

Globalization: Cultural Ecofeminism in Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper*

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Article Received: 15/03/2026

Article Accepted: 18/04/2026

Published Online: 20/04/2026

DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.04.390

Abstract

This paper discusses the term ecofeminism and its role in literature specifically in the works of Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* (1996). Ecofeminism articulates that oppression of women and the ecology is inherently connected. It voices in the direction of marginalization and devastation of nature simultaneously. More recently ecofeminists are recognizing male domination and exploitation of both women and the environment. Kavery Nambisan is an Indian novelist as well as a surgeon and the impacts of her career can be glimpsed in her fictional works. She depicts the awesome splendor of Coorg which is in Karnataka. The distinctive culture and religion of the people of Coorg is artistically portrayed by using the fortunes of Nanji who becomes a young bride in the Kaleyanda Clan.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Culture, Women, Nature, Marginalization

1. Introduction

Globalization has been a transformative force, reshaping cultures, economies, and environments across the globe. In this complex web of change, literature emerges as a reflective and critical medium, capturing the nuanced interactions between global forces and local realities. Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* stands as a poignant narrative that probes into the heart of rural India, presenting a rich array of life that is at once deeply traditional and in flux due to the pressures of globalization. This paper aims to explore the novel through the lens of cultural ecofeminism, an approach that combines ecological

concerns with feminist insights to understand how environmental degradation and gender oppression are interconnected and exacerbated by global capitalist expansions. By situating Nambisan's work within this framework, this paper uncovers the layers of meaning that reveal how globalization affects cultural identity, the natural environment, and the position of women in society. Through detailed analysis, this paper argues that *The Scent of Pepper* not only critiques the adverse impacts of globalization but also embodies the principles of cultural ecofeminism, offering insights into resistance, resilience, and the path toward a more sustainable and equitable world.

2. Discussion

Ecofeminism is a movement that examines the connections between exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970 alongside second-wave feminism and the Green movement. The term 'Ecofeminism' was first introduced by the French writer named Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Feminisme ou la Mort* (1974). The ecofeminists believe that women and the environment have a strong bond, because of their split history of indulgent despotism. Cultural ecofeminism encourages an association between women and the environment. They believe that women have a close connection with nature because of their gender roles (eg., family nurturer and provider of food) and their biological roles (eg., menstruation, pregnancy and lactation).

Kavery Nambisan comes from Coorg (Kodagu), a hilly district of Karnataka also called as Scotland of India. She is also a native speaker of that Kodagu language. The Coorgis, the small ethnic minority for the first time, appears in Indian English fiction for the first time in her novel *The Scent of Pepper* (1996). The characters are realistically portrayed by the novelist. The stories from Coorg narrated by her grandmother are in fact real stories. She used all those oral stories from her grandmother as the plot of her novel. It portrays a grand picture of the Koduvas who are very bold, furious, martial race and holders of coffee estates. The origin of this tribe is unknown, but they are not indigenous tribes as well as settler groups that migrated to Coorg, in the remote past. Nambisan sobs over the dwindling numbers of the tribes and intricate political dynamics where the Karnataka government fails to recognize them as a distinctive cultural group. Kodagus have unique cultural practices and their complexity. Nambisan begins to view globalization as a threat to the culture of all the fourth world communities, especially in India. The Coorgis have entered Indian English fiction for the first time. Nambisan sketches her

protagonist, Nanji's own community on the literary canvas, constructing has ethnic identity imaged in terms of landscape, religion and rituals, marriage, family structure, birth, death and widow-head to find what is distinct in one's own culture. Nanji represents an ideal Kodava woman and being aware of agricultural practices such as sowing, transplanting and cutting paddy. Simultaneously she is into farming, preserves food items thereby supplementing her family's income innumerable ways. Nanji is in-charge of her home as well as estate shows the solidarity of her knowledge without fear. "She bound behind some coffee bush and points to a patch of land. She harangues the workers and as though they grumble, they know that the only with her is to be efficient..." (23).

The novel portrays it as a vivid imagery that takes the readers to the roots and soil and then the soul of the Kodagu and its people. Though the main narrative focuses mainly on the challenging life experiences of Nanji, her relatives and the people around her all contribute to bringing about the cultural and political history of Coorg people from pre independent India and its connection with British settlers and administration. Nanji's character represents the idea and stands for the interrelation between nature and culture. She is also depicted as the connection between the human nature and physical world. Nature in this novel does not provide a beautiful environment but make an appearance as a force to compute when the coffee plantations production decreases one year as the forefathers have been angered, "There will be no escaping the anger of our ancestors. Kodagu will be punished"(17).

The protagonist trusted about the benignity of her ancestors enriched land fertility and rain showers. The vertical rainfall designated the happiness of the predecessors, the wasted water of horizontal rainfall to their despondency. The deluge was crosswise and furious when a Kodava married a person from another community. She is very proud to marry a person in the Kodava community. Nanji disagreed with Mallige's romantic ideas of decoration with flower vases. She mentioned it as, "Beauty without value is criminal. There's work, work, work waiting to be done"(189).

Nanji's practice of farming was deep as she had been placing her soft feet on the earth since she was three. She had worked along with her grandmother, Neelaki in paddy fields when she was five. At seven, she learnt to trim the coffee plants along with Yeravas. She had noted the process of fragrant flowers turning into green berries and the eagerly awaiting plucking of red, ripe berries at the right time. Her tireless sincerity, accuracy and

efficiency attracted the Yerava workers. They affectionately called Nanji as 'Baliyakka', bringing her shoots of bamboo, mushrooms and crabs, green leaves of kembu and river fish. Nanji was so fond of farming that she could not rest at home even in her advanced stage of pregnancy.

The habitation and the coffee plantations appeal to be infusing her calmness and her sense of peace. Nanji submerge her grief and joys in her duties as a mundane task. She also allotted the servants to take care of her father-in-law Rao Bahadur Madaiah in her absence and to supervision the labourers in the coffee estates too. Nambisan creates a memorable relationship and interconnects it with the domestic realism in this novel *The Scent of Pepper (1996)* through Nanji and how she effectively manages with enormous patience handles her smooth operation of the household work and agricultural work with equal ease like Mother Nature.

Like any other Kodava women, she enjoys certain entitlements and responsibilities. The family protects, cares for, nurtures and gives its members thus binding the family in togetherness. *The Scent of Pepper (1996)* shows how pregnant women are overfed so that they do not succumb to confinement sickness. Women are supposed to pass their culture and tradition to the next generation. Nanji participate in all ceremonies, in traditional songs and dances, religious festivals and so on.

Counter culture explores a set of ideas such as beliefs, behaviours and expectations of what the majority of people think in a society and the residuals accept the norms. The Counterculture movement impacted society in various ways. Counter culture contains certain important aspects of life such as anti-war, saving the planet, civil rights, gay liberation and feminism. The in depth analysis of the vast landscape, their customs, their myths and legends and the people with their traditional beliefs reflected in this novel that reflects the influential Counter discourse to the unifying grand narratives of nationalism. Nambisan focuses on British culture too in this novel *The Scent of Pepper (1996)*. The colonised began to underestimate their own culture when they get exposed to colonial culture and their way of living; they imitate them to keep alongside the British culture, "The men quickly take to trousers, well-cut jackets, hats and bowties and look good. The few (women) who try to wear frocks with short sleeves or no sleeves find it awkward when they could not hide the stiff black hairs on hitherto unrevealed places. So they revert to a sari" (48)

The Kodava women bobbed their hair and wore slacks, served tea with sandwiches and kept beautiful gardens. They sent their children to convents and their children too were comfortable to eat with a knife and a fork and return with polished accents. In a country like India, there is a cultural outbreak of violence against the weak and the unprivileged, especially those who occupy the lower hierarchies such as women, tribes, lower castes and so on.

Racism or ethnic oppression destroys the cultural values, ways of life, language, clothing styles and religion of the oppressed and also forces them to assimilate the host culture and loss of cultural distinctiveness. An ethnic community in a particular locality leads to its marginalization. Physical violence, political oppression, economic deficits, religious divisions and government persecution also cause social and cultural degradation. Globalization has brought with it an intermingling of diverse cultures. It leads to cultural exchange, transforming ethnic or native cultures as hybrid cultures. Sometimes, these predominant cultures impose their culture on these ethnic communities leading to the acculturation of ethnic communities thereby diminishing them altogether. The significance of the communities obliterates the roots of ethnic groups.

Nambisan convokes the private conversation in which the colonizers disparage the culture of Kodavas were peaceful settlers after they suddenly get overpowered by the colonizer, “Rupert, one of the colonisers tells his wife Clara that until the British came and sanitised the lives of the natives, the Kodagus were simple – minded rustics who were conquered by the Rajas of nearby Haleri, and subjected to all sorts of cruelty like sacrificing animals, and practice of worshipping guns, spears and ancestors”.(59)

Through the female characters, Nambisan highlights gendered identity, trauma, refusal, protest, suffering and need for social change. The novels of Nambisan revealed real experiences of poverty, violence, rejection and suffering. Her writing is a reconstruction of self after the trauma that swings from the community to the individual. The veil of culture and tradition disparages women in patriarchy. It overpowers them by restricting their roles to the bearing and rearing of children, caring for the sickness in the family, collecting water and firewood, cooking and serving food, milking and tending young animals, helping in farming and other similar duties. Nambisan has brought to show that women were central figures in everyday life and remained concealed in history. In this process, Nambisan tries to show women are more intensely rooted in soil than men and that they play a major role

as the cultural transmitters by instilling culture, wisdom and ethics in the younger generation.

3. Conclusion

Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent of Pepper* serves as a compelling narrative that intricately weaves together the themes of globalization, cultural identity, and ecofeminism. Through the lens of cultural ecofeminism, this paper has examined how the novel critiques the multifaceted impacts of globalization on rural communities, the environment, and the lives of women. Nambisan's storytelling illuminates the complex relationships between humans and nature, culture and economy, highlighting the detrimental effects of environmental exploitation and gendered oppression. However, beyond its critique, the novel also offers a vision of hope and resilience. It suggests that in the face of global challenges, local cultures, and women, in particular, possess the knowledge, strength, and spirit to resist and redefine their futures. This paper argues that by integrating the insights of cultural ecofeminism, Nambisan not only sheds light on the dark corners of globalization but also celebrates the potential for regeneration, sustainability, and equality. The novel stands as a testament to the power of literature to reflect, critique, and inspire change in the globalized world, making it a vital read for anyone interested in the intersections of culture, ecology, and feminism.

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