

A Study of the Relationship between Women and Nature in *Bhoomika* and *Flute in the Forest*

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Abstract: This article delves into the intricate relationship between women and nature, examining the themes of nurturing, protection, and coexistence through the analysis of the movie *Bhoomika* and the novel *Flute in the Forest*. The study explores the depiction of physically challenged but empowered female characters who strive to safeguard the environment despite their own marginalization. Drawing upon ecofeminism, the article investigates how women and nature have historically been oppressed and the cinematic and literary representations that challenge these norms. The examination of characters like *Bhoomika* and *Atiya* highlights the interconnectedness of marginalized voices and the role they play in advocating for environmental balance. Through an exploration of gender dynamics, supernatural elements, and the preservation of nature, the article underscores the vital message of coexistence and the need to heed the voice of the voiceless.

Keywords: Women, Nature, Eco feminism, Cinema, Literature

Women and nature have always shared a close connection. There are various reasons for such a relationship they share. Some of them include nurturing, caring for the young ones, protection, etc. This paper shall study the movie *Bhoomika* and the novel *Flute in the Forest* to look at the relationship between women and nature. The main characters are physically challenged but are gifted in some way or the other. This quality does not affect their goal to protect and care for the flora and fauna around them. They try and fight to protect the natural resources in ways they could. They act as the voice to the voiceless woods despite being in the marginalized section themselves. The characters are young adults and their bond with nature is highly studied in this work. The answer to whether the characters succeed in their struggle even as death embraces them is to be noted upon.

Proposed by Cheryll Glotfelty, Ecocriticism is also known as environmental criticism or green criticism as it deals with how nature and the natural world can be imagined through literary texts. One of the major types of eco - criticism is Eco Feminism. It talks about how woman and nature are oppressed. Nature (mostly country life) is the feminine aspect while Culture (city life) is the masculine aspect. They are both in opposition. Nature is seen as a woman whose basic task is to reproduce and nurture. In the eyes of the materialist, labour and productive capacity of working - class women and nature are bound to serve men as it is the rule of patriarchy. Pre modern cultures treated nature with respect. That is, nature was worshipped. Whereas, modern culture oppresses nature, people are benefitted from nature at the expense of nature. Eco feminist Spiritual critics legitimates female power, female body and female sexuality as they are the representations of nature.

In cinema, nature is identified with a mother figure and another is the one responsible for bringing chaos. Both the notions are associated with women and thus projected to the external world. The movie *Bhoomika* expresses how humans are interrelated with nature. The title of the film is also the name of the main character, an autistic teenager. *Bhoomi* in

Tamil means Earth, the film thus shows in the flashback sequence about how *Bhoomika* is affected when there is an imbalance in the surrounding and dies mysteriously. Later, the villagers and the school where she was admitted for her talent in painting abandon the village, also the people who try to buy the land or destruct the forest are killed. Roots and the dense forest engulf the whole area. The character *Gayathri*, who is an architect, concludes that all the horrific happenings are because of *Bhoomika*'s spirit. The concept of Gaia Hypothesis is that Earth is a self - regulating organism and other organisms thrive within it. In case, any organism threatens to create an ecological imbalance, it will be killed. So, *Bhoomi* - *Bhoomika*, both struggle to maintain the ecological balance. *Bhoomika* hates it when in her own room her things are placed in a different order. She also paints outside of the paper and rejects clothes which are not made of natural sources. Her father and her relatives are clueless about why she behaves in a different way when things are not right. *Bhoomika* bangs her head on to the tree which is been cut down for construction purpose as she had no help to stop the imbalance that has given way to disruption in sustenance of living organisms other than humans. *Bhoomika* knows only about the place she lives in, she could not differentiate between good and bad and just like the Earth, she has not limits. The famous painter who visits her realises this connection between *Bhoomi* and *Bhoomika* and speaks to her father that she does not require education since she herself is everything. Even when her father *Ganesan* teaches her under a tree, to make her write the board exams, she can take in all the information he narrates to her and is able to reproduce the same. The director of the movie makes sure that the lines she memorizes are also related to past and destruction. Denoting how Earth rejuvenated to its present state, *Bhoomika* is taught about the Paleozoic Era,

“While...while the beginning of the Paleozoic Era is often described as an explosion of life, the end of the period that happened over 251 million years ago.... was

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more like an implosion of life. As much as 96% of all life on earth went extinct during the event known as the P - T extinction. Although the cause is not entirely understood, the P - T extinction almost turned earth into a lifeless planet." (*Bhoomika*52: 40 - 51: 52)

Nature and women in the movie are not only used just for visual appeal but to put forth a strong message to not destruct nature and gain its wrath. Also, to prove that nature is a nurturer, Sam's son is shown to be deprived of his speech impediment after Bhoomika's spirit helps him to paint and leaves without hurting him. Generally, women in movies are a subject of male gaze. Femininity resides in a woman's body and clothes when in a movie. Specific shots project the female body. In the movie *Bhoomika*, the women characters are not portrayed to be mere objects of sexual desire. The ghost of Bhoomika is shown to be a large mass of green creepers with butterflies fluttering around.

Through Ecofeminism the cause of marginalization of women and nature is brought out for discussion. In the movie, Gautham is handed over the deal for refurbishment of a deserted compound for a politician. Here, man tries to recreate an entire space after complete destruction of the existence of other living creatures as well. The anthropocentric approach here shows how man becomes the centre and takes up the sole authority. That is, man tries to become the creator. Earth or the creator can also be the destructor. A woman is thus associated with Goddess Durga devi. In the movie, Bhoomika loves to save nature and destructs anyone who tries to violate it. This includes the death of the politician, Krishna and Gautham towards the climax. Sam is exempted probably because she is a mother and the person who prompted Gautham to buy the deal but had nothing to do with the destruction. It can also be considered that; Sam was dependant on Gautham as they both were not supported by their parents due to their marriage. Now that Gautham is also going to be killed, she will be left alone to fend for her son Siddhu. This indirectly implies that Bhoomika tries to convey the message to Sam about how lonely she felt when she was excluded after losing her flora and fauna and when people deserted their village.

In - between human and nature relationships, there exists the role of sex inequality. Subjugation of women in movies is exposed with the use of the concept of Hyper Masculinity. It is not that women are the weaker sex but the idea of control and taming of women. Aditi is Gautham's sister who accompanies her brother's family to enjoy the natural environment and to be a company for Siddhu. Gautham is only able to handle her tantrums and it is believed so by Gayathri as well as Sam. Aditi ventures out of the property and runs into the forest area where she is attacked by wolves and it is Dharman and Gautham who save her. Also, she is reluctant to enter the property as the group confirm a paranormal presence through Gayathri's mobile. Gautham is the one who controls Aditi, drags her inside the property and shuts her up when she yells at him out of fear. Aditi is shown to be in trauma and is unable to overcome the same. In the climax, she is taking a counselling session with a psychologist.

Cinema influences people as it is the popular media till date. The relationship between women and nature is shown to be a visual appetite by the film makers. Rarely the audience witness the real essence of nature. Wildlife and some portions of nature are shown using CG effects and graphics because they are not to be violated. In the movie, the rare red squirrel which appears in selected scenes is a graphical representation of the bond between humans and nature. Dharman tells Siddhu that he saw the squirrel only now since ages. Nature, beauty and wildlife are thus commodities for different shots. Women are in general subjected to male gaze and are objectified for attracting the audience. The movie *Bhoomika* differs from that aspect as the female characters are not seen to be dressed or portrayed in a vulgar manner but as bold and educated women. In fact, Gayathri is been hired by Gautham and the politician for the project because of her impressive ideas at work despite her reluctance to destroy the whole property. This shows the changing trends in Cinema industry to convey a social message in modern times.

Flute in the Forest by Leela Gour Broome is about Atiya, a polio - stricken teenager who lives with her father in a sanctuary. He father is a ranger and mother is a dancer. Her parents separate as Atiya is afflicted by polio at the age of five and becomes unfit to perform on stage. Atiya is interested in wildlife and goes on solo trips around the sanctuary due to her adventurous spirit. This book is designed with each chapter containing a representation of the character in that chapter as a tribal art. Atiya is like her father who loves nature and wildlife. Despite having a mother who is fond of the city life, Atiya promises her father that she too will not leave him alone. This novel does not focus on the commercialization of nature and women. It deals with the life of Atiya and the jungle. She is alone when her father leaves for work. The little girl is well aware about the forest and during one of her adventures, she is drawn to the sound of the flute. The women characters in the novel other than Atiya is her mother, her mother's sister and Mrs. Pillai. They are not shown to be part of nature or sharing relationship with the sanctuary. Atiya's mother chooses her passion over her family and is clearly not interested in the sanctuary or wildlife. Atiya follows her father's footsteps and goes on adventures and even learns about the forest. After learning to use the flute, she even calms down the rogue elephant Rangappa. This carries the underlying meaning of how a woman is a nurturer when she calms down a child throwing tantrums.

Gopal, Mrs. Pillai's son joins Atiya in her adventures. He is not like Gautham from the movie. Gopal loves to be in the sanctuary post school and is the only friend of Atiya. He is mischievous, not so brave and tags along with Atiya to explore the jungle. Gopal acts as the centre when he warns Atiya to not wander alone. He also is cautious and does not tell his mother about his outing with Atiya. Both the children share a close bond for their interest in the jungle and for being the children of single parents. Gopal stayed with his mother to complete his schooling and did not have any other relationship with the jungle like Atiya. Atiya's father, Sardare is the other male figure who is shown to be caring for the life around him. He hates the poachers, cares for the tribals and animals. Despite being a male, he is seen as the

mother figure for the jungle and the tribals as he saves many lives and cares for them.

Both Atiya and Bhoomika are physically challenged children. Their disability does not come in the way for their love for nature. They are treated as special children which even more elevates the reason for them to be sharing a close relationship with the natural world. It is very true that they could see the world from a different perspective than the other children. In fact, Atiya is bullied by her classmates and Bhoomika is not admitted to the school as well as ignored by the people of the village. Both the children found solace in the natural world around them. All they were aware of included the natural world, their fathers, and their skills. This side-lined concept shows how these children are marginalized from the already marginalized group. Leela Gour and Rathindran Prasad have tried to tell their audience about the dominance of human beings who are slowly creating a path for destruction due to the chain reactions that occur in the process of using the natural resources present in the surroundings. There is no reason for choosing disabled girl children but they are the best educators about co-existence. Gender plays a major role in this context as always girls and women are associated with caring, protecting and nurturing the young ones. Boys and men on the other hand are bound to work like Sardare and destruct for selfish benefits like Gautham. The usage of super natural elements in the movie is to discuss about how the main character safe guards the environment even after she is no more and is a ghost. Bhoomika conveys the message of protecting nature and the natural elements through paintings (which are manmade colours), Gayathri's mobile phone which works in the property where there is no signal for over a decade (technological destruction of life) and mysterious killings of men who work at the site (all their bodies having bruises similar to the one on her forehead) Atiya does the same by reading about the sanctuary and the inhabitants. She proves that learning an art is not only for a purpose but also for the good of the natural life.

The novel and the movie thus have conveyed the intended meaning. It is left to the audience to decide about choosing the side which they wish to be on. Co-existence is very much needed for a peaceful and healthy life on Earth. When the whole concept of marginalization is erased, this can be achieved. Creatures do not have a voice and these children have been the voice. When the voiceless gain a voice, then they all may become like Rangappa.

In the intricate tapestry of human-nature relationships, the stories of Bhoomika and Atiya serve as poignant reminders of the profound bonds shared between women and the natural world. Through their challenges, triumphs, and empathy, these characters transcend their physical limitations to become beacons of environmental protection and preservation. Ecofeminism's lens provides us with insights into the historical oppression of both women and nature, while the cinematic and literary portrayals dissect the complexities of these relationships. Ultimately, their narratives underscore the urgent need for coexistence, highlighting the role of marginalized voices in championing a harmonious and sustainable world where the silent whispers of the environment are heard and respected.

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