

Gender and Ecology: An Eco-Critical Study on Mamang Dai's "The Black Hill"

Sr. STELLA THOMAS

Research Scholar, Assam Don Bosco University, Assam

Dr. MANIKLAL BHANJA

Associate Professor, Tezpur College, Assam

Abstract

North-East India comprising of the eight states Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland, and Sikkim is regarded as one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse regions in Asia. Arunachal Pradesh, North-East India's remotest state, also known as 'Land of the Dawn-lit-Mountain's is the first Indian soil to greet the morning sun. It is the North Eastern tip of India with its borders touching China, Bhutan and Burma (Myanmar). The state offers a dazzling array of flora and fauna that is sure to enchant any tourist. Arunachal (Irun means 'Sun' and Achal means 'Rays') is named so because it is the land of the rising sun. "The Black Hill" by Mamang Dai gives us bonding connectivity of man with nature. Eco-Criticism is a recent development in the literature of the world. It is an awareness of the on-going destruction of nature, due to the greed of man, which has led to the emergence of green movements all over the globe. The purpose of these organizations is to safeguard nature from mass destruction. Ecology has always been a fascinating subject for me since my early years. The realization that ecological movements have gained immense impetus today, and the awareness that such an issue has become so vital today more than ever, has prompted me to undertake this presentation and research. Northeast India is actually going through a traumatic period, not merely because of ethnic conflicts and elements of violence, but also because there is dangerous increase in the destruction of its natural environment. Eco-Criticism is a response to the need for a humanistic understanding of our relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental annihilation. Nature is valued in terms of its usefulness to us. Many environmentalists argue that we need to develop a value system that takes the intrinsic or inherent value of nature as its starting point. Many of us value rural ways of life, hiking, or camping or are members of one of the focal environmental organizations.

Keywords: Environmental, Ecological, Unprofessional, Safeguard and Humanistic.

Introduction

Bible affirms that in the beginning, there was only God. Then God created the world and the universe and everything in it. Genesis Ch. 1 gives a fascinating account of the creation of everything that exists. On the sixth day, God created man and woman after he had created the world with everything in it, living and non-living. Man is commissioned by the Creator to be the steward over creation (Gen 2:15). From this account, it is clear that the Biblical concept of reality is eco-theandric; reality consists of God, man, and the rest of creation. In the course of his existence, due to pride and greed, man has tended to consider reality only in two dimensions, namely Theos (God) and Anthropos (man). In the third dimension, the Oikos (world) has been ignored and undervalued.

We may say that it is this mentality that has been responsible for the extensive destruction of nature down through the centuries, even up to now. The natural world has been exploited for the benefit of man. There have been some enlightened people like St. Francis of Assisi who has brought the world to a realization that nature ought to be loved and respected as God's handiwork. Our forefathers always spoke of God with a constant reference to creation. But today we see a deviation from this attitude towards a perversion which results in mass destruction of nature and everything in it.

Women, Ecology, and Development

The term 'ecology' derived from the Greek roots Oikos (meaning home) and logos (meaning study or discourse),

which imply the study of organisms 'at home.' According to Haeckel, in 1870, the ecology is defined as the "scientific study of the relationships of living organisms with each other and with their environment." The environment in its purest form provides serene and enjoyable quality of life not only to human beings but to the entire creation of Lord. The mother's womb provides every basic need for sustenance. After birth overcoming agony, the mother gets a sigh of relief, and the child cries, getting exposed to the world outside experiencing the pinch of entirely different, and varying environment –earth, air, water, sky, and fire (Tiwari, 2011).

Feminism as ecology, and ecology as the revival of Prakriti, the source of all life, become the decentered powers of political and economic transformation and restructuring. When commodity production is introduced as development, it destroys the potential of nature and women to produce life and goods and services for basic needs. Women are devaluing first because their work cooperates with nature's processes and work, which satisfies needs and ensures nourishment (Shiva, 1988). Science and masculinity were linked with domination over nature and femininity, and the ideologies of science and gender reinforced each other (Shiva, 1988).

Ecological Arrogance to Ecological Leadership

Humanity is facing an unprecedented environmental crisis. Over the past few hundred years, as humans, we have used, and abused coal, oil, forest, rivers and seas. We have unleashed the start of a climate change that has never been before (SDB R. R., 2017). Pope Francis, the head of the Catholic Church conveys his belief in human potential for change, by their capability of rising above, choosing what is good, and making a new start, in spite of their mental and social habituation. We can take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. An ecological adaptation can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems. The writer reminds us that nature is a book through which God reveals them self and speaks to us. That is why he appeals to protect our environment and support international efforts to save our planet (Mylapore, 2017).

An ecological leadership necessitates environmental awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits, change of lifestyle, and collective action.

An Eco-awareness is vital solution to the issue.

- It fosters to see, appreciate, and understand connectedness in the natural world.
- It triggers decisions that will conserve the irreplaceable natural resources, vulnerable plants, and animal species.
- It stimulates acquiring adequate knowledge and skill on the issues of the environment and assists in comprehending, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the planet's causes, and effects, dimensions, and interconnectedness.

The personal ecological conversion, which brings lasting changes in one's life, steers to community conversion, resulting in collective action. Tackling climate change and promoting sustainable developments requires the engagement of all people, families, schools, youth movements, etc. This conversion results in planting and protecting trees in a small town to the protection of rainforests through international political commitments.

Mamang Dai gives a constructive concept of nature by classifying the nature into:

- a. Nature as Mother and Provider- The concept of scenery as a Mother who provides and cares for living beings is familiar among the people of North-East India. Nature provides them with materials for their houses, crops, and plants for their food water for their drink. Everything that they need in their day-to-day existence is procured from nature.
- b. Nature as the abode of the Spirits- Among most of the tribal societies, the divine being is seldom seen in personal and individual terms but rather as a pervasive spirit- presence diffused throughout the cosmos and the earth. All the tribes of North-East India believe in some sort of spirits who reside on the hills, mountains, in forests, rivers, and lakes. Among the Nagas, there is a belief in the existence of good feelings, who act as protectors and guardians of the people, especially against their enemies. These morale reside in rocks and caves, brooks and rivers,

forests and fields, hills and dales, hefty trees and marshes and in around villages.

- c. Nature as the home of the departed- The concept of life after death among the tribal people of this region is closely connected with nature. They also believed that the souls of the departed go through some natural elements like fire and water a. (SDB D. B., Introduction to Contextual Theology, 2009).

Tribal cultures are nature-based. The tribal people live in close contact with nature, and nature plays a very significant role in their life. Thus, it is borne out by their cultural custom of deriving names of places from nature, folktales, songs, and folk stories centered on environment, etc. The tribal people maintain a symbiotic relationship with their eco-system. They derive their necessities of life, like food, shelter, fodder, fuel, clothing material, timber, medicines, and materials for their traditional industries, etc. from nature. Eco-Criticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Eco-Criticism cannot contribute much to debates about problems in ecology, but it can help to define, explore, and even resolve ecological troubles in large in scope. Eco critics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound biological implications (Barry, 1995). Eco-Criticism is literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist observation. Ecology is the scientific study of natural interdependencies, to each other and their shared environment. Creatures produce and shape their environment, as their atmosphere creates and shapes them. The word 'ecology' is new in connection with the 'green' movement (Waugh, 2006).

Ecology: A Human, Spiritual Challenge

Everything in this world is sacred; nothing is secular. Everything is a divine manifestation. The earth or the universe is God's work and gift to us. You cannot fight for its rights unless you have a profound love for it. We cannot justly pray to God the father of all if we do not treat other beings in a brotherly or sisterly fashion, because everything is created in God's image. It was God's message that led

Francis of Assisi to take a radical decision to consider everything as God's child, including the inanimate creatures like calling them as brother sun and sister moon. The greenhouse effect is already causing extreme weather conditions: devastating droughts in some places, killer floods in other spaces, widespread failure of agriculture and therefore food scarcity and most destructive of all for the human race, the rising of the sea- levels everywhere. Sea levels will rise because the warming of the oceans will expand the volume of water. The call to mission is not only for humans. Every creature is created with a purpose and, therefore, missionary. Every human being is faithfully moving forward to reach the goal for which it has fashioned. Our mission can be achieved by having trustworthy and faithful servants around us. If we accept God as a protector, we should protect the globe with responsibility (SSA, 2017).

Laudato, Pope's encyclical on ecology, reminds us that our ordinary home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has gifted her. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and all forms of life. We can awaken our hearts and move towards a biological renovation in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to the cry of the soil and the cry of the deprived (No.49).

Eco Feminism

Though 'Eco Feminism' used by Francoise D' Eaubonne, it gained popularity in protests against the ecological disaster caused by the hierarchical world view of anthropocentric action. Rather than attempting to overcome the hierarchical dichotomy, eco-feminists distinguish themselves from other feminists by rediscovering the interdependence and interconnectedness in the 'web of life.' The Inter connectedness was itself sometimes called as 'spirituality' by the eco-feminists. Ecological feminism was born of an awareness of women's potential for bringing about biological revolution, and it was on a conviction that the illogic of the logic of domination on nature and women must

be exposed. The aim of eco-feminists is not merely establishing more egalitarian relations, but it is also retrieving a sense of the sacred. With the loss of the sagacity of the blessed, there can be the demise of the whole view of the planet. Deep Ecology suggests that rights are not only possession of human beings but also of being who are affected by human beings.

Environmentalism and Eco-Criticism

Eco critics worry that too much attention to nature as a cultural and ideological construct will lead to neglect of virgin ground as an objective, material, and vulnerable reality. Environmentalists are typically able to see as defenders of scenery, but it is noticed that all human behavior, including the environmentally destructive, derives from natural impulse. We need to acknowledge and value natural ecosystems and dependence on them, without forgetting that 'nature' is a series of changing cultural constructions to praise and blame. Bill Mckibben argues, at the End of Nature (1990), that global warming has brought the pure state of nature to an end; by changing the weather, they make every spot on earth human-made and artificial. They have also deprived environment of its sovereignty, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's liberty is its meaning; without it, there is nothing but us (Waugh, 2006).

Environmental Education

Our age is mainly marked by the presence of two powerful tools, such as information and technology, to change. It could affect a change in the behavior- be it economic, cultural, or social. And we see drastic changes in all these domains since the arrival of the information age. An environmentally educated society can influence government policies in the order to be environment friendly. The emergence and flourishing of the information age in India provides a unique feature to the environmental management system emerging in society. It is the right medium to facilitate environmental education and information dissemination. Environmental ethics think of nature as a community, not just a commodity. This ethics asks a gentle presence rather than a thoughtless one. It protects all species. It sees humans as biotic citizens who belong to land, not a man to whom the land belongs. Nature had a safe and secure position in Indian living

conditions. People lived in harmony and integration with life. All the sacred scriptures and intellectual traditions endorsed a happy co-existence with nature. (foundation). Human beings live in both the natural and social worlds. Environmental education should be the center of all learning processes to a great extent in changing the thinking and attitude of people towards our earth and the environment. The basic education, right from the school stage must inculcate a feeling of belongingness to the planet in the small children. 'Earth thinking will gradually get incorporated in our thinking and action, which will greatly help in transforming our lifestyles to sustainable ones. There is a Chinese proverb "If you plan for one year, plant rice, if you plan for ten years, plant trees, and if you plan for 100 years, educate people." If we want to protect and manage our planet earth on a sustainable basis, we have no other option but to make all persons environmentally educated (Kaushik, 2012, p. 21).

Conclusion

From the beginning, our sages and saints have been moving to mountains, meadows, and streams and experiencing elevation of mind that close contact and communion with nature produced. They understood that man and nature were not two entities but an enmeshed part of the same organic unit the same divine spirit. They propagated: "Earth is our mother, and we are its children." (Tiwari, S. 2011). There is an earliest Vedic hymns which say:

*"Whatever I dig of you, O Earth,
May you of that have quick replenishment!
O Purifying One, may my thrust never,
Reach right unto your vital points, your heart!"*
(Atharva Veda)

Let us be compassionate to natural history and plan and practice an eco-friendly life style and reduce our needs. Let our responsibility and concern towards the earth, must affect future generations in constructive ways. We should pass on to them a livable, life-giving planet, not a faultily injured home or a desert.

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