জোল মিহলাই খুৱায়। পেট পৰিষ্কাৰ বা কৃমি পেলুৰ পৰা ৰক্ষা পাবৰ বাবে চিৰতা তিতা, শুকুতা তিতা গছৰ পাত আনি তিয়াই থৈ ৰাতিপুৱা সন্তানক খালী পেটত খাবলৈ দিয়াৰ দায়িত্ব মাকেহে ভালকৈ পালন কৰে। এনে আৰু বহু ৰোগৰ চিকিৎসা বনৌষধিৰেই কৰা হয়। অৱশ্যে এই বনৌষধিবোৰৰ স্বাস্থ্যসন্মত গুণাগুণক অস্বীকাৰ কৰিব নোৱাৰি। মূৰৰ বিষ, পেটৰ বিষ, ছাল-চুলিৰ বিভিন্ন ৰোগ, মহিলাৰ বিভিন্ন ৰোগ আদি বিধিসন্মত প্ৰাকৃতিক ঔষধেৰে চিকিৎসা কৰাৰ জ্ঞান থলুৱা সমাজৰ প্ৰায় মহিলাই জানে বুলিলেও অতুষ্টি কৰা নহয়।

“গাঁৱলীয়া তিৰোতাৰ অস্ত্ৰোপ্ৰচাৰ সম্বন্ধেও যৎসামান্য জ্ঞান নোহোৱা নহয়। গৰ্ভতে মৃত্যু হোৱা সন্তানৰ প্ৰসৱ, সন্তান ওপজাৰ পিছত বাঁহৰ চোঁচেৰে নাই কটা, পোৱাতিৰ ফুল পৰাত সহায় কৰা কাৰ্য গাঁৱৰ বহু তিৰোতাই পাৰদৰ্শিতাৰে সম্পাদন কৰে। ল’ৰা-ছোৱালীৰ খহু, গাৰ বিহ-ফোঁড়াত পকনি দি (প্ৰলেপ) পকুৱাই তথা কাঁইটেৰে খুঁচি অথবা তীক্ষ্ণ অস্ত্ৰেৰে ফালি পূজ উলিয়াই শুকনি দৰৰ দি শুকুৱাব জানে।”<sup>৩১</sup>

উল্লিখিত কৰা আলোচনাৰ পৰা এটা কথা স্পষ্টকৈ পৰিলক্ষিত হয় যে- প্ৰকৃতিৰ পৰা আহৰিত

জ্ঞানেৰে পৰিপুষ্ট হৈ মানুহে জীৱন-নিৰ্বাহ কৰি আছে। মানৱজাতিয়ে প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহ এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ সম্প্ৰসাৰণ কৰি সংৰক্ষণৰ গতিধাৰা অব্যাহত ৰাখিছে। এইক্ষেত্ৰত নাৰীসকলে অগ্ৰণী ভূমিকা পালন কৰি আহিছে। “গাঁৱৰ ভাষা-সংস্কৃতিৰ সংৰক্ষক তিৰোতাসকলেই বুলি অন্য প্ৰসংগত কোৱা হৈছে। বাহিৰৰ লগত আদান-প্ৰদান অহা-যোৱা নোহোৱাত তিৰোতাসকলৰ ধৰ্মবিশ্বাস, আচাৰ-নীতি সাধাৰণতে ৰক্ষণশীল। তিৰোতাৰ এই ৰক্ষণশীল স্বভাৱ এপিনে যেনেকৈ আমাৰ লোক-সাহিত্য (সাঁথৰ, যোঁজনা, নিচুকনি গীত, বিয়ানাংম), সাজ-পাৰ, অলংকাৰ আদি প্ৰাচীন-সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্য জীয়াই ৰাখিছে, সেইদৰে অসমীয়াৰ ভেষজ জ্ঞান-ভাণ্ডাৰকো ৰক্ষা কৰি আহিছে।”<sup>৩২</sup>

#### সিদ্ধান্ত :

“লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ জৰিয়তে থলুৱা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা” শীৰ্ষক প্ৰস্তাৱিত গৱেষণাপত্ৰখনি অধ্যয়ন কৰাৰ অন্তত কেতবোৰ সিদ্ধান্তত উপনীত হ’ব পৰা গ’ল :

- ১। থলুৱা সমাজ এখনত নাৰীসকলে প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষক হিচাপে জ্ঞাত বা অজ্ঞাতভাৱে কাম কৰি আহিছে।
- ২। প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানসমূহক সামাজিক লোকাচাৰৰ ভিতৰুৱা কৰি প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা প্ৰজন্মলৈ নাৰীয়েই জ্ঞানবাহনৰ দায়িত্ব পালন কৰি সংৰক্ষণ কৰিছে।
- ৩। পৰম্পৰাগত কৃষিপদ্ধতি, উৎসৱ-পাৰ্বণ, খাদ্যাভ্যাস, চিকিৎসা আদিকে ধৰি দৈনন্দিন জীৱনৰ সকলোবোৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত প্ৰাকৃতিকভাৱে আহৰিত জ্ঞানসমূহ প্ৰয়োগ বৰ্তমানেও নাৰীসমাজে নিজৰ লগতে সমাজখনতো জীয়াই ৰাখিছে।

#### সামৰণি :

মূল বিষয়ৰ আলোচনাৰ পৰা হয়তো প্ৰশ্ন উত্থাপিত হ’ব পাৰে যে পুৰুষসকলৰ প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণত কোনোধৰণৰ অৱদান নাই নেকি? উত্তৰ হিচাপে উল্লেখনীয় হ’ব যে মাতৃতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাৰ প্ৰাধান্য কমি আহি পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাৰ লগে লগে নাৰী-পুৰুষৰ মাজৰ কাম-কাজসমূহলৈও বিভাজন আহিল। পূৰ্বতে পুৰুষ নাৰী উভয়ে সকলো কাম একেলগে কৰিছিল। একেলগে চিকাৰ কৰিবলৈ গৈছিল, শস্য উৎপাদন কৰিছিল। সময় পৰিৱৰ্তনৰ লগে লগে পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক উদ্ভাৱিকাৰীৰ কথা আহিল, সম্পত্তিৰ অধিকাৰ আহিল, যাৰ ফলত নাৰী-পুৰুষৰ দায়িত্বসমূহো পৃথক পৃথক হ’ল। ঘৰৰ ভিতৰুৱা কাম-কাজ যেনে ৰন্ধা-বাটা, সম্পত্তিৰ হিচাপ ৰখা, হাঁহ-কুকুৰা পোহা। নিজৰ সন্তান প্ৰতিপালন কৰা আদি দায়িত্ববোৰ মহিলাসকলৰ ওপৰত দিয়া হ’ল। আদিম সমাজৰ এই পৰম্পৰা আজিও খিলঞ্জীয়া নাৰীসকলৰ মাজত প্ৰতিফলিত হয়। বাহিৰৰ সমাজখনৰ পৰা ভিতৰলৈ সোমাই নাৰীসকলে তেওঁলোকৰ মাজত গঢ়ি তুলিছিল এখন সংৰক্ষণশীল সমাজ। সেই সমাজখনত নাৰীয়ে আহৰণ কৰা প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণ হৈছিল। সমাজ জীৱনৰ বাবে প্ৰয়োজনীয় প্ৰাকৃতিকভাৱে আহৰিত জ্ঞানসমূহ মাকৰ পৰা জীয়েকে, শাহুৰ পৰা বোৱাৰীয়েকে শিকিছিল আৰু এইদৰে মৌখিক জ্ঞানসমূহ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰো অন্তৰ্ভুক্ত হৈ পৰিল।

এনেভাৰেই নাৰীয়ে এটা প্ৰজন্মৰ পৰা আন এটা প্ৰজন্মলৈ লোক-সংস্কৃতিৰ অন্তৰ্গত জ্ঞান প্ৰদান কৰি প্ৰাকৃতিক জ্ঞানৰ সংৰক্ষণৰ গুৰু দায়িত্ব আজিও পালন কৰি আহিছে।

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তৰুণ লইং

অৰ্ঘ্যেয়া মহন্ত

লোকপিয়ল অনুসৰি মিচিংসকল অসমৰ দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যাগৰিষ্ঠ ভৈয়াম জনজাতি। নৃতাত্ত্বিক বিশ্লেষণত তেওঁলোক মঙ্গোলীয় প্ৰজাতিৰ লোক আৰু তেওঁলোকৰ ভাষাটো চীন-তিব্বতীয় ভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ তিব্বত-বৰ্মী শাখাৰ উত্তৰ-অসম উপশাখাৰ অন্তৰ্গত। মিচিং জনজাতিৰ লোকসকল বৰ্তমান অসমৰ ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰৰ উত্তৰ পাৰে ধেমাজি, উত্তৰ লখিমপুৰ, বিশ্বনাথ, শোণিতপুৰ, মাজুলী আৰু দক্ষিণ পাৰে তিনিচুকীয়া, ডিব্ৰুগড়, বৰহাট, যোৰহাট, গোলাঘাট জিলাত বসতি কৰি আছে। তদুপৰি অৰুণাচল প্ৰদেশৰ চিয়াং, নামচাই জিলাতো মিচিংসকলৰ বসতি পোৱা যায়। এই জনজাতিৰ লোকসকল নিজা সাংস্কৃতিক উপাদানেৰে চহকী হোৱাৰ লগতে সেইবোৰৰ সংৰক্ষণত তেওঁলোক অতিশয় সচেতন।

সংস্কৃতিৰ এক অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংগ হৈছে লোক-খাদ্য। মিচিংসকলৰ লোক-খাদ্য পুষ্টিৰ তথা স্বাস্থ্যকৰ হোৱাৰ লগতে সেইবোৰ সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পৰা ব্যৱস্থা তেওঁলোকৰ মাজত প্ৰচলিত হৈ আহিছে। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে এই লোক-খাদ্য প্ৰস্তুতকৰণ আৰু সংৰক্ষণত ঘাইকৈ মিচিং নাৰীসকলে ভূমিকা লয়। মিচিং জনজাতিৰ লোক-খাদ্যসমূহৰ ভিতৰত আমিষ খাদ্যৰ প্ৰচলনেই বেছি আৰু সেই খাদ্যবোৰ প্ৰাকৃতিকভাৱে বহুদিনলৈকে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখাৰ কিছুমান পদ্ধতি নাৰীসকলে অৱলম্বন কৰে। বাঁহৰ চুঙাত বনৌষধি গুণযুক্ত মানিমুনি, ঢেকীয়া, বিহলঙনীৰ আগ, টেঙেচীৰ পাতৰে শুকান মাছ উড়ালত খুন্দি লৈ নাম্‌চিং প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হয় আৰু সেই নাম্‌চিং বছৰ বছৰ ধৰি খোৱাৰ উপযোগী হৈ থাকে। ঠিক সেইদৰে গাহৰি মাংস, গাহৰিৰ পেটু, কুকুৰা মাংস, অন্যান্য চৰাই-চিৰিকতিৰ মাংস মীৰাম (জুহাল)ৰ ওপৰত ধোঁৱাচাঙত এমাহমানলৈকে শুকুৱাই ছমাহ-এবছৰৰ পাছতো খাব পৰাকৈ সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা হয়। মিচিংসকলৰ চাউলৰ পৰা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা পানীয় দুই প্ৰকাৰৰ পোৱা যায় — নগিন আপং আৰু পংৰং আপং। এই দুবিধ পানীয় প্ৰস্তুতকৰণ আৰু সংৰক্ষণতো কেৱল নাৰীসকলৰ ভূমিকাই প্ৰধান। মাছ, মাংস, আপঙৰ উপৰি কাঠ আলু, মিঠা আলু, শিমলু আলু, নহৰু আদি বিশেষ পদ্ধতিৰে কেইবামাহলৈও তেওঁলোকে সংৰক্ষণ কৰে আৰু সেই সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিবোৰ মূলতঃ নাৰীসকলৰ দ্বাৰাই সম্পাদিত হয়। এই লোক-খাদ্য মিচিং নাৰীসকলে কেনেদৰে প্ৰস্তুত কৰে? এইবোৰৰ

সংৰক্ষণত মিচিং নাৰীসকলে কেনেদৰে আগভাগ লয়? বিজ্ঞানসন্মতভাৱে খাদ্য সংৰক্ষণ কৰা জ্ঞান তেওঁলোকৰ আছেনে — এই সকলোবোৰ দিশ সামৰি মিচিং জনজাতিৰ লোক-খাদ্য সংৰক্ষণত নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা সম্পৰ্কে এক মূল্যায়ন আগবঢ়াবলৈ এই আলোচনা-পত্ৰত প্ৰয়াস কৰা হৈছে।

সূচক শব্দ : লোক-খাদ্য, নাম্‌চিং, আপং, মৌৰাম (জুহাল)।

### পদ্ধতি :

গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত প্ৰধানকৈ বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতি প্ৰয়োগ কৰা হৈছে। মূলতঃ প্ৰাথমিক সমলৰ ওপৰত ভিত্তি কৰি গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছে। এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনৰ বাবে ক্ষেত্ৰভিত্তিক অধ্যয়ন কৰোঁতে বিভিন্ন জনৰ পৰা আহৰণ কৰা মৌখিক সমলক আধাৰ হিচাপে লোৱা হৈছে। দ্বিতীয়তে গৌণ সমল হিচাপে বিভিন্ন গ্ৰন্থৰ সহায় লোৱা হৈছে।

### পানীয় সংৰক্ষণত মিচিং নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা :

মিচিংসকলৰ মূল উৎসৱ অনুষ্ঠান যেনে - আলি-আই-লুগাং, পংৰাগ, ডুবুৰ, ওৰম্ আদিত প্ৰচুৰ পৰিমাণে আপং বা চাউলৰ পৰা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা পৰম্পৰাগত পানীয়ৰ প্ৰয়োজন হয়। সেই আপং প্ৰস্তুত কৰিবৰ বাবে মিচিং সমাজত পুৰুষসকলৰ কোনো অৱদান নাথাকে। তেওঁলোকে কেৱল চাউলমুঠি উলিয়াই দিয়েই নিজৰ দায়িত্ব সামৰে। আপঙত ব্যৱহাৰ হোৱা আপব প্ৰস্তুতকৰণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত নাৰীসকলে ঔষধি গুণযুক্ত বনৰীয়া শাক, লতাজাতীয় উদ্ভিদ, গুল্মজাতীয় উদ্ভিদৰ পাত আদি গোটাই সেইবোৰেৰে আপব প্ৰস্তুত কৰে। আপবৰ বাবে প্ৰথমে বিভিন্ন বনৌষধ, যেনে - জালুক, জলকীয়া, বিহলঙনি, পিপ্লি, হালধি, মধুৰি পাত, কঁঠাল পাত, ৰাম্‌নাম আননী (ঘাঁহজাতীয় উদ্ভিদ), তিতা চম্পা পাত, ইনজাৰী (ঘাঁহজাতীয় উদ্ভিদ), আদা পাত, তাপাত পুংকেৰ, ইক্‌ছেদ-ইকয়েদ (এবিধ লতা), মাৰ্চাং (মালাকাঠী), ভেদাইলতা, লং, ইলাচি, যম লাখুটি, পপতে আদি এশ-এবুৰি পত্ৰ-লতিকা বুটলি আনি ধুই টুকুৰা-টুকুৰকৈ কাটি ৰ'দত দুই-তিনিদিন শুকুৱাই ভিজা চাউলৰ লগত মিহলাই উৰালত খুন্দি ঘূৰণীয়াকৈ বা চেপেটা-ঘূৰণীয়া কৰি খেৰেৰে মেৰিয়াই ৰ'দ নতুবা ধোঁৱাচাঙত শুকুৱাই পূৰ্ণ হ'বলৈ দিয়ে।<sup>১</sup> নগিন আপং বা বগা আপঙৰ প্ৰস্তুত কৰা সময়ত এখন ডাঙৰ ডলা উলিয়াই তাত সিজোৱা চাউলখিনি চৌদিশে বহলাই সমান কৰি তাত আপব পিঠা মিহলি কৰা হয়। সেই আপবৰ সৈতে মিহলোৱা সিজোৱা চাউলখিনি এটা মাটিৰ কলহত ভৰাই দিয়া হয় আৰু পোক-পৰুৱা, জেঠী, পঁইতাচোৰা নোসোমাবৰ বাবে আৰু লগতে সেই মিশ্ৰণখিনি পানীয় ৰূপ ল'বলৈ এটা কলহত ভৰাই কলপাতেৰে সেই কলহৰ সন্মুখত টানকৈ সোপা দি ৰখা হয়। তেনেকৈ ৰখাৰ তিনি দিনমানৰ পিছত মিশ্ৰণখিনি কলহৰ পৰা উলিয়াই খৰাহী এটাত ৰাখি অলপমান পানী মিহলি কৰি টানকৈ চেপি দিয়া হয়। সেই মিশ্ৰণখিনিৰ পৰা নিঃসৰিত ৰসখিনিয়েই হৈছে নগিন আপং। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে এই আপং পোন্ধৰ দিনমানলৈকে মাটিৰ কলহত সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰি আৰু এই সংৰক্ষণে নাৰীসকলেই কৰে। মিচিংসকলে ঘৰলৈ আলহী আহিলে এই আপং আগবঢ়ায় নাইবা ঘৰৰ গৃহস্থয়ো প্ৰতিদিনে এই পানীয় গ্ৰহণ কৰে। বৰ্তমান

মিচিংসকলে আপঙৰ সলনি চাহ বা তামোলোৰেও আলহীক আপ্যায়ন কৰে। বিশেষকৈ বৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মত দীক্ষিতসকলে আপঙৰ পৰিবৰ্তে চাহ বা অন্যান্য খাদ্য আগবঢ়ায়।

মিচিংসকলৰ আন এবিধ পানীয় হৈছে পংৰং আপং বা ছাই মদ। সেই পংৰং আপং প্ৰস্তুতকৰণ প্ৰণালী অতি কষ্টকৰ আৰু নগিন আপং প্ৰস্তুত প্ৰণালীতকৈ কিছু পৃথক। দদগাং, পংৰাগ, ওৰম্ আদি মৃতকৰ শ্ৰাদ্ধ অনুষ্ঠান, বিভিন্ন ধৰ্মীয় অনুষ্ঠানত এই আপং থকাটো বাধ্যতামূলক। এই আপং প্ৰস্তুতকৰণতো পুৰুষৰ কোনো ভূমিকা নাথাকে। কেৱল মহিলাসকলেহে ছাই মদ বা পংৰং আপঙত ব্যৱহাৰ সামগ্ৰীখিনি জৈৱিক পদ্ধতি অৱলম্বন কৰি প্ৰায় দুমাহমানলৈকে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখি এই আপং প্ৰস্তুত কৰে। এই আপং প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে ধানখেৰ আৰু তুঁহ জুইৰ ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। প্ৰথমতে চাউলখিনি সিজাই লোৱা হয়। সেই আধা পোৰা সিজোৱা চাউল আৰু ধানখেৰ চোতালত জ্বলাই দিয়া তুঁহ আৰু ধানখেৰৰ ছাইখিনিৰ সৈতে আপব মিহলাই কলপাতেৰে বাঁহৰ টোমৰ ভিতৰত চৌদিশে বতাহ সোমাব নোৱৰাকৈ প্ৰায় এমাহৰ পৰা দুমাহ ধৰি গাপ দি সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা হয়। তাংচুক বা পংবৰত (শংকু আকৃতিৰ সামগ্ৰী) কলপাতেৰে মেৰিয়াই এই মিশ্ৰণখিনি ৰাখি তাত পানী ঢালি দিয়া হয়। তাৰ পৰা পৰিষ্কাৰণ হৈ যিখিনি পানীৰ ৰস নিৰ্গত হয় সেইখিনিয়েই হৈছে পংৰং আপং বা ছাই মদ। এইবিধ আপং তিনিদিনলৈকে খোৱাৰ উপযোগী হৈ থাকে। সম্প্ৰতি আপং প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে মাটিৰ কলহৰ পৰিবৰ্তে পলিথিনেৰে তৈয়াৰী মোনা কলহৰ ঠাইত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰাৰ উপৰি পংৰং আপং ঢাকিবৰ বাবেও কলপাত বা কৌপাতৰ সলনি ৰঙীন পলিথিন ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা দেখা যায়। কিন্তু দেখা যায় যে আপং প্ৰস্তুতকৰণৰ লগত পলিথিন ব্যৱহাৰ কৰাটো অত্যন্ত স্বাস্থ্য হানিকাৰক। আপঙত থকা বিভিন্ন ধৰণৰ এলক'হলকে আদি কৰি দ্ৰব্যসমূহে Bleacher-ৰ দৰে কাম কৰি পলিথিনত থকা ৰং আৰু অন্যান্য দ্ৰব্যসমূহ ধুই লৈ আহি আপঙৰ লগত মানুহৰ শৰীৰত প্ৰৱেশ কৰি কেঞ্চাৰৰ দৰে বিভিন্ন ৰোগৰ সৃষ্টি কৰাৰ সম্ভাৱনাই অধিক।<sup>২</sup>

### আমিষ খাদ্য সংৰক্ষণত মিচিং নাৰীৰ ভূমিকা :

#### মাছ সংৰক্ষণ :

নাম্‌চিং প্ৰস্তুতকৰণ আৰু সংৰক্ষণ : আমিষ আহাৰৰ ভিতৰত শুকান মাছৰ পৰা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা নাম্‌চিং (শুকতি)য়েই সবাতোকৈ দীঘল সময় ধৰি সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰি। কোনো ৰাসায়নিক দ্ৰব্য ব্যৱহাৰ নকৰাকৈ দহ- বাৰ বছৰ পৰ্যন্ত বাঁহৰ চুঙাত নাম্‌চিং সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পৰাটো মিচিং নাৰীসকলৰ অন্যতম কৃতিত্ব। খাদ্য সংৰক্ষণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বৈজ্ঞানিক পদ্ধতি অৱলম্বন কৰা অন্যতম নাৰী হিচাপে ওপলোকক আখ্যায়িত কৰিব পাৰি। মিচিংসকলৰ উপৰি অসমৰ উত্তৰ পূৰ্বাঞ্চলত থকা পাহাৰীয়া লোকসকলৰ মাজতো নাম্‌চিঙৰ প্ৰচলন দেখা পোৱা যায়।<sup>৩</sup>

নাম্‌চিং প্ৰস্তুতকৰণত পুৰুষসকলে বাঁহৰ চুঙা শুকুৱাই যোগান ধৰাৰ বাদে আনুষংগিক কোনো ভূমিকা নাই বুলিয়েই ক'ব পাৰি। মিচিং নাৰীয়ে কিংপাৰত (উৰাল) শুকান মাছ জাতিলাওৰ আগ, টেকীয়া, মানিমুনি, পচলা, টেঙেচি টেঙা, বাঁহৰ গাজ আদি কেঁচা অৱস্থাতেই শুকান মাছৰ লগত মিহলি কৰি খুন্দি



চুঙাত ভৰাই থয়। প্ৰায় এমাহৰ পিছৰ পৰা খোৱাৰ উপযোগী হোৱা নাম্‌চিং পানীৰ সংস্পৰ্শলৈ নাহিলে দহ-বাৰ বছৰ পৰ্যন্ত খাদ্যোপযোগী হৈ থাকে। মন কৰিবলগীয়া যে নাম্‌চিং দীৰ্ঘ সময় ভাল হৈ থাকিবৰ বাবে তাত বতাহ সোমাবলৈ দিব নালাগিব।

নাম্‌চিং মিচিং সমাজত একপ্ৰকাৰ মৰ্যাদাসম্পন্ন খাদ্য হিচাপেও সামাজিক স্বীকৃতি আছে। কাৰোবাৰ ঘৰলৈ আলহী খাবলৈ গ'লে বা কাৰোবাৰ ঘৰলৈ মিতিৰ-কুটুমৰ আগমন ঘটিলে নাম্‌চিঙৰ চুঙা একোটা উপহাৰ হিচাপে আগবঢ়োৱা হয়। মিচিং ঐনিতমত উল্লেখ পোৱা যায় ---

নাম্‌চিং অতুং দুংগেৰলাই

আঙাৰাঙে এমদুবনে

(অৰ্থাৎ “নাম্‌চিং থাকোঁতেও শুদা ভাত বুলি কয় কৈছা।”) প্ৰকৃতাৰ্থত বছৰৰ বাৰমাহে মিচিং সমাজত নাম্‌চিং থকাটো অপৰিহাৰ্য বুলিয়েই গণ্য কৰা হয়। সাধাৰণতে দেখা যায় যে মাছজাতীয় খাদ্যবোৰ শুকান কৰি ল'লেও এটা সময়ত পোকে ধৰে বা ভেঁকুৰি যায়; কিন্তু নাম্‌চিঙৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত দেখা যায় যে ইয়াৰ প্ৰস্তুত প্ৰণালীত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা ঔষধি গুণযুক্ত উদ্ভিদ আৰু সংৰক্ষণ কৰা পদ্ধতিৰ বাবে এই খাদ্য বছৰ বছৰ ধৰি খোৱাৰ উপযোগী হৈ থাকে। সেয়া নিঃসন্দেহে মিচিং নাৰীৰ লোকখাদ্য সংৰক্ষণৰ বিজ্ঞানসন্মত নিপুণ কৌশল।

**শুকান মাছ সংৰক্ষণ :** মিচিংসকলে নাম্‌চিঙৰ দৰে শুকান মাছো সংৰক্ষণ কৰিব জানে। বাংলাভাষী লোকসকলে মাটিত বহুদিন ধৰি মাছ পুতি থৈ ‘হিদ্‌ল’ নামৰ এবিধ খাদ্য প্ৰস্তুত কৰে; কিন্তু মিচিং নাৰীসকলে সেই পদ্ধতিৰ বিপৰীতে মাছৰ পেটু উলিয়াই লৈ মাছখিনি এফালে আৰু পেটুখিনি আনফালে ৰাখি চাৰি-পাঁচদিনমান টান ৰ'দত কৰ্ককৰীয়াকৈ শুকাবলৈ দিয়ে। মাছৰ পেটুখিনি কিঃপাৰ (উৰাল)ত খুন্দি লৈ বতাহ সোমাব নোৱৰাকৈ মাটিৰ কলহত ভৰাই ৰখা হয়। এই পদ্ধতি অৱলম্বন কৰি মিচিং নাৰীসকলে শুকান মাছ দুইৰ পৰা তিনি বছৰ পৰ্যন্ত খাবৰ উপযুক্ত হৈ থাকাকৈ সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখে। বতাহ বা পানীৰ সংস্পৰ্শ নাপালে শুকান মাছবোৰ ভেঁকুৰি নাযায় আৰু পোকেও নধৰে। শুকান মাছ সংৰক্ষণৰ এই বিজ্ঞানসন্মত পদ্ধতিটো মিচিং নাৰীসকলেহে অৱলম্বন কৰে। এইক্ষেত্ৰত পুৰুষসকলৰ কোনো ভূমিকা নাথাকে।

**(ক) বাকলি থকা মাছৰ সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** বৌ মাছ, বাছ মাছ, মিৰিকা, খৰিয়া, কুড়ি আদি বাকলি থকা মাছবোৰৰ পেটু কাটি বাকলিবোৰ কেঁচা অৱস্থাতেই আঁতৰাই টুকুৰা-টুকুৰকৈ কাটি তিনি-চাৰিটামান টান ৰ'দত কৰ্ককৰীয়াকৈ শুকুৱাই লোৱা হয়। এইক্ষেত্ৰত মাছবোৰৰ মূৰবোৰ আঁতৰাই ৰখা হয়। প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দত শুকুওৱাৰ পিছত দুদিনমান ধোঁৱাচাঙত এনেভাৱে শুকুওৱা হয় যাতে অঙঃ আদিন (মাছৰ টুকুৰাবোৰ) টান হৈ পৰে। এনেদৰে ৰ'দ আৰু ধোঁৱাচাঙত শুকুৱাৰ পিছত মাছৰ টুকুৰাবোৰ ৰঙা আৰু ধোঁৱা বৰণীয়া হৈ পৰে। সেই মাছৰ টুকুৰাবোৰ পানীত ভালদৰে ধুই পুনৰ ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই দিয়া হয়। সাধাৰণতে শুকান হালধি, আদা আদি লগত মিহলাই শুকান মাছবোৰ মাটিৰ কলহত ভৰাই থোৱা হয়। এই পদ্ধতিত শুকান মাছ আঠ-ন বছৰলৈকে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা হয়। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে হালধি, আদা আদি দিয়া হয় যদিও নিমখ কোনো

কাৰণতে মাছৰ লগত দিয়া নহয়। মাছখিনি বহুবছৰ ধৰি খাদ্য উপযোগী কৰি ৰাখিবলৈ পানী, নিমখ আদিৰ সংস্পৰ্শলৈ আহিবলৈ নিদিয়াৰ লগতে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা পাত্ৰটোত বতাহ সোমাব নোৱৰাটোও অতি জৰুৰী।

**(খ) বাকলি নথকা মাছৰ সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** বৰালি, আঁৰি, মাগুৰ, শিঙি, বামি আদি বাকলি নথকা মাছ পেটু কাটি মিচিংসকলে বাকলি থকা মাছৰ দৰেই টুকুৰা-টুকুৰকৈ কাটি মূৰ আঁতৰাই টান ৰ'দত শুকুওৱাই সাধাৰণতে মাছৰ টুকুৰাবোৰ দুআঙুলমান জোখত কাটিলে সংৰক্ষণৰ বাবে বেছি সুবিধাজনক হয়। বাকলি নথকা মাছবোৰো বাকলি থকা মাছৰ পদ্ধতি অৱলম্বন কৰিয়েই সংৰক্ষণ কৰা হয়। এই সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিত মাছবোৰ পাঁচ-ছয়বছৰলৈকে খাব পাৰি। অৱশ্যে বৰালি মাছ বাকলি থকা মাছৰ দৰেই আঠ-নবছৰমানলৈকে খাদ্যোপযোগী হৈ থাকে।

**(গ) সৰু মাছৰ সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** মাছৰ ভিতৰত আটাইতকৈ বেছি শুকুৱাই ৰাখি সংৰক্ষণ কৰা মাছবিধেই হৈছে নাৰ মাছ। মিচিং ভাষাত ‘নাৰে’ মানে হৈছে - চাফা বা পৰিষ্কাৰ। সেই ‘নাৰে’ শব্দৰ পৰাই নাৰ শব্দটো হৈছে বুলি মিচিংসকলে ক'ব খোজে। নাৰ মাছ সাধাৰণতে শাওণ-ভাদ আৰু আহিন মাহত বেছিকৈ পোৱা যায়। মিচিংসকলৰ এই মাছ অতিকৈ প্ৰিয়। কাৰণ এই নাৰ মাছৰ নাম্‌চিঙেই হওক বা অন্যান্য ঙচান অঙঃই হওক ইয়াৰ চাহিদা আটাইতকৈ বেছি। কিয়নো নাৰ মাছবোৰৰ বাকলি আঁতৰোৱাৰ প্ৰয়োজন নাই। কেৱল পেটু কাটিয়েই ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই সংৰক্ষণ কৰিব পৰা যায়। মিচিং অধুষিত অঞ্চলসমূহত মাছত অহা উজানৰ ভিতৰত নাৰ মাছৰ উজানেই সকলোতকৈ বেছি। মিচিংসকলে নাৰ মাছৰ বাবে নদী বিচাৰি বিচাৰি দুৰ্গম অঞ্চলত বসবাস কৰে। সেয়ে কোৱা হয় মিচিংসকলক নদীয়ে খেদাতকৈ তেওঁলোকেহে নদীক বিচাৰি খেদি ফুৰে। নাৰ মাছৰ এটা উজানতেই এঘৰ মিচিং মানুহ এবছৰৰ কাৰণে শুকান মাছ, নাম্‌চিং আদি প্ৰস্তুত কৰি ল'ব পাৰে। সেই আটাইবোৰ সংৰক্ষণৰ কলা-কৌশল মিচিং নাৰীসকলেহে জানে।

**মাংস সংৰক্ষণ :**

**ঙচান এগু আদিন (শুকান গাহৰি মাংস) :** গাহৰি মাংস মিচিংসকলৰ অন্যতম প্ৰিয় খাদ্য। দদ্‌গাং, ওৰমু নাইবা তেনেধৰণৰ মাংগলিক অনুষ্ঠানত গাহৰি বধ কৰাটো মিচিংসকলৰ এক পৰম্পৰা বুলিব পাৰি। অনুষ্ঠান আয়োজন কৰা গৃহস্থৰ কাৰণে গাহৰিবোৰৰ তপিনা, কলিজা, পেটু আদি ৰাখি থোৱা হয়। আলহী আহিলে গৃহস্থই দুইৰ পৰা তিনিদিনলৈকে ধোঁৱাচাঙত শুকুৱাই ৰখা গাহৰি মাংস আলহীক আপ্যায়ন কৰোঁতে আগবঢ়ায়।

মিচিংসকলে গাহৰিটো টুকুৰা-টুকুৰকৈ কটাৰ পিছত নাৰীসকলে দীৰ্ঘদিন ধৰি সংৰক্ষণ কৰাৰ উদ্দেশ্যে ধোঁৱাচাঙত অতি কমেও এসপ্তাহ শুকুৱাই ৰাখে। মাংস, কলিজা, পেটু আদিৰ পৰা চৰ্বিৰ তেল, পানী আদি নোহোৱা হৈ যেতিয়া সকলোবোৰে এটা শুষ্ক ৰূপ লয়, তেতিয়া সেইখিনি মাটিৰ কলহ বা বাঁহৰ পাত্ৰত বতাহ সোমাব নোৱৰাকৈ ৰাখি দুইৰ পৰা তিনি বছৰ পৰ্যন্ত মাংসখিনি সংৰক্ষণ কৰে। অৱশ্যে কোনোবা আলহী-অতিথি আহিলে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰখা মাংসখিনি উলিয়াই প্ৰয়োজনীয় অংশবোৰ কাটি বাকী অংশবোৰ পুনৰ ধোঁৱাচাঙত দুদিনমান শুকাবলৈ দি পাত্ৰত বতাহ সোমাবলৈ নিদিয়াকৈ ভৰাই সংৰক্ষণ কৰা হয়।

**ঙচান পৰগু আদিন (মুগী মাংস) সংৰক্ষণ :** গাহৰি মাংসৰ পিছতেই মিচিংসকলৰ প্ৰিয় খাদ্য হৈছে পৰগু



আদিন বা মুৰ্গী মাংস। মিচিংসকলে মুৰ্গী কাটি পেটু, ভুৰু আদি উলিয়াই আচিন (কলিজা) আঃদে (আমঠু), আন মাংস কাটি টুকুৰা-টুকুৰ কৰি সিজাই লয়। অৱশ্যে তিনিদিনমান ধোঁৱাচাঙত ৰখা হয়। মাংসত থকা পানীবোৰ শুকাই মাংসখিনি কনকণীয়া হোৱাৰ পিছত কাচৰ পাত্ৰত ৰখা হয়। তেনে কৰোঁতে টানকৈ সাঁফৰ মাৰি ৰাখিব লাগে যাতে বাহিৰৰ পৰা বতাহ নোসোমায় বা পানীৰ সংস্পৰ্শলৈ আহিব নোৱাৰে। তেনেদৰে মুৰ্গী মাংস দুবছৰমান সংৰক্ষণ কৰি খোৱাৰ উপযোগী কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰি। পূৰ্বতে মিচিংসকলে বনৰীয়া চৰাইৰ মাংসও সংৰক্ষণ কৰিছিল; কিন্তু ভাৰত চৰকাৰৰ বন আইনৰ পিছৰ পৰা এই প্ৰথা লোপ পালে।

**শাক-পাচলি সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** মিচিং মহিলাসকলে শাক-পাচলি সংৰক্ষণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত বিশেষ ভূমিকা লয়। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে পুৰুষসকলৰ বেছিভাগেই শাক-পাচলি সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিটোৰ বিষয়ে জ্ঞাত নহয়। সেয়েহে মিচিং নাৰীসকলক শাক-পাচলি সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ৰাণী বুলিও কোৱা হয়। তলত শাক-পাচলি সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিৰ সম্পৰ্কে চমু আলচ যুগুত কৰা হ'ল -----

**পাৰঃ তাপা (কোমোৰা) সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** পাৰঃ তাপা (কোমোৰা) সংৰক্ষণ অসমৰ অন্যান্য জনগোষ্ঠীৰ দৰে মিচিংসকলেও বহুদিন ধৰি সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰে। পুৰঠ চালত বা চাঙত যিফালে এবছৰমান ঢাল খাই আছিল ছিঙি অনাৰ পিছত সেই কোমোৰাটো সেইফালেই ঢাল খুৱাই ৰখা হয়। অন্যথা ইয়াক দীৰ্ঘদিন সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব নোৱাৰি। কোমোৰাটো দুই-তিনি আঙুলকৈ দীঘে দীঘে টুকুৰা কৰি গুটিবোৰ আঁতৰাই ছয়-সাতটামান প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দত টুকুৰাবোৰ শুকুৱাই মাটিৰ টেকেলিত ভৰাই ৰখা হয়। এই পদ্ধতিত দুবছৰলৈকে কোমোৰা সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পৰা যায়। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে এই পদ্ধতিত কোমোৰা হাঁহ, কুকুৰা আদি মাংসৰ লগত ৰন্ধাৰ পিছত খাবলৈ ইমানেই সোৱাদ হয় যে কোমোৰাৰ টুকুৰাটো কোমোৰা নে মাংস তাক ধৰিব পৰা নাযায়।

**ইংকুং (গাজটেঙা) সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** ভলুকা বাঁহৰ গাজ কাটি আনি বাকলি এৰুৱাই চকলা-চকলকৈ কাটি চাৰি-পাঁচটামান টান ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই ৰখা হয়। এনেদৰে শুকুওৱাৰ পিছত কাচৰ বৈয়ামত ৰাখি তিনিবছৰলৈকে গাহৰি মাংস, শুকান মাছ, কেঁচা মাছ, আঙ্গুন অইং (খুদ চাউলেৰে প্ৰস্তুত কৰি সিজোৱা আঞ্জাবিশেষ), মুৰ্গী মাংসৰ লগত খোৱা হয়। গাজটেঙাৰ সৈতে মিঠাতেল মিহলাই ৰাখিলে তিনি-চাৰিবছৰতকৈও অধিক দিন ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিব পৰা হৈ থাকে।

**তুলৈ অয়িং (লাই শাক) সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** লাই শাকক মিচিং ভাষাত 'তুলৈ অয়িং' বুলি কোৱা হয়। 'তুলৈ অয়িং' সংৰক্ষণ কৰিবলৈ প্ৰথমে লাইশাকখিনি ধুই টান ৰ'দত দিব লাগে। ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই লোৱাৰ পিছত শাকখিনি মিহিকৈ কুটি উৰালত খুন্দি লোৱা হয়। খুন্দি লোৱাৰ পিছত লাইশাকখিনি কলপাতেৰে ভালদৰে মেৰিয়াই লৈ মাটিত পাঁচদিনমানৰ বাবে পুতি থোৱা হয়। মাটিত পুতি থওঁতে শাকখিনিত মাটিৰ স্পৰ্শ যাতে নালাগে সেই কথালৈ লক্ষ্য ৰাখিব লাগে। পাঁচদিনমানৰ পিছত সেইখিনি উলিয়াই পুনৰ ৰ'দত দিয়া হয়। ভালদৰে ৰ'দ পোৱাৰ পিছত লাইশাকখিনি কলহত ভৰাই টানকৈ মুখনি মাৰি বতাহ সোমাব নোৱাৰাকৈ ৰখা হয়। এই পৰম্পৰাগত সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতিৰে লাই শাক চাৰি-পাঁচবছৰ পৰ্যন্ত সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰি। এই লাই শাক মাছ বা মাংসৰ সৈতে খাবলৈ অতি তৃপ্তিদায়ক।

**তালাৰ (নহৰু) সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** নহৰুৰ বাকলিবোৰ আঁতৰাই কিঃপাৰ (উৰাল)ত কেঁচাতে খুন্দি ৰ'দত চাৰি-পাঁচদিনমানলৈ শুকাবলৈ দিয়া হয়। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে মিচিংসকলে মাছ, মাংসৰ পৰা আৰম্ভ কৰি বেছিভাগ খাদ্য-সামগ্ৰী শুকুৱাওঁতে সাধাৰণতে ধোঁৱাচাঙত কিছুদিন শুকুৱাই লয়; কিন্তু নহৰু সংৰক্ষণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ধোঁৱাচাঙৰ পৰিবৰ্তে কেৱল ৰ'দতেই শুকুওৱা হয়। তেনেকৈ ৰ'দত শুকুৱাৰ পিছত কাচৰ বৈয়াম বা মাটিৰ কলহত টানকৈ ঢাকনি দি ৰখা হয়। নহৰুৰ উপৰি নহৰুৰ পাত বা নলাবোৰ কেঁচা অৱস্থাতেই খুন্দি দুই-তিনিদিনমান প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই কলপাত বা তৰাপাতেৰে মেৰিয়াই মাটিত তিনিদিনমান পুতি ৰখা হয়। মাটিৰ পৰা উলিয়াই আনি নহৰুৰ পাতখিনি পুনৰ দুদিনমান ৰ'দত দিয়া হয়। তেনেদৰে সেই পাতখিনিকো কাচৰ বৈয়াম বা মাটিৰ কলহত বতাহ সোমাব নোৱাৰাকৈ ৰখা হয়। এই পদ্ধতিৰে নহৰুৰ ফুট আৰু পাত পাঁচ-ছয়বছৰলৈকে সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পাৰি।

**তাকে (আদা) সংৰক্ষণ পদ্ধতি :** মিচিং ভাষাত আদাক 'তাকে' বুলি কোৱা হয়। আদা শব্দটোৰ লগত মিচিংসকলৰ মিবু বা পুৰুহিতে গোৱা 'আঃবাং' (পুৰোহিতে গোৱা বিশেষ গীত) গোৱা যায়। সেয়ে আদাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ মিচিং সমাজত অতি প্ৰাচীন বুলিয়েই ক'ব পাৰি। অৱশ্যে মিবুসকলে তেওঁলোকৰ ভাষাত তাকেৰ (আদা) পৰিবৰ্তে 'বোম্বে চিবুং' বুলি কয়। সেয়ে মিচিংসকলৰ মাংগলিক কামত আদাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ অনস্বীকাৰ্য। মিচিংসকলে আদা গোটাকৈ পানীত সিজাই লৈ কেইবাটাও ৰ'দত দি আদাৰ পৰা পানীখিনি শুকাবলৈ দিয়ে। এনেদৰে শুকুওৱাৰ পিছত কলহত টান সাঁফৰ দি আদাখিনি দহ-বাৰ বছৰ পৰ্যন্ত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰে।

**পেংৰেড কাৰ (মাটি মাহৰ পৰা প্ৰস্তুত কৰা খাৰ) :** মিচিংসকলৰ পেংৰেড অয়িং (মাটি মাহৰ আঞ্জা) অতিকৈ প্ৰিয়। মাটি মাহ সাধাৰণতে এবছৰতকৈ বেছি দিন সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখিব পৰা নাযায়। কেইবাটাও প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দত মাটি মাহ শুকুৱাই ৰখাৰ পিছতো খুউব বেছি ১০-১২ মাহ মানহে যায়। মিচিংসকলে মাটি মাহ মাৰিবলৈ প্ৰায় ৩০ বৰ্গফুটৰ এডো খৰ মাটি কোৰেৰে চাফা কৰি লয় - যাক কোৱা হয় কুলা। সেই কুলাখনত মাটি মাহবোৰ চপাই লৈ শুকান অৱস্থাত মাটি মাহৰ গা-গছবোৰ (তুণ) জমা কৰি মৰণা মাৰে। মাটি মাহৰ মৰণা মৰাৰ পিছত গা-গছসহ বাকী থকা জাবৰখিনি কুলাখনত জুই লগাই দিয়ে। জুই দিয়া মাটি মাহৰ পৰা যিখিনি অৱশিষ্ট ছাই ৰৈ যায় সেইখিনিকে মিচিংসকলে 'কাৰ' (খাৰ) বুলি কয়। সেই খাৰখিনি মাটিৰ কলহত ভালদৰে সোপা দি ৰাখিলে দুবছৰলৈকে 'পেংৰেড অয়িঙ'ৰ উপৰি অন্যান্য আঞ্জাৰ লগত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিব পাৰি। মাটি মাহৰ আঞ্জাৰ লগত খাৰ সংমিশ্ৰণ নকৰিলে আঞ্জাখন 'পাগ নুঠা' বুলি কয়। অৰ্থাৎ মাটি মাহৰ আঞ্জাৰ লগত খাৰ অপৰিহাৰ্য। মিচিংসকলে মাটি মাহৰ লগত শুকান মাছ, গাহৰি মাংস, হাঁহ মাংস, নাম্‌চিং আদি সংমিশ্ৰণ কৰি আঞ্জা প্ৰস্তুত কৰে। মাটি মাহৰ খাৰ মিচিংসকলে আঞ্জাত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰে।

**আলাং (বগৰী আচাৰ) :** মিচিং অধ্যুষিত অঞ্চলসমূহ নদীপৰীয়া হোৱাৰ বাবে নদীৰ পাৰৰ চাপৰিত বগৰী গছ প্ৰচুৰ পৰিমাণে পোৱা যায়। মাঘ মাহত বগৰী ফলবোৰ পুৰঠ হোৱাৰ পিছত সেইবোৰ পাৰি আনি ৰ'দত শুকুৱাই ৰাখে। ছয় মাহমানৰ পিছত সেই শুকান বগৰীবোৰ কিঃপাৰত (উৰাল) খুন্দি মিহিকৈ গুৰি কৰা হয়। গৰম দিনত অতি প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দত যেতিয়া পথাৰলৈ আছ ধান নিৰাবলৈ যাওঁতে নাইবা আছ ধান চপাওঁতে বগৰী

গুৰিখিনিৰ লগত পানী মিহলাই চৰবতৰ দৰে খোৱা হয়। সেই চৰবতে দেহ শীতল কৰাৰ লগতে প্ৰখৰ ৰ'দৰ লগত তিষ্ঠি থাকিব পৰাকৈ শক্তি প্ৰদান কৰে। সেই বগৰীৰ পৰা নিৰ্মিত চৰবত ৰাসায়নিক পদাৰ্থৰে মিহলাই প্ৰস্তুত কৰা ক'কাকোলা, পেপচি আদি ঠাণ্ডা পানীয়তকৈ বহুগুণে বিজ্ঞানসন্মত। ইয়াৰ উপৰি আম, নৰা বগৰী আদি শুকুৱাই অসমৰ অন্যান্য জনগোষ্ঠীৰ দৰে দীৰ্ঘদিন ধৰি সংৰক্ষণ কৰি ৰাখে। অৱশ্যে আচাৰ প্ৰস্তুত কৰা পদ্ধতিটো মিচিংসকলে অন্যান্য জনগোষ্ঠীৰ পৰাহে শিকিছে বুলি ক'ব পাৰি।

**উপসংহাৰ :** সময়ৰ পৰিবৰ্তনৰ লগে লগে মিচিংসকলৰ খাদ্য সংৰক্ষণৰ ব্যৱস্থাও সলনি হ'বলৈ ধৰিছে। বিশেষকৈ বনাঞ্চলসমূহ সংকুচিত হোৱাৰ ফলত বিভিন্ন প্ৰজাতিৰ ঔষধি গুণযুক্ত উদ্ভিদবোৰ ক্ৰমাৎ লোপ পাবলৈ ধৰিছে আৰু লগতে নৱ-প্ৰজন্মই সেইবোৰ উদ্ভিদৰ উপকাৰিতা, ব্যৱহাৰ আদিৰ বিষয়ে জ্ঞাত নহয়। মিচিংসকলৰ প্ৰঃ আপং বৃক্ষৰ পাথৰজনিত সমস্যা, পেটৰ বিভিন্ন ধৰণৰ ৰোগ আদিত মহৌষধ হিচাপে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা হয়। এইক্ষেত্ৰত অসম চৰকাৰ, মিচিং স্বায়ত্ব শাসিত পৰিষদ, জাতীয় সংগঠনে আগভাগ লোৱাৰ উপৰি প্ৰঃ আপঙৰ ভৌগোলিক সূচক চিহ্ন (Geographical Indication) পঞ্জীয়নৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰি এই সম্পদ সংৰক্ষণ কৰাটো অত্যন্ত জৰুৰী।

#### গ্ৰন্থপঞ্জী :

- দলে, বসন্ত কুমাৰ : মিচিং সমাজ-সংস্কৃতিৰ সমীক্ষা, চন্দ্ৰ প্ৰকাশ, পাণবজাৰ, গুৱাহাটী-১, জানুৱাৰী ২০০৮  
 দলে, হেমচন্দ্ৰ, দলে, জীপেন (সম্পা.) : মিচিং জনজাতি, সদৌ গুৱাহাটী মিচিং কীবাং, প্ৰথম প্ৰকাশ, ফেব্ৰুৱাৰী, ২০১৯  
 পেণ্ড, ডাঃ নোমল : মিচিংসকলৰ ইতিবৃত্ত আৰু সংস্কৃতি, মনোমতী পেণ্ড, ডিব্ৰুগড়, ২০০০  
 মৰাং, বাসন্তী : নাৰী আৰু সমাজ-সংস্কৃতি, ৰঞ্জিত তামুলী, নিউ বাসুদেৱ বুক ষ্টল, ঢকুৱাখনা, প্ৰথম প্ৰকাশ, ৯ মে', ২০১৯  
 লইং, মুহিৰাম : মিচিং লোক-সংস্কৃতি, অংকুৰণ শাখা সাহিত্য সভা, ৰজাবাৰী, বোকাখাত, ডিচেম্বৰ, ২০০০

#### তথ্য দাতা / তালিকা :

- ১। তিলেশ্বৰী লইং, গৃহিনী, চোমনি টেম্বেৰা গাঁও, গোলাঘাট জিলা, বয়স ৭৩ বছৰ।
- ২। কমলেশ্বৰী মৰাং, গৃহিনী, চামগুৰি মিৰি গাঁও, উত্তৰ লক্ষীমপুৰ, বয়স ৭১ বছৰ।
- ৩। নাথুৰাম পেণ্ড, বৰচাপৰি গাঁও, গোলাঘাট জিলা, বয়স ৮২ বছৰ।
- ৪। ভণ্ডি পেণ্ড, বৰচাপৰি গাঁও, গোলাঘাট জিলা, বয়স ৭৫ বছৰ।
- ৫। মিনু পাচুং, বাঁহগুৰি গাঁও, গোলাঘাট জিলা, বয়স ৬২ বছৰ।
- ৬। কুমাৰী পলং মিলি, হেৰহেৰি গাঁও, গোলাঘাট জিলা, বয়স ৬৫ বছৰ।

## Merging Identity with Nature : Reading Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* from an Ecofeminist Perspective

*Lalsanlevis Nampui*

#### Abstract:

Considering the corpus of literature from different writers of North East India, especially of writings in English, the theme of identity has been found greatly addressed or indirectly celebrated in these works. Writing itself can be seen as an act of survival for many of the blooming writers with their roots and origin steeped into the mystifying lands of the North East. Hence, the land and its people make a dominant appearance with nature forming as one of the shades of entity for the many hill dwellers or significantly, hill communities of this region. Such is essentially the case of Mamang Dai, a noted literary figure of Arunachal Pradesh (of India) constantly speaking for the soul of the enchanting lands of Arunachal. This paper is mainly directed towards an analytical reading of one of her successful works, *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) to underline the spirituality of Ecofeminism reverberated through many of the stories recounted in the legends. It is important to associate again how nature, women and identity assimilate with each other, presenting stories of the past which however cannot be delinked with the present. The joys of the bygone days in oneness with nature and beings, the threats to identity-of the self (of inclusion and seclusion from nature) and the community (at the extended level for distancing with nature) and the waiting for a hopeful day act as reminders for human life restrained with power struggle, changing notions of identity and diminution of individuality. The power play engaging identities both high and low in the day to day life is deeply resonant as Mamang Dai unravels beautiful, at times strange, mysterious and innocent stories of living characters in the legends.

**Keywords :** identity, literature, nature, ecofeminism.

The term, 'identity' attains a very emphatic note when it brings into focus the vibrant milieu of North East India. It is strongly vital and can be easily related to struggle, assertion (its recognition and acceptance narrowed down greatly here generally) and large scale manifestations. Many a times, it can be problematic when simply interchanged with ethnicity where marginalization and marginalizing tend to overlap each other. Whatever history or histories could be connected with the people of this region, commonly called 'North-East Region' or 'Northeast India', the perception of tribal identity in particular has now gone through some modifications for the better in place of fixity and stereotyping. Though commonly adjoined with remoteness, which in turn is interpreted for backwardness and violence chiefly highlighted as everyday survival struggle; the present picture of North East India as painted by the contemporary writers in English is beyond these views. Political and economic developments again might not be so visible but literature has then contributed much to the expression of life and people living among the hills. It is undeniable that literature remarkably has a high potential to capture reality partially, extensively or even wholly. And so, with the kind of representation through the current writers coming from North-Eastern India, there are not only the facets of reality but the notion of identity tends to acquire a fresh treatment; capable to draw lines of assimilation and universalising along the mainstream. This paper is an attempt to underline the perspectives of identity conjoined with nature and also to highlight the ecocritical perspectives and more of ecofeminism through an analytic study of *The Legends of Pensam*, first published in the year, 2016 and written by Mamang Dai, another noted contemporary writer hailing from Arunachal Pradesh of North East India.

#### **Literature for Crafting Identity :**

Literature embodies printed information along with artistic merit. The intrinsic worth and power of power is this body is immense and immeasurable. In creating space for the common lives of the hill folks in the world of literature, North East writers invariably are attempting identity construction at all levels- individual, collective, regional or national. They tell stories not only about terror and violence but blended discourse on democracy, freedom, nationhood, territorial affiliation and peace. Their narrative or discourse also matters since literature always makes room for inclusion, it is meant for all and unaffected by territorial margins and cultural diversifications. It never disappoints when dealing with the human condition, often evoking thought and feeling. Literature has the enabling power to assimilate all under the same umbrella, with the condition of being (whether human or non-human). It speaks about humanity and also of the loss of humanity. The context is all that vary and writers from this part of the country cannot be simply viewed as representing their social and literary tradition alone. In fact, these writers find their voice and create perspective through

arrays of culture, history, daily experience, race, gender and folklore. It would indeed be a difficult task to state down the primary characteristics of literary conventions coming from this particular region. In North East India, we come across several languages, religion not only one- Hinduism, Buddhism, Animism, Islam, Sikhism and Christianity existing along each other. Thus, when we are confronted with the word, identity; it is imperative to understand what the substantial mark of identity is. As we admit heterogeneity as a remarkable aspect of the social and political life of the people, can identity be merely based on race, language, region or religion? Here, in the literary world we find celebration of nature, heritage, landscape and also the conscious attempts to emphasize the possibilities of change, to move outside territorial identification, search for relationships and commonalities.

#### **Shaping Identity and Nature into One :**

North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) as the old name of Arunachal Pradesh truly subscribes to its name as very much a frontier land. The dwelling place of the sun-god, Aruna; geographically the state shares its boundaries with the neighbouring countries of Bhutan, Tibet and Burma. However, historically the land had been almost a virgin land largely undisturbed by outsiders, neighbours and colonial exploiters. It is perhaps for this reason that myths and folk traditions continue to exist and regulate the simple lives dwelling among the hilly tracts. Mamang Dai, a journalist and former civil servant in *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) presents a host of ancient legends of the Adis in particular retold by some people out of memory. It can be mentioned that memory in fact becomes a potent device for the artless narration of stories that follows which becomes mystifying, captivating and surprising all at once. In a very impressive and convincing manner, she takes the reader on to a journey that is much scintillating such that it seems like a leap into the distant past and the world seen with awe, admiration and wonder. The life of the Adis depicted here shows them with animistic faith yet endearing and fulfilling in the embrace of nature. The tiny but old villages lie surrounded by dense forest or placed on high mountain passes. In the words of the author herself, "Isolation has been the best protection for the pristine forests and rich bio-diversity of Arunachal." (Dai xii). Story telling fills the most part of this book except for the songs of the rhapsodist chanting his songs amidst the hidden mountains. In an attempt to connect the fine threads of stories retold, two important things become visibly clear-forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world.

The world of *Pensam* though remote is greatly unaffected by humdrums of the so-called modern but restless life forms. Here, the villages heave with life as if welling up with revelations and mystery. A web of magic seems to glitter, encircling over the lives of the innocent folks where all things seemed possible and true. There is a resurfacing of ancient

culture, traditional myths and practices take place with nature as a primeval force upon the lives of people. To this can be added the vital issue of how ecology itself has been used as a metaphor for culture. The people, their food habits, dress, dance, music, folk festivals etc. cannot be viewed as existing apart from the natural environment. Likewise, it would not be so difficult to identify the ecocritical perspectives permeated through the numerous stories related by the characters.

‘They had surrendered ancestral lands to the government and now the road and the things that came with it seemed...to steal their identity like a thief’, (Dai 156-157)

And then, “The tree made an indescribable sound as it fell, and Larik thought, ‘The old tree is weeping’.” (Dai 159)

Like Larik from the story of ‘the road’, the readers are drawn to the environmental woes perpetrated under disguised urbanisation or development. This infringement upon nature/environment largely developed in the mid nineteenth century with industrialization comes into view. This apparently creates focus on the resulting split between culture and civilization. The release of scientific approach with a propensity for both boon and curse can be counted as one of the primary causes for ecological imbalance or environmental crisis. The awareness of the threat to the natural environment has been ventilated at several occasions in the book. Changes in the picture of yesterday and today are sharply noticed by characters like Rakut’s father and Hoxo’s father who could testify of Stilwell Road demanding a high toll of human lives, of a no man’s land where the only people living there (past the Lake of No Return) are the men with guns. (Dai 41). In one of her poems, “The Voice of the Mountain”, this same view recurs when Dai writes-

We live in territories forever ancient and new,  
And as we speak in changing languages  
I, also, leave my spear leaning by the tree. [12-14]

The voice of the mountain is also the voice of the narrator; the voices unite to claim that the world is forever changing but peace and permanence are still out of hand. The yesteryears are more endearing with the immortal sun, mountains and rocks like the past recreating itself through thousands of years. The young turns old and is gone, however, the waning nature can still outline the chapters of the world. A growing concern about the defects of mindless developments affecting nature extensively can be easily reached to as the inhabitants of Pensam indirectly draw a comparison between the early years and the present. Through the mode of memory or recollection, the sharp contrast is drawn. At every point there is an underlying acknowledgement of identity with nature and a growing sense of gradual alienation from nature in many of the stories. Besides ecocritical perspectives making

its way, often there is a case of moral dilemma in case of identity. In other words, for this hill community which had found abode only in nature; how much are they to identify with the past (whose identity is merged with nature) and how far are they to go ahead?

It is interesting to note that their identity is rooted in nature itself. As we look at characters or story tellers like Hoxo, Pinyar and Nenem, they have been known and identified themselves with the elements of nature alone. Hoxo was believed that he belonged to the sky, people called him as the boy who fell from the sky. Pinyar again, though a widow was gifted in her young age to make the best ‘si-ye cakes’ among women by a small race of supernatural beings called the ‘miti-mili’. The legendary beauty, Nenem has been called ‘river woman’ and every villager who knew her would remark that she was like the river. These kinds of characters have to spend their whole lives among the forests, rivers and hills but if at all, they were to be removed from their ordinary environment, they become most perceptible to identity crisis. Here again is a clear depiction of how identity has been merged with the objects of nature, how the living conditions of these folks are very much shaped and dependent on the providence of nature. In this context, the process of culture and civilization are undoubtedly affiliated to nature in several ways. Nature is not simply an object of worship for them but the basis of identity and existence is interdependent on nature.

#### **Drawing Lines of Ecofeminism :**

Environmental issues in the west and the east have different pictures to offer. Of the west, it is mainly of the massive exploitation of natural environment in its heady race of capitalism. Meanwhile, in the east, specially referring to the third world countries, environmentalism is directed towards uncontrolled poverty and economic crisis as the major reasons behind ecological degradation. In the third world nations, there is often a dearth of land for the poor and hence conservation of forests or protection of wilderness is not all significant for that section or group of society who are thriving under acute poverty. However, the western notions of nature have been retained largely in the east. For example, the concept of nature versus culture is one where women are equated with nature and with culture. Here again, the image of nature is essentially figured as a feminine gender and hence reference to the nature as ‘mother nature’. Thus emerges ecofeminism from the mainstream of ecocriticism towards the end of the twentieth century. Under ecocriticism, older myths and religious beliefs find profound significance for nature is revered. Either human or non-human, all lives remain embedded in nature. Ecofeminists not only legitimise female power but also give importance to women’s knowledge. They argue that the pre-modern cultures were more suitable for ecology as nature was then held with far greater respect. Keeping in view the ecofeminist spirituality, it comes to sharp notice that *The Legends of Pensam* offers penetrating

thoughts on the identity of women and nature as lying in the same train of thought. At certain point, this book clearly explains how both women and nature are equally exploited by the male ways of thinking and action. At another point, it shows how the female characters share much of their identity with nature, thereby establishing the fact that a woman's relationship with the environment is far stronger than man's. Identity of women resurfaces when taken into consideration their nature, work, knowledge and situatedness.

Right from the beginning, the legends of Pensam seep in ancient and folksy tales with the characters taking part in the narration. Unreasonable the stories might seem to some but reversing the androcentric priority of reason over emotion is what radical ecofeminism would easily allow, here is the tacit overthrow of reason at large. This then enables the intricate weaving of tales through oral tradition and recollection. The world of these folk tales brings the memorable and sweet picture of nature in the past right before the eyes. Nature was then likable to the pristine form, its bond with humans far reliable and better experienced. There are also parallels drawn of the women characters with the objects of nature.

'Hah! Listen to this bird! You should be careful.' (Dai 76)

Here, old Me-me chides young Ari when she expressed her desire to be reborn as a bird to be able to fly. She then finds herself instructed that it is only through marriage and achieving motherhood, she would be able to realise her true worth in life. Arsi is called a bird and not innocent for her childish longings, just like it is very common to refer a young dame to a bird. As a woman, as she is to yield to marriage in order to attain her worth, nature too is eminently expected to yield for the human needs. The story ends with a prayer to the earth, 'Grant us blessings. Give us food. Oh! Great mother! Protect us!' (Dai 79)

The legendary beauty, Nenem who has been called river woman was once admitted to the first mission school in a town across the river. Her illness rescued her from the school which she actually hated, she later tells her friends that while her time at school she was most frightened with the thought of not being able to see the river again. Later as she grew up into a beautiful lady, she easily found the attraction of a young British official, David whom she could not herself resist from. Their relation did not end well as David left the village while Nenem was unwilling to follow him. Their love story somehow had a connection with ripe oranges, which served as the chief occasion for David to approach Nenem and for Nenem to cherish her old memories by planting orange grove in her garden even after marrying Kao. No one ever understood why she planted orange trees. And in the end, she breathed her last just beyond the orange trees as she went to fetch water. Kao bore the pain silently to watch his wife and was later buried in the grove of the orange trees. Here, Kao could also see the changes that were taking in his land. He saw 'the plainsmen and their co-conspirators from

the hills who came to bring down the old trees and flatten the hills' (Dai 130). He noted with his meticulous eye how the hidden life forms in the ancient body of the earth were being uprooted. The land was changing and so also the lives of the people. Yet Nenem's pain of loving the one she truly loved remained with her till the end. Had David stayed back for the sake of their relation, Nenem would not feel her dying even after blessed with a loving husband and child. The manner in which Nenem lay struck with heart pain in love that never found any cure and how the environment in which she lived remained continually inflicted create a striking note of similarity here. As a woman, Nenem sacrificed her love for the land and her land lay unprotected and desecrated in the hands of constructors and road builders.

For characters like Rakut, 'change is a wonderful thing. It is a simple matter of rearrangement, a moment of great possibilities... Hoxo pointed out the green engot plant growing wild near the house from which a green dye could be extracted (Dai 190-191). He thinks that everything was available for nature to provide. They were however, unable to fully realise that 'the texture and the speed of change' was already making visible impressions all across the land. In Pico, during the sowing season and its celebration, a visitor would still see the green hills, green bamboo and the green rivers flowing in all directions. Besides this, it was now very common to see young men on motorcycles roaring across the stones while young picnickers wearing fake fur and woollen caps waved at passers-by. Again, Motum village team for volleyball was disqualified because one of their players tried to play holding a bottle of beer in one hand. In the end, the narrator holding up the old binoculars peers into the glass. The old lens began to clearly show the distant canopy of trees and a river stretching like an ocean. In the distance was also the sight of narrow apartment blocks, grubby streets and bamboo scaffolding.

### **Conclusion :**

The change or transformation taking place in the lives of many of the characters in the stories is often marked as sudden and drastic. The increasing number of widows for hunting accidents did not find any solution for the poor widows. Here, we consider sufferings in the case of not only the women section but also of the dangers to the wildlife system from hunters. Life seemed unchanging to the suffering but the environment became not only polluted but also subjected to several forms of exploitation. Identification of women with nature has remained the same but there is also a rising awareness of the degrading environment in the long run, *The Legends of Pensam* strikes on the same note besides impressing the readers with the art of narration. What is more identical here are the level of persecution and the extent of misery borne on to these two entities in the name of the so-called, laws of nature or destiny. It would not be overtly abrasive to suggest that the environment needs a quick

healing and it requires the healing protection not only from women but also from men without giving up.

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## Women Agripreneurs in Mushroom Cultivation and Food Processing: A Step Towards Sustainable Agricultural Development

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### Abstract:

Sustainable business ventures are concerned with conserving the community and nature while creating a product or service. Agripreneurs continue to study and adopt sustainable processes of farming, commercial prospects across the agribusiness cycle and overcoming agribusiness hazards. They are continually looking for methods to make their businesses more sustainable. Involvement of agripreneurs in mushroom cultivation and food processing not only act as their source of livelihood but also contribute to sustainable agriculture and its development. Considering this, the study primarily focus on presenting the contribution of mushroom cultivation and food processing on sustainable agriculture. On the other hand, women are actively contributing in the development of the agricultural sector and their participation in the agri-business activities lead to the generation of women agripreneurs. Thus, this paper emphasizes on identifying the relationship between the profiles of women agripreneurs involved in mushroom cultivation and food processing and their annual turnover from their agri-ventures. The study adopted an empirical research design and it was conducted in eight districts of the state of Assam. The samples were selected using multi-stage sampling and ANOVA, t-test, correlation, mean, percentage and frequency were used to analyse the data. The result shows that educational qualification of women agripreneurs and business training have significant impact on the annual turnover of their business. Improving these two factors can lead to the enhancement of business performance of women agripreneurs in particular and sustainable agricultural development in general.

**Keywords :** *Women, agripreneurs, sustainable agriculture, Assam, mushroom cultivation, food processing.*

## Introduction

Sustainable entrepreneurship is an emerging issue in today's world. Sustainable development is the development of a nation that occurs without depleting the environment. This concept has been defined in various manners but the core of it revolves around the idea of overall development of a nation without working against nature. Padmavathi stated that “for the long-term prosperity of the nation, development should not be just motivated by one need without considering the wider impact of the action” (Padmavathi, 2011). Sustainable development through entrepreneurial ventures can lead to an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable society. Another important emerging issue in the world is the empowerment of women of a nation. Women play a very important part in the development of any nation. It is of paramount importance that the effort should be taken towards the development of the female population of a nation. Sustainable development of women is needed to be focused on in order to develop an economy (Ambepitiya 2013; Sharma, 2020). By encouraging more and more women towards sustainable business ventures the nation can eradicate two issues at one go. One such step towards a sustainable development is empowering women by motivating them to become entrepreneurs. Women in entrepreneurship have a very significant potential in generating economic growth for a nation. As per a report by Forbes India, it has been identified that women comprise 13.76 percent of the entrepreneurs in India. It has also been identified that women own only 20.37 percent of the MSMEs in India. This indicates that there is a need to increase the number of women players in the field of entrepreneurship.

It has been established that the role of a woman in the development of a nation is very crucial. Recently it has been observed that “with the increase in the level of unemployment in India, more and more women are entering into agripreneurial business ventures” (Mahajan et.al. 2020). In recent years the number of women agripreneurs in India has increased. This is also observed in the state of Assam. At this stage of transformation women should be encouraged towards sustainable business ventures and this can be achieved through education and appropriate training. To encourage them towards sustainable business ventures, they must be enlightened on how they can increase the profitability of the sustainable business venture with minimal investment.

This study has mainly focused on women agripreneurs in Assam. Assam is an agrarian state with 75 percent of the population involved in agricultural practices. Assam Agriculture University, in its study on ‘Agricultural Draft Policy’ explained that “in Assam, there is huge untapped opportunity for fruitful employment of the youths in the agricultural sector, particularly, in secondary agriculture which adds value to agricultural products”. It is generally agreed

that “Assam has a high potential for the development of agricultural entrepreneurship with the opportunities mainly in the food processing sector” (Borah, 2018). As per National Family Health Survey, 2019-21, it was reported that there are 1012 women per 1000 males in Assam. This indicates that the majority of the population in Assam comprises of women. Thus, encouraging the women population of the state towards entrepreneurial activities will not only help in fighting with unemployment but will also lead to a healthy growth of the national economy.

Moreover, it is to be considered that there are various agricultural practices that might not be sustainable to the environment. Some of the most common practices are the use of chemicals to induce the growth of an agricultural product, growing genetically modified organisms, deforestation as a result of the requirement of more land area, etc. “These practices are not only deteriorating nature but also harmful for the health of a human being” (Sharma et al. 2019). People are therefore looking for organically produced products as they are produced without the use of chemicals and are healthy to be consumed by a human being. Mushroom cultivation is one such organically grown product that is also sustainable in nature. This requires a very small amount of land and the growth rate of this product is very high as well. “Mushroom cultivation can directly improve the livelihood through nutritional, economical and medicinal contributions” (Shahi et al. 2018). Mushroom cultivation is becoming the preferable agribusiness activity among the agripreneurs due to minimum requirement of land and space for its production. “It not only adds to the health benefit of human beings but also its substrate can be used to produce high yield biogas” (Chavez et al. 2019). “India generates around 273.3 million tons of crop leftovers each year, and it has been calculated that if only 0.5% of the residue is employed in mushroom production, the amount of mushroom cultivation can be boosted to 300,000 tons” (Mishra 2008). On the other hand, food processing is one of the significant form of sustainable business venture, as through this process one can preserve a product and increase the longevity of the food product. It adds value to the agricultural product and helps in making mass availability of the products. These two forms of agriventure activities mainly show their utility not only for agricultural development but also for sustainable approach. Given this, the study primarily highlighted the importance of mushroom farming and food processing to sustainable agriculture.

However, concentrating on the sustainability of a venture is not enough, it is important to consider the profitability of a business venture. There are a number of factors that act as an influencing factor towards a profitable business venture. Some of these factors involve the education level of the entrepreneur, and the training acquired by them. It is required to analyse if these factors will also help agripreneurs in increasing their revenue in a year. Women,

on the other hand, are actively contributing to the growth of the agricultural sector, and their involvement in agri-business activities results in the formation of female agripreneurs. Women agripreneurs are adopting sustainable methods through agriculture, but it should support their livelihood.

It has been established that mushroom cultivation and food processing are sustainable forms of business ventures, however, there is a need to increase the growth rate of these business ventures to generate more annual turnover. Considering previous studies it has been observed that profile of the entrepreneurs helps in enhancing their business performance, so in this study, the researchers focus on determining the association of the profile of the women agripreneurs with the annual turnover of their agriventures.

**Objective**

The purpose of the study is to establish the association between the profile of women agripreneurs engaged in mushroom cultivation and food processing and their annual revenue from their agriventures.

**Materials and Methods**

To achieve the objective of the study, an empirical research approach was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Assam, situated in the north-eastern region of India. The data were collected from 131 women agripreneurs, from different areas of Assam. In this study a multi-stage sampling technique was applied to select the respondents. Assam has six agro-climatic zones and 35 districts. To select the districts, in the first stage, out of 6 agro-climatic zones 4 were selected, these zones were Upper Brahmaputra valley zone, Lower Brahmaputra Valley zone, North Bank Plain Zone and Central Brahmaputra Zone. In the second stage, two districts were selected from each zones. These districts were, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur from North Bank plain Zone, Jorhat and Majuli from Upper Brahmaputra Valley Zone, Kamrup Rural and Kamrup Metro from Lower Brahmaputra Valley zone and Nagaon and Hojai from Central Brahmaputra Valley zone. In the third stage, women agripreneurs were selected purposively from the selected districts with the help of Agriculture Development Officers and Agricultural Extension Agents who are considered expert in accessing the ongoing agriventure activities within their jurisdiction.

For choosing the respondents from the selected districts, judgement sampling was employed. The judgement was on the basis that only those women agripreneurs were selected who were commercially involved in mushroom cultivation and food processing. No specific list of women agripreneurs in each of the districts was identified, as such the researchers purposively chose from among the available women agripreneurs identified when visiting the District Agriculture Office of the selected districts. Table 1 shows the sample distribution of

women agripreneurs across the selected districts of Assam.

**Table 1: Sample distribution of women agripreneurs across selected districts of Assam**

Districts	Number of samples
Lakhimpur	12
Sonitpur	14
Jorhat	2
Majuli	32
Nagaon	14
Hojai	19
Kamrup Metro	18
Kamrup Rural	20
Total	131

For the purpose of the study, information on age, educational qualification, age of business, business training, agriventure activities and annual turnover were collected from women agripreneurs using a structured schedule. Data on respondent’s age, age of business and annual turnover were collected using a continuous scale. Later they were categorised to nominal scale for presentation. The hypotheses were tested using ANOVA and independent t-test, where the annual turnover was considered as the dependent variable, and educational qualification, business age, and business training were taken as the independent variables for the respective tests. ANOVA, t-test and correlation were used only after fulfilling the required assumptions, which included the test of normality using Shapiro-Wilk test, and homogeneity of variance using Levene’s test. Further, Pearson correlation, frequency, percentage and mean were also used to provide an in-depth analysis of the data with the help of the SPSS software.

The following hypotheses were formulated for achieving the objective of the study:  
H<sub>01</sub> : There exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different levels of educational qualification of women agripreneurs  
H<sub>02</sub> : There exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different slabs of business age of women agripreneurs  
H<sub>03</sub> : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean score of annual turnover between the trained and untrained women agripreneurs



Discussion

The respondents of the study belonged to different profiles based on their education qualification, agri-venture activities, business age, business training, and annual turnover. The profile of the respondents has been displayed in table 2 below.

Table 2: Profile of women agripreneurs

Sl. No.	Particulars	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
1.	<b>Agri-venture activities</b>		
	Mushroom cultivation	30	22.9
	Food-processing	46	35.1
	Both	55	42
2.	<b>Educational Qualification</b>		
	Below class 10th	8	6.1
	Matriculation	20	15.3
	Higher Secondary	52	39.7
	Graduation	51	38.9
3.	<b>Business Training</b>		
	Yes	85	64.9
	No	46	35.1
4.	<b>Business Age</b>		
	5 -9 yrs	78	59.5
	10-14 yrs	39	28.9
	15-19ys	6	4.6
	20-24 yrs	8	6.1
5.	<b>Annual Turnover</b>		
	1-10 lakhs	90	68.7
	11-20 lakhs	32	24.4
	21 -30lakhs	7	5.3
	31-40 lakhs	2	1.5

Source : Data collected by researcher

Table 2 shows that out of 131 respondents of women agripreneurs, 22.9% are involved in mushroom cultivation, 35.1% in food processing and remaining 42% are engaged

in both of the agri-venture activities. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the women agripreneurs are carrying mushroom cultivation with food processing. On analysing the educational qualification of women agripreneurs, it was found that most of the respondents, i.e. 39.7% were higher secondary passed, followed by 38.9% graduates, 15.3% have passed matriculation and qualification with below class 10 were 6.1%. From the table we can see that 5 to 9 yrs slab covered the highest (59.5%) share of the respondents’ business age, from which we can infer that most of the women agripreneurs are in the developing phase of their agri-venture. Based on the new segregation of MSME in India, under the MSME Act, 2006, it was found that annual turnover of all the respondents, fell under micro enterprises. Therefore, further segregation was made to make detailed analysis which presented that annual turnover of the 90% of the respondents fall within 1- 10 lakhs slab, and only 1.5% of the respondents have the annual turnover within 31 – 40 lakhs.

For testing the Hypothesis  $H_{01}$ , ANOVA was conducted, considering educational qualification of the respondents as the categorical variable.

Table 3: Results of  $H_{01}$

Hypothesis	p-value
$H_{01}$ : There exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different levels of educational qualification of women agripreneurs	0.000

Table 3 depicts the summary of ANOVA where it shows that p-value is 0.000 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis “there exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different levels of educational qualification of women agripreneurs” is rejected. This indicates that educational qualification of women agripreneurs affect the annual turnover of their agriventure activity. Huarng et al. stated that “on analysing 155 women entrepreneurs also found that lack of education among women entrepreneurs was one of the significant variables that relates with the difficulty they face in running their business”(495).

Table 4: Descriptive analysis between educational qualification and annual turnover

Educational Qualification	Number of respondents	Mean
Below Class 10	8	3.88
Matriculation	20	5.40
Higher Secondary	52	9.31
Graduation	51	14.08

To make further analysis between educational qualification and annual turnover of women agripreneurs, we have presented table 4. The mean scores of annual turnover of women agripreneurs are seen to have increased with the increase in their educational qualification. It can be observed that the mean score of women agripreneurs with graduation degree is highest, i.e. 14.08, followed by a mean score of 9.31 among higher secondary passed respondents. Further, a mean value of 5.40 was derived among women agripreneurs who have passed matriculation and the lowest mean value of 3.88 was derived among women agripreneurs with educational qualification of below class 10. So, it can be concluded that women agripreneurs with higher educational qualifications generate more annual turnover in their business.

For testing the Hypothesis  $H_{02}$ , ANOVA was conducted, considering business age of the respondents as the categorical variable.

Table 5: Results of  $H_{02}$

Hypothesis	p-value
$H_{02}$ : There exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different slabs of business age of women agripreneurs	0.981

Table 5 depicts the summary of ANOVA where it shows that p-value is 0.981 which is more than the level of significance 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis “there exists no statistically significant difference in the mean value of the annual turnover among the different slabs of business age of women agripreneurs” is not rejected. This indicates that the business age of women agripreneurs does not affect the annual turnover of their agriventure activity. For testing the Hypothesis  $H_{03}$ , independent t-test was conducted, considering business training attained by the respondents as the categorical variable.

Table 6: Results of  $H_{02}$

Hypothesis	p-value
$H_{03}$ : There is no statistically significant difference in the mean score of annual turnover between the trained and untrained women agripreneurs	0.038

Table 6 depicts the summary of independent t-test where it shows that p-value is 0.038 which is less than the level of significance 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis ‘there is no statistically significant difference in the mean score of annual turnovers between the trained and untrained women agripreneurs’ is rejected. This indicates that business training attained by the women agripreneurs affect the annual turnover of their agriventures activity.

To get an in-depth view of the nature of the association between the business training attained by the women agripreneurs and their annual turnover, Pearson correlation was employed. The results of the correlation test have been depicted in table 7.

Table 7: Correlation between business training and annual turnover

Particulars	Business Training	Annual Turnover
Pearson Correlation	1	0.182
Sig (2-tailed)		0.38
N	131	131
Pearson Correlation	0.182	1
Sig (2-tailed)	0.38	
N	131	131

Table 7, shows that there is positive correlation between the business training attained by the women agripreneurs, and their annual turnover. Similar result was also presented by Bauer on evaluating the “perception of women entrepreneurs with respect to the business training” they procured(23). The author found that participation of the respondents in the business training programs acted a key factor in their business growth in the later stage

Findings:

The purpose of the study is to establish the association between the profile of women agripreneurs engaged in mushroom cultivation and food processing and their annual revenue from their agriventures. The study has taken into consideration women agripreneurs involved in mushroom cultivation and food processing. The analysis revealed the majority of the women agripreneurs were engaged in both mushroom cultivation and food processing. Based on the result of business age, a very less number of women agripreneurs seemed to have more experience in their business. Here, three factors relating to the profile of the women

agripreneurs - educational qualification, business age and training were considered. The relationships of these three factors, with the annual turnover of the women agripreneurs were analysed. Statistical tests – ANOVA, independent t-test and correlation was conducted to test the hypothesis formulated for the study. The result of the respective tests shows that the educational qualification of the women agripreneurs and the business training attained by them has a significant impact on their annual turnover. On the contrary, the business age factor was identified to have no significant impact on the annual turnover of the women agripreneurs.

### Conclusion:

Women entrepreneurs face several challenges in running their business which includes lack of finance, access to market information, gender discrimination, social and cultural boundaries, balance between home and work responsibilities. Mitchelmore and Rowley stated “above all inferior education and training pose a major hindrance for women entrepreneurs in their successful business growth” (139). Prior studies have established that the “education qualification, training, and the business experience of the women entrepreneurs affects their access to finance”, suggesting that their financial knowledge and experience has an impact on their business performance (Khaleque 37). In the case of the women agripreneurs in Assam, the study identified that educational qualification and training has the potential to enhance the business performance. It was established through the analysis conducted in this study that the women entrepreneurs who have received business training were able to yield better annual turnover compared to those who have not acquired any business training. Similarly, the increase in the level of education of the women agripreneurs positively impacted the annual turnover of their business ventures. The higher the level of education, the higher is their annual turnover. However, contrary to prior studies, the business age or experience of the women agripreneurs did not have any significant impact on their annual turnover. When it comes to sustainable farming techniques it is assumed that the level of profitability is very low, as the amount of investment in such techniques of farming is high. Mushroom cultivation and food processing require a very low amount of investment and its production can be increased with minimal effort. It was observed that this can be achieved through education and business training provided to the women agripreneurs involved in such businesses. Thus, it can be concluded that for enhancing the profitability of the sustainable businesses, proper education and training should be given to the agripreneurs. Such a step will not only encourage women empowerment but also support sustainable livelihood in the long run.

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## Of ‘in-between’ Spaces and Varied Transgressions : Reinterpreting Women-Nature Relationships in Temsula Ao’s Writings

*Dr. Namrata Pathak*

### **Abstract :**

The allegiance of women to the world of nature in most of Ao’s writings gives birth to a malleable responsibility to create and invent, to produce a strong sense of geography. There are some stances which we need to discuss herein. Firstly, a woman is shown to assume the autonomy of different life worlds. Interestingly, Ao’s texts unfold certain set-ups of formative and transformative human action and historically shifting values. Ao’s women characters do justice to the writer’s romantic aspiration of giving voice to the voiceless and empowerment to the powerless in the invasive stretch of her land. Secondly, the rhetorical questions on fragmented world-views, on a litany of disaster, are taken headlong by her women characters. The fractured Naga lives dictated by violence and insurgency, troubled at the face of manipulation, violation, and betrayal, find a moment of release in that robust moment when the women are placed as enunciators and transgressors of normative spaces. The woman finds herself in the free space of the groves and forests, marshlands and water bodies, places that reflect her resourceful, elusive, and wily ways of life. By roping in instances from Ao’s collection of short stories, *Laburnum for My Head*, the paper aims to look at women-nature relationships which unfurls a fertile site for developing a praxis of ‘in-betweenness’; a node of intersection between the human and non-human that relies deeply on shared nourishment, love and sustenance.

**Key words:** *Eco consciousness, Ecology, Non Human, Eco feminism, Space, In-betweenness*

### **Introduction**

In Temsula Ao’s writings we come across women navigating in the face of the most pressing dangers in the Naga territory. Most of the women imagine life-affirming alternatives, and these imaginations through time and space make her interrogate the human-caused environmental changes which are further punctuated by capitalist agendas, patriarchal power and ideologies. This kind of female embodiment engages in a dialogue, a natural link between sustainability and search for one’s roots. Women are seen to scale heights as only they have the “insights into fostering environmental sustainability on multigenerational timescales” as their ecotherapy can be effective in everyday life, not to mention the disaster ridden Nagaland, its varied sociopolitical terrains, mostly desiccated and arcane (Douglas viii). Conscientiously overseeing the green vistas and demographic spaces, women extrapolate from medicine, biology, astronomy, and contemporary science to address matters related to “pregnancy and childbirth, climate change, psychic capabilities, and post-capitalist economics” (Douglas 2).

### **Female Bodies as Transgressors**

Ao in her writings depict ecological and feminist possibilities for women, but there is also a shared masculinist anxiety which fills the narrative structure of a text with radical shifts. The men are claimants and producers of a cautionary tale of anthropocentric destruction and Ao’s insistence is that in the process of demonstrating an anthropocentric continuity we need “to reverse course and provide humanity with a second chance to develop a sustainable inhabitation of Earth” (Douglas 2). Lentina in “Laburnum for my Head” shows a similar misapprehension as she questions and fails to stick to a series of dichotomies like the pastoral and the urban, reality and utopias, the private and the public, and the human and the non-human providing us the scope to mix myths and narratives, feminist standpoints and varied depictions of nature. Her body that becomes coterminous with a specific tree, the laburnum, reverses the current trajectory of ecocide and also, counters hetero-normative politics. Incidentally her body cannot find a place in a totally domesticated biosphere, in the artificiality of “consecrated ground...choked in the specimens of human conceit” (Ao 1).

“Three Women” attempts to understand acts of transgressions in terms of the voices of the narrators, their stories being woven into modes of oppression. Liberation from oppression provides the trajectory of transgression that draws special attention to the act of speaking for oneself— re-emphasizing the dictum that the ability to speak empowers people and this discourse of being heard and seen, in a way, also expresses their empowering. The three women, Martha, Medemla, and Lipoktula cultivate a voice, a fact that exposes the complex connection between discourses of transgression and the working of power. In the sphere of everyday life, their transgression precisely begins as a combative act, a polyvocal

enterprise that counters not only the dialectics of power but also nourishes a clairvoyant confrontation with the other, chiefly the aggressor and the perpetrator of masculine violence (Agger 62-63).

Lentina's act of smirking on the very day of her husband's funeral, her obsession to grow laburnum plants and her non-traditional ways of life finally culminate in an eco-spectacle, a theatrical device of exuberance—the laburnum tree. The laburnum trees in resplendent yellow blossoms attracting everyone's attention have the power to immortalize Lentina. The tree is described as such in the short story:

So ends the story of the un-dramatic life of an ordinary woman who cherished one single passionate wish that a humble laburnum tree should bloom once a year on her crown.

And every May, this extraordinary wish is fulfilled when the laburnum tree. Planted on her gravesite in the new cemetery of the sleepy little town, bursts forth in all its glory of butterfly-yellow splendor (Ao 20).

There is a peculiar pleasure she derived from the thriving laburnum trees at the end—the trees do not make any reference to history or origin, but they point to an abstraction that leads to a celebration of ephemerality, of spectacle. The tree is an object that endows her with the attribute to transgress the limits of oppression codified in many ways and at many levels. The static tree, immobile and non-motile, can be pitted against the human world, a space populated by body movements, speed and acts of motion. Interestingly, the tree embodies transgression as a point of cancellation of spatial/territorial reference-points. The tree mimics the objects in complete disarray in the human world, subverts the concept of order and of regulative norms. There is no utility of directive paths, no creation of a larger structural paradigm in the world of nature. Perhaps that's why the laburnum tree unshackles Lentina and infuses a new sense of freedom in her. There are no senseless and repetitive networks of "object paths" as the tree produces an inertial constraint on the viewer who prefers to proceed logically from one object to the other (Baudrillard 31).

The act of transgression herein lies in Lentina's answer to the loss of temporal continuity through the tree. She sees the rapid movements that societal demands evoke as a kind of constraint. The tree stands for those spaces which cannot be visualized and thought about, democratic and egalitarian spaces that deride the inevitability of speed. The accelerated pace of a woman, she being on her toes all the time, she playing multiple roles—there is a desire to transgress the strict patterns of life and palpably rediscover the freeways and passageways that create an in-between space or a space within a space. The laburnum trees are not things but relations. Her special labour in growing them affects their materiality, thus, lending them discernible peculiarities, contours and forms.

In regard to "Three Women" Lipoktula's rape by Merensashi creates a space of initiation that is lethal. This space attempts to conceal the scars and pain of the woman; this space does not leave any trace behind. Desiring "an uncultivated, amnesic intoxication", the man stamps on the woman's body a code of silence and forgetting (Baudrillard 6-7). Rape is an articulation of various spatial verbs and adverbs; it is a grammar of creating a space that relies on the notion of materiality of the body, the vitality of controlling it and owning it through violent penetrations. Power invested in authoritarian figures like Merensashi within the societal structure of living and sustaining manufactures a variety of processes and relations of domination. His overpowering presence, his gait and his insatiable sexual urges produce social cleavage and fractures, power's hegemonic verticals.

Lipoktula's final revelation about her "participatory submission", however enables her to produce a new mode of knowledge—she dissolves the idea of disciplinary punishment and disrupts our sense of what is the right thing to do (79). This critique serves as a functional mode that provides an alternative account of who she is and what she desires as a woman. She turns this narrative of victimization around and enhances the possibilities of blowing away hegemonic coherence. Rape ceases to be rape when the woman's consent is involved.

On a different note, in "Three Women" the communicative potential of Lipoktula's silence can also be termed transgressive. Pierre Macherey says that such an act "assigns speech its exact position, designating its domain" as silence, herein, becomes the centre and principle of expression, speech's "vanishing point" (Saltz and Krashner, 2006:96). Lipoktula is seen to keep mum about her rape and consequent pregnancy. It seems speech eventually has nothing more to tell us. Ao makes us investigate the silence, for it is the silence that hides a semantic load. Silence speaks about the registers of political cultures, and it is the rhetoric of the unspoken, the non-vocal that substantially qualifies for a woman's presence/absence as wielders of social discourses. However, in Lipoktula's case, her silence is transgressive as it is created purposefully to elude others, primarily her husband the Merensashi. Her silence does not exhibit a complicit process of submission, rather it hides at its heart the power of revolt. After all, it was she who consented and was receptive to Merensashi's sexual prowess.

### **Of Mothers and Motherhood**

The act of transgression subverts a naïve acceptance of rules, also resists coercion, constraint, and domination. In "Three Women" a form of gaiety and merry-making infuse fresh elements to the narrative. The procedure of giving birth, and also motherhood is celebrated in three generations. The conditions of pregnancy, however, expose a specific

technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. Martha, the dark skinned girl with a mop of unruly curls who is called a “coolie” by her friends and classmates much to her chagrin is not the actual daughter, but is adopted by Medemla. Lipoktula was raped and impregnated by Merensashi. Her daughter Medemla, however, is unaware of the identity of her real father. Martha, towards the end, gives birth to a baby boy. Ao uses a potent language to describe the bond between the three women as such:

Apok, the new father, who is watching the activities of the women from the doorway, now comes forward, directing his gaze towards the bed in order to have a closer look at his just-born child. But his vision is obstructed by the daunting circle of the women, these three different kinds of mothers, standing as though mesmerized by the miracle of new life. He is reluctant to break the spell and, feeling like an intruder in a sacred ceremony, slips out unobserved (Ao 80).

Motherhood, here, becomes a mode of transgressing the limits of a disciplinary society; the three women enter a liberating space of care and cure, love and alchemy, an act that binds them in a bond of shared goals. Motherhood relies on moments of transformation and change, but it also became a device to systematically expel the man, the father, from its ambit as shown in the mentioned scene above. In “Three Woman”, the process of giving birth points to valuing the gain of the body through doubling up or producing another body, and it also brings out the body’s potential to challenge patriarchal norms and structures in the text. Although the woman’s body is a postulant to explain the resistance to a male-centric world, it also represents historically contingent social practices of a specific locale. On the other side is the force of moral signature of a society on the mother-figure, the extent to which the society allows liberty to do, feel or think certain things. The women in “Three Women” represent the oppression of the past that has been inscribed on her body, and also the viability of transformation. The body is used as a site of power and resistance. Giving birth celebrates a grey space, an in-between space, as a remarkable change takes place when the baby comes out—the head first, then the whole body:

The growl she emits is like nothing these women who have participated in many deliveries, have ever heard, and as the last hiss leaves the throat, one of them shouts, ‘I see the head, one more push, baby, just once more.’ Martha hears her and with an ultimate effect gives another push and the baby slithers out of her exhausted body. The baby’s wet and slimy contours as it surges through the passage produces such a sensuous effect on Martha that she will always remember it as more sublime than the transient ecstasies of sex (Ao 79).

However, the initial state of Martha’s and Lipoktula’s pregnancies are put under scanner—this makes us wonder how women get programmed by the social conditions in which they find themselves and also on why they accept being programmed. As a “mode of assujettissement”, women are “invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations” (Foucault 264). But in Ao’s story the women destabilize the limits of the present order and represent a form of critical resistance to a power that, in Butler’s words, sets the limits to what a subject can ‘be’, but beyond which it no longer ‘is’. Also, failing to conform to the condition that the norms define who one is, these women by resisting insubordination creates an organic grammar of transgression. This transgressive space harps in all the resources available, both internal and external, and make the women reign supreme on both their physical terrain and mental landscapes. She, in a way, is the creator here. Medemla, Martha and Lipoktula are no longer trapped in a world that all the time pushes its limits.

Martha writhing in labour pain, thus awaiting a moment of genesis, is in a state of acute anticipation. What emerges after a while is a baby, a validation of her power to create or a real moment of exactitude and clarity. Here, the mother’s body is the shifting intersection between that which it carries, contacts, touches and that which it separates. This ostensible reformulation of subjectivity that motherhood initiates, the individual’s change of social status, or passage into a different category of social membership, and the women being a self-aware author of their own social conduct and product add certain layers to the process itself. In this context, motherhood leaves open the empirical question of whether, and to what extent, the self really is changed? Does it trace a woman’s trepidation for remoulding herself? Does it provide a self-conscious and sensitive understanding of her body which she posits in the interstices of social relations?

### **The Laburnum Tree: An equivalence of both the human and non-human :**

Lentina’s obsession for the laburnum tree throws light on a “conjunction” that one is able to enter into and through which one is able to exercise her desire. This orientation balances green ethics, personal standpoint and social context in defining the woman’s identity. Lentina’s acute awareness of natural sites and materiality and their interrelation and mutual affectivity bring forth the question of ethics—can we include the capacities and abilities of the human world without creating damage to the non-human plane? Can we create an assemblage of the green objects ridden by human objectives? Her preference of a natural burial furthermore shows the organic relationship between nature and women and the bounds of this special communication and representation. The rejection of man-made artifacts and gravesites after her death makes Lentina the champion of a natural cause.

The headstones in the old cemetery bear mute testimony to duties performed by willing and non willing offspring and relatives. The laburnum tree on the other hand is alive and ever changing in its seasonal cycles: it is resplendent in May; by summer-end the stalks holding its yellow blossoms turn into brown pods; by winter it begins to look scraggy and shorn. Springtime brings back pale green shoots and by May it is wearing its yellow wreaths again, to outdo all the vainglorious specimens erected in marble and granite (Ao 2).

In no way her stance privileges the human, autonomous, sovereign subject, rather for her the laburnum tree becomes a continual investment of energy. She tries to gender the tree, and locate it in the site of memory and permanence. This urge is beyond notions of female labour, utility, regression, and the restricted economy of the *oikos*, the hearth and home. Lentina is no more tied to the agonizing process of strife and anguish that every woman in a traditional society knows and experiences. She is a body without control and even after her death she will live and thrive on as the tree will always bear the marks of her subjective impulses. No longer complicit in the process of her self-formation, Lentina will eventually live in other viable forms of life, the laburnum trees.

Lentina's death at the end converges with a woman's right to control her body, becoming not just a question of sympathy or concern, but of what rights one could exercise, or what justice requires. In short, it is a matter of doing what is not permitted or what is termed as impossible. This stance will flourish and flower, not wither away with time. The laburnum trees strengthen Lentina's relationship to/with herself, and make her strive towards self-formation and self- fulfillment.

#### **Conclusion :**

The women in the concerned stories disrupt conformity to a universal moral law or societal norm. The aesthetics or the means of a woman working on herself gets manifested in her act of confession (to readers)— Lipotkula states that she enjoyed physical intimacy with Merensashi even though we are made to think that apparently it's an intercourse by force at the beginning. Also, motherhood is projected as a source of empowerment which takes in its fold human creative and libidinal energies as portrayed in the case of Martha, Medemla and Lipotkula. In a similar vein, Lentina experiences herself as an agent of power, rethinks the logic of social interaction, chiefly on how unstable it is to rely on other's values, or to fall into the irrational relativist trap of others' judgments. Ao takes the readers by hand, makes them proceed through the labyrinthine alleys of the text just to arrive at an ephiphany, a discovery of an important aspect of life. This leads to the extrapolation of knowledge of a particular situation, phenomena, and event into generic explanations. By putting the female protagonist in the centre stage, Ao makes her undo partialities and political ideologies. Proved to be a

useful tool for transgression, the women, far from being a retreat from the world, engages with the green world of nature in the production of knowledge, non-restrictive and unbound. Also, she subtly comments on contemporary politics, discussing particular events and trends rather than specific agendas. Taking a resort to nature, the women simulate activity that contrasts with the ground level death and sufferings of the present time.

The thrust here is to project transgression as an economy of production, a fact that has a self generating, self referring value. This act also has the potential to upset the politics of the patriarchal world order. Moreover, this politics converts the mass into cohesive entities. The women, however, provide an unexpected resistance to this; their power lies in their inertia. The allegiance of women to the world of nature here gives birth to a malleable responsibility to create and invent, to produce a strong sense of geography. She is shown to assume the autonomy of different life worlds, and interestingly the stories unfold certain set-ups of formative and transformative human action and historically shifting values. The rhetorical questions on fragmented world-views, on a litany of disaster, are taken headlong by her women characters. The fractured Naga lives dictated by violence and insurgency, troubled at the face of manipulation, violation, and betrayal, find a moment of release in that robust moment when the women are placed as enunciators and transgressors of normative spaces.

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## Special Education Teachers' Knowledge on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Skills in Inclusive Education

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### Abstract:

The present study on Special Education Teachers' knowledge on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills in inclusive education was conducted with 30 participants. Participants of the study were chosen from various government and non-governmental schools of rural and urban areas in Tamil Nādu by using purposive sampling method. To focus on the uniqueness of Special Education Teachers' Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills, the investigators have chosen purposive sampling method. A sample of 30 increases the confidence interval of the population data set enough to warrant assertions against the research findings. In this view 30 respondents are chosen for the study. The 30 Special Education Teachers were divided into two groups, each of the groups had 15 rural and 15 urban teachers. Among these sampled teachers 15 were having below 10 years of experience and the remaining 15 are having more than 10 years of experience. A survey was carried out for the study to gather specific information from the respondents on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills at grassroot level. The independent variables chosen for the research study are gender, locality, and experience. The dependent variable used in the study is to know the exact stand of the Special Education teachers' UDL skills in inclusive education. Details were collected from the special education teachers through the personal data sheet and checklist developed by the investigators on Universal design for learning (UDL). From the present study its clearly visible that, most of the special education teachers are aware of the Universal design for learning and terms related to UDL but don't have adequate experience and training in implementation part.

**Key Words:** *Special Education Teachers, Universal Design for Learning, Knowledge and Skills, Technology, Inclusive Education and NEP 2020.*

### Introduction:

In the 21st century, referred as the technology era, the developed and developing countries are growing enormously in science and technology. This technological growth helped many developing countries to acquire the status of developed countries. Thus, technology has become a centre point of national development, especially in education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this technology made remarkable history in education especially higher education. Online classes, online examinations, and online degrees became a major part of our educational system. New Educational Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasized the same; it assures technology upliftment in education. Universal Design for Learning mainly integrates technology. Universal design for learning (UDL) helps the teachers to preserve their class materials, and share them with students easily including distance learners. Multiple means of representation, engagement, action and expression should be applied in the process of teaching and learning process by the teachers especially special education teachers in all the activities to achieve their educational goals. This, helps the teachers to attend to all the learners in their classroom. In the year 2012 *Summarizing Dell, Newton, and Petroff* "Universal Design for Learning is a philosophical foundation for curriculum development that provides individual opportunities for learners". *Dell* and his co-workers pointed out that this Universal Design for Learning creates a way for all the learners through the teacher's efforts in acknowledging all the learners in 2012. In support of their work *J.Harris* (2014) proved that students can learn better if they are provided with auditory and visual form of instructions. The present research work also addresses the same with Special Education Teachers from inclusive schools at classroom level.

### Objectives:

The following objectives are envisaged in the present research study:

1. To study the knowledge of special education teachers universal design for learning (UDL) skills in inclusive education.
2. To compare the knowledge of special education teachers for UDL skills in inclusive education according to gender.
3. To analyse the knowledge of special education teachers for UDL skills in inclusive education according to locality.
4. To compute the knowledge of special education teachers for (UDL) skills in inclusive education according to experience.



**Hypothesis:**

- $H_0$  There is no significant difference among the special education teachers' knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to gender.
- $H_1$  There is no significant difference among the special education teachers' knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to locality.
- $H_2$  There is no significant difference among the special education teachers' knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to experience.

**Need of the Study:**

Nowadays our classrooms are accommodating varieties of learners like auditory learners, visual learners and others with or without disabilities. They are coined as diverse learners. It is high time for teachers to address all the diverse learners, especially special education teachers. These special education teachers play an important role in inclusive education. Many research studies state that teachers should have strong planning and technical support to address the looming issues of diverse learners for making Inclusive Education more effective and successful. The present research is an experimental attempt to know the state of special education teachers' knowledge on universal design for learning. This study also helps special education teachers to equip themselves to attain fruitfulness in inclusive education. The study can be replicated for general teachers including subject, language, and physical education teachers. The same study can be used by the Head of the Inclusive Schools with slight modification.

**Scope of the Study:**

The following are the main scope of the present research work:

- Identifying the exact stand of special education teachers on UDL skills in Inclusive Education.
- Compute the knowledge of special education teachers on UDL skills in Inclusive Education.
- Special education teachers can equip themselves to attain fruitfulness in inclusive education through UDL.

**Review of Literature:**

The effects of training in UDL on lesson plan development of special and general educators in a college classroom environment were investigated by experimental design with a control group which was used for this study. A one-hour teacher training session introduced UDL to the experimental group; the control group received the intervention later. Differences were found between pre-test and post-test measures for both treatment groups for special education and general education teachers. The results suggest that a UDL can help teachers

to design a lesson plan accessible for all students by (Spooner et al in 2007). Spooner states that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) basic principles of multiple representations, multiple options for expression, and active engagement are made realistic through availability of current educational technologies. The study delineates unique features of collaborative professional development opportunities and benefits for teachers and teacher educators (Zhang et al 2005). Izzo, et al said the same in 2008, Cumming, et al, & Megan in 2021. Larger numbers of students are entering higher education with more diverse learning needs as stated by Holly Buckland-Parker in the year 2012. Later Kumar & Wideman 2014, highlights UDL can be possible with adequate training and immediate feedback.

**Materials and Methods:**

The research study employed survey design in Tamilnadu. Odunthurai (smartest village) Moothakurichi (largest village) Ariyalur (smallest village) Naluvadapathy (poorest village) were the selected rural area of the study. Cities and towns like Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Trichy, Sivaganga and Erode have largest population of qualified Special Education teachers. These location are considered as urban areas for the study. The participants of the study were chosen from various government and non-governmental schools of rural and urban areas in Tamil Nadu by using purposive sampling method. To focus on the uniqueness of special education teachers' UDL skills, the investigators have chosen the purposive sampling method. A sample of 30 increases the confidence interval of the population data set enough to warrant assertions against the research findings. In this view 30 respondents were chosen for the study. The 30 special education teachers are made up of 15 masculine (male) and 15 feminine (female). Further, the same 30 special education teachers were divided into two groups, each of the groups had 15 rural and 15 urban teachers. Among the 30 special education teachers 15 were having below 10 years of experience and the remaining 15 had more than 10 years of experience. The independent variables chosen for the research are gender, locality, and experience of special education teachers. Survey method is used for the study to gather specific information from the respondent on UDL skills at grassroot level. The dependent variable in the study is to know the exact stand of the special education teachers on UDL skills in inclusive education. Details were collected from the special education teachers through the personal data sheet and checklist developed by the investigators. Collected data are analysed and tabulated by performing descriptive statistical calculations.

**Limitation of the Study:**

- The participants' size is limited, because of the purposive sampling method as the investigator cannot provide opportunities to all the teachers.
- The study has been carried out with Special Education Teachers alone.

- Special Education Teachers from Tamil Nadu state were only chosen for the study.
- General teachers including language, subject, and physical education teachers are excluded from the study.

**Result and Discussion**

Table No.1 portrays significant difference between male and female special education teachers’ knowledge on UDL skills. The calculated variance of the female special education teachers is 11.885 at the same time variance of the male special educators is 30.695. This may be due to the opportunities utilized by male special education teachers during in-service training. Thus, the hypothesis 1 “There is no significant difference among the special education teachers’ knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to gender” is rejected.

Table No. 2 is the experimental evidence to show the variance observed among the rural and urban special education teachers’ knowledge of UDL skills in inclusive education. The urban special education teachers’ mean score is 25.49 whereas the rural special education teacher’s mean score is 13.12 only. This variance is observed due to the geographical influence of special education teachers. Thus hypothesis 2 “There is no significant difference among the special education teachers’ knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to the locality” is rejected.

Table No. 3 explains the range of special education teachers’ knowledge of UDL skills in inclusive education based on their locality. Usually, the higher the experience gives the high score. Here the investigators were surprised to notice that the special education teachers with below 10 years of experience ranged are 14 at the other end 5 was the range of special education teachers with above 10 years of experience. This may be due to the curriculum upgradation in the special teacher education programmes. The updated curriculum includes new educational policies and innovative methods of teaching. Thus hypothesis 3 “There is no significant difference among the Special Education Teachers’ knowledge on UDL skills in inclusive education according to experience” is rejected.

**Table 1 : Special Education Teachers scores on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills in inclusive education with respect to locality**

S. No.	Gender	Count N	Range R	Minimum deviation	Maximum	Mean	Standard	Variance
1	Male	15	15	17	32	22.866	5.5403	30.695
2	Female	15	12	18	30	22.2	3.4475	11.885

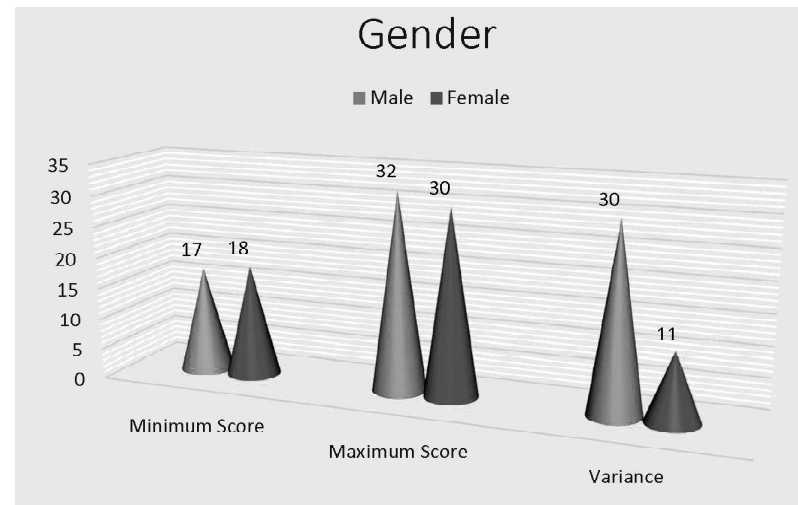
*Table 2 : Special Education Teachers scores on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills in inclusive education with respect to locality*

S. No.	Locality	Count N	Range R	Minimum deviation	Maximum	Mean	Standard	Variance
1	Urban	15	14	18	32	23.933	5.0493	25.495
2	Rural	15	13	17	30	21.133	3.6227	13.123

*Table 3: Special Education Teachers scores on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills in inclusive education with respect to experience*

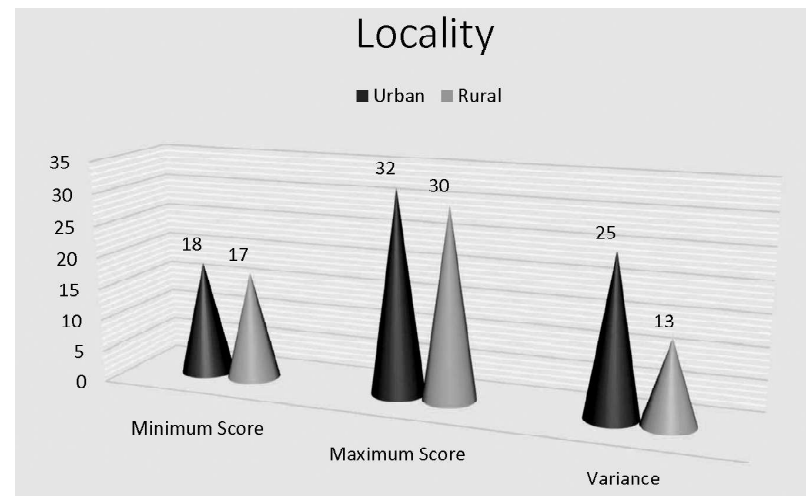
S. No.	Experi-ence	Count N	Range R	Minimum deviation	Maximum	Mean	Standard	Variance
1	Below 10Years	15	14	18	32	25.66	4.369	19.095
2	Above 10 Years	15	05	17	22	19.4	1.639	2.686

*Maximum and minimum scores obtained by the special education teachers' knowledge on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skill according to gender along with calculated variance.*



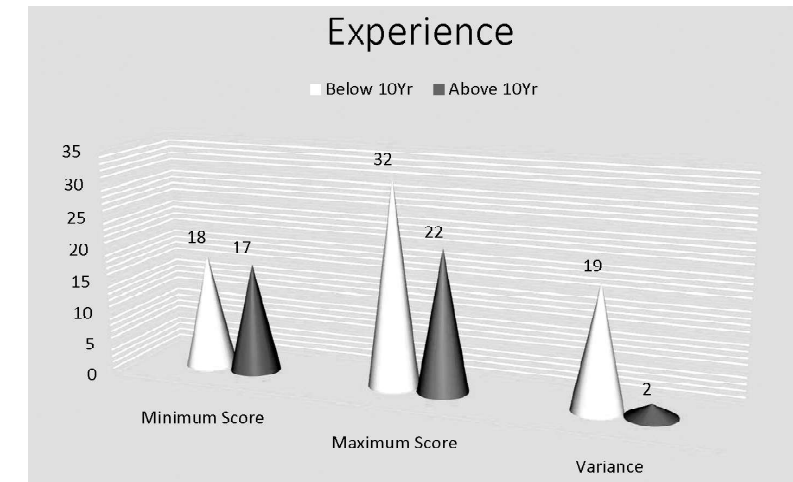
**Figure : 1**

*Variance of special education teachers' knowledge on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) skills based on their locality with maximum and minimum scores.*



**Figure : 2**

*Maximum, minimum scores and variance of special education teachers based on their experience.*



**Figure : 3**

### Suggestions and Conclusion:

India is on the developing country list; because of its strong education system and technology. In our nation, we are following a special type of curriculum that has global standards while at the same time reflecting the extract of traditional methods. It is high time for developing countries like India which has varieties of learners in the inclusive classroom should have strong technological support. Thus, the Universal Design for Learning provides a platform for successful inclusive education programme. From the present study, it is clearly visible that, most of the Special Education Teachers are aware of Universal Design for Learning and terms related to UDL. It is also evident that the special education teachers from rural and urban areas required high support to execute the UDL principles. The present study submits pre-service, in-service, and refresher courses that should be livelier and practical-oriented for teachers. Especially each district of Tamil Nadu should organize practical classes on UDL. The same can be implemented in other districts of India, for successful Inclusive Education by bridging the theoretical and practical knowledge of Special Education Teachers and other teachers. Rural and urban areas should be treated same in-terms of trainings and development. Intensive training programmes can be planned for rural areas.

**Acknowledgment:**

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## “Nature is My Temple”: Revisiting the contours of Ecofeminism in Alice Walker’s *The Temple of My Familiar*

**Dr. Ritushmita Sharma**

### **Abstract :**

Alice Walker once in one of her iconic essays titled “Everything Is a Human Being” (1988) has mentioned: “We must begin to develop the consciousness that everything has equal rights because existence itself is equal. In other words, we are all here: trees, people, snakes, alike” (127). Again, in order to re-emphasise her interconnectedness with the natural world, Walker in one of her another essays titled “Am I Blue?” (1988) has pointed out that “I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think there are people who do not know that animals suffer. People like me who have forgotten, and daily forget, all that animals try to tell us” (7). These two excerpts from Walker’s literary oeuvre are copious enough to unambiguously hint at her concern and compassion towards the world of nature and animals, and while doing so, she has stationed herself as an intellectual thinker, thereby proposing ethics of moral behaviour and responsibility. It is in this context, this research paper aims to explore the contours of ecofeminism as projected by Walker especially in her novel *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). In this regard, this paper considers Karen Warren’s theoretical interpretations of Ecological Feminism in order to investigate Walker’s conceptualisation of the non-human ‘other’. Furthermore, this paper follows the contention that, Walker while pointing out the intersections between the human and non-human also surpasses the stereotypical projections of women of color via opting to roister the belief that “to be Black is some-how to be close to nature” (Greenwood 166).

**Keywords:** *Ecology, Ecofeminism, nature, non-human*

### **Introduction :**

Alice Walker is one of the important voices not only in terms of taking a stand against the ideas of racism and herosexism but also due to speaking up against the current popular discourses oriented towards speciesism and anthropocentrism. In this regard, one can specially refer to her non-fictional body-of-works such as “Am I Blue?” (1988), “Everything Is a Human Being” (1988), “Frida, the Perfect Familiar” (1998), and also her fictional works titled *The Color Purple* (1982), *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) and so on, wherein Walker’s compassion towards the natural/animal/plant world is continually revealed. In all these mentioned works, if viewed from an Ecocritical perspective, one can identify with Walker’s firm conviction that those who are considerate towards the cause of social justice and social equity can never participate in the destruction of natural world. Again while referencing about the controlling meat-eating culture, Walker expresses disappointment about the exacerbating routine of consuming animal flesh on a daily basis. She writes: As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out. (“Am I Blue?” 7)

As Walker’s literary works invites a large group of readers, the need to take prompt steps against the cruelty upon the non-human ‘other’ is viewed as menacing by the ones who significantly prefers daily meat-eating. This as a result has led the way to immediately suppress Walker’s voice by imposing ban on her works that articulates dictums against the superior meat-eating culture. Nevertheless, amidst these debates, Walker has never stopped to be morally conscious herself. That is why her works have recurrently continued to bespeak her social justice missions, thereby highlighting her sheer belief on integrating the environment and the animal world together under “the sphere of moral consideration” (Peter Singer 97).

In Western metaphysics, the environmental movements which have sought to address the importance of animal rights, and also the Ecocritics who have constantly addressed ecological values, are often deemed to be comprised of ‘mainstream’ white activists. But this notion has been soon called into question, as Walker herself points out that black people irrespective of their proficient participation in different environmental movements, are either misrepresented or discriminated by the soi-disant ‘mainstream’ white activists. In fact in case of Walker herself, it is only with her benevolent consideration towards the non-human ‘other’ as well as to the natural world, that in the due course of time, probably in the late 1980s that she managed to gain a prominent position among many Ecofeminists. Like Walker, there are other black writers as well, such as Ben Okri, Imbolo Mbue, Kimberly N. Ruffin, Carolyn Finney etc. who in their works have tried to address and question this racial hierarchy which has been sustained in between the whites and the non-whites in relation to environmental

concerns. In this regard, Carolyn Finney's work titled *Black Faces, White Spaces* (2014) is significant where she has pointed out that how African Americans have always shared a strong filiation with the natural world, and this in consequence also serves the purpose of debunking this constructed racial binarism. Finney points out: "African Americans toiled, sang songs, wrote stories, and transformed the landscape with hard work, big dreams, and a belief that African Americans have and have always had an intimate, ever-changing and significant relationship with the natural environment" (xvi). This observation is quite crucial as it not only details how people of color perceive their connectedness to the natural world, but also defies the so-called entrenched white supremacy over 'the environment', and by that means also reasserts the idea that 'environment' is *not* "something (only) white people do" (7). Similarly in the context of Walker, she too through her works has explicitly shown her staunch solidarity with the animals and the natural world. This is rightly evident in one of her interviews with Pamela B. June titled "Alice Walker on Ecofeminist Issues in Her Fiction: An Interview," published in *Women's Studies: An inter-disciplinary journal* (2015), wherein she points out:

My interest is not so much in perfection, as I think some vegan and vegetarian people aim for; those are a very strict way of showing solidarity with animals. I am more interested in consciousness about interaction between humans and the other animals . . . I think that the emphasis that has come up in my work is about growing a feeling of solidarity with the other beings on the planet as common sufferers here. We all, some of us more gruesomely than others, are being eaten in one way or another, so there is a real intent on my part to share what I feel is an awareness of the way in which we are like the animals, that they are like us, and that we face a common end actually, death. (102)

The preceding excerpt clearly demonstrates Walker's efforts to speak for the less privileged, thereby compelling us to proceed towards a more good-natured and humanitarian society. Furthermore, as indicated in her writings, she has directed us towards a realm where both the human and the non-human worlds are seen to be intersecting on a more conscious level. So this particular trait of Walker's writings in a way empowers us not only to understand her philosophical stance and social vision but also at the same time allows us to navigate through her Ecofeminist insights.

### **Objectives :**

Now getting back to the chief objectives of this research study is to offer a critical reading on Walker's Ecofeminist vision in *The Temple of My Familiar*, it is interesting to see how Walker in this particular novel has laid out her cognizance about the non-human world and its connection with the world of humans. *The Temple of My Familiar* which has been

Walker's own personal favourite, as the author claims herself, is highly self-reflexive as well as intertextual in nature. An in-depth reading of it will further highlight that the novel is also experimental in terms of its blending of multiple genres as well as multiple narratorial positions. But apart from these aspects, the novel to all its intents and purposes is an Ecofeminist work as it repeatedly vouches for an *inclusive ecosystem* via providing an intrinsic value to everything that constitutes it. However, in the quest to identify with the elements of Ecofeminism in this novel, one must need to be guided through its theoretical context.

### **Text Analysis :**

The roots of Ecofeminism can be traced back to the critical mode of 'Ecocriticism'—a term first popularised by William Rueckert through his essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978). Ecocriticism as a critical mode of inquiry investigates the characterisations of 'nature' in literary and cultural texts, or in simple terms, it examines the interrelation that resides betwixt environment and literature. In the context of Ecofeminism, however, one might call it to be an extended form of Ecocriticism that perceives the "forces of oppression" as being connected with one another (Pamela B. June 99). This indicates that the daunting task of Ecofeminist critics is to underscore the idea that there remains a dominant ideology which serves as the basis of different "forces of oppression" (such as racism, sexism, speciesism etc.), and this dominant ideology often operates via binary oppositions in order to subjugate the non-human 'other'. In this context, Karen Warren's understanding of this theoretical discourse is of vital significance. She describes Ecofeminism as a branch of learning that highlights "important connections between how one treats women, people of color, and the underclass on one hand and how one treats the non-human natural environment on the other" (xi). Again, Greta Gaard's observations are crucial as she mentions in her chapter titled "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" that, Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Its theoretical base is a sense of self most commonly expressed by women and various other nondominant groups—a self that is interconnected with all life. (1)

With reference to the varying observations on Ecofeminism, one may straightforwardly trace strong Ecofeminist resonances in *The Temple of My Familiar*. It is interesting to note that this novel was published during a time frame when Walker's other literary works, including *The Temple*, devotedly assigned 'animals' in prominent roles. For instance, to consider the essay "Am I Blue?" in this context, one might find out the analogous connection that Walker draws in between the abuse of women of color in relation to the abuse of animals. First of all, Blue in the essay refers to a 'white horse' whose undergoing

misery for separation from his beloved partner Brown is depicted as quite ‘human’: Blue was lonely . . . Blue was like a crazed person . . . He looked always and always toward the road down which his partner had gone . . . It was a look so piercing, so full of grief, a look so *human*, I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think that there are people who do not know that animals suffer. (7)

Again via Blue’s narrative, Walker persuasively encapsulates a vignette of intersectionality via conjointly bringing the ideas of speciesism, racism and Ecofeminism under one roof. She points out that in slavery, the children of white people are often reared by black ‘mammies’. As soon as these young ones become nearly around twelve, they are asked to completely erase off their deep emotional attachments with ‘mammies’ that they encounters, and in consequence, these young adults at later period of life would apathetically talk about their black ‘mammies’ as being sold out to other “good” white households (“Am I Blue?” 5). This similar reference to black ‘mammies’ can be correlated with Blue’s circumstances as he was placed with his female partner only to mate and conceive, and once the purpose is fulfilled, the female horse had been taken away by the respective owner. So the striking parallelism between *the use and abuse of animals* with that of *the use and abuse of women of color* is addressed by Walker, and while doing so, she not only speaks for the women of color but also advocates for animal rights and animal liberation.

In view of the literary works wherein Walker resisted against human ignorance towards the animal world, it is so far *The Temple of My Familiar* which seems to have effectively pronounced Walker’s concern for the species of the natural world. In the very beginning of this novel, we find Walker effectively expressing Little Zedé’s pain as she watches and hears the mournful cry of a peacock:

Little Zedé had stood waiting as the fat, perspiring woman who owned the peacocks held them in ashen, scratched hands and tore out the beautiful feathers one by one. It was then that Zedé began to understand the peacock’s mournful cry. It had puzzled her at first why a creature so beautiful . . . emitted a sound so like a soul in torment. Next she would visit the man who kept the parrots and cockatoos, and the painful plucking of feathers would be repeated. (1)

Little Zedé’s mother, also known by the same name Zedé, is a seamstress in an old country in South America, who earns her living by crafting capes and clothing from ‘found feathers’ collected by her daughter, not from the deplumed ones of the peacock/s as hinted in the above extract. As the narrative progresses, we find that many years later, the daughter too like her mother, in order to ward off their poor living conditions, starts making feathered capes from the ‘found feathers’ in a sweatshop which she retrieves while cleaning. This is a

powerful instance where painful act of plucking peacock feathers primarily indicates the sheer cruelty perpetrated against the animal world. In conjunction with this, the reference to sweatshop workers indicates the poverty-stricken conditions of the oppressed class where they are mostly victims of double marginalisation—for being both ‘women’ and ‘black identities’ at the same time. Another important perspective is that Walker in her projection of this mother-daughter duo, she completely unfastens them from a space where they are not shown partaking in the destruction of the species. But in a very constructive manner, she offers a projection of women of color (Zedé and her daughter) and their too much obsession in collecting feathers in order to articulate about how feathers constitutes a crucial part in preserving the indigenous identities of deterritorialised South American people.

In contrast to the belief wherein women being “close to nature” are viewed as potentially dangerous, Alice Walker too has been criticised for the same as she is found making strong alignment between ‘black’ women and the natural world. Her intrinsic belief which resonates in all her works, but strongly evident in *The Temple of My Familiar*, is that humans have so much to learn and inculcate from the non-human ‘others’. For instance, in this novel, there is an episode that records the experiences of a ‘white’ woman and about her visit to Africa. In her account, the ‘white’ woman expresses her failure to hear the singing of “the little serpent” (239) unlike the ‘black’ women who could hear it due to their “perceived closeness to nature—and specifically to primates” (Greenwood 167). This in a way indicates Walker’s *celebratory* Ecofeminist vision that aims for a harmonious reconciliation of both ‘human’ and the ‘non-human’ world together, and hence showcases Walker’s strong belief that “to be Black is some- how to be close to nature” (Greenwood 166).

One can further unravel Walker’s posthumanist ethos as she believes in the inextricable bond that links both human and animals; she believes that we, the human beings, are all animals in actuality and this is how we imbibe compassion for the non-human animals as we can identify with our own spirit within them. This notion is instantiated in *The Temple of My Familiar* through an African-American character called Lissie who in conversation with Suwelo, a History professor of same ethnicity, talks about her ‘dream memories’. Lissie profess to Suwelo about her experience of living multiple past lives at multiple times from remote past to present time via her ‘dream memories’; she explains to Suwelo that in each of her past lives, her gender (men/women), her racial identity (black/white), and even her species identity (human/non-human) are continually in a state of flux.

In one of her narratives, as Lissie narrates from her ‘dream memories’, she appears as a white boy and in her experience of this past life, she realises how both the human and the non-human animals are living in unison and are part of the same ecosystem. Lissie of this past

life explains to Suwelo who too appears as a white man in this dream vision that, In these days of which I am speaking, people met other animals in much the same way people today meet each other. You were sharing the same neighbourhood, after all. You used the same water, you ate the same foods, you sometimes found yourself peering out of the same cave waiting for a downpour to stop. (Walker 389)

Lissie, whose both gender and racial identification is transmuted to a white lad, points out that his mother and other women of this past life are companioned by ‘familiar’ which implies ‘pets’, or “companion animals of a special kind” (McKay 256). These ‘familiar’ live bondage free and independent lives, yet they share a sense of emotional belonging with their companions, who are referred to as their human friends. This is evident in the context of Lissie’s long description about his mother of this past life, and how his mother shared a strong bond with a lion named Husa, her ‘familiar’ and her only companion friend, “It was an elegant sight . . . my mother and Husa walking along the river, or swimming in it. He was gigantic, and so beautiful. I am talking now about his spirit, his soul . . .

“But this is all nonsense and grievous ignorance; as is most of what ‘mankind’ fancies it ‘knows.’ Just as my mother was queen because of her wisdom, experience, ability to soothe and to heal, because of her innate delicacy of thought and circumspection of action, and most of all because of her gentleness, so it was with Husa and his tribe. They were king of creation not because they were strong, but because they were strong and also gentle” (Walker 390)

Through Walker’s depiction of this particular ‘dream memory’, she refers to a primeval moment in history wherein human and the non-human animals coexisted with one another, and as it is depicted, the animals were seen as—‘free beings’, ‘unchained’ and ‘liberated’—as evident in the context of Husa, the lion. However, this representation is in sharp contrast to the contemporary times as Lissie in the present day context points out to Suwelo about the self- incurred human-animal difference for which the humans are only accountable:

This perhaps sounds strange to you, Suwelo. About the lions, I mean. But it is true. This was long, long ago, before the animals had any reason to fear us and none whatever to try to eat us, which—the thought of eating us—I’m sure would have made them sick. The human body has been recognized as toxic, by the animals, for a very long time . . . It is a great tragedy today that no one knows anymore what a lion is. They think a lion is some curiosity in a zoo, or some wild thing that cares about tasting their foul flesh if they get out of the car in Africa. (389-390)

Again, on an another occasion, Lissie comes to Suwelo to narrate one of her another

‘dream memories’ wherein Lissie retains her black identity and Suwelo again is a white man; the dream features Lissie’s temple, “a simple square-room structure”, and it also includes her own ‘familiar’—a mixed-breed creature of “part bird, for it was feathered, part fish, for it could swim . . . and part reptile, for it scooted about like geckoes do” (*The Temple* 132). In the dream, both Lissie and Suwelo get repeatedly distracted by the ‘familiar’ as it was skidding all over the place, and therefore Lissie aims to retain the possession of the flying creature in an enclosed space. But everytime Lissie tries to catch and trap the ‘familiar’, it would break free. Although Lissie describes her trapping adventures as “a stupid reflex of human pride”, yet she understands that “all of this activity on the familiar’s part was about freedom, and that by my actions I was destroying our relationship” (*The Temple* 133). Immediately there appears an unfathomable horde of ‘white’ folks that witnesses Lissie’s incessant futile attempts of imprisoning the ‘familiar’, but this time the tiny creature breaks through and flies away using its wings that it had never wielded before. As Lissie realises later on, she says to Suwelo that how she out of “pride and distraction” has been disloyal to her ‘familiar’ who was so “cheerful and loyal” to her (134). This particular dream imagery is highly symbolic on different grounds. Firstly it symbolises an unswerving loyal camaraderie between a creature from a non-human world and a human woman, particularly a black identity. But this friendship loses its essence immediately when Lissie, under the burden to make an overwhelming presence in front of the ‘white’ crowd, betrays her own ‘familiar’ via her constant acts of entrapment. This might further signify that Lissie could not move beyond the feeling of considering her ‘familiar’ as more than a ‘pet’, and only treated ‘it’ as only non-human ‘other’, and hence failed to give it a status of ‘being’. Secondly, this dream imagery also gives a hint at the power play that exists between the white and the blacks. For instance, the sudden appearance of an unknown white audience and an unaccustomed European milieu makes Lissie more conscious to assert her domination upon the non-human ‘other’; she might possibly think that her act of entrapment will rule out the assumptions of the ‘white’ people who are often tend to mockingly collates women of color with the animal world. But Walker establishes her Ecofeminist frame of mind as she makes the ‘familiar’ free from the enclosures, and also challenges the power relationships of society by making us see what happens when we fail to address the importance of other ‘beings’ in this world.

Another important incarnation of Lissie’s past life, as recorded in her ‘dream memory’, is that of a witch; she tells Suwelo of her dream visions as she enters into the history of medieval Europe where ‘witches’ are women of color (as designated by ‘white’ inquisitors) and they are closely connected with the animal world.

Woman ... kept alive some feeling for the other animals ... We never forgot it should



be possible to communicate with anything that had big enough eyes! So there we were, the dark women, muttering familiarly to every mouse or cow or goat about the place. (219)

Walker, through Lissie's incarnation as a witch, insinuates that women of color have placed equal value to animals like the way they give to their own human children. Walker also brings into light the strategy behind using the term "witches" against black women by Spanish Inquisitors, and the reason is that it is their agenda to gain the upper hand over the women of color, and also mark a distinction between the human and non-human world. In this context, Lissie declares, "the inquisitors, set in place to control us, declared 'consorting with animals a crime, punishable by being burned at the stake!'" (*The Temple* 220). From this instance, one can understand about 'white' male inquisitor's propaganda of considering human and animal human, for keeping company with animals. Furthermore, it is also indicated that how due to white male inquisitor's false propagandas, women of color and their association with animal world have failed to find a representation in the written history.

- Walker in *The Temple of My Familiar* also asserts her Ecofeminist stance when she provides her critique against the increasing meat consumption on a daily basis. One such instance is that of Lissie who in her actual reality gets exasperated when she sees Uncle Rafe consuming duck meat. Then again, another important character in this regard is Fanny who gets visions about being *consumed* by white men. When Robin, Fanny's therapist asks about her visions, she says: "white people ... very fat ... They are always eating, eating. Everywhere you go, they are sitting down eating. In Paris, they are eating. In London, they are eating. In Rome. They eat and eat. It makes me feel afraid" (341). Through frequent reference of 'eating', Fanny directs her critique against whites' self-proclaimed right to control over everything, such as, white supremacy have often resulted in the unchecked *consumption* of animals, *consumption* of women (in the form of sexual exploitation), and also *consumption* of oppressed groups (economically and socially). With reference to this metaphor of 'eating', or 'consumption', Alice Walker explicitly states: Europeans ... rape, pillage, and destroy most of Africa. They projected cannibalism onto Africans, while in fact they ate all of Africa. So the sense that many people have is that the Europeans basically have devoured Africans and everything they had. (105-106)

#### Conclusion :

From the discussion so far, one can thus primarily conclude that Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar* via various instances convincingly demonstrates her Ecofeminist insights by drawing connections between the subjugation of both women of color and the oppression of natural/non-human world. These connections, as Walker suggests, are imperative to discern out the reason behind viewing environment from a feminist perspective

or vice-versa. Furthermore, Walker by and large foregrounds her everlasting concern towards the animal world via her critique against the intersections of class oppression, sexism, and racism, but mostly on speciesist oppression. As a result, the novel has been able to serve the purpose for it readers to proceed towards an Ecofeminist understanding via celebrating faithful and compassionate convergence between human and the non-human, nevertheless, also emphasising the significance of animal ethics and protection of animal rights as its predominant theme.

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## The New Narrative of Green Women Influencers

*Sikdar, Barnali*

### Abstract

Sustainability and circular fashion carry a lot of potential to bring about positive change in society at large so that planet earth can recover from the demands placed upon it for resources. In achieving the goal of circularity in the fashion industry, many committed women influencers are leveraging social media as a platform to influence people and educate them on how we can minimise the human footprints on the environment while adopting sustainable ways of producing and retailing fashion.

**Keywords:** *sustainability, circular fashion, social media, women influencers.*

### Introduction :

Amidst the environmental crisis, human society is searching for alternative ways to satisfy human needs while minimising the exploitation of natural resources. With growing awareness of the environmental crisis, the greater focus on life and the environment is pushing us towards achieving ecological integrity. At this juncture the aim to achieve a carbon-neutral fashion industry is vital. This aim is achievable only if we change our habits in terms of our fashion consumption. To change this habit of chasing fast fashion trends many influencers on different social media platforms are creating content which are directly or indirectly creating awareness on sustainable fashion. In this regard, it won't be wrong to say that women influencers are taking the leap of hope towards circular fashion. Therefore in the present paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the issue of sustainable fashion and how women influencers are positively engaged in bringing change to our fashion consumption with different sustainable-fashion ideas.

### Objective:

1. The main objective of this study is to analyse various ways in which sustainable fashion influencers can be termed green influencers.
2. This paper aims at analysing the usefulness of sustainable fashion goals.

3. The focus of this study is to discuss different ways to adapt sustainable fashion choices that can eventually minimise the impact on the environment.
4. The focus will also be on understanding how different women influencers are working on different paradigms of circular fashion.
5. Lastly, it would be apt to say that the present paper is going to highlight the essential link between sustainable fashion and a sustainable environment.

### Methodology:

An analytical method has been adopted for this study. Apart from the analytical method, A qualitative approach to research is followed to understand the use of the term sustainable fashion. Along with this a quantitative approach is also been used while collecting data on different sustainable influencers from Instagram.

### Discussion:

#### Sustainable fashion:

Our environment is deteriorating every single day. Nowadays we use terms like global warming, air, water and soil pollution frequently. Concern related to water scarcity is now a daily reality. These terms related to environmental problems have become a part of our daily language making us more aware of our planet and its alarming situation. We have become more conscious about our role in protecting and preserving nature and limited natural resources. We have started opting for alternative ways in our lives to help combat the damage already made. Through alternatives like using biodegradable bags instead of plastic bags, reducing food waste, saving water, using green energy, etc. we are trying to invest in the greater role of protecting the planet. In this backdrop, we still haven't taken our clothes as seriously. We haven't asked enough if our clothes and environment are in any way related. Are we polluting the environment every time we buy new clothing? Do we care about what happens to our old clothes once we throw them into the dustbin? Now the answer would be a bit scary because the consciousness of this aspect of environmental pollution is slowly affecting people. In the blog post-*Sustainable Fashion Transformation: Recycling and Reuse*, published by the Admin, Sgt Group, the extent of the pollution done by the apparel industry is clearly described:

*August 1 has marked 2018 Earth Overshoot Day when humanity has consumed the entire year's worth of the planet's natural resources. From now on we will be exploiting the earth's savings borrowed from the next year, depleting an equivalent of 1.7 annual earth's capacity to replenish the natural resources and sequester carbon. On a global average, one person buys 5kg of clothes per year, with up to 16kg bought in Europe and the USA. The clothing and textile industry annually emits a total of 1.7*

billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, a significant factor triggering global climate change. This is large because 63% percent of textile fibres are derived from petrochemicals, while other 37% is dominated by cotton (24%) that demands extensive amounts of water and intensive use of pesticides. Textile production requires nearly 79 billion cubic meters of water for growing raw materials and wet processing, causing large-scale pollution with toxic chemicals that severely damage the water basins, biodiversity, and soil. The industry generates 2.1 billion tonnes of waste in the form of disposed clothing and off-cuts each year, yet only 20% of it is collected for reuse or recycling. (SgT)

The above quoted lines are enough to highlight the environmental pollution generated by the fashion industry. If we focus on this whole process at a micro level we find that it takes 2700 liters of water to make one cotton t-shirt which is equivalent to the amount of water a person drinks in two years. (National Geographic) . Here we need to know another fact which is very relevant - “ of the 100 billion garments produced each year , 92 million tons end up in landfills” ( Igini) . If half of these tossed out clothes are of synthetic fiber we can never imagine them decomposing. Along with this the journey of clothes from where the raw materials are purchased and the factory where it is manufactured contribute a lot to the pollution of the environment. Thus, data on pollution done by the fashion industry may scare anyone. But can we stop wearing clothes? Absolutely not. Now what can we do? Here, the most viable answer would be ‘Sustainable fashion’ . Understanding Sustainable fashion and more awareness on its implications can change the present scenario to a large extent. By referring to sustainable fashion we are talking about those clothes which are made of eco-friendly fibers and not from synthetic fibers like polyester, nylon, and so on. For sustainable clothes, fibers are extracted from natural resources like wood pulp, banana, jute, hemp and even pineapples. These clothes can decompose in a shorter span of time. Brands like Levi’s, Espirit, AND have shifted towards sustainability in terms of their products. Companies like Eco Vero have started making clothes from wood pulp which is eco-friendly and thus will have less strain on the environment (Assoune). But there are many floating ideas regarding Sustainable fashion and our common understanding of the term. Such an effort to understand the impact of sustainable fashion was done by KPMG, China. In the forward of the Fashion Summit supported by KPMG China and sponsored by HSBC we are given an idea of how and to what extent the idea of sustainable fashion works through a survey. The forward began with the following lines:

*“Are global consumers ready to embrace sustainable fashion? The key goal of this survey – which was commissioned by Fashion Summit, sponsored by HSBC and supported by KPMG China – was to explore the current understanding of*

sustainable fashion and what could help encourage responsible buying behaviour.

*The survey, which was carried out in Hong Kong, London, New York, Shanghai and Tokyo, with at least 1,000 people polled in each city, collected views on people’s definition of ‘sustainable fashion’, their support for it, their willingness to pay for it, and their ideas on possible measures the fashion industry should adopt to promote sustainability.”(kwok 2 )*

After the survey done by the summit the result is presented thought the following table

Table No. : 2 (Kwok 5)



**Social media influencers:**

Now a days business model for business firms have changed their paradigm. From big to small business houses are investing in social media influencers to promote their products. It is only because social media platforms are providing space for different types of content for its users that business houses can’t ignore their importance and impact. These floating contents on the Internet have enough potential to attract new consumers and thus its influence is hitting high with influencers creating valuable content. In this regard, Seda Yildirim points out that there are three types of influencers. Yildirim has recognised these three types and positioned them in a table which is mentioned below :

<i>“Types</i>	<i>Who are they?</i>	<i>The power</i>
<i>The celebs.</i>	<i>Celebrities.</i>	<i>Celebrities are main players in influencer marketing. As having the highest number of followers they have the biggest share in the market.</i>
<i>The Execs</i>	<i>Experts and Professionals</i>	<i>Experts and professionals are important social media professionals influencers with having higher number of followers</i>
<i>The everyday.</i>	<i>Social media users</i>	<i>Social media users can be used for social influencers as they have followers with 500-10000"</i>

(Yildirim, 13)

All the above mentioned types of influencers are equally responsible for only one purpose and that is influencing. The whole process of influencing claims a much larger share on different social media platforms. In such a scenario when we talk about sustainable fashion and its implications on the environment we cannot neglect the impact of these influencers on the conscience of the general public. In fact, Social media influencers are playing a crucial role in setting the trend, and changing marketing strategies. In the research done by Julia Lidgren and Mikaela Major, respondents have rightly argued that “*social media influencers could encourage sustainable fashion consumption by sharing content-regarding how, where and what to purchase. .... Respondents claimed that influencers are in the position to drive sustainable fashion consumption by spreading awareness and providing practical examples on how to behave*” (Lidgren 22)

Now if we narrow down our area of concentration on women Influencers and sustainable fashion then the reading will be on how and in which way are they influencing to bring a positive change in the world of fashion with their take on circularity of fashion and its need to protect the environment. For the current study we will be focusing on 10 women Influencers to track down their journey on sustainability and fashion. These women Influencers (Instagram) are randomly selected for the present study depending on all the three categories

mentioned above. A list of these sustainable women fashion influencers active on Instagram are given below:

1. Aparna @stylishsuitcase : her Instagram bio says she is interested in slow fashion, here she writes her sustainable travel tales. She is a practitioner of plant based diet. She is here to explore ideas towards creating a circular economy.  
Followers : 23.6k
2. Sandra @windsorburylane: Sandra says she follows a “style and a life where slow, seasonal and conscious living are at the root.”  
Followers : 3914
3. Neha Sharma @stylewali is a stylist who supports local and ethnic wear.  
Followers: 155k
4. Jenna @ironicminimalisther insta bio says that she is the slow fashion stylist. Followers: 5743
5. Adity Mayer @aditimayer she is an explorer of style, sustainability and social justice.  
Followers: 68.9 k
6. Sanjana Rishi @sanjrishi explains herself as an attorney at large. Her Insta handle says she is “Advocating sustainability in fashion, the Indian way”  
Followers: 112k
7. Jennifer Nini @ecowarriorprinces she explains herself as a warrior. A follower of sustainability and slow fashion.  
Followers: 50.1k
8. Leah @unmaterialgirl she introduces herself as a former fast fashion addict turned slow fashion activist  
Followers: 17.8 k
9. Alyssa @msbeltempo is encouraging creativity instead of consumption while giving goals on sustainable styling.  
Followers: 55.3k
10. Tanishka Mishra @tanishkamishra is helping us “ build a conscious wardrobe, style sustainably and become a mindful consumer”  
Followers: 1676

These influencers like many others have definitely influenced the buying habits of their followers. As influencers create a community around themselves , which often move around the same preferences of life they may provide us with a lot of inputs on how the community grows. The question on how people come together and join a purpose can create knowledge on the prospects of developing sustainable fashion habits through influencers. In this regard we may definitely point out that the purchase intent in social media is effected by many factors. Ellinor Bertilsson and Laura Van Alphen has rightly pointed out in their master

thesis *FROM FAST TO SLOW: CAN INFLUENCERS MAKE US SHOP MORE SUSTAINABLY* “Additionally, there are a lot more factors that affect purchase intent when it comes to social media influencers. Trust, number of followers, and similar values are a few other factors that also impact purchase intent” ( Bertilsson and Van Alphen 42). As of now we need to shift our attention from purchase intent to the women influencers to reflect on those aspects which ultimately make them green influencers. In the above mentioned list of influencers, a brief note on their Instagram bio has been added to provide a glimpse of their interest and work. But to know the different layers of sustainable fashion we are in need of concentrating on their body of work which is visible on their social media pages. While carrying on with the intention of understanding slow fashion through the lens of women influencers there might be a question lingering at the forefront of this study, which is –

why women Influencers? Now the answer to this question lies in another question: Who are the targeted consumers of fast fashion? There are many surveys done to deal with this issue and to answer the above question. In most of the surveys it is seen that women are the targeted consumers for many fast fashion brands as women spend more on clothes than man. Therefore in an article “Would more women in fashion power positions mean more female consumers ?” in *Forbes*, Pamela N Danziger has rightly pointed out, “*Women make up half of the population, spend three times more on clothing than men, and at least in the women’s fashion segment, account for virtually 100% of customers*”(Danziger). If this is the truth then there can’t be any more valid reason for taking up female influencers who can reasonably influence females with their own experience of shopping. When influencers can relate with the behavioural differences in women in terms of shopping then it becomes easy to think about ways and methods of influencing them in shifting their attention from fast fashion to slow fashion. Here it will be wrong to say that women influencers can only influence women as they are equally capable of influencing everyone irrespective of gender differences. Here the reference to women as targeted consumers is taken up so that the points of sustainability and slow fashion issues can be discussed for a larger group of people.

In a country where *khadi* became a symbol of freedom, fashion and clothing were always near to nature. India as a country has always seen its people draped in hand spun clothes from natural fabrics which is bio degradable in nature. In India, cotton, *khadi*, *silk*, *eri*, and *Muga* are used as fabric for our clothes from time immemorial but with modernization, and industrialization mass production of machine-made synthetic and polyester clothes began, while changing our buying habits along with our surroundings. These clothes with a lesser life span in terms of fashion end up in landfills, polluting the earth forever, as they take thousands of years to decompose. Now this has become a world phenomenon and a deadly disease for the Mother Earth. The fast fashion industry want us to keep buying more but we need a fashion industry which is slow and keeps our buying habit in check. Here the agenda is to buy less and use more. In this scenario influencers can really be important in suggesting some

green measures. These green measures are enumerated below:

#### **Ways of Green influencing:**

##### **Handloom enthusiasm:**

To deal with all the aspects of pollution created by fast fashion the above listed influencers usually create different contents. In most of these contents one or the other aspects of sustainable fashion gets highlighted. Different influencers work differently and thus they create contents differently.

Some influencers try to work on sustainability while promoting indigenous and handwoven clothes. These influencers highlight their journey of sustainable and slow fashion through their concern for weavers and hand spun clothes which are made mostly with natural, breathable and biodegradable thread. For example, Neha Sharma @the\_stylewali is an influencer of this category. She promotes ethnic wear and supports local weavers. In her posts she is seen flaunting different silks and natural fabrics used for weaving sarees which is an ethnic traditional Indian wear. In such influencing the main intention of the influencer is to bring her followers closer to the knowledge of ecofriendly fabrics which in the long run will have lesser strain on environment. On the other hand, they propagate the need of acknowledging the work of local weavers. By doing so they try to influence people in avoiding machine-made products which definitely carries more carbon footprint.

##### **Styling:**

Some other influencers promote styling tips and by doing so they slow down the urge of buying new clothes. Styling old clothes give new life to them. Styling is thus a sustainable way of keeping away clothes from reaching dumping zone soon. It definitely slowdown the journey of a cloth from production to the landfills. In other words styling provides more life to a particular cloth. It may thus be taken as a better way of using clothes while providing option against fast fashion. Influencers like Jenna @ironicminimalist, Sandra @windsorburylane, Adity Mayer @aditimayer and many others are example of those influencers who are committed to sustainable influencing through styling. Re-wearing and restyling clothes are the mantra of their influencing.

##### **Circularity of fashion:**

Many women influencers are those who talk about circularity of fashion in their space. The circularity of fashion and the content made around it made these influencers capable in spreading awareness on sustainability and fashion. The idea of circularity in fashion is not new but it’s awareness is very low. Thus, women influencers who are growing awareness on this are doing a lot on different aspects of circularity in fashion to make the idea popular. Some of the most important ideas which can bring our fashion to circularity are Thrift, swap, mend, upcycle, reuse, etc. Suggesting many of these methods Aparna @stylishsuitcase writes

in the Instagram post published on 2nd May /2022,

*“My focus is to rescue and save what already exists on the planet than give my money to brands mass producing from fossil fuel based fabrics and exploiting labour, particularly women in the global south..... when buying new, I support weaving communities or brands empowering weavers or using futuristic and regenerative fibers which are sustainable.”* (Aparna Mishra) Along with this, she has again said *“The most sustainable fashion is fashion you already own”*(Aparna Mishra)

### **Thrifting:**

To bring circularity and sustainability in fashion, thrifting is the best option. It is one of those major ways in which we can bring clothes closer to the idea of sustainability. In thrifting, emphasis is given on accepting old clothes from a store. The idea might be a little weird but yes there are stores from which we can buy used clothes and they are called thrift stores. These thrift stores can provide ample opportunity for buying preloved or preowned clothes.

### **Swap :**

Swapping clothes is another idea which may give longer life to a piece of clothes. Here the idea is to swap garments. Swapping clothes can be sustainable in nature as this can definitely retain clothes away from landfills while giving newer life to it. When two individuals swap clothes they can easily mitigate the demand of following fast fashion trends without wasting money or without adding any fast fashion material to the wardrobe. In many cities swapping events are organised in regular intervals.

### **Upcycle:**

Upcycling clothes can be another option for adopting sustainability in fashion. Upcycling clothes can provide new look to the older garments. It is like giving new life with new appearance to the used outfits. Upcycled clothes are fun to carry and may give us new fashion goal.

### **Reuse:**

Reusing clothes is a useful technique to persuade sustainable way of understanding the journey of clothes. In the apparel industry refusing can be one of the best way of accepting a sustainable option. Reusing clothes while mending it, making it new, changing its shape and pattern can definitely help in achieving the goal of sustainability. On the other hand, handed down clothes are great choice when we talk about reusing them. Tanishka Mishra in one of her posts reminds us about Indian ancient technique of *Kantha* work where different pieces of clothes are woven together with beautiful needle works that may be used as comforter. *Kantha* works are done on sarees as well. Here *Kantha* comforters are such good example of

reusing clothes. In many of her posts Sanjana Rishi has talked about using second hand clothes. She has suggested how using second hand or refurbished clothes can reduce our carbon footprint on the environment. She prefers a lot of preowned materials when it comes to fashion and thus suggests different second-hand cloth stores for her followers from where they can buy as well as sell their old clothes.

### **Conclusion:**

We can conclude this study by saying that many women influencers can be meaningfully termed as green influencers as these influencers are set in a journey of spreading awareness on sustainability in fashion through their chronicles on slow fashion. These content creators are consciously trying to influence their followers on different aspects of sustainable fashion. Through their creative talent they are playing the role of green warriors. These green warriors are continuously fighting against the malignant effects of fast fashion on our environment. The referred green influencers in this study are among many who are taking the challenge of changing the mindset of people while being the example of change. Collaborating with these women green influencers fashion industry can bring potential change in their marketing strategies and even in consumer behaviour. All in all it may be said that these women green influencers are the strength of the present and hope for a bright and green future.

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## Linkages between Women's Education and Environmental Quality : Evidence from India

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### Abstract

Presently the perception of environmental sustainability is the major concern of the world. The continuous growth of population and developmental activities severely decrease the quality of environment and act as a key source of environmental degradation. Loss of environmental quality on the one hand directly affects health status and on the other hand acts as a major threat to quality of life. Under such condition, women's education gains topmost priority. This is because educated women not only play significant role in economic development and controlling population but also help in managing and preserving natural resources. This ultimately plays major role in environmental sustainability. In this paper we have investigated the impact of women's education on environmental quality in India using secondary data. Environmental quality is measured by Environmental Quality Index, developed by 'Planning Commission'. Higher value of the index implies higher quality of environment and more sustainability and vice versa. On the other hand, women's education is measured by Girls' Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education. The regression result revealed girls' gross enrolment in higher education significantly affects the quality of environment in India. Therefore, as an act of the deeper understanding of the connection between women's knowledge and environmental sustainability, emphasis should be placed on increasing girls' enrolment in higher education in India by providing affordable quality education.

**Keywords:** *Women's Education, Environmental Quality Index, Sustainable Development, Regression Analysis, and India.*



## 1. Introduction

During the last few decades the world has experienced drastic loss in environmental quality due to the destruction of environment on a comprehensive scale. The continuous growth of population and developmental activities are the major causes of environmental degradation. Among other factors, global warming caused by rise of CO<sub>2</sub> in atmosphere and massive deforestation is pointed out as another main cause of degradation (Lim et al., 2022). Apart from this, other major factors responsible for environmental degradation include poverty, urbanization, agricultural and various institutional factors etc. (Chopra, 2016; Lim et al., 2022). Immense environmental impairment has numerous negative consequences on ecosystem and human life. Loss of environmental quality on the one hand directly affects health status and on the other hand acts as a major threat to quality of life.

India is recognized as one of most severely affected nations in the world due to environmental damage. Degradation of environment directly affects the health of millions of population while indirectly it causes death in India. Apart from health concerns, it has economic consequences as well. According to World Bank the cost of environmental damage is estimated to be about \$80 billion in a year (Financial Times, 2013). The figure accounts approximately 6 per cent of India's GDP. Several researchers put forward many causes for environmental damage in India. But the most important reason for the poor state of environment is India's enormous size of population along with massive poverty (Nagdeve, 2007; Jha, 2018). Thus, present state of the environmental health along with its social and economic consequences become the key concern in India.

In the face of rigorous efforts by government and other development agencies, the quest for environmental sustainability is the major concern of the world including India. In fact, there is growing commitment and consensus among the policy makers regarding environmental sustainability at local, regional and international level which has been recognized as one of the core discussions in development studies in the recent past. The extraordinary changes in the environmental patterns symbolize a threat to human beings and life on this earth. Precisely, the essence of understanding environmental degradation and deteriorating health status and quality of life in a gender perspective is very much crucial due to differences in the socio-economic roles and rights between men and women. However, even today, while assessing the linkage between human beings and nature in environmental perspectives, women's knowledge, perspectives and needs are being overlooked by the Environmental Education research and theory (Martin, 2016). Against this backdrop and in the context of growing interest in understanding the role of women in environmental sustainability.

**Objectives :** The objectives of the present study are twofold.

Firstly, the study aims to understand the state-wise scenario of environmental performance index in India.

Secondly, the primary aim of this paper is to investigate the impact of women's education on environmental quality in India using secondary data sources.

## 2. Linkage between women and environment

Although the linkage between women and environment in the development process is a recent one but in reality its journey started in 1985 at the World Conference held in Nairobi where the action plan was drawn to strengthen the leadership of women in environmental management and administration and to provide information, education and training to women on environmental issues (Rico, 1998). Similarly, it is difficult to have a consensus regarding the notion of environmental sustainability which is universally acceptable as its quality or intensity is not the same across space and time. Broadly speaking, it can be said that environmental sustainability is a situation of interaction with the environment to stay away from the depletion or the degradation of natural resources so as to generate a long term environmental quality.

Previous research works have analyzed and established that women play an ample role in natural resource management and contribute a lot to environmental conservation. In this context, (Moser 1991) states that the role played by women in environment can be examined as managers or maintainers of the natural environment, as rehabilitators of the natural environment in the sense of sustainable development, and as innovators in the use of appropriate technology in the creation of new environments. Besides, women play an important role in managing the natural resources available to them and is profound in adopting different mechanisms to deal with the kinds of environmental crisis they face (Dankelman et.al., 1997). The fact is that even today more than 70 percent Indian women are directly dependent on the natural resources such as fuel, food and fodder, forest, water and land chiefly in rural areas. Thus, being the daughter of nature, women also act as farmers, as collectors of water and firewood and most importantly have a close connection with their local environment and often suffer most directly from environmental harms (Aditya, 2016). Moreover, women are more attached to the natural environment than men as they are basically accountable for household management. As a result, this section of people living in the society are more likely to suffer from a ruined home, locality, and city environment and to bear more of the burden that goes with living in poor housing and communities with inadequate residential and health infrastructure; they suffer the most since they spend more time at home and its immediate surrounding area (Etta, 1999). Factors like use of resources at unsustainable levels, inefficient



technologies, improper administrative practices, poor economic development policies, growing population pressure on natural resources, unscientific development practices, ignorance about the laws and regulation of environment protection, poor education, are related to the critical threats to the environment such as the deterioration of human health (Ibanez et.al.2018). Therefore, under such circumstances, protection of environment is the utmost priority. In this regard the initiative like- the 1992 UN Earth Summit, Chipko Movement in India, Kenya’s Green Belt Movement, Appiko movement, Save Silent Valley Movement, and Narmada Bachao Andolan, the ongoing movement of Medha Patekar (Indian social worker), Menaka Gandhi (an Indian environmentalist and politician) reflects the trend that most of the participants are women, Adivasis, and poor people (Shiva, 1988).

In this way, although women have done all this, their contributions towards environment have generally been undervalued which strongly advocates for empowering women through education. In fact, a systematic approach is very much essential to link the environmental issues with the women’s education in the development process. This is because environmental dimensions of development and women’s education are inseparable, and that this link is a result of the aggregate effect of social relationships and actions as they influence the natural ecology on the one hand and the impact of women education on environmental changes on society on the other hand (Gallopín,1986). Moreover, earlier researches have also affirmed that people’s commitment and involvement in public debates about environmental problems vary according to their levels of education and understanding of the issue (Salehi et al. 2015). Besides, women’s education has been considered as an essential tool for women empowerment for long time but the relationships between women’s education and environmental quality have not been deeply explored in the field of environmental education research (Sakellari et.al. 2013). In this way, the extent of literature outlined here has served to underscore various aspects of environmental sustainability in the context of developmental perspectives. Understanding the linkage between gender especially of women and the environment and sustainability has emerged as an important segment of environmental discussion because loss of environmental quality on the one hand directly affects health status and on the other hand acts as a major threat to quality of life. So, the proposal of women’s education gains top most primacy. This is because educated women not only plays significant role in controlling population but also helps in managing and preserving natural resources. Under such circumstances, understanding whether women’s education improves environmental quality is the need of the hour from developmental perspective and against this backdrop the researcher has found a gap and showed interest to make a study to fulfill the gap.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The study is conducted by collecting data from many secondary sources. The data related to Environmental Performance Index (EPI) are collected from the paper of (Chandrasekharan, et al., 2020). It is used as a proxy of environmental quality (Mukherjee and Chakraborty, 2009). On the other hand, the data for Girls Gross Enrolment Ratio (GGER) and NSDP per capita (NSDP) are compiled from Handbook of Statistics on Indian Economy, published by RBI. The variable GGER is used to measure the extent of women’s education. Per Capita Energy Consumption (PCEC), and Emission Intensity data are collected from State Energy & Climate Index Round-I. Other variables such as Urbanisation (URB), and Population (POPU), are collected from Census 2011, and <https://uidai.gov.in/images/state-wise-aadhaar-saturation.pdf>, respectively. For this study, we have collected data (for all the variables) for the year 2020, covering 28 states and 3 UTs of India. The variables description are shown in Table-1.

Table 1 : Description of the variables

Variable	Definition	Type of Variables	Source
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)	Represents the quantitative measure of environmental wellbeing.	Dependent Variable	Chandrasekharan, et al., (2020)
Girls Gross Enrolment Ratio (GGER)	Displays the share of girls enrolled in higher secondary studies	Independent Variable	RBI
Urbanisation (URB)	Refers to the share of population lives in urban areas	Control	Census 2011
Population (POPU)	Shows total number of population in millions	Control	<a href="https://uidai.gov.in/images/state-wise-aadhaar-saturation.pdf">https://uidai.gov.in/images/state-wise-aadhaar-saturation.pdf</a>
NSDP per capita (NSDP)	Shows per capita Net state domestic product (in Rs.) at 2011–2012 (constant) prices	Control	RBI

Variable	Definition	Type of Variables	Source
Per Capita Energy Consumption (PCEC)	Shows energy consumption in kg of oil equivalent per capita	Control	State Energy & Climate Index Round-I
Emission intensity	Emission intensity referstothe extent of emissions in terms of GDP.	Control	State Energy & Climate Index Round-I

Source: Researchers’ own specification

3.2 Methods

In this section we have discussed the appropriate method used in the study to analyse the objective concerned. As the variable Environmental Quality Index (dependent variable) ranges from 0 to 1, we have identified our model as non-linear model. The rationale for deciding such specification is to avoid the problem of unboundedness. The logistic (non-linear) regression equation to investigate the impact of girl’s gross enrolment on environment quality is shown as:

$$EPI_i = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-[\alpha_i + \beta_i GGER_i + Z' + u_i]}}$$
..... (1)

$$EPI_i = \frac{e^{[\alpha_i + \beta_i GGER_i + Z' + u_i]}}{1 + e^{[\alpha_i + \beta_i GGER_i + Z' + u_i]}}$$
..... (2)

$$1 - EPI_i = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-[\alpha_i + \beta_i GGER_i + Z' + u_i]}}$$
..... (3)

$$\frac{EPI_i}{1 - EPI_i} = e^{\alpha_i + \beta_i GGER_i + Z' + u_i}$$
..... (4)

Interestingly it is observed that, although we have started with the selection of non-linear model, our final model becomes linear model. Now, if we take natural log on the both sides of the equation (4) then

$$\ln \left[ \frac{EPI_i}{1 - EPI_i} \right] = \alpha_i + \beta_i \ln GGER_i + \ln S' + u_i$$

Or,

$$Z_i = \alpha_i + \beta_i \ln GGER_i + \ln S' + u_i$$

Where,  $Z_i$  shows for log of odds ratio of environmental quality index and  $GGER$  represents girls’ gross enrolment ration in higher education,  $\alpha_i$  and  $u_i$  are the intercept and error term respectively.  $S'$  is set of all possible control variables.

4. Analysis of the Results

4.1 State-wise scenario of environmental performance index

Degradation of environment is one of the most serious causes of concern in the world including India (The Economic Times, 2019). Expanding the growth of population along with the practice of pesticides and insecticides in agricultural activities severely affects the quality of environment. The latest report provided by the ‘World Economic Forum’ claims that among the 180 countries, India ranks 168<sup>th</sup> in relation to environmental performance in 2021. The rank further decreases and hits the bottom as India languishes at 180<sup>th</sup> in 2022. These figures show the extent of ill health of environment and severity of the concern in India. Therefore, for deeper understanding of the fact, we have analysed state-wise scenario of India’s environmental performance index in figure - 1 :

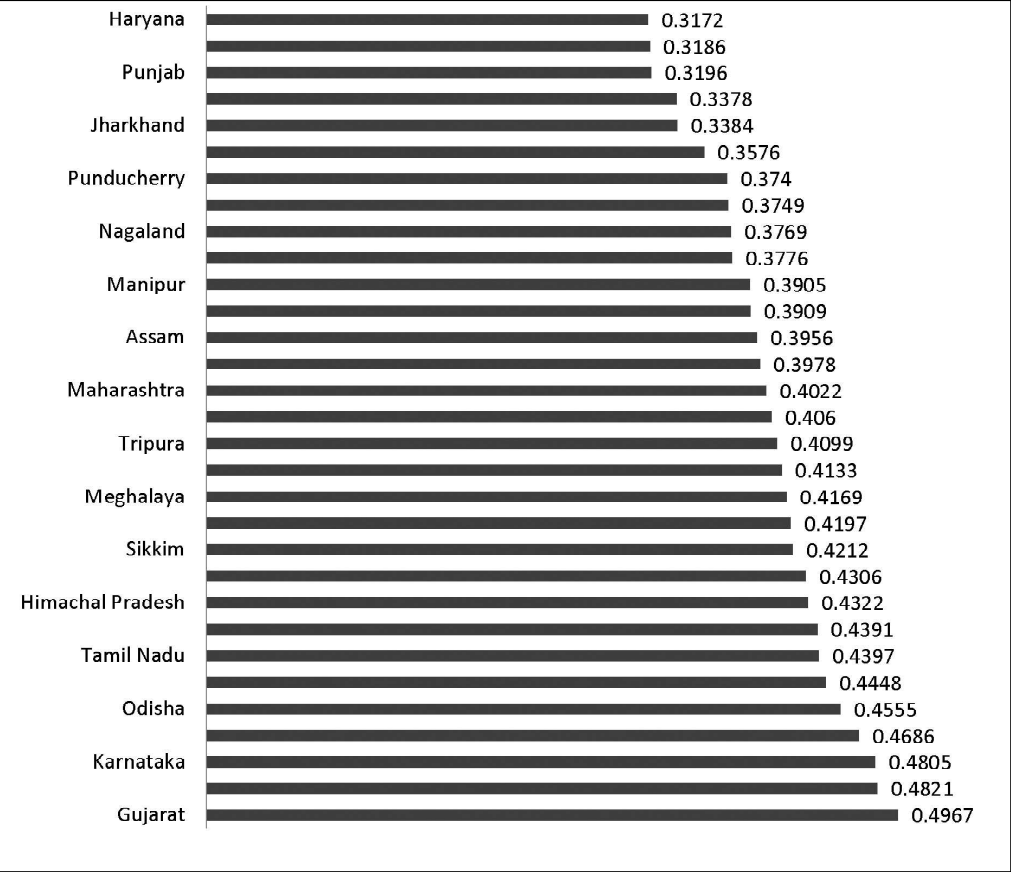


Figure 1: Snapshot of Environmental Performance Index across Indian states

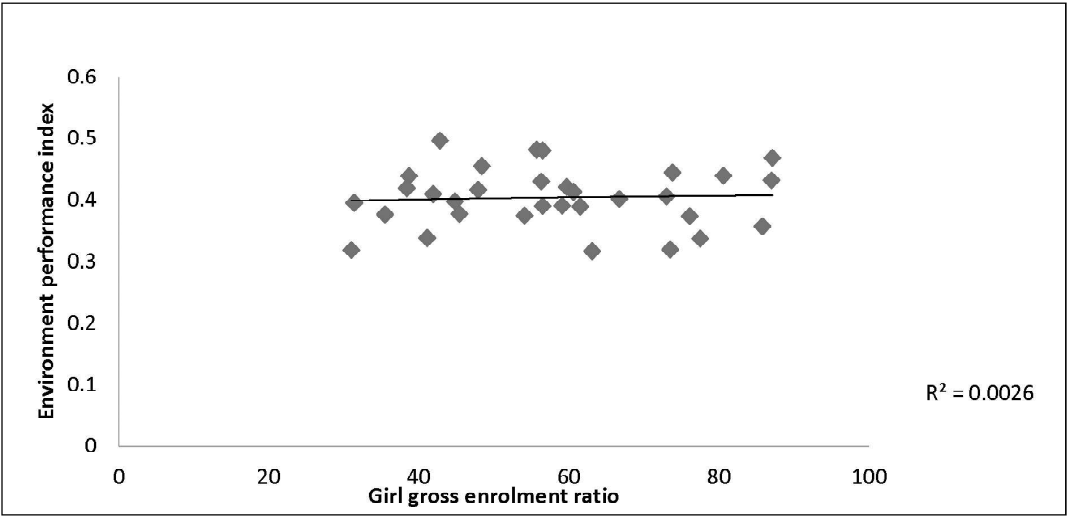
Source: Researchers’ own drawing

The figure-1 reveals that, there is huge dis-similarity in the performance of environmental quality index among the states. The highest value of the index is recorded for Gujarat followed by Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. On the contrary, the lowest value is observed for Haryana. The disparity in the performance of environmental quality index is may be due to dissimilar environmental laws and regulations in Indian states (Priyadarshini and Gupta, 2003). In fact, dissimilar socio-cultural background and respect towards nature are also another cause for such disparity (Dwivedi, 2006).

4.2. Impact of women’s education on environmental performance

In this segment, we have analysed the impact of women’s education on environmental performance. Here we begin with examination of scatter diagram analysis to cognize the relation between the concerned variables. The diagram shown in figure-2 reveals that there is positive association between girl’s education and environmental performance (hence environmental quality) in India. But the relation is found to be weak as the recorded value of R square is very low. The probable reason for such weak relation is due to non inclusionof other variables that may affect the association.

Figure 2: Scatter analysis for Association between Environmental Performance Index and Girls Gross Enrolment Ratio



Source: Researchers’ own drawing

Consequently, we have included number of control variable in the regression model that may affect the association. Thus the final regression equation (see methodology for details) to investigate the impact of women’s education on environmental performance is given as:

$$Z_i = \alpha_i + \beta_i \ln GGER_i + \ln S' + u_i$$

Where,  $Z_i$  shows for log of odds ratio of environmental performance index and GGER represents girls’ gross enrolment ration in higher education. The  $S'$  is the set of control

variables that include Urbanisation (URB), Population (POPU), Per Capita Energy Consumption (PCEC), NSDP per capita (NSDP), Emission intensity, and Deforestation (DF). Summary statistics of variables are presented in Appendix Section (Table-A1). The result of logistic regression model is shown in Table-4:

**Table 4: Result of regression analysis (Logistic)**

Variables	Coef.	Std. Err.	t Stat.	Pro. Value
ln GGER	0.10463	0.06613	1.58*	0.100
lnURB	-2.75553	0.532179	-5.18***	0.000
lnPOPU	-0.018724	0.01315	-1.42*	0.100
lnEC	0.064799	0.071317	0.91	0.373
lnSDP	0.138623	0.071108	1.95*	0.064
lnEI	-0.00937	0.025845	-0.36	0.720
lnDF	-0.0302	0.007754	-3.89***	0.001
Cons	-0.0159871	0.0493427	-0.32	0.749
Model Summary				
F(7, 23)			3.12**	
R-square			0.58	
Adj. R-square			0.49	

Source: Researchers’ own calculation

Note: \*\*\*, \*\*, and \* shows 1 percent, 5 percent, and 10 percent level of significance respectively.

In the above table, let us first discuss the appropriateness of the model used in our analysis. This can be understood from F statistics. It is seen that the F statistic (3.12) is statistically significant at 5 percent level. This implies that our overall model is significant. This result is further supported by adjusted R square (0.49) and claimed better fit model. Since our model is statistically sound and free from statistical errors, we will now focus on regression results. In Table-4 we found that the coefficient of girls’ gross enrolment in higher education (0.10) is positive and statistically significant. This implies that girls’ education positively impact environmental quality. Further, value of the coefficient implies that, if girls’ gross enrolment in higher education increases by 1 percent environmental quality will improve by 10 percent. In general women are more concerned and careful about environmental

issues compared to male due to their caring behavior (Stern et al., 1993). Therefore educated women are not only more aware about environmental illness but also able to make more sustainable choices that helps in managing and preserving natural resources (Imran et al., 2021). Besides, being the first teacher of their children, educated women teach future generation the importance of environment and make them more concerned about environment (Sola, 2014). All these aspects ultimately improve the quality of environment and make it more sustainable.

Among other determinants, urbanization negatively and significantly influences environmental quality. This is because industrial activities associated with the rise in urbanization produce several types of pollution (such as water, air and soil pollution) which decreases the quality of environment (Uttara et al., 2012). Similarly, growing population has negative and significant impact on environmental quality. With growing population, the extraction of resources from environment also increases to satisfy growing needs (Pimentel et al., 1997). And rise in resource extraction along with other negative consequences of growing population decreases the quality of environment (Weber, and Sciubba, 2019). At the same time, the variable deforestation also negatively influences environmental quality in India. This is because, deforestation adversely affects climate and biodiversity which results in loss of environmental quality (Vajpeyi, 2001). However, the coefficient of SDP is found to be positive and significant. This indicates that, per capita SDP positively influences environmental quality.

**5. Conclusion and policy formulation**

In the present day, loss of environmental quality is the most serious concern in the world. The continuous growth of population and developmental activities severely decrease the quality of environment. It acts as a key source of environmental degradation. Loss of environmental quality on the one hand directly affects health status and on the other hand acts as a major threat to quality of life. India being the second largest populous country with massive poverty and illiteracy, is under serious environmental threat. This is because the illiterate and poor people make more environmental damage by over exploitation of natural resources compared to the rich and literate people. The severity of the concern can be traced from India’s lowest rank (180<sup>th</sup> rank) in terms of Environmental Performance Index. In this paper, we have investigated the impact of women’s education on environmental quality (environmental performance index) in India. The study shows that, there is huge dis-similarity in the performance of environmental performance index among the states. Almost in all the states the value of environmental index is less than 0.5 which is very negligible compared to the developed countries. These outcomes visibly point out the severity of the fact and the crucial requirement for sustainable policy measure. Further, the regression result shows that

girls' education positively impact environmental quality in India. This may be because educated women make more sustainable choices for environmental wellbeing than less educated women. This result empirically establishes the well-acclaimed fact of women's knowledge-environment relationship.

Therefore, in order to understand the connection between women's knowledge and environmental sustainability, emphasis should be laid on increasing girls' enrolment in higher education in India by providing affordable quality education. Additionally, since India witnessed gender discrimination in the access of education, govt. should adopt appropriate policies to remove such inequalities for increasing girl's enrolment (Tippa, and Mane, 2018). Apart from this, looking at the negative impact of growing population and deforestation, govt. should adopt strict policies to control population as well as deforestation in India. As expected, urbanization adversely affects environmental quality in India. But as urbanization reflects country's growth, we can't resist urbanization. In such case policies need to be adopted to encourage the use of CNGs and the plantation of trees in urban areas in order to reduce the negative impact on environment.

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Appendix

Table-A1: Summary Statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Count
Environment Performance Index	0.40	0.04	0.317	0.49	31
Girl Gross Enrolment Ratio	57.74	16.86	31.00	87.10	31
Urbanisation	36.18	21.32	10.03	97.50	31
Population	42.92	52.00	0.69	237.88	31
NSDP per capita (constant)	123736.9	76377.57	310	374055	31
Percapita Energy Consumption	234.37	102.62	71.80	471.70	31
Emissionintensity	0.012	49.54	0.02	0.077	31
Deforestation	64684.35	94615.07	12	287000	31

Source: Researchers’ own calculation

Entrepreneurship, Sustainability and Economic Empowerment : A Study in the Context of Bishnupriya Manipuri Women in Assam

Dr. Tapasi Sinha

Abstract:

In the midst growing unemployment problems around the world, entrepreneurship is one of the prime activities that could be undertaken by women so as to become financially stable. Particularly for those women who live in remote areas and are economically backward having no other viable source of income generation. Entrepreneurship activities, if well established, surely will play an important role in the economic empowerment and sustainable development thereby changing their economic status. The Bishnupriya Manipuri women in Assam, belong to a linguistic minority as well as an economically backward community. But womenfolk of this group of people are rich in art and culture, they have expertise in craft and handloom activities. Hence they could opt entrepreneurship to improve their economic condition and contribute towards their empowerment and sustainable development. Keeping in mind the importance of entrepreneurship, the present study examines the prospects of entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women and also various problems and challenges that these women face in this field. Besides, the paper also suggests some measures to tackle the problems and foster entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women, keeping in view the sustainability of the environment. The data for the present study has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The study finds it important and hence recommends the intervention of policy makers on the one hand and academicians to do research on the other for the widespread awareness of entrepreneurship among women in general and encourage the Bishnupriya Manipuri women in particular.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, Economic Empowerment, Bishnupriya Manipuri Women

**Introduction:**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> session of UN General Assembly in its resolution on entrepreneurship for sustainable development 73/225 clearly acknowledged the significant role of entrepreneurship in the context of 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The resolution stressed that Entrepreneurship by creating employment opportunities and innovation not only contributes for economic development but also improves social conditions by addressing social and environmental problems and challenges. Besides, the resolution focused on the development of comprehensive and holistic approaches including both long-term and short-term measures for entrepreneurship. This indicates the role and significance of entrepreneurship to accelerate sustainable economic growth and also remedial measures to deal with adverse effects of COVID 19 pandemic on the development of entrepreneurship at micro as well as macro levels. National Knowledge Commission (Gordon & Natarajan, 2017) defines entrepreneurship 'as the application of knowledge and skills and competencies or monetizing a new idea by an individual or a set of people by launching an enterprise or diversifying from an existing one thereby to pursue growth while generating wealth, employment and social good'. Thus, entrepreneurship involves the entrepreneur who possesses innovative skills and takes risks. It also includes various functions undertaken by the entrepreneur to establish the enterprise. Amongst the various elements such as land, labor and capital, innovation and risk bearing are the two basic and fundamental elements of entrepreneurship. In fact, innovation i.e., doing things in a new and better way is the hallmark of entrepreneurship. While doing something new, it necessarily involves risk factors as there is every possibility to incur loss due to competition, change in government policies and customer preferences. In spite of this, entrepreneurs take risks and start enterprises. Thus, as a purposeful activity entrepreneurship undoubtedly creates new opportunities while building and scaling something revolutionary that advances the society. In other words, the role of entrepreneurship is very important as it not only helps solve the growing unemployment problem among the people but also contribute to the sustainable development of a society as well as the nation.

As half of the human resource, participation of women in entrepreneurial activities is not only important in the context of economic empowerment but also in respect of sustainability. This is so because there is a close link between women empowerment and sustainable development. Empowerment of women can be understood as a multidimensional process of providing power to women in respect of equal access to resources, rights as well as freedom of self-determination and also to ensure their equal participation in the process of decision making in all spheres of life. In short women's empowerment involves raising the capacity of women to determine their own lives and make strategic choices about different issues. While

sustainable development is generally defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). However, over the period of time, many changes in development perspectives, sustainable development is also perceived as development having three interrelated elements and/or dimensions such as social development, economic development and environmental protection. All these three elements need to be fulfilled collectively otherwise it will impede sustainable development. It indicates the fact that both men and women should equally contribute to all dimensions of development so as to keep a balance in the environment. Without emphasizing empowerment and equal participation of women, sustainable environment is not possible. However, gender inequality still prevails which adversely effects women empowerment. Therefore, improvement of socio-economic and political condition of women and gender equality are the prima facie for sustainability. So far as economic development of women is concerned, entrepreneurship plays an important role as entrepreneurial activities stimulate women to become financially viable and strong. In fact, development of women as entrepreneurs will generate multifaceted socio-economic benefit and helps to achieve rapid, all round regionally and socially balanced economic growth. The underlying meaning is that women and girls are at the same time effective and powerful change makers who can play a significant role for sustainable development through their active participation and leadership in social, economic, political and environmental spheres. There are many women entrepreneurs around the globe who not only raise their voice but also actively involved in sustainable initiatives and climate adaptation as well as mitigation measures.

Women entrepreneurship is relatively a recent phenomenon which came into lime light in the late 1970s. In India women entrepreneurship has come a long way from papads and pickles to engineering and electronics. In the era of globalization women particularly in urban areas are creating history in non-conventional areas like consultancy, import and exporting garments, interior designing, textile industries, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and so on. In India there are different institutions that not only endorse but also work for the development of women entrepreneurship. These institutions are – Federation of Ladies' Organization (FLO) 1983, Federation of Indian Women Entrepreneurs (FIWE), Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India (CWEI) 2000, Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) which has launched two specific schemes for women Mahila Vikash Nidhi and Mahila Udhya Nidhi, The Ladies organization of Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) etc. Mention may be made of Bharatiya Mahila Bank that provides business loan to the women entrepreneurs to start their new business which does

not require collateral security if the loan amount is less than one crore. Besides, the government of India through NITI Aayog has launched women entrepreneurship platform (WEP) to create an ecosystem and support women entrepreneurs and sponsors across the country. It provides the services such as incubation and acceleration for business at initial stage, skill training and mentorship, funding and financial support, assistance in marketing, corporate partnerships and most importantly the platform as well as network to share each others experiences. Moreover, the Government of India has undertaken various measures and schemes to promote women's entrepreneurship activities such as—

- a) Shree Shakti package introduced in 1989 by State Bank of India that provides financial assistance up to Rs. 25000/- to women entrepreneurs without collateral security and guidance. Similarly, Priyadarshini Yojna by Bank of India provides financial assistance to start small business and retail trade.
- b) Mudra Yojana Scheme that offers loans ranging between Rs. 50000/- to Rs. 10 lakhs ideal to start and expand small or micro business such as small shops, beauty salons, coaching centers for running home based small business.
- c) Dena Shakti Scheme by Dena Bank provides loans for women who wants to start new business in the fields of agricultural and allied activities, trade, manufacturing, micro credit, education, housing etc. The maximum loan limit is Rs. 20 lakhs while the interest rate is fixed at 0.25% below the base rate.
- d) The Udyogini scheme specially for those women whose family income is below Rs. 1.5 lakh per annum. It provides loan up to Rs. 3 lakhs at a very low rate of interest.

Various studies however, show that in spite of all these schemes, involvement of women in entrepreneurial activities is very low in India. This is because the successful implementation of these schemes depends on many factors like socio-economic and cultural condition prevailing.

#### **Objectives:**

The main objectives of this paper are –

- 1) To find out various entrepreneurial activities available to Bishnupriya Manipuri women particularly in Assam.
- 2) To identify the factors that put serious challenge on the Bishnupriya Manipuri women to expand their business.
- 3) To provide some suggestions to foster entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women so as to facilitate sustainability and economic empowerment.

#### **Materials and Methods:**

For the present paper, data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected with the help of interview schedule through multi-stage sampling. At the first stage, the sample of areas from Assam where a substantial number of Bishnupriya Manipuri people are settled has been selected through the technique of purposive sampling. In the second stage, samples or respondents have been collected from the selected areas mainly Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. Since community wise population is not available, the exact size of population of the areas is not known and given the time constraints, a total number of 100 respondents has been collected through the technique of simple random sampling. The secondary data has been collected from different text books, journals and websites etc.

#### **Discussion:**

The Bishnupriya Manipuri women belong to a microscopic linguistic minority community living in Assam since ages ago. They have a unique culture and language that distinctly identifies them from all other communities of Assam. Originally, Bishnupriya Manipuris were the inhabitants of the princely state of Manipur particularly the villages near the Loktak Lake. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, due to various internal conflicts and the repeated Burmese invasions, a major segment of the Bishnupriya Manipuris fled away and settled in other places within and outside the Manipur kingdom. In course of their outward movement, some of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people settled in the plain lands of Jiri-bam, a district of Manipur. While outside Manipur, they settled in Assam, Tripura and Sylhet now in Bangladesh. Thus, though Dr. G.A Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India (Weierson, 1994), mentioned about the existence of a considerable number of Bishnupriya Manipuris in two or three villages of Manipur particularly near Bishnupur who could speak Bishnupriya language. However, they are now completely overshadowed by the Manipuri (Meitei) language. Nevertheless, they still retained their ethnic identity and continued to identify themselves as Bishnupriyas or Hindu Manipuris.

The Bishnupriya Manipuri community is patriarchal in nature and as such the male members enjoy greater power and control in respect of decision making. The Bishnupriya Manipuri women though lead a better and honorable life due to the absence of dowry system and other social evils but in terms of decision making and independence, they always have to fight for their equal rights. Moreover, regarding the inheritance of property, though law grants equal property rights but it is found that most of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women do not claim their share of paternal property either due to ignorance or out of the fear of developing strained relation with their siblings. During the survey, it was found that 90% of



married women do not possess property such as land or house. In-fact these are owned by the male members of their family. This clearly indicates the economic dependency of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women. However, regarding their family responsibilities it was not limited to the domestic sphere. Rather, Bishnupriya Manipuri women are very hard working and share equal burden to meet their family expenses alongside their male counterparts. This often necessitates them to undertake handicraft work on one hand and go outside to work in the paddy fields on the other. In the present decade with globalization and liberalization, there is greater participation of womenfolk of this community in all spheres and no one can deny the important contribution made by these women in the family as well as the societal level.

#### **Prospects of Entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women:**

The Bishnupriya Manipuri community is economically backward. Majority of these people live in rural areas and both men and women participate in agricultural activities and cultivation, which is in fact the main source of their livelihood. Apart from agriculture, handloom production is another important source of economy to this community. Particularly, womenfolk are engaged in the production of their traditional garments not only for their own consumption but also for business purpose which ultimately make a great contribution towards their economic development. Since the Bishnupriya Manipuri women are good weavers and skilled in producing various handloom products which are in high demand in the global market. These products are also environment friendly and there is an ample opportunity for these women to set up new enterprise in the field of handicraft and handloom production. In fact earlier, handloom production was the main source of livelihood for these women. However, with modernization coupled with growing education among women that opens up new alternatives of earning money, not many women particularly from the new generation are willing to engage in handloom activities. Thus only 10% women are found to be engaged in this field. Apart from handloom enterprises, entrepreneurial activities were taken up in the field of beauty & cosmetics, fashion and interior designing, photography, writing, foods processing and beverages etc. which are indeed popular areas for these women. In fact, when there was gross unemployment problem due to COVID – 19 pandemic on the one hand and demand for vocal for local on the other, these activities appeared as a good source of income for these women. For example, a Bishnupriya Manipuri woman Sunita Sinha from Silchar established her business on traditional food items of Bishnupriya Manipuri Community such as *Heedol* (Dry fish paste), *Longchak* (stink beans) during the Covid period which is now running very successfully as these traditional food items are sustainably cultivated and are in great demand. But it becomes very difficult and challenging for most of the

Bishnupriya Manipuri women to emerge as successful entrepreneurs owing to several factors. Even in the field of handloom activities which was once the main source of their income, Bishnupriya Manipuri women have small business enterprise with little success rates.

#### **Findings:**

1. It may be worth mentioning here that even in recent past Bishnupriya Manipuri women had a great reputation in handloom production, weaving traditional garments for their use as well as for business purpose but these are slowly disappearing among the young generation.
2. The problems and challenges faced by Bishnupriya Manipuri women-entrepreneurs are multidimensional. During the survey it is found that compared to males, 75 percent Bishnupriya Manipuri women faced absence of financial access.
3. Since Bishnupriya Manipuri community is patriarchal in nature all economic resources like land and capital are controlled by the males. All major decisions relating to the management of property (movable and immovable) are taken by males.
4. Women are legally entitled to have a share to their parent's property, but none of the samples avail it either due to ignorance or due to the fear of having strained relations with their parents and siblings.
5. Nearly 50 percent of the sampled Bishnupriya Manipuri women entrepreneurs are not independent enough to control their own earnings and find it very difficult to start and manage a new business by their own.
6. Among Bishnupriya Manipuri women 60 percent are economically dependent and are not confident and willing to take risk of starting a new enterprise. Most of them lack self-confidence and don't want to invest money and take risk.
7. The main reasons of such lack of motivation are – financial dependency, low success rates of business activities, lack of time, gender-based responsibility, lack of family support etc. This is probably because they are more inclined towards machine made products on the one hand and their growing interest in other occupation on the other.
8. Due to the patriarchal nature of the community, domestic responsibilities are the principal duties for Bishnupriya Manipuri women. In fact, women have internalized this gender-based roles as their primary duty. Consequently, women hardly get time at their disposal to contribute in business activities. They encounter a serious tussle when they plan to start a new business or enterprise.

9. Among others, infrastructure which includes raw materials, institutional and organizational set up is very essential for starting a new business whether large or small. These infrastructural limitations pose a serious challenge at the initial startup which hinder these women to expand business at a greater level.
10. It is found during the survey that 60 percent of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women entrepreneur lack proper business skill and knowledge. They are educated up to secondary or matric level and don't have any business acumen or training.
11. It is observed that, the financial assistance provided by the government to buy materials of weaving, knitting and handicrafts to start a new business are not properly distributed among the needy women.

#### **Suggestions to Promote entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women:**

Promotion of entrepreneurial activities among the Bishnupriya Manipuri community in general and women in particular is very essential for their sustainable development. Particularly during the post pandemic period where employment opportunities are very less in both public and private sectors, the importance of entrepreneurship to deal with growing economic and unemployment crisis remain very vital. In case of Bishnupriya Manipuri women who are double marginalized i.e. one at the community level as their community is economically backward, and on the other at the gender level, the role of entrepreneurship is very significant in raising their financial condition as well as economic empowerment. Therefore, in order to promote entrepreneurship among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women some suggestions are put forwarded under the following.

Awareness should be created in the community level on sharing of domestic responsibilities and other household works, so that women who possess business skills as well as knowledge can get sufficient time to devote to their enterprise.

The Government and Non Governmental Organisation must organize some vocational training and skill development programs. The financial institutions should provide financial support for the infrastructural development under various welfare scheme. On the other hand, the political leaders or public authorities should abstain from nepotism and other vote bank politics while distributing financial schemes to the women of this community.

#### **Conclusion:**

Sustainable development of a community in particular and a nation in general is not possible if half of the human resources are left behind. Until and unless women are empowered and gender equality is achieved, development cannot progress in a balanced manner. Therefore, economic empowerment of women is one of the pre-requisites to achieve the

goal of sustainable development. In the midst of growing unemployment problem during the post pandemic era with less employment opportunities in public as well as private sectors, entrepreneurship could play a significant role in solving such problems and help women to contribute in the process of sustainable development. However, the study finds that entrepreneurial activities are very low among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women. There is a need to develop entrepreneurial zeal among the womenfolk so that they can empower themselves and can contribute to the sustainable development of their own community as well as the country.

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## Factors Affecting Potential of Ecotourism and Its Sustainable Development in Assam, India - A SWOT Approach

*Kirtika Uzir  
Dr. Monoj Kumar Chowdhury*

### Abstract :

Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing and most notable fields of tourism today. From a variety of viewpoints, ecotourism has a significant influence on the development of a place. As a result, it will be feasible to enhance and improve a region's economic, social, and environmental position by enhancing and developing sustainable ecotourism. Assam is one of India's last unspoiled gems, with a territory that is rich in both nature and culture. Forests, hills, lakes, and rivers abound in the region, creating a plethora of enthralling eco-destinations where visitors may experience natural beauty and learn about local cultures. With seven national parks and many wildlife sanctuaries, Assam can give travellers peace and tranquility in the middle of nature, as well as eco-tourism hotspots. In this study, first, the SWOT components (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) are determined through interviews with visitors, local people, and specialists, as well as field observation and consideration of similar works in the literature research, in order to fulfil the aim. Then, using a SWOT analysis and speaking with specialists, some realistic and beneficial tactics are established. The study's main contribution is to provide a SWOT analysis for categorising strategies into distinct groups. According to this paper, the three strategies "Encouraging investors and entrepreneurs to establish ecotourism centres in the region," "Establishing and improving hygienic units and medical clinics in the region," and "Improving and diversifying tourism services and products to attract tourists and increase their satisfaction" will have the greatest impact on achieving sustainable development in the region.

**Keywords:** *Eco-tourism, Sustainability, SWOT analysis, Strategies for Tourism Development.*

### Introduction :

The term "ecotourism" is a relatively new phenomena in the tourism sector, making up just a small portion of the sector. Ecotourism is defined as environmentally conscious travel to relatively untouched natural areas for the purpose of enjoying and appreciating nature (as well as any corresponding past and present cultural traits that encourage conservation, have minimal negative visitor impacts, and allow for beneficially active socioeconomic participation of local people (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Ecotourism may have a range of both beneficial and bad effects on the environment, culture and socioeconomic situation of a location, just like any other type of tourism. In its ideal state, ecotourism offers visitors a high-quality encounter with nature, raises money and support for conservation initiatives, has no negative influence on the environment and promotes the financial well-being of the host communities. While there is indication that the proclaimed advantages of ecotourism may be attained, there are just as many instances when ecotourism has failed to achieve its stated goals. The effects of ecotourism have been quite unpredictable. Ecotourism aims to bring together sustainable travel, society, and environmental protection. This means that those who enact and engage in ecotourism activities should adhere to the following ecotourism principles: reduce adverse environmental effects; promote environmental and cultural consciousness and respect; offer rewarding experiences to both guests and hosts; offer additional substantial economic benefits; provide financial benefits and empower local people; and increase sensitivity to host countries' ideological, environmental, and social issues (Das, 2011). Therefore, if its guiding principles are taken into account in a sustainable manner, ecotourism is a notable method for preserving the environment and generating revenue for local populations. It may have a significant influence on both the preservation of natural resources and economic growth. Ecotourism has been recognised by conservationists as a useful strategy for safeguarding local people and natural resources. Typically, ecotourism engages with living elements of the natural world and primarily emphasises environmentally sustainable travel, human development, and socially responsible tourism (Surendran, 2011).

### Eco-tourism diversity in Assam :

Because of its natural beauty and pleasant environment, Assam, the most notable state in North East India, is considered to be a popular destination for visitors. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are the states that border this one. Bangladesh and Bhutan also shared borders with Assam. The state covers an area of 78,438 sq km or 2.39% of the total territory of India. (Economic Survey of Assam, 2010–11) The plains and the hills are the two main natural geographic divisions of the state. The Brahmaputra and Barak valleys are part of the plain.

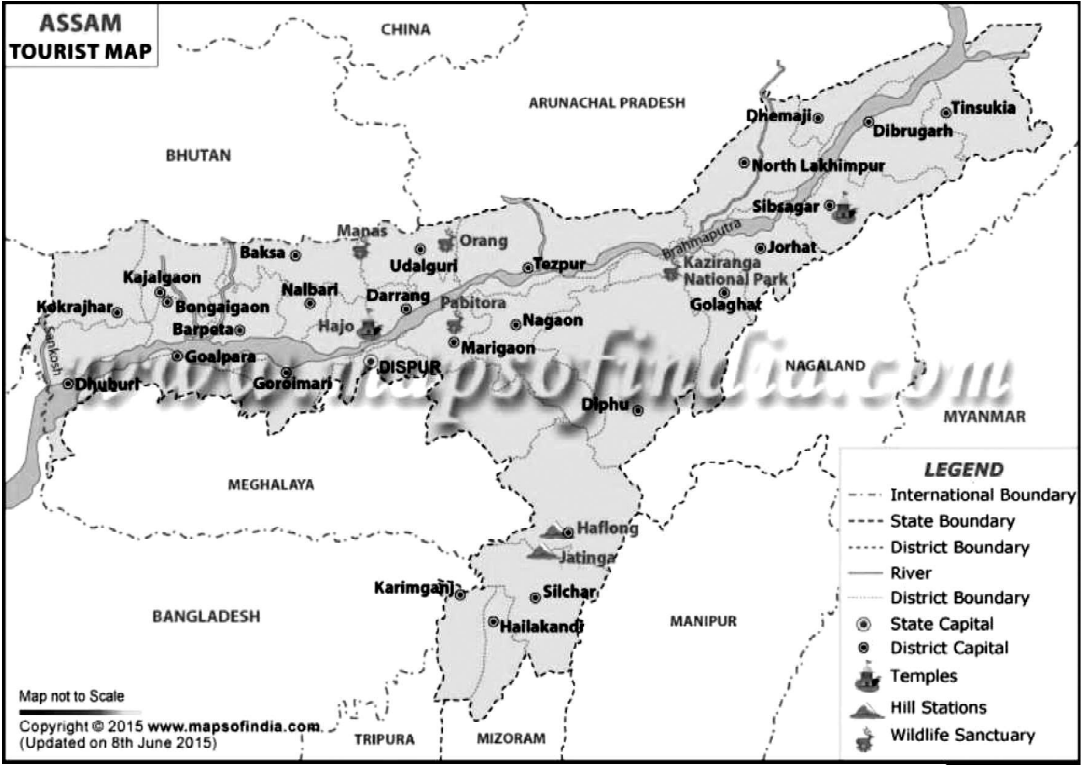


Figure 1 : Assam Tourist Map

Source: mapsofindia.com

There are several options for those who enjoy adventure and water sports in the Nameri National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa, and Bhalukpong in the Sonitpur region, which is well known for ecotourism and highly well liked by environment enthusiasts. Majuli, located in the Brahmaputra delta and encompassing around 2860 square kilometres, is said to be the world’s biggest river island. It serves as a key hub for pilgrimage, the spread of Hinduism’s Vaisnavism religion, heritage preservation and ecotourism. The expansion of wild life tourism in Assam has benefited greatly from the Joypur Rain Forest, Dihing-Patkai, and Dibru-Saikhowa, among other highly rich sources. The biodiversity in the Assamese hills and plains is renowned, and the state’s forests and hills are home to a wide variety of valuable, attractive, and medicinal woods, bamboos and other plants. According to Gogoi et al. (2011), Kaziranga National Park in Assam is a popular travel destination for both local and international visitors because of its rich bio-diversity resources. However, ecotourism development in Kaziranga

has received special attention since it fosters community involvement, decreases pollution, and lessens confrontations between humans and animals (Khound 2011). To preserve biodiversity, ecotourism development is urgently needed. It’s also critical to support livelihood opportunities in other Assamese destinations. Hence, this study aims to comprehend many aspects of ecotourism in Assam.

**Aim of the study**

The main goal of this research is to evaluate the present state of ecotourism at a location or destinations specifically Assam, where it is being pushed as a regional development strategy. To do this, a SWOT analysis will be used to investigate the interactions and effects between tourism, the environment and community. Hence, the stated objectives of this study are:

- 1. To identify and prioritize various factors affecting the potential of Ecotourism in Assam.
- 2. To integrate SWOT analysis to understand the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat in context to Ecotourism of Assam.
- 3. To provide strategies using pair wise matrix for sustainable development of Ecotourism in Assam.

**Research Methodology :**

In order to conduct a SWOT analysis of Assam’s ecotourism, this article will conduct a thorough analysis of secondary data, including published and unpublished documents from the Department of Forestry and Directorate of Tourism, Government of Assam, newspapers, books, various journals, etc. From literature review various factors related to ecotourism were identified and was discussed with 15 tourism experts to rank the factors using weighted mean method. After the identification of factors, SWOT analysis was implemented to study about the internal and external environment of tourism industry of Assam in detail. Taking these factors into account, a Likert scale—a widely used technique for grading the respondents’ ideas—was used in the construction of the questionnaire. The proposal for ecotourism in the Assam was made up of Likert-type questions with ranking responses (very high, high, moderate, low and very low). Proximity from cities, potential for tourism, recreational amenities, landscape view and natural risks (such as floods, landslides, and wildfires) were among the ranking factors. The intrinsic and advantageous characteristics that foster or support the expansion of ecotourism were the grounds of strength. The weaknesses were obstacles to the growth of ecotourism and sustainable environmental assets in the future. Opportunities existed that the local government, commercial sector, and stakeholders in the community could use to their advantage in order to promote ecotourism and local natural resources

sustainably. Threats should be halted or reduced since they were impeding the development of sustainable natural assets and ecotourism. Finally, a pairwise matrix containing the following S-O (strengths-opportunities), S-T (strengths-threats), W-O (weaknesses-opportunities), and W-T (weaknesses-threats) was used to identify anticipatory strategies for the sustainable development of Assam’s ecotourism.

**Factors affecting potential of ecotourism :**

The different variables were rated in accordance with the mean value obtained from a Likert-scale survey of tourism professionals. It was shown that raising small enterprises’ awareness of the need to grow eco-tourism in Assam is the most important aspect needed. Another crucial element is the promotion of ecotourism destinations, with the exception of a few sites like Kaziranga National Park, are mostly unknown to the public. It is also crucial to include the neighbourhood community and diverse stakeholders. The various factors along with the priority ranking are stated below:

**Table 1: Factors influencing eco-tourism in Assam**

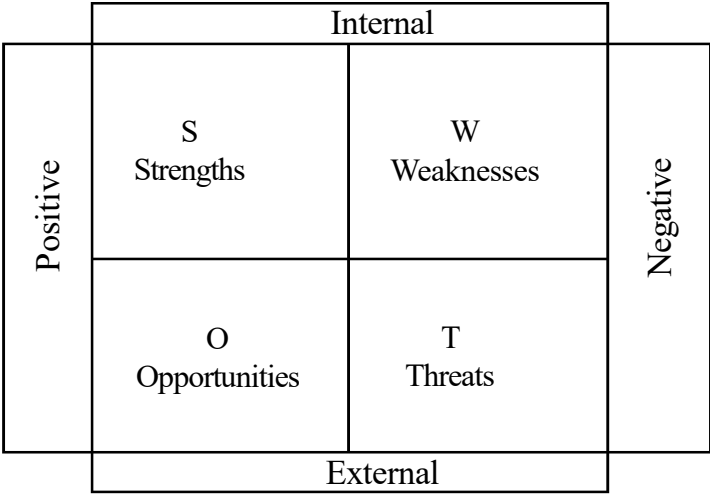
Code	Important Factors Affecting Potential of Ecotourism	MEAN	RANK
F1	Creating small businesses in the field of tourism.	3.46	I
F2	Campaigns to increase public awareness on the ecotourism	3.42	II
F3	More involvement of local people and authorized office on effective monitoring	3.35	III
F4	Increasing the quality of tourist accommodation in terms of service delivery.	3.34	IV
F5	Natural hazard (heavy flood, earthquake, landslide)	3.05	V
F6	Tourist guide and proper information of destinations mainly local culture, traditional foods, dominant plant and wildlife (brochure, sign, etc.	2.90	VI
F7	Effectives security for international tourist	2.88	VII
F8	Necessary services such as camping sites, eco homestays etc.	2.80	VIII
F9	Rubbish and plastic left in environment	2.78	IX
F10	Developing management and strict law enactment to alleviate the activities such as arson tree branch cutting, littering etc.	2.62	X

(adapted from Fallahzade &Hajabbasi, 2012; Heshmati, Arifin, Shamshuddin, & Majid, 2012).

The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) method implements prioritised strategies in achieving sustainable development goals at the community scale and is a viable and adaptable technique for outcome on ecotourism based on interdisciplinary evaluation of ecotourism. It is a holistic, integrated analytical technique for including several disciplines in the planning process. SWOT is therefore frequently used in the management of ecotourism when making decisions. More opportunity tactics can be discussed based on SWOT outcomes. SWOT is a good method for identifying and ranking ecotourism development strategies, nevertheless (Sahani, 2021).

**SWOT analysis on ecotourism :**

Large corporations created SWOT analysis or the SWOT Matrix in the midst of the 1960s to pinpoint the critical elements needed to reach the objective. In actuality, it is a way for choosing a strategy to decide on a short-term or long-term approach to a variety of difficulties and challenges, as well as the order in a variety of events. This model can be created for a company, a partnership, or a specific geographic area. Two matrices of internal and external elements make up this structure. External factors are connected to opportunities (O) and threats (T) of a territory or system, whereas internal variables are linked to weaknesses (W) and strengths (S) of a set, a location, or an issue.



**Figure 2: SWOT Analysis**

Source: [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

With its deep woods, uneven terrain, flora and wildlife, the magnificent Brahmaputra and its tributaries, wild life reserves, and several endangered species of mammals, Assam primarily caters to nature-centric tourism. Few locations around the world can compete with what the state has to offer tourists in terms of natural beauty and biological diversity. The essence of tourism in Assam is nature tourism, interpreted in terms of wildlife sanctuaries

Table 2: SWOT Analysis.

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Unique and attractive landscape.</li><li>➤ Low cost of tourism services and facilities in the region.</li><li>➤ Environmental services like adequate water resources, wildlife, fish etc.</li><li>➤ Local market for handicrafts and handlooms.</li><li>➤ The hospitable and friendly behaviour of the people in this region.</li><li>➤ Moderate climatic conditions</li><li>➤ Easy public access to main roads, airport, market, hotel, hospital, customs, electricity facilities.</li><li>➤ It is pleasant for international visitors.</li><li>➤ Has an array of types of tourism available like wildlife, religious, cultural, tea, adventure etc.</li><li>➤ Suitable tourism infrastructure to develop rural tourism.</li><li>➤ Diversity and plurality of natural, cultural, and tourist destinations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Lack of attention or involvement by local people to the eco-tourism industry.</li><li>➤ Unsuitable accommodation and recreation facilities due to the government’s lack of planning and investment.</li><li>➤ Improper environment and swage structures.</li><li>➤ Lack of planning and management talents to use sustainable resources.</li><li>➤ The inability of people to speak in an international language such as English.</li><li>➤ Lack of trained experienced workforce.</li></ul>
OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Increasing the incentives for sponsorships and private businesses in the area to invest, such as the success of the local tourist industry.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Due to pollution, damage to natural and historical features, and decreased tourism, the region’s economic power has decreased and little preparation to stop the</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Create an indigenous handicraft and handloom market.</li><li>➤ The potential for international engagement in introducing and developing the region’s tourism attractions.</li><li>➤ Enhancing local workforce training and educating residents about welcoming tourists.</li><li>➤ With the success of tourism in the area, prevent rural to urban migration and boost employment.</li></ul>	<p>abuse of the ability of some seasons’ bearing areas because due to a lack of spatial planning process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Degradation of regional handicraft’s authenticity as a result of visitors’ customs combining with it.</li><li>➤ Cultural Issues Caused by the blend of Native Culture with Tourism.</li><li>➤ Resistance to make handmade goods after economic growth.</li></ul>
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7. STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Strength-Opportunity (S-O) Strategy

- Enhancing visitor and tourist amenities and infrastructure.
- Hiring educated individuals to instruct the locals to better welcome tourists via the identification and utilisation of additional attractions or the region, such as natural attractions, handicrafts, and so forth.
- Requesting private sector companies to make investments in developing tourism in this area.
- Encourage locals to get involved in creating the region’s tourism amenities and infrastructure.
- Interaction and collaboration between the local community, governmental, and non-profit tourism-related groups to advance the tourist sector.

7.2 Strength-Threat (S-T) Strategy

- Attracting public support for the creation, marketing, and preservation of high-quality indigenous handicrafts.
- Making plans to safeguard the environment and employing the appropriate methods to do so.
- Educating the community about the benefits of tourism on local life by creating educational programmes and encouraging cultural growth within the community.

### 7.3 Weakness-Opportunity (W-O) Strategy

- Planning for the construction of residential and recreational amenities due to the region's strong potential to attract more tourists.
- Increasing the effectiveness of national and international tourism advertising.
- Promote tourist education by holding various gatherings with locals.
- Creating and developing a green destination that is suitable for visitors.

### 7.4 Weakness-Threat(W-T) Strategy

- Promote tourism by utilising the research that has been done in this area.
- Increasing the number of religious and cultural activities in the area to draw tourists and lengthen their stay.
- The municipal council and governor's office are hosting seminars on investment and the tourism business, and they are urging investors to provide amenities for visitors like classic resorts in small towns and the outdoors.
- Fostering strong communication and collaboration between village councils, residents, and local authorities to advance the tourist sector.

### 8. Conclusion :

In this study, we used a SWOT matrix technique to examine the plans for Assam's integrated management of natural resources and ecotourism development. The results indicate that the primary effects of unmanaged ecotourism include increased disputes in local communities and landscape use/cover change as a result of campaigning pressure, trash disposal, plant elimination, soil disruption, and water pollution. The major causes of this condition include insufficient field surveillance, bad administration, and a lack of public leisure and welfare services, both in cities and in the surrounding areas. The preservation of environmental assets should be rigorously taken into consideration based on strategic solutions, concurrent with the building of required infrastructure for the growth of ecotourism. In order to encourage and grow legitimate ecotourism operations, local governments, the commercial sector, and local stakeholders must work together. Therefore, regular patrols, stringent enforcement of preservation measures, and restrictions on degrading activities like plant eradication, arson fires, waste dumping, and plastics disposal in the environment are essential to the preservation of pristine landscape and threatened native species. These tactics can assist governments in striking a balance between the growth of ecotourism and the preservation of natural resources on a local level. It is advised that further research be done on a number of areas relevant to the development of sustainable ecotourism, such as legal reform, public education, training, ethical development, and religious tourism in Assam.

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