

# CONTEXTUALISING ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE AND STRUGGLING WOMAN IN KAVERY NAMBISAN'S THE HILLS OF ANGHERI

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the themes of ecofeminism as they interconnect particularly to the women in Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri*. The female characters in the novel understand that non-human life, including that of plants and animals, converges with human life in real and meaningful ways. It also examines how this novel's structuring principles and thematic fixations mesh in light of Nambisan's political strategy of pursuing public appeal and growing awareness of her selected topics, in this case to emphasize environmental interdependence. Her characters, who are influenced by their unique setting, are exposed to sustainability through their connections with other places and cultures, and as the novel progresses, their stories develop philosophically as well as structurally. The difference in women characters interaction with non-humans reveals a way for Nambisan's readers to transform and reconsider their concerns towards non-human others because the women are more kind and compassionately presented in the novel.

**Keywords:** Environment, Interconnectedness, Ecofeminism, Women, Nature

Kaveri Nambisan is a doctor by profession and also a famous writer. Her works strongly reflect her medical career. She began writing because she enjoyed seeing her name published. She has a unique talent for storytelling. Nambisan has a special talent for using natural visuals to emote and express herself. An efficient use of nature-related photos has considerably aided her in capturing the temperament of her characters because the majority of her novels are insights into their unfortunate circumstances. It is necessary to view her works through the prism of ecofeminism because of how well she is able to depict the physical and mental characteristics of her characters utilizing elements from nature. She is one of the female authors that explores the relationship between women and nature in her works, one of which is *The Hills of Angheri*.

A great example of a novel containing characters that are inspired by a landscape that has been altered by a patriarchal, exploitative, and destructive way of life is Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri*, which is situated in Kodagu. Each character has a unique relationship with the earth, despite the fact that they may all face the same difficult natural conditions as they try to survive. In the novel, women experience and relate to the countryside differently from males. Women in the novel strive against patriarchal, conventional, environmentally exploitative practices and rituals that are kept alive by the men because they accept the ecosystem and its diversity. The men in the novel get very close to doing what has always been done.

The historical setting of *The Hills of Angheri* is a Kodagu that has been subjugated by the environment. Nambisan does not join the fight against the coal companies like South Indian writers who came before her did. Instead, she broadens the scope of ecological decline in Kodagu to include environmental problems linked with biodiversity loss, climate change, and human predation on animals. Her story blends the harsh reality of climate change with the more passionate, character-driven narratives of Kodagu coping with climate change as it interacts with their daily lives in the wake of the environmental movement and the current climatic calamity.

Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri* is a novel about a young country girl named Nalli and her struggle to fulfil her dream of becoming a doctor. The country girl changes from being so naive to one who has greater life experience, as shown by Nambisan. The protagonist struggles to express her dream while still in the stage of naivety. She moves from India to England during the experience phase, where she struggles academically and encounters racial prejudice because of her Diaspora.

Nalli is determined to create a hospital in her village and is resolute in her approach to every challenge. Her childhood buddy Jai has completed his medical studies, and Nalli enjoys working with Jai to carry out her plan. However, over time, Jai's idea of constructing a hospital in the hamlet loses its allure and clarity due to his urban lifestyle, where he is kept occupied with surgeries. Infuriated by Jai's addiction to city life, Nalli believes that she is now solely responsible for realizing her childhood ideal because Jai has no interest in doing so. The objective in this regard is concisely expressed by the definition of Nilanjana Roy that follows:

From matrons on the make to surgeons who are generous with their knowledge to Jai - Nalli's childhood love who chooses the successful but frenetic life of a doctor in Bombay over their dream of a hospital for Angheri - the cast of supporting characters is drawn with intimate sympathy.

She experiences several trials as she searches for her identity. Nalli completes a journey from innocence to experience, ignorance to self-discovery, and finally realizes her dream of becoming a civil surgeon through her labour and situation.

The female characters of *The Hills of Angheri* argue that rather than seeking to rule the land, humanity must work with it in a variety of ways to create a balance. It is suggested that the intertwined dualisms of nature/man and feminine/masculine are self-defeating; the more they are enforced, the more nature rebels. This novel's entwined structure blends its thematic engrossments with environmental interconnection and cyclical arrangements in human behavior and nature. This structure is underlined by analogies within and across the narratives. The female characters in the Kodagu setting analyze this sense of interconnectivity, and eco-feminist ideas are updated to balance the supremacy of nature with patriarchal control over women. The characters highlight how Appalachia is "othered" as an area in conjunction with the environment and women, while simultaneously proposing a gendered response to the environment that broadly aligns with eco-feminist ideals.

The partial perspective of masculinity examined by eco-feminists such as Ariel Salleh, “Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Eco-feminist/Deep Ecology Debate,” who contends that “men’s ungrounded restless search for the alienated Other part of themselves has led to a society where not life itself, but ‘change’...has become the consumptive end” (225). The Hills of Angheri tries to highlight the need for fabricated male/female or culture/nature dualities to be incorporated in order to transform a power dynamic into an ethic of mutual respect. Nambisan is known for writing complex female characters, despite the fact that occasionally her male characters contradict the essentialism of ecofeminism, she does not reduce them to ciphers.

Nature and human nature are very tightly entwined together in Nambisan’s work. And everyone would concur that Nambisan’s *The Hills of Angheri* is fantastic. To investigate the lives of Indian women, she gave her female characters narrative voices. She also concentrated on the environmental devastation happening in a modernizing and industrializing India. She also looks at the psychology of women who live alone and away from society. Through her words, Nambisan alerts us to the ecological threat and degradation of the natural world. It has recently grown in importance on a global scale.

According to the interpretation of *The Hills of Angheri*, Nambisan’s writing about place, groundedness, and ecology draws on her knowledge of bioregions, particularly those in the South, which she has gained both personally and through her academic work. Because of Nambisan’s early interest in biology, the story portrays a bio-centric worldview in which all life is interdependent and interconnected. The degree to which Nambisan embraces an eco-feminist spirit of gendered dualities in her portrayal of the environment and the ways in which her female and male characters are modelled within it is examined in this novel.

In patriarchal rhetoric, nature is depicted as inert, much like the feminine body, but ecofeminists advocate for women to flow with the natural order. Man’s ability to plant seeds in both the soil and the woman highlights the eco-feminist connection between the oppression of women and the degradation of environment. *The Hills of Angheri* does not suggest that one gender is more natural than the other while including masculine farmers and hunters. Instead, it makes use of the concurrent environmental and human oppression, particularly of women. In this way, the novel may be seen to project an analogous “othering” of Kodagu tribes by extending the eco-feminist equation of the oppression of women with the prejudice on environment beyond gender. *The Hills of Angheri*’s thoughtful eco-feminist discourse demonstrates that there is no doubt about how gender affects how humans interact with the environment.

Nambisan can bring to readers a thorough discussion on the environment and humanity, the food-cycle, the benefits of preservation, the dangers of over-hunting, and even the possibility of harmony between predators and farming by narrating their story and examining their conflicts. Even though Nalli and Jai engage in debates along similar lines at some point in the novel, theirs are more focused and precise regarding the difficulties faced by farmers as they try to make a living off the land. Instead, the novel’s macroscale is introduced and examined here on the mountain: the general pressures between what humans can and want to do, as well

as the environmental effects and outcomes of the changes brought about by hunting (such as growing populations of smaller animals, the majority of which are insects), agriculture (overuse of insecticides killing pests and starving birds), or trade. Nambisan creates a dynamic, complex, and acute series of scenarios for Nalli through the non-human and human collision of strangers on the open spaces of the Western Ghats—in fact, due to the specific feasibility and even the essentiality of such collisions—which result in her leaving the mountain pregnant but alone. Nambisan also establishes the collective scene for the other narratives in the novel through the same scenarios and collisions, a context marked by the socio-environmental past of provincial India, the types of ecological tensions that have built the way places like Kodagu have progressed, the significant conflicts that sustain to happen over control of space, such as whether to go after concerning coyote elimination, and the ongoing effort to restore and rehabilitate.

The Hills of Angheri tackles numerous eco-feminist ideas by linking the destruction of nature to the patriarchal myth of dominating women, even if Nambisan prefers not to solely portray environmental deterioration in terms of gender. The Hills of Angheri depicts the effects of environmental pollution on the lives of women and animals through issues with disease and reproduction, just as profound ecology and eco-feminism address the fight against resource exhaustion and pollution.

Since both the author and her protagonist are licensed doctors with an FRCS, The Hills of Angheri incorporates a significant amount of autobiographical material. Due to her personal expertise in the medical profession, the author has clinically described the hospital environment. This novel has a real-life feel to it because it appears to be a collection of Nambisan's experiences. Her depiction of female characters demonstrates the struggles faced by women in achieving equality. In "Kavery Nambisan's Mango-Coloured Fish: A Picture of Illusions and Realities of Marriage," Prakash A. Patil remarks:

As a bildungsroman novel, it vividly presents three stages of Nalli's life: adopt stage, where she imitates others and lacks self-confidence, adapt stage where she encounters an ambivalent situation in England and has dilemmas in the form of binary ideas such as Indian or the British, woman or man, expert or novice, etc. and the adept stage where she is more confident and independent in her pursuit and not ready to get help even from Jai. (5)

Nambisan challenges the androcentric idea that males are independent of nature, which has historically divided femininity and masculinity along cultural lines. A recurring topic in all of Nambisan's stories is the urgent need to strike a balance between nature, society, and gender while also acknowledging their connection. The female characters bloom with the knowledge that loneliness is merely a human presumption and are aware of their interconnectedness with ecology. The fertility of her goats is carefully managed so she can demand a premium price for the meat when other farmers are willing to sell it; Nalli is rash in trying to save the weak chicks residing in her hut but refrains from interfering with the snake in the roof, which ultimately kills the chicks.

The ladies of Nambisan do not preserve the natural world in some idealized way; rather, they are logical ecologists who treat predators fairly and keep an eye on the delicate balance that gives their habitat its unique exclusivity. Nalli is a true steward of the land, ensuring the prosperity of it for the Widener family's future generations. To further solidify her connection to the farmland, she even adopts the family name. While Nannie looks after the planted orchard, Nalli is the government-employed steward for the wild forest and all of its numerous pathways and ecosystems.

Nalli finally emerges as a successful woman. She develops into a smart, self-aware surgeon who wants to make a life for herself in her own village. Nalli believes that by realizing that a woman's life is not just about love, marriage, education, and domestic concerns, she has found personal redemption. She must instead contribute significantly to the improvement of her country and community. As a result, she makes the decision to establish the hospital in her hometown and becomes the first Indian woman surgeon.

In this novel, Nambisan vividly depicts the protagonist's trials and victories as she comes to understand who she is as a person. She combats with the tradition and modernity, society and self and in an interview with Deepa Mishra, Nambisan herself admits "Nalli is after my own heart, there is no escaping it. Her personal life is different from mine, but the surgical situations are taken from my own life or what I have observed and later fictionalized" ("Kavery Nambisan - In Conversation with Deepa Mishra," web). As a representation of Nambisan, Nalli has shown that a woman's thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and accomplishments are not influenced by outside factors like family, tradition, the village environment, or male gender dissuasion. She disregards the negative stimuli and transforms them into triumphs in order to become a powerful lady.

According to *The Hills of Angheri*, there is no need to uncover beauty because it is already present. According to Nalli's perspective, it is up to us to understand the inherent beauty present in all of nature. Nalli discusses the ways that playing the part of an animal is favorable by nature. For instance, she thinks that even though no one ever watches tanager birds, they are nonetheless intriguing. When a reptile eats some of the birds she prefers that are perched on her patio, she once more says that she admires the entire ecosystem more than specific species or individual creatures.

The women characters in *The Hills of Angheri* have a particular perspective on the landscape, despite the outright rejection they meet to their patterns in the form of sarcastic remarks, doubt, odd looks, and steadfast enmity. The women view the non-human environment using all three of the criteria—things-in-themselves, things-for-them, and things-for-others—that define for productive ecological practices and attitudes. They do not see it as something they can utilize. Instead, they see it from all three perspectives. The main female characters in *The Hills of Angheri* can see how interrelated and dependent humans, animals, and plants are on one another.

Instead, Nalli's story focuses on the connections between her divorce and ensuing resurgence of self-confidence, the shifting butterfly migration patterns caused by climate change, and the



realization that Nalli's refusal to address climate change may soon physically alter her in the same way that Nalli's refusal to accept the death of her child has emotionally altered her. It would be difficult to understand the rich complexity involved in the interconnectivity, intersectionality, or interanimation of the various strands of the novel if one were to analyze solely the novel's literary environmental aspects as eco-criticism.

In *The Hills of Angheri*, nature also contributes significantly to maintaining the link with the ecology. These seductive statements about the unending cycles of life have exposed the interlinked labyrinth of life where all species are interconnected with each other in their natural environment. With her experiences living overseas and in India, she has come to understand the realities of life and the necessity of maintaining one's individuality in one's original country. Identity confusion is a shaky success. Nalli makes the decision to go back to her village despite any difficulties that may arise. Despite their lack of trust in her and their unwillingness to give her a location to build a hospital and recognize her as a surgeon, she decides to assist the people of Angheri. She chooses to work for them and is willing to put up with ridicule or unfavourable remarks.

In the end, Nalli shows herself to be a professional woman, a surgeon who is aware, self-aware, educated, and eager to make a life for herself in her own village. She believes she has found her own salvation. She now understands that a woman's existence is not limited to love, marriage, education, and domestic limbo, but rather that she must contribute significantly to the empowerment of her society and country. She makes the decision to establish the hospital in her hometown after returning there. She ultimately appears to be an Indian woman surgeon from a rural area.

As a spokesperson for Nambisan, Nalli has demonstrated that a woman's ideas and sentiments, aspirations, goals, and accomplishments are not influenced by outside factors like family tradition, the village environment, or the disapproval of male relatives. She disregards the unpleasant stimuli and transforms them into beneficial outcomes. In order to make her village smart, Nalli is actually prepared to "race into a rough weather." Through Nalli, the author has attempted to convey the idea that education should be prioritized for one's mental well-being rather than for financial gain.

The characters in Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri* come from both rural and urban settings, and they all exhibit varied levels of respect for the nature. Sometimes, the ambivalent interactions between people and nature are the result of patriarchal/imperial ideologies, as seen, for instance, in how city dwellers approach natural resources and the people who create them for their utilitarian value. The conflicting nature of the interaction between humans and nature is partly a result of the material hardships that drive people, particularly in rural areas, to degrade the very ecosystem that supports them. Nambisan seems to have exhorted the ladies to fight, to take the lead, and to oppose repression. *The Hills of Angheri*'s female characters resist the dualistic (feeling/reason, nature/culture, etc.) culture that permeates the Kodagu setting, and in doing so, it clarifies how Nambisan readers can similarly fight the exploitative, patriarchal, and environmental cultures and attitudes.

The Hills of Angheri are home to environmental problems, and eco-criticism has shown to be a useful tool for examining the state of the earth's environment today and how it is affecting both non-human and human species. With its emphasis on control over women and nature, eco-feminism plays a crucial role in eco-literature. The Hills of Angheri focuses on dangers to the environment such climate change, the extinction of animals and species, the loss of biodiversity, the usage of insecticides, and the struggle of the female protagonist with patriarchal structures in society.

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