

Of All the Mothers at Stake: Ecofeminism and Bangladeshi Films

Khadizatul Kobra Urmay*

Abstract

Ecofeminism explores the connection between nature and women, and the abusive treatment of both in the hands of patriarchy and the capitalistic modes of production. Essential feminists believe nature and women to be connected through their roles since the inception of earth and human civilization. The way mother nature provides human beings and animals with all the essentials to be born, grow up, and survive, and lets the human civilization to flourish is similar to a woman's giving birth to babies, and raising them with utmost care in the role of a mother. From that viewpoint, both nature and women are the origins and protectors of life. Therefore, exploiting the source of life itself indicates the endangerment of life on earth. On the other hand, socialist ecofeminists believe that patriarchy uses this concept of the link between women and nature on the basis of the roles mentioned above only to dominate them. Bangladeshi filmmakers of this generation have become conscious of visually representing this age-old concept of woman-nature relationship—the abuse of both in their films which can be analysed from an ecofeminist point of view. This paper explores two Bangladeshi films, *Haldaa*, directed by Tauquir Ahmed, and *Padmapuran*, directed by Rashid Polash, and sheds some light on the depiction of interconnectedness of nature and women from an essentialist ecofeminist perspective, and the subordination of both from a socialist ecofeminist perspective. It shows how human civilization suffers if both nature and women, especially the mothers, are not treated and valued properly.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Essentialist and socialist ecofeminists, nature and women, patriarchy and capitalism, river pollution, motherhood

During a conversation between Hashu and Nader Chowdhury, the protagonist and the antagonist of *Haldaa*, a Bangladeshi film, Hashu warns Chowdhury that killing a mother fish is a sin because there will be no supply of fish for men if there is no mother fish. Chowdhury gives her a curt reply saying that this is not her concern, her concern should be giving birth to a child. In response, Hashu voices her fear that her child will not survive in this polluted environment (Ahmed, 2017, 00:51:38). This conversation encapsulates the value of nature and women in the eyes and hands of patriarchy and a deep concern for nature, women, and mankind in the protesting voice of a woman. Recently, Bangladeshi filmmakers have been seen developing an interest in portraying the violence being committed for ages against women as well as nature where they attempt to amalgamate the images of women with nature. *Haldaa*, directed by Tauquir Ahmed, deals with the vital issue of destroying nature through the honest depiction of polluting Haldaa river, along with the subordination of the female characters resulting in

* Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shahjalal University of Science & Technology

problems with their motherhood, insecurity, and identity crisis. On the other hand, *Padmapuran*, another Bangladeshi film directed by Rashid Polash, attempts to connect the taming of the mighty Padma river and its impacts with exploitation of women and motherhood. Both of the films delineate the story of the helplessness of mothers and their attempts to connect themselves with mother nature. It also showcases varying degrees of differences in the portrayal of the nature of their struggles, and the role they play to fight back for themselves, and for nature and environment. Thus, both of the films can be viewed and scrutinised in light of ecofeminism which investigates the aspects of both exploitation of nature, subordination of women and the function of patriarchy and capitalism behind these acts of domination.

The term “Ecofeminism” was coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort (Feminism or Death)* (Krishna & Jha, 2014). Ecofeminism first emerged as a movement in the 1970s. It is “a social movement and form of theoretical inquiry that resists formations of domination and seeks to construct a politics for planetary survival and social egalitarianism” (Carlassare, 2000, p. 89). The seeds of ecofeminism are found in several movements aimed at ensuring justice in society and environmental health which are intertwined with feminist studies, and the attempts to reveal the connections prevailing in gender, ecology, race, species, and nation on the basis of the ways they all are being exploited. These endeavours, to make these connections, were based on the texts such as Susan Griffin’s *Woman and Nature*, and Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (Gaard, 2011). It is an alliance of ecology and feminism (Ruether, 1997) which looks for affinities between devaluation of earth and devaluation of women (Gates, 1996). According to some ecofeminists, a profound connection prevails between nature and women in their roles as “the life-givers, the nurturers, the ones in whom the seed of life grows,” and because of women’s role as the source of life, the first image of the Goddess was perceived in the form of a woman. Women also need to reclaim the similarities of the sacredness of her sexuality as well as her powers to give life with the sacred goddess (Ruether, 1997, p. 38). Among the various wings of ecofeminism, cultural or spiritual ecofeminism acknowledges this connection between women and nature through their recognition of the concept of “mother earth” and the “femininity of nature.” Cultural ecofeminism believes that changes in “culture, language, idea, and spirituality” can bring in social change (Carlassare, 2000, p. 96). The ecofeminists who identified earth as female, and thus acknowledged women’s closeness to nature, were criticised as ‘essential, and anti-intellectual goddess-worshippers’ (Gaard, 2011, as cited in Oksala, 2018). This group of ecofeminists, referred to as essentialist ecofeminists, recognizes the essential or the biological characteristics of women which separate women from men, and supports the view of the inherent affinities between women and nature. The essentialists speak for nature too due to their belief in this closeness between nature and women. This is also women’s responsibility to protest and fight for nature. On the other hand, socialist ecofeminists criticise this view of essentialists and emphasise on how domination of women’s bodies and their work are interconnected with capitalists’ exploitation of nature and its elements - land, water, and animals. They believe that this conception of woman’s closeness to nature as the mother and nurturer is a tool used by patriarchy to suppress women, and control them (Carlassare, 1994, p. 222). Ruether was in favour of the idea of

women not associating themselves with nature (Ruether, 1975, as cited in Mellor, 1997) because, women's association with nature puts themselves in opposition to men who are associated with culture. Thus patronising the ideas propounded by patriarchal society in which women represent "body, earth, sex, the flesh in its mortality, weakness and sin-proneness" and men represent "spirit, mind, and sovereign power over both women and nature" and, thereby, broadening the gap between men and women (Ruether, 1997, p. 34). Opposed to the essentialists, the socialist ecofeminists believe in the construction of the stereotypes of women and the difference between men and women as the work of patriarchal society. They give emphasis on how patriarchy attempts to justify this domination and exploitation by referring to the feminisation of nature and naturalisation of women. They are materialists in terms of their understanding of the exploitation and domination of women and nature as their properties by western capitalism and its various modes of capital accumulation. In the reign of capitalism, women are considered synonymous to nature, where violence is the way to dominate them both (Mies, 1986, as cited in Oksala, 2018). Socialist ecofeminists protest against capitalists' exploitation of nature and natural elements regardless of the environmental crises, such as, air and water pollution, deforestation, river erosion, and extinction of species caused by this attempt to tame nature in order to reap economic benefits and gather maximum profits. They adopt feminist analysis to show this domination over nature and how women turned into victims to all the ecological consequences caused by patriarchal capitalistic society, along with the way they have always been treated as subordinates in the name of their femininity and men's self-imposed role as the sole decision makers. Surely, if the women, the mothers, directly or indirectly suffer from both ecological and feminist perspectives, their children, that is to say the human race, will also suffer the consequences. These systems of domination are equally devastating for environment as well as women and children. Women and children suffer from the terrible consequences of environmental crisis caused by these systems of domination since capitalistic modes of production and patriarchy are interconnected in this global world where power gained from accumulation of profit is the reason behind all attempts to dominate others, be it women, nation, or nature. Even in this 21st century, the power of the patriarchal capitalism lies in achieving the desired production in the industries through increasing rate of usage of machinery as well as raw materials collected from natural resources, and controlling other countries through modern weapons and explosives to gain access to the resources abundant in those countries. In doing so, the capitalist owners are not only making money and assembling power to dominate others in the patriarchal society, but they are also destroying the nature and posing great risks for the environment. This western capitalist attitude to reap benefits as much as possible works behind all imperialist endeavors all over the world and results in the inevitable warfare where even nuclear weapons are also being used nowadays. This exploitation of natural resources, industrial wastes, militarism, use of nuclear weapons, deaths and injuries are severely affecting both the environment and humankind. Though the whole humankind is victimised by these man-made calamities, often women and children are the worst sufferers of these problems unnecessarily created by the patriarchy and western notion of capitalism in the name of progress and development. Capitalism and imperialism have created class conflicts and binary relationships in society based on the western ideas of

superiority and inferiority. However, the connection between women and environment varies with the region and their social class since this connection depends on to what extent they have regular interactions with environment (Oksala, 2018). Women manage the household chores in the poor countries especially in South Asian region. They collect water and fire, prepare food, and actively take part in agricultural work. So, the problems related to air and water pollution, farming and food shortage affect those women. When the poor women join the factories to help their families survive, their work is undervalued compared to men. They receive minimum payment. Simultaneously, the unhealthy work environment and the pollution caused by the factories doubly affect the health of women as well as their children. So, on one hand, patriarchy does not allow women to step outside of the boundary it has set for women; on the other hand, patriarchal capitalism exploits women's cheap labour in this industrial society. Thus, women became deprived of their equal rights both inside and outside of their home. Therefore, it can be said that though environmental crises are not only women's problems, yet these environmental issues are linked with feminist issues (Gaard & Gruen, 2005, as cited in Oksala, 2018). The emergence of ecofeminism was needed due to the lack of concern for environmental issues on the part of feminists in the postmodern era (Gaard, 2011). When feminist concerns and ecological concerns are intertwined, feminism and environmentalism separately cannot serve the purpose. Here ecofeminism is necessary to address the intertwined issues of both feminism and environmentalism. Therefore, the ecofeminists discuss the plights and rights of women, along with the global crises like environmental pollution, food and fuel shortage, climate change, deforestation, extinction of wild life, use of nuclear weapons and many others. Ecofeminists urge for a world which is not only eco-friendly, but also gender-just, and they seek to save the environment and improve the condition of women through their writings and activities. The seeds of both women's liberation and solutions to the ecological crisis lie in the regulation of all kinds of domination attempted by the representatives of patriarchal capitalistic society. Therefore, the socialist ecofeminists seek social change not through changes in culture and consciousness but through bringing changes into "material circumstances" (Carlassare, 2000, p. 96). According to Ruether (1975, as cited in Glazebrook, 2002), women must perceive that neither their emancipation nor probable solutions to ecological crisis will be possible in this society where different forms of domination are at the center of all the fundamental model of relationships. Therefore, as long as all kinds of shackles of domination imposed by various systems in a patriarchal society cannot be broken through the desired changes on materialistic level, women will continue to be subjugated by men and nature will continuously be destroyed by humans. *Haldaa* and *Padmapuran*, these two Bangladeshi films, to different extents, delineate some of those ecofeminist concerns.

Haldaa, released in 2017, is titled after the name of the river Haldaa which is situated in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, and is, allegedly, the only natural fish breeding center in Asia. This Haldaa river is being polluted everyday by the greedy industrialists and factory owners which affects not only the nature and the environment but also the people relying on this river for their survival. *Haldaa* exhibits how the environmental issues have impacts on women and how women are affected by men's merciless attempts to dominate the nature. This film integrates river and woman at one juncture in its treatment of the underlying connection between women and nature. The

conversation quoted at the beginning echoes the ecofeminists' fears and hints at that interrelation between women and environment, and the endangered human species as an outcome of the exploitation of both women and nature. Like the ecofeminists, it is the woman in the film who questioned the patriarchy and stood against the domination, injustice, and violence towards women and nature.

Haldaa begins with an urge to save river Haldaa (Ahmed, 2017, 00:00:54). This film provides evidence of violence towards nature when the existence of chemical factories and brick-kilns are seen on the river bank. Burnt oil and other chemical wastes are continuously being dumped in this river which are polluting the river water. Similarly, black smokes from the brick-kilns are polluting the air. There are random extractions of sand from the river. Moreover, the flow of water decreases day by day because of unplanned sluice gates and dams across Haldaa to control the flow of water. At the same time, dredger machine propellers are killing the mother fishes. Unfortunately, mother fishes are being caught in the spawning season when they are supposed to lay eggs. A vivid depiction of how the river is being polluted day by day is presented in the voice of some common villagers living on the bank of the river who address the river as their mother. They notice the climate change as a result of the violence towards nature. There is no rain, and without rain the fishes will not lay eggs. The urge to protect nature at any cost is explicit in their conversation. They not only express their awareness of the causes and nature of pollution, and the horrible consequences this environmental pollution will lead to, but also exhibit a realization of the utmost importance of saving the river for the sake of their own existence and survival (Ahmed, 2017, 00:05:25).

The river is the mother – this metaphor is very significant in terms of acknowledging the femininity of nature and establishing its relation to women. Throughout the film *Haldaa*, recurrent appearances of this mother image of both nature and women are noticeable. The mother image comes here, so that the river may be viewed as the mother to the fishermen and other people who are directly or indirectly depending on the river for their livelihood for ages. This is an example of the feminisation of river which the essentialists recognise. River provides for them all. If mother nature is at stake, human kind will be at stake too. And, in the name of so-called progress, capitalists are not only destroying the mother river, but also killing mother fish which leads to the decreased rate of laying eggs and scarcity of fish in the river. An honest description of the tortures inflicted on the river is provided in the film in the voice of a member of Haldaa Protection Committee who not only attempts to raise awareness among the local people, but also urges them to speak against the people responsible for this injustice to nature (Ahmed, 2017, 00:30:17).

All the descriptions of the condition of Haldaa validate the function of the capitalistic underpinnings behind the pollution of the river and human-induced climate change which is changing people's lives. In this film, Nader Chowdhury, the antagonist and the representative of a patriarchal capitalistic society as well as western notion of progress, is the owner of chemical factory and brick-kilns. The rate of his factory's chemical pollution is too high; burnt oil and other industrial wastes of his factory are being dumped in the river; his brick-kilns are on the bank of Haldaa and polluting the air

with its black smokes; his dredger machines are destroying the river. He doesn't pay any heed to the proposal of shifting his factories and brick-kilns from the river bank. Even the corrupted government officials accept his bribe and suggest him to dump the wastes when it is dark so that nobody notices (Ahmed, 2017, 00:18:13). In the spawning season when fishing is prohibited in Haldaa in order to let the mother fish lay enough eggs, Chowdhury not only buys mother fish from the bazar (Ahmed, 2017, 00:17:06), but also orders his loyal fisherman to bring mother fish in order to entertain the guests from the government office (Ahmed, 2017, 00:48:21). Thus, Chowdhury becomes the symbol of patriarchal capitalism who asserts power over nature and its elements. He is the image of man dominating nature by dint of violent ways, and at the same time poses himself as a threat to motherhood. The conversation between Chowdhury and the government officials at Chowdhury's place demonstrates the corporate greed and corruption, and particularly no concern over the ongoing damage caused to the environment. Moreover, they shamelessly attempt to justify their money-making policies and the prospects of living an alleged civilized life saying that the destruction of nature is needed for the progress of human civilization (Ahmed, 2017, 00:52:55).

A poetic contest is seen arranged in the film through which the arguments behind the domination of nature and pollution of environment, as well as refutations of those logics and arguments have been presented. In that contest, the *kabial*¹ who takes the task of speaking on behalf of people like Nader Chowdhury and the corrupted officials, declares that he is a progressive person who wants progress. He delineates the benefits of constructing roads and factories and tobacco cultivation through which society is marching towards prosperity. He tries to justify dumping of wastes on the rivers by alluding to his forefathers that they have been doing this for ages and the wastes in the river flow down to sea causing the river no harm (Ahmed, 2017, 01:08:20). This indicates the attitude of the emerging industrialists who take pride in bringing modernity at the cost of the purity of nature. To refute these arguments, the other *kabial* makes it clear that progress does not need filling up or obstructing river (Ahmed, 2017). He raises the vital question that if the river is filled up, where will fishes lay eggs? He calls for everyone's attention to the ongoing act of damaging the environment (Ahmed, 2017, 01:10:19). Again, in another scene, when Haldaa is truly lacking eggs, the illiterate fishermen reiterate the same concern that the fishes are unable to lay eggs due to the torture inflicted on the river (Ahmed, 2017, 01:13:16). The way humans try to control the nature and its elements like water, land, air and exploit nature only to reap financial benefits surely has terrible repercussions.

According to Warren (1994, as cited in Vance, 1997), patriarchal domination of nature and patriarchal domination of women go hand in hand. Parallel to the treatment of nature, *Haldaa* depicts the treatment women receive in a patriarchal society where they not only suffer from helpless dependence, identity crisis, endangered motherhood, but also become the victim of environmental crisis caused by men. Hashu, the protagonist of this film, is bound to marry Nader Chowdhury despite her genuine attachment towards Bodi, a common fisherman. Chowdhury offers to pay off her father Monu Mia's debts in exchange for Hashu's hands since his wife has failed to produce a child in seventeen years of their married life. At first Hashu refuses to marry Chowdhury, and her father

also supports her. But, when Monu Mia gets unwell from the worries of how to pay off his debts, Hashu's mother rebukes her saying that she is responsible for her father's illness, and Hashu gives up (Ahmed, 2017, 00:33:11). This is how a woman is victimized in a patriarchal society where even the mother who is forever fighting with poverty and uncertainty does not want to understand how she is depriving her daughter of her happiness. It is the patriarchal society which has taught her that a wealthy household, sufficient food, and good clothes are more than enough to make her daughter happy. Marrying the person who shows the audacity to slap her father is alright if it removes the burden from her father's shoulders. Chowdhury's first wife who has been married to him for seventeen years is not happy with this marriage, but she is also bound to accept this marriage. This is how the women in patriarchal society are stripped off their choices and voices. She utters the truth to Hashu that rich men marry beautiful girls from poor family so that they look like a fairy and work like a maid (Ahmed, 2017, 00:38:30). Hashu is also seen to have been beaten by Chowdhury in the film. Hashu's conversation with her mother in law, Surot Banu reveals about the merciless beatings that the wives get in this family even for some small mistakes (Ahmed, 2017, 00:23:41). In addition to these, *Haldaa* touches on the identity crisis that women go through in such a society. The pain of losing the name after marriage is also evident in Surot Banu's words that nobody called her by her name after coming to this house (Ahmed, 2017, 01:32:00). Besides, the first wife is addressed as *Boro Bou*² throughout the whole film. Her original name was also buried under *Boro Bou* after her marriage. She not only loses her own name, but is left in fear of losing the identity of the elder wife too. Her desperate attempts to make Hashu wait for her husband in order to let her fall asleep, and as a consequence, get beaten by her husband on her wedding night spring from the painful memory of her own wedding night (Ahmed, 2017, 00:39:04). A number of attempts to retain her position in this house and to prove her worth are evident in her putting emphasis on Hashu's secret relation with Bodi (Ahmed, 2017, 01:35:30), questioning the legitimacy of Hashu's child, getting rid of Hashu by suggesting to her to run away and never come back, and later trying to make Hashu insane (Ahmed, 2017, 02:04:01). Each and every action of the elder wife reveals her fear of losing that life in which Hashu's mother believed in. Hashu and the elder wife, both of their value in Chowdhury household depends upon their ability to give birth to Chowdhury's heir, their role as a mother. The Elder wife has to accept Chowdhury's second marriage only because she herself is sterile; Hashu is brought into the house only to produce children. The Elder wife's fear grows with the prospect of Hashu expecting that desired child. This is how patriarchal ideas devalue women and try to justify this devaluation which the socialist ecofeminists condemn. The subjugation of women takes three stages and three layers of sexism to be completed, and involves the idea of motherhood. "The conquest of the mother" puts woman in a state of economic dependence resulting in women in bourgeois society exchanging their sexuality with financial security; "the negation of the mother" assimilates women with fleshly lust and thus renders women inferior to men; and "the sublimation of the mother" presents women in an image of pure womanhood that does not acknowledge their actual needs (Ruether, 1975, as cited in Mellor, 1997, p. 298-299). This view of Ruether (1975, as cited in Mellor, 1997) can be applied to the situation of Hashu and the elder wife in *Haldaa*. Hashu and the elder wife both hailing from poor families also shed light on the

gender hierarchy prevailing within class hierarchy in terms of the ideas and values of women from different social class despite their common role as “mothers, child raisers, and sex objects” (Ruether, 1997, p. 35).

According to some ecofeminists, the earth is a living organism and human beings are a part of the life on earth (Carlassare, 2000) whereas humanity is also a part of nature (Mellor, 1997), and all living beings are interconnected (Gates, 1996) which negate the idea of women’s closeness to nature and establish the presence of nature in both men and women. They are all undoubtedly equally interrelated. As a result, the destruction of one will surely bring destruction of others. Therefore, violence towards nature and natural objects as well as women will devastatingly affect the existence of human being on earth. The longest peace camp (1981-2000) held at Greenham in England was run by women who began with the slogan of “women for life on earth.” It was an encampment of women who pressured the Royal force to refrain from operating and testing nuclear cruise missiles. They expressed their fear for the future of all their children and for the future of the living world which is the basis of all life (Gaard, 2011).

When Hashu protests against the river and environment pollution (Ahmed, 2017, 00:51:38), she brings up the issue of the survival of her child amidst these pollutions. A child requires an eco-friendly environment to be born and to grow up where the ecological balance will be ensured and the child will have pure air, water, and adequate supply of food. The pollution of Haldaa will deprive the child of that environment. If capitalism keeps ruining nature, its rivers, its species in the name of bringing progress through their factories and industries, and if patriarchy keeps exercising power over women despite acknowledging their role as birth givers, and takes advantage of motherhood to control women, it is obvious the next generations will not survive in this waste land. Violence towards the mothers and mother earth will accelerate the end of human civilization. After all, if the rivers are polluted, where will the fishes lay eggs? And, if the mother fish is killed, how and from where will the supply of fish come? Moreover, at the Chowdhury household, Hashu keeps having nightmares about her father’s killing of a mother fish (Ahmed, 2017, 00:41:20). Her nightmare on her wedding night holds symbolic significance too. She is a woman, and she will be a mother in the near future. But her motherhood and her happiness will be endangered in this house. On several occasions, Hashu expresses her fear of losing the baby. She confides her fear to Bodi that Chowdhury and his first wife will not let her baby survive (Ahmed, 2017, 01:34:05). During one of her conversations with Chowdhury’s first wife, she strongly expresses her desire and determination to save the baby when she is asked what she wants (Ahmed, 2017, 01:38:24). It is the lonely island, far from the polluted water, chemical factories, and brick-kilns, where she finds the perfect place to keep the baby safe in her womb. Hashu’s desperate attempts to secure her child’s life are demonstrations of her inborn sense of motherhood and recognition of her role as the nurturer and protector of the life depending on her for its survival which the essentialist ecofeminists acknowledge.

Brick-kilns are presented in *Haldaa* as a metaphor for an agent of death to indicate how capitalism along with industrialization is playing a role in culminating the journey of human on earth. On one hand, black smokes from the kilns are poisoning the

air and damaging health of the people by causing severe diseases leading to death or lifelong sufferings. On the other hand, using the brick-kiln to murder Bodi and to let his dead body disappear in the ashes displays a direct way to portray the brick-kiln as a threat to life. The scene of Bodi's murder in the kiln (Ahmed, 2017, 02:01:29) stands as a symbol of all the deaths directly and indirectly caused and are going to be caused by the smoke and fire (Ahmed, 2017). Only Bodi is not burnt. The fire lit in the kiln burns Hashu's happiness as well. By killing Bodi in the kiln, Chowdhury tries to establish his control and sole right over Hashu. And, again the brick-kiln, as a symbol, manifests the connection between the domination of women and nature through violence that the ecofeminists argue about. The warning of the risk given by Françoise d'Eaubonne's in *Le féminisme ou la mort* that is going to be faced by the future generation (Glazebrook, 2002, p. 12) is voiced with much concern in the film *Haldaa*.

However, the tortures on both river and women did not go unchecked by women in *Haldaa*. Hashu's protests and actions reflect the activists of ecofeminism who have relentlessly been working to save earth and women, and demanding for liberty from the devaluation and exploitation of western patriarchal culture. Women have always shown the instinct to have felt the negative impacts of ecological imbalance and environmental crises caused by industrialization on their lives. An example of that awareness is "Chipko movement" in northern India in the 1970s. The meaning of "Chipko" is "to embrace". During this Chipko or tree hugging Movement, women from villages came forward to embrace the trees as a demonstration of protecting the trees from being uprooted, and demonstrate their protests on the issue of deforestation along with the issues of cash cropping, male alcohol addiction, and an alarming increase in the rate of violence against women which were connected with deforestation. Another example of a similar kind of movement is the Greenbelt movement in Kenya that started in 1977 led by Wangari Maathai that urged everyone to plant trees. Green Belt movement has not only planted trees and promoted environmental conservation, but also worked to empower women. The first explicit ecofeminist movement was recorded on 17 November, 1980 in Washington DC. It was known as "Women's Pentagon Action," organised by Ynestra King and other ecofeminists, where around 2000 women, gathered at Pentagon. Toxic contamination, ecological violence, militarism, and sexual violence were some major issues they protested against during this Pentagon action which focused on the maltreatment of both environment and women, and drew everyone's attention to both ecology and feminism (Carlassare, 2000).

In *Haldaa*, there is a Haldaa protection committee whose members are urging to stop this pollution and save the river (Ahmed, 2017, 02:07:05). But it is Hashu, the woman, who understands the intertwined problems faced by both Haldaa, the river, and herself, a woman, and shows resistance against both the oppression of women and nature. She vehemently reacts and advises her father to ask for God's forgiveness when he confides to her that he killed a mother fish (Ahmed, 2017, 00:22:20). Later, she refuses to cut the mother fish brought for the guests at Chowdhury house (Ahmed, 2017, 00:49:57). When Chowdhury chides her saying that her job is giving birth to babies, she promptly puts forward the connection that lies between safe environment and the existence of man, and raises the issue relating to the survival of her child in this polluted environment

(Ahmed, 2017, 00:51:38). She is like the mother fish, and her child will not live in this world the way the mother fish can no longer lay eggs in Haldaa. So, how will the future generations survive if this environmental pollution is being continued? Hashu reiterates the idea of her assimilation with the mother fish when the government official sees her and compares her to the fish on her hands and flirtingly asks whether those beautiful fishes still exist. She promptly replies with the same metaphor that the beautiful fishes still exist, but they will stop existing soon indicating the danger that both the mother fish and the woman are facing (Ahmed, 2017, 00:53:55). When the elder wife asks whose baby she has conceived, she firmly replies that it is her baby (Ahmed, 2017, 01:38:29). Polluted Haldaa is no longer a safe place for the mother fish, likewise Chowdhury household is not safe for her and her child. Therefore, like the fishes that are going back from Haldaa, she too runs away from this place. Mother nature becomes her ally in this journey to a utopia for her unborn child by offering the river as her escape route (Ahmed, 2017, 01:39:18). Besides, *Haldaa* exhibits a direct demonstration of revenge of nature when Chowdhury's loyal fisherman, Niranjan, died from a snakebite while catching a mother fish (Ahmed, 2017, 01:53:21).

After Bodi's death and Hashu's return to Chowdhury house, the image of Hashu that appeared impersonates the violent side of nature when all the damage has been done to her. Hashu's actions disclose the punishment men must receive in exchange for his tyranny over both nature and women. A desperate and determined Hashu murders Chowdhury with a dagger taken from Chowdhury's own collection (Ahmed, 2017, 02:12:25) which she previously noticed hanging on the wall while waiting for her husband on her wedding night. Hashu's murder of Chowdhury bears twofold significance; she punishes the oppressor of woman as well as the oppressor of nature and environment. In addition, the dagger serves the function of the metaphor for the oppressor's own deed which will eventually bring his downfall. Thus, Chowdhury's death also signifies how the lives of humans will be jeopardized, and the severe consequences they will face for their own thoughtless decisions and actions against their mother earth.

On the other hand, though the subtitle of *Padmapuran* is *Haar Na Mana Nodir Golpo*, in English which means the tale of the indomitable river, unlike *Haldaa*, *Padmapuran* neither focuses much on the river 'Padma' and its violation in the hands of men nor showcases the strong resistance against the perpetrators. The violators of Padma, the river, and Golapi, the major female character, are not seen to be brought to justice. The director rather focuses on presenting the ill fate of Golapi before the sympathetic eyes of the audiences. But, in doing so, he uses the same "mother" image of the river and draws a parallel between woman and river. *Padmapuran*, released in 2021, begins with the image of the dead body of Golapi floating on a raft on the river (Polash, 2021, 00:00:55). After that, through the voiceover of a narrator, the film starts telling the tale of mighty Padma, how the people on its banks depended on it, and how their lives were once enveloped in happiness. Quickly the narrator gives a glimpse of how the lives of the people were changed as a result of building dams on the river. Attempts to tame the river by preventing its natural flow did not bring any good in people's lives, rather the inevitable drought and flood due to the climate change changed the locality instead. The

boatmen and fishermen lost their work, superstitions among people and smuggling increased (Polash, 2021, 00:03:07). Where there were big ships and fishes in the river before, now this sounds like a fairy tale. The fairy tale life of the people has ended too. Man's domination of nature and its devastating impacts are manifested through the voice of the narrator. However, *Padmapuran* also emphasises on river's role as the mother and provider. The connection between nature and woman that the essentialist ecofeminists believe in is manifested in the words of the old grandmother. She told young Golapi who was known as Mayna back then that River and the body of women are similar to each other. The river must flow; river too becomes pregnant like woman if it is prevented from flowing in its natural way (Polash, 2021, 00:12:11). In the same way, Golapi too gets pregnant from being forcefully abducted and raped by a lecherous man who offers money in exchange of her body, but upon Golapi's Guru Maa's refusal, he sends men to take her away (Polash, 2021, 00:33:45). The mother image of Padma river has been emphasised again and again throughout the film. When Golapi is rendered homeless, she accepts the river as her only mother who will save her, give her shelter. Like Hashu, Golapi too, another would be mother, seeks refuge to the river, the mother nature (Polash, 2021, 00:51:40). She too gets on a boat in order to find a shelter for her and her child. From time to time Golapi keeps having imaginary conversation with Padma river in her mind where she seeks a name for her child to the river (Polash, 2021, 01:17:52). The river is personified here. It is the river only to whom the distressed mother can unburden herself; she can trust only the mother nature. However, this film does not portray the helplessness of only these two mothers, Golapi, and the Padma, the mighty river. Golapi's crippled mother's tears also expresses the utter helplessness of a mother when her child was being taken away by the hijras³ (Polash, 2021, 00:23:43). Golapi's Guru Maa⁴, who is the leader of that group of hijras, shows signs of anger both of the times when the man offered her money for Golapi (Polash, 2021, 00:33:06), as well as when she could not save her from being raped by that man (Polash, 2021, 00:34:10). Though it is later revealed that she convinced little Mayna to believe that she is a hijra and manipulated her to join their group in the name Golapi only for her business, her genuine love for Golapi is obvious when she bids her farewell. Golapi's mother and Guru Maa both could not keep her safe, and their failure as mothers is vivid in their tearful expression. This exchange of female body with money supports the idea of patriarchal capitalism's commodification of women. On the other hand, this film portrays Golapi's sister-in-law, who does not hesitate to engage in physical intimacy with another man, and is also suffering from her failure to be a mother (Polash, 2021, 00:43:45). She refused to let Golapi stay with them, but at the end of the film, the 'mother' in her sheds tears to adopt Golapi's child (Polash, 2021, 01:30:57).

Though *Padmapuran* does not overtly display socialist ecofeminists' idea of not connecting woman with nature since this is patriarchy's invention to dominate woman and establish them as inferior to man, a glimpse of how this motherhood is used to gain other purposes is shown in the film. When Golapi manages a shelter and starts having dreams of a happy life with Cobra, a smuggler, Cobra and the other smugglers start using Golapi as a cover to smuggle drugs from one place to another. In the name of taking a pregnant woman to doctor, the smugglers' group transports drugs so that they will not be suspected by the police (Polash, 2021, 01:17:05). Golapi is unable to resist because she

has no other options. Here, she gets a place to stay and food to eat, and most importantly she has found love here who promises her to take all her responsibilities including her unborn child (Polash, 2021, 01:01:50). But, compared to the way Hashu shows resistance and protests against both of the domination of nature and women in *Haldaa*, Golapi shows little or no resistance at all. She is too occupied with the miseries of her own life. *Padmapuran* depicts the consequences that women face due to the harm caused to the river. The women of the villages on the bank of Padma are involved in smuggling and drug business to support themselves and their family. Golapi's mother sells drugs and is arrested by the Police too (Polash, 2021, 00:18:37). Later, Golapi's sister-in-law is also seen running the business. Kopila is another smuggler in the film. She drinks alcohol, commands the men unequivocally because she clearly knows what she should do to survive. But, Kopila appears as a much stronger woman than Golapi. She tries to free Golapi from the the agonies of expectation (Polash, 2021, 01:18:18). Only after that, Golapi shaves her head as her own feeble way of responding to the betrayal of her beloved by leaving her. He likes her long hair, so removing what he likes seems to Golapi a manifestation of her anger directed towards the man (Polash, 2021, 01:22:01). Though later on he proves himself as a loyal man and comes back to marry her, Golapi was not destined to have a happy life (Polash, 2021, 01:23:16). All her problems are concerned with finding a place to stay; she does not see the connection between their life and the domination of river. There is no concern shown in her over the destruction of the river that affects her family as well. Her brother, Ronju, later succumbs to insanity from excessive drug addiction that resulted in infertility too (Polash, 2021, 00:45:38). Ronju's wife is deprived of the life she wants, the life of a mother. She has been deprived of motherhood; even her relationship with other man cannot give her a child (Polash, 2021, 01:30:08). In a sense, the consequences of environmental crisis caused by domination of river are responsible for her or her husband's sterility which renders her incapable of bearing a child. Thus, she has also become a split image of endangered motherhood. Here, the exploitation of river, natural calamities as its aftermath, the struggle for survival by any means, a dysfunctional family— everything is interrelated. Whatever humans are doing to nature will return to them as consequences. When Golapi loses her last hope of having a married life, she still manages to get herself on a raft and gives birth to the child on the riverbed, the safest place she thinks of for her child (Polash, 2021, 01:28:35). Though this childbirth puts an end to her life, *Padmapuran* hints at a new beginning amidst all adversities when Golapi's newborn child is found and brought to home by Golapi's brother and sister (Polash, 2021, 01:31:38). Naming her Padma suggests the symbolic connection between the river and the child where both of them are indomitable. The way the river Padma keeps flowing amidst all the violence caused towards her, the child also survives in her mother's womb and comes to this world. Though she has lost her mother, the mother river brings her to her home (Polash, 2021, 01:32:33).

Though the story of *Padmapuran* revolves around Golapi's life as a mother carrying an illegitimate child in her womb and her search for a home and family, the film touches on the role of the river as the 'mother,' and to some extent connects the oppression of nature and environment along with the oppression of woman. In *Padmapuran*, the image of woman on the river is depicted on several moments. Towards the end of the film, a dead Golapi is seen on the raft on the riverbed (Polash, 2021,

01:31:38). In *Haldaa*, the film ends with the image of Hashu rowing the boat on the river and journeying towards unknown leaving the corpse of Chowdhury and the corpse of his unjust domination behind (Ahmed, 2017, 02:12:50). The river will protect her, it will take her to her destination away from all the corruption and degeneration. Thus, the women become assimilated with nature on the riverbed. There is one woman whose miserable journey on this polluted earth is ended, but she succeeds in leaving her progeny to continue living in this world, and there is another woman who is beginning a new life though her fate is still uncertain because nobody knows how she will escape the charges, but she is determined to save her child and bring her child safely to this world. Golapi's newborn child and Hashu's unborn child, both are their mothers' child and are protected by the mothers, the Padma and Haldaa, who are also at stake. *Haldaa* has brilliantly presented the link between woman and nature and conveyed the message to keep all the mothers, that is to say both woman and nature, safe from being treated as properties as well as only the agents of reproduction which indicates both production of offspring and economic production. This is where the ideas propounded by both essentialist ecofeminists and socialist ecofeminists are excellently integrated, and the protests against the subjugation of nature and women in which all ecofeminists participate together become the ultimate objective of *Haldaa*. Similarly, though not as obviously as *Haldaa*, *Padmapuran* too shows the dangers of man-made environmental crisis and its severe consequences on human beings especially women and leaves a message to save the river in order to save people and improve their conditions.

Endnotes

1. The poet and singer who leads a group of singers in singing duels, known as *Kabigaan*, a form of Bengali folk performance.
2. The eldest wife/daughter-in-law.
3. The people of third gender.
4. The leader of the group, respected by other Hijras like a mother.

References

- Ahmed, T. (Director). (2017). *Haldaa* [Film]. H.M. Ibrahim.
- Carlassare, E. (1994). Essentialism in ecofeminist discourse. In C. Merchant (Ed.), *Key Concepts in Critical Theory: Ecology* (pp. 220-234). Humanities Press.
- Carlassare, E. (2000). Socialist and cultural ecofeminism: Allies in resistance. *Ethics and the Environment*, 5(1), 89-106.
- Gaard, G. (2011). Ecofeminism revisited: Rejecting essentialism and re-placing species in a material feminist environmentalism. *Feminist Formations*, 23(2), 26-53.
- Gates, B. T. (1996). A root of ecofeminism: Ecoféminisme. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 3(1), 7-16.
- Glazebrook, T. (2002). Karen Warren's ecofeminism. *Ethics and the Environment*, 7(2), 12-26.
- Krishna, N. R. & Jha, P. (2014). Ecofeminism in the novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 2(7), 103-109.

- Mellor, M. (1997). New woman, new earth-settling the agenda. *Organization & Environment*, 10(3), 296-308.
- Oksala, J. (2018). Feminism, capitalism, and ecology. *Hypatia*, 33(2), 216-234.
- Polash, R. (Director). (2021). *Padmapuran* [The Legend of Padma] [Film]. Punnah Films.
- Ruether, R. R. (1997). Ecofeminism: First and third world women. *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy*, 18(1), 33-45.
- Vance, L. (1997). Ecofeminism and wilderness. *NWSA Journal*, 9(3), 60-76.