

Reifying Feminine Principles of River: An Ecofeminist Reading of Geeta Mehta's *A River Sutra*

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Abstract

The term 'river' in India directly imprints one's mind with the image of a goddess; sacred, kinetic, dynamic, fertile, and life-sustaining. India is a riparian civilization. The Narmada, also known as 'life line of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh', rises from Amarkantak and flows westward, making a traditional boundary between North India and South India, eventually draining into the Arabian Sea. Along with its geography, rich biodiversity, anthropological, architectural and environmental significance, the Narmada is an integral part of the Indian religion, culture, folks, fables, legends, and literature. The Narmada's dam/age not only annihilates the entire civilization of the natives but also instigates the desertification of their culture and sustenance process. In *A River Sutra* Geeta Mehta refutes the patriarchal notion of the river as inert, passive, weak, and fragmented through some intriguing tales that shore up to tie all the life-supporting feminine principles of the Narmada together.

During the publication of Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), 'Save Narmada Agitation' or 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' (NBA) was popular. But she has maintained a studied indifference to the historical reality that the Narmada is endangered for over a decade since the inception of the Narmada Valley Project which comprises two multipurpose dams. This particular paper explores Mehta's attempt to re(envison) the feminine principles of the Narmada in the context of Indian religion, culture, tradition, spirituality, and society. The article discusses in detail her creative, interesting, and seamless flow of story-telling that powerfully evokes and reactivates the stream of environmental consciousness in her readers against the unjust political actions.

Keywords: Geeta Mehta, *A River Sutra*, Ecofeminism, Indian Fiction, Narmada, Feminine Principle, Ecophilosophy

Geeta Mehta is comparatively less well known Indian women writer, although she has now published four books. Her journalist, diasporic experience, and political background deftly unearth India's mysticism, history, culture, environment, politics and people. Her first book

Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East (1979) is a collection of satirical essays that lends a witty analysis of contacts between westerners in search of Eastern Enlightenment and Indians becoming westernized. *Raj: A Novel* (1989) is a historical fiction that reveals the struggles of life during the British Raj in India through the eyes of a highly born woman, Jaya Singh. *Snakes and Ladders: Glimpses of Modern India* (1997) explores the unflinching account of Modern India. *Eternal Ganesha: From Birth to Rebirth* (2006) explicates the rich religious and cultural meanings of the Hindu's beloved deity, Ganesha.

During the publication of Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), 'Save Narmada Agitation' or 'Narmada Bachao Andolan' (NBA) was popular. But she has maintained a studied indifference to the historical reality that the Narmada is endangered for over a decade since the inception of the Narmada Valley Project which comprises two multipurpose dams. This particular paper explores Mehta's attempt to re(envision) the feminine principles of the Narmada in the context of Indian religion, culture, tradition, spirituality, and society. The article discusses in detail her creative, interesting, and seamless flow of story-telling that powerfully evokes and reactivates the stream of environmental consciousness in her readers against the unjust political actions.

The renowned Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva's argument about the Third World women's ecological consciousness is worth quoting here to support the objective of this paper, "Third World women are bringing the concern with living and survival back to centre stage in human history in recovering the chances for the survival of all life, they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society, and through it the recovery of the earth as sustainer and provider" (Shiva 214).

Mehta's *A River Sutra* is written in a frame narrative, along with the familiar model of Boccaccio's *Decameron* or Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, linking the six stories around the spine of a single character and a country inn. 'Sabdakalpadrum' (standard Sanskrit dictionary), gives several etymological meanings of the word "Sutra". In literal terms, 'sutra' is a thread or string, it has a unifying theme, and sutra is also a maxim which is usually aphoristic. The Narmada functions as a suite narrative arc threading set of stories together which suggests that a philosophical or ethical principle can be pulled, perhaps in aphoristic form, from the river's symbolic presence in the tales.

A River Sutra starts with the epigraph "Listen, O brother/Man is the greatest truth/Nothing beyond" (Love Songs of Chandidas) which suggests that "man is the greatest truth just because he is swayed by the power of love and reaches out to others" (Sharma, Milan 306). The Narmada witnesses the lives of humans through the reflections of love and its power, desire, and its cost. She is both the setting and the character in the novel. The narrator appears as an interlocutor, too shadowy, even sometimes a passive hearer of the stories to be called a

protagonist. The wave of the stories rises from the mouthpiece of the main narrator and subsumes into another frame and inset tales. Even one of the stories is narrated through entries in the diary to avoid the monotony of telling the tale. Narrators of the stories converge on the banks of the mythical-canonical river, Narmada, and cherish mental serenity by telling their experiences.

A River Sutra has meta-narrative that narrates six consecutive stories variously titled ‘The Monk’s Story’, ‘The Teacher’s Story’, ‘The Executive’s Story’, ‘The Courtesan’s Story’, ‘The Musician’s Story’ and ‘The Minstrel’s Story’ and ends with ‘The Song of the Narmada’. An unnamed, widowed, bureaucrat, tired of his ‘worldly obligations’, accepts the position of running a government rest house, situated on the bank of the Narmada river. He assumes this stage of his life as ‘vanaprastha’, the third ‘ashrama’ (stage) of the Vedic ashram system where the retired goes to the forest to reflect.

The narrator’s forest retreat, the rest house, is situated halfway up a hill of the Vindhya Range and one side of his cottage is occupied with mango trees while its seven hundred feet below flows the Narmada. “A great aid to my meditations is the beauty of our location...fertile fields stretching from miles to miles into southern horizon until they meet the gray shadows of the Satpura Hills...bamboo thickets and trees overgrown...suspending the bungalow in jungle so dense...” (4). The book tells about the mythology which says that born of the god Shiva’s sweat, the river first appeared on earth as a beautiful, tempting, changeable virgin, and Shiva named her Narmada, the Delightful one. She is holy both to the pilgrims and to the aboriginal Nagas of the region. Her properties include absolution for attempted suicide, as well as cures for snakebite and madness.

The Minstrel’s story has two parts, in the first part; Naga Baba saved the unnamed girl and gave her a new life in the lap of nature. In the second part; the girl grows as a river-minstrel. In a poetical and metaphorical manner, the song she sings to the river is also strangely about her as she and the river both are twice-born. The animalization and commodification of woman are quite evident in this story. Her father calls her a ‘misfortune’ because her mother died while giving birth to her. “I was never allowed to eat until everyone else had eaten, so I was always hungry. And I was beaten by my father” (249-250). He then sold her to the brothel keeper saying that she was her new mother, but the woman never treated her in an expected way or as a daughter, instead “she just kept me (Uma) in that house for those men (customers)” (250). In the brothel she is called by the name ‘Chand’, meaning the moonlight, “The customers chose the name, they said my skin is as soft as moonlight” (250).

On the ‘night of Shiva’, Naga Baba had to beg alms from an ‘unclean’ house before returning to the jungle. Thus he goes to the brothel where he sees “A child was cowering behind

a plastic-covered sofa, her face twisted with pain as a man gripped her chin in one hand. With his other hand the man was lifting the child's small body to bring her lips closer to his own" (245). The monk had to intimidate the employer to get the child as alms and ironically the brothel keeper assumes that he would use her sexually. The child is called as a misfortune; she is maltreated, abused, and exploited. While giving the child to Naga Baba, the woman says "But I paid five hundred rupees for her. It was a great charity I did her father. When I bought her there was no flesh on her at all. See how well I feed her, and still there is not enough of her to satisfy a man... If you still want to keep her so badly, come back in twelve or thirteen years. She won't be any good to me by then... And do not curse me later when you find what trouble she brings. She doesn't even have a name. Her own father calls her misfortune" (246).

Naga Baba had rescued her on the night of Shiva, so he gripped her arms, and lowered her into the water, and said "The Narmada claims all girls as hers. Tonight you become a daughter of the Narmada" (254), and gave her a new life and new name, Uma, means the 'peace of night'. Apparently, the child who used to be feeble, scared, orphaned eventually attains a kind of identity with the river. The Naga Baba had left her to follow the next stage of his enlightenment. Tariq Mia says, "If the Narmada was born from Shiva's penance, then surely Uma was born of the Naga Baba's penance" (258). He is apprehensive that Naga Baba would ever leave Uma, "I didn't think the Naga Baba would ever leave Uma. She was more than a child to him. She was the fruit of his austerity... Tell me, what higher enlightenment could he acquire by leaving her?" (258).

Naga Baba re-enters mainstream life as Professor Shankar. Earlier he used to head the Archaeological Department, but he got fed up with the red tape and resigned from government service and wrote a remarkable book, *The Narmada Survey* and became the chairman of the Indian Preservation Trust. He comes back not with any mythical or religious notion, but simply with the declaration, "I love this river... I'm afraid I only care for the river's immortality, not its holiness... What we are seeing today is the same river that was seen by the people who lived here a hundred thousand years ago. To me such a sustained record of human presence in the same place-that is immortality" (263-264). The love of the professor with the river and regard for her immortality draws the analogy between Uma and the Narmada.

Tatvamasi, a Gujarati novel by Dhruv Bhatt gives an overview of the life and culture lived on the banks of the river Narmada, especially, of the tribal folk. Mehta also traces the history of the Narmada from ancient to the contemporary era, "Thousands of years ago the sage Vyasa dictated the *Mahabharata* on this riverbank. Then in our own century this region provided the setting for Kipling's *Jungle Book*. In between countless other men have left their mark on the river... For instance, Kalidas. His poem *The Cloud Messenger* and his great play *Shakuntala*... Then twelve hundred years ago Shankaracharya composed a poem to the river... all the poems

Rupmati and Baz Bhadur wrote when the Narmada appeared to them as a spring from under a tamarind tree” (264-265).

Mehta satisfies all her readers by asserting the point that everybody has different perception about the Narmada, and they might be true in their own way. Professor Shankar says the sacredness of river is “Mere mythology! A waste of time! If anything is sacred about this river, it is the individual experiences of the human beings who have lived here” (267). He mentions about his archaeological research of the area, “Our datings of the rock samples prove they are from the Stone Age. So they must be among the oldest evidence of human life in India. Lower down the same cliff we are finding implements from successive ages-Neolithic, Iron, Bronze.” (267). The purpose of his stay is “This river is an unbroken record of the human race” (268), opposite to narrator’s purpose who wants retreat from the world but ironically this could not be the right to flee because “Too many lives converge on these banks... they were like water flowing through lives to teach us something” (268).

The river minstrel’s chanting provides ecospirituality of the Narmada that reminds us of the roots of ancient Indian traditions that worships all forms of nature. She sings about the grace of the Narmada and her role in cleaning the pollution caused on the river, and how these properties oblige the sages to call her with different names, she pays tribute to the Narmada, “You grace the earth/ The devout call you Kripa/You cleanse the earth/ Of its impurities. The devout call you Surasa/The holy soul/ You leap through the earth/Like a dancing deer. The devout call you Rewa” (273).

The feminine principle of the Narmada can be drawn by equating her journey to Uma. The river minstrel says to the Narmada, “But Shiva called you Delight/ Named you Narmada/From Shiva’s penance you became water. From water you became a woman” (273). Naga Baba as Shiva had taken Uma as alms on the night of Shiva for his penance and dipped her into the Narmada, calling her the daughter of the Narmada and now she is grown a young, beautiful woman. She further chants, “Then he changed you into a river/To cool the lusts of holy men/And called you Narmada, Soother of Desires” (275); the grown Uma is a river minstrel and she satiates the pilgrims with her river music. The lines “You were present at the creation/By Shiva’s command you alone will remain/At the Destruction” (277), points out the agelessness of Uma and immortality of the river.

Professor Shankar explicates the Indian philosophy about the process of human evolution, “soul must travel eighty-four thousand births in order to become a man... Only then can it reenter the world” (281). Being an ascetic, Naga Baba has lived and experienced different life forms and now as Professor Shankar, he has re-entered into the world as a human being. Uma like the Narmada is “twice born/ Once from penance/Once from love” (275) and as

Professor Shankar now says, “I am only a man” (281), she is the love and desire of him. The river minstrel who is young and slender, dresses herself in the ‘crimson sari’ paints an image of the bride, colored in love and desire, and also “purple waters slip like a garment/ From your sloping banks” (276) creates an image of her as a desirable woman. The river seems a beautiful maiden in the prime of her youth, and the nameless narrator remarks, “I watched the water sparkling and disappearing...like the anklets encircling a woman’s foot and thought of the Ascetic watching the dancing woman formed by the rivulets from his own penance” (96). The dancing river with anklets in her foot has an analogy with the river minstrel singing with her instrument on the left shoulder.

The Narmada says, “Bring your knowledge of mankind/And follow me/I will lead you to the next Creation” (278), indicates the sexual consummation of Uma and Professor Shankar as Mehta suggest in the beginning of the novel, “I can see the river flowing to meet her bridegroom in all those variations that delighted the Ascetic” (9). It is interesting to see how all these ideas that characterize the river are larger embodied in Uma, the chief protagonist of the Minstrel’s story, transcends them and creates an atmosphere where Uma and Shankar become the earthly embodiments of the Narmada and the god Shiva and nature and woman merge in perfect gyno-ecological harmony. The flickering clay lamps carried by the current toward the ocean also imply fulfillment. Thus the women and nature have been made to appear extensions of each other. Once she is restored to the process of being, becoming and fulfillment in which she becomes a replica of the great river itself.

The Indianness lies more in the soul of the country than its body (casteism, regionalism, communalism, nepotism and so on) and the soul of the country lies in its thought, aesthetics, philosophy, science and technology, its way of living in entirety and totality, in a word, its entire culture from the ancient times to the present day. Vikram Chandra and Shashi Tharoor have tried yoking of myth to history, and to reinvent the ancient myths in the context of modern times. India is a mystery which cannot be explored in terms of the discursive practices of the novel. Unlike Atwood’s *surfacing* where the narrator escapes from civilization to find a strange communion with nature which is also haunted and hunted, Mehta has taken particular care to present the Narmada as a young, beautiful and desirable woman. The river presented as an organic being full of human emotions, “the river’s heartbeat pulsing under the ground before she reveals herself at last to the anchorites of Shiva deep in meditation around the holy tank at Amarkantak” (5). The narrator observes, “the stream took on the form of a woman-the most dangerous of her kind, a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetics to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, at yet another as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire” (8).

“In Warren’s own words, the boundary conditions specify that an ecofeminist ethic must be an anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and opposed to any ‘ism’ that presupposes or advances a logic of domination” (Cuomo 5). Ecofeminists argue on the notion that the biological differences are another cause of discrimination, such as poets like Petrarch and the aesthetes portray woman as mere physically “beautiful objects”. This ideology leads to the objectification of the female where she is locked into a corner of the room, veiled in some culture, exploited and seduced for her beauty or even exploited and accused of not attaining the parameters of beauty.

Mehta’s next story, the musician’s story deals with the exploitation on the basis of physical beauty. Her mother is embarrassed and insecure enough to support her innocent daughter against the society, turning her into an anti-matriarch, and she says, “Unfortunately my mother seldom spoke to me. My ugliness upset her. When other children stared at me, sniggering at my ugliness, my mother’s eyes filled with tears... Shamed by mother’s tears, I hid in the bathroom, examining myself in the mirror to see if my face was losing any of its coarseness” (210).

God has created the universe without any discrimination, but man has structured the society with the establishment of binary oppositions to assert his superior role in society for exploiting the ‘other’. These binary oppositions are rich/poor, ugly/beautiful, fair/dark, white/black, man/woman. This internalized hatred and the cultural construction of beauty play a crucial role in this story. The girl forces herself to learn the music against her will in order to find some acceptance and identity, but every kind of woman’s art is always forsaken, “He ignored my tears and forced me to continue practicing until the cushions of my fingertip developed calluses” (210).

Marriage is taken as an option to protect girls. Unfortunately, the mother believes that “a woman without genius could be protected only by a husband in a harsh world designed for men” (212). This makes clear the execution of the law which is either obscure or dependent on the interpretation of patriarchy. Her education, economic independence and individual choice is not considered by the parents, and even she regrets about her education, “Just think what my study did to me, an adolescent girl who knew the stain of her ugliness would prevent any man from desiring her, and yet learning only how to express longing” (216).

While giving music lessons, the father instructs her streaming her nature with the river, “Imagine a raga as a riverbed. The grace notes are the water of the river. It is written in the Raga-vivodha that a raga without grace notes is like a night without moonlight, a river without water, a creeper without flowers, a woman without a garment... You must think of yourself as water washing over stone, shaping it with the relentless touch of your love” (215). The man has

manipulated the concept of beauty in literal terms but lacks the essence of true beauty that can be sensed and felt in nature. The father says:

Men are fools... they think only humans respond to beauty. But a feeding deer will drop its food to listen to music, and a king cobra sway its hood in pleasure...Do you hear that peacock's cry? It is the first note of the scale. *Sa*... Can you hear that calf calling its mother? It is the note-*re*... If you sing *ga* three times, very quickly, it is the bleating of a goat...*Ma*, the cry of the heron...*Pa*, the song of the nightingale... *Dha*-the neighing of a horse...*ni*-when the elephant trumpets. "I could hear him imitating the animals... until the nature of the notes became second nature to me. (205)

The girl is struggling for acceptance in the family also, she says, "I struggled to please my father inside the music room, and then outside the room consoled my mother for my ugliness" (213). The ferociously ugly daughter of a genius musician father, after being jilted and betrayed by the man she loves, forswears music forever; she feels 'dead inside', and comes to the Narmada. She is objectified by both, her father as well as the young man, one needs to transfer his music and the other is impatient to enhance his own and both have given her nothing in return and the father suggests her to meditate on the banks of the Narmada, the symbol of Shiva's penance until she gets cured to her past and 'can become again the ragini to every raga' (225). But she is uncertain about the fact that the river has any such powers to recreate her desire in music. Still, she hopes. In the story, one finds the perception of parallelism between the pursuits of a woman and the spontaneity of the Narmada. Geeta Mehta dreams to create a utopian society where exploitation comes to an end.

Marti Kheel perceptively suggests that: "Nature, which has been imaged as female, has been depicted as the "other", the raw material out of which culture and masculine self-identity are formed" (244). The courtesan laments over the annihilation of women condition and pollution of Shahbagh, she bewails:

How Shahbagh has changed in my lifetime. Where there used to be gardens, now we have factories. Our gracious old buildings have been torn down to be replaced by concrete boxes named after politicians. The woods that once ringed the city have been cut down for the shanty-towns of labor colonies. Even the boulevards around our haveli have been overrun so that our view is now only of a bazaar, and we must keep the windows to the west closed because of the smell from the open gutter.

The city is owned by men who believe every human being has a price, and a full purse is power. Trained as scholars, artists, musicians, dancers, we are only women to them, our true function to heave on a mattress and be recompensed by some tawdry necklace flashing its vulgarity on a crushed pillow...oblivious to the frigidness of our salaams....my mother died, and I lost my protection from such men. (167-168)

The Courtesan's story narrates how the women in their tribe are treated as a consumer's goods, merely as an object and instrument of pleasure like *The Handmaid's Tale*. The narrator (we) hears this story from the two narrators, the courtesan and her daughter. The courtesan tells how she failed to protect her daughter from the growing indignity around her or growing pollution of a heatless society ruled by a money-power-muscle nexus.

The strength of Indian is its unity instead of being multicultural society and Mehta is trying to (re)establish the glorious historicity of India by the lines like, "The Nawab (of Shahbagh) was a Muslim but he honored the river's holiness", in the words of Nawab, "Bathing in the waters of the Jamuna purifies a man in seven days, in the waters of the Saraswati in the three, in the waters of the Ganges in one, but the Narmada purifies with a single sight of her waters"(163). The condition of courtesans was comparatively better "Renowned not just for their beauty but for learning, they were in great demand to educate the heirs to India's mightiest kingdoms" (164). Vatsayana's classic *Kama Sutra* describes that she must be the mistress of sixty-four arts and the essence of their art was to teach noblemen good manners. The talent of courtesans' has gradually been ignored and discouraged but still they are "certainly more accomplished than any other woman in India" (165).

The courtesan's seventeen years old daughter has been abducted by the bandit, Rahul Singh who turns out to be a victim of society's injustice, and eventually, both of them, the 'panther' and the 'goat' married to each other. The courtesan's psyche is not different from musician's wife who is more concerned about their chastity and reputation in the society than the well being of their daughter, "With her beauty and her unblemished reputation, she could have married a respectable man. Who will believe in my child's virtue now? Who will accept her as a wife, a girl captured and kept by criminals for two long years?" (173). After the murder of Rahul Singh, scared to imagine the life of "girl known to be courtesan and a bandit's wife" (187), the girl finds the Narmada her last home, and she surrenders herself to the river in order to avoid the terrible ignominy of recapture by the police.

The Narmada lovingly embraces all kinds of creatures in her breast: "Turtles and river dolphins find refuge in your waters/Alighting herons play upon your tranquil surface/ Fish and crocodiles are gathered in your embrace/ O holy Narmada" (255). Also, the mother was "happy

her daughter had died in the Narmada because she would be purified of all her sins” (190). The beginning of the novel states the mythical signification of the Narmada in liberation and purification of the soul: “The river is among our holiest pilgrimage sites, worshipped as the daughter of the god Shiva. During a tour of the area I had been further intrigued to discover the criminal offense of attempted suicide is often ignored if the offender is trying to kill himself the waters of the Narmada” (2).

The Executive’s Story is heard from his diary. Nitin Bose’s diary begins with the description of pollution in Calcutta, “Outside our office Calcutta crumbled under the weight of neglect, exploitation, poisonous humidity, traffic jams, power failures, and roads plowed up like rice fields to make an underground railway... the devastations of nature that daily drew that desperate to a great metropolis itself desperately surviving as if a war had just ended” (110). He was an urbanite tea company executive and his young colleagues believe in “Drink, shoot, and fuck” (112).

The estate (Kamarupa hills) has a history of ‘mythological tales’, ‘legends of a vast underground civilization’ which is peopled by a mysterious race of ‘half human, half serpent’, and the place is devoted to ‘pleasure and learning’, guarded by hooded serpents. He feels possessed by the serpent-like woman, Rima, an aboriginal tribal woman whose sexual favors he has first enjoyed and then rejected in disgust that he cannot ‘love a coolie’s wife’, and now must undergo an aboriginal rite before the goddess of Narmada to exorcise her spirit. The two women Rima and the Narmada represent nature and they are comparable in terms of their power to facilitate penance to the victims and also. they are ‘beautiful’, ‘desirable’, ‘oil-scented’, ‘loosened long black hair’, ‘eyes outlined in collyrium’, and palms and feet painted with ‘vermilion’ (139).

The tribals of Vano village worship the goddess of desire, they believe that “without desire there is no life.... The goddess is just the principle of life. She is every illusion that is inspiring love... She is what a mother is feeling for a child. A man for a woman. A starving man for food. Human beings for God. And Mr.Bose did not show her respect so he is being punished” (142). Despite feeling and comprehending the importance of a woman as a source of life, love and knowledge he disrespects and denies it, and thus Nitin makes an idol and worships both the power of desire and womanhood pervading in nature. “the pre-Aryans had lived here peacefully for centuries, perhaps even millennia, before the Aryans arrived. Their philosophy was based on a profound respect for nature and the interdependence of all life... the war between the pre-Aryans and the Aryans was a classic conflict between instinct and reason” (154). The story starts with the diary and ends with Bose’s writing on tribal practices which was submitted to the ‘Asia Review’ for publication.

The Monk's Story tells about a young monk, Ashok (nearly thirty years old) who has renounced the world though he is heir of his father's large diamond company. The Jain philosophy believes in 'nonviolence'. They are mostly bankers or merchants in order to avoid ahimsa, "If we were farmers, we might unknowingly kill creatures under our plows. In Industry the earth is drilled for oil, iron, coal" (24). He recalls his wife as a 'gentle creature' who has neither the imagination nor the appetite for pleasure, after their children's birth, she is preoccupied with her maternal duties. Mahavir's teaching compare humans longing of freedom with the 'dammed river waiting to be released'.

In the whole novel, the Narmada presents itself as a witness to the draughts and desertification of human lives and their environment. It is streaming of lyrical interlocking stories flowing through the Jainism to the tribal myths, epics to articles and books, music to dancing, ascetic to archeologist, and falling into the Narmada that reflects the meaning of this whole picture gallery of mystic India. The myths, for instance, though the Sanskrit meaning of the Narmada is a whore, still she is supposed to have four hundred billion sacred spots on her banks.

Ecofeminist philosophy of India adores both the civilization as well as the wilderness of nature. The protagonist at the end is no longer detached and complacent about his choice of 'vanaprasthi', and all victims of society merge with the river. Mehta reveals how the pollutants of society like prostitution, commodification and objectification uses women only to cash the crop and destroy their feminine principle and power of sustenance. The novel is conceived in terms of an organizing principle which has temporal as well as spatial dimensions. She succeeds in trying to protect the Narmada in a remarkable way by establishing the notion that the Narmada is not only a river to the natives, but it is a sacred site and life support system.

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