

## Patriarchality in Rural India: An Aspect of Despicable Social Polarity in Dipika Rai's *Someone Else's Garden*

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**Abstract:** Historically and culturally, women, in Indian pastoral society suffer severe permissiveness of subjugation and submission. However, bad conditioning and treatment women encountered were highlighted as being parallel to exploiting a piece of land. Literature, the mirror and chain-link to society and social merits as far as demerits reflects wholly women's status of inferiority in many societies as been marginalized and devalued due to extreme yet disparaging dominant tradition trends of individualism. This study is conducted in the light of the concept Ecofeminism with reference to Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980). This theory evaluates different aspects of cultures, including power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term vs. short-term orientation. Tacitly, Dipika Rai's *Someone Else's Garden* depicts the catastrophic situations to the maximum and the most deplorable conditions of baffling women in rural India. All but the elements of "uncertainty avoidance" and spiritual orientation envisaged the assimilation of women to nature being absolute, relative and relatively permissive.

**Keywords:** social subjugation, patriarchal system, Hofstede's theory, ecofeminism, justice request, nature.

### INTRODUCTION

*Someone Else's Garden* as a model categorizes the harnesses tenants of Ecofeminism affiliated to women postures in society against egoism and male mania. Ecofeminism alleviates, hence advocate the social and environmental justice quests as been correlated for women being subjugation. In most literary works, women writers take refuge to nature to prescribe their suffering and foreground their envisioned world and society integration.

Geert Hofstede states "Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy" (See [www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com)). Thereupon, Hofstede underlines in his study on national cultural preferences rather than individual cultural preference to uncover the defects and deforms of the code of humanity concerning women's life conditions. Since the dawn of humanity on Earth, women have been considered a second class according to proliferated notion of men man superiority. Along with sophistications conditions of women in terms of intellectuality, behavior, and effect in their societies, even male writers commenced writing about the bad conditions of women in society. Yet they do not go deep to uncover their sufferings and oppression in their societies. This, might be reasoned that, their writing has not embodied their anguish, pains, and grief to communicate their spiritual predicament. Hence, female writers expose their tragic life within the patriarchal society in their writings in the actual and logical life for the sake of getting

what they are yearning for: equality, identity, and humanity.

Women wish to have a sense of humanity not as a thing that exists for the pleasure of man to be used as a puppet or object. Rai utilized the landscape of nature to express the "suppress[ed] women" (Kumbhare, 2009: xv) in life.

Rai's work intricately weaves the politics of silence and the power of voice throughout the narrative. By providing a platform for women to express their thoughts, fears, and aspirations, the novel becomes a catalyst for change. It reinforces the importance of women's voices and illuminates the potential for growth and empowerment when they are heard. The bad and unbearable conditions of women are depicted by various genres of literature in a different manner to portray the real status of women when men "oppress and exploit [them]" (Walby, 1989: 214). Writers have exploited many techniques and styles to correct the view of women in terms of politics as in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*; political activism is the main idea that is concentrated on by the writer. Kamala Das's poems *an Introduction and Relationship* which describes a woman as nothing more than a body for a man's enjoyment. It "vividly delineates the helplessness of Indian women and indifference of society to their plight" (Sree, 2005:25).

The question of the female status in society is evident in Lata Bai's lamentation on the status of a female baby "when does a female baby become a human being? At conception? At birth? At five?

At puberty? At marriage? Never? When her parents can offer her a life?" (Rai, 2011:7). In *Someone Else's Garden*, women are exploited by being sold as prostitutes at the Red Bazaar and their body part, the kidney, is taken out and traded for a piece of land to satisfy the men's addiction of alcohol and prostitution. Mamta, the protagonist, knew that her scar had somehow bought her family a piece of unneeded land. "So they gave me everything but twenty-five thousand, which they gave me after the operation" (Rai, 2011: 139).

To draw the world's attention, Rai uses the philosophical resemblance between nature and women to expose the ill-treatment of women in a male-dominated society. Nature can be regarded as a woman's ally in a patriarchal society, as Sivarajani and Rajarajan explain in their consideration of ecofeminism in Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai's novels in a patriarchal society for being "alienated from male-centered hierarchy, women tend to seek consolation from the nature-based spirituality and they also seem to draw strength from their natural surroundings" (136).

### Dipika Rai

Dipika Rai is one of the inspiring Indian writers on the social and political issues of her gender as she has a wide range of experience due to her career as a freelance journalist. Her first novel is considered one of the most representative and highly interpretive as it is based on the true conditions that most Indian rural girls encounter in their life. *Someone else's Garden* comes to tell Rai's cultural views concerning some vital social issues as Rai declares:

I wanted to examine the disconnect between the dharmic (i.e. spiritual) India and the karmic (i.e. the empirical) India, particularly since of late India has been handed the role of guardian to the spiritual keys of the world. I wanted to explore why in such a spiritual place like India – and India is indeed a very spiritual place – is there so much social injustice sanctioned by tradition. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

She delves into the power dynamics inherent in a patriarchal society. Rai's narrative highlights how the institutional structures, cultural norms, and social conditioning limit women's voices and potential. This exploration encourages readers to critically examine these structures, thereby fostering a greater understanding of gender inequality and fueling the conversation around

feminism. She strives to bring to life the hurdles that are erected against girls simply because they are females. Rai portrays strong females who were unaware of their own strength, as well as men who were both rude and ugly, and men who were able to love and be loved. As she explains "what I call the cultural burden of ancient civilisations, and the ways in which that burden can be lifted." (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

She also directs what life has to actually be approximating for people who were born in India's poorest areas. Reading or watching certain literary works on women's plights reveals that women in India and other developing and third-world countries are treated in the manner represented in her writings. She is not a feminist in her ideological writing, yet she prefers to be a humanist. This is because she believes in the concept of humanity. In this context, she states:

I am not a feminist, I enjoy the special place we hold as women in the world. And as such, I want to get away from the intellectual distinctions between men and women, so I would rather be described as a humanist. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

*Someone Else's Garden* explores themes of identity, belonging, and the search for meaning in an interconnected world. It delves into the struggles and experiences of individuals who find themselves caught between cultural, societal, or personal expectations, and their own desires for self-discovery and self-expression. Through vivid storytelling, the novel invites readers to reflect on the complexities of navigating relationships, tradition, and the human experience. It offers a window into the multilayered human psyche and the universal longing for understanding and acceptance. Readers of her novel may receive various themes and perceive multiple images and messages which reflect the intensity of her experience and punctuality in choosing her topic to be delivered in public. One of these topics is the correlation of women to nature which falls within the core concepts of ecofeminism. The notion of a better life for women that meets their aspirations is her target as she links nature and land with the circumstances of women in dealing with men. In this respect, she notes:

No work is 'entirely of fiction', because each time a writer sits down to write he/she brings himself/herself to the table. Most characters are composite characters, shades of people, sometimes

even feelings, that are placed in a particular context to impart a particular message. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

### **The Context of Ecofeminism: Women and Nature**

Ecofeminism, to put it simply, is the study of the link between literature and the natural world. Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies, much as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious viewpoint and Marxist criticism brings an understanding of modes of production and economic class to its study of texts. As the comparisons to feminism and Marxism show, ecofeminism is an obviously political style of analysis. Ecologists, social ecologists, and environmental justice supporters seek to integrate environmental and social concerns by building on the insights of previous critical movements. (Garrard, 2004:3). Francoise D' Eaubonne coined the word "ecofeminism" in her foundation essay "Le f  minisme ou la mort" in 1974. (Feminism or Death). She proposed raising awareness about the linkages between women's oppression and nature's dominance in order to free women and nature from unjust subjugation. Ecofeminism supports for a more dynamic, diverse, and hybrid bridging of women's and nature's relationships, rather than serious deconstructions of social, cultural, and, historical dominions of females and nature.

The philosophy of Ecofeminism handles terms of abuse and exploitation besides authority upon nature. D'Eaubonne "introduced the idea to raise awareness about interconnections between women's oppression and nature's domination in an attempt to liberate women and nature from unjust subordinations"(Vakoch,2017:3). As primary archaeological findings detected that Mesopotamian civilisation has proof that primordial people who follow equal lifestyle are always united with nature, this novel is to be provoking numerous questions of issues; to mirror on the deep inequalities to women, to question the rights of women in the masculine realm and to look beyond the tradition and culture that often weighs us down. Through her novel, she aims "to get away from the intellectual distinctions between men and women, so I would rather be described as a humanist" (Rai, 2011: 6)

The objective of ecofeminism is to make a solid basis for the relationship between the physical and spiritual qualities of women and nature between the feminine in general and natural cosmos. Here

in this novel, the author concentrates on the earth, the land, which is harshly exploited by man regardless of its silent suffering in giving and sacrifice. Man aims to have the authority and supreme power over nature for the sake of controlling the universe and the land used to noiselessly grant men their insatiable whims. Women here are just like the land in which men cultivate and the land is accustomed to bestow submissively. As life should be balanced in every aspect to be smoothly heading, D'Eaubonne claims that "the relations between sexes" can be defined as "humanistic and ecological issues at the same time" (Vakoch, 2017: 242-43). Thus, sexual relations can be characterized, according to D' Eaubonne, as the "humanistic and ecological issues at the same time" (D' Eaubonne, 1974, 242-243). Dependence is a state which is used to describe the similarity between women and nature by means of maternity which is arguably in terms of resemblance between Women and Nature: both of them are mothers. The first aspect of similarity introduces the exploitation where it lies in the phase between Women and Nature, and possibly for this reason, "the way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat women" (Roach, 1991, 49).

Rai is cautious in reflecting on the reality and the actual conditions of life by means of criticizing just like communicating with the mind of the reader in a logical manner. She receives her inspiration for creative writing from nature as she states:

Those beautiful hills evoked a feeling of poignancy in me as a young girl and I became quite introspective. I grew up surrounded by a sort of lonely-beauty, relying on my own best-guesses to explain the larger issues of life. I read a lot because there was so much true freedom and knowledge in books. I think my childhood experiences made me a contemplative person, and that attitude of mind is what drives my creativity. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

If we take ecology to be the study of the house, the relationship between women's activity and ecology becomes more apparent. According to Merchant, "it is beginning to dawn on women that they must assume the responsibility for housekeeping nature" (Merchant, 1996: 167), as depicted by Lata Bai in *Someone Else's Garden*, "She knows why Devi must be all things to everyone. Is she herself not manifested in various forms: mother to her children, wife to her husband, friend to friend,

sister to sister, daughter-in-law, worker... (Rai, 2011: 6). In this respect, women are depicted in various forms related to the functions or purposes they serve in society; however, they are never depicted as woman per se. Their identity is formed by how useful they are. These stereotyping of the image of women is what makes the story a powerful rhetoric against the humiliation women get in their own society. Rai goes on explaining:

See, she'll make a good mother", because as far as lata Bai is concerned daughters are born to be good mothers first, before anything else... As far as Seeta Ram is concerned, daughters are born to be good wives first before anything else. (Rai, 2011: 15)

Women as nature is not only productive but also a provider as:

The father, Seeta Ram, enjoys picking his teeth. He adores well-kept shoes. He despises missed meals. The meal has been postponed today. Why is the meal being delayed when one wife and four children are still at home? "Lata, Lata. Food" he shouts, sitting cross-legged and placing his turban carefully on the floor beside him. He's come home early to escape storm" (Rai, 2011: 10).

So, the raging storm outside can only be escaped through seeking the warmth of a housewife. Ram, the deity, expects to be served regardless of the overwhelming duties Ram, the deity, the man expects his wife is shouldering to keep the house functional.

### **The Status of Indian Women in the context of Ecofeminism**

In earlier times, the majority of societies restricted the role of women to seduction and a thing that gives birth to children. In addition to that, some societies of Greek and Roman times looked at women as a degenerated, humiliated, and disgraceful position and "the source of evil and temptation" (Alter, 2008: 12), who corrupted society through their activities. This showed the tragic fate of women who led a miserable life because of the patriarchal society. Thus, women lost their vital status of being human beings who have an identity as it becomes obvious that women could be sold just like anything which can be possessed by men; "I paid five hundred rupees for her. It was a great charity I did her father" ((Mehta, 1993 246). Even women's aspirations had been crushed by marginalizing their identities, even though they had high social status or education. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, Louise

Lamphere, and Joan Bamberger observe the real position of women in society as "in every human culture, women are in some way subordinate to men" (Rosaldo, 1974: 17).

Women played a powerful role in the history of India as they ruled and occupied prominent positions as Razia Sultana who ruled Delhi in the period (1205-1240), Jijabai who was a great warrior and administrator, the Queen of Jhansi who gathered the Indian people to revolt against British colonization, and many other women who had a great and effective part in the history of India, yet they were absent and passive in the ideology of men who live in the countryside due to their prejudice and pride. The best example of ignoring women by the male-controlled society was not giving her rights in the field of education and the first free school for girls was opened by Peary Charan Sarkar in 1847 and was called "Kalikrishna Girls' High School" (Jha, 2017: 16). That school was established by an Indian educated woman who sensed the battered Indian woman in her society which eliminated her identity and rights. For that Rai states that "a baby and then another. That's where my life is going to pour out of me when I die. From between my legs and not from my nose like other people" (Rai, 2011: 13). Rai's words depict the bitter reality of how women are reduced to a womb for bringing forth children. Women and Nature are frequently compared since they both serve as reproductive agents. According to Kate Soper's article, both women and nature connect as soil and land for planting:

The association of femininity with naturality represents a more specific instance of the body-mind dualism brought to the conceptions of nature, since it goes together with the assumption that the female, in virtue of her role in reproduction, is more corporeal being than the male. (Soper, 2000: 139)

Women, generally, who live in the countryside and rural areas are still disregarded and live in devastation and dehumanization. Naturally, when people are being under oppression, they struggle and strive to break the chain to get free from the disparaging tradition, culture, and society which snatched their value, identity, and rights for the silent voice of women in terms of politics, economics and sociality. Rai admits that she criticized some Indian communities in dealing with women as she says:

In some ways Indian women are the most emancipated in the world, we can rise to the top of



our careers, we can control a household of men, our gods and goddesses hold equal sway over our hearts, which is much more than can be said even for some developed countries. But still, in pockets, albeit deep and wide pockets, women are badly treated, not just by society and men, but also by other women. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

Undoubtedly, many people will be surprised for knowing that there are still discrimination and marginalization of Indian women as “Never had a woman been given so much power and authority. Women were meant to give pleasure to men and not rule them”(Podder, 2012: 33). Rai also emphasizes the treatment of women in terms of the exploitation of their reproductive and genital systems. Women and Nature are frequently compared since they both serve as reproductive agents. Women as seed-planting soil as she does every job: weeding, fencing, digging, planting, mending... when you have nothing it seems like all the labour in the world won't help you get ahead. Only once has he seen men here work as solidly as he did in his father's field: when putting out a wildfire in the granary – without instruction – just for the sake of survival (Rai, 2011: 91).

Women are also treated as a source of income. Trading women's body parts is equal to trading fruits and wheat for living because, in men's conscience, women are disparate beings, they are not human. This statement is supported by Plumwood when she expounded that the aim of ecofeminism is to ‘destabilize hierarchal dualisms where men rule as reason, subject, and master colonizing women as nature, object, and slave. (Vakoch and Mickey, 2017: 4).

### **Women in *Someone Else's Garden***

*Someone Else's Garden* is one of the most significant novels that directs attention to the plights of women in India who are relentlessly depressed in their parents' life and then exploited and abused by their husbands. Thus, Rai, in "Someone Else's Garden", challenges conventional notions of love and relationships as she explores the complexities of romantic bonds and interrogates the patriarchal assumptions that often characterize them. By portraying unconventional relationship dynamics, the novel invites readers to rethink and reimagine love outside the confines of traditional gender roles. Rai grasps the meaning of land in which everything comes out from, thus, women hold some merits of nature which is considered the major companion to man. Nature

affords priceless consolation to society so that women are related to the character of primitive classical mythology. Thereupon the writer feminized nature as it has the characteristics of women and Ecofeminism communicates with the feminism philosophy along with ecology. Accordingly, Rai states that about the link between nature and women:

Those beautiful hills evoked a feeling of poignancy in me as a young girl and I became quite introspective. I grew up surrounded by a sort of lonely-beauty, relying on my own best-guesses to explain the larger issues of life. I read a lot because there was so much true freedom and knowledge in books. I think my childhood experiences made me a contemplative person, and that attitude of mind is what drives my creativity. (Shaikh, 2011: Dipika Rai – The Asian Writer)

There is an interconnection between the command of nature and command of women in two phases: ideological cultural and socioeconomics. The first phase that said women are closer to nature than men in terms of sensations and body. Concerning the second phase that said women are associated with economics more than men in the levels of production, child raising, providing food, cleaning and working everywhere they are located. However, they are marginalized in the public sphere by the patriarchal society in both factors; power and culture. As a result, there are some similarities between mother and nature in the concept of maternity. James E. Huchingson states “the way we think about and treat the environment is related to the way we think about and treat women” (Huchingson, 2005: 396). The role of women cannot be restricted in the sphere of housekeeping nature as it is observed in the role of Lata Bai in the novel as “she knows why Devi must be all things to everyone. Is she herself not manifested in various forms: mother to her children, wife to her husband, friend to friend, sister to sister, daughter-in-law, worker...” (Rai, 2011: 6)

Women are God's blessing that men have ever in our world to complete their life in repose one as nature in which it is basically located for the benefit of humanity not just for men. Women cannot only provide men a sexual intercourse, but also take care of men under any title as:

they organize their lives so that they can be looked after by a woman. Have you seen one in our village that isn't married? Have you seen one widowed father who hasn't got a daughter or

daughter-in-law looking after him? I tell you we better off when our country was looked after by a woman Prime Minister (Rai, 2011: 68).

Women are often equated to Nature on the basis of both functions as reproduction agents. Both Women and Nature correspond to soil and land for planting. Men try to exploit and dominate the nature and land, according to their pleasure regardless of the damage that they may cause as their prejudice blind their intellectual insight. Thus, men are careless about the health condition of women when they commence their sexual affairs with their women even if they are fully aware this will hurt women. Thus we can observe in the novel when the woman gives birth, she needs a period of time to be ready for sex:

Tonight we will sleep apart, and we should remain apart for the next forty days till I am once again pure. But on the twelfth day, you will take me to your bed. Then you will climb over e that very night. We will pull the cloth over our heads and, healed or not, in pain or not, bleeding or not you will pour your seed into me .A baby and then another. That's where my life is going to pour out of me when I die. From between my legs and not from my nose like other people (Rai, 2011:13).

The conditions, circumstances, and culture of women cannot be bearable from childhood till death thus we have a very important question that is delivered by the marginalized woman in the novel. Lata Bai laments the status of a female baby as she does not get her humanity and identity during her shifting stages in life. She asks: When does a female baby become human being? At conception? At birth? At five? At puberty? At marriage? Never? When her parents can offer her a life? (Rai, 2011: 7)

Although women were still marginalized, like Mamta, and considered inferior, men dealt with women as if they were objects, ignoring their roles, rights, and identities as in the case of Mamta who leads an agonized life within both her family as well as her husband. Her father does not love her as he commands her mother to give her little food only to keep her alive when she was engaged. So, Rai deeply highlights this disfigured portrait of a society in public to restore the social balance. Likewise, in nature, men dare to accomplish repulsive deeds in dealing with women. They are not only exploited physically and spiritually but also go far in their intrepidity to sell women or even some parts of their bodies for their pleasure.

Therefore, women are exploited by being sold as prostitutes at the Red Bazaar and their body part i.e. kidney is taken out and traded for a piece of land to aid the men's addiction to alcohol and prostitution. This is very obvious in the novel as women had been sent to the city with one of their uncles where there was food to have. They all knew what happened to the girls who went to the city. They eventually became prostitutes and turned up in the Red Bazaar (Rai, 2011: 30). Commodifying women into an object that can be sold and owned is quite similar to how a piece of land is treated. The intimacy and resemblance a woman has towards land is clearly stated at a moment of giving birth to a new life. Lata Bai finds her strength to give birth in the fields she tills at. In this respect, Rai states:

She knows this field intimately, suddenly in flower with the first rain. She's worked it for how long? Much longer than twenty years. So long she doesn't remember. She has laughed in it and cried in it. Hidden in it and rejoiced in it. She's had all her babies in it and played with all her babies in it. The field has watched her through her life. Its soul reaches out to her and its arms protect her. She feels the field's love pour over her. It sinks in through her pores and blood, feeding every atavistic part of her with its generosity. Her field. She'd die without it. (Rai, 2011: 3)

This spiritual connection between Rai and the field highlights the fact the ecofeminists emphasize in their writings. It is that bond between woman and nature that holds them close to each other and which is being emphasized by Rai here. Women have no consolation in their life just nature which is considered their ally in a patriarchal society because as they are being alienated from the male-centered hierarchy, women tend to seek consolation from the nature-based spirituality and they also seem to draw strength from their natural surroundings. It is also this parallel between tilling a land and a woman that the quote pinpoints and the capability of the male to usurp both of them that brought into the forefront by the writer.

## CONCLUSION

Dipika Rai's *Someone Else's Garden* marks a departure from traditional female archetypes by presenting multi-dimensional female characters who defy societal expectations. Through protagonists like Bai and Lata, the author challenges the notion that women should conform to predefined roles, offering readers a refreshing perspective on self-determination and agency. It is

about how their experiences they go through are parallel to male's exploit nature. Women are considered as a place for dependence, their bodies and reproduction capacity are cruelly exploited for men's pleasure and convenience. Fathers and husbands do not share equal responsibilities in child-rearing leaving the burdens solely on women to endure like the land which is exploited by Man. On top of this, women are seen to find salvation in nature. They exhibit better mental and emotional states when they are surrounded by nature and they appreciate nature more than men do. Lata Bai's husband becomes furious when he knows that his wife delivered yet another female. He considers his daughters "someone else's gardens". Rai depicts a clear picture of an Indian woman in resemblance with nature and this is not only the predicament of Mamta or Lata Bai but also many girls and women around India. This suffering will continue because of the scant intellectual capacity of men for comprehending the humanity of women like men. "Someone Else's Garden" is a significant contribution to feminist writing, offering a unique perspective on themes of gender, power, and agency. Through the exploration of multi-dimensional characters, examination of patriarchy, amplification of women's voices, and subversion of societal norms, the novel encourages readers to critically engage with feminist discourse. In its compassionate storytelling and thought-provoking narrative, to reshape societal understandings of gender dynamics, making it a valuable piece of feminist literature.

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