

Tilo and Spices: An Ecofeminist Reading of *the Mistress of Spices* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

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Abstract

This paper seeks to outline ecofeminism in India in terms of both activism and fiction that explicitly foreground women. I also state that women's relationship to the environment is ambivalent, thus disputing the dualism of nature/culture and yet straddling the grey area between these two binaries. This is particularly highlighted by Indian women writing fiction in English. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in her diasporic work *The Mistress of Spices* talks about the inseparable relation between women and nature.

Key Words: Spices, Nature, Ecofeminism, Women, Patriarchal Domination

Introduction

As a result of a series of conferences and plants held in the United States by a group of academics and professional women during the late 1970s and early 1980s a new branch called Ecofeminism took birth. They met to bat the ways in which feminism and environmentalism might be combined to promote respect for women and the natural world and were motivated by the notion that a long matter-of-fact precedent of associating women with nature had led to the oppression of both. The central tenet of Ecofeminism is that social and environmental issues aren't separate, that the cause for the mistreatment of women, people of colour and the medium stem from the same place. So, from an ecofeminist perspective, it's trim to view all these issues inclusively. Divakaruni's bestselling unfamiliar *The mistress of Spices* written in a unique style that blends prose and poetry, magic and reality was named one of the top hundred books of twentieth century by the San Francisco Chronicle. Divakaruni's exposition, 'I wrote the book in a spirit of play, collapsing the divisions between the realistic world of twentieth century America and the perpetual one of myth in my attempt to work a up-to-date fable.' This work is one of the sporty specimen for the vignette of ecofeminism. The characters of novel are really much related to nature. Yea though the work is diasporic and feminist approaching can point our jiffs which supply specimens of ecofeminism.

Objective of the Study

Environmental damage is a feminist issue and so is climate change. Both are major social issue moment. The manlike dominated society in Indian culture has marginalized nature as well as woman for fulfilment of their essentials. By exploring the relationship between the clime and women, the fight for environmental protection needs to have another woman at its helm. But for it to be truly intersectional, we've to concentrate on the relationship between women have between each other in the society. We need to empower and support communities that have close relation with clime if we want to fence from another decline. Bearing Issues faced by women and nature are one of the major problems in current society. Yea though we've the tradition of appreciating both, the manlike dominant culture oppresses woman and nature. It's high time we need to respond to their issues. The problems of nature and woman aren't separate. They're concatenated. Ecofeminism

helps us to spread light on kaleidoscopic issues faced by woman and nature also gives us head idea for answers. This will be helpful to all who are interested in learning a connection between woman and nature.

Hypothesis

This paper endeavours to study ecofeminism in the novel *Mistress of Spices* authored by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Chitra Banerjee uses the different elements of nature like fire and water in the entire novel. She uses underwater life, island and ocean as the integral part of setting in the novel and serpents, Sampatti's fire as characters in the work. Spices are interwoven in the novel that is used by Tilo adeptly to cure and heal the Asian community in Oakland. The stylistic features of the novel also have nature and its different elements. Nature becomes an inseparable part of this work and it is presented in all its forms and the complete cycle of creation, preservation and destruction

Research Methodology

This paper is an analysis of a novel *The Mistress of Spices*. The theory ecofeminism is applied to the novel in order to prove the concept of theory in the novel. Various methods can be adopted to fulfil the project. In this project we are focusing on the primary source which is a novel by famous female author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Also we will consider two branches of ecofeminism, Radical ecofeminism and spiritual ecofeminism. The concept included in the theory work is applied to the novel and various incidents are projected to prove that *The Mistress of Spices* is a work under ecofeminism.

Review of Literature

As a recent learned approach Ecofeminism studies “the relationship between literature and physical surroundings” and answers resembling questions as, “How is nature represented in this sonnet? How do our conceits of the land influence the way we treat it? In what ways has scholarship itself affected humankind's relationship to the natural world? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental juncture transuding into contemporary literature and popular culture? Etc.” (10) India is well endowed with nature and the idolatry of nature has been a way of life since time immemorial. People have been worshipping the natural objects like the sun the moon the shops, waterways etc. But with changing times the truculence towards nature has also widened. The mannish dominated society in Indian culture has marginalized nature as well as woman for fulfilment of their necessities since the ancient times. Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and C.K Janu. Multiple women authors like Anita Desai in her factory represents nature or uses symbolism of nature in relation to women characters that allows the anthology to descry new and undiscovered realms of Ecofeminism. Her novels like *Cry,the Peacock* and *Fire on the mountain* envelop the burning issues of nature and woman. *Cry,the Peacock* represents the vital connection between nature and woman. *Fire on the Mountain* revolves around three women characters Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das. The response of these characters to different situations in life has been expressed with natural images to portray the inner cognizance. The original depicts the darker hues of nature with a mishmash of darker side of concerned women characters. This novel makes it clear that ecocriticism encircles not only ecological issues, but also those natural icons that contribute to a relative connection between natural and non-human unions. (11) Arundhati Roy “ s most acclaimed work, *The God of Small Things* depicts the relationship between women and nature and the way both are oppressed by the patriarchal society. The unprecedented interprets the deterioration of the fictional whistle-stop of Ayemenem. The pollution of the trough Meenachal and the convalescence of the History house as a excursionist harbour are critical to the work which leads the way to the association between ecological exploitation and gender demarcation.(12) Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* portrays the problems generated due to man's encroachment upon the natural

order of chattels and exhibits that the affinity amongst humans and creatures is stronger than the relations between men. (13)

Relevance of the Study

Issues faced by women and nature are one of the major problem in current society. Even though we have the tradition of respecting both, the male dominant culture oppresses woman and nature. It is high time we need to respond to their issues. The problem of nature and woman are not separate. They are interconnected. Ecofeminism helps us to spread light on various issues faced by woman and nature also gives us prime idea for solutions. This will be helpful to all who are interested in learning a connection between woman and nature.

Tilo and Spices

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is an accomplished Indian American author, poet and professor who combine in her writings diaspora, feminism, and ecofeminism. In *mistress of spices*, Tilo, specialist of secret of spices reserved her life to helping those in need within the South Asian community in California. Tilo the doxy of spices the paladin is trained by the first mom amongst the nature to use spices as rehab power.

I know their origins, what their colours signify, and their smells. I can read each by the true- name it was given at the first, when ground split like skin and offered it up to the sky. Their heat runs in my blood. From amchur to zafran, they bow to my command. At a canard they yield up to me their hidden lots, their magical powers. (3)

From centuries back it's considered that nature contains female calibres. Women and nature are related to each other in chromatic ways. In the fresh *The Concubine of Spices*, the advocator Tilo and nature has an amazing cloistered relationship. Both the advocator and spices have a great unbreakable bond within them. All the spices, their origin and powers are well known to the advocator. Like a mother knows her baby, Tilo is *Concubine of Spices*. She knows the secret of nature. All the spices bow to her commands.

Tilo was born to agriculturist's family and she was considered to be a burden by her parents. She was named as Nayantara, star- eye. During her birth the nature ate her with thunder. The season was dry and people were blundering out of dearth and poverty. She was the creator of opportunity. Yea though in the inception she was a burden thereafter she was the bringer of luck. The land was known beyond the deep in her name and fame.

I knew who stole Banku the water- carrier's buffalo, and which lackey girl was sleeping with her master. I saw were under the earth gold lay buried, why the Weaver's spin-off had stop talking since last full moon. I told the zamindar how to find the lost ring. I cautioned the town let head of the deluges before they came I cured the spin-off of a monarch, predicted the death of a fuehrer, and drew patterns on the ground to keep the good winds blowing for the merchandiser jack-tars. (8)

Narrator is the champion of the novel. She's the bringer of luck. With her unnatural power she brings fortune to the land. She helps the citizens to be fat-cat. As her fame spread, her vill and family spread their name. Everyone believed that Tilo is lucky girl, as well as bringer of luck. She helped people from in and out of her home megacity. Tilo was a relief and support to multiplex people. Author of the work, Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee portrayed the hierophant as a woman closely related to the nature. She knew the magic of spices and can prognosticate the disaster. She predicts who stole and who act out. In all ways she's an asset to the people of her land.

Til is the sesame seed, under the sway of world Venus, gold brown as nonetheless just touched by

truelove. The flower of which is so small and straight and refocused that moms supplicate for their grandchildren to have nose shaped like it. Til which rest into paste with sandalwood cures troubles of heart and liver, til which fried in its own painting restores lustre when one has lost interest in life. I'll be Tilottama, the essence of til, life-giver, restorer of health and replacement. (42)

Tilo the proponent is really significant connected to nature. She was yea named after the spice til, sesame seed. Sesame seed is used as remedy for the heart and liver. It's also considered as the life giver. Once someone lost the interest in life, sesame is used for restoring the lustre and give replacement to the person. When we go through the novel we come across the Tilo whose life giver restorer of health and possibility. The novel is divided into colourful chapters. Each chapter is named after each spice. The chapter describes about each spices and it's application as bringer of luck. The first chapter is named as Turmeric. In this chapter the backer explain how to use Turmeric for getting its magical powers.

Turmeric which is also named halud, meaning, colour of day break and conch shell sound. Turmeric the defender, keeping foods safe in the land of heat and hunger. Turmeric the auspicious spice, placed on the heads of new-born for luck, sprinkled over coconut on pujas, rubbed into the roomers of marriage saree ... for thousand bits before history began, hubbies-and those who long to be hubbies- have done the same. (13)

Turmeric from ancient times was used in all special occasions. It's considered as pure spice which brings fortune to the function. This particular spice was inevitable in matrimonial function, pujas and for girls. It's also an inescapable spice in the kitchen. Likewise all spices mentioned in the novel has its own power and do help the people in different ways. For exemplar 'I'm burning presently incense of the champak flower for harmony in your home. '

When Geeta's father told Tilo about his granddaughter, her mod mindset and relationship with a Chicano boy Tilo used the power of champak to bring harmony in his family. Spices are bringer of luck and helping hand to beaucoup people. One can witness a close relationship between man and nature. Neem is a factory which has been used since generations for colored ailments, as a cure and it's well specified disinfectant.

"Tilo use us, we give ourselves obligingly to you who have tended us so faithfully. Lotus root and abhrak, amlaki and outside of all makaradwaj king spice, we're yours to command. Use us for love for beauty for your joy, because that's why we were made. Come Tilo come "(189).

Spices give away themselves to earthborn for fulfilling their adjurations. Like women give her for the family and others Nature immolation herself for her children that's earthborn being. As Vandana Shiva the big-name Eco feminist ideologue put up her conception there's a relation between earthborn being and nature, but nature is more affiliated to women. Women are considered to be the copy of love compassion immolation and forbearance. She's the melting candle of the family. Unfortunately and sarcastically she's the goddess who does not take any respect from others. Despite of our tradition, she's considered to be a burden to the parents. Tilo third originator of her parents was also considered a burden.

"They named me Nayan Tara, but my parent'sfaces were heavy with fallen hope at another girl child, and this one coloured like mud. Wrap her in old clothes; lay her face down on the floor. What does she bring to the family except a dowry debt" (7). Girls were burden to the family because they were to be married and a good amount has to be given as dowry. But from a girl's view the things are different. A girl is born and brought up in a family as a princess to her parents. As grew old the first phase of discrimination can be seen within the family.

A boy child and a girl child is treated in different way. A girl is taught to sacrifice for others. She is asked to be patient and obeying. Her opinions and ideas are not considered even in her own matters. After a certain age she is married to a stranger and is forced to leave her house. No one enquire about her happiness and no one is interested in her sorrow. Everything is left to the fate or destiny. Spices are also related to women and her life. Every spice has its own birth place and native home land. But they are taken away by human beings and used for their needs. The spices taken away from its mother land undergoes various processes. They are not only taken away but even sacrifice its original form. We all are familiar with the Spices in our Kitchen. They are known for its aroma and flavour. But has anyone thought about where these spices are from?

Spices went through various process and they are crushed to powder for human use. They belongs to different place, different forms but finally crushed for others needs. Vandana Shiva, has always related women to nature. Both women and nature is the victim of exploitation. They suffer and sacrifice for the others. Both are taken away from their birth place. When female sacrifice her dreams for the well fare of others, spices are forced to sacrifice its very form. It is crushed to powder and send in colour full packets and end up in stores.

Nature is always considered as mother figure. Who is a mother? A mother is the synonym of love, care, sacrifice and compassion. Our mother nature is not different from this. Nature produces shelter and care to living being. She gives her love and sacrifice herself for her inhabitants. "A Mistress must carve her own wanting out of her chest, must fill the hollow left behind with the needs of those she serves"(69). Tilo being the Mistress sacrifice herself for the spices. Her personal desires and feelings were set apart for others. She is the mother figure to all spices. Spices in return loved her and helped her. When she wants to help the customers of her spice shop, all spices talk to her and help her save them. These spices sacrifice themselves for the one who loves them the most.

When I put the wedding Garland around his neck, did I ever know that this is what is being a wife and mother, walking the edge of a knife with fear like a wolf waiting on both sides. And worst of all the mouths, the mouth coming to me even after I finally sleep, the mouths crumpled with hunger so many days this month, crying, ' so good Amma give us another half spoon more please Amma please', and turning away with eyes like anguished stone. (61)

A mother is a sacrificing figure. She enters into marriage with many hopes and dreams but she end up with feeding mouths and frustrated still happy to serve. Spices the daughter of Mother Nature born and grow with many dreams. But what is their destiny, it is to serve the needs of human and animals. They sacrifice their life leave their birthplace to satisfy human beings.

From giving a motherly position to the nature, the author is uplifting it to a spiritual level. All the spices mentioned in the work have got some particular power to help others. If turmeric is for luck, 'shalparani is the herb of memory and persuasion', 'powder from sandalwood tree relives the pain of remembering'. All the spices in the store have a magical power. They speak to Tilo, helping others in their needs. They have the power to create and destroy the life. Red chilli is the destroyer among spices. Spices and herbs are blessings of nature. Every spices inspire of their lives help others especially women. They have an invisible thread which binds them throughout life.

Spices are part of the life in happiness and sorrow. In ups and downs, it is role in one's life is inevitable. From dawn till night spices occupy a major position in everyone's time. In many auspicious occasion such as marriage or birth spices like turmeric and sandalwood have a very special place. When someone passes away neem is an important part. Also if there is disease in some house mother use to seek Neem for curing. Likewise spices are used for cooking. Normally a day begins with a cup of tea in our country. Some add cinnamon for a flavour. Making any dish mother's add chilli powder, Turmeric, Ginger for the spice.

Or add cinnamon, coriander powder or any other spices for flavour. Spice is a part of life for the women folk.

The very term Eco feminism is coined from two different terms Ecology and Feminism. Eco feminism itself says the relationship between a woman and Nature. Both are interdependent. Tilo is dependent on the spices. She seeks help of the spices to console and save others. She asks the help of nature for her own survival. Apart from spices we can also witness the presence of other elements in nature. The novel is intertwined with Nature and Tilo the protagonist. From beginning till end various elements of the nature are present in the novel. All the five elements such as water, fire, air, sky and land.

Women and nature are exploited by the patriarchal society for their own needs and profit. Tilo was a ordinary village girl. But as she grew old her power for foretelling calamities and finding missing objects increase her fame. As fame spread the pirates of the sea took her away from the home land. She was forced to leave all her happiness and beloved ones for their profit and success. Likewise spices were taken overseas in order to get the money and they were used by human for their own needs. Spices, herbs and all elements of the nature are for the benefit of the people. Potentials of women are also used for others.

Tilo is not the only spice girl in the novel. She had many sister spice girls. She described other spice girls as “they become water wraith, spirits of mist and salt, crying in the voice of gulls”(83). While mistress are leaving the island “ We had known it would be hard to leave this island of women where on our skin the warm rain fell like pomegranate seeds, where we woke to bird call and slept into First mother’s singing, where we swam naked without shame in the lakes of blue lotus”(87).

The author is creating a women land where she can explore her power and her relationship with nature. The island is full of women folk all young and happy. They are trained to listen to the spices. All her fellow spice girls were taught to be strong enough to face their life. First mother taught them the secret of nature. Nature becomes their life. Even though they were born in different places they join in this Island. Island calls them for their destiny.

Tilo was named Nayan Tara before she came to the island. She send a calling thought with a gold hook over the waters by which freebooters came in quest of her and took her out killing her parents and destroying the vill with fire. She lives with freebooters bringing life and death as the queen of freebooters. Her life gets more composite with the powers given by nature. As a freebooter queen she reviews her life and wants to know her pining and transfer a calling debate over water. As a result typhoon comes in the water and she gets released and saved by the serpents of under water.

“Sky grew dull like the scales of hilsa fish stranded on sand, air sparked and stung, wind keened in our masts and ripped at our sails. And then it appeared on the horizon, the great typhoon I’d called up from it’s sleep in the ocean through of the east. It came at me, and beneath it the water was boiling” (52).

Banerjee Divakaruni depicts spices as her character. Each chapter is on the basis of each spice. Every spice has its own important role in the protagonist life. To each customer she lends her service with the help of spices. The very first time when Tilomet First mother spices sing to her. She was eager to know the magical powers of spices. After learning from the first mother about every spice, Tilo and her fellow sisters becomes mistress of various nature elements.

Reaching California Tilo was in the Spice Bazaar. In spice Bazaar her only company was spices. They talk to her, help her customers and protected her from dangers. They were all under her

commands. Spices were personified by giving them voice and vision. Even though others cannot hear spices Tilo and spices have a strong bond. They speak to each other. When Tilo wanted to help her regular customers she seeks spices for their powers.

Spices are very much related to women. In every aspect she is the mistress of spices. Here spices are considered to be feminine and Tilo is the mistress of these spices. One important aspect of the novel is to that the spices have got a mistress not mister. Author could have related the spices to male Gender, but chooses female protagonist to show their bond with nature. She also widens her thoughts by comparing women and spices. Both women as well as spices are the destroyer.

In the novel we could witness the power of spices in destroying others. Red chillies are able to destroy the shop. Other spices stopped their power when they felt Tilo is breaking the rules. They hurt others, Haroun by not showing their power and his life was in danger. When Tilo left the spices and desired for Raven, the male protagonist they abandoned her. Tilo is rule breaker among the Mistress. She brought doom to the community. As she went with Rayan, and had sexual intercourse the spices bring earthquake which was powerful enough to destroy the entire Spice Bazaar.

“Mistress who was, when you accepted our punishment in your heart without battling it, that was enough. Having readied your mind to suffer, you did not need to undergo that suffering in body also” (112). Women are the synonym of forgiveness. Whatever happens in their life, whoever harm them or hate them women have the broad mind and power to forgive others. Spices are of same broad mind. When Tilo break the rules and went out of the shop these spices warned her without enabling their power but forgive her when she returns to them with an apology. We can see a warm relationship among them. Spices even though destroyed the building, was unable to harm their mistress. They understood the female desire for a common life. They left Tilo unharmed and grand permission for her to leave the shop. A kind of empowerment can be seen in the character of Tilo.

Towards the end of the novel a disastrous earthquake that symbolise the Indian ideology of creation, preservation and destruction complete the cycle but bonds Raven the masculine proponent of the novel to Maya, the name given to Tilo by Raven and show the violent side of nature. Together Tilo and Raven look for the 'terrene paradise', a dream world representing a starry-eyed subsistence. High up in the mountains, pine and eucalyptus, damn odour of redwood, windjammer and come'. Notwithstanding they realize that a new world can be created from the remains of the devastated world. (143)

Because there's no terrene paradise. Except what we can make back there, in the door in wreck in the pliable- out meat. In the ordnance and needles, the white remedy- dust, the youngish man and woman lying down to dream of wealth and power and waking in cells. Yes, in the hate in the fear. This way the cycle of nature also comes to an end from beginning with Nayan Tara's creation as a foreseer and further is saved and re invested as she goes on to be initiated as the spice girl by the first mommy and towards the end all the powers given are taken back destroyed as she breaks the rules of getting emotionally attached with someone and yea revolutionaries to take shape as a beautiful lady. The earthquake destroy everything but not her fate to bring again from the debris. In destruction also the life sprouts again.

Analysis and Major Findings

The Mistress of Spices set in contemporary Oakland, California. Tilo, the formal character, is a shopkeeper born in India and indoctrinated in magic, who helps customers satisfy their demands and supply with the mystical tracts of spices. Her life changes when she falls for an American man named Raven. Unfortunately, she chooses to disregard the rules of the training in her pursuit of affair and her decision to seek out guests outside her shop, which results in the spices inflicting

desert on her and those she cares about. To save Raven from being another victim of spices influential magic, she decides to leave him after one night where they make love. Subsequently, she accepts the desert for disregarding the rules of her training, which results in the store being destroyed in an earthquake. She survives and she and Raven attune and decided to help to rebuild the burg. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni uses the different elements of nature like fire and water in the entire novel. She uses under water life, isle and ocean as the integral part of setting in the novel and serpents, Sampatti's fire as characters in the work. Spices are interwoven in the novel that's used by Tilo competently to cure and heal the Asian community in Oakland. Each chapter is named after a spice. Nature becomes an inward part of this work and it's presented in all its forms and the complete cycle of creation, preservation and destruction.

Conclusion

India is well endowed with nature and the worship of nature has been a way life since time immemorial. But with changing times the truculence towards nature has also widened. The male dominated society in Indian culture has marginalized nature as well as woman for fulfilment of their needs since the ancient times. *The Mistress of Spices* by Divakaruni is a diasporic feminist work. This paper aims to conclude by projecting various evidences which prove the work as an ecofeminist novel. Divakaruni has used ecofeminism adeptly that makes her narrative interesting, gives depth to her writing and beauty to her stylistic features. This paper can be used by literature students to study the different elements of ecofeminism in the novel.

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