

# A Study on the Ecofeminism in the Selected Writings of Sugatha Kumari

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**Abstract :** *Ecofeminism is a field bridging ecological ethics and feminism that seeks to explore the conceptual connections between environmental degradation and sexist oppression. Eco-feminists argue that women are prominent actors and contributors to environmental rehabilitation and conservation. The theory of Ecofeminism upholds that the oppression of women and the domination of nature are interconnected phenomenon. Eco-feminists analyse the issues like racism, class, colonisation, hetero sexism and other forms of oppression against women in relation to the human highhandedness on environment or ecology. They also argue that women are more affected by any type of natural disaster which in turn makes them conscious of the need for environment protection. This article will critically analyse poems of the prolific Indian writers Sugatha Kumari who always fought for upholding the women's issues and conserving the nature. The paper aims to study her writings through the lenses of Ecofeminism, to treat her as unabashed political commentaries on women and nature.*

**Key words:** Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Degradation, Sexuality, Ecology.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term Ecofeminism was first coined by Françoise d' Eaubonne in 1974 in her contentious work *Le Feminisme ou la Morte*. In this book, she writes about a world devoid of the male domination where humanity dominates everywhere. Ecofeminism establishes an imperishable relation between the exploitation and degradation of the environment and the ill treatment and subordination of women. "Ecology" is a biological science which deals with complex interactions among organisms and their environment. The habits of animals and plants in different areas are described in the writings of Hippocrates, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Reaumer etc. The word feminism implies the equality of men and women. Feminism is a range of movements that share's a common goal to achieve personal, political, economic and social equality of sexes. Ecofeminism is a blending of ecology and feminism. The term ecofeminism was coined by French writer Francois Eaubonne in 1974. Ecofeminism emerged in the western countries as a result of the ecological and feministic movements of 1970s and 1980s. In 1970 ecofeminism gave its birth in France, Germany, Japan, Finland, Australia etc. The developers of ecofeminist ideas like Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, carolyn merchant, Ynestra king, Ariel Kay salleh, Val plumwood and others emphasise that ecological issues are the basic issues of women's, because there is always a correlation between oppression of women's and oppression of nature. Therefore, we can analyse that there exists an ecological perspective in feministic theories. Nature and women are exploited in the same way, if these two are not protected and preserved, there is no existence for world environment. The feministic ideology has its own path of development, it starts from liberal feminism and proceeds to Radical feminism, from there it enriched through social feminism and finally reached the stage of ecofeminism.

### Major Thrust

Sugatha Kumari was a pensive poet who fought for nature and marginalised. Sugatha Kumari, an established Malayalam writer and activist, was one of the pioneers of green activism in Kerala. She has sown evergreen seeds in Malayalam poetry, she showed the world that art, nature and human are not differ from each other, but united in a

single point. It is she who initiated discussions on environmental feminism in Malayalam, explicitly through her poems and protests. Sugatha Kumari, born on 3rd January 1934, has been at the forefront of environmental and feminist movements in Kerala. She has a distinctive place in Malayalam poetry for her emotional, moral and humanist compassion. Sugatha Kumari started publishing poetry in the early 1960s. *Muthuchippi* (1961), *Pathirappookkal* (1967), *Irulchirakukal* (1969), *Rathrimazha* (1977), *Ambalamani* (1981), *Kurinjippookkal* (1987), *Thulavarshappacha* (1990) and *Manalezhuthu* (2011) are some of her prominent works.

The poem *Oru Pattu Pinnneyum* (A Song Again) is one of the most celebrated poems on environment. A bird with broken wings sings alone with pains in the remains of a tree. The bird here stands as the symbol for women, who are oppressed by patriarchy. What the bird suffers after deforestation and other nature exploiting activities becomes the sufferings of women as the aftermath of masculine violence. She is the victim of patriarchal power. The bird says that she did not have any companionships other than rain, tree, river and darkness. She forgets her pain when she sings the song. The broken wing signifies that she cannot fly anymore to touch the high sky, which reminds her of the limit up to which she can go for her dreams and passions. Although she embraces the sky with her melodious song with its one wing's rhythm. What links the bird and women is their inferior status or subjugation to man. It becomes the key to get exploited. It is the capitalism exploit nature whereas patriarchy manipulates women.

The poem *Kurinhipookkal* presents the woe of the poet as she is afraid of the development which may devastate the kurinhi flowers that bloom once in twelve years. She is scared of the arrival of man with axe, fire and vulture eyes. She asks whether rubber will replace the plants. She adds that it is the memory of kurinhiflowers which soothes her when she is in city. The poems present subordination of nature by masculine power. In terms of ecofeminism women and nature are related to each other in terms of meaning and purpose rather than what they are. Both are deemed to be feminine and hence prone to domination. They are often regarded as a tool for human exploitation and have no singular qualities that make them valuable.

The poem *Silent Valley* is another one which reveals Sugatha Kumari's eco-feminist stands. It is about the nightmares that the poet sees- the dying Kunthi River and falling down of trees. The dream haunts the poet. She impulses her companions to protect the woods and wildlife like she does and they willingly follow it. Throughout the poem the profound bond between nature and humanity can be seen, and when it comes to end the poet presents her passionate affection with nature by drowning in the Kunthi River. When she addresses the forest as mother, the leaves of all trees call back her- 'child'. The response of nature shows the unconditional love for her children in spite of all harsh attitudes from them. Sugatha Kumari equates the concept of 'mother love' of nature with--- of women. Sugatha Kumari's ecofeminist stance is clearly visible in the poem *Silent Valley*. The poet sees horror dreams of falling trees and drying Kunthi river. Here the poet urges her fellows to guard the forest and sing for the same, as she and her companions give tongue for the woods. The poet echoes the deep bond between nature and humanity. Chris J. Cuomo claims: *Since nonhuman communities and entities are necessarily, intrinsically bound up with human life and interests, the well being of nature is implied, to at least a minimal degree, in human flourishing. Some degree of nonhuman flourishing is instrumentally necessary for human flourishing* (63). Towards the end of the poem the poet presents her deep attachment with nature. She drowns in the Kunthi river and calls the forest 'mother'. Then every tree and leaf responds to the call 'child'. S. Rajashekhara claims "*Sugatha kumari's poems praise earth, nature and women; shows empathy to them and shares their joy*" (143). In *Silent Valley* too she does the same.

In the poem *Vidhi*, Sugatha Kumari presents a court scene where the mother earth is the petitioner and her son man is the culprit. The judge is the God and he is surrounded by deities. The earth appears there enraged in torn green attire and dry tangled hair. A deity calls her name, describes her as one who endures everything. Ecofeminists regard the earth as a fostering mother, a figure who earns reverence from everyone. Here the poet presents the earth as tormented mother. She complains that her son is death to her. He is so cruel to every being on the earth.

In the poem *Karunyam*, Sugatha Kumari draws the thoughts of an ox that waits to be slaughtered. The ox is an icon of distressed nature and women as well, who are victims of exploitation. The dreams of the ox also are getting slaughtered. The unknown butcher who kills the animal is the representative of patriarchal authority. The inferior status that the women and natural entities possess is clearly visible from the poem. Both the women and nature are the victims of power. Val Plumwood in her *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* analyses the power relations as *an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm* (42).

Sugatha Kumari highlights 'vegetarianism' largely as an Ecofeminist ideal in her prose work *Mekham Vannu Thottappol*, (1995) and raises a 'go-veggy campaign' against the barbarious measures meted out to the slaughtered animals. Her foresights of this kind, might be borne out of her own pride in her mother country's traditional wisdom, that counted all animals as divine manifestations in the Hindu Tantra and at the same time present an example for what the Indian Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva accuses as the violence of reductionism. Sugatha Kumari's Ecofeminist validations assume a universal nature, as it discusses what the deprived and the have-nots surrender and sacrifice for the sake of development, which is the 'new religion' of the modern world. When she takes sides with the deprived and the dispossessed, she wages a war against 'the spreading condition of homelessness' (Peter Berger qtd in Shiva 103) that is the lot of the poor, who are always outside the interests of the haves and the rich.

Needless to say Sugatha Kumari's concept of Ecofeminism addresses almost all the burning issues which find a place in the premise that Vandana Shiva calls the 'third world environmentalism' (Shiva 47). Her socialist Ecofeminist ideology is deep rooted in the country's wisdom traditions, which counts the nature around as Earth Mother and 'an attribute of Shakthi' (Shiva 39). The 'tree-poet' expands her literary horizons as she comes to the second phase of her activism, where she leads reforestation campaigns in Attappadi, Muchikkundu and other places with the help of NGOs and seizes the opportunity to raise her voice for 'environmental justice' (Platt 140) against the 'environmental apartheid' (Platt 142) meted out to the tribal folk and the hapless, who are victims of mass deforestation. Her pleas for tribal justice touch its peak in the 'mostly ecological of her poems, "Adivasi Saksharatha" (Kadinu Kaval 10), where she adopts an oral chanting, purportedly fitted into the tribal's mouth to raise indignant questions at the way they are being plundered of all their resources, when they chose to welcome 'the kings who came to civilize them'. The poem echoes the deep thoughts of the poet, and she seems to challenge the agents of civilisation, whose reckless tactics deny the tribal even his ethnicity. In many of her ecological essays in her various prose works, where like her 'acquaintance' (personal interview) and erstwhile contemporary Das, Sugatha Kumari opts for genre-crossing, as most of her ecological essays find a poetic rendering too. She becomes intolerant as she discusses the government sponsored welfare programme for tribal rehabilitation and argues that attempts to modernize them and spoil their ethnicity is the cause of tribal unrest in various parts of the country.

## II. CONCLUSION

Ecofeminism is a movement for existence of life. It is considered as a revolutionary movement for the liberation of women, men and nature. Sugatha Kumari is one of the most honoured writers of Kerala. Sugatha Kumari, who describes herself as "an introvert" in the early phases of her career, with works speaking of the romantic ruminations of her quiet soul, allowed a gradual interplay of her grooming factors to stand tall among her contemporaries as the relentless advocate of Social Ecofeminism. Her exposure into the arena of an undefined activism began as early as the 1970s when she was to organise a decadelong ecological campaign for a hillock *The Silent Valley*, and to emerge as an unaffected activist and writer. Her plunge into social activism was not an accidental one, but 'a mature outplay of the forces and factors that had gone too deep into her making from her childhood. But as the chieftain of a band of writers, who put forth the first instance in the world for 'an ecological struggle' Sugatha Kumari was to exhibit an affinity to the theoretical postulates of Social Ecofeminism in her writings.

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