

# Sacred Seeds and the Holy Fertile Mother Earth: Indigenous Ecological Management and Perspectives in *I, Rigobert Menchu*

A. Nazira

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Arts College for Women, Salem,  
Tamil Nadu, India; anazirabegum@gmail.com

## Abstract

The Mayan Culture, like all other traditional tribes, is solely dependent on Land for their existence. Land is their source of food, clothing, habitat, medicine and pastime. They don't have any life that could be separated from their life. Land is source of power to the ruling class but source of life to the Mayans. The Mayan tribes consider the land as their mother and the spirit of land is called Rajawal. They ask the permission of the spirit of land for a perfect season. The seasons of Mayan Year is based on the process of preparing the land, sowing, growing and harvesting the corn. Corn is divine and they believe man is made of corn and that is why to be born as human is divine. Corn takes religious recognition. Eco is the short form of ecology, which is concerned with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment. Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. These are obviously interdisciplinary studies, unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. This combination of the physical and the spiritual can be seen in some of the terms used in ecology and ecocriticism, which both have the same aim, to contribute to the preservation and survival of man. This paper presents a holistic approach to agriculture.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Ecocriticism, Hegemonic Centrism, Testimonio

## 1. Introduction

Humans do always exist within some natural environment. There is no human existence without Nature. But the existence of humans has made the existence of Nature questionable. The heedless exploitation of Nature has posed a great threat to the survival of the Earth. The overexploitation of Nature and the disheartening disrespect shown to the elements of nature have resulted in the ecological crisis that looms ahead without any immediate solution. Human beings are the only species solely responsible for ecological atrocities that have shattered the delicate and divine web of ecological symbiotic relationship. This relationship should remain unbroken for the existence of human, other creatures and the earth. It is the collective responsibility of human beings to resuscitate the dying Earth. This conscious raising task is performed by Ecocriticism. It is

a programme of imparting ecological literacy. It insists on the celebration of Nature.

The western colonial ideology postulates that Nature and the resources in nature are to be conquered and utilized or exploited. It has the dangerous policy of use, crush and throw. The imperialistic arrogant attitude considers that the virgin resources in Nature are there for their consumption and degradation. The consumer and marketing attitude of West is always diagonally opposite to the indigenous people who are the guardian angels of Mother Nature. Natives have an intricate and instinctive knowledge of Nature. This knowledge is unarguably superior to the cultured technology. Indigenous people's relationship with Nature has much to teach the rest of Human species. Management of earth is something they have acquired without attending any college programmes or Universities. It is the superior knowledge that accepts the co-existence of all species and

recognizing them as peers. This non-hegemonic and communal (that includes all living creatures) form of sharing of available natural resources in a sustainable manner is the basis of simple and meaningful life style of the Natives. The culture of Natives is not human-centered rather it is centered on Nature. It is a counter measure to the hegemonic human centrism.

The literature that celebrates indigenous way of life and ideology is Rigoberta Menchu's "I, Rigoberta Menchu", the testimonial writing of Guatemalan social activist and Nobel Laureate of 1993. Any testimonio or testimonial writing is an act of conscious raising. It is thought provoking as any finest art must do. It is said that we can judge the beauty of a piece of art by the strength of the receiver's reaction. It is true with the testimonio of Rigoberta Menchu. The celebrated work is iconoclastic. It explodes the western myth that projects the "Others", "the Natives", "the Indigenous" as animals so that they can be exploited. The counter hegemonic text of Menchu nullifies the colonial concept that foregrounds the natives as people with no culture, no scientific outlook, no technology and no history. The work is an enlightening discourse which throws light not only on the social, cultural and political life of Guatemalan indigenous people but also the eco friendly life style of the indigenous people registered here has made the a eco-critically conscious raising work.

## 2. Eco Centric Leanings

Menchu says that the Mayan culture, the culture of the indigenous people in Guatemala, is a culture that adores nature. They respect the world a lot. Starting from water everything in Nature is sacred for them. From childhood they are instructed not to waste water as water is pure, clean and gives life to man. They have realized that without water the survival of human race is impossible.

It is believed by the Mayans that the Earth is the mother of Man because 'She' gives him food. Their life is based on the crops they grow. They eat maize, beans and Menchu states "we don't eat cheese, hams or things made with machines"<sup>1</sup>. Here is the simple yet wise solution for the problem of world food crisis. The indigenous rule of eating maize, what is available in one's own environment is the resistance to the cultural hegemony that reinstates that only western food as suitable for humans. They never commercialise food. Food is considered to be divine. They consider even ploughing the land as harming the earth. They ask for Earth's permission before they sow their maize. It is quite amazing that the culturally, scientifically, and technologi-

cally so called impoverished natives have such a cultured way of seeking Earth's permission. It is not the ritual but the understanding and consciousness of the people that soil is the non-renewable resource and that must be managed in a sustainable manner.

The next important ecological issue discussed by Menchu is seeds. Seeds are given a sacred position in their culture. The seeds for the coming year are picked out as soon as the cobs start to grow. They are chosen and put a mark to identify. When the maize matures the big seeds are wrapped in the leaves in little balls. They are left in the branches of a tree to wait and to be dried as carefully as possible. Menchu details that it has to be a place where none of the women pass over them, or jump on them or anything, nor where the hens and chickens or any other animal can walk on them- where dogs for example can't get them. A child stands watch to see that nothing gets at them.

The seed sowing ceremony elucidates the link among all the agents living and non-living that assist in the transmission, germination, growth and sustainability of virility of seeds. Menchu's elaboration and explanation of the ceremony is nothing but what the modern seed technology that is concerned with seedless varieties has failed to foresee

Before seeds are sown in the ground we perform a ceremony. We choose two or three of the biggest seeds and place them in a ring, candles representing the earth, water, animals and the universe (that is man). In our culture, the universe is human. The seed is honoured because it will be buried in something sacred. For us the word seed is very significant. The candles are lit in every house. .. It is like an offering to the one God. This will be our food for the coming year. During the fiesta, prayers are given up to the earth, the moon, the sun, the animals and the water, all of which join with the seed to provide our food. Each member of the family makes vow and promises not to waste the food<sup>1</sup>.

To the Mayan culture, maize is the centre of everything. Maize is used for food and for drink as bottle stoppers, and for the dogs and pigs. As maize is the centre of existence, they celebrate the first day of picking maize cobs. Before picking them they have a thanks giving ceremony in which the whole community thanks the earth and the God who feeds them. Harvest is considered as the victory of the whole community. They don't prefer to plant cash crops as food crop is considered more important. This reversal of present market based agriculture makes the fertility of soil a big question. Their food, their houses, their livelihood, their medicine everything depends on the bounty of forest and Earth.

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### 3. Conclusion

In the views of Eco conscious critics, 'anthropocentrism' that is making human beings as the centre of this environment is nothing but environmental racism. This environmental racism is used to rationalize the exploitation of animals, the 'others' of environment. It is done in the name of 'human and reason-centered culture'. Western culture had only one excuse to exploit the human and animal "others" that is they are uncivilized and animalistic. Actually the Western culture is brutal and animalistic. The concept of colonization is the example for this brutal attitude of West.

Menchu's work brings into lime light the fact that indigenous people are highly eco conscious, guardians of Nature and the epitome of culture. Man made machines and construction of false ideologies do not make culture rather an understanding that celebrates the importance of all creatures is the message this paper attempts to register.

### 4. Reference

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