

**TRANSITION IN ECOFEMINIST APPROACHES TO INDIAN
FICTION WRITING BY WOMEN NOVELISTS: A STUDY WITH
REFERENCE TO SELECTED AUTHORS BETWEEN 1950 AND 2010**

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Chapter 7

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Conclusion

Nature has always remained in the backdrop of Indian writings. This is mainly because of the geographical and cultural inclination. The subject of the relationship between women and nature has always been there in the Indian culture and tradition. This has reflected in the literature as well. The study has been done to analyse this relationship between women and nature, the patriarchal interventions and its reflection in the literature and transition over a period of time with respect to certain works of selected authors. The former chapters have in detail analysed the transition in the ecofeministic approaches adopted by some selected Indian English writers and their chosen works - Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), by Anita Desai, Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008) and Usha K.R.'s *Monkey Man* (2010). The transition that happened during the period from 1950 to 2010 has been analysed well and these women writers have also probed into the psyche of their characters. The transition of women characters and nature during those few decades have indeed been projected in the literature as well. The meek and submissive nature of women has now changed to the bold and outgoing kind. With more education and awareness, the women have started recognizing their rights and so demanding accordingly. The nature too has started to retaliate fiercely against the atrocities against them.

The transition is evident in various levels in each of these writings. Markandaya has powerfully portrayed the struggle of the lady who holds on to her agrarian values during dire conditions. Rukmani lives a life full of disappointments and lacks. The lack of money, comforts, shelter or even food. However, love somehow balances these lacks, as seen in nature, where it somehow balances. In the modern novels, this balance is not visible. There is no compensation for the loses incurred. Nathan and Rukmani's realization of the worth of each other makes their life easier and fulfilling. They take pain to sustain their family because of love. The familial bond is strong in this novel of Markanday, but is absent in the modern day novels. The culture of disruption of the family is seen in the fiction by the later authors. Nathan and Rukmani sustained a community life. They too

encountered problems (Kunthi), but they managed with the openness or transparency that they showed to each other thereby further strengthening their bond. The opaqueness of the modern families where each person shrinks to oneself seeking fulfilment in virtual relationships rather than real life ones. I believe that this is leading to the shattering of nuclear families. The tendency of the shattering of nuclear families indicates the upcoming of homosexual families. Ultimately, heading towards the breakdown or collapse of the society just as over exploitation of the nature can lead to annihilation of the earth itself. One way to overcome this disruption is through sustainable development.

"Human beings are a part of the whole we call the Universe, a small region in time and space. They regard themselves, their ideas and their feelings as separate and apart from all the rest. It is something like an optical illusion in their consciousness. This illusion is a sort of prison; it restricts us to our personal aspirations and limits our affective life to a few people very close to us. Our task should be to free ourselves from this prison, opening up our circle of compassion in order to embrace all living creatures and all of nature in its beauty."

- Albert Einstein, cited by Ivone Gebara (400)

Nature is seen as a representation of women from the primordial times. As stated before, the feminine quality of nature might have prompted the patriarchal mindsets to inflict brutality upon it. It is evidently seen in this modern era, when the land mafia has almost wiped off a major portion of the wilderness and its blessings to the humanity along with it. The land, the water, the air, everything has been affected. The earth is crying out with immense pain along with its human counterpart – women. The advancement in this modern era has not caused any kind of progress in the ethics and morality; rather it has caused a decline. The respect and regard which existed among the Indian community for both women and nature has seen a fast deterioration in the last few years. The way women are being treated in India and around the world have evoked curiosity among the intellectuals as to what went wrong in these years. Man has turned into a wild beast, which obliterates anything that comes his way. We can easily see the relation between the wreckage of nature and ecology; and the traumatizing state of women in the world today.

India has always been closer to nature and spirituality. The customs and traditions in India are closely bound by nature. Geographically too India is blessed with forests, rivers, mountains, oceans and wide range of flora and fauna. India is a mixture of all. There's even a modern saying that when God created Earth and distributed the climates and vegetation among all the countries around the world, the God chose India to have the diversity. This is one reason that this rich nation was brought under captivity by the western countries for over a Both geographically as well as culturally, India can be proud of being a diverse nation. One can find the chilling snow paths to scorching deserts in India. Likewise, the people in India are also diverse. As mentioned before, India can boast of its diverse and wide range of ecology and culture. India being an agrarian community has remained closer to nature. Nature was present in almost all the rituals, rather we could say that the rituals in India were conducted in accordance with nature and it was connected with women. There was hardly any ritual among Indian Hindus, which keeps women and nature away. The writers from around the world have depicted this closeness and relationship that exists between the nature and women. When the deterioration of nature began to happen, it was reflected on its innate companion. One could say that the degeneration of the value system of the society began with the patriarchal accession.

The advent of patriarchy into the Indian culture prompted the resultant demarcations in the society in various forms. The industrialization or the industrial revolution proved to one of the hazardous revolutions, which paved way for different kinds of degenerative crises in India and around the world. Capitalism, pollution, deforestations etc. are just a few consequences to mention. Beneath all these big terms, lies a society that is decomposing in various ways. The postmillennial era has witnessed these putrefactions in the form of the attacks on both natural environment and women. Each day, the crimes against them are increasing. It seems as if the mankind has lost its ethics and morality. Eminent Indian writers, especially the women writers have promptly addressed all these issues. It may be because of the earlier mentioned reasons of their innate connectivity with nature. Women writers are the ones who raised their voice against the atrocities towards both nature and women. They could easily transmit the psyche of the characters and depict it in a more convincing manner. The patriarchal dominance, which is prevalent in the Indian society was shamed and ridiculed through

their writings. Their writings have also prompted the readers to think about the current pathetic situation of women and the destruction caused to nature.

India seems to be lenient to patriarchy even in this post millennium era. The modern Indian women have shown the world that they cannot be chained down to some male chauvinistic thoughts. They have made their own identity in all spheres of life. There would hardly be any field where women have not proved their caliber. They have proclaimed to the world that they are indomitable in all the turfs. Indeed, they have proven themselves to be far better than their male counterparts. However, this does not make much change in the outlook of the Indian society. The Indian women; however successful; are still pinned down by the patriarchal thoughts. They are seen way below their male equivalents.

It is still not surprising to see the importance given to a male child in some Indian families. A boy is considered to be the heir or the person who carries the family legacy forward. So, a boy is raised in vapid circumstances, where he is free to do what he pleases, while the girls are brought up with immense restrictions and percepts. A girl in Indian society is always tuned to be submissive and tolerant. A deviant from these stereotypes are looked down with raised eyebrows. An unacceptable behavior from the part of a boy in the society is often dismissed with a sly remark “after all he’s a boy.” Though there are exceptions in the society, the overall outlook of the Indian ‘modern’ society is still vexing girls to be ‘in their limits’. When these girls from a younger age itself learns to protect and nurture things, the boys are bound to be involved in destructive games. The society itself creates an impression that manliness is shown through destruction and dominance.

A typical Indian household has the father as the head of the family. He is the decision maker. It is he who declares the rules of the family and everyone has to follow these. Though education and awareness has created much changes in the society, still a larger section of the society seems to be in favour of patriarchy, either out of fear or out of mere habit. The reflections of these can be seen in all the works of art – in literature as well as in illustrations. The women in the household do not have an upper hand in decision-making. Every time it’s either the father or the husband or brother, who are

the policy makers and the women in the family are to just abide by it. Though India has surpassed many developed nations in numerous spheres including space technology, still it clings on to the basic dominant conventions over the so-called ‘effete’.

The conflict in relationship is because the change that has taken place in women and nature is not accepted by the male-centric society. The non-acceptance is evident in every sphere of life. The show-biz industry even in this post-modern era shows little tolerance towards the woman-centric milieu. It is also reflected in the mass media and advertisement industry. The non-acceptance of females as stronger, powerful and successful beings is conventional and evident since decades, although a change to this attitude is slowly developing. When women are portrayed in advertisements they are being presented as weak and feeble and always requiring a strong support. They are reduced to mere body beyond their identities. These commercials often demand women or girls to look beautiful, seductive, sexually appealing and always to be appearing pleasingly at service to their male counterparts. This is the reflection of the image that the patriarchal society holds for women. Females when depicted in commercials are often represented as forming part of the product advertised, as people lacking individuality or strength, which is contrary to experience. This is one of the best examples in the modern world of the capitalistic society where one can see the outlook towards nature and women. Nature and Women are commodified for the benefit of the selfish patriarchal capitalistic society. All around the world, Nature has always been abused in the name of tourism. This particular industry has extended its tentacles to the female world as well. Women and children are again exploited in the name of tourism, which is actually the propagation of ‘sex-tourism’ in many parts of the world. The money-minded male-centric society has threatened the existence of both the entities. It is interesting to note that the perpetrator in both cases remain the same.

There is a constant conflict with the traditionally believed concepts and the modern norms or modern situations. The main reason could be that while traditional family was replaced by nuclear families, the traditional mental makeup of the male-centered society lingered on jeopardizing the values of equality on which modern families could be firmly founded. The patriarchal society could not accept the change in the nuclear family and so it wanted the nuclear family to adhere to the traditional principles. Likewise, Nature is

also being exploited more and more each day for making it convenient for man's own use, not taking into consideration the sustainable development which needs to be taken care of and thus receiving backlashes from nature. The uncontrolled exploitation of the earth for excavation of the natural resources leaves the earth drained and void. The digging of the earth in the name of fuel and other resources like coal, oil, sand, diamonds, granites etc. is eliminating or consuming parts of our Earth to an extent that it cannot be recovered or substituted. These activities are still continuing in spite of the repeated warnings from the scientific and ecological scholars. Even when there is the availability of renewable sources of energies like solar, wind, tidal etc., man still continues to harm the earth even more these days. Man acts as if the earth belongs to him alone and is not willing to share with other species, who has the same rights as man. Prolonged exploitation of nature annihilates the resources which become extinct to a limit where it becomes irreversible. The male-centric society focuses solely on development forgetting the nature and the ecology. The nature is destroyed and the ecology is disrupted. The earth begins to suffer and later it retaliates. The blow of retaliation proves to be fatal for the humanity. Man, most of the time, forgets that the earth belongs to the other species as well. He treats as if earth and nature ought to serve him and provide him with everything, but should not expect anything in return. This selfishness or self-centered attitude that focuses on his own comfort and wellbeing will push him towards a dark future of suffering and misery.

The changes or transformations often lead to violence, in fact the non-acceptance of the change causes violence. Violence happens when one is denied the rights or denied the identity. The subservient now is very conscious about their rights due to the upliftment of them through education, awareness and also globalization. Even in poor countries the people are conscious of their rights though they don't assert their rights. Once they are conscious about their rights and denied for a longer period violence erupts. All changes bring some sort of tremor in us, but certain changes create a permanent tremor. We despise change because it brings about a tremor in our space or comfort zone. Some tremors are good because it brings in positive changes and makes life more challenging and livable. There are other tremors that annihilate life, tremors that are beyond oneself, that one cannot overcome. This causes the total destruction of some socio-political or environmental structures. Man's self-centered patriarchal mindset does not even consider his female

counterpart as equal but they are looked down upon as subservient. They are often denied their rights and are considered inferior to their male likes. Human beings live in many spaces. Globalization challenges the territory of culture. It threatens the upbringing and breeding. The violence against women causes destruction of woman, which destroys the family, thereby finally leading to the destruction of the society. The emergence of homosexuality has disintegrated the familial structure of human beings unlike the what is found in nature. Nature always promotes co-habitation and homosexuality cannot be seen in nature. Nature tries to balance everything by compensating or adjusting itself until the limit is reached and then reacts fiercely, but only to sustain itself.

The increasing divorce rates in India is an indication of the change that is happening. The women is more empowered now and they have started demanding their rights after years of oppression. The two figures below shows a comparison done between the literacy rate or education rate and the increased divorces in Indian states:

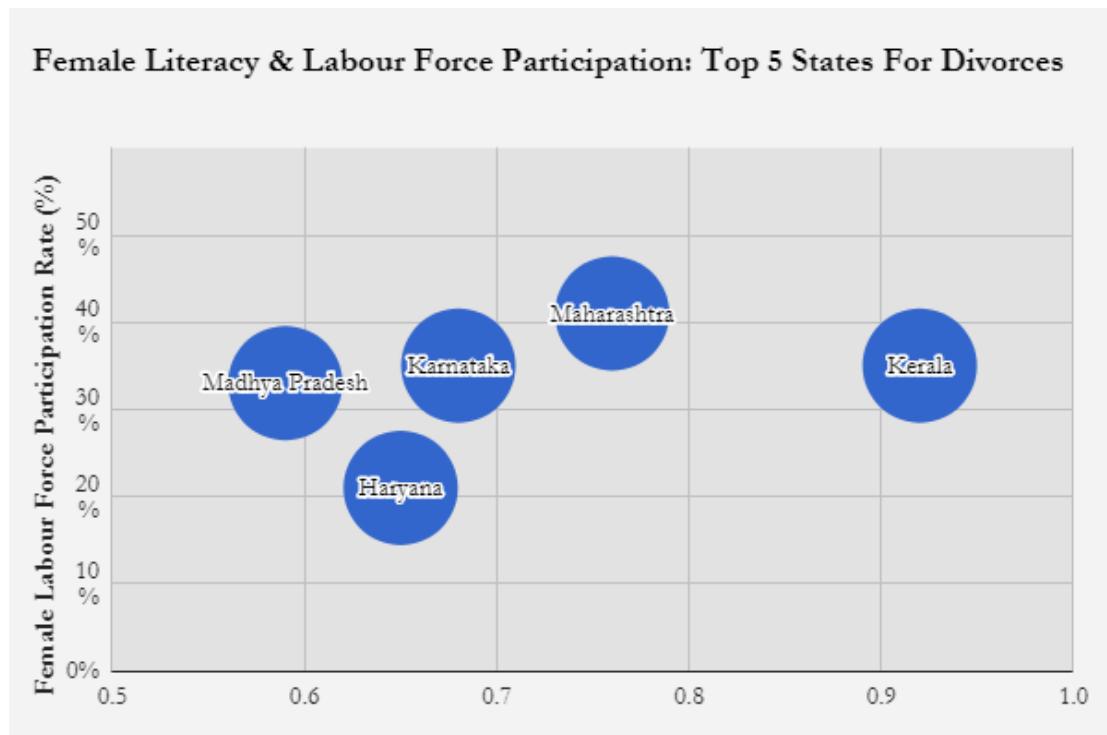


Figure 1

(The Quint, 2016)

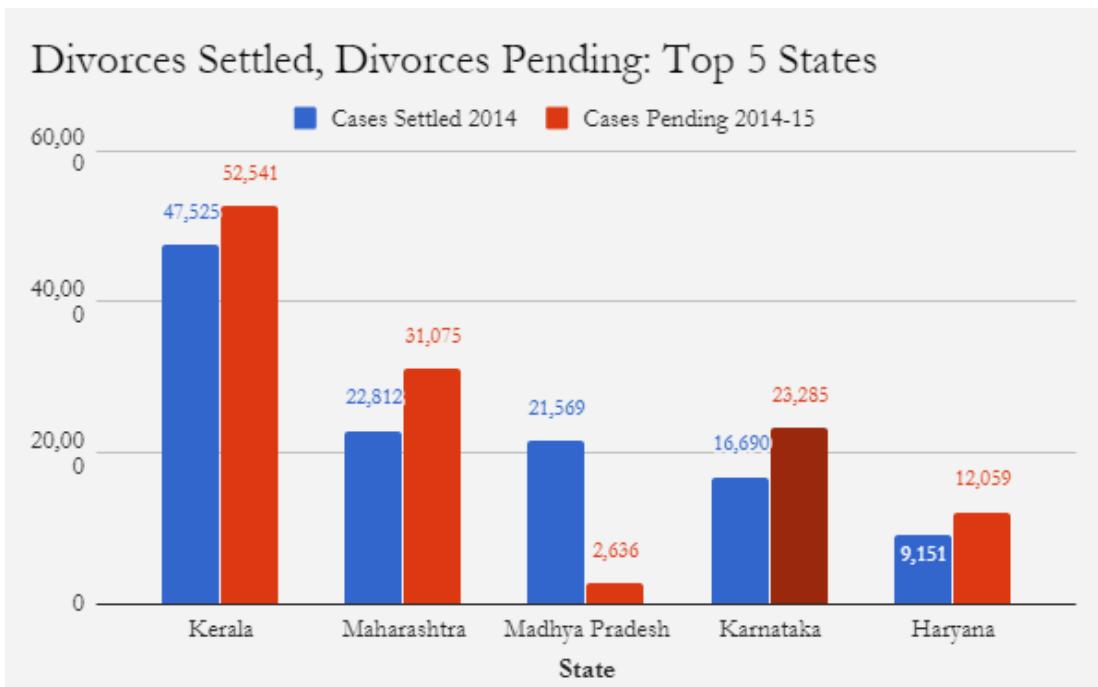


Figure 2

(The Quint 2016)

The above comparative study was done by *The Quint*, in June 2016. The study revealed that when women were more educated and aware of their rights, they were more likely to be unwilling to stay in an abusive marriage. They opted for a divorce rather than enduring violence. Here the ecofeminist views liberate women and nature from the clutches of the patriarchal oppressive mindsets to head towards a sustainable development. The liberation of women and nature from the oppression and unwanted violence. The individual has the right to live with her or his own identities, which goes well with nature. Ultimately, men and women along with all other living beings are meant to live happily and peacefully. This should not be exerted but should come naturally and so here comes the need to stress on sustainable development.

Violence in the natural world and human world are totally different. Violence in the natural world is for food or the fulfilment of other needs whereas the violence in the human world is for the mere selfishness of accumulation – the accumulation of money and power. It is also used to subjugating people for his own comforts. This subjugation of individuals for a long period makes them react fiercely. This reciprocation comes out in the form of terrorism, war, rebellions etc. This happens because of the denial of rights for certain people. When the subjugated realize their rights and start reacting, the subjugator

becomes powerless. The ideal example would be the colonization period in India. When people in India started realizing their rights and started reacting to the colonization, ultimately the colonizers were forced to leave in spite being far more powerful than the colonized and give back their freedom ending over hundred years of colonization. This is one of the best examples to reveal that prolonged violence or suppression will not in any way guarantee the subjugation of something or someone forever. In the same way, the prolonged exploitation of the nature annihilates the resources and as a consequence, unpredictable repercussions like earth quakes, flood, drought etc. occur. Nature adjusts itself to the circumstances as the woman does to her economical or psychological circumstances for a long period. Earth is quite tolerant towards the violence inflicted upon it to a certain extent, but when it surpasses the limit, the violence is paid back in the same coin but it becomes beyond control.

The recent flood in Kerala, reminds us of the power of nature and how human advancements become insignificant in front of nature. When nature decides to take the course, it becomes unstoppable. Kerala is a place blessed with the abundance of natural beauty and no wonder it is called the ‘God’s own Country’. The ‘Sahya Parvatam’ or ‘Sahyadri’, which means the ‘benevolent mountains’ – the Western Ghats occupies a major portion of Kerala. The Ghats, as its name profess is rich in biodiversity and thus provides the state with a large variety of flora and fauna. The Western Ghats is regarded as an ecologically sensitive area and is supposed to be protected. It shelters rare varieties of plants and animals and also is the store house of the fresh water sources. The ‘Sahya Parvatam’ as it is known in Kerala, is highly populated area and the human migration to it started largely during the 1960s. The forests were cleared for cultivation and this eventually started damaging the environment. The people started cultivating and the main products were tea, coffee and spices. This increased the income of the farmers there thereby paving way for more migration to the area. The escalation in the intervention into the environment started reflecting in the nature. The unscrupulous developmental patterns eventually started damaging the ecology. In 2011, Gadgil Commission under the leadership of Dr. Madhav Gadgil, an eminent ecologist and environmentalist, had submitted a report on the Western Ghats and marked it as a highly sensitive environmental zone. The commission formed under Dr. Gadgil had submitted a report banning all the

developmental programs which would affect the environment in turn causing damage to the people. However, this report was welcomed with adverse criticism and protest from the ill-informed locals and farmer who thought that this report is antagonistic towards them. It was regarded as pro-environmental and against the people. In an interview with Hindustan times Dr. Gadgil showed his displeasure about the approach of the government of Kerala:

“Accusing the successive Kerala governments of inaction, Gadgil said, “We had first submitted the report in 2011...we were in a sense boycotted by government officials as we had recommended them to stop illegal activities...”

Gadgil said that the report had very specifically pointed that if the stone quarrying was not stopped, it might eventually lead to natural calamities “like the one happening in the state today”. However, the establishments turned a deaf ear to the recommendations. According to Gadgil, a total of 1,650 excavators were deployed for stone quarrying and mining, of which only 150 were given permissions.”

(Hindustan Times, August 2018)

So, in 2013, another committee called Kasturirangan had submitted a report on the same reducing the restrictions suggested by the Gadgil commission. However, this also could not satisfy the people living in those areas.

The developmental activities still continued in those areas but in a more reduced and restricted manner. The reports regarding the environmental sensitivity and fragility were overlooked to a certain extent and thus summoning the destruction. The result as the world saw was the devastating flood in August 2018, which literally razed almost the whole of Kerala, leaving very few places. All the places stated in the Gadgil commission report were severely affected, as most of the recommendations of the commission were derided or snubbed. Though the flood happened due to the heavy rainfall during the monsoon, yet it can be considered a “man-made calamity” as said by Dr. Gadgil. Deforestation and the replacement of natural forests by the cash crop plantations led to the devastating landslides, which added to the impact of the floods. The beauty of Kerala lied in its scenic natural

landscapes. However, the blessing of nature was taken for granted and man exploited the blessings, which eventually led to this large-scale disaster. This way it can be deemed as “man-made calamity”. When these kinds of natural disasters, which are summoned by man happens, it adversely affects the women and children more than the men. The difficulties that the affected women face are innumerable, from sanitation to shelter. They are more susceptible to the adversities that comes along with the disasters. The recent interview done by Hindustan Times with Dr. Gadgil reveals his disappointment with the Kerala government for overlooking the commission’s warnings and suggestions which brought about the drastic disaster:

“Irresponsible environmental policy is to be blamed for the recent floods and landslides in Kerala. Extensive stone quarrying and mushrooming of high-rises as part of tourism, and illegal forest land acquisition by private parties are the major reasons for the recent floods in the state.”

(Hindustan Times)

Irresponsible exploitation of the principle of use and throw culture of the consumer society lived out today is another issue that poses a great threat to the whole ecosystem including humanity. The menace of the plastic is obliterating the earth today. The reckless use of it will finally prove to be fatal. Another prime issue faced by the humanity, which is again the result of the advancements, is of technology. Technology despite its immense contribution in human advancement, has created a ‘technical’ human being. Technology was a tool for the human being which aided in his progress, but the modern sense of technology makes man subservient to technology or in other words technology, which is man-made has overpowered him. One of the major repercussions of it is the disparity it has created between the ‘city-man’ and the ‘country-man’. The ‘city-man’ is well versed and updated about the latest technologies and holds the ultra-modern gadgets whereas the ‘country-man’ or the village folk is oblivion to most of these. So, he is looked down upon as he is unaware of these snobbish ways of life. This creates a conflict based on technology as before which was of the nature-culture conflict and now it has taken the form of technology and non-technology levels.

Sustainable development as a final solution to the problem that the world is facing today. The return back to ecospirituality or the worship of nature has become inevitable now. Man needs to understand the importance of paying reverence to the nature as well respect all other beings and perceive them as equal. Deterritorialization is happening on different levels, especially physical and psychological. The displacement from one's own territory, the loss of love life and family have a great impact on the whole societal structure. When the basic belief systems become unfirm, it creates a tremor in oneself and alienates oneself from everything. Rukmani was alienated from her own territory and was placed in an industrial atmosphere, further to the urban space. However, she held on strongly to her agrarian values. Nathan and Rukmani has not lost the values in spite of their extreme poverty because of the basic bond of love that they shared and also the attitude towards nature. Nature was seen as the sustainer and destroyer. So, in order to have a secure future, at present the world needs to have a strong bond with nature and all other creatures on earth.

This thesis aims at bringing in more studies in literature related to the field of ecofeminism, which is the new *mantra* for the sustainable development. Literature has always been the gadget in the ignition of new 'renaissances'.

The earth is not destroyed yet, but it is sustained. In the same way human love is not destroyed but sustained. Annihilation of everything is very easy but sustenance is quite difficult. A lot of strength and technology is required for sustaining everything and sustenance require consistent and planned effort. Destruction only takes a moment's time, but sustenance needs continuous and strenuous effort.

The famous poem by the renowned nature poet Robert Frost is relevant even in this post millennial era. How will the world end is the question he asks - in fire or in ice? Fire is the heat of passion, rage, war, greed etc. Ice is the coldness which freezes everything. It takes away all the warmth that is present in the human beings.

"Some say the world will end in fire,

Some say in ice.

From what I've tasted of desire

I hold with those who favor fire.
 But if it had to perish twice,
 I think I know enough of hate
 To say that for destruction ice
 Is also great
 And would suffice”

(Robert Frost, 1920 *Fire and Ice*)

World can freeze or it can burn. Fire of passion can annihilate or it can freeze by the indifference of the human beings like freezing of the relationships. So, the option lies with the people to decide to if they prefer a sustainable development or a total annihilation. There is a cry from around the world to protect it from heading towards an annihilation. The earth needs to be sustained and it can only be done with the co-existence of all living beings. So, one needs to think if this beautiful earth can be sustained or will it perish? Are we heading towards the annihilation of human relationships or are we heading to sustain it in spite of hardships? Now is the time for the patriarchal societies to shed their male-centric ego and embrace all living beings and treat them equally for the upliftment of each other. Mother Nature and Women are both protectors and sustainers. The world will prosper if they are revered. The literary world too is summoning the whole humanity for a sustainable future.

ॐ द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः
 पृथिवी शान्तिरापः शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः ।
 वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वेदेवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः
 सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि ॥
 ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

— यजुर्वेद ३६.१७

om dyauḥ śāntirantarikṣam śāntih
 pr̥thivī śāntirāpaḥ śāntiroṣadhayaḥ śāntih
 vanaspatayah śāntirviśvedevāḥ śāntirbrahma śāntih
 sarvam śāntih śāntireva śāntih sā mā śāntiredhi
 om śāntih śāntih śāntih

— Yajurveda 36:17

May peace radiate in the whole sky as well as in the vast ethereal space everywhere.

May peace reign all over this earth, in water and in all herbs, trees and creepers.

May peace flow over the whole universe.

May peace be in the Supreme Being Brahman.

And may there always exist in all peace and peace alone.

Aum peace, peace and peace to us and all beings!

- (Translation by Swami Abhedananda, Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, India)

लोकाः समस्ताः सुखिनोभवन्तु

lokāḥ samastāḥ sukhino-bhavantu

May all the world's beings be free and happy.