



## Interconnection of Women and Nature in Amitav Ghosh's *Jungle Nama*

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### Abstract

*Women and Nature in general are always interconnected with each other. Especially in India, from giving rivers the name of women to calling nature as 'Mother Nature' these two entities are often perceived together. Amitav Ghosh, an eminent writer and anthropologist portrays how humans treat nature. His works also show how women treat nature and are connected with it. Despite dealing with folklore and myth, his verse adaptation of the Bon-bibi myth of Sundarbans subtly points out how greed drives humans. The myth orbits around Bon-bibi and Dhokkin Rai, where the habitants worship the former and are feared by the latter. The main focus of this paper is to show the interconnectedness of women and nature and how they are more driven to preserve nature and maintain the balance of the environment.*

**Keywords:** *ecofeminism, Bon Bibi, Dokkhin Rai, Woman, Nature, Jungle Nama, Amitav Ghosh.*

## 1. Introduction

Nature and Women are often seen as the givers for those around them; but are also exploited abundantly. It might be for this reason that women tend to be more on the side of nature in preserving and protecting it as they associate themselves with nature in many aspects. During the development of civilization humans, mostly men used lands and nature to their favor. They started using lands for cultivation, hunting animals to feed themselves, and destroying forest lands to convert them into their living habitat. This practice later became the root cause for humans' Anthropogenic approach towards nature. They started to believe that nature's existence is to serve humans and thus they started exploiting their resources without holding back. At the same time, women were dominated by men and were expected to serve them and tend to their needs. They were confined within four walls of their homes and were expected to look after their family and meet the expectations of the people around them. This exploitation and domination of nature and women led to the need for the amalgamation of environmentalism and feminism. Ecofeminism as a movement was started in the late 1970s and 1980s. One of the founders of U.S. ecofeminism, Ynestra King states that ecofeminism is the 'third wave of the women's movement'. She also wrote, "We are a woman-identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperiled times." Whenever there were a violation and destruction occurred against nature, women associated it with the patriarchal impositions that were imposed on them. The support and voices that came from women can not only be seen in various movements and protests. Still, they can also be seen through various representations of women in folktales across various cultures. India, as a place with overflowing cultures, and traditions acts as a home to various folktales. Indian culture and folktales also represent the connection women have with nature. This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between nature and women in the graphic novel *Jungle Nama* by Amitav Ghosh.

## 2. The Interconnectedness of women and nature in *Jungle Nama*

One of the most significant movements that happened in India was the Chipko Movement which took place to preserve trees from getting cut down by the forest officials. Women in the Himalayan region during the 1970 led this Chipko

Movement during the 1970s. To protect the trees from getting cut down, women from that region started this non-violent movement where they went and hugged the trees. For ages, women played a major part when it came to nature. It can also significantly be seen through myths and folklore that are passed down through generations. Indian Myths and folklore represent women as goddesses of nature such as Goddess Manasa Devi, who is believed to protect people from snakebites and is also worshipped as the goddess of fertility, the river goddess Yamuna, and nature as a whole is always referred to as Mother Nature. Vandana Shiva in her *Staying Alive* says that nature is the embodiment of feminine nature. Let it be the women representations in mythologies and folktales and women in real, nature is encapsulated with feminine energy. This can also be seen in the novel *Jungle Nama* by Amitav Ghosh through one of the main characters - Bon Bibi. This verse-adapted novel is the adaptation of the Bon Bibi myth that is widely spread and passed down in the lands of Sundarbans. This legend though written previously in the name of *Bon Bibi Johuranama* which translates to 'The Narrative of Bon Bibi's Glory' by Adbur Rahim Shahib and Munshi Mohammad in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ghosh's interest specifically lay in the second half of the work which deals with the Dhona, Mona, Dukhey, Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai. "Those are long sections in the story which are interesting, but not as interesting to me as the story of Dhona, Mona, and Dukhey" (Ghosh, 2021).

Amitav Ghosh, in one of his interviews, states that the story of Bon Bibi is about finding balance with the world. The story revolves around Dhona, Mona, Dukhey, Bon Bibi, and Dhokkin Rai. Dhokkin Rai the tiger demon residing in the land of Sundarbans fears none and feasts upon humans. To stop his ruthlessness came down two strong forces, Bon Bibi and his brother Shah Jongoli. Bon Bibi and her brother greatly humbled Dokkhin Rai. They fought ruthlessly where the tiger demon feared that it was his end but to his surprise, he was not killed by them. Instead, they came offering a deal where he was given his separate territory. Bon Bibi believed in the sustainable relationship among every living thing in nature offered Dokkhin Rai the southern part of the jungle. "Bon-bibi folklore was to drive home to the point of how essential a sustainable relationship is to the natural world."

Thus did Bon Bibi create a dispensation, that brought peace to the beings of the Sundarban;  
Every creature had a place, every want was met, all needs were balanced, like the lines of a couplet (6)

Even though the goddess ensured peace and harmony in the lands of Sundarbans, it was disrupted by greed, want, and desire. Brothers Dhona and Mona lived in the lands of Sundarbans where Dhona was richer and the latter was content with what he had. Dhona no matter how rich he was wanted more, which drove him to plan a trip to the mangrove forest. In the quest for more wealth, he announced that he would make use of seven ships for the journey to collect everything his vision captured such as timber, was, and honey. Despite his brother's advice to live with what they have and not be driven by greed, Dhona gets ready for his journey to the mangroves. Mona refused to partake in the journey and volunteered to arrange seven vessels for the journey. When they became aware that they lacked a person, Dhona suggested that they take their cousin Dukhey for that position. Dhona had made sure that he made use of the poor status of his cousin Dhukey in his favour. Dhona visited his cousin Dukhey to join him on the journey to Sunderbans while also promising him a better future along with an assurance that he would arrange for Dukhey's marriage after returning from the journey. He also gave a few coins to his cousin and asked him to give them to his mom assuming that might convince her to send her son off to the mangrove forest. When Dukhey's mom got to know about Dhona's offer, she knew that his promise holds no truth. Apart from Bob-bibi, Dukhey's mom plays an important role in reflecting how women are more understanding towards nature and interconnected with it compared to greed-driven men. Dukhey's mother advises her son about the wicked minds of men and how dangerous it can be. She is well aware of how enough can give happiness. Even though not educated she encapsulates the knowledge that greed can never bring happiness and harmony.

"He'll make big promises, tempt you with money;  
you know little of the world, and of men's villainy." (p.20)

Chris Cuomo, an environment and ethics scholar when asked about the moral link between women and nature, says that women empathize with nature and understand the power it holds. Since both women and nature belong to the oppressed part, she believes it is the reason for their solidarity. In her interview with *Times of India*, she states how in the past 200 years the development made by men and women differ a lot and how clearly it can show wealth is perceived by both men and women. While men's energy shifted more toward capitalism and industries, women's wealth was exerted on building connections among people and focused more on social health and well-being. This stance can be observed in Dhona's situation also. Where men like Dhona are driven by greed and Dukhey are swayed by money, Dukey's mother stays clear in her mind as to be content with whatever they have. She also warns her son about the tiger demon - Dokkhin Rai and how he feeds on people's greed. She advises him that if he ever faces a situation with the demon, he must not panic and stand his ground as there is an entity he can turn up for help. She tells him about Ma Bon Bibi who is known as 'the Lady of the Jungle'. It was the mythical goddess that gave the people of Sundarbans safety and connectedness towards nature. Amrita Sen, in her paper "Traditional livelihoods and survival crisis: the politics of biodiversity conservation in Sundarban, West Bengal", states, "Sundarban is the only context where a deity is worshipped not only as a prerequisite of a custom but because of need, the need to gain confidence and courage before entering the forest". Dhona along with

Dukhey started his journey to the mangrove forest. As they were passing through the forest, unbeknown to them they entered the boundary of Dokkhin Rai. Their intrusion did not go unnoticed by the tiger demon. He was confident that their entry into his boundary did not hold any true intentions except collecting all the resources that were available in the forest. Dokkhin Rai tricked Dhona and his fellow people by emptying every natural resource. The confused Dhona closed his eyes where he saw Dokkhin Rai in a strange shape. Upon sensing their intentions and wanting to feed from their greed, the tiger demon requested an offering in return for the resources from the forest. Dhona wondered what he had offered to the tiger demon Dokkhin Rai to which he replied that he desired human blood and thus wanted the poor lad Dukhey. Initially feeling bad for Dukhey, Dhona refused Dokkhin Rai's offer but later driven by greed his mind changed ruthlessly by agreeing to Dokkhin Rai's offer. He trapped Dukhey in the hands of the tiger demon. When he realized his fate, Dukhey recalled his mother's words of surrendering themselves to Bonbibi in need of help. He started chanting the rhyme, which is in the form of a poetic style called dwipodi-poyar. Dukhey's cry for help reached the ears of Ma Bonbibi. She instructed her brother Shah Jongoli to bring her Dokkhin Rai to teach him a lesson and make him pay for his sins. When he was brought to Bon-Bibi, he asked for her forgiveness which was given to him with a final word that is not to cave into temptations. Bon-Bibi says, "You must stay within your bounds and never transgress; with what you have you must make do, don't seek excess." (Ghosh 56). Ghosh, through the mythical woman Ma Bon-Bibi, has captured the interconnectedness of nature and woman and how deeply they care for the sustainable relationship among all living beings. It is evident, even in the name of the goddess as she is referred to as the lady of the forest.

"Bon Bibi's mercy has granted me a reprieve.  
Truly is her mercy beyond all measure;  
She's sent me great riches, an immediate treasure."(p.69)

### 3. Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh brings the intricate relationship of men and women shared with nature. Ecofeminism at a core stands against Capitalism and Misogynism. The Characters Dhona and Dokkhin Rai represent the male essence of how they are driven by greed and want for more. They make use of nature to their desire and believe that the resources that are provided by nature are to benefit and fulfil human needs. They are driven by the anthropocentric ideology that they fail to realize the wants and needs of nature. On the other hand, women's representations in *Jungle Nama* differ from the male representatives. Dukhey's mom and Ma Bon Bibi both express how it is important to be content with what they have. The goddess Bob Bibi insists on the importance of balance between nature and humans. The intersectional environmentalism is reflected in *Jungle Nama* where nature is seen as interconnected with humans, especially with the feminine power. From the Greek goddess Gaea to our Mother Nature, or in this case, the lady of the forest Bon-Bibi, it is the feminine essence that is more interlocked with nature in nurturing and protecting them.

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#### CITATION

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