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Reconstructing ecofeminism: A study of Kamala Markandaya's *nectar in a sieve*

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Abstract: The critical discourse on ecofeminism makes a novel attempt in understanding the relationship between literary texts and the problems with regard to gender and ecological crisis through various literary genres. In this context, the present paper attempts to study how the concept of ecofeminism, which was originally postulated in the West, is reflected in Indian writer Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Furthermore, this paper investigates how the Indian English novel adds a new dimension to ecofeminist discourse, which consists in a fundamental departure from the overall conceptualization of ecofeminism in the West. Within this frame of reference, we shall first probe into the intricacies of ecofeminism and then analyze the selected Indian English novel in light of Markandaya's understanding of ecofeminism.

Subjects: Development Studies, Environment, Social Work, Urban Studies; Social Sciences; Education; Arts; Humanities; Language & Literature

Keywords: ecofeminism; gender; environmental crisis; Kamala Markandaya; *nectar in a sieve*

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to understand ecofeminism in an Indian context through a close reading of Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). It is an effort to trace elements of ecofeminism in the Indian English novel; at the same time, the article intends to explore how a particular Indian English novel adds a new dimension to ecofeminist discourse. To accomplish these two objectives, the paper is divided into three sections. First, in order to understand the basic tenets of ecofeminism as well as the critiques of ecofeminism, we will give a brief overview of the concept of ecofeminism by examining the perspectives of Western and Indian ecofeminists. Second, on the basis of this, we can ruminate and reflect on the essence of ecofeminism in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Subsequently, we explore how this Indian English novel adds a new dimension to ecofeminist discourse.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The present paper is a modest contribution to the ecofeminist discourse in general and Indian English novels in particular. It intends to examine two aspects in Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). First, it will trace the elements of ecofeminism. Second, it explores how the novel adds a new dimension to the ecofeminist discourse by portraying the experiential world and soil of India, alongside the narration of real Indian environmental problems. This is not a tall claim to theorize the ecofeminist discourse, but rather an attempt to incorporate an Indian English novelist's insight into ecofeminist discourse.

2. Ecofeminism

We will first study the historical evolution of ecofeminism, and thereby explore the latter's vital tenets, thus providing the overall theoretical underpinnings required to analyze the elements of ecofeminism in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954). Therefore, in this section, we seek to answer the following questions: What is ecofeminism? Why are women and nature connected? How has the theory of ecofeminism evolved? What are the important elements of ecofeminism? What are the major arguments of Western and the Indian ecofeminists?

Ecofeminism as a conceptual tool in the human sciences originated and developed in the West. The human sciences study biological, social, and cultural aspects of human life, as well as the behavior and relation of human beings with other entities; this has paved the way for the rise of discourses like ecofeminism to solve problems related to women and nature. The Ecofeminist discourse in the West coincides with the emergence of ecological discourses such as deep ecology, shallow ecology, and ecocriticism both in the Natural Sciences—a branch of science dealing with physical world, for example, physics, chemistry and astronomy—and other discursive formations. As the term ecofeminism itself indicates, it is a meeting place of two theoretical enterprises—Feminism and Ecocritical discourses. In the context of ecofeminism, it is necessary to first understand the pregnant notion of feminism as a theoretical enterprise. Feminism does not simply derive from the exploitation of women by men but, as the major ecofeminists posit, it includes how women are the firsthand victims of the degradation of nature because of their close association and dependency on it (Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 1993, 2002; Shiva, 2010, 2012).

2.1. Women and nature interface

The term ecofeminism may raise the question in our mind as to why women and nature are connected to each other, thus implying the need to study the interface between women and nature. Although some ecofeminists reject this connection (Ortner, 1974), while others emphasize the association between women and nature to be strong (Daly, 1978), most ecofeminists opine that the links between women and nature can be sustained on the basis of ideology, biology (Starhawk, 1989, 2002), ontology (Griffin, 1980), and a history of oppression (Adams, 1994; Eaubonne, 1978; Merchant, 1980; Ruther, 1975).

The connection of women and nature is generally based on three claims of an empirical, conceptual, and epistemological character (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003; Warren, 1996). First, the empirical claim shows that the firsthand victim of the impact of environmental deterioration is woman in the name of the development of science and technology because of her close association and dependency on nature. In short, the ecofeminist empirical claim examines the sociopolitical and economic structures that reduce many women's lives to poverty, ecological deprivation, and economic powerlessness (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003, p. 2). The second conceptual claim focuses on the construction of society on the basis of a "hierarchy and dualism" (Eaton & Lorentzen, 2003, p. 2), which reveals patriarchal ideologies as the root causes of domination of women and the exploitation of nature. The third claim is epistemological, centering on knowledge of nature. In this perspective, women have historically been agrarian cultivators and thus favor sustainable and renewable agriculture. Moreover, they are heralded as saviors of nature, invested with the mission to protect, preserve, and nurture the environment (Daly, 1978; Eaubonne, 1974; Merchant, 1980; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Ruther, 1975). These are the three connections between women and nature which have paved the path for ecofeminism to frame debates on the exploitation of women and nature.

2.2. The western ecofeminist discourse

There are many movements, protests, and activities, acting against ecological crises over the past three decades, which are largely responsible for the emergence of ecofeminism, which has recently emerged as an evolving theory.

Ecofeminism, the neologism, was coined by a French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, in her path-breaking book, *Le Feminisme Ou la Mort*, which was never translated into English. Her fundamental intention was to call out to women to save the planet. Francoise d'Eaubonne, a founder of the stream of Feminism and Ecology, claims that the root cause of domination of women and nature is patriarchy. She has given a sophisticated historical analysis of patriarchy, sustaining that that the latter appears at the end of the Neolithic period, leading to the conversion of dry to irrigated agriculture with the help of modern technology. The other factors that ultimately provoke ecological degradation are the mastering of fertility and the exhaustion of the resources. Francoise asserts that women are life-givers, life-preservers, and have concern for future generations, whereas men are exploitative, plundering and subordinate women and nature. As such, she argues that a more balanced relationship between the sexes would translate as a more balanced relationship between production and consumption. Further, this concept resurfaces in *Silent Spring* Carson (2000), which focuses on the sinister aspect of man's technological progress and its adverse effect on environment, namely the use of toxic chemicals in the countryside and the widespread destruction of wild-life in America. Further, she makes a well-reasoned argument that human beings and ecology are two sides of the same coin: without one, the other is not able to exist. As such, both must be subject to limitations so as to maintain the desirable balance between the human and nature.

Ynestra King, a North-American ecofeminist, adds her perspective to the evolution of ecofeminism as a theory which, though out history, has established a connection between women and nature, by considering women as inferior to male-dominated culture and all social practices as the root of ecological destruction. Dialectical feminism (King, 1990, 1995) attempts to resolve this nature/culture dualism. Furthermore, contrasting to the thought of other ecofeminists, Mary Daly, an American radical lesbian feminist, has given her remarkable contribution to the field of ecofeminism by her major work *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), defending that male connection with culture is generally considered as superior to that of women's connection with nature; however, she herself rejects this belief and sustains that the female/nature connection is a more of a strength than a weakness. She further juxtaposes female and male qualities, with women being defined as having life-giving power, fostering a dynamic connection between animal and earth, whereas men have a death-dealing power, which translates as an incapacity of bonding with nature, and the destructive control over women and the environment.

Starhawk (2002)—a spiritual ecofeminist, Wiccan priestess, social activist, and psychotherapist—puts forth three concepts of earth-based spirituality: the first, consisting in “immanence”, presupposes that the Goddess exists in all particles, spanning the human, animal, and plant world; the second refers to the “interconnection” that translates as oneness between the natural cycles and processes, with the animal and plant world; the third evokes “compassionate” lifestyle, defined as care for each other's. Starhawk propounds that women should support the save-the-earth movement. Like Starhawk, Carol Christ—a spiritual ecofeminist—desires to replace the God of patriarchy with a Goddess of humanity. Christ thinks that a Goddess religion practice can recreate egalitarian harmony between the human and nature by undoing hierarchical thinking and dualism. Merchant (1980) asserts that the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is an underlying cause of ecological crisis, and the domination of women and nature. Science, technology, and capitalism are the symbols of social progress, but these are also the motives for depletion of natural resources and loss of ecological values and culture. Plumwood (1993, 2002) has pointed to various causes of the domination of women and nature, such as dualism, rationalistic culture, global free market, technoscience, production and consumer oriented market economy. Amongst these, she propounds that the root cause of the debasement of women and nature is dualism, which implies not only depicting a relationship of difference, dichotomy, and non-identity, but systematically constructing an inferior one. The concept of dualism is constituted by many factors such as backgrounding, instrumentalizing, denial of dependency, and radical exclusion. Susan Griffin's (1980) cursory attack targets the androcentric attitude. She claims that all humans and non-humans have an equal right to survive because all consume the same sunlight, air, water, and land, thus drawing parallel lines between the destruction of nature and the diminishment of women's bodies.

According to Karen J. Warren (1997), the root cause of domination is to be found in all types of “isms”, that is, “isms of domination” like racism, classicism, heterosexism, militarism, and naturism, which are unjustified systems of exploitation and subordination. At the center of these “isms” lies patriarchy, male gender privilege, and power.

Adams (1994, 2010) gives a new dimension to ecofeminism by including animal oppression alongside sexism, racism and naturism. Adams argues that meat is masculine food, a symbol of male dominance, with meat eating being traditionally considered a male activity due to the working man needing meat for strength. Therefore, meat is both animalized and masculinized because animals are absent referents¹. Adams additionally claims that the oppression of women and animals on the basis of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption is connected to butchering and sexual violence. Gaard (1993) affirms that ecofeminism as a theory revolves around the peace, labor, women’s health care, anti-nuclear, environment, and animal liberation movements, the core objective being that of bringing an end to the oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality by challenging the hierarchical structure of power and domination. All such oppression is intertwined and, to liberate the oppressed, there is a need to change the wearing and eating habits of human beings, as well as extend concern to all living beings, especially animals, namely by supporting vegetarianism.

By mapping the contour of Western ecofeminist perspectives, it becomes clear that the root cause of exploitation of women and nature is patriarchy, which for most ecofeminists means male domination perpetuated in the form of certain social practices such as the logic of dualism, the “isms” of domination leading to women and nature being reduced to the absent referent, and the hierarchical structure of power and exploitation. The result of this patriarchal domination paves the way for the scientific revolution, capitalism, and globalization, leading the human race to pay a heavy price in various forms, namely food pollution by commercial agriculture and the dumping of toxic waste.

2.4. The Indian ecofeminist discourse

Let us now contemplate a few Indian ecofeminist viewpoints. Vandana Shiva, a prominent Indian ecofeminist thinker and activist, has made major contributions to the field through her works such as *Ecofeminism* (Mies & Shiva, 1993), *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (1993), *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (2010), and *Biopiracy* (2012). According to Shiva, women and nature have an intricate and intimate relationship, as well as a shared history on the grounds of a common experience of exploitation, degradation, and domination by an androcentric attitude. She further argues that the degradation of women and nature is due to the emergence of a new world order that is based upon development, modernization, advancements in science and technology, and new reproduction technologies. She claims that women’s subsistence practices, knowledge of and dependency on nature for survival are marginalized and replaced with modern science, leading to the physical and cultural uprooting of indigenous peoples from their ancestors’ soil. Moreover, this has caused an onslaught on local culture, which in turn has fragmented and commodified into saleable entities on the global supermarket in the form of “ethnic food”, “ethnic music” and “folklore” by harnessing ethnic objects for the tourist industry.

Shiva attacks such developments as a consequence of a Western paradigm with vicious effects on human beings in general and women and nature in particular. The basic purpose of such development or progress is economic gain, which is a key driving force of the Western industrialized economy. Terms such as development, progress, and globalization appear to be synonyms for Western countries, the latter being more focused on productivity and economic growth than adequately attending to nature. In short, they assume that natural resources are available in abundance for satisfying their greed. This attitude leads to the destruction of “*Prakrati*”—an active, powerful and productive force essential for the renewal and sustenance of all life. Due to the exploitation of nature, women are deprived of their main activity, inspiration for creativity and sanctity of life, and they struggle to conserve their subsistence base. In this context, Vandana Shiva gives the example of

Chipko, the first epoch-making movement, in which the women of the Garhwal district in the Himalayas protested against the commercial felling of trees by hugging the trees; this movement has gained much popularity and recognition worldwide.

The introduction of new technologies in agriculture has also deprived peasants and farmers of their traditional agricultural practices, especially in the case of “third world” women who produce and reproduce wealth in partnership with nature by maintaining the integrity of the ecosystem. Reductionist forestry has destroyed the tropical forest, while reductionist agriculture has destroyed tropical farming. The patriarchal mode of progress places emphasis on monoculture, in which a homogeneous system yields high productivity albeit only in one dimension based on commercial interests and economic imperatives, whereas multicropping, despite having lower productivity, constitutes a development in real terms due to being environmentally conservative. The shift from mixed cropping to monoculture has not only affected employment but also soil fertility.

Shiva argues that the only path to survival and liberation for nature and woman is an ecological one of harmony, sustainability and diversity, as opposed to domination, exploitation, and surplus. She again asserts that woman plays a vital role in environment, both as its savior and as victim of ecological mal-development. As such, her struggle constitutes a non-violent, non-gendered and humanity-inclusive alternative to the dominant science, technology, and development paradigms. In this perspective, what generally is actually a mal-development process, a source of violence to women and nature, due to development strategies being typically aimed at promoting Gross National Product, the market economy, the scientific revolution, colonization and corporate sectorized agriculture.

Agarwal (1992) is another representative of Indian ecofeminism, with a perspective different from that of Shiva's. According to Agrawal, women cannot be considered a homogeneous group, differing on the basis of class, race, culture, and caste. She argues that gender domination cannot be isolated as the sole cause of the degradation of women and nature, without attending to the political, social, and economic factors inherent in domination. Further, ideological shifts and the disparities, that are prevalent in Indian society, have aggravated the existing problems.

Agrawal thinks ecofeminism is inadequate because it ideologically constructs relationships between gender and nature, which become part of a structure that cannot be considered whole. This limitation has given a platform to Beena Agrawal to come up with an alternative theoretical formulation to ecofeminism, which she terms as Feminist Environmentalism. In this perspective, a male and female relationship with nature is rooted in material reality. Gender and class determine division of labor, distribution of property and power, and also structure interaction with nature. She also highlights how the division of labor, property and power shape the experience of “the people”—poor peasants, tribal people and cultivators—whose practical interaction with nature, giving them knowledge of the latter, implies that they are precisely the worst victims of the destruction of nature.

Feminist environmentalism has defended a democratic alternative approach, which focuses on transformation. It underlines the need for shifts in the composition of forces of production, alternative technology usage for production, usage of knowledge systems for choice-making, and class and gender redistribution on the basis of decentralized planning and production. She also flags up a need to involve localized communities and rural people (especially women) in interaction with trained scientists, so as to draw attention to the necessity of rethinking the prevalent class and gender-based division of labor, as well as the resources which are associated with the human and non-human world relation.

Chayya Dattar, a leading feminist activist and founding member of “Forum against Rape” and “*Stree Mukti Sanghata*” (Women's Liberation Organization), tries to develop, in her work titled *Ecofeminism Revisited* (2011), an alternative development model which is opposed to market-oriented capitalism. Focusing on decentralization of power, the local production system, and

subsistence practices, she especially addresses the problems of rural women whose livelihood depends upon natural resources. Further, she aims to create awareness for environmental destruction by introducing on a substantially alternative development agenda.

In the article titled “Tradition of Prudence Lost: A Tragic World of Broken Relationship” (2003), Aruna Gnanadasan exhibits the loss of age-old agrarian tradition due to globalization. Her basic contention is that the liberalization of the economy and the privatization of every sector are replacing the livelihood of villagers. As she says, “What of the life and livelihood of the farming community in India? How is this community going to survive when its intricate web of relationship with the earth is broken?” (Gnanadasan, 2003, p. 75), simultaneously alluding to the impact of dam construction, nuclear reactors and other industrial projects on the farming community.

2.5. Ecofeminism in West and India: A critique

As a backdrop to ecofeminism, we will now try to analyse the extent to which Western and Indian ecofeminists’ ideologies vary, focusing on their most prominent arguments.

The major Western ecofeminists consider that the exploitation of women and nature is essentially due to profit-based systems (d’Eaubonne, 1999) and mechanistic science (Merchant, 1980), leading to increased nuclear threat and the dumping of toxic waste, namely chemicals and lethal material (Griffin, 1980; Ruther, 1975).

According to Western activist Lois Gibbs, North-American environmental activists protested against the dumping of toxic waste in Love Canal, New York State, in 1978, due to causing ill health amongst the population. The South-West Germany peasant women Why! Movement against nuclear power plant. In 1992, Joan Sharp, a representative of Black Workers for Justice, fought and created awareness among Mexican workers of how the Schlage Lock Company usage of toxic chemicals was contaminating the groundwater and causing cancer (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 4).

Environmentalists and historians have put forth that American environmental problems are a symptom of “a full stomach phenomenon” (Nash, 1982), an ultimate luxury of the consumer society (Moore, 1989), which consists in an outcome of postindustrial and post material society (Inglehart, 1977). This cursory glance at Western ecofeminists, activists, environmentalists, and historians flags up a common standpoint as regards environmental problems in the West as being majorly related to health.

In India, however, seventy percent of the population depends upon traditional systems of production for survival and sustenance. The Western developmental attitude has destroyed Indian agrarian culture, indigenous people’s knowledge about nature, sustainable way of life and biological diversity (Shiva, 1993, 2010, 2012). Modern scientific knowledge related to agriculture has excluded women from the latter domain by marginalizing and devaluing their indigenous knowledge and skills (Agarwal, 1992). Liberalization, privatization, and globalization have changed rural economy by shifting subsistence farming to cash crop farming, mix cropping to monoculture, with profound environmental impact due to usage of excessive chemical fertilizers and depletion of groundwater (Datar, 2011; Gnanadasan, 2003).

Indian environmental problems are related to forests, dams, and the impact of mining on land, especially cultivated land. Three major movements have protested against environmental crises. The first epoch-making, Chipko movement led the peasants of the Garhwal Himalaya region to protest against the commercial felling of trees by hugging the latter; as previously stated, this movement has gained worldwide popularity and recognition (Gadgil & Guha, 1994, p. 104; Rao, 2012, p. 134). Another grassroots movement that launched a protest against the building of large dams on the Narmada River, considered one of the most catastrophic environmental disasters in the world,

was the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada River Movement) (Rao, 2012, p. 135). Thirdly, the nature-based conflict concerning the impact of mining on cultivated land springs to mind, under the form of various protests against such mining projects that emerged as early as 1947, in the Doon valley in northwest India, and, more recently, in 1983, in the Gandhamardan hills of the Sambalpur district in Orisa. Such struggles sought to draw attention to the irreversible consequences of mining projects such as deforestation, the drying up of water resources, and loss of agrarian lands (Gadgil & Guha, 1994).

Overall, the Indian environmental crisis revolves around the attempt to preserve forests, land, water and fisheries, struggling for the rights of victims, generally peasants, whose social network is disrupted by ecological degradation (Bavishkar, 1995, 2005; Gadgil & Guha, 1992, 1994; Guha, 1989; Sharma & Sharma, 1981). Concisely, while Western ecofeminists habitually reduce the major ecological problems to advancements in science and technology, emphasizing in particular the harmful impact on women of the dumping of toxic waste into natural resources, Indian ecofeminists' chief concern is usually related to the question of subsistence and survival due to the impact of logging, mining, dam construction, industrialization, and reductionist agriculture. This is a fundamental departure from the overall conceptualization of ecofeminism in the West.

3. Nectar in a sieve: Ruminating on the introduction of tannery in pastoral rural life

Kamala Markandaya, one of India's most prolific women novelists, has ten novels and many short stories to her credit. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) was widely acclaimed. Born in 1924 in Chimakurti (Karnataka), India, Markandaya went to Madras University to study for a Bachelor's Degree in History, years during which she worked as a journalist and published many short stories in Indian newspapers. She married Englishman Bertrand Taylor and went to England in 1948. Most of her novels concentrate on East and West, tradition and modernity, rural and urban life, ruminating on economic, socio-cultural, and political aspects. Her works include *Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Coffey Dams* (1969), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure City* (1982).

Kamala Markandaya's first novel—*Nectar in a Sieve* (1954)—is a classical pastoral. It is a tragedy engineered by the introduction of industry and modern technology in the idyllic rural life of India. Due to establishment of tannery in the village, the lives of village people, especially women, get disrupted and pastoral land is destroyed. Markandaya tries to unfold the truth of man and nature's inseparable relationship. Nature is not only the backdrop but also a major character in the novel. Let us examine the representation of ecofeminist concerns in the novel by critiquing the interrelated oppression stemming from modern economic theory and practice, which, as per ecofeminist arguments, is an outcome of patriarchy. This concept is manifested in the novel through the establishment of tannery in a village that hitherto consisted in pristine and serene wilderness.

We may now proceed to scrutinize this Indian English novel on the basis of two fundamental premises of ecofeminism: on the one hand, the idea that a patriarchal conception of modern development is the root cause of the exploitation of women and nature and, on the other hand, the positing of women as saviors of nature, due to a correlation drawn between the two.

3.1. Patriarchal attitude: Impact of tannery on agrarian culture

Let us begin our analysis of the novel, focusing on the primary critique of ecofeminism, that of patriarchy (male domination) (Adams, 2010; Daly, 1978; Eaubonne, 1974; Gaard, 1993; Griffin, 1980; Merchant, 1980; Mies & Shiva, 1993; Plumwood, 1993; Warren, 1997) in the form of development, globalization, and capitalism, considered the root cause of exploitation of women and nature. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) exhibits the patriarchal attitude in the form of tannery, depicted as the root cause of exploitation of women and nature by encroaching on cultivated land and the age-old agrarian culture.

In this novel, Markandaya tries to link the introduction of the tannery in the village to two groups of men of different provenance, the first of which overseers, foremen, and workers, and the second constituted by landowners, represented, for example, by *Zamindari*² such as Shivaji, and merchants, traders, shopkeepers, and moneylenders, known as the *Savakari*³, represented in turn by the money lender Biswas and the grocer Hanumant.

Men are the epitome and symbol of modernization and development. The construction of the tannery starts under the supervision of the overseer and the white men. Markandaya's purpose is to depict the idyllic life of the village which is desecrated by the introduction of the tannery. Before the introduction of the tannery, the village was calm and serene, with bountiful flora and fauna, and the major occupation of the villagers was agriculture. Over the two-month period of tannery construction, there is a continuous overflow of bullock-carts laden with bricks, stones, cement, sheets of tin, corrugated iron, coils of rope and hemp. Further, the kilns in neighboring villages which keep burning the bricks are unable to meet the demand of the construction of the tannery.

As the "evil" of development is introduced into the village by disturbing its agrarian culture, the villagers are forced to work on the project of the construction of the tannery. In excitement over the new construction, the young boy Arjun aptly suggests, "They are pulling down houses around the maiden and there is a long line of bullock carts carrying bricks" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 27).

The second important feature of patriarchy is represented by the landowning *Zamindari*, portrayed in the novel through Sivaji, the proprietor who leases his land to peasants Rukmani and Nathan, who are the tillers of the Shivaji's land. Though Sivaji accompanies Nathan and Rukmani in their rough phases, he sells the land to the tannery for a profitable price. He is thus not bothered over the livelihood of Nathan and Rukmani, who have worked on the land for more than thirty years. The villagers are struggling hard to survive. The fields have consumed all their labor, and all that lies before them in the end are worthless heaps of dried hay on account of nature's fury. The pathetic condition of landless people is that they received no concessions in paying their dues to their landowner and are left with nothing; their only hope is to wait for another crop. This shows that patriarchal culture mars agrarian culture, which is represented by third world peasants like Rukmani. Regardless of more than thirty years' association with the land as their own child, everything that Rukmani and Nathan held is effaced by Sivaji.

The landowner appears one day and declares that the land is to be sold to the tannery and has to be vacated within two weeks; this inhuman patriarchal attitude is received as follows by Nathan, "The land is to be sold. We are to move. Sivaji came this morning. He says there is nothing to be done. The tannery owners are buying the land. They pay good prices" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 134). The tannery not only grabs the livelihood of the people, but also mars the ecology and environment of the village.

Additionally, villagers are exploited during their hard times by moneylenders, such as Hanumanta and Biswas. Indifferent to villagers, shopkeeper Hanumanta is very harsh towards Rukmani, claiming, "You have come for rice. They all come for rice. I have none to sell, only enough for my wife and children. Are you not growers of it? Why then do you come to me?" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 45). Then, Rukmani goes to Biswas to buy rice; he too is very indifferent to villagers, exploiting them at his content. He fleeces the villagers and says, "Take it or leave it. I can get double that sum from the tanners, but because I know you" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 45). This attitude shows how he is unconcerned with the villagers' plight, immune to the fact that the tannery has changed everyone's attitude in the village.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the tannery impacts on the villagers' lives at different levels. First, *bazaar* prices of daily commodities soar very high, with common people being unable to afford their daily needs. Secondly, the small scale businessmen are wiped out because of the bigger shops. The agrarian culture and the small scale shopkeepers' condition steadily and gradually deteriorate

by the slow sprawl and spread of the flourishing tentacles of the tannery, which in the end swallows the serene pastoral land of the village.

The tannery goes on working day and night. Markandaya states, “A never-ending line of carts brought the raw material in thousands of skins, goat, calf, lizard, and snake skins—and took them away again tanned, dyed and finished” (Markandaya, 1954, p. 49). Further, the pastoral land is encroached by the construction of a little colony for the higher officers and workers, in between the town and the open country, of “brick cottages with whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs” (Markandaya, 1954, pp. 49–50). As such, Markandaya probes two contrasting types of lifestyle. On the one hand, the introduction of the concrete buildings in a serene landscape and, on the other hand, constructions meant for peasants, typical huts with thatched roofs and mudwalls.

Third, the tannery changes the attitude of the young generation, as they no longer want to continue their ancestral profession of tilling the land; rather, they wish to earn easy money by working in the tannery. Rukmani’s sons—Arjun, Thambi, and Raja—have not, for instance, shown any inclination to the cultivation of the land; instead they would like to join the tannery. In response to Arjun’s decision to join the tannery, Rukmini’s expresses her contention and remorse, “You are young, besides, you are not of the caste of tanners. What will our relations say?” (Markandaya, 1954, p. 53). Here, we can observe the recklessness and indifferent attitude of Arjun, as he replies “I do not know, I do not care. The important thing is to eat” (Markandaya, 1954, p. 53). The tannery not only engulfs the agrarian culture but also creates fractured identity among the younger generation. Due to insufficient food, first Arjun and next Thambi—two sons of Rukmini—join the tannery and later go to Ceylon to work on plantations. On the other hand, Raja—another of Rukmani’s sons who too joined the tannery—is caught in a theft in the tannery and loses his life. This adds further to the woes of Rukmani’s already devastated life.

Fourth, the tannery denotes the indirect effect of the modern development attitude, leading to problems such as global warming, on the age-old agrarian profession and on the environment. Here, it is very appropriate to relate Carolyn Merchant’s conflation of “technology innovation, the spread of the capitalist market, *the scientific revolution*, and changing attitudes towards nature and the earth” (Merchant, 1980, p. 43; emphasis added). Indeed, once peaceful and calm, Rukmani’s life changes into that of hunger and suffering:

The drought continued until we lost control of the time. Day after day the pitiless sun blazed down, scorching whatever still struggled to grow and baking the earth hard until at last it split and irregular fissures gaped in the land. Plants died and the grasses rotted, cattle and sheep crept to the river that was no more and perished there for lack of water, lizards and squirrels lay prone and gasping in the blistering sunlight. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 79)

Markandaya, further, wanted to project the ugly transition of the simple, traditional, pastoral, idyllic village into the crowded noisy town. The birth of a town in the village entirely changes the scene of the village and the lifestyle of the villagers, who just experience destruction, frustration, and long-lasting poverty:

Not in the town, where all that was natural had long been sacrificed, but on its outskirts, one could still see the passing of the seasons. For in the town there were the crowds, and streets batted down upon the earth, and the filth that men had put upon it; and one walked with care for what might lie beneath one’s feet or threaten from before or behind; and in this preoccupation forgot to look at the sun or the stars, or even to observe they had changed their setting in the sky: and knew nothing of the passage of time save in dry frenzy, by looking at a clock. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 117)

The emergence of the tannery in the setting of the village changes the face of the village beyond recognition as well as alters the lives of many people. Although many are able to survive successfully, many more fall victim to the tannery and lose their lives in the clutches of this modern juggernaut. The tannery brings only resentment and resignation to the lives of villagers because their sons and daughters are allured into the tannery, ultimately losing their rural lifestyle.

Fifth, due to hunger and loss of traditional modes of work, many of the peasant women are compelled to take up prostitution. Kunthi, Rukmani's neighbor, for example, starts the business of prostitution to fulfil the hunger of her belly as well as that of her family, as Markandaya very minutely extrapolates:

I thought of Kunthi as I had once seen her, with painted mouth and scented thighs that had held so many men, and I wondered if after all these years he had not at last found about her. Perhaps the truth has been forced upon him, I thought, looking at her with suspension, and I gazed upon that ravaged beauty. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 84)

The throng of men has spoiled women's chastity. Not only Kunthi but even Ira, daughter of Rukmani, who is abandoned by her husband because of her barrenness, could not bear her grim, dull, dark, hopeless future, nor the unending hunger and starvation of her younger brother, and slowly turned her mind to prostitution. Once Ira was a decent and obedient girl but now she is ready to sell her body at the cost of one rupee per day in order to save her brother Kutti, who is lying hopelessly on his deathbed. The tannery has not only marred the village pastoral land and agrarian culture but also ruptured moral values.

3.2. Ecofeminist concern: Woman as savior and nurturer of nature

The novel confirms the viewpoints of most of the renowned ecofeminists that women are invested with a mission to save and nurture nature. Chris Cuomo, an American ecofeminist, observes, "Environmental ethics can benefit by incorporating feminist insights on the limitations of traditional philosophical conceptions of ethics" (Cuomo, 1998, p. i). This key feature of ecofeminism can be studied through Rukmani, the principal protagonist of the novel who, as representative of the third world woman peasant, is very much associated with nature.

The novel centers on Rukmani; she marries Nathan, a tenant farmer, poor in a material sense but rich in love and care. In the novel, Rukmani is strongly associated with nature; she nurtures and cares the field like her own child. The tannery, in her experience, is a catastrophe that falls upon the village, not only disturbing the simple, primitive, traditional, agrarian oriented families, but also the pastoral land of the village.

Rukmani's character can be studied at two levels: first, her association with nature and, second, her reaction to the introduction of the tannery on the pastoral land and its effect on the lives of villagers, both of which reflect ecofeminist concerns. After marrying Nathan, Rukmani starts her journey in the bullock cart to her husband's village. Her concern for animals is narrated in the following manner, "Poor beasts, they seemed glad of the water, for already their hides were dusty" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 5). We are told that she likes the song of mynahs, as well as that of many other birds, such as the cry of the eagle, which makes her warm and drowsy. Rukmani takes praise and pride in planting seeds and nurturing plants in the garden. She plants a few pumpkin seeds in the garden behind the hut and soon the seeds sprout with delicate green shoots. She frequently visits the nearby well to fetch water for the plants and, sometime later, a pumpkin begins to ripen into yellow and red. She has a lot of admiration for it, "One would have thought you had never seen a pumpkin before" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 11). The growth of this pumpkin boosts her energy and she starts planting beans, sweet potatoes, brinjals, and chillies. She is certain that all these plants grow well in her hand.

Rukmani's intimate and intricate relationship with nature is portrayed through her labor in the fields, which represents her affection for nature. The entire novel is the epitome of an ecofeminist stance. Indeed, Rukmani prays continuously for the betterment of her land and crops, fruits and harvest; she shows divine integrity between herself and nature upon recounting, "I was young and fanciful then and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did, unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 14).

The Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva posits, "For more than forty centuries, Third World peasants, often predominantly women, have innovated in agriculture. Crops have crossed continents, crop varieties have been improved, and patterns of rotational and mixed cropping have been evolved to match the needs of the crop community and the ecosystem. Peasants as experts, as plant breeders, as soil scientists, as water managers, have kept the world fed all these centuries" (Shiva, 2010, p. 98). Markandaya focuses on third world women peasant and sheds light on their attitude towards variegated cropping and the maintenance of sustainable ecological balance. In the novel, Rukmani and her husband's stress the importance of mixed cropping in the paddy farm and, as we have seen, even grow pumpkins. Rukmani, the third world woman peasant, has traditional agrarian knowledge of cultivating the land: "Dung is too useful in our homes to be given to the land, for it is fuel to us and protection against damp and heat and even ants and mice. Did you not know?" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 34). Dung is indeed one of the major fertilizers, germicides, and fuel for Indian villagers.

Though she is not able to work in the field because of pregnancy, she starts working in the garden. The growth of plants and vegetables keeps her in constant wonder. Her close association and affinity with the land is increased by her physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological development through work in the garden. This lineage of feminist spirituality is advocated by the US ecofeminist Starhawk, who claims that "the second base concept of earth-centered spirituality is that of interconnection ... (this) translates, natural cycles and processes, animals and plants" (Starhawk, 1989, p. 178). The interconnection between human and non-human can here be traced through Rukmani. Due to nature's fury, Rukmani's family lost crops many times and went empty stomach many nights, yet she maintains her balance and never curses either field or nature because of her faith in the motherland as the following passage in the novel indicates:

While the sun shines on you the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in your which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for? My heart sang and my feet were light as I went about my work, getting up at sunrise and going to sleep content. Peace and quiet were ours. How well I recall it, how grateful I am that not all the clamour which invaded our lives later could subdue the memory or still longing for it. Rather, it has strengthened it: had there not been what has been, I might never have known how blessed we were. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 9)

The impact of draught on Rukmani's family is horrific. They become penniless as all the money has gone to pay the land dues and nothing is left to sell; everything withers in the long weeds of draught including the crops of paddy, vine, and vegetables. While travelling in the bullock cart to the city after being left landless, Rukmani expresses her compassion, concern and attachment to the land: "The hut—its inhabitants—recedes behind us and yet in front of us, for we are sitting with our backs to the bullocks. Our beloved green fields fall away to a blur; the hut becomes a smudge on the horizon. Still we strain our eyes to pierce the reddish dust the wheels throw up" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 144).

Vandana Shiva thinks that the exploitation of women and nature is due to a developmental attitude in the form of the scientific revolution and a reductionist paradigm which she equates with maldevelopment: "Development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities" (Shiva, 2010, p. 99).

Rukmani's compassion for nature is moreover visible in her apprehension for the bullock, which has developed many raw patches on its skin with a trickle of blood running down. It leaves a deep scar on her heart. On the other hand, the cart driver mutters indifferently that the animal will soon be good for nothing and he is not able to afford another one. These contrasting emotional responses clearly depict, as the major ecofeminists contest, that women have greater concern for animals whereas men tend to be more indifferent to them. A similar observation can be made when Rukmani accidentally touches a snake, which Nathan, her husband, kills. In this context, Markandaya says, "Women can sometimes be more soothing than men" (1954, p. 17). Later, Kali, one of Rukmani's neighbours, adds her viewpoint: "Poor thing, no wonder you are terrified. Anyone would be. But it is a pity your husband killed the snake, since cobras are sacred" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 17). The novel features women as harmonious with nature, tending to follow traditional Indian cultural customs, such as the belief that the Cobra is sacred and should be worshipped instead of killed. Moreover, she names her daughter after one of the rivers of Asia, Irawaddy, as water is considered a precious and sacred resource.

Rukmani's reaction to the introduction of the tannery in the village is noteworthy. She regrets that the tannery has invaded the village and the maiden land where children used to play. Bazaar prices have gone up too high and are out of reach of the common people. For instance, she expresses her dissatisfaction over the impact of the tannery on an aged woman's business of selling vegetables. Earlier, Rukmani used to sell vegetables to granny, but as the bazaar prices soared high she starts selling vegetables to the shopkeeper, Biswas, in order to make more profit. Markandaya has given a starkly contrasting picture of the village before and after the introduction of the tannery, which brings a paradigmatic shift in the villagers' lives: "But we never went hungry as some families were doing. We grew our own plantains and coconuts, the harvests were good and there was always food in the house—at least a bagful of rice, a little dhal, if no more" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 26).

The end result of the tannery is that the small farmers generally lose their livelihood because their sons are lured off the land by paid work. Rukmani and her husband can no longer pay their dues, leading the landowner to sell the land to the tannery. Rukmani's phobia of modernization is clearly visible in the following passage: "the tannery would eventually be our undoing. Since then it had spread like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way" (Markandaya, 1954, pp. 135–136).

The adverse impact of the tannery makes itself felt through the disappearance of birds from a bio-diverse land that was once full of them:

The air was cool and still, yet the paddy caught what little movement there was, leaning slightly one way and the next with soft whispering. At one time there had been kingfishers here, flashing between the young shoots for our fish; and paddy birds; and sometimes, in the shallower the water reaches the river, flamingoes, striding with ungainly precision among the water reeds, with plumage of a glory not of this earth. Now birds came no more, for the tannery lay close—except crows and kites and such scavenging birds, eager for the town's offal, or sometimes a palpitta, skimming past with raucous cry but never stopping, perhaps dropping a blue-black feather in flight to delight the children. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 71)

In addition to loss of crops and having to till the land and sow the seeds, she sells her wedding sari, her daughter's sari, and Nathan's dhoti for the sake of the land. This shows that Rukmani is not ready to accept modernization nor the introduction of the tannery in the village, in what can be seen as representing an ecofeminist stance. She is forced to confront the noise and the smell of the tannery, the transition of the clammed up village into a hustle-bustle area, as well as Ira's adultery and her gloomy future. Moreover, Rukmani loses her sons to the modern juggernaut: Arjun and Thambi leave their ancestral occupation of agriculture and join the tannery, later leaving for Ceylon to work on a plantation; Raja, another son, loses his life in the tannery, and Selvem finds work in the city. Rukmani then witnesses the adultery of her daughter and her cruel fate: when her son-in-law had desired a child, he had not been given one, but now she is blessed with an illegitimate grandchild. In short, her life is completely shattered by the tannery. In this context, Rukmani's thinking is very *apropos* as she says:

But the man who finds a woman in the street, raises an eyebrow and snaps his fingers so that she follows him, throws her a few coins that he may possess her, holds her unresisting whatever he does to her, for this is what he has paid for—what cares such a man for the woman who is his for a brief moment? He has gained his relief, she her payment, he merges carelessly into the human throng, consigning her back into the shadows where she worked or to the gaudy streets where she loitered. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 118)

Rukmani's family meets a tragic end. Being landless in spite of working on the land for more than thirty years, Rukmani and Nathan end up going to the city to live with their sons; however, they are unfortunately unable to meet up with them. With no money to return to the village, they start working in a stone quarry where Rukmani loses her husband. The novel is a rigmarole journey of a third world woman peasant, impelled to move from a simple, naïve, and traditional agrarian context to the city for survival.

Hence, the present paper very much engages with the life experiences that result from the impact of the exploitation of nature in the name of development on Indian peasants, tribal, and indigenous people. In the next section we will flag up the unique contributions of this Indian English novelist to ecofeminist discourse.

4. Reconstruction of ecofeminism

In the last section, we contextualized the Indian English novel within the framework of ecofeminism by especially engaging with the basic tenets of ecofeminism, namely patriarchy, regarded as the root cause of exploitation of women and nature, alongside the idea that women are predisposed to act as saviors of nature. However, in this section, we undertake another form of interpretation and another variant of a close reading of Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, by investigating how this Indian English novel adds a new dimension to ecofeminist discourse, indicating that men may also act as saviors, nurturers, and caretakers of nature as well as first-hand victims of the exploitation of nature. It is important to bear in mind that for Indian peasants, tribal and indigenous people agriculture is not only the means of subsistence and a question of survival, but also a motive for deep cultural reverence. Therefore, Indian ecological problems can be considered as gender neutral.

This statement may be contentious, as it may be critiqued for being baseless. Indeed, the scope of the statement has its limitation, due to lacking contextualization within the global panorama of ecofeminist literary criticism; nevertheless, it makes sense within the restricted context of the Indian environmental crisis depicted through this particular Indian English novel. Here, questions may arise as to why the paper is not focusing on gendered division of labor. Indeed, men are paid habitually paid more than women for the agricultural labor. Another intuitive question concerns why this research paper should demonstrate a shallow and superficial attitude in attempting to unify dichotomical gendered power relations under an egalitarian approach?

To seek to answer to the latter question, it is useful to turn to Leopold's idea that sustains that "To understand the functions of a hand it is necessary to understand the whole body and consider the former in an organic relation to the latter. Similarly, a human is both a member as well as the home of which (s)he is a member" (Leopold, 1968, p. 204). In congruence with Leopold's proposition, the core project of this paper is neither to study the intricacies of the gendered division of labor nor "to address [how] material realities in which women of different classes (castes/races) are rooted might affect their responses to environmental degradation" (Agarwal, 1992, p. 123). By reevaluating the novel through the role played by Nathan, Rukamani's husband, we will attempt to show how men can play a role that is not congruous with their habitual casting within ecofeminist discourse. Nathan, a poor tenant farmer, is always engaged in either cultivating land or looking after animals such as bullocks and goats. When Nathan sees the ripened pumpkin fruit that his wife has planted, his enthusiasm is at its height and he is full of admiration for her. His admiration, involvement, and proximity to the field symbolize his concern for nature. Nathan feels great joy, happiness, passion, devotion, and dedication for the land; he is always preoccupied with either the land or the crops.

Trying to show the growth of the crops, he brings a few green stems to Rukmani, “And think only of your trials, not of the joy that are still with us. Look at our land—is it not beautiful? The fields are green and the grain is ripening. It will be a good harvest year, there will be plenty. See how firm and strong they are—no sign of disease at all. And look, the grain is already forming” (Markandaya, 1954, p. 71). The minute and detail explanation of the growth of grain reflects the interconnection of creations.

The joint venture of Nathan and Rukmani thus can be seen as projecting Indian agriculture as gender neutral, with the cultivation of land requiring the involvement of men and women in ploughing, sowing, and harvesting of the crop. As Rukmani proffers, “I was out all the day with Nathan planting the paddy in the drained fields. Corn had to be sown too, the land was ready. My husband ploughed it, steadying the plough behind the two bullocks while I came behind, strewing the seed to either side sprinkling the earth over from the basket at my hip” (Markandaya, 1954, p. 18).

Both Nathan and Rukmani lived their lives for the sake of their land as if the latter were their own child, considering it a part of their life to the extent of not being able to envisage being separated from it. They never think of land merely as a means of survival; rather, they feel a spiritual connection with it. As Starhawk writes, “For to say that the earth is alive and sacred is to take a truly radical stand. What is sacred cannot be exploited. If the ground we walk on has a scared character, we cannot allow its soil to become eroded. We cannot clear-cut the old growth forests for profit, for what is sacred cannot be measured against the scales of profit and loss” (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 2004, p. 177). Nathan has a holistic approach to nature. For example, he believes that human beings and snakes have an equal right to the land, despite both having their own place on it. Nathan’s proximity to land thus gives us an opportunity to contemplate and rethink male protagonists as also being connected with nature. As such, we can see that Markandaya’s novel allows for a critique of the major ecofeminist conceptual argument, which surfaces in Rosemary Radford Ruether proposition, according to which “patriarchal self-deception about the origin of consciousness ends logically in the destruction of the earth” (Ruther, 1975, p. 195). This argument reveals itself as not being universal in scope, but rather the outcome of a certain culture which can be opposed by another vantage point.

4.1. Man as firsthand victim of exploitation of nature

Nathan, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, loses his means of livelihood. Therefore, there is no hope for him to continue living in the village, and both he and Rukmani set about for a new life in the city. In the cart, on the way to the city, after winding up thirty years of life in a small bundle of luggage, Rukmani’s and Nathan’s anguish is very acutely projected in the following manner:

The carter flicks both bullocks with his whip, the animals strain forward, the cart gives a lurch. Nathan holds out his hands, our children bow their heads. Then we begin to move the three come after us a little of the way, walking in the dust the wheels grind out of the earth, until the bullocks begin to trot and they fall back. We are farther away with every turn of the wheels. The bullocks have found their own rhythm now, moving so that their hoofs strike the earth together and yoke is borne steadily on their shoulders; we are travelling fast. (Markandaya, 1954, p. 144)

Thus, despite having spent their entire life working very hard on the land, Rukmani and Nathan are left with nothing in the end, being forced to join a stone quarry in the city where Nathan meets tragic death. Nathan is thus a firsthand victim of the introduction of the tannery in the village.

5. Conclusion: Reverence to Indian agrarian culture

For Indian peasants, tribal and indigenous peoples, agriculture is not only the means of subsistence and a question of survival, but also a motive for cultural reverence, as previously stated. Markandaya traces this concept throughout her novel. Despite losing their paddy due to nature’s harsh and

unbearable fury, Nathan and Rukmini do not lose their hopes nor aspirations and Nathan starts breaking the dams in the fields where water is filled. Attributed to the effects of drought or floods, Nathan loses his crops and for many days the entire family starves. The eternally optimistic Nathan never falls a prey to adverse circumstances, in this instance catching fish for food. Nathan believes that the cycles of nature change and that it will be a matter of time for a good harvest to be reaped. With the turn of the tide, they should be able to pay the dues to the landowner, Sivaji, and even manage to visit their son, who works in the city.

Later, Nathan comes to know that if he is not able to pay the dues in time, he will lose the land. This idea of losing the land disturbs him greatly; he is not able to think of the consequences of this possibility. Additionally, the reaping of meager crop forces Nathan and Rukmani to sell their utensils and clothes, including Rukmani's wedding and other saris, as well as Nathan's dhoti in order to pay the dues to Sivaji. They hardly get Rs. 155 from the items they sold, which is merely half of the amount they owe.

Nathan had always wished that his sons work on the land and follow the agrarian culture for which he has divine passion and attachment. He tries to convince his sons to work on the field, but his efforts fail. His sons turn their back to the land and say, "There is nothing for us here, for we have neither the means to buy land nor to rent it. Would you have us wasting our youth chafing against things we cannot change?" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 70).

We can identify another deep connection of Nathan with the land. Though the land was not his own, he loves the land as if it were his own child. He has always harbored fervent hope that he might have his own land someday, "He had always wanted to own his own land, through the years had been the hope, growing fainter with each year, each child, that one day he would be able to call a small portion of land his own. Now even his sons knew it would never be" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 54).

Despite enduring many difficulties, such as the consequences of nature's fury and the loss of his sons, Nathan manages to face these hardships and maintains faith in the land. This aspect comes across in the following excerpt: "We will find our strength. One look at the swelling grain will be enough to renew our vigor. Indeed, it did our hearts good to see the paddy ripen. We watched it as a dog watches a bone, jealously, lest it be snatched away; or as a mother her child, with pride and affection. And most of all fear" (Markandaya, 1954, p. 96). However, when he comes to know that Sivaji sold the land to the tannery for a good price, Nathan is not able to cope with the situation. His hands tremble and he feels impotent and unable to say anything, fearing loss of affinity, intimacy and dependency on the land which for thirty years was their lives' treasure. He concludes that the tannery has resources beyond his imagination, ensuring a good harvest and crop of rice to feed the tannery workers. Thus, Nathan's thinking can be regarded as pointing to the gradual acceptance of the introduction of global corporatism.

Thus, rethinking this novel leads us to conclude that the root cause of ecological destruction cannot be reduced to patriarchy; environmental problems are not due to an androcentric attitude but rather to an anthropocentric attitude. This paper thus tries to give an alternative formulation to the prevalent ecofeminist discourse, claiming for a non-dichotomical view of the exploitation of nature. Hence, we cannot draw fit in gender into watertight compartments that reduce patriarchy to the root cause of gendered and environmental exploitation. In our view, this study has been worth undertaking for two reasons; firstly, the present ecological concerns compel us to increasingly pay attention to such issues; and secondly, this analysis has consisted in a new reading of a particular Indian English novel, helping us understand Green Literature and the possible contribution of Indian English fiction to alternative perspectives on ecofeminist discourse.

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Notes

1. According to Adams, absent referent means that animals are passive and merely exist for butchering and vivisection, whilst forgetting that animals are independent entities that have an equal right to the Earth, also constituting a part of the human.
2. The system under which *Zamindari* held land and on which they collect tax from peasants whom they have given for cultivation.
3. It means merchants, traders, shopkeepers, and moneylenders.

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