

Environmental Concern And Cultural Practices In Cyborg Proverb By Nitoo Das

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Abstract:

In Cyborg Proverb, there is a juxtaposition of environmental ethics and cultural showcase. This juxtaposition intersects with the feminist explorations. Many poems from the book, combines folklore and gender concerns imbibed intricately in it. Select poems, thus, commit to the interplay of feminism, environmentalism and folklore. I study the poems in the context of ecofeminism. This paper attempts to peep into the folk narrative of Assamese community as demonstrated through the poetic narrative of Nitoo Das.

Keywords: environmentalism, folklore, feminism.

Ecocriticism has its addition in including the feminist studies to study environmentalism. This branch of ecocriticism is later termed as Ecofeminism which studies parallel environmental exploitation and oppression of women indicating that researching of both the issues in the same line will help to understand and solve the issues better. Thus, ecofeminism has begun noting that the oppressor for both nature and women is same resulting from the masculine accountability. Though such a note has been criticized for acquiring an essentialist view, there are other trajectories of ecofeminism. In its wide variety of dimensions, it is not surprising to read ecofeminism collaborating with folklore studies also. Writing about ecofeminist ethic and its correlation with myth and folklore, Correy Wallace writes in 2006 that religious interests and feminist causes do intersect with environmentalism. Further he writes that religious texts and the behavior and belief systems of the practitioners should be examined in order to from the base the base of environmental ethic. Other than ecofeminism, there is feminist folklore as a theoretical framework affirming a transdisciplinary approach to amalgamate multiple notions to understand each one in a better possible way. Feminist folklorists urge that traditionally society is structured according to masculine normative. They argue that the reality of human world and the knowledge about it are constructed from the experiences of man. Hence, it is necessary to interrogate the narratives circulating among the people from the times immemorial be it folklore. They suggest that in studying folklore gender must be granted as a category to invigilate each items of folklore. This way feminist theory will also contribute to question the previously held assumptions and internalized stereotypes (Kouseloes, 1999).

Folklore is a mirror of the people who traditionally bears and trespasses the texts of folklore. Orality is one of the characteristics of folklore. But in the modern times, the texts of folklore are transcribed in print enabling the literary representation in different genre. In literature folkloristic representation forays into the reinterpretation of the original text. Hence, the text embraces multiple possible viewpoints. It is in this context that this paper intends to analyze the poetic presentation of the folkloristic detail available in the select poetic text. A woman's experiences in the society are different from that of a man. Hence gender becomes imperative in interpreting different genres like that of folklore. This comprehension ties up the feminist concern, natural world and folklore to showcase an intrinsic association for a parallel understanding. Folktales centering on the feminine principle show different perception of environment. Further ecofeminism deconstructs the binaries like nature/culture, man/woman etc. (Bhattacharya, 2022). Such comments culminate in the interpretation of the poetry of Nitoo Das also. In the poem, "At Age Eleven" the poet writes about the rituals that a girl comes across when she undergoes the first cycle of menstruation. In traditional Assamese society, there are various traditions associated with menstruation. As the tradition goes, the girl cannot go

out for seven days. She cannot meet anyone and has to be on fast for a few days. The poet rewrites these rituals by bringing in a feminist perception. As per the folk belief, the girl has to marry a plant to get rid of the curse of f destiny. She also has to sleep on straw and eat fruits for several days. The speaker in the poem says that she is not going to do these things again in life. The speaker shows her angst against all the rituals she obeys. She feels that when she writes about her disagreement about the rites, she dismisses those folk beliefs. As a way of reacting against these rituals, she vows not to blush like a bride. She promises to turn deaf against such observing and thus she rejects the compulsions of conventional beliefs. She promises to turn down such observing and thus she rejects the compulsions of conventional beliefs. Through the rewriting of these traditional beliefs, the poet also points out the relationship between women and nature. Out of anger, the speaker says that she would have made a firm relationship with the plant she has married to. But after the ritual, never in life she has met the plant. She is also bathed with the turmeric. Such descriptions determine the connection of women with nature. Such ideas continue in other poems also. In the poem, "Man kisses a Tree" the poet imparts how the transformation happens when a man builds up a relationship with nature. A man's touch of the tree makes something to 'shifts.' This transgression is against the 'grief' of the tree. The poet writes about the connection between a woman and nature in the poem 'Jokhini.' The image of a 'Jokhini' of a traditional Assamese society is drawn in the poem. The Jokhini resides under the tree harmoniously. The tree responds to all her emotions. She shakes the tree whenever she moans of being not sure of many things. The Jokhini is invisible in the eyes of others yet she can be felt in the movements of the tree. She also describes the gaze of a male who cannot see her but dreams of her in vision. The white flowers of the tree bloom throughout the year thereby accompanying her in her invisible existence. Somehow the tree and the Jokhini lives for one another and keeps mutual understanding for each other. Both of them live unnoticed yet contribute to the synchronicity of the living world. The way the Jokhini can no more feel the 'feet' becomes symbolic of the lack of permanence in the lives of the tree also. The gone feet and the uncertainty of the Jokhini possibly hint at the exploitation caused to the environment around.

Many poems in "Cyborg Proverb" are about the ecological concern of the poet. The poet writes about the scenic beauty of many places in Meghalaya. While writing about the popular places in Meghalaya, the poet refers to the idea how the nature in the surrounding becomes the identity of the people. In the poem, "Six Poems about a Meghalaya Travelogue" the poet writes about the places like Mawphlang, Mawlynnong and Laitkynsew. In all these short poems, it is pointed out how people are spiritually connected with nature. Talking about the root bridge in Mawlynnong, the poet writes that the roots are likes the tale with various subplots, character and conflicts in the story. It is symbolic of the folklore that the native people in the locale carry from generation to generation. The poet is concerned about the significance of nature in the lives of the people. At the same time, the poet refers to the sentiment of the people associated with nature. In the same poem, the poet writes when a leaf of Rhododendrun full of love of a woman falls off, the earth expresses the pain. Thus, the poem hints at the ecological consciousness of women fraternity and the unavoidable bonding between women and nature. The poet's concern for nature gets entangled with the comment on the feminist perspective. So, this poem also extends the environmental concern to the embodiment of the feminist issue and somehow or the other presents the both on the same ground with an ecofeminist perspective. The poet's ecocritical notions are found in other poems like "Ladakh Travelogue" which are not about a Meghalayan place but still confirms the poet's voice for nature. In this poem also, she writes about the significance of the local places in the lives of the indigenous people. Ladakh is a popular tourist place. This place is famous for its natural appeal. The poem resonates this and portrays how the pebbles, the moon in Kargil – all speak up for unbeatable natural abundance. Nowhere in the select poetry book, the poet fails to connect with nature, folk-stories and feminist issues. Sometimes it is the combination of the three aspects together and sometimes one holding on the other. So, the poet's connotations are not restricted to the presentations of the Meghalayan scenic beauty but the poems do not fail to uphold a general ecofeminist and folkloristic ideas of the poet. The poem 'Alakshmi' is about the idea remains in an Assamese traditional

society. The poet rewrites this image and reinterprets the image of an Alakshmi. She writes that the Alakshmi is only an image who is left unmarried and deprived of all the pleasures and prosperity of life. Alakshmi is supposed to be a different woman who does not fall into the expected idea of a woman. She does not do what she is supposed to do in her age. Her face does not fit the conventional idea of beauty and hence she is not supposed to be a Lakshmi. In an traditional Assamese society, there is an idea of a Lakshmi who follows the norms of the society. Anyone who does not look like the concept is supposed to be an Alakshmi. The poet sarcastically presents this idea and brings in the parallel idea about a crow in the society. A crow is supposed to bring in curse because of its color and the voice which are actually natural. Both the ideas about an Alakshmi and the crow align and unfolds the satire in the folk belief. Here one can see that the poet's note on folkloristic belief, comment on the feminist frameworks and an intermingling of the both to understand the idea better. The poet's concern for nature or the bird and the feminist voice get displayed in one frame in a way of ecofeminist observation. This poem ends with an empowering note for the lady whose bright eyes dismiss the impositions on her personality.

The poem "Aitama's Last Lesson" shows how the folkloristic belief orally transmits from generation to generation. Aitama is the grandmother who tells the tale to the next generations. She is the bearer of the stories and traditions that she passes into the following generations. Every stanza of the poem begins with the words- "Do not" (P.38). She teaches what to do and what not to do. But in this poem, Aitama reverses all the don'ts and asks to do the opposite. This poem also mingles the folkloristic ideas and a feminist perspective. Further the poem has a note on preservation of nature when Aitama says not to cut the pomegranate tree. She says that if one cuts the Moina will not forgive. This points out the mutual empathy of nature and woman for each other. Here it is noticeable how the ecofeminist sentiment of the poet surfaces in sharing the pain of cutting a tree which the woman does not like. "Ambubasi" reflects the conventional thoughts of people in the traditional belief, it is said that goddess Kamakhya bleeds only once in year unlike the 'regular women.' This poem signifies the slaughtering of the animals in front of the goddess and points out that the goddess bleeds from a 'dead vagina' only to protest against such worshipping. The poem reacts against the tradition of killing animals to worship the goddess kamakhya. At the same time, it also draws attention how the sorrow of the goddess for the animals gets entangled with the unnecessary stigma menstruation cycle.

Poetry of Nitoo Das posits an interdisciplinary approach in connecting feminist ideologies with that of the ethics of environment protection. The select poetry neither surfaces a sole attempt of feminist folkloristic view nor display an isolated ecofeminist conception. Rather her poetry perceives the both to dual on the extended versions of understanding from both the field. Das collects the materials of folklore and rewrites those only to deconstruct the conventional and stereotyped practices of folk ideas.

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