

# Traditional Ecological Values of Indian Knowledge System in *The Forest of Enchantments* by Chitra Divakaruni Benerjee

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**Abstract :** Chitra Divakaruni Benerjee is the greatest Indian Writer on Indian Knowledge System. She is school of Indian Mythological knowledge in herself. Her writings, their flow and selection of wordings mesmerise the readers in such a way that a reader feels himself transferred in a different world. *The Forest of Enchantments* is the great example of her Indian mythical knowledge. It is not only a book to convey the unveiled knowledge of Indian Epics but it is a full set of ethics and Ecological values for what India was once the teacher of the world. The protagonist of the novel is Queen Seeta, the wife of Lord and King Ram. This book is the story of Ram in the context of Seeta, which showcases the hidden aspects of Seeta's life. One of them is Seeta as a Naturopathist. There are lots of things in this story of Seeta till the earth from the birth which show Seeta as a daughter of nature. The present paper is a small attempt to discuss the traditional Indian ecological values expressed by Divakaruni through Seeta which are also the ecological values given by the book.

**Keywords:** Forest, Earth, Eco System, forestry, irrigation, architecture, ethno-biology, Medicines, plant.

**Introduction** - Knowledge of Nature is an old innovative art which is transferred by generation to generation. Nobody can guess its establishment date and nobody can suggest about its degradation time but it can be said with a great confidence that it helps in promoting interdisciplinary research of all aspects. It gives us the practical utility to solve the current and emerging problems and actively engages us for spreading the rich heritage of our country and traditional knowledge in every field of life. *The Forest of Enchantments* is a book full of traditional ecological knowledge. It is a recreation of The Ramayana. The Ramayana is one of the world's greatest epics but *The Forest of Enchantments* is a narrative art told by Seeta. Besides being a tragic love story, it is also a treasure house of Ecological Knowledge. Although its hero is Lord Ram still it has a shero (Brave heroine in the context of Hero) for whose brilliant and brave retelling Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni composed *The Forest of Enchantments*. She places Seeta at the centre of the novel for telling Seeta's own story in her own inimitable voice. Readers become enchanted by seeing the word sketch of Seeta's journey from the great city of Ayodhya to the forests (from where the story starts) and the jungle with her beloved husband, the exiled Ram. Besides the leading theme of Seeta's abduction by the ferocious demon king Ravan and her returning to Ayodhya with Lord Ram, the book tells us Seeta's love,

affection and knowledge of ecology as a sub theme. It highlights different aspects of Seeta as a daughter of Mother Nature. Seeta comes out from the nature, says good-bye from the lap of earth and shows her affection even with the small segment of the nature till the final, unexpected tragedy which she must undergo. Laced with Seeta's joys and sorrows, the story tells us about the forest as her best friend in her agony and her triumph. This forest testifies her heartbreak and the same forest restores her resilience in the obstacles of life. *The Forest of Enchantments*, in this way, invites the readers to look into the ecological affection of Seeta which is an ideal lesson for the lives of other women who are unknown by the Indian Knowledge system of five basic elements of their existence.

**Use of Indian Knowledge System in *The Forest of Enchantments*:** With a main theme of contemporary battle of wills, *The Forest of Enchantment* is the best example of Indian knowledge system. It is a system based on *Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya*, meaning thereby Indian Knowledge system is a journey from unknown to known. By using the same concept with a dilemma Divakaruni says, "Seeta's character is much more than what we understand her to be. Still, I don't know who Seeta really was". (Divakaruni-8). The writer confesses later in the book that Seeta is the incarnation of Goddess Lakshmi and because of assuming a human body, she also has many human weaknesses.

This weakness allows Seeta to become angry when Sage Vishwamitra comes to Seeta and hands over The Ramayana for criticism. Seeta, with a great Indian rhetoric answers furiously : "It is good in lyrical beauty with melodious words..but ... But did you not know what happened to me when I was sitting alone in the dark under the tree?" (Divakaruni- 8)

This Indian Knowledge System teaches us the science of survival by using the Vedic concept of *The PanchaMahayajnas*. It is made up by *Brahma, Daiva, Pitra, Bhoot and AtithiYajna*. The meaning of life, according to this concept, is to use these elements for the protection and inspiration of human life. Divakaruni transforms all these elements one by one in her writing and re-creates the ancient story in such a wonderful way that despite the tragic ending of Ram-Seeta's love story nobody hates Ram. The readers try to find out the divine aspects of Ram and start seeing *Brahma* in it.

Divakaruni, beside all the elements of Indian knowledge system, does not ignore the *AtithiYajna*. 'Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni does justice to the guest appearance women of Ramayana who have always been neglected due to ignorance. These ladies invokes Chitra as the divine guests and continuously say as "Write our story too, we have been despised and misunderstood, we have been blamed, we have been forgotten, we have been condemned.." (Divakaruni- 14). Then the Chitra welcomes their guest appearance and replies them as, "Yes, I will definitely write your story because without your story my own story cannot be complete." (Divakaruni- 14,20).

*The Forest of Enchantments* is, thus, not just a retelling of a much-told epic; rather it is a book that re tells Indian Knowledge System in story genre with a balanced and non-judgmental view.

**Traditional Ecological Values:** This book has a classic-creation of Chitra Divakaruni in showcasing the traditional ecological values. It has love for nature; it has a feeling of joy by the marvellous touch of the earth; it has a simplicity of a folk singer stood under the tree in the silence of dark forest; it has a rhythm of a flowing river. It teaches the lesson of love for nature. The novel starts with the tender description of Seeta's morning walk in his palace-garden. She is roaming around the gorgeous garden of King Janak. Her bare feet are experiencing the soft touch of hue, passing by the grass. She was worried about the low flowering of gracious Gronhus and the charming Champaks. She cares for the sick plants, touches them with tender love, digs the roots for proper watering and the plants become healthy. It shows great ecological values Seeta have from her childhood. She suddenly recalls Ram's first appearance for *Swyamwar* and use to sing like blowing wind, blushes like the pomegranates in her father's garden and her heart aches with joy in a doubtful dilemma. She asks herself with a deep sigh, " Will this prince/ with eyes shining /like a mountain pond/ take my heart too?" (Divakaruni- 21).

People use to call her Goddess Exotica (Van Devi).

When the Novel opens the readers see that Seeta had a specific power to know about the medicinal plants. Whenever she used to touch any plant she could understand its healing power. She could easily recognize the medicinal plants and she was able to understand different species of the plant kingdom, with all their medicinal parts like whose flowers, fruit-parts, leaves, roots, stems, or seed are directly used or used in some preparation as a medicine to treat a condition or disease.

Seeta's knowledge of the beneficial properties of medicinal plants to treat diseases represents a valuable resource to preserve the biological and cultural diversity of different ethnicities and it provokes the readers to respect the plant kingdom. The Forest of Enchantments is one of the simplest and most beautiful retelling to teach the ecological values to the students.

'Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni does not only search the nature's example in the beautiful things and conditions, but also when she obeys *Vashishtya* to write her own *Barah Khadi*. She chooses red colour and in behalf of Seeta, she writes: " I selected red ink to write my biography.....red is the colour of menstrual blood, womb blood and finally the colour of my most favourite flowers." 'Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni turns the Ramayana around by telling it in the voice of Seeta ... This inversion is a gift – it presents us a with a way to know an already well-known story better and to love an already beloved story more'. (Sattar 112). She turned the Traditional Ramayan with beautiful ecological value and also explained important thing along with a love story that how nature has a connection with human beings. Seeta loves Naturopathy. She likes to create medicines by plants , she talks to plants in her own way. She is a master of Ethno-biology. Forestry like all Indian ladies is her inborn talent, she wants to see a talking monkey and prohibits the army to make harm to plants. She wants to irrigation, architecture, Biology. Thus the work is 'A work...of pluralities and possibilities with traditional ecological values.'

**Conclusion:** The book is full of lots of r traditional ecological rituals which teaches us stuff of Indian knowledge system. There is a mantra in Atharvaveda which literally expresses the pain of the earth in the present era- "Yattebhoomevikhanaami, kshipramtadapirohatu./Ma temarmavimrigvari, ma tehridyamarpipaam. Atharvaveda 12.1.35

Whatever part of the earth we dig, we should fill it again soon. Do not harm the heart and vital places of the earth under any circumstances. But who is following these principles today? In the blind race of selfishness, everyone wants treasure, even if its price has to be paid by the destruction of the entire environment. Today, due to our own crimes, nature has become distorted, the fierce form of Shiva is eager to destroy the creatures in terrible forms like famine, flood, epidemic, earthquake, tsunami. All the efforts being made to live life seem insufficient. Today's

scientists have accepted in their minds that the abandonment of ancient thoughts has given birth to the present tragedies. So, the book in this scenario of destruction, teaches us nature still has a lot left to offer, even though we have not been able to become good children of the Earth, its motherly nature still wants to protect us.

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