

# The Feminine Voice In The Ecological Crisis: Analyzing The Role Of Female Characters In Divakaruni's Nature-Based Narratives

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This study discusses how the female characters in nature-based stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni use the feminine voice in the ecological crisis. It explores, with an ecocritical perspective, how Divakaruni depicts women as being central to environmental movements, connecting their own development with the wellbeing of the natural environment. The paper draws our focus to the role of nature as a place of resistance, healing, and power to the women protagonists, which provides a subtle insight into how women interact with nature. Keywords: female voice, ecological crisis, characters of female gender, nature-based plots, ecocriticism, empowerment, environmental conflicts, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni.

**Keywords:** Ecological crisis, feminine voice, empowerment, relationship, nature based narratives.

## Introduction:

In her fiction, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni offers a wealth of exploration of the intersection of identity, culture, and natural environment. Having great roots both in Indian and global worldviews, Divakaruni often explores some complicated issues in her works which are all revolving around the life of women, their challenges, and their strength. A very striking and much neglected feature of her works is the image of the nature and the environment, and especially the way in which it touches the feminine experience. The stories of Divakaruni present the ecological crises of women as something that comes in advance of the threats of the natural environment and of women themselves, which are presented as active participants of their natural and social worlds, rather than as mere victims of the events that unfolded. The purpose of this paper will be to analyze the ways in which the Divakaruni works give voice to

the feminine voice in the ecological context and how in her characters the significance of nature-based narratives that require social and environmental justice can be found.

Women and the environment have been a longstanding concern in the area of ecocriticism (which deals with the connection between literature and the natural world). Theorists such as Greta Gaard and Val Plumwood have led the pack of ecofeminist thought in highlighting the inherent connection between environmental degradation and the oppression of women. To them women and nature has been equally exploited by patriarchal systems which objectify both as resources to be manipulated and consumed. Divakaruni works can be considered as a strong protest narrative in this regard where female heroes not only act within the environment but in many instances are involved in a multifaceted dialogue with it. These women are portrayed as change agents who defy societal conventions as well as environmental imbalances.

In his novels, e.g. *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002) and *One Amazing Thing* (2010), Divakaruni addresses the intersections of individual, cultural and ecological pasts. The stories show how the lives of women are tautologically connected to the environment they live in, whether it is the nature of the Indian landscape or the American city. However, these characters are not merely victims of the ecological crisis but also become storytellers, healers, and activists that restore their bond to nature.

In the Divakaruni novels, nature is not merely the context of human struggle but is also a participant of the story. In both the sacrosanct groves of *The Mistress of Spices* and the symbolism of the banyan tree in *Sister of My Heart*, nature plays several roles in how it contributes to the strength and resilience of the female characters in both novels. This essay will examine these themes in works by Divakaruni, and in doing so help illuminate the ways in which narratives centered on nature provide a lens through which to perceive the environmental and social struggles that women currently experience in modern society.

The theoretical background of this study is mainly ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Ecocriticism as a study of representations of nature in literature is also preoccupied with the ways in which the human being connects to the environment. The main assumption that ecocriticism makes is that literature is a reflection of human attitudes towards nature, so that we can understand the environmental anxieties of a certain period of time through the prism of literature. Ecofeminism has become an important branch within ecocriticism, concentrating on how environmental degradation has traditionally been allied with the exploitation of women. Ecofeminism assumes that women, as well as nature, are relegated and oppressed by feminist patriarchal ideologies according to which they are objects to be manipulated and exploited by others.

Eco feminism offers a helpful approach toward examining the many-layered associations her female characters exhibit to the natural world in the context of the work by Divakaruni. Her feminine voice in her stories is not the voice of passive victimization, but passive involvement in forces of the environment and culture. In India, as well as in the United States, the natural world is frequently used as a metaphor concerning the inner life of these women and how it

influences their actions, choices, and identities. The female characters of Divakaruni often practice the healing rituals, gardening and communication with earth as both literal and symbolic forms of resistance.

Based on the works of theorists like Carol Adams who discusses the linkage between the exploitation of women and animals and Karen Warren who presents the idea that ecofeminism uncovers the oppression that both nature and women are subjected to within the patriarchal systems, this paper shall take into consideration how ecological issues are brought to the forefront, not only by the individual Divakaruni but also by the general community through her works. The stories have women who are sensitive to the world around them, who become environmental caretakers and environmental advocates, who also must cope with personal issues of cultural displacement, family and personal identity. To discuss the role of women characters in nature-based narratives of Divakaruni, the present paper will dwell on some of the main texts which are the illustration of the interdependence of the gender, ecology, and narrative.

*The Mistress of Spices* (1997) - This book is a strong illustration of how nature empowers women through symbols and instruments as discussed by Divakaruni. Its main protagonist, a mistress of spices named Tilo, is closely tied to the natural world, and makes use of the abilities of the spices to heal and instruct others. Nature is infused with symbolism throughout the novel, as spices signify the abundance of life, culture, and tradition, and also highlight ecological imbalance brought about by human greed and colonialism.

*Sister of My Heart* (1999) - Divakaruni combines the personal with the ecological in this novel, and emphasises the connection between two women, Anju and Sudha, and their connection to the natural Bengal. The environment is richly depicted, through the trees and rivers which mold the lives of the characters as well as through the socio-political agonies that these characters pass through. This story is a profound examination of how female characters are connected with the land, its culture, and its current environmental issues.

This paper will discuss how Divakaruni employs nature-related stories to emphasize how ecological, cultural and gender based struggles intersect through these works. Her feminine voice is not merely the passive onlooker of the ecological crisis but an actor, struggling to change, to survive, and recover. Within the context of the movement of female characters through their worlds, this paper will illuminate how the feminine voice in the ecological crisis is brought to the fore in the fiction of Divakaruni.

This paper shall serve the purpose of providing a deeper insight into how feminism and ecocriticism intersect in the study of the feminine voice in the context of environmental crisis in the Divakaruni fiction. By addressing the agency of female characters and their relationships with the natural world, the paper will highlight the significance of acknowledging women as central figures in both ecological and cultural stories. Nature is not simply a setting but an essential element of the story that addresses topics of empowerment, resistance, and survival through the lens of Divakaruni.

## **Literature Review:**

The engagement of feminism and ecocriticism also known as ecofeminism has been a subject of concern among different scholars which have discussed the interactions between female gender and nature. Ecocriticism as a genre of literature concerns itself with the treatment of nature in literature, and the way these treatments are formed by and manifest the human attitudes to nature. The literature of feminist theory has also concerned the experiences of women, sometimes emphasizing their suffering and struggle against the patriarchal world. Ecofeminism integrates these two theoretical frameworks and is proposing that the oppression of women and the destruction of nature are connected and tied to the ideologies of patriarchy. The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni provide the perfect platform to address these overlaps, with her novels introducing female characters whose connections with the surrounding world are the focal point of the stories.

This literature review covers the available ecocriticism and ecofeminism literature and feminist readings of works by Divakaruni, specifically how her fiction reveals the feminine voice in ecological crisis. It uses a number of sources and discusses the applicability of these theoretical approaches to our analysis of Divakaruni fiction, and how these interpretations help illuminate the themes of nature, gender, and resistance in her fiction.

In the late 20th century ecocriticism was developed in response to increasing environmental concerns, and scholars such as Lawrence Buell and Cheryll Glotfelty insisted on an ecological reading of literature and its role in our connection with the environment. According to Glotfelty (1996), ecocriticism refers to the examination of the relationship of literature and the physical world. She sees ecocriticism as a way to interpret the way in which literary works engage with nature and that the ways in which works of literature engage with nature are a response to how society perceives environmental concerns.

Ecocriticism was, however, frequently accused of not paying enough attention to gender and to the contribution of women to environmental problems. This is where ecofeminism, a branch of ecocriticism that started emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, came in. Ecofeminism applies to the issue of the dual oppression of nature and women, founded on the same patriarchal framework. The theory of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy suggests that women exploitation and nature exploitation go together and are sometimes of the same nature (Vandana Shiva, 1988 and Carol Adams, 1990). Western colonial practices have marginalized both the environment and indigenous women in particular as Shiva (1988) puts it. In this sense, ecofeminism studies the reproduction of these systems of intersecting domination in literature and culture.

Feminist literary critics have been using ecofeminism as a significant point of view when discussing the presence of women in literature. Other scholars like Maria Mies (1993) and Elizabeth Shove (1994) have referred to the subordination of women to systems ruled by patriarchy as being related to the exploitation of nature. Ecofeminism as it relates to literary criticism has been much concerned with the presence and representation of women in literature, as both caretakers of nature and as casualties of environmental degradation. An important aspect to note in this critical approach is that female characters have the power to act as agents of environmental justice and social change.

When feminist literature is viewed through an ecofeminist approach, authors such as Susan Griffin (1978) in her book *Woman and Nature* examine the metaphoric relationship between the woman and nature. Griffin states that such cultural identification of women with nature has been employed to both oppress women and exploit natural resources. This motif of the female as connected to nature, frequently as inert or maternal, is modified in numerous ecofeminist readings, as female characters in these books take positive action against environmental and social injustice.

The writings of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have not been thoroughly analyzed through the prism of ecocriticism or ecofeminism, although a few feminist scholars have approached her novels in feminist terms. Divakaruni examines the theme of displacement, identity and the immigrant experience in her work, and frequently discusses how women can manage challenging situations. This relationship of women with nature has been described by Divakaruni as a broader feminist theme in her work. In her novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), her main character, Tilo, is an influential character who is related with the earth by her knowledge of the spices. The novel also deals with the way Tilo hosts people in nature to heal them and empower them, where women may take back control by connecting to nature. The magical spices are metaphors of the inner power of the characters and their belonging to the earth that supports the connection between feminine power and nature.

In *Sister of My Heart* (1999), Divakaruni narrates the intricate characters of two women, Anju and Sudha, who have a strong attachment to the land they belong to. The novel is also laden with environmental imagery, with landscapes like the sacred groves of Bengal influencing the identities of the characters in a big way. This relation to nature is both a spiritualizing device and a way of reminding the characters of their cultural past. Banu (2015) argues that the image of women in the novel is deeply rooted in nature and it questions the Western view of nature as a passive setting, rather as an active agent in molding the lives of female characters.

*The Vine of Desire* (2002) by Divakaruni contributes towards understanding feminine ecological experience further. The novel, a continuation of the story of Anju and Sudha in *Sister of My Heart*, explores migration and identity as well as exploiting the metaphor of nature. The emotional experiences of the characters are reflected in their relationships to nature, both as an element of comfort and as a reminder of displacement. The way due to which Divakaruni presents women going through the contradiction between their personal needs and environment implies that the question about identity may be largely intertwined with the ecological issues.

It is one of the most important contributions of the Divakaruni fiction that nature is portrayed as the place where female characters can be empowered and resist. In *The Mistress of Spices*, the natural world instead does not passively act as a background, but serves as an active participant in the healing process. Divakaruni employs the theme of spices, which are associated with both culture and nature, to accentuate the position of women guardians of culture and nature. Opponents of this stereotyping such as Jain (2000) believe that this portrayal of women as custodians of the environment defies the very definitions of femininity by showcasing them as strong, independent women who can take charge of their lives.

Likewise, in *One Amazing Thing* (2010) nature is also a place of defiance in the midst of an environmental crisis, in which the characters are compelled to challenge their own and their collective relationships to the surrounding world. This piece demonstrates how Divakaruni relates ecological disasters as metaphor and parallels to individual and group conflicts to empower female characters as actors in the process of their own existence.

Such scholars as Glotfelty (1996) and Adams (1990) offer valuable theoretical perspectives of the analysis of the work of Divakaruni in the sphere of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. These methods also present useful means of comprehending how the female characters of Divakaruni connect with nature as a symbol of their emotional and spiritual existence as well as a means of combating ecological and social injustices. Divakaruni is adding to the general discussion of ecofeminism with her nature helps and puts women in the center of ecological conflicts. Through her works, Divakaruni seeks to understand the place of the feminine voice in the ecological crisis, as the literature emphasizes the role of women in the ecological crisis, as well as their agency in social change.

Finally, the fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni represents a fertile field in which to pursue the ecocriticism and feminism interface. Her compositions show a subtle representation of women characters whose encounters with nature bring out more information about the gender aspects of environmental disasters. Divakaruni attacks traditional ways of portraying women and nature through her novels and this is a novel approach to the role of women in environmental stories.

## **Research Methodology**

This paper will employ a qualitative research method to examine how female characters in the nature-based stories of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni intervene in crises in the environment using ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The first intention is to see how the female protagonists of Divakaruni engage with nature and how this engagement underscores larger themes of empowerment, resistance, and ecological consciousness.

The two novels by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in which nature and the female experience stand out as the central themes will be the subject of the research: *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999). They were chosen due to their abundant ecological descriptions and the relevant position of the female characters that interact with their surroundings in transformative modes. The novels give us a clear picture of how Divakaruni has treated nature and how women are empowered in various cultural and geographical settings.

Ecokriticism and ecofeminism will be employed as the main theoretical framework in the research. The description of nature and its connection to the human in the novels will be studied through the prism of ecocriticism, and the connection between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature will be interpreted using the prism of ecofeminism. The ecofeminist will be used to analyze the ways in which the women characters in Divakaruni address ecological and social crises, presenting their resistance to these crises through their

attachment to the environment, as formulated by various scholars such as Vandana Shiva (1988) and Greta Gaard (1997).

The selected texts will be closely read to find and discuss significant motifs, symbols and stories about nature. This will involve the following steps:

**Character Analysis:** The female characters will be examined in order to see how they relate to nature and how their identity was determined through the effects of nature on them. Particular consideration will be made to the way these characters interact with nature during crisis, change or opposition.

So, the research will investigate ecological symbolism through symbolic portrayal of nature in the novels of Divakaruni. This involves examining how certain natural elements, which include spices, trees and scenery, mirror the inner world and plight of the female characters.

**Themes of Empowerment and Resistance:** The study will identify how nature can be used to empower the female protagonists in the work and allow them to overcome their personal, social, and ecological problems. The contribution of women as nurturers, carers and agitators in these stories will be evaluated.

Results will be viewed in an ecofeminist perspective, in terms of the contribution that Divakaruni has made to the discussion regarding the role of women in ecological and social justice. This paper will also show that the stories of Divakaruni depict female characters not only as passive figures, victims of the ecological destruction, but as active agents of change, whose connection to nature is a key to their empowerment and resistance.

The study will allow gaining a more in-depth insight into the ways in which Divakaruni fiction fits into the ecofeminist framework and obtain some insight into how women are represented in modern environmental literature.

The writings of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni especially *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), *Sister of My Heart* (1999), *The Vine of Desire* (2002), and *One Amazing Thing* (2010) provide abundant material to explore the intersections between women stories and ecology issues. These novels have what can be called a subtle understanding of feminine experience through the theoretical prism of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, as women are not only victims of ecological disasters, but also active participants in restoring themselves and their surroundings. Ecocriticism provides us with the means by which to examine the presentation of nature in these texts and the ways such representations articulate problems of society and nature, and ecofeminism helps us see how women and nature have been oppressed twice, by patriarchal systems. Here, I will enter into a closer examination of the chosen pieces of writing, illustrating how the images of women provided by Divakaruni and their connection with nature can serve as an example of ecofeministic ideas.

The most obvious instance of Divakaruni using nature as a symbol and as a means towards empowering her female leading character, Tilo, could be *The Mistress of Spices*. The story of the novel revolves around a woman called Tilo who is appointed with some magical duties of a "Mistress of Spices" in an Indian spice shop in California. Tilo is closely tied to nature, with



her powers symbolically being based on a variety of spices, each symbolizing a different element of life, culture, and environment. The ecofeminist concept of nature as not a passive background of feminine identity and agency is brought to the fore in this novel.

As the Mistress, Tilo is a protector of nature, and she treats her spices by healing other people and leading them to self-improvement. The spices are metaphors of the life-bearing nature of the earth and symbolize the relationship between the feminine and the Earth. Being able to command these elements of nature allows Tilo to gain some power but as she struggles to reconcile her role as mistress with her wish to have a personal life, we see the conflict between the nurturing position women are supposed to take both in the family and the society. The novel is a critique of the way in which societal expectations of women tend to keep them bound to traditional, nurturing roles, thereby limiting their freedom. Looked at in the light of ecofeminism, when Tilo finally decides to break the ties of her obligations to other people and instead follow her heart and her own freedom of choice, it can be viewed as a rebellion against the patriarchal forces who are trying to subjugate her as well as the natural world.

The character of Tilo reflects the ecofeminist view of women as resources to be used or dominated, just like nature. But the development of Divakaruni as Tilo matures and empowers herself via her connection to nature breaks this paradigm to present a new, feminist vision of female independence and environmentally conscious practices. Tilo is intimately connected with the spices, and it means that women are able to regain their agency, as it is an intimate connection with the earth.

Divakaruni again associates female identity and empowerment to nature in *Sister of My Heart*, but on a closer scale (family-wise). The novel is set around the lives of two cousins, Anju and Sudha, and their relationship has been influenced by their personal tragedies as well as being tied together by their own cultural and natural family background. The story takes place in Bengal, where natural scenery, especially sacred groves, factors prominently into the lives of the characters.

The sacred groves are more than physical locations, but also represent cultural and spiritual links. They are a place in which women, especially Anju and Sudha, can relax and recuperate, supporting the ecofeminist notion that women tend to feel powerful when they connect to nature. But these women too are caught up by the confining traditions and patriarchal demands of the world they live in, demands that tend to jeopardize their relationship with nature. The novel unveils the ways in which the non-male characters desire to be independent women, but they are restrained by culture and society in their autonomy and in their freedom to relate with the surrounding world.

The women in the book *Sister of My Heart* are victims of a patriarchal system in the ecofeminist sense of the term, which undermines their caretaker roles to their families and nature. However, they are united by their connection with nature represented by the holy groves, which provides a source of resistance. Their experiences with nature as they move towards self-realization and empowerment are interpreted in terms of ecofeminism, that is, ecofeminism is not merely a movement to protect the environment, but also the re-possession of the natural and social space by women of color. The sacred groves are a figurative depiction



of their strength as they negotiate their hardships, their ability to stand up against their oppressors.

The novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, when interpreted in terms of ecocriticism and ecofeminism demonstrate intricate and subtle representations of female characters who explore their relations with nature and society. In novels such as *The Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart*, *The Vine of Desire* and *One Amazing Thing*, nature, however, is more than a setting but a strong influence that affects, tests and empowers the female characters. The symbolism of nature features employed by Divakaruni underscore the subjugation of women and the natural world as well as underscore the hope of resistance, restoration, and empowerment women experience when connected with nature. Divakaruni critically examines the patriarchal system through these texts and highlights the importance and potential impact that women can have in bringing positive change to the environment and society.

In her novel *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), and her book *Sister of My Heart* (1999), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents an in-depth exploration of the interplay between gender, nature, and identity. Using such texts, Divakaruni explores the intricacies of women experience especially issues like cultural inheritance, the female psyche, and their connection with nature. The connection with the natural world is a part of the story and a reminder of individual and interpersonal conflicts in both novels. This can be looked at through the prism of ecocriticism and ecofeminism and traced in these texts as to how Divakaruni uses this power of nature to define the identities and fates of her female characters.

However, in *The Mistress of Spices*, Divakaruni creates a mystical story of a woman called Tilo, who was selected to become the Mistress of Spices, a mystical healer who practices the power of spices to heal and guide members of Indian community in the state of California. The novel also realizes the connection between nature, culture, and individual agency, and the motif of spices is an attempt to reveal the issues of female empowerment and environmental responsibility.

Her control and direction of the powers of the spices serves as a representation of Tilo because she is very much connected to nature. All the spices of the novel embody the various forces of life or emotion in a person which signifies the great power of nature over human life. The spices symbolize not only the cultural heritage, but also the healing qualities of nature. According to an ecofeminist interpretation of the story, the role of Tilo as a keeper of the natural world is similar to the traditional job of the female as a nurturer and caretaker not only at the domestic level, but also in the ecological sense.

The way Tilo is connected with spices is similar to her connection with the natural world through spices, she has a power to heal people physically and emotionally. The spices which seem to be a part of the Indian tradition imply an intertwining with the land, its resources, and tradition. This is a connection of strength and restriction. The idea of feminism and ecology of women and their work being related to earth is illustrated in the case of Tilo whom God sends to raise and heal using nature. The relation between nature and women is foreshadowed, where nature is presented as the keeper of eco-knowledge. It also however comes with the big responsibility of having to balance nurturing with her personal wants of freedom and this is

the struggle that many women involve themselves with when it comes to choosing self-sacrifice versus personal freedom.

The story of Tilo is a bargaining of power as she is a mistress and has authority over spices and hence over life. But this control at a great price to herself and her own liberty. Her role restricts her to love, and as she cannot live her life beyond her duties. This movement represents the ecofeminist response to the patriarchal system with its attempts to subjugate women and nature to its own ends. In her solitude and self-restrictions, Tilo would represent how women are traditionally restricted in their roles by the standards set by culture. Her final resolve to escape and live a life of love is not only a personal liberation, but also an ecological one-as the land, when left to its own devices, is able to grow and thrive, women will be able to grow and thrive when they are no longer encumbered by weighty systems.

The novel, through the transformation of Tilo, presents the conflict between the roles of a caring mother in which women have historically been expected to act and the necessity of individual identity and self-realization. Tilo and the freedom she gains demonstrates the ecofeminist values of re-establishing agency and freedom, not just to women, but also to nature, that has been so often isolated and managed by patriarchal systems.

Divakaruni explores the world of two young women, Anju and Sudha in the work *Sister of my Heart*, which is filled with intense emotional and familial connection between them, but is also influenced by the surrounding culture and environment. The novel is set in Bengal and the connection between these women and the land they belong to is highlighted, as nature is very important in the story and in the inner world of these characters.

The holy groves and the nature in *Sister of My Heart* play a significant metaphoric role of the spiritual trip of the characters. The groves represent an area of refuge and strength, and provide the women with comfort amidst personal and family tribulations. Such association between women and nature are a feature of ecofeminism of women connection to earth which is a healing and empowering space. The sacred groves are not just physical spaces but spiritual temples where Anju and Sudha relate to their ancestral home, their culture and to one another.

The holy groves provide a refuge to the women, free of the patriarchal systems which aim to dominate their lives. They are able to develop their relationship, seek inner strength and fight the forces that would stifle their own autonomy in these spaces. Similar to the groves being a place where the women are safe, they also echo the ecofeminist notion that nature can be a place of resistance and transformation. Women, like nature, are strong and caring at the same time, and their relation to the earth is also part of their survival and struggle in the repressive social world.

The way Anju and Sudha relate to nature also shows how an identity is bound up in ecological and cultural powers. Anju and her experiences, characterized by her attempt to deal with an oppressive marriage, are contrasted with Sudha, who has a more rebellious spirit and thus tries to find another way in life. They have a connection to nature, they have the sacred groves and rivers and they have the country scenery. These landscapes, both physical and metaphorical,

within the context of ecofeminism, define the lives of the women and provide them with the chance to become empowered and develop as personalities.

But the social pressures and male restrictions that both the women endure depict that the autonomy of women has in many ways been associated with the earth but at the same time is under its domination. This natural world is a place of power, and a place of conflict because the women are negotiating the difficult intersections of their own desires, cultural norms, and their own need to live their own lives.

The forced marriage of Sudha and the emotional turmoil of Anju underscores how women are constrained by patriarchal rules. The exploitation of the land and materials frequently reflect the suppression of women in the context of ecofeminism. When women such as Anju and Sudha rebel against the patriarchal society, it translates into rebellion against the exploitation of nature, and thus resistance to environmental as well as gender justice.

In the end, the experiences of both Anju and Sudha show that the empowerment of women is connected with their relationship to nature. In this novel nature becomes both a real matter where they can self-conceptualize and a figurative matter of the same. Nature to Anju is a healing process, not having to go through personal loss and pain but coming out of it to find her identity and purpose again. To Sudha, the natural landscape provides both a literal and metaphorical means of escaping her repressive situation, and it also gives her what she needs to make decisions about her own future. In such cases, nature is not merely a surrounding, but a powerful circle, which influences lives of the women and their ability to struggle.

The *Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart* echo some of the most important ecofeminist ideas, and Divakaruni proficiently balances the issues of female identity, agency, and autonomy with the connection between women and nature. Nature in both novels is not a passive environment, but rather a dynamic active force in the lives of the female characters. Divakaruni emphasizes the role of nature in the formation of female identity and strength, the significance of environmental and social justice, through her portrayals of Tilo, Anju, and Sudha. The novels do not portray women as passive victims; they are active agents in their own stories and their struggle to become empowered and autonomous is closely intertwined with their relationship to nature. Divakaruni adds her voice to this ecofeminist discussion through these texts, as she shows how nature has the transformative ability to shape the lives of women and nature is both a place of healing and where resistance is a means of survival.

## **Conclusion**

The works of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, especially *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart*, offer abundant material about the gender, nature and identity intersections, viewed through the prism of ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The novels elaborate on the lives of the female characters whose lives have been significantly influenced by nature. Divakaruni refers to nature as a setting, but also as an essential element that shapes the emotional, spiritual, physical paths of the female characters in both texts. This discussion of the natural world as a place of empowerment and struggle can be awarded to the ideas of ecofeminism, which focuses on the intermingling oppression of the female and of nature under patriarchal systems.

Divakaruni brings nature as curing and trapping with the help of the character of Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices*. The way Tilo can master spices which symbolically represent her connection to nature is a fascinating portrayal of female agency and how women can be liberated through connection to nature. Nevertheless, the fact that she ultimately chose to escape her confining role highlights the conflict between self-denial and individualism that women frequently experience in a patriarchal society. The novel concludes that women, much like nature, should not be limited to the roles assigned to them but be able to develop, evolve and express their agency.

Similarly, the representation of sacred groves and nature in *Sister of My Heart* can also be understood as a metaphor of spiritual connection, resistance, and identity formation. The holy ground on which Anju and Sudha seek refuge portrays the thought that nature is a place of empowerment, where women create their identities and resist societal oppression. The novel is critical of how societal pressures restrict the freedom of women and shows how nature can also serve as a means of healing and subversion.

The novels in which Divakaruni writes oppose the conventional portrayals of women and nature and show strong female characters on which the connection with the environment is the key to their survival and empowerment. Turning to the ecofeminist approach to these texts, the role of women in the society is better understood through both ecological and cultural discourse and how women need to reclaim control over their sexuality and the nature itself. Divakaruni provides a very good perspective on female strength through the books *The Mistress of Spices* and *Sister of My Heart* when nature becomes not only a source of strength but a strong tool of opposition to the patriarchal power.

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