

ECO FEMINISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY *MADAIAH THE COBBLER*

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Abstract

This paper examines how the play Madaiah the Cobbler written by H S Shivaprakash, one of the greatest playwrights of Karnataka offers numerous insights into the issues of feminism and ecology. H S Shivaprakash writes from within a regionally culture specific environment. Some of the major forms of eco-feminism found in this play are Liberal Eco-feminism (to expect 'reform from within existing political and economic structures'); Cultural Eco-feminism (to elevate and liberate women and nature by celebrating pre-historic era); Social Ecofeminism (to abolish all systems of domination to make an ecological society as possible); Socialist Ecofeminism (to consider Nature an active subject and not to dominate it). The values cherished by these various ecofeminists are perceptible in the play Madaiah the Cobbler and there are numerous instances that illustrate how the attitudes of men towards women are linked to their attitudes towards nature and vice-versa. Gaia and Isis are female deities who saved the earth from chaos and represented female power and force for change. In the pre-historic era, the society was 'matrifocal', 'matrilineal' but the condition was changed gradually due to patriarchal society, occupies the stage right from the beginning.

Keywords: Eco-feminism, matriarchal, Mother Nature, Ecology

The term 'eco-feminism,' introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 asserts the power of women in ecological revolution. 'Ecology' derived from GK 'oikos' (house) is the science of household. As Women have mediated the connection between the earth and the house, the connection between nature and women and between ecology and feminism has been explored. Women and nature have an age-old association between then and moreover constructed over time by culture and science. The interest in both women's movement and the ecology movement has been astonishing over the past few decades and both the movements declare the talent of female in the maintenance of environmental integrity. Westbury in her paper "The Nature of Women" observes that "Eco-feminism is the third wave of the feminist revolution. It says that the feminine values of non-violence, cooperation, and nurturing will help to connect us with nature and prevent 'ecocatastrophe.'

Eco-feminism is based on 'interconnectedness' and shows the cosmos as an ecological self-deserving moral consideration. Warren defines eco-feminism as:

... the name given to a variety of positions that have roots in different feminist practices and philosophies. These different perspectives reflect not only different feminist perspectives (e.g., liberal, traditional Marxist, radical, socialist, black and Third World); they also reflect different understanding of the nature of and solution to pressing environmental problems. (9)

Thus eco-feminism is an attempt to call women 'to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet' and to promote new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature. It recognizes both

women and nature as 'super-green-cleaners' who can understand and heal environmental destruction. It became popular in 1980 when the cultural feminists identified how both women and nature could be liberated together. Rosemary Ruether wrote:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within-a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movement with those of the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this (modern industrial) society. (204)

That the environment is a feminist issue has been defended by many feminists and ecological feminists since 1970. Eco-feminists point to the twin domination of women and nature and identify eight kinds of women-nature connections. According to Warren, there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature and if they are understood well, they can help in understanding the issues of feminism, environmentalism and environmental philosophy. The eight sorts of women-nature connections identified so far are Historical connections, Conceptual connections, Empirical and Experiential connections, Symbolic connections and Theoretical connections. Eco-feminism tries to expose the age-old connection between women and nature and explains how the degradation and devaluation of women lead to the destruction of nature. Eco feminists have identified various 'isms of domination that lead to the domination of women and the destruction of nature. Images of nature as female are deeply encoded' into the

text; of literature and 'any feminism, environmentalism or environmental Philosophy, that fails to recognize important women-nature connections is simply inadequate' (Warren 9). As women and nature have an age-old bond between them-it is identified that the devaluation of women leads to the destruction of nature-they can attain liberation too together. In order to gain liberation, various 'isms of domination' that oppress women and nature must be found and dismantled. Carolyn Merchant in her book *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* sees eco-feminism as a broad, diverse, worldwide movement, dedicated to preventing further deterioration of both women's condition and that of non-human nature. She summarizes the movement as having generated a number of unique eco-feminist approaches, bringing together women and men who offer a variety of ideas and strategies (206).

The play *Madaiah the Cobbler* was first performed in Ksetrayya Kalakshetra, Vijayawada, at the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi South Zone Festival, 1991. As the play opens, seven Guddas appear on the stage and introduce themselves. From their introduction, they are identified as the 'Elephant Hill,' 'the Honey Bee Hill,' 'the Wild Wood Hill,' 'the Cobra Hill,' 'the Gunji Hill,' 'the Gulganji Hill,' and 'the Cobbler.' The word 'Gudda' literally means guru or wise, elderly man. As the Guddas (rather than women representatives) stand for their environment, man is given more representation than women. Even the Guddas invoke male gods rather than female goddesses. 'Blessed man of miracle,' 'Lord Ishwara of Sangama,' 'Lord of the moon-lit night' 'Madeva,' 'Madappa, the miracle maker,' 'Lord of Thimmappa of Tirupati,' 'Bless us O son of Hara,' 'Hail to the Elephant Goad,' 'Father Shani,' etc are the representation of male authority and glorification. Cultural eco-feminism celebrates an era in pre-history when female goddesses were worshipped and honoured. Patriarchal culture has replaced female goddesses with its male gods. Some cultural eco-feminists even advocate the revival of ancient rituals centred on goddess worship and the female reproductive system. Even some eco-feminist feel that women are closer to nature due to their biological activities. The biological activities are misunderstood by men, who are the product of cultural dualism and patriarchal society. They associate women with nature due to their biological activities and degrade both women and nature.

Simon de Beauvoir feels that women and men are biologically different but women can transcend their biology to assume values "Women is related to nature; she incarnates it: Vale of Blood, open rose, siren, the curve of

a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world"(281) Stacy Alaimo remarks that women, seen as embodiment of nature, are 'doomed to immanence and otherness' whereas men mark their transcendent subjectivity' by separating themselves from the world of nature. Ecofeminist desire not only a transformation of gender relations but also a radically different way of humanity to interact with nature.

In *Madaiah the Cobbler*, king Samana of Bankari arranges a fest to celebrate his conquest of the three worlds. He is not satisfied conquering the three worlds but want to conquer the Sun, Moon and Mother Earth. Gathering all his stars together, Moon God begins his battle and loses it even before it begins. King Sravana marches with Moon God as his prisoner tied to his elephant's leg. And then, the Guddas sing, "Having taken both Sun and Moon prisoners, /Samanaiah rushes with his army to the /Kingdom of Earth mother" (Shiva Prakash 117). King Sravana is the product of patriarchal culture who tries to dominate Earth Mother. As the Earth is represented through female (Mother), the male (Sravana) tries to possess and control her. He says, "...During all these epochs, we were under your control. Now, you are our possession. In future, you will not threaten us with your weapons like famines and floods. You will not threaten us with your weapons like famines and floods. You will not hide from us your precious stones, roots and minerals" (118). Eco feminist blame the patriarchal culture that glorifies men and King Sravana is just an embodiment of the glorification of male authority which eco feminists try to dismantle.

The association between nature and women misunderstood by patriarchy and men think that they are superior to and cleverer than women because they forget the fact women are saner and closer to wisdom than men. Being close to nature, women can understand better the cycles of nature and display ecological wisdom. When King Sravana is adamant to capture Mother Earth, she makes a remarkable and witty comment:

Sravana, my child! What do you
Intend to do with me? Kill me if you
Like- But, mark this? When I die,
You will all die with me. (118)

Susan Griffin asserts that recent cultures are all fundamentally patriarchal and degrade women in notable ways by associating them with nature. Ecofeminism stresses the connection between the domination of women and the domination of nature and through Sravana the

connection can be explained clearly. King Sravana tries to possess Mother Earth (woman) and his attitude of possession creates in him the urge to possess other elements too. Five elements, guardians of the eight directions, trinities, gods and demons cannot save the Earth Mother because King Sravana has made all of them his prisoners.

There is none to prevent King Sravana from his cruelty and the Guddas decide to seek help of Madaiah. Gudda 7 says:

Sure! When Samana treats Earth Mother
Like Footwear, who else but a cobbler should
Rescue her? Now I shall dress up like
Madeswara. (121)

Madaiah was born as the son of Utrajamma and Chandrasekhar appa, a cobbler couple living a lowly life beyond the seven fences. Therefore, Madari is the other name by which he is known. As Madaiah says, his home is:

A snake-pit on the Honey Bee Hill, under
A tree laden with hives or the tall cliffs
Of the Elephant Hill, beyond the wings of
Birds and bees. (122)

It seems that Madaiah gains power due to his association with nature and devises a plan to free Mother Earth. He promises King Sravana that he would bring a pair of sandals made of human skin which nobody has ever worn before. He goes in search of sandals and meets a lovely young woman on the way. Robbers (products of patriarchal society that treat women as objects of possession) meet Madaiah and the lovely woman: They say, "Robber 1: I'll take the money! / Robber 2: I'll keep the jewels! / Robber 3: And I will have the lovely woman. (128) Women and nature are treated as commodity rather than sacred beings. Eco-feminism emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and inherent value of women. Not surprisingly, the stone speaks philosophically in this play:

I have been a stone for hundreds of years.
.... Forgive me! Having been a stone
For hundred years, I had forgotten the
Manners of the civilized world... (146)

The evil men in king Sravana's kingdom failed to realize not only the importance of non-human environment but also the dignity of females. Sankavya is the daughter of forest deity. She emerged from a conch and is therefore called, 'the conch-woman'. Neelagowda of the soligas is her husband. As she could not bear him a child even after many years of marriage, he started taunting her about her barrenness and made her suffer unbearable pain in the

thorny hut. She, moreover, tells Madaiah, "The forest turned barren like me. There was no more game plants and trees were without fruits and berries. Our tribesmen moved off to other forests and towns. My husbands, too, went with them" (138). Patriarchy always associates woman and nature and blames them for no fault of theirs. In his conversation with Sankavva, Madaiah reveals its hypocrisy as "Dear Sankavva, you aren't barren. Your husband and tribesmen have made you barren. Come out, my child" (138)

Eco-feminism wants to replace conceptual schemes, practices, and theories that naturalize women and feminize nature. Some of the main projects of Ecofeminism are to make visible "Women-nature connections" and where harmful to women and nature, 'dismantle the conceptual structure of domination which have kept various "isms of domination", particularly the dominations of women and nature' (Warren 9). According to Carolyn Merchant, "An organically oriented mentality in which female principles played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principle in an exploitative manner"(77).

Anthropological studies have suggested that the identification of women with nature and males with culture is both ancient widespread and new archaeological discoveries of early civilizations in Mesopotamia yield a vast array of evidence that an egalitarian attitude was practiced among the ancient people of the region. Nature is often described in sexual terms and degraded to the core. King Sravana considers Earth Mother as an object to be possessed. He tells Earth Mother. "Don't deceive me with your fancy word. I know you are deathless. Besides beauty ought to be relished in living being, not in a corpse" (Shivaprakash 118). When Earth Mother calls him child, he proclaims vehemently that he shall be her husband. He shall 'explore all her secrets and taste all her pleasures'. He says that Earth Mother is an 'inexplicable riddle'. Owing to the feminizing of nature the domination of women and nature is prevalent in the society. *Madaiah the Cobbler* depicts many incidences that connect women with nature and vice versa. These incidents point to the degradation of both women and nature.

King Sravana fails to realize his connection to the earth (Land) and wants to rule the entire environment, failing to realize the importance of the environment. He is totally the paragon of patriarchy which one of the root causes of 'ecocatastrophe' As Salleh points out. "Eco feminism is a recent development in feminist thought which says that the current global environmental crisis is a

predictable outcome of patriarchal culture” (15). King Sravana has been brought up by the conceptual structures of domination that construct women and nature in male biased ways. He maintains ‘value dualisms’ and ‘value hierarchy’ which are the components of conceptual structures. Even ‘conceptual connections are located in an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework characterized by logic of domination’ (Warren 9).

Social eco-feminism declares that the idea of dominating nature stems from the domination of human by human and an ecological society is possible only by ending all systems of domination. King Sravana is a tyrant who oppresses women and nature through his status and authority. Eco feminists announce that women are not included in discussion and debates that define their own nature as emotional and passive. Male nature is identified as active and female is considered passive and hence the principle of the domination of men over both women and nature. Warren feels women are considered by men as the realm of physical because they are identified with nature and men identify themselves with ‘human-mind’ and therefore the realm of the mental. Eco-feminism wants to liberate both women and nature from this domination.

When King Sravana is forcing Earth Mother to sit on his lap, Madaiah interferes and hands over the sandals. King Sravana wears the sandals and shouts in agony. “Madari! Oh, Madari! My eyes are filled with red flame! My body is filled with unbearable heat! My ears are deafened... (Shivaprakash 157). He collapses on the ground and the Earth Mother stands breathing hard, the personification of anger. Madaiah removes the crown of Sravana and holds it before her like a begging bowl. He pleads with her, “Dear Earth Mother! Forget the wrongs committed by your children... Renounce your terrible anger and give alms of mercy to your children (158).

Owing to the metaphors that are suggestive of sexual assault, women and nature are rendered passive and submissive. Eco feminism insists on the need for symbolic

revolution in the social, sexual and economic structures that exploit both women and nature, to liberate women and nature. Man must know how to respond with the feelings of women and the cycles of nature. If he fails to realize their merits and importance and tries to dominate he will create not only ecological damage but his own destruction also. The play *Madaiah the Cobbler* holds so many incidents and events that declare how the domination of nature leads to the destruction of women. Eco-feminism identifies patriarchal dualism and mechanization of nature as the root cause of the ‘twin domination’ and in this play Madaiah the Cobbler King Sravana represents (along with others) patriarchy and he is also an agent of ‘ecocatastrophe’. Through this study the role of patriarchal duality in ‘the twin domination of both women and nature’ is identified and the connection between women and nature is also established.

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