

# Psychological And Ecofeminist Analyses Of Select Poetry Of Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu And Meena Kandasamy

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## Abstract

Since the primeval stretch of time women seems to have established an inherent relationship with nature resulting in the development of literary approaches such as ecocriticism, ecofeminism and ecomysticism. These literary approaches points towards the facts how the human culture is connected to the natural world with an intense underlying interaction between them. An exploration of the vibrant, colourful and mesmerizing ecology of the North-East and South India can be made by probing deep into the literature produced by the writers of different states of these two different regions of India. This paper thus, aims to critically analyse a few selected poems select women poets belonging to both North-Eastern and Southern India like Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu and Meena Kandasamy through the lens of ecocriticism to re-read their psychological connectedness with nature and compare the environmentalist essence of the poetry of the two diverse regions of India. The paper also desires to highlight and study the various tenets of ecocriticism like ecomysticism and ecofeminism while re-reading the selected poetry of the aforementioned poets of the North-East as well as South India to convey how the women's psychological perception of nature has helped them to liberate both nature and themselves from the long-built shackles of exploitation.

**Key Words:** Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Ecomysticism, Indian English Poetry, North-East India, Psychology, South India

## Introduction

Our society is always busy with fulfilling the selfish needs and desires of its own. Did we ever pause for a while to think about the most exploited ones around us? Do we know how long the powerful people have been ruling over the oppressed and the voiceless entities around us? No matter how long we have gained independence but the voiceless are still strangling behind to liberate themselves from the shackles of exploitation of the patriarchal society. The exploitative behaviour of men has led them to extract their pleasures out of both nature and women equally. Hence, nature and women have been deliberately made voiceless against the dominant culture of our society. Such dominating behaviour meted out to nature

and women throughout ages has enhanced their relationship with each other. Women have started aligning their condition with nature resulting in the development of their psychological connectedness with their surrounding nature. Women have understood the need for the liberation of nature to improve their own submissive condition. Hence, they drew a parallel between their oppression with nature and often turned towards it to emancipate their feelings of sufferings. Such an emotional, mental, and spiritual acceptance of nature as one's own soul instilled within women could very well be comprehended if we delve deep into the poetry of women writers of different places and ages. By re-reading the poetry of women writers from North-East and South India through ecocritical perspective the

paper tries to prove how ardently women desires to liberate themselves and nature and how often they mentally perceive nature and how they seek for their liberation through their mystical oneness with nature and other environment sustainable activities.

A close study of the writings of the North-East and South Indian poetries through an ecological perspective would reveal that how the surrounding nature has influenced in shaping the aesthetic sensibilities of the women writers of India and how hard women have tried to use their poetry as a tool to raise their voice against the injustices of the society they live in. This paper hence, deals with women's perception of nature by exploring the poetry of Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu, and Meena Kandasamy, belonging to different places in North-East and South India respectively through the lens of Ecocriticism to prove how deeply women perceive nature and upholds it through their creative faculties to bring about a revolutionary change in the society.

### **Objective:**

This paper aims to reconnoitre:

- How the women poets of the North-East and South India psychologically perceive the nature around them?
- How they reflect the various emotions, cultural and socio-political aspects by using ecology as a tool for change and revolution?
- How ecology and the human culture both intermingles together giving a free expression of the concealed thoughts and conflicts of the mind?
- The paper desires to prove the above points by re-reading the poetries of Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu and Meena Kandasamy through the lens of ecocriticism.

### **Theoretical Background:**

Before delving deep into the poetries of the above mentioned Indian women poets to prove the objectives of the paper it would be

worthwhile to investigate the theoretical background of ecocriticism and its sub-parts ecofeminism and ecomysticism.

The term ecocriticism was first used by the US Critic William Rueckert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' in 1978. Ecocriticism is also known as ecopoetics, environmental literary criticisms or green cultural studies. In this literary theory nature is considered as a cultural construct of the society and should be given a place along with race, class, gender, etc. for evaluation in a literary text. The need for the ecocriticism aroused as a result of the inhuman activities of human beings meted out towards nature from where there is no return. As Donald Worster, an environmental historian rightly says that we are facing a global crisis today which is not because of how ecosystem functions but because of how our moral or ethical systems functions. Now to spread the awareness of ecological concern and at the same time to show how human beings and their emotions and daily activities are related to the surrounding natural atmosphere, literature plays a vital role. And the North-Eastern and South Indian Literature has greatly incorporated ecology to express human actions and feelings. Psychology is all about emotional perception that varies from person to person and this varied psychology of women is united through the theory of ecocriticism by focusing on their common objective of attaining gender equality and sustainable development of the ecosystem. So, ecocriticism is not only remains confined to the 'Nature Writings' but also is an essential element for literary and psychology studies. In this context I would like to quote again from the book 'The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology' by Joseph Meeker where he says, "Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures...if the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behaviour and the natural environment—to determine what role, if any, it

plays in the welfare and the survival of mankind and what insights it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us.” (1997)

Ecocriticism is divided mainly into branches i.e., ecomysticism and ecofeminism and so in order to decipher a literary text through the lens of eco we need feminism we also need to sometimes read it under the light of ecomysticism to fulfil the greater objectives of the theory as a whole. Ecomysticism is the art of living perfectly and ecologically and at the same time having a spiritual perception of the elements of nature.

The feministic views of the modern world developed greatly due to increased oppression of both nature and women which in turn led to the uprising of this new critical movement known as ecofeminism. Ecofeminism as a significant ecological and feminist movement emerged in 1970s and Françoise d' Eaubonne is often considered by critics to have given an intellectual or theoretical foundation to ecofeminism which aimed to draw a parallel between the sufferings of women and nature. Ecofeminists believe that there is a deep inherent connection between women and nature. The modern concept of Ecofeminism was developed by a group of academic and professional women in United States of America to promote all round development of women and respect them as an important member of the society. They urged that all women must join their hands together to stop the environmental exploitation if they want to liberate themselves from the long-built shackles of oppressions. The main aim was to demolish all the types of patriarchal controls over the society in the field of socio-economic, cultural, natural or individual. For them nature was the first target which they wanted to liberate from the domination of man. Women took able steps and imagined the very soil of the Earth as their own soul. To quote from the introduction to “Feminism and Ecology” by Mary Mellor “Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the

exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and the oppression of the women. It emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and the green movements, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement the concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.” (1997) This marginalization is very well noticeable in the “gendered” language used to explain nature such as “Mother Earth” or “Mother Nature” as well as the animalized language often used by men to describe women mercilessly. Therefore, the concept of ecofeminism has contributed to the society in a positive approach to attain the common goal of liberating both women and nature to bring about a sustainable development of the society as a whole. The parallelism drawn between women and nature has led the common mass to look through the serious oppressions and injustices meted out to the innocent creatures of the Earth. And further incorporation of the concept of eco feminism in the works of literature has helped to spread among the common masses the necessity to preserve both women and nature for the continuation of habitation on Earth. And this goal of equality among humans and nature is achieved greatly through the literary voice of the North-East India where all these modern concepts of Ecofeminism, ecocriticism and Ecomysticism are deliberately used to express and voice their own struggles, oppression, identity crisis, etc. in a unique manner.

Ecofeminist scholars have asserted that it is not because women are female or ‘feminine’ in character that they relate them to nature but because of their similar states of oppressions by the same male dominated social. This similar state of oppression moulds the psychology of women in such a way that they start perceiving

nature as their counterpart. This very understanding of nature as the other half of women's consciousness has led to the successful union of their feelings which in turn paves the path to prove the relevance of this theory of ecocriticism to achieve the goals of gender equality and sustainable environmental development.

### **Analysis and Observation:**

The Poems of both North-East and South India represent a deep ecological concern for the sustainable development of the environment with its vast vista of images of hills, rivers, mountain peaks, legends, myths, tradition, and culture. The theme of ecological concern seems to bind together the multi-ethnic writers with the same thread and aims towards the liberation of the souls of tortured women. The marginalisation of nature and women is well reflected in the language used in poetry and the women's psychological perception of nature and is well drawn in such writings which would help us to prove our broader objectives of this research paper.

This common line that binds the poets together is well revealed by an eminent Indian English poet Jayanta Mahapatra who said that it is undoubtedly poetry that unites us and it is the poets who will not keep us away from one another, who will not separate us. Hence, for this paper in order to rediscover and probe deep into the nature conscious mind of human beings, especially women, it re-reads the poetries by poets of different regions who are: Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu and Meena Kandasamy. All their poetry represents environmental issues that lead to the degradation of the ecology. Their poetry implicitly advocates for the preservation of the ecology of their respective regions which in turn will lead to the preservation of their native land, tradition, culture, humanitarian values, and above all the women.

To start with one of the most famous and most reputed writers of the North-Eastern region is

Mamang Dai who belongs to Arunachal Pradesh. She is also an environmental activist and a nature poet as well as a nature lover. Her poems represent the mystical myriad world of Arunachal's ecology and cultural heritage. Her poems reaffirms that nature is not a passive force rather is a dynamic force that plays a pivotal role in shaping an ecological consciousness. An ecomystical consciousness among men leads them to possess a healthy psyche which again would lead to an ethical development to live in a perfectly and ecologically sound environment. It makes humans to realise the truth and they start respecting and preserving every being of the nature. This sense of ecomysticism is a predominant aspect in the poetry of Mamang Dai. In Dai's poem 'The Missing Link' the following lines provide an ecomystical sense in it showing a spiritual presence in the flow of the river water:

"The river was the gentle green and white vein of own lives

Linking new terrain,

In a lust for land brother and brother

In a dispute settled by the rocks

Engraved in a vanished land." (Dai)

If we probe deep into these lines then we can very well find the river as a metaphor used for a mystical being who is connecting lands of disputes and socio-political upheavals. Both nature and human life are suffering because of the modern period and its crisis. So, through nature and its soothing touch the poet tries to resolve the problems. In the poem rocks seem to settle the disputes between one another. The concept ecocriticism is based on the fundamental principle that human culture is connected to the natural world having a durable interaction between them. So, in this poem too we can find a relationship between river and human life where the river tries to revive back the vanished ethics of the land. The emotional

consciousness of people of the land is expressed with the usage of the word “dispute”. Not only this but the veiled condition of women of the region is also expressed with the usage of the word “brother to brother”. Does dispute affect only men? Are women not equally affected? This gendered lens is intentionally put on the poem to show how habitually men tend to reject women from the paradigm of culture. Hence, once rejected from within the cultural association women tends to align themselves with nature and is considered by the society as “other” where they become subject to exploitation and torture. This ecofeminist lens provided to this poetry would again prove how intricately women’s psychology gets paralleled with nature and how we need to liberate both in order to achieve a serene and peaceful society and environment.

The intense concern of Dai for nature is visible greatly in her poem ‘The Voice of the Mountain’ where the mystic and the grandeur of the mountain with the myth and folklore tells us an ethereal story of the people around and about the deep concern for preservation of mountains for the sustainable development of the society. In the poem the mountain seems to be an omniscient being who had witnessed the history and the present and says, “For Thousands of Years/ I know I Know these things as rocks know, burning in the Sun’s embrace...” the mountains also know the clouds intimately and have a clear link with the impending. Even the tribal people with their traditional knowledge and experience understand the linkages between mountains and rains. They have a belief system about the symbiotic relationship between the mountains and the rain and this very traditional beliefs are entwined with the nature’s expression in the poems which establishes how nature and human beings have in intrinsic interaction amongst themselves that is mystical and grandiose in nature. This deep coherent relationship is understood well by the tribal people of the region which reveals the ecocritical and ecomystical concepts that human and nature are

bind together with fine threads of connection. The complaint where the mountain says “peace is falsity” reveals the challenges of the modern world where environment continue to remain vulnerable to growing demands for water, natural resource, tourism...incidents of conflicts, etc. Several movements for peace have been witnessed by the mountain over the course of the time but many of them resulted in violence and wars. Peace could never be achieved to its fullest. Thus, the oppression of nature and the conflict amongst men inflict pain and sufferings and the theory of ecofeminism with the expression of such realities through the literary works aims to liberate both the suffering women and nature.

Not only ecomystical but also ecofeminist elements abound in the poems of Mamang Dai where she parallels the suffering of the women and the nature under one umbrella with the hope for liberating both from the dominations of the patriarchal society. In her poem “The Sorrow Woman” it seems that while speaking of the wretched condition of women she speaks of the degradation of the nature as expressed in the following lines: -

“My love, what shall I do?

I am thinking how I may loose you

To war, and big issues

More important than me....

Ah! That urgency for survival,

But what will they do?

Not knowing the sorrow of woman.” (Dai)

These lines are often reflective of the voice of the marginalized women who is silenced or remains unheard in the patriarchal society. The women’s voice can be identified with that of the voice of nature. Men are so busy fighting wars among themselves and it is only through a sustainable development of nature that we can make the earth a proper place for survival. This

is anthropocentric or androcentric in perspective where there is a wide gap between the human world and the natural world. And the women too are sided with nature separating her from cultural indulges which makes the women to lament that men don't understand their sorrows deep inside. This patriarchal attitude is not only meted out to women but also to the nature revealing the ecofeministic expression of the poem "The Sorrow Women". Has anyone thought about woman and nature and how adversely they are being affected by the wars fought by men? The answer is no, as in the poem, narrator herself expresses, "to war and big issues/more important than me." So, women and nature are always paid the least attention and a few cares about the damage that is done to them due to the modern advances, conflicts and the wars. According to a study conducted in 1987 by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice concluded that Native American Women are exposed to various health hazards as a result of frequent exposure to uranium mining activities suffering high rates of miscarriage, bones as well as gynecological cancers. Not only this but also women in developing countries are subjected to unique challenges in the environment according to the research conducted by the 'UN Women Watch fact sheet on Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change'. Infant and child health as a whole is negatively influenced by these negative impacts on mothers resulting in long term social degradations. Ecofeminists like Julia Mason said as quoted in an article by Alyssa Adimovich that there is a "social mentality that leads to the domination and oppressions of women [and it] is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the environment... [Thus] it is not coincidental that we treat both the Earth and women badly..." (2015)

Dai reflects her concerns that veils the mysteries in nature. Her poems reflect the myths of some tribal communities of the North Eastern regions including the Nyishis of

Arunachal Pradesh. They are of the psychology that tigers and human beings are brothers who are potentially same and united to one another despite of physical differences. This traditional myth and psychological barrier of the poem throws light on the philosophy of Spiritual ecological which is considered under the broader term of Ecomysticism. The poem reveals the philosophy that human soul is the part of the "anima mundi", the soul of the world. Tana's conscious effort to mingle the contemporary society with the mythical background reflects his concern for the ecology and the primitive essence of nature and tradition making his poems as perfect literary examples for the theory of ecomysticism and ecocriticism.

Not only the above description regarding the poetry of North-East India but also South India reveals the Ecocritical turn in their poetry where their conscious effort to mingle both the consciousness of nature and women to parallel their sufferings and liberate them from the long-oppressed shackles of patriarchy helps to regenerate the vibrant land that is surrounded by the natural aura and aims to rediscover the lost identity of women of South and in turn the nation as a whole.

To deal with the poetry of Sarojini Naidu we can very well find how she often deals with the themes of women and nature in her poems where she intricately tries to weave ecological concern and women oppression within the same thread. If we analyse her poetry 'Pardah Nashin' through the lens of Ecofeminism we can very well find out how she focusses on the confined condition of women where she indirectly satirizes the conservative society which keeps the women veiled behind the traditional norms of the patriarchal attitude. The poem 'The Pardah Nashin' upholds Naidu's views about the traditional institutions that often rejects the rights of women. Initially, she celebrates the women behind the pardah but then she also shows how mentally broken down and aware she is regarding her confined and isolated life

behind the darkness from where she remains unheard. Her *pardah* separates her from the surrounding reality and makes her succumb to the manmade world where she is always controlled by the society, she lives in. The following lines of this poem convey how Naidu's heart is full of sympathy for women who are compelled to lead an artificial life:

But though no hand unsanctioned dares

Unveil the mysteries of her grace,

Time lifts the curtain unawares,

And sorrow looks into her face. (Naidu)

The poet acquaints us with the pathetic condition of women where no one ever tries to understand a woman's desires and beauty and its only sorrow that covers her entire life and her she keeps on weeping that remains invisible behind the *pardah* 'nashin' woman as mentioned in the poetry. Not only this but Naidu draws analogies between women and nature with various references in her poetry. The ecofeminist turn in the poetry is very well visible in the following lines:

Her raiment is like morning mist

Shot opal, gold and amethyst.

From thieving light of eyes impure,

From coveting sun or wind's caress, (Naidu)

From the above lines it is very clear that to describe the womanly grace the poet has paralleled herself with natural phenomenon. It seems that it is only nature who can understand and feel her pain. The poet says, "From coveting sun or wind's caress' her raiment is just like the morning mist" (Naidu). Her pure and pious self was upheld through her innocent character like nature which is contrasted with the cultured and artificial life created by men. This aspect of comparison done between the

two helps in the rediscovering of women's identity through a new lens of nature and in turn through the theory of ecofeminism making the poetry to have a revolutionary approach to make a positive change in the way women live by emancipating them and their surrounding nature from the confined living. Naidu wants us to acknowledge the importance of nature and women in our life and voices for the need for equality.

Mena Kandasamy, another South Indian poet focusses on aspects of ecomysticism as well as on female oppression and exploitation. In her poetry 'Fire' the way she describes the influence of nature on human life is tantalising. Her description of nature is mystical to a great extent where she vividly describes every aspect of fire in the following line of her above poetry:

Black satanic fumes  
Shroud the blank blue skies  
in puffing jet black soot;  
few flashy cameras record  
glimpses of destruction (Kandasamy)

She gives instances of how nature controls the human life and how futile men are to think that they can control nature. She even personifies nature with the word "feverish cries" where she tries to reveal the fact that nature is showing her frustration with her cries. Nature's cries stand as a metaphor for the exploitation and the ill treatment meted out to them by the human society. The reason for the fire is sometimes made suspicious with line like: "Our huts are burning/ Regular huts in proper rows/ Dry thatches (conspirators-in-crime)", through which the poet also tries to indicate that humans might be the conspirators who intentionally put the nature on fire with his uncontrollable acts of desire.

The poem therefore, with its sense of mysticism brings forth the theory of ecomysticism and in turn fulfils the broader philosophy of ecocriticism and ecofeminism showing how nature and women are inseparable entities on Earth and the destruction of one badly impacts

the other. It is nature that stands as witness to the lifelong incidents of the past and a sustainable development of this nature will thus, lead to the preservation of traditional sensibilities, legends and myths, the human culture and above all would lead to a positive growth of women psychology and help them to raise their voice to establish their unique identity in this society.

### Conclusion:

Thus, by a probing deep into the poems of Mamang Dai, Sarojini Naidu and Meena Kandasamy, it is very well proved that no matter from whichever state they belong to each of them is connected to one another on the common ground of the representation of ecology, women's psychology and human behaviour in their unique way making a reading of the ecocriticism and ecofeminism very probable and prominent in their poetry. The aesthetic sensibilities provided by the hill capped and oceanic areas and the cloudy abode made these poets to reunite the various cultural and traditional and social issues of the society with ecology giving it a modern shape and fervour and to liberate their struggling souls free from the shackles of human restrictions and oppression. Thus, by using the tools of ecocriticism, ecomysticism and ecofeminism it can be proved that in order to liberate the suffering women souls we need to mentally accept nature as our other half and identify ourselves with our ecology around. This philosophy of ecological as well as psychological perception of a woman is well visible in the poems of the North-Eastern as well as South Indian poetry. Hence, re-reading women's psychology through an ecofeminist approach opens a new arena to view our life at the crossroad of gender, nature, psychology, and poetry. The above few examples are just testimony of how every literary composition of these regions aim to incorporate nature in it with the ultimate goal of liberating, expressing and emancipating both nature and human

beings from their long-suppressed confinements.

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