

Women and Nature in BP Koirala's *Sumnima*: An Ecofeminist Study

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Abstract

The article aims to analyze the connections between women and nature in Bisheshwar Parsad Koirala's novel *Sumnima*. To examine the relation between women and nature in the novel, the theory of ecofeminism has been used. Ecofeminism deals with the relationships between women and nature that particularly deals with the domination of women and exploitation of nature in a patriarchal social order. Ecofeminist critics believe that issues of women and ecology are interrelated. They critique that the domination of nature by human beings is guided by the patriarchal world view, the same world view that justifies the domination of women. Thus, they resist the exploitation of women and nature. Koirala's *Sumnima* underscores the patriarchal structure based on dualisms like men/woman, masculine/ feminine, culture/nature, and spiritual/material, which destabilizes the system based on the hierarchy of the traditional gender roles. Thus, the article argues that the novel is written from the perspective of ecofeminism. The analysis of the study centers on the depiction of women and nature in the novel. The finding of the article shows that, in patriarchy, women and nature are treated as feminine and they are dominated and exploited. The analysis is significant as it helps to understand the importance of feminine to maintain harmonious relation between men, women and nature.

Keywords: dualism, ecology, ecofeminism, feminine, patriarchy

Introduction

Background

Bisheshwar Parsad Koirala (BP Koirala) has a distinguished place in the history of Nepali literature. His contribution, especially, in the field of Nepali fiction is commendable. He was the pioneer of psychological realism in Nepali literature. His first short story in Nepali language, "Chandrabadana" [Moon- Faced] (1935) is supposed to have initiated the formal discourse of psychological realism in Nepali literature. He composed six novels: *Teen Ghunti* [Three Turns] (1968), *Narendra Dai* [Elder Brother Narendra] (1969), *Sumnima* [Sumnima] (1969), *Modi Aaian* [The Grocer's Wife] (1980), *Hitler Ra Yahudi* [Hitler and the Jews] (1983), and *Babu, Aama Ra Choro* [Father, Mother and Son] (1989). Likewise, he has published two collection of short stories, *Swet Bhairabi* [The White Goddess of Terror] (1983) and *Dosi Chasma* [Faulty Glasses] (1949). Through these works, he has brought the suppressed and

subdued human emotions to the fore. Especially, his novels are remarkable for the philosophical ideas, and the portrayal of human psychology in them.

Prior to Koirala, most of the Nepali novelists focused on social realism and the mode of writing was based on idealism. They emphasized more on events than on characters. They aimed to maintain the status quo. But Koirala distinguished himself through his literary works by introducing a new way of presenting reality. Sharma (1992) claimed that in the process of creating a distinct identity in Nepali literature, Koirala "added a new dimension to contemporary Nepali literature an altogether new element of psychological realism into his literary works" (p. 209). Similarly, philosophical ideas based on existentialism and absurdism were alien to Nepali literature. Rai (1999) claimed that Koirala has inaugurated the themes of existentialism, alienation and absurdism in his novels (p. 251). Rai believed that Koirala's *Teen Gumti* is the first work to deal with the philosophical concept of existentialism in Nepali literature. Hutt (1984) pointed that influenced by the philosophy of existentialism and alienation, Koirala's works are different from his predecessors. He remarked, "Sexuality is in evidence in the novels of Visvesvaraprasad Koirala" (p. 311). Chalise (2019) agreed that "Koirala has introduced new way of presenting social reality in relation to the consciousness to the human existence" (p. 321). Subedi (2064) also suggested that Koirala has introduced the notion of existentialism and absurdism in Nepali literature (p. 324). His works explore the psyche of human beings as they reveal that not only social norms and values are absurd but absurdism is also inherent in our psyche.

Besides these philosophical ideas, his novels also raise the contemporary issues of gender, ethnicity and environment. Tripathi (2012) viewed that his novels protest the social restriction on women's life and body (p. 268). Critics have discussed the issues of psychology and ethnicity in *Sumnima* (Chalise, 2019; Sharma, 1992; Magar, 2010). In addition to these issues, Koirala's novels explores men domination of women and nature in patriarchy. This is pertinent in *Sumnima*. In the novel, Somdatta, the protagonist, treats women like the earth to sow the seeds. Though critics have been fascinated by the novel ever since its publication and discussed the different aspects of the novel, none of them have discussed the links between women and nature in the novel. Thus, this article has attempted to fill this research gap by analyzing the novel from the perspective of ecofeminism.

Statement of the Problem

Sumnima problematizes the man-woman relation. It depicts Somdatta's distorted relation with Sumnima and Puloma, two women in his life. Sumnima is his love. But he discards and dismisses her because he considers her ignorant and barbarous. Puloma, his wife is a cultured girl from his community. However, he fails to maintain a smooth relation with her. He treats her as a mere accomplish to reproduce him a male issue. He dominates her and controls her sexuality. Fed up with the imposition of cultural mores by Somdatta, Puloma

becomes hostile towards him. Hostility between them ruins their family life. Malnourished and frustrated Puloma dies. Forlorn and old Somdatta has also faced his pathetic death. His son is rescued by Sumnima and her people, the indigenous ones. A question arises whether the novel supports ecofeminist perspective by dismantling dualisms like culture/nature, masculine/feminine, and spiritual/material found in patriarchy. The following research questions are formulated to solve this problem:

- What connections do women and nature have in the novel?
- How are women and nature portrayed in the novel?
- Why does the protagonist dominate women and nature?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To identify the links between women and nature in the novel.
- To analyze the portrayal of women and nature in the novel.
- To examine the ways the protagonist dominates women and nature.

Review of Literature

Most of the critics acknowledge Koirala as the pioneer of psychological realism in Nepali novel. He is said to have introduced Freudian psychology in Nepali novel and many critics believed that *Sumnima* explores human psychology in terms of *Id*, *Ego* and *Super Ego*, whereas many critics viewed that the novel deals with the issues of ethnicity. Analyzing the issues of ethnicity, Sharma (1992) argued that "the novel shows the confluence of Kiratic culture and Hindu philosophy" (p. 214). But Rai (2001) believed that Koirala's writings are based on research. The novel includes *Puranic* elements in it. In the novel Sumnima is more than a Kirat girl. She represents the Kirat culture and their value system. They are materialistic and believe on the earthly life. Rai pointed that Sumnima's suggestion to her daughter and Somdatta's son to understand and respect the cultural background of the partner and adjust and compromise with each other shows the coexistence of different cultures in the society (p. 275). Dhakal (1999) also mentioned that the novel shows the conflict between the Kirat and the Aryan cultures represented by Sumnima and Somdatta. But the focus of the novel is on the reconciliation between them (p. 68).

In the same way, Subedi (2007) claimed that the novel deals with the conflict between two different belief systems. They are the belief systems based on materialism and spiritualism. Sumnima, who represents the Kirat culture, focuses on materialism whereas Somdatta as a representative of Aryan culture focuses on spiritualism. The novel suggests that this material life gets its meaning by making its natural consummation (p. 396). Chalise (2012) claimed that

the novel is a reflection of Eastern philosophy based on humanity. Sumnima is used as the mouthpiece for the author to assert the importance of humanity. Chalise further argued that the failure of Somdatta's rigid belief guided by orthodox Hinduism supports the victory of humanism over religious orthodoxy (p. 127). Chalise, too, agreed that the novel portrays the conflict between the Kirat and the Aryan cultures. Nepali (2017) has also analyzed the humanistic perspective of the novel, arguing that the novel is written from the humanitarian perspective. He explained, "Koirala demonstrates his humanitarian view through Sumnima. As a social realist with modernist outlook, he focuses on objective reality that is related with human pains and passions" (p. 42). By presenting the protagonists from two opposite ethnic groups, Koirala shows that it is vain for human being to be rigid and pursuit for spiritualism.

Magar (2010) has made a comparative study of Koirala's *Sumnima* and Pradhan's *The Battle of Kirtipur* in his study. According to him, the novel raises the ethnic issues as he claims:

Koirala presents ethnicity in such a way that it has its existence only in relation to another ethnic group. These ethnic groups are always in struggle for their existence. In the novel, we find specially two ethnic groups, namely Brahmin and Kirat, which are always in struggle to pervade directly or indirectly their own cultural and religious traits on others. Somdatta, representative of Aryan or Brahmin, tries to continue Hinduization but Sumnima opposes it. Finally, Somdatta's pure Hinduism falls into crisis. (p. 40)

Magar has appreciated Koirala's tact of merging two different ethnic groups into a single family and blurring the social hierarchy. Sumnima takes Somdatta's son to get him married with her daughter. As a social reformer, according to Magar, Koirala suggests the intercultural harmony between different cultures.

Kandel (2014), too, discussed the issues of ethnic consciousness in the novel. He claimed that the novel deals with ethnic consciousness and emphasizes the need of respecting other's culture. Along with raising ethnic consciousness, Koirala insists for harmonious relation among the people living in the same geographical territory (p. 30). In the same vein, Chalise (2019) mentioned that Koirala has explored the value of cultural identity in the novel. According to him, the novel reflects the diverse cultural reality of Nepali society. For him *Sumnima* is Koirala's search for mutual identities as he states, "He has proposed to rethink into cultural tradition of different cultures with different identities into the mode of coexisting cultural continuation" (p. 315). The novel highlights the importance of coexistence among different cultures.

Unlike the above mentioned critics, Regmi (1993), Pradhan (1995), and Rimal (2012) have stated that Koirala was a writer of human sexual psychology. Regmi (1993) observed that though Somadatta tries to be away from Sumnima, her portrait is engraved in his mantelpiece.

He is torn apart between his obligation towards parents and his desire for Sumnima. Despite his attempts to restrain his desires they get manifested when Sumnima kissed him (p. 129). Pradhan (1995) identified Koirala as an expert in dealing with sexual problems of human beings. According to him, the novel makes it clear that sexual desires and attraction to opposite sex are natural for human beings. So, they should be met through the normal course of sexual intercourse (p. 413). Rimal (2012), too, traced the influence of Freudian psychology in the novel. He explained that the conflict experienced by its protagonist is caused by his libidinal instincts. He suffers for he fails to channelize his normal sexual urges (p. 96). He aligned Somdatta's conflict with *Id* and *Superego* in Freudian psychology.

Most of these critics have analyzed the novel as a conflict between the Kirat and the Aryan cultures. They noticed that Koirala's emphasis is on the unity among diverse cultures. Some of them have analyzed the novel from the humanitarian perspective whereas others have traced the influence of Freudian psychology in the novel. Their opinions have enriched the meanings of the novel. Yet, none of them has mentioned the links between women and nature and their domination by men in patriarchy. Thus, this article aims to address this research gap by examining the links between women and nature, and explaining how men dominate women and nature in the novel.

Methodology

In this article, Koirala's *Sumnima* has been used as the primary source of information as a text for analysis. To analyze the links between women and nature and to examine the domination of masculine culture on feminine nature, the article has drawn insights from ecofeminist critics. The analysis has used interpretative method of analysis. It has taken the ideas of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Yenstra King and others who advocate for horizontal and harmonious relation between men, women, and nature. Thus, ecofeminism has been applied to analyze Koirala's novel.

Ecofeminism as a type of feminism deals with human beings' relationships to the nonhuman natural world. It believes that women's and ecological issues are interrelated. The more commonly termed ecofeminism is a conjunction of two words: ecology and feminism. While feminist and ecological analyses can be combined, feminists are seen as turning increasingly to theory, and environmentalists to action (Alldred & Dennison, 2000, p. 124). Ecofeminists argue that women are culturally tied to nature; there are conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic connections between feminist and ecological issues (Tong, 2009, p. 237). Although many feminist critics denied, ecofeminism follow the ontological assumption, 'women are closer to nature than man.' The ecofeminist ethics is grounded in the assumption that the dominations of women and of nature are morally wrong and ought to be eliminated (Warren & Cheney, 1991, p. 180). The aim of ecofeminism is to create nature friendly, just society.

Ecofeminists claim that patriarchy's hierarchical, dualistic, and oppressive mode of thinking has harmed both women and nature. Warren (1987) specified four core assumptions of ecofeminism: (1) There are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (2) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding of the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (3) the feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (4) solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective. Mies and Shiva (2014) have stressed that "the rape of the Earth and the rape of women are intimately linked - both metaphorically, in shaping world-views, and materially, in shaping women's everyday lives" (p. 11). Ecofeminism critiques the masculine domination of feminine. It argues that it is the same masculinist mentality, which denies women their right to their bodies and sexuality, threatens ecology and environment. King (1983) has pointed that this masculinist mentality depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way. Thus, to eradicate the patriarchal exploitation of women and nature they claim that women should take initiation. Ecofeminism as a theory and practice is an attempt to this venture.

In his *Sumnima*, Koirala critiques the dualistic patriarchal structure that favors attributes associated to masculinity and dominates women and nature. Somdatta, who stands for masculine culture, dominates Sumnima and Puloma, the two women in his life. Sumnima resists Somdatta and his belief system based on the religious scripture. She favors indigenous knowledge and suggests that man should not interfere in the course of nature. Likewise, Puloma revolts against the cultural restriction imposed on her by Somdatta. The female characters resistance to masculine cultural domination of women and nature provides scope for the ecofeminist interpretation of the novel.

Results and Discussion

Set in the prehistoric time, the plot of Koirala's *Sumnima* deals with the distorted man-woman relation. Somdatta has had a unique upbringing. He has been excluded from the village life and has been taken to an isolated hermitage in Varahakshtra so that he will be a sage, an ideal life for a Brahmin boy as defined by the Vedic system. In the strict rules of the ashram he would spend most of his time doing yoga, making fire sacrifices and reading the religious scripture. The only freedom that he would get is the time when he would go to graze his cow. This is the only time when he would be freed from cultural restrictions. It was during this time, he has met Sumnima, the female protagonist of the novel. This is the first time he has encountered a naked girl in her adolescence. His encounter with the naked girl, in the lap of nature, away from home marks his exposure to the feminine principle. Sumnima stands for the feminine principle as she is the pure nature. Her naked body, her use of ethnic, colloquial language and her belief in the worldly life stand in opposition to Somdatta's belief that favors the masculine culture derived from the religious scripture.

Somdatta has embraced the Aryan culture defined by religious scriptures. He has internalized the orthodox Hindu belief that places Brahmin males at the top of the Verna system and subjugates women and indigenous people to them. Thus, he introduces himself from his father's name: "I am Somdatta, Son of Suryadatta, a Brahmin belonging to the Aryan stock" (p. 7). Sumnima is an embodiment of natural instincts of the human being. She has not been exposed to the artificial cultural aspects based on formality and modesty. Neither has she been aware of the patriarchal culture that treats men as superior to women. Being surprised, she asks him why he introduced himself from his father's name. Somdatta replies that "a son receives his life as a gift from his father and, therefore, we never commit a sin of neglecting this liberal relation of the gift of life. This is the way we express our gratitude [towards father]" (p. 7). Since the son gets his life from his father, it is his duty to respect him.

Contrary to Somdatta, Sumnima believes that the mother's role in a child's life is more important than that of the father. So she is not convinced by Somadatta's argument as she reminds him, "You are given birth by your mother and, therefore you have to respect her, [. . .]. It is for this reason that we Kirats first get to know our mother and the man she shows becomes our father" (p.7). It means that the father is a secondary person and it can be any "male shown by mother" (p.7). The way Sumnima gives priority on the mother to the father stands in opposition to Somdatta's understanding about man-woman relation.

Somdatta's knowledge about the man-woman relation is guided by Brahmin's cultural milieus which are hierarchal and based on domination and subjugation. He believes on the gender roles that define man as the *Purusa* and woman as the *Prakriti*. According to this definition, man as the Purusa is the owner of the Prakriti who stands for the Mother Nature in the macro level and a field for harvest in the micro level. Nabar (1995) explains:

Traditionally, woman is regarded as the field, the man is the seed. . . . The seed is given priority over the womb, from the offspring of all living beings are marked by the seed. If the seed is sown in the ground at the right time, only the fruit of that seed springs from the soil, and in doing so it reflects none of the qualities of the womb from which it has sprung. (p. 107)

Because of the woman's reproduction process she is treated like the land for cultivation. In the procreation system, her role is like that of the earth/or the soil which is treated as a passive agent that yields the harvest according to the seed sowed in it.

Thus, Somdatta blames Sumnima for being ignorant and lacking a good culture. He claims that the Aryan culture is superior to Sumnima's Kirat's culture:

We are the descendants of the Aryans, we are well cultured. You are wild Kirats, a community devoid of any good culture. Therefore, your concepts are different from

ours. Mother is field, you stupid girl. The master of the field is father. You are ignorant of this truth [and] the system of introducing oneself from mother is beastly. (pp. 7-8)

Patriarchy associates women to nature and believes that "they could be oppressed, exploited and dominated by man." (Mies & Shiva, 2014, p. 18). Agarwal (1992) argues that the nature culture dichotomy is created by patriarchy to dominate women (p. 120). Somadatta's insult to Sumnima shows masculine cultural domination of feminine nature. Somdatta subjugates women to men and he insults the Kirats, the indigenous people as they identify themselves from their mothers.

The Aryan culture is patriarchal and works on a series of dualism like man/ woman, Aryan/ non-Aryan, Purusa/ Prakarti, sky/ earth, spiritual/ material, and culture/ nature. In this dualistic framework women, nature and non-Aryans are grouped in the negative side. They are associated with the feminine and are treated as inferior to men. King (1990) contends that "the systematic denigration of working-class people and people of color, women, and animals is connected to the basic dualism that lies at the root of Western civilization" (p. 106). Woman, because of her reproductive function, is associated with the nature. The non-Aryans are also treated as being closer to nature as they lack culture. This is verified by Somdatta's father who believes that the system of introducing oneself from the mother is animalistic. He explains, "Due to the absence of the virtues of chastity and fidelity in females of brutes (beasts) their children are introduced through mother" (p. 18). His father's explanation shows their belief on men's superiority to women and nature.

In the novel, the feminine nature is dominated by the masculine culture in the use of language. Somdatta address his mother as *mata*, an honorific term that the Aryan people use to address their mothers. But Sumnima uses the colloquial term *aama* to refer to her mother. Being curious Sumnima asks him why he addressed his mother as *mata*. Somdatta answers, "This is the language of gods." Sumnima is not satisfied with the answer. She persists: "Then, why don't you speak in a human language being a human yourself... instead of calling a person so dear as mother, you call her *mata* and distance her?" (p. 8). Somdatta clarifies that the mother is synonymous to goddess and to show her status equal to God they use the term *mata*. But, Sumnima advises him to speak a human language and behave like human beings. Her suggestion about not going against one's nature shows her connection to nature. Besides she admits that her knowledge about language is not drawn from books.

Somdatta abuses Sumnima on the ground of language. Feminist critics like Helen Cixous believe that the patriarchal language is phallogentric and it dominates women and the other who are not cultured from the patriarchal perspective. The critics of phallogentrism note, "Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male dominated" (Abrams, 2001, p. 211). Through the language men dominate women. Helen Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray agreed upon the fact that "Symbolic

discourse (language, in various contexts) is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, and speaks in place of everything and everyone else- including women" (Jones, 1981, p. 248). Since Sumnima uses the colloquial language, Somdatta brands her as barbarous.

However, Sumnima protests Somdatta's argument. She explains that the Aryans are artificial. They cover their mother with cloth and cover her essence of womanhood. She observes:

You people put clothes on anything and cover their real identity. You hang a mask on the face of an undamaged person ... and cover the body with all kinds of garments and dresses. . . . As your mom covers her body day and night with exceedingly long clothes making you easy to turn her into a godly figure from a simple human female, otherwise inside the coverings even your mother has the same things what all women have with them. (p. 9)

Sumnima thinks that the Aryans are pretentious and avoid facing the reality. For her wearing clothes is unnatural. Thus, she claims that they do not cover their bodies with clothes; they do not identify their unclothed mothers as goddess. She explains that under the garments all women are the same. It suggests her outlook based on materiality.

Somdatta believes that the Kirats and the Bhillas are inferior to the Bhramins. He has seen them submitting to the decree of the prince and serving his parents. In the gatherings at his father's hermitage, he has heard the prince ordering them not to pollute the Bhramin's place by slaughtering animals. Besides the prince ordered them to serve the Bhramins: "Bhillas and Kirats present here, our ancestors have conquered the whole land extending up to the Himalayas and, therefore, it is under our protection. . . The Brahmin family living here establishing its hermitage is highly respected by us" (p. 12). The Kirats and Bhillas also admitted that they had been serving the Bhramins by clearing the jungle, and by providing the manpower and materials to erect the ashram. They have gifted them a milking cow. Somdatta realizes that these people are inferior to them; thus, they should submit to the will of the Bhramins.

Unlike Somdatta's perception, the Kirats and Bhillas are liberals. They are practical, ground to the earth and believe in objective reality. They are inclusive and for them human life is more important than the sacred beings. They are aware of the invasion of the Aryan people in their life. Sumnima's father confesses that because of the Bhramins their population is decreasing as their daily life has been threatened. Since Kirats and Bhillas are non-vegetarian, their cuisine includes flesh. But they decide not to slaughter cows to avoid war with the Bhramins/ Hindu who worship cows. Sumnima's father explains that religion should not be given more importance than life. So they decided not to kill cows to stop war (p. 14). Bijuwa's

outlook towards life resembles Mies and Shiva (2014), who insist that "we need to live, produce and consume within ecological limits and within our share of ecological space, without encroaching on the rights of other species and other people" (2014, p. 16). Bijuwa believes on compromise. It shows the indigenous people's nonlinear belief system. But Suryadatta and his community believe on hierarchy and believe on domination and control.

Sumnima, too, believes on the Law of the Nature. She does not like warfare; nor does she like human encroachment in nature. Her ecological awareness can also be traced by analyzing the episode of the hawk and the pigeon. She admired the beauty of the pigeon, but Somdatta was unaffected by its appearance. But when it was attacked by the hawk, he hurriedly chased it and rescued the pigeon. He was satisfied that he had saved the life of the pigeon. But Sumnima points to the fact that he has deprived the hawk from its food. Since the hawk is carnivorous in its nature, so it is natural for it to kill the pigeon for food. She questions: "Why do you try to disturb the harmony maintained by nature with your unmatched rules of religion" (p. 19). Her stand reminds Mies and Shiva (2014), who point to the role of human in the living process. They argue, "We are part of nature, not her masters and owners. . . . We need to recognize the rights of Mother Earth and therefore the intrinsic values and living process" (2014, p.16). Sumnima, too, points to the interdependence of the species in the nature and resists human beings' interference in the ecosystem.

For Somdatta, the world of senses, body, passions, and desires are men's enemies. Thus, men should guard them. For him woman's body is a reservoir of evil and he asks Sumnima to wear clothes to hide her body. One should not appreciate one's body, for body and sensual feelings are the sources of hindrance to one's journey to redemption. Thus, to get rid of romantic feelings, he asks Sumnima to vanish away. He orders her not to come to his sight: "Your body is an obstacle for the enhancement of my soul" (p.30). On the contrary, Sumnima believes in worldliness, physicality and sensual pleasure. She tells her daughter the difference between the Kirats and the Brahmin. "We Kirats are creatures of soil, we love the soil. We are fully absorbed in the enjoyment of the pleasures of life, we don't see its lack. For us our body alone is the most loving thing" (p.114). Sumnima's belief on nature and the materiality of the body shows her proximity to nature. As an ecofeminist she embraces the beauty of nature and wants to preserve the nature as it is. She protests the manipulation and domination of nature by culture.

Sumnima is confident that her outlook to human life and nature is superior to Somdatta's journey for spiritualism. She warns him that he is in the wrong path. She feels humiliated and insulted by Somdatta's identification of her body as a "ditch of sin," a hindrance to attain redemption from this worldly life. She critiques him for destroying the structure of the nature and creating a vacuum within himself. For her the Aryans humiliate the nature, and say that religion will prosper (p. 27). She clarifies that nature has its own structure; we should love

nature as it is. Her breasts and other organs are part of the structure of the female body. Thus, when Somdatta castigates her body as a source of evil she gets offended and leaves him.

Guided by the masculinist mindset Somdatta marries Puloma to meet his religious duty. For him the function of women is to bear sons to their husband so that they can continue their lineage. His father has advised him: "Dear son! A marriage performed to fulfill some duty is not only blameless but inspired by religion" (p. 33). He never cares Puloma's emotion and feelings; rather he dictates her to restrict her sexual impulses and take part in the ritual sex. King (1983) aptly critiques: "It is the same masculinist mentality which would deny us our right to our bodies and our own sexuality, which depends on multiple systems of dominance and state power to have its way" (p. 10). Somdatta manipulates religion, and denies her sexual pleasure. He commands her:

According to our Vedic canons and religious scriptures we must perform the fire sacrifice and special ritual to fulfill that particular religious duty [. . .] the bodily union performed for getting a son doesn't have the physical element. If there is even a slight awareness of physical element and of physical pleasure the duty of the union vanishes, religion melts away. (pp. 44-45)

Even after the intercourse he verifies whether Puloma has felt any pleasure. He manipulates her as per his belief.

Despite their ritual engagement in sex, Puloma fails to conceive. The ritual performance of sex is tiresome for her. She would shudder at her heart imagining the date of the ritual sex: "The more they find their bodily conjugation's failure, the more they increase their religious activities and the fire sacrifice. But even then all their efforts failed" (p. 49). Despite his aim to attain divinity following the spiritual path, he has to take part in procreative rule for the sake of male lineage that makes his life a success. Being helpless, he decides to take support from Sumnima's father, the Bijuwa. The Bijuwa is quite surprised when he knows that Somdatta wants a son to accomplish his religious duty. As he shares:

'Why do you need a son?' Somdatta said, 'Our ancestors would not be salvaged if we do not have issues for protecting our religion. Without children all the religious piety earned in this mortal world will be useless. That is what our religious scriptures prescribe.' (p. 44)

The Bijuwa realizes that Somdatta has been disconnected from the natural aspects of the body following the path of spiritualism.

The Bijuwa believes on the worldly pleasure. He was surprised to listen that Somdatta has not felt pleasure in the sexual intercourse with his wife. Somdatta firmly replied that "we have killed the desire for pleasure with penance. In our life our objective is only fulfilling the

duty" (p. 55). It shows the death of nature by the imposition of culture. So the Bijuwa says that Somdatta's *man*, the nature, i.e. the materiality of the body is annoyed. He reminds him:

Our body is not a machine, nor a medium, nor a means. It is itself a goal, an objective. You shouldn't neglect and hate it. When the physical body of man is devoid of its juice, the desire of pleasure and feeling of enjoyment, it is like lifeless; and it cannot bear children. The body is not a lifeless emotionless tool only. A baby is the result and proof of copulation, do you understand O Brahmin?' (p. 46)

The Bijuwa reminds him that the human body is not an object; rather it is a subject and functions on its own way. His understanding of the working of nature stands parallel to Mies and Shiva (2014) who insist that nature is a subject, an imitated matter, and a materializing spirit (p. 186). They suggest that we should not manipulate it according to our whims. Since Somdatta and Puloma remained apathetic to their body, they failed.

The Bijuwa advises Sumnima to restore Somdatta's sensual impulses using the indigenous methods of arousal. She takes him to the man pond which stands as a Mother Earth in her miniature. Sumnima washes his body, caresses and massages it. He feels immense pleasure and asks her who has taught her such skills. She responds to him that one needs not learn such things. They learn them in the process of living (p. 56). These are indigenous knowledge based on lived experiences. Mies and Shiva (2014) claim that ecofeminists do not rely on the book knowledge but on the experience, struggle and practice (p.18). Sumnima's source of knowledge is also based on practice. Ilaiam (2002) rightly explains, "A consciousness that gives more importance to nature than to sacred beings is always stronger. It is a consciousness that constructs its own kind of character" (p. 34). Sumnima believes on nurturing, caring and loving. She focuses on the body and materiality. For her body is more important than the soul; because she can experience it. Consequently, her knowledge works.

Sumnima arouses erotic feelings in Somdatta; and when he has sex with his wife forgetting all his religious activities she conceives. Since Puloma has been in reverie, she, too, enjoys the sex. Though she falsely believes that she has been raped by the Bhilla Yuwaka, her childhood friend, she rejoices. Her questions after she becomes pregnant disrupts the patriarchal structure based on dualism like virtue/vice, purity/impurity, and spiritual/ body. She questions the patriarchal definition of sin. If the pleasure that she had in the night with disguised Somdatta, who she thinks is the Bhilla Yuwaka, is a sin then what virtue is. If sin is evil, how could it be so pleasing? She questions what is more important, faith or experience. What is truth- the lived life or the imagined life? Is sin limited to sex (p. 74)? Her questioning shows the limit of patriarchal culture that prioritizes men, mind, and masculinity to women, body and materiality.

Puloma's final realization of the torture that she has to bear maintaining culture aligns with ecofeminists understanding of violence against women in patriarchy. Mies and Shiva (2014) observe that violence against women is as old as patriarchy (p. 9). Puloma, thus, becomes hostile towards Somdatta and expresses her agony: "You have tortured me throughout my life. I only experienced pain in copulation with you. You are an evil, envious man so you want to snatch the moment of pleasure from my life" (p.74). Her remark is a challenge to Somdatta because a Hindu wife must not retreat her husband even if he abuses her. "For in the Brahmin culture God and men are equated in many respects" (Ilaiam, 2002, p. 10). Thus, Puloma's revolt against Somdatta is women's revolt against patriarchal practice that treats women as tools for bearing sons to men.

The hostility between them grew and forlorn and dejected Puloma and Somdatta die. Their son is rescued by Sumnima. The demolition of patriarchal structure based on hierarchy is symbolically suggested by showing the crumbling down of the hermitage. Even its residue has been destroyed as there remain no sign of the hermitage in the place where it had been; even Somdatta's offspring has forgotten about their ancestors.

Conclusion

Sumnima is written from ecofeminist perspective. It destabilizes the patriarchal structure based on dualisms and dismantles the hierarchy of the traditional gender roles. Guided by the hierarchal notion of men/women and culture/nature, Somdatta treats both women and nature as raw materials or objects to be used by men. But Sumnima and Puloma resist him. Sumnima and her people stand for the feminine nature. They follow feminine principles, value the body, and depend on sense impressions. Sumnima claims that it is through the body that human beings experience pain and pleasure. She prioritizes love and affection to modesty and formality. She gives more importance to nature than to sacred beings. So does Puloma. She secretly rejoices the sweet memory of the Bhilla boy despite her upbringing in the Orthodox Brahmin family. She questions the patriarchal notion of vice and virtue and denies the notion of sin in sexual pleasure. Disregarding the Bhramin cultural milieu, she retreats her husband and accuses him for torturing her throughout her life. The way Sumnima and Puloma behave underscores Somadatta's belief that prioritizes culture to nature. They resist the patriarchal culture, speak to their mind and give importance to the materiality of the body. Their activities justify their ecofeminist stand.

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