

Interconnection between Nature and Women: An Eco-feminist Reading of Devkota's
Shakuntala

This research work explores the interconnection between nature and women in Devkota's Shakuntala to understand how they are interlinked to each other in relation to the theoretical insight of ecofeminism. The concern to the nature-woman interrelationship and the way of treating nature and women in male centered society make the need for this research. As nature and women are the victims of patriarchal social structure, they face common suppression and oppression as a result of androcentric thoughts. The nature-women relationship has been scrutinized in the light of eco-feminist perspective: a theory that views nature and women as the feminine in patriarchal viewpoint. The research method consists of wide reviews of relevant literatures collected from different scholarly journals and books. The findings from this research show that nature and women are the entities which possess similar attributes on the ground of their oppression. Both nature and women exchange common qualities by womanizing nature and naturalizing women. The significance of such a bonding between nature and women helps to understand that they are interlinked as an important entity by sharing some common values. The conclusion of this research is that the environmental and feminist issues are equal at present. This can be well addressed by foregrounding the multiple voices of ecofeminist theorists who focus on the concern of nature-women interrelationship.

Keywords: interconnection, nature and women, naturalized women, feminized nature, domination, ecofeminism, patriarchal viewpoint

This study examines Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Shakuntala* from the eco-feminist perspective with special attention to the interconnection between nature and women in the patriarchal social structure. The epic *Shakuntala* has very close association with nature-women relationship. *Shakuntala* has been entitled in the

name of the major female character Shakuntala, an abandoned daughter of Menaka and Vishwamitra. Since her birth Shakuntala has deep attachment with natural world. Several textual instances describe Shakuntala's childhood, adulthood, youth and womanhood in the connection of nature and its entities. Even her sufferings, pleasures and emotions are exemplified with a number of natural objects. Furthermore, her growth, marriage, separation and reunion are the major incidents that take place in the lap of nature. Her physiological changes, facial countenances and the movements are metaphorically described in relation to natural things. Other female characters like: Menaka and Gautami also have significant presence in the epic who have developed intimate relationship with nature. The actions and the situations of female characters in the epic are quite relational to the natural surroundings.

To analyze *Shakuntala* in the shade of eco-feminist theory, the researcher has used the theoretical insights of some of the ecocritics and ecofeminists such as: Karen J. Warren, Susan Griffin, Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, and Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. The major arguments of all these theorists encompass the ideas of ecofeminism that deal with how nature and women have interlinked. As these theorists have come from ecofeminist thoughts of schools, some of them argue that suppression of nature and women is same in patriarchal social structure. However, some others claim that nature and women share similar qualities as they are treated equally as life-affirming forces for saving the existence of nature and human beings together. In this research work, by applying the theoretical insights of the aforementioned ecofeminist theorists, the researcher will contend and establish that Devkota's *Shakuntala* is an ecofeminist text which primarily deals with the issue of nature-women mutualism and its treatment in the androcentric social structure. In other words, *Shakuntala* projects the idea of male domination over nature and women on different grounds.

Devkotas's *Shakuntala* has been discussed and analyzed from different angles of understanding by applying various theoretical insights. Primarily, the entire text is about the Hindu mythology based on the incident of the holy Hindu scripture- *the Mahabharat*. The major event of the epic revolves around the birth, marriage, separation and reunion of the chief female character, Shakuntala. Some scholars have highlighted the significance of Nepalese cultural and national values of the epic whereas others have uncovered the ecological and mythical aspects of the text. Though the epic can open up several issues for wider and intensive debates, it has largely occupied the notion of ecofeminist perspective to look at it differently as well.

Literally, the epic unfolds the story of relationship between Shakuntala and the king Dushyanta but indirectly it shades light on the issue of nature and women relationship. Throughout the epic, we can find many events that establish the strong bond between nature and women. In one hand, it exposes the exploitation and oppression of nature and women in the hand of the male characters. On the other hand, the epic depicts the caring and life-affirming forces of qualities inherited in nature and women. The situation of the female characters in the epic is presented as sufferers and victims. Nature and female characters are taken as the suppressed group in the epic but male characters are portrayed as suppressor. Nature and women both are victimized in the hands of male characters. Apart from such suppression, the epic accentuates the mutual relationship between nature and women. In addition, nature and women are seen as protector and savior for each other's co-existence. Some of the lines of the epic glorify the masculinity as the creator and destroyer of nature, therefore, male characters are transcended as superior to nature. In the same way, male domination over women is shown through the acts of some male characters- the king Dushyanta, the sage Kanva, a fisherman and the demons. The king Dushyanta

has deserted Shakuntala and made her suffer for a long time. The expressions of the sage Kanva when he has to send Shakuntala to her husband's home depict male mentality of inferiorizing women. Acts of killing fish by a fisherman and disturbing tranquility of forests by the demons show male suppressive mindset over nature. Even the mental agonies and pathos of Shakuntala caused after she was abandoned by her newly married husband are taken as instances of male superiority over females.

The term 'ecofeminism' was developed over the last three decades, which intersects two critical perspectives- ecology and women. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary tenth edition, "Ecofeminism is defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society" (485). This definition hints that the ecological concerns and the feminist movements are the results of the male dominated society. It emphasizes on the issue of philosophy and politics that have encouraged women to be much conscious about commonality of suppression on both nature and women. Their consciousness about their mutual suppression balances human life and ecology for their lasting sustenance.

The terminology 'ecofeminism' (ecofeminism) has firstly been coined by a French feminist, Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le Feminisme ou la mort* (*Feminism or Death*) which she had written in 1980. In a research journal, *The International Journal of Literary Humanitis*, Danielle Roth-Johnson writes "In 1974 she wrote *Le Feminisme ou la mort* (*Feminism of Death*), the first work in which she uses the term ecofeminism to talk about how society's disregard for women is comparable to its contempt for the environment" (5). The statement affirms that the word ecofeminism has come into practice after d'Eaubonne has introduced it in her book *Feminism or Death* during 1970s. Roth-Johnson agrees that d'Eaubonne has

introduced the term for the first time to study how society disregards nature and women as a similar issue. The advent of the concept of ecofeminism brought worldwide waves to make women more responsible for preserving and caring the nature and natural world. The Green Belt Movement of 1977 initiated by Wangari Mathaai in Africa, the Chipko Movement of 1973 started by Vandana Shiva in India, feminists' involvement in preparing jam from berries sprayed with herbicides and offering the product to the parliament to taste in Sweden in 1999, opposing voice of feminists in Uranium processing project in Canada in 2006 and organization of cleaning up hazardous waste sites by housewives in the USA in 1980s are the imminent examples of the direct influence of the concept of ecofeminism across the globe. All these environment caring initiations are the instances of worldwide movements increasingly known as 'ecofeminism' dedicated to the continuation of life on the earth.

The theory of ecofeminism primarily argues on the issue of interrelationship between ecology and women. This theory blends the divergent aspects of women's life with the environmental concerns and similarly the environmental elements are studied in relation to feminine attributes. Moreover, the theory of ecofeminism attempts to establish the very close and intimate relationship between environment and women. Moreover, the theory acknowledges that the feminist and ecological issues are interlinked which prove nature-women affiliation is inevitable for sustaining the existence of both on the earth. Some of the prominent ecofeminist theorists have made various claims to assert that nature and women have interdependent nexus.

Among the ecofeminist theorists, Karen J. Warren, an American ecofeminist in her book, *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*, agrees on the concept of

ecofeminism by mentioning that “According to ecofeminists, trees, water, animals, toxics, and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the status and plight of women cross-culturally” (4). By this definition, Warren admits that many of the ecofeminists take all the natural entities as the parts of feminism which let people know about the condition of women associating them with cultural values and practices. Further, Warren clarifies ecofeminism as “What makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism are feminist issues” (4). Warren insists that ecofeminism is a quite different discipline that studies the natural components and entire nature conflating them with the issue of feminism. Nature and natural world of animals, birds, insects including other creatures are taken under the consideration of feminist value and issue. Such considerations of natural objects help to connect entire nature with the notion of feminism and their subjugation in the societies where males are treated as superior to nature and women.

In *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, an American radical feminist philosopher, Susan Griffin explores the identification of women with the earth both as sustenance for humanity and as victim of male rage. She equates nature-women mutualism by stating that “We are woman and nature” (6). In this statement she admits that nature and women are equal for a number of reasons as they share some mutuality in terms of their domination. Additionally, Griffin affirms that “He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. The wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her . . . He says he is not a part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature” (VI). Through the crux of the statement Griffin clarifies that the secret bond between nature and women looks queer to the men. She emphasizes on the unique

quality of the women that enables them to understand the language and communication of nature. At the same time, she demarcates the line that separates the world of nature and women with the world of the men. The world of nature and women has mutuality whereas the world of men has exclusivity with the world of nature and women.

Agreeing on the theory of ecofeminism, Val Plumwood, an Australian philosopher and ecofeminist in *Feminism and Mastery of Nature* highlights the males' gaze at nature and women in inferior sense. She quotes that "Feminists view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than an instrument of oppression, a relic of patriarchy" (20). In her understanding, the advocates of feminism perceive interlink of nature and women as the object of suppression, particularly in the hands of males for a long period of time. She, further mentions that "The connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation is by no means a thing of past, and continues to drive. The backgrounding and instrumentalisation of nature and that of women run closely parallel" (21-22). The statement forecasts that the continuation of domination of nature and women in the male dominated societies exists even in the days to come. Furthermore, it is stated that nature and women are never foregrounded with their significance rather they are often fetishized as objects to fulfill the need and want of others.

Taking the ecofeminist theoretical perception of an American ecofeminist, Greta Gaard under consideration, through her book *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, we come to know that she has pinpointed to the dominating factors of nature and women along with all sorts of discrepancies done to them on the basis of various grounds. She comprises the voices from different sectors which distinctly differentiate the oppressor and the oppressed. In her contention she has dichotomized nature-

women connection and males' position to examine how nature and women are defined with the male dominative mentality. She puts her words as:

In their analyses of oppression, socialists, animal liberationists, ecologists, and feminists each distinguish between privileged and oppressed groups, where the privileged are upper- or middle-class, human, technologically and industrially 'developed' male, and the oppressed are poor or working-class, nonhuman animal 'undeveloped' nature, and female, respectively. (1)

The extract explicitly classifies the two groups where the males are addressed as privileged and developed whereas females and nature are meant to be oppressed and undeveloped. Both females and nature are inferiorized and treated equally by the males. As she talks on the issue of animal inclusion, she claims that there should be proper addressing and space for animal in the theory of ecofeminism. She writes that "Within ecofeminist theory, the place of animals must be addressed" (5). She argues that the presence of animals is a must while dealing with the theory of ecofeminism. It believes that animals are the issues of ecofeminist theory.

Maria Mies, a German professor of sociology and Vandana Shiva, an Indian environmental activist collaboratively discuss on the theory of ecofeminism in their co-authored book, *Ecofeminism*. The foreword section of the book begins with the major concern to ecofeminism. Both the writers contend that ecofeminism is bridging feminism with the world of naturality. They mention that:

The word 'ecofeminism' might be new, but the pulse behind it has always driven women's efforts to save their livelihood and make their communities safe. From the Chipko forest dwellers of North India some 300 years ago to the mothers of coalmining Appalachia right now, the struggle to create life-affirming societies goes on. (3)

According to Mies and Shiva, ecofeminism has ever encouraged and motivated women for the lasting preservation and conservation of whole environment that ultimately result for building the healthy societies to move on. They agree that the efforts of women to protect the forests have sustained their ways of living and life. Their affection and attachment to the different environmental movements around the globe have eventually formed many nature friendly societies that potentially sustain for more and more years prolonging the life expectancy of the dwellers.

While reviewing on the major theory of ecofeminism, we find many research works. They have come up with innovative ideas to deal with the concept of ecofeminism. Some of the researchers who have carried out their research on ecofeminism are: K. Sivaranjani and S. Rajarajan, Chris Cuomo, Alicia H. Puleo and Donald P. St. John. They have treated the term 'ecofeminism' from the perspective of history to the modern trend of changes in society. However, they all have agreed to the notion of interconnection between ecology and feminism by pursuing the divergent approaches and ideologies.

According to K. Sivaranjani and S. Rajarajan, ecofeminism is a historical movement that began along with the advent of the Mesopotamian civilization. The concept of ecofeminism existed since the time when human civilization came into existence. It is argued that ecofeminism has a long history that has connection to the agricultural activities of the ancient people who often united themselves with nature. Both the researchers in a journal, *English Studies International Research Journal* affirm that the conception of ecofeminism by connecting it to the origin of human civilization. They argue that:

Ecofeminism finds its voice fairly in this universe as early as a species. In ancient times we accept nature with cooperation without any competition.

Early archeological discoveries found out that Mesopotamian civilization has an array of proof that ancient people who follow egalitarian lifestyle who are always united with nature. (136)

It is acknowledged that the value of ecofeminism has emerged along with the beginning of the universe. Since then there has not been any competition between nature and human but there has always been cooperation. As the evidence of nature-human bond, the Mesopotamian civilization speaks louder than any other proofs. As a whole, the major argument of the researchers is that the idea of ecofeminism is as old as human civilization. This argument debunks the claims of modern ecofeminists who believe that ecofeminist wave is the result of post nineteen seventies movement. It is a historical movement that has long been in practices.

Emphasizing on the contention of a researcher, Chris Cuomo in a journal, *Ethics and the Environment*, we comprehend the notion of ecofeminism as the interconnection between human beings and ecology. The researcher has studied ecofeminism associating it to the entire ecological sphere and human species. The researcher quotes that “In more precise terms, ecofeminism stresses the depth to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities and the fact that we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships” (136). The extract basically hints that the notion of ecofeminism deals with the realities of ecology and human beings. Further, ecofeminism professes that composition of all human and nonhuman beings rely on the physical and conceptual relationships. Indeed, the researcher admits that human survival and existence completely depend on the environmental issues. It hints that how much human beings are aware of ecological issues to save their planet and themselves for their common welfare. It disseminates that our identity comes from conflation and relationality of physique and

conceptualization. Nothing has its identity in isolation rather has relationality in one way or other to be known.

Alicia H. Puleo, a scholar in an article, “What is Ecofeminism?” views ecofeminism in terms of a feminist issue. The researcher interfuses feminist agenda with ecological ethics and studies them together as ecofeminism. The major argument of Puleo suggests that ecofeminism study has instilled a new perception among women to look at ecofeminism from a new angle. Puleo defines ecofeminism as “An easy way to explain ecofeminism is to define it as a meeting between feminism and ecology. Today, ecofeminism is on the rise, mainly among young women, and is gradually leaving behind a long when it was little known or poorly understood” (27). In Puleo’s view, ecofeminism is the confluence of two divergent subjects of feminism and ecology. The definition of Puleo claims that the young women have fascination to understand ecofeminism at present in comparison to the past. It has set a new way of dealing with ecofeminism by a young circle of females who have wisely defended ecofeminism from its poor conception. They have widened the conceptualization of ecofeminism making it as a movement of young women as well.

In a journal, *The Institute for Ecosophical Studies*, Donald P. St. John, a researcher reviews ecofeminism as a consequence of radical and cultural feminist movements. Besides it, John brings the issue of female domination that the males practice in different forms. John approaches to the notion of ecofeminism by contending that it is an issue that mentions hierarchy between males and females on the basis of different aspects. He states that:

Ecofeminism grew out of radical or cultural feminism which holds that identifying the dynamics -- largely fear and resentment – behind the dominance of male over female is key to comprehending every expression of

patriarchal culture with its hierarchical, militaristic, mechanistic, industrialist forms. (3)

The extract seriously draws attention towards the forms of domination that the males impose upon females. The researcher indicates that ecofeminism is born out of females' rage and hatred against patriarchal one way culture and their strategic technique of othering women as inferior beings.

Casting glimpse upon the theoretical insight of ecofeminism which juxtaposes nature and women, we come across many scholarly writings that interlink nature and women in different dimensions. Many of a few researchers who have studied and researched on interconnection between nature and women are: Kate Soper, Janneke Lourens, Atyaka Lakshmitarukmi and K. Sivaranjani. These researchers have uncovered the interrelationship of nature and women in terms of their oppression, exchange of attributes and origin of creation.

Kate Soper, a critic in a critical text, *The Green Studies Reader* perceives a woman as nature and nature as a woman. Soper generalizes nature and women as single entity by attributing their qualities to each other. In a sense of naturalizing women Soper states that “[The] association of femininity with naturality represents a more specific instance of the mind-body dualism brought to conceptions of nature, since it goes together with the assumption that the female, in virtue of her role in reproduction, is a more corporeal being than the male” (139). The statement suggests that the quality of nature and a woman is to reproduce something new. And, Soper adds that both nature and a woman are physically more capable for reproduction than males. Similarly, to womanize nature Soper declares that “. . . and with this way we may associate a tendency to feminize nature viewed simply as landscape – trees, woodland, hills, rivers, streams, etc. are frequently personified as female or figure in

similes comparing them to parts of the female body” (141). The extract signifies that different natural parts and landscapes embody the female features to describe them in different contexts. Soper, in her writing focuses on the idea that womanizes nature and naturalizes women in reciprocity of shared qualities.

In a research work, *An Ecofeminist Reading of the Relation between Women and Nature in Margaret Atwood's Surfing and Cheryl Strayed's Wild*, Janneke Lourens views nature-women tie as a way of animalizing women according to the androcentric thought. At the same time, Lourens talks on the male domination attitude over female in this research. Lourens examines nature-women bond as “Women are culturally tied to nature according to ecofeminists. The oppression of women and its connection to nature is stated in many traditional sources, but these are hardly positive. A woman is an animal and an animal not of the highest order” (qtd. in Lourens 9). The statement of Lourens claims that the way of treating women is never positive since past while connecting them with nature. Though ecofeminists agree that women have a cultural affiliation to nature, but the practice of animalizing women in a derogative way as inferior to other animals is common. Women’s rank and position deny them to hold their identity as equal as animals too because of traditionally ingrained mindset of patriarchal society.

Atyaka Lakshmitarukmi takes nature-women relationship in terms of life-affirming force. In her thesis, *Patriarchal Viewpoint on Women and Nature: Ecofeminist Reading on Dan Brown's Inferno*, Lakshmitarukmi valorizes the values of nature and women. She asserts nature-women connection as “Ecofeminists see that women and nature share values that relates to the ability to nurturing, caring and reproducing. Thus, this perception considers the parallel position between women and nature” (27). In this assertion, Lakshmitarukmi harmonizes nature and women in

relation to other living and non-living things. She believes that everything comes into existence not because of any other creators except nature and women. She treats nature and women as the ultimate creators of the universe and positions them above all for creating everything in the world. Her notion on nature and women is more positive that transcends interlink of ecology and feminism.

Perceiving the major contention of K. Sivaranjani and S. Rajarajan in their conjoined writing, *Eccentricity of Ecofeminism in the Selected Novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai* they bring mythological reference in discussion to support the idea of interconnection between nature and women. They contend that “Women are associated with the nature of primordial classical mythology. They have actively taken steps to control the full blown impact of climate change over nature. Nature is feminized because it possesses qualities of women” (136). Sivaranjani and Rajarajan argue that the connection between nature and women has long been in practice since the time of ancient mythology. They mention that feminine figures are the reasons behind climatic changes that recur in nature. They add that nature is similar to women as it possesses feminine features. They perceive nature-women relationship through the spectacles of mythology and mutualism or reciprocity.

Reviewing the research on *Shakuntala*, we have some significant pieces of research that have unveiled the multifaceted dimensions of the epic. The epic has attracted a large number of scholars who have critically examined and analyzed it from different perspectives. The perspectives have unearthed the divergent and new facet of the epic. Some of the researchers who have researched on *Shakuntala* are: Bal Krishna Sharma, Hem Lal Pandey, Sarita Bhattarai and Basanta Raj Neupane. Among the researchers, some of them have researched on the issue of Nepalese culture and deep feelings of nationality. Others have excavated the ecological, gender hierarchical

and mythological values of the epic. Though different scholars have studied *Shakuntala* from various perspectives, they have not studied it by applying ecofeminist theory.

Bal Krishna Sharma, a researcher in a journal *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal* incorporates the cultural and national features which he thinks are the dominant factors of the epic. Sharma finds Devkota as the advocator of cultural practices, values and beliefs of Nepali nationality. He writes that “This paper presents a study of Devkota’s English *Shakuntala* as a cultural and nationalistic text” (205). He admits that Devkota has unveiled the Nepalese cultural value referring the roles of characters. He states that “Devkota’s minor characters also hold a notable significance for the reason that they reflect the poet’s concern to perpetuate Nepali culture of fidelity or trustworthiness” (207). Similarly, Sharma expresses Devkota’s nationalistic notion as “The conclave of Indra and his entourage to distract Vishwamitra’s penance camouflages the Rana’s sinister design to foil the potential Nepalese stirring to revolt against the oppressive regime” (206). In this sense, Sharma internalizes that Devkota has preserved various cultural and national icons in his great epic *Shakuntala*.

In a journal, *Devkota Studies* Hem Lal Pandey opens up the significant issue of gender biased ideology embedded in the epic. Pandey foregrounds the concept of hierarchical division between male and female characters of the epic. He asserts that “*Shakuntala*, Laxmi Prasad Devkota’s epic in English, portrays men and women in a hierarchical way by presenting them in oppositional characteristics” (37). His major contention in his work is to spotlight on the discriminative positionality and treatment of women by their male counterparts. It echoes in the line “The dichotomy of transcendence and immanence leads to characterize the male characters superior and female inferior” (37). His work vividly shows how female characters in the epic have

been subjugated and how the position of male characters has been elevated. Further, he contends that female characters like, Menaka, Shakuntala and Gautami work for physical happiness than the spiritual peace. It signposts that female characters are only pleasure seeking beings. Finally, Pandey leads his argument to conclude that Devkota's *Shakuntala* exposes the fact of binary opposition.

Furthermore, a critic, Sarita Bhattarai brings epic's ecological issue in broader discussion in a journal, *Devkota Studies*. Bhattarai minutely penetrates through the epic to come up with a new insight of bird imagery and its significance presented in the text. She argues that "Since a description of nature is an essential component of an epic, I attempt in this paper to study a single component of nature- the bird- as an image that purposefully pervades the English epic" (43). Bhattarai quotes the lines that exemplify her contention as, "Sing, goddess of the sacred book and lyre/ Saraswati upon thy snow white swan" (I. 1). In the second line, she focuses on the word 'swan' which she describes is of snow-white color. Further, she claims that such imagery of birds pervades throughout the epic. With this new finding in her research, Bhattarai has set up a new area of knowledge in Devkota's *Shakuntala*.

In a master degree's thesis entitled *Myth in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Shakuntala*, Basanta Raj Nyaupane has focused on the mythological facet of the epic. In his thesis, he has uncovered the major influence of the Hindu mythology that the poet has conjoined in the epic. He mentions that the poet has begun the epic recalling the Arabian mythical story *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* in which a term 'Open Sesame' is used to enter a treasure. In the context of the epic, the poet has used similar phrasal term as "Cry 'Sesame' to the golden gate and in" (L 12) to enter the ancient world of eastern philosophy. It is taken as the mythological influence on poet to mythologize his text. More importantly, the researcher has focused on the myth of

the king Dushyanta, Shakuntala and their son Bharat. He posits the concept of mythology as “Laxmi Prasad Devkota’s *Shakuntala* is a Hindu mythological text, presents the myth of king Dushyanta, Shakuntala and their son Bharat after whom India gets her name (Bharat)” (31). By compiling such evidence from the epic, the researcher has affirmed *Shakuntala* as a mythological text in which the mythological aspect of the epic has significantly foregrounded.

By going through these all researches of the scholars on various issues and themes, the researcher comes to realize that the epic *Shakuntala* has multiple features to interpret it from multiple angles of comprehensions. The aforementioned critics and scholars have interpreted and analyzed the epic through the spectacles of traditional values, national ethics, natural enrichments, and anthropocentric norms. Despite these all facts and outcomes of the researches, none of the researchers has discussed the epic in terms of blending ecology and feminism together. Therefore, the researcher’s standpoint in this research is to study and analyze *Shakuntala* as an ecofeminist text specially focusing on the secret bond between nature and women.

Analyzing *Shakuntala* in the illumination of ecofeminism, the researcher has supplied some textual evidence that connote with the theoretical notions of Karen J. Warren, Susan Griffin, Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, and Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. The claims of these theorists focus on the concept of ecofeminism that nurture the values of the theoretical insight of nature-women interconnection. Additionally, the ideas of some other researchers like: Kate Soper, Janneke Lourens, Atyaka Lakshmitarukmi and K. Sivaranjani can be some relevant apprehensions that justify the relationship between nature and women.

Taking Karen J. Warren’s theoretical insight into consideration, we have some textual evidence that clarify Warren’s claims. Warren insists that “. . . nonhuman

nature and naturism are feminist issues” (4). She simply draws nature and women closer as by connecting them as single entity. It shows that nature and women relationship is an essential bond that unites them together. The lines from ‘To the Reader’ section of the epic that incorporate nature-women connection state that “Live the wood-land life/ Fresh like the rosebud, dimpled like the rill/ With nymphs and fairies” (L 24-26). In these lines, the poet establishes interconnection between nature and women. He suggests that we have to beautify the life like of crystal rosebuds and beautiful rivers that can please the beholders. He informs that the life spending in the woods or forests can be pleasant and peaceful with the companies of nymphs and fairies. He hints that completeness of life is only possible where there is beautiful connection between nature and female. By highlighting the relation of nature with entire human species the poet mentions that “Nature is intimately woven into life” (L 20). Though the statement is a holistic understanding of nature-human interlink, it partially accentuates nature-women bonding and their significance for each other’s mutual existence.

Furthermore, Warren views nature-women values in terms of naturalized women and feminized nature. She perceives this technique of naturalizing women and feminizing nature as a means of strategic domination of patriarchal society. She believes that such interchange of nature and women is often done in a derogative way. She exposes such patriarchal domination as:

Animalizing or naturalizing women in a patriarchal culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans thereby reinforces and authorizes women’s inferior status. Similarly, language which feminizes nature in a patriarchal culture where women are viewed as subordinate and inferior reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature. (12)

Some of the lines of Canto V that animalize and inferiorize women can be cited as “Her tresses black are like a bumble-bee’s/ Voluptuous wings, her eyes are like bat’s eyes peer. Her form, I grant, is slender-like a mantis thin!” (L 50-52). In these lines, the poet describes the physical appearance of Shakuntala connecting to some creatures of nature. Her black lock of hair is like sensual pleasing wings of a yellow-black insect. Her eyes look like the eyes of a nocturnal beast called, a bat. In the same way, her body structure is like of an insect that has larger parts above and below the waist. In these all comparisons of Shakuntala to the natural beasts, the poet has only focused on the weaker parts of women. Animalistic qualities surpass the humanistic values of a female character. In this sense, women are inferiorized and subjugated by attributing animal qualities to them.

On the other hand, the poet has feminized nature in a derogative projection in Canto I. While describing the sacred river Godavari, the poet has attributed female characteristics to the river. He has feminized nature as:

Not by places did she pause, nor all
 The luxuries of silk and velvet craved,
 But like a maiden to her lover running
 She slid beneath the stars on her clear course
 Of dutiful devotion. For she must

Her own lord find lamenting through the woods. (L 309-14)

The poet has distorted the natural beauty of the holy river, Godavari comparing it to the nature of an unmarried girl who is worrying to date with her lover. The poet indicates that the flow of the river is like a running of the unmarried girl towards her lover. As the unmarried girl does have no fascination towards anything luxuriant besides her lover so does the river under the starry sky. It flows in its own way

without caring the beauty around it as if it hurries up to meet its lamenting beloved in the forest. The poet has generalized the importance of the river equating it with the nature of the young girl. It shows that the feminine nature is more submissive and desirous to do the things that they want. It points out that such womanish nature is immature and indecisive which is based on emotion than reason. Implying the weaker tendencies of women to the holy river, the poet has defamed and demeaned its religious and historical values.

Aligning to the theoretical insight of Susan Griffin on nature-women interconnection, we can supply some of the textual instances that assure Griffin's standpoint on ecofeminism. Griffin believes that women are nature or parts of nature. She defends that women are nature and parts of nature as "We are Women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature" (6). In her all metaphoric comparisons, she depicts women as nature. In Canto II, the poet treats Menaka, one of the leading female characters of the epic as a part of nature in the lines as:

One brushed the beads upon her snow-white brow
 With lotus leaves; another gently touched
 Her lips with paradisaal rose; a third
 Re-clasped her breast-knot. The fair Menaka
 Reddening smiled as smiles the rose of June. (L 103-7)

Menaka's preparation to land on the earth from the heaven to deviate Vishwamitra from his deep penance portrays her as natural object. The poet naturalizes her smile as a rose of June and her brow as white snow. Moreover, her complete beauty and womanhood also needs the help of natural entities like, lotus leaves and paradisaal

rose. In another moment, the poet has addressed Menaka as a bird. It is mentioned in a line “Thus danced Menaka, bird of paradise” (L 457). By presenting female as an element of nature and her necessity of natural things for her identity as woman, the poet attempts to prove that a woman is herself as nature. It argues that completeness of a woman or female rely on the natural objects. It is believed that nature and women are interdependent for their common identity.

The poet, in Canto III represents Shakuntala, the major female character of the epic as nature. He describes Shakuntala’s growth from child to maiden to girlhood as:

The child to maiden grew,
 Wild rose now garden-reared. Her figure filled,
 Her lips to sweetness softened, and her tongue
 A language spoke from creatures learnt and birds
 That carry blooms aloft with warbling cries.
 She lipped her dawning words of woodnotes wild
 From nature’s store of utterance, consciously
 And quickly grew to girlhood . . . (L 339-46)

Shakuntala’s growth and development in Kanva Rishi’s ashram in the forest portrays her as a complete form of nature. The poet calls her as a wild rose that the wild garden has nurtured and nourished. She has learnt the languages of the wild beasts and can communicate with the cries of the birds. Her morning merriment begins with the words of the forests that come from the store of nature. She has ability to understand and correspond to each of the utterances that she gets from the nature’s store. For more, the poet has called Shakuntala as a precious piece of stone used as valuable ornament. He praises Shakuntala’s childhood as “This little gem, this smiling paradise” (L 85). He has manifested a female character of the epic as a part of nature.

Describing Shakuntala by associating with natural components, the poet has agreed to the notion of woman is nature.

Unlike Warren and Griffin, an ecofeminist Val Plumwood views nature-women ties from the perspective of male domination over nature and women. She agrees that nature and women are similar in terms of bearing domination and sufferings from males. She elucidates the male domination tendency on nature and women as “Feminists view the traditional connection between women and nature as no more than as an instrument of oppression, a relic of patriarchy” (20). She adds that “The connection between women and nature and their mutual inferiorisation is by no means a thing of past, and continues to drive” (21). She agrees that nature and women have been bearing male domination for years and assure that the practice continues as a remnant of patriarchy.

Agreeing with the statement of Plumwood, Canto VII marks the female domination of patriarchal thought. It incorporates the thought in the epic as “In search of home ‘tis woman’s destiny/ To roam the world, if need be, with her mate/ Her parents home is – but a maiden – inn/ Where boys are lords, but girls mere sojourners” (L 250-53). These lines capture a moment when Kanva Rishi has to bid farewell to his adopted daughter, Shakuntala to see her husband, Dushyanta. This moment best projects the idea of male domination over female. The lines describe women as inferior to men. It says that parental home for woman is only for their childhood age as a temporary dwelling like an inn. As they mature and grow into adulthood and girlhood, they should look for their new home like many other girls do. Searching new home and new life is a destiny for all women born to live. Boys in the parental home get respect and regard as lords where girls get their identity simply as momentary dwellers. With such a discriminative patriarchal mentality, women are

often treated as 'other' and inferior beings than males. This rustic ideology embedded in the epic manifests the severe male domination over entire female community banning them from their right of justice and equality. It is the instance that highlights that females are the subjects of domination and inferiorization.

Male domination over nature is projected in Canto II by praising the power of masculinity as the creator of the earth. It states that "Lord Vishnu made/ This world of wondrous beauty for his wife/ Queen Laxmi, as a gift of purest love" (L 276-78). The poet has elevated the value and position of male god and devalued the significance of the earth. The poet has reduced the magnificent dwelling place of all creatures and human beings into the form of memento of love. The poet has objectified the earth as a commodity that symbolizes immortality and purity of male's love to his beloved. In Canto IV, the greatness of the king, Dushyanta is hailed as the king of nature as well. It says that "Glory to great Dushyanta: 'May the king/ Of beasts, whose eyes the jungle dominate" (L 60-61). It shows that all the creatures and plants are under the control of Dushyanta. He is admired as the master of nature who has full authority over the kingdom of animals and forestlands. Further, it mentions that the king can use forest and animal for his pleasure and fun. The king exposes his masculine superiority over animals and forests in the lines as "A king his respite seeks in the leafy worlds/ And just the green to breathe he creatures hunts" (L 183-84). The king has used forests only for taking short rest to relieve him from exhaustion. For other purpose, he uses greenery of the forests to breathe fresher air and to hide himself for hunting the creatures. Besides the major male character of the epic, even the subtle male character has nature dominating mindset. In Canto VIII, a fisherman's act of killing a fish is an example that represents minor male character's domination on nature. This cruel act of the fisherman comprises in the lines as "Suddenly the line/

Grew taut; a monster 'rehu' fought the hook/ In jaws entangled, struggling valiantly" (L 352-54). The fisherman imposes his masculine strength over a helpless creature of nature to end its life. The hardest struggle of the monster rehu to get rid of the fishhook to save its life is in vain. It becomes powerless and only waits for death in sufferings. It is an instance of the domination of nature by males.

As Val Plumwood advocates, an American ecofeminist, Greta Gaard contends on ecofeminism in relation to males' hubristic attitude over nature and women. But her clear departure with Plumwood lies in the use of specific terms to address males as 'privileged' or 'developed' and nature and woman as 'oppressed' and 'undeveloped'. Gaard classifies male and nature-women linkup into two groups and treat them as dichotomous categories. There are many textual illustrations that agree with Gaard's argument. The textual evidence that marginalize nature and women and centralize men pervade throughout the epic.

Canto VII constitutes that women hold the position of oppressed group. This can be shown as "To women, mistress of the hearth and home/ Her lord is god, almighty is this power,/ Who rules her life incontrovertible/ And she is shadow to the reigning sun" (L 275-78). Through the lines, we understand that the poet has dichotomized male and female as privileged and oppressed group. Males can impose their unimpeded authority upon their female counterparts and females are to bear the authority as their duty. Life of women has no freedom and choice but has to confine within the area of hearth to home. They are the subjects to be silent and voiceless. They learn only to regard their male counterparts as almighty lord and source of power to protect them. These all androcentric thoughts view women as oppressed and men as privileged. In a similar way another evidence that features women's oppression is "'Vishnu", she prayed, "lend me strength divine"/ For harder than the

mountain is my task” (L 189-90). In these lines, Menaka’s quite depressing condition is described. When she comes to disrupt the deep meditation of divinely god Vishwamitra, she finds the task harder and pleads to the savior lord Vishnu to empower her to accomplish the task. This situation also categorizes women as undeveloped and men as developed.

In some of the cases in the epic, male superiority over nature indicates that male is privileged or developed and nature is oppressed or undeveloped. The lines in Canto II that allude valorization of male and damnation of nature are presented as “They say when Orpheus played his music lyre/ The power of his music bent the hills/ The ocean throbbed, the trees responding ran” (L 292-94). In these lines, the masculine power seems as omnipotent that has unusual strength and divinely power. The power of a lyre played by a man has brought everything in motion. It has bent the hills, caused the violent movements on the ocean and made the trees run. Such impossible events take place on nature not because of any divinely force rather this happens because of the masculine force which can be understood in terms of male as developed and nature is undeveloped. Another reference in Canto V that suggests male as privileged and nature as oppressed is “Black, airy demons that on wings obscene/ Disturbed the penance of the holy woods” (L 130-31). In these lines the destructive nature of male is portrayed. Males do not consider whether the things are of greater value or significance, they just desire to create problems. Demons’ deformed appearance and disturbing activities in the peaceful and sacred forests represent the authority of masculinity over the destruction of naturality.

Like many other ecofeminists, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva view nature-women connection in terms of their benevolent and tenderly quality. Both the writers accept that nature and women have kind and loving nature. Nature and women are

life-affirming forces that they make everything come into life and existence. Both the scholars believe that women efforts to save nature has enhanced them opportunity to live in healthy and prosperous communities. They argue that “The word ecofeminism might be new, but the pulse behind it has always driven women’s efforts to save their livelihood and make their communities safe” (3). It affirms that the concept of ecofeminism always encouraged women to live in safe community. Furthermore, they clarify how the safe community is possible and assert that “From the Chipko forest dwellers of North India some 300 years ago to the mothers of coalmining Appalachia right now, struggle to create life-affirming society goes on” (3). They justify that women’s collective involvement in nature saving campaign has given new way of life to many societies. They expect that nature friendly behavior of women can change the world into eco-friendly common home to every individual. They trust in the concept of nurturing to nature is nurturing to our world.

Canto III projects the women’s caring and friendly tendency to nature. The reference appears in the epic as “Where Gautami addressed the *tulsi* plant/ That grew on ochre-colored mound, in prayer” (L 280-81). The lines deal with the religious belief of a Hindu woman. Gautami, as a wife of holy sage Kanva, makes her holy prayer while worshipping to a plant. Along with the religious projection, there is apparent attachment of women with natural entity. It is not only a matter of prayer and worshipping but also it is about caring nature. Another reference in Canto IV that regards women as caretaker is “Thou lookest like the daughter of the sea/ Sprinkling the garden of Vanaspati” (L 336-37). These lines come from the maiden who appreciates Shakuntala’s beauty. The maiden believes Shakuntala as the daughter of the sea who sprinkles water on nature to give life to all plants. In a sense, Shakuntala seems to be caring to nature. In the same way, Canto VII also shows Shakuntala as

caregiver to nature. She expresses her affection to nature as “Let me stay and love/
Thy grey-haired grace, affection fatherly/ While watering my darling flowers and
shrubs” (L 244-46). Shakuntala wishes to care her older father while caring her dear
flowers and shrubs. Her loving manner to address flowers and shrubs as ‘my darling’
evokes the feelings that woman is really caring to nature.

As women care to nature showing their benevolence and devotion, in return,
nature also serves women as protector. Canto III comprises some examples that
represent nature’s care to women. Particularly, such examples are connected to the
events of major female character, Shakuntala. In different situations, nature treats her
as if she is nature’s child and friend. One of the instances that depicts nature’s
responsibility to women is “Though shalt not lack for food or drink; for earth/ Kind
mother to the growing orphaned child/ Shall nourish thee on Nature’s dainty sweets”
(L 104-6). This is the reference when Vishwamitra decides to leave the newly born
baby girl in the forest. Vishwamitra believes that nature is Shakuntala’s mother which
brings her up with care and love. Shakuntala gets enough nourishment and protection
in the lap of mother earth after she is abandoned by her biological parents. She gets
care from bees after Vishwamitra abandons her in the forest. This situation appears in
the lines as “Away he went, the sage Vishwamitra,/ But bees there came in humming,
buzzing swarms/ Their queen pursuing, larger she than they/ As majesty befits” (L
132-35). Later bees drop honey into Shakuntala’s mouth to satisfy her hunger. It is
mentioned in the lines as “Some sweetened drops fell on the baby’s lips:/ Content and
satisfied she, tasting, smiled” (L 150-51). In an occasion, Shakuntala gets good
company of many birds that entertain and please her. The companionship of birds for
the merriments of Shakuntala is revealed in the lines as:

Came every bird that nestles in the woods

And danced, or sang, or down a feather cast,
 Or shielding warmest her with its downy wings
 From chilly movements of the woodland breeze.

A protegee of birds Shakuntala,
 (for thus her name) lived smiling happily. (169-74)

The descriptions of these lines indicate that every bird in the forest attempts to keep Shakuntala happy and cheerful. These birds do not let her feel that she is an orphan. For her happiness, all the birds gather together and make a kind of celebration. Some birds perform their dance. Some others sing sweet songs and some few birds give warmth to save her from chilling woodlands breeze. These all birds' acts are the finest examples that manifest nature's kindness to female. It also clarifies that nature and its entities do not have less caring qualities than human beings do have.

Canto VI has also projected nature's benignant quality that supports for women's delights and pleasures. The moment that encapsulates women's delight that nature enhances can be seen in the lines as:

The trees, the flower's
 Their leaves and branches shook and banners waved
 Of verdure. Bees like ceremonious priests,
 Buzz'd hymns; and tinkled bells campanile
 The forest whole, and all that therein lives,
 With praise belauds their nuptial happiness. (L 47-52)

By internalizing the description of the lines, we come to know that Shakuntala's wedding is pleasant because of the presence of natural inhabitants. Her wedding fills trees, flowers, bees and whole woodlands with delights to celebrate and share their happy moments on the occasion. Every entity of nature praises and wishes the

beginning of new life to Shakuntala. The nuptial knot of Shakuntal has given immense pleasures to nature. Nature warmly welcomes and greets the ceremony with joyful moments. No human has accompanied wedding except the dwellers of nature. So, in this sense, nature is everything for Shakuntala which indirectly states that nature is truly and eternally bound to women.

Thus, this research paper has made an attempt to analyze and interpret *Shakuntala* in terms of nature-women interconnection. Theoretical concepts of ecofeminists like: Karen J. Warren, Susan Griffin, Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, and Mies Maria and Vandana Shiva have been used to examine and analyze *Shakuntala* from the perspective of ecofeminism. Warren's standpoint on ecofeminism has helped to uncover the nature-women relation in the epic emphasizing on the issue of nature and women are similar in terms of feminizing nature and naturalizing women. Griffin's argument on ecofeminism has provided an insight to perceive *Shakuntala* as a text that views nature-women bond by projecting women as complete manifestation of nature and the constituents of nature. Though Plumwood and Gaard regard ecofeminism as an ism to expose domination of nature and women by male-centered society, Gaard differs from Plumwood in respect to classifying male as superior and nature and women as inferior. Both view nature and women equal on the ground of their oppression in the hands of males. Mies and Shiva contend ecofeminism in relation to nature and women's mutual caring qualities. Both claim that nature and women are similar because they possess the characteristics that help to sustain the world of nature and human for lasting with inter-dependency. By applying the theoretical insights of these all ecofeminist theorists, Devkota's *Shakuntala* is proven as a text that deals with the notion of ecofeminism focusing on the issue of nature-women interconnection and mutualism.

The entire textual analysis of this research revolves around the issue of intermingling of nature and women. Firstly, it has explicitly established the relationship between nature and women on the ground of their inferiorization by naturalizing women and feminizing nature. Secondly, their relation is viewed by projecting women as a complete manifestation of entire nature and natural entities. Thirdly, their connection is understood in terms of male domination over nature and women. Finally, their interconnectedness is highlighted as both of them are life-affirming forces. As a whole, the textual analysis has incorporated textual evidence connecting them with the theoretical insights of the ecofeminist theorists to show nature and women as an interlinked subject. Considering their sacred bond, the researcher anticipates that planetary health and global justice can only be possible if the insights of ecofeminism are practically implemented into reality believing on the eternal existence of interconnection between nature and women.

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