

THE LONG PATH TO SELF-RENEWAL IN JAHNAVI BARUHA'S REBIRTH

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Abstract

This paper explores a study of the trajectory transformation of the protagonist from a submissive unassuming person to someone who knows her worth. The paper reviews the process of this transformation and how nature and person assisted in her self-renewal. The inextricable link between human beings and the natural environment has been of perpetual interest for writers down age. Theoretical deliberation on this relation between the natural environment and human beings has started to gain momentum only in the last decay of the twentieth century. The word ecocriticism deals with literature and nature and on the other hand ecofeminism establishes a direct link between the natural environment and female sensibility. Both ecocriticism and ecofeminism connect human beings with nature. Ecofeminism considers the domination of both nature and women by men as the root cause of environmental problems. The present study interrogates how nature becomes a perennial presence in the transformation of the protagonist from a meek docile girl to a bold lady who knows how to take things in her stride in Jahnvi Barua's novel *Rebirth*.

Keywords: Transformation, self-renewal, Female sensibility, ecocriticism, and ecofeminism.

The ecofeminism movement is connected with the exploration and degradation of the natural world against the subordination and oppression of women. Western rationality identifies binaries as the structural basis of life such as man versus woman, nature versus man, and man versus civilization. The binary of man versus women and nature is interrogated in ecofeminism. It also traces similarities between nature and women in relation to man. Feminism promotes a gynocentric perspective a concept critiquing and anthropocentric dualism.

Ecofeminism expounds on mutual care between nature and humans. Mario Mie traces the development of this consciousness in the book *Ecofeminism* co-authored by Vandana Shiva as follows An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love.

Only in this way can be enabled to respect and preserve the diversity of all life forms including their culture expressions, as true sources of our wellbeing and happiness. (6)

The research explores the connection between women and nature through the character Kaberi, who was caught in the hands of patriarchal society and tries to overcome all the hurdles in her life to bloom like a flower in this world without losing her petals. Barua is an Assamese-born Indian writer who carved a place for herself in Indian writing in English. The novel *Rebirth* was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2011 and the Commonwealth Book Prize in 2012. The protagonist Kaberi is an Assamese girl, who enters the metropolitan city of Bangalore after her marriage to Ranjith (an IT professional). On the other hand, it also denotes the domination of men against women within the geographical boundary of India. The novel opens with the monologue of Kaberi, she unfolds seven years of her wearisome marriage life with her irresponsible husband to her unborn foetus. She could not make a decision on her own because of the influence of the society. She always lets others make decisions for her. She fails to question their influence as a result she becomes the victim of a patriarchal society. She has suppressed her individuality and forgotten her own responsibility. She is an obedient and docile lady for an unfaithful abusive husband. Towards the end of the novel, a tremendous transformation takes place within herself, she becomes a novelist out of self-emancipation.

Feminism deals with understanding, eliminating, and creating alternatives to the oppression of women in society. Nature is related to feminism because an understanding of nature and environmental problems often helps to understand how and why women's oppression is linked with the unjustified domination or exploitation of nature. Nature was exploited by humans in the case of farming. The modern era of farming was marked by the excessive use of pesticides which makes the land infertile land. This infertile land is compared with women who were connected with contemporary problems like infertility issues and they

were named as barren women by the society. The word barren woman was associated with the word barren land, the so-called infertile land. These issues are focused on by Barua through the character Kaberi, who was considered a barren woman for seven years of her marriage life. As Ranjith was an IT professional, he did not spend much time with her in the seven years of her married life and this affected her inner psyche which ended in trauma. She often recalls her life in Assam where she was one with nature. All these together brought the hormonal imbalance and resulted from the infertility issues in her life. But this was faced only by her and not by Ranjith. The society blamed Kaberi and not Ranjith and named her as a barren woman.

According to Janis Birkeland, ecofeminism is "A value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the link between androcentrism and environmental destruction (19)". Men try to mould nature as per their wish and finally ends in destruction and the result is that nature holds the name as barren land. The same thing happens in Kaberi's life where she was uprooted from the natural world of Assam to the metropolitan city Bangalore after her marriage to Ranjith. He was a man who adapted to the modern world and tried to show his own desire wishes to Kabire and made her change the lifestyle to a fashion world where no one takes care of their health but loves to be

fashioned in their food habits. All the environmental issues joined together and made her pursue the name of a barren woman after seven years of marriage life. The society doesn't blame Ranjith for Kaberi's infertility issues and it shows the authority of men over women.

Ecofeminism also examines the effect of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature. Ranjith who stands for a male-dominated society expelled from Kaberi due to her infertility and had an illegal relationship with another woman named Lakshmi. It seems like men leaving the barren land and moving forward to the fertile land. But once again if the barren land changes into fertile land they move back to the land where they lived once. Kaberi personally hates this because she was pregnant when her husband left her and she did not reveal this to her parents as well as to her husband Ranjith. She wants Ranjith to accept her as his wife and not as the one who was expected by society as a childbearing machine.

As the novel opens we can find the protagonist Kaberi as an introvert who delineates herself through words to the unborn infant. Through her intermittent nostalgic musing, the author weaves up the entire life of Kaberi before marriage in the lush green terrain of Assam. The author has a perfect juxtaposition of the urban landscape of Bangalore with the lush green vegetation and scenic beauty of Brahmaputra. The movement is seamless and smooth and this was compared with the calmness of Kaberi. She does not overreact towards her husband when he is out of her life. She maintained the peace like that of nature towards human beings.

The interior landscape of the Kaberi is laid plain before the readers without any hope in her life. But there arises a development in her character when she thinks of her past life in Assam. In Assam, she was bound by nature. The slow realization of her empowerment is garnered by sensing the intimate objects around her. The sight, sound, smell, and even the memory of the lush green homeland give her a whiff of solace. The reader can sense all these through the own words of Kaberi towards her unborn child.

Sometimes not very often when I missed the open skies of my childhood, I would set out of the flat, locking it carefully behind me, and run up the terrace where I was surrounded by the sky. Still, it was never as blue as I remember and I was left with an ache in my as I leaned against the low wall. (1)

As the story progresses, she and her friend along with her friend's autistic son goes for a boat ride in the Kabani river. Here also she recalls her visit to the Kaziranga wild life sanctuary. While on the boat they suddenly spot a tiger far away. She describes the moment as. "The boat is silent. No one talks; we are imprisoned in our own thoughts. A tiger always seems to have this effect on people, robe one of all speech. It cuts us down to size, in a way, reminding us of our largely insignificant place on the immense stage of nature." (58)

Here the author brings out the importance of nature and the real domination of nature towards human society. Ecofeminism juxtaposes the historical exploitation and domination of women and nature as going hand in hand and both are seen as the victims of development. As the story

progressed, Kaberi started to write her own experience and decided to publish, which was hated by her husband. Ranjit always wants his wife to be under his control and a docile girl who wants to be a typical housewife and wants to hold her husband's wish as her own wish. Nevertheless, she decided to publish the book without any second thought. During the middle part of her pregnancy, she moved to her hometown where she found the strength within herself and decided to be an outspoken person. Nature molded her to face the problems with courage. This is witnessed in her lonely days in the lonely cold flat in Bangalore. She tells us about the jacaranda plant outside their flat. Due to climate change, the jacaranda tree stands without blooming and it seems barren throughout the year.

At one point due to climate change, it started to bloom and started to spread its lovely fragrance throughout the area near the apartment. It boosted up to changed her thoughts with regard to herself and it brought change in her life. Like a jacaranda tree, her life also started to bloom and she decided to spread the fragrance of her positive thoughts through her writings to this world. She draws a parallel with the jacaranda in an emphatic and empathetic manner "The jacaranda is bar now, no feathery leaves to clothe it nakedness....But soon, as soon as the temperature begins to rise, it will grow resplendent, confident, a different being entirely" (81).

While recalling her days in Assam she invariably refers to the sparkling waters of Brahmaputra. The river had a tremendous impact on her psyche. On another occasion, she describes a car journey along the river bank. The sight, smell, and sounds, of nature work as tropes triggering the transformation of the protagonist. According to Linda Vance "Ecofeminism is understanding, interpreting, describing and envisioning a past, a present and a future, all with an intentional consciousness of the ways in which the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are intertwined" (126).

As her pregnancy progresses, Kaberi gets ready for the birth of her child as well as her own rebirth. She also accepted her husband like the harbor of humans on Earth. Her journey to Assam evokes confidence and courage within herself. She begins to see things from a different perspective which helps in the improvement of health and confidence. She comes back to Bangalore as a strong person who no longer depends upon her husband and she also expressed her wish to publish her writings with a strong voice. Through this novel, Barua brings out the development of woman as the development of nature which takes a long journey to fulfil the wish. One should also understand that promoting women's equality is not a matter of isolating women from men or children but it is a process of converting patriarchal domination for both women and men into a new relationship of mutuality.

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