

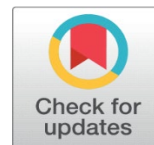
DRESS AND ECOFEMINISM IN KURBAH'S ONATAAH: OF THE EARTH (2016)



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ABSTRACT

Dress or clothing normally represents or reflects the belief system, tradition, and identity of a society. India being a multicultural nation is a befitting example especially when it comes to its northeastern states. It is a true emblem of multiculturalism and diversity perfectly reflected through its dresses. The northeastern states depict an integrated picture of rich bio and socio-cultural diversity. And this is true about Meghalaya. The tribes of Meghalaya, namely Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo follow the matrilineal societal structure and maintain a close relationship with nature. Pradip Kurbah's Khasi film *Onataah: Of the Earth (2016)* illustrates how social views around women are formed in the different spaces of the 'feminine' and the 'masculine' and its repercussions. The film revolves around the life of a rape survivor and her journey towards healing from the consequences of the grotesque act upon her body and depicting society's reaction to such an incident. This paper draws on ecofeminist ideology to understand the director's use of dress as a narrative tool in the film to show the association between the protagonist, Onataah, and nature, and also trace upon the impact of nature in giving Onataah a new perspective and healing in the process. The ecofeminist perspective is instrumental to the analysis of the film in relation to the society being matrilineal in its practice of kinship but patriarchal in authority and thus in its treatment of the marginalised – women and nature.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism is a social movement that came into being as a result of several other movements – feminist and ecological movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term 'ecofeminism' was coined in 1974 by the French feminist author and civil rights activist Françoise D' Eaubonne to describe 'how society's disregard for women is comparable to its contempt for the environment' Roth-Johnson (2013). Ecofeminist's view oppression of women and nature by men as a direct consequence of 'patriarchy' supported by other systems of domination such as 'capitalism' Buckingham (2015). The capitalist culture created a change in the power dynamics, generated otherization, treating women and nature as inferior to men. The huge gap between the sexes; and between nature and men caused changes in the power dynamics which enabled men to claim ownership over nature and women, treating them as their 'property' Jubimol (2017) The connection between nature and women with respect to their exploitation in the study of ecofeminism has been established by many scholars. Elizabeth Gould Davis states, 'woman... is the ally of nature, and her instinct is to tend, to nurture,



to encourage healthy growth, and to preserve ecological balance' [Davis \(1971\)](#) She also claims that it is the seizing of her authority by man that is responsible for the 'uncoordinated [Davis \(1971\)](#).

Ecofeminism in the context of India reveals a strong association with nature. People are dependent on the environment and its resources for survival and livelihood. Nature in most part of the country is considered sacred, and its elements are prayed to owing to its rich history of animism and pagan religious practices. Meghalaya is a geologically rich state, situated in the north-eastern part of the country, with a unique social structure which separates it from the rest of the country. Contrary to the majority of the communities of the country, the tribes of Meghalaya have 'matrilocal residence and matrilineal descent' [Kapadia \(1966\)](#) The matrilineal system adheres to a kinship system where descent is drawn through the mother or maternal ancestors. Children take after their mother's surname; and where property is passed onto the females. Also, majority of the women of this community are active bread winners of the family along with taking care of the household chores and family. In almost every sphere, women can be seen working alongside men, from administrative to clerical positions, from teachers, doctors, lawyers to shopkeepers and daily wage workers. However, it is paramount to bring to the notice that even with a matrilineal structure, it does not advocate for women empowerment or women domination when it comes to public space. Women do not have any special power outside the familial space. For instance, in the local council, Dorbar Shnong, the traditional village institution of the Khasis comprise of 'all the male residents, women are not allowed to be members of the council' [Bhutia and Liarakou \(2018\)](#) Thus, all major decision-making powers lies in the hands of the men of the village. One can envision a true unadulterated society of equality of the sexes where women do not face discrimination and tangible improvements take place only when females of the society will also be an integral part of the major decision - making bodies such as the Dorbar Shnong. The Khasi society though matrilineal in structure, it is not matriarchal in authority and ideology but patriarchal.

The demography comprises of the 'tribal population rich in ecocultural-linguistic heterogeneity and have practiced a harmonious relationship with the environment' [Bhutia and Liarakou \(2018\)](#) Given that most of the population of the state depends on nature for their resources and is an agro-based community, they have a very high regard for the preservation of the environment. The Khasi tribe shares a sacred relationship with nature and firmly believes in its sanctity despite the ongoing purloin of its resources and commercialization of its hills. [Chakraborty \(2020\)](#) This is in compliance with the patriarchal skills that take advantage of nature, transferring masculine control and authority over women and nature, demonstrates patriarchal imperialism. The illegal mining of coal and limestone in the Jaintia Hills has had a detrimental effect on the health of the people of the place especially women and children. Women of the place put their lives in danger in order to protect the environment. Ms. Kharshing has been awarded the prestigious 11th International Hrant Dink Award for her relentless work towards 'raising awareness about women's rights and the struggle against male violence' [Turkish award for activist \(2019\)](#). In her fight against ferrying illegally- mined coal she had to face the brutality of the men and their attack which left her with being in coma for more than a week. These incidents should not be treated in isolation but is just one of the many instances where women face violence against them because of standing up for their rights and also in preserving nature. The matrilineal structure of society does not vouch for the empowerment of women and enjoyment of a higher status. It can be observed that many times in the different phases of society, women

are victims of gender-based violence as they still adhere to the patriarchal ideologies in governing the society juxtaposed to labelled matrilineal society.

2. DRESS IN KHASI TRIBE

Society at large has a bigger role to play in terms of preserving and restoring its culture, beliefs, and practices along with its unique identity. The next generation is to take these forwards as the lineage of the society. With the evolution of time, changes are bound to happen, and the vivid example is the dress adopted by society. It naturally becomes a symbolical representation of their heritage and culture [Arthur \(n.d.\)](#).

Meghalaya resplendent with serene atmosphere and environment is home to rich culture and traditions. Apart from the rituals, food, festivals, dance forms and traditions, different dressing styles mark the difference between the different tribes. For the purpose of this paper, the study will focus on the dressing style of the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya. The womenfolk of the Khasi tribe wear a dress called *Jainsem* - a garment consisting of two-piece of clothes. *Jainsem* is worn around the body over the blouse in a cross-bodied fashion layered one above the other, secured with knots on each shoulder. Another piece of garment worn by the womenfolk of the Khasi tribe is the *Jainkryrsah*. It is considered a traditional dress, even though it is just a simple piece of cloth which can be worn with ease, tied on one shoulder and acts as a simple apron. Both the dresses are cultural representations of the Khasi society where women wear them every day, be it at home or outside. However, there is a slight difference in the preference of *Jainsem* and *Jainkryrsah*. *Jainsem* is worn as formal attire whereas *Jainkryrsah* comes as informal dress mostly worn in the house or during any manual work [Singh \(2020\)](#). It is a symbol of modesty and respect for society. Women usually wear *Jainkryrsah* at home especially in the kitchen to cover themselves from the stains of cooking [Nothing Like the Simple Lines \(2016\)](#). The traditional attire of the menfolk includes a long-unstitched piece of cloth around their waist. This is accompanied by a jacket for the upper body, and a turban or some kind of headgear to accessories [Bansal \(n.d.\)](#).

The Khasis are very conscious of protecting their culture and customs, but with time as the rest of the country, changes are prominent even here. The new generations are adopting the western code of dressing. In Khasi tribe, it is crucially the males who are seen mostly in western attires as compared to the womenfolk of the tribe. This is an interesting fact to note that the responsibility of passing on the tradition and protecting it is solely on the shoulders of the women. The women can be seen in their traditional dress from their homes to offices to marketplaces to formal or social occasions, basically everywhere. The limited spaces or times when the male members of the tribe can be seen donning the traditional attires is during the festivals.

3. MEGHALAYA CINEMA

Meghalaya cinema, in comparison to the plethora of regional cinemas in India, is still in its developing stages and very young. What strikes out is the fact that, even after it being a relatively younger industry and having very few films to its credit, it is increasingly getting national and international recognition. Going back to its film history, the first film society was formed in 1962 by Padum Barua, an Assamese Director. By this time, Shillong was part of Assam. Hence, it lost its cine society right after Meghalaya as a new state, came into existence in 1972 [Mittra \(2017\)](#). It took a

decade for Meghalaya to come out with its first film *Ka Synjuk Ri Ki Laiphew Syiem* (1981) which was directed by Hamlet Bareh Ngapkynti and then later its first colour film *Manik Raitong* (1984) by Ardhendu Bhattacharya [Lyngdoh \(2017\)](#). Some where both the films closely captured the historical and cultural practices of Khasi tribe in bits and pieces by using mythological narratives [Kuotsu \(2012\)](#). The first commercial film got featured in 1999 namely *Ka Mon Bajwat* which got huge accolades from general public and further empowered Meghalaya cinema to spread its horizon by incorporating digital films in Jaintia and Garo languages along with Khasi. Since then, Meghalaya cinema has witnessed popularity and rise in new forms of film culture.

Pradip Kurbah, of late a synonym for Meghalaya cinema, has gained international recognition with his Khasi films namely *Ri: Homeland of Uncertainty* (2014), *Onataah: Of the Earth* (2016) and *Iewduh* (2019). With three National awards and the only Indian to have won Kim Ji-seok Award at the 24th Busan International Film Festival in Korea, Kurbah is highly known for his interest in different forms of cinema rooted in social and cultural practices, which he experienced while working with Hindi and Telugu film industries. Later, he encapsulated his vision in different forms of videos and films. His film *Onataah: Of the Earth* (2016) is noteworthy here as it has been remade in Marathi as well as adapted into a book.

Costume in cinema is integral in moving the narrative forward and portrayal of a society that the story is based on. Thus, most of the Meghalaya films show its female protagonist and characters in traditional attire as is the case in the real society and men in western attire. Even in the film, *Onataah: Of the Earth*, the director shows the female characters in traditional *Jainkyrshah* and brings about a change in the pattern of dressing of the protagonist to portray the transition. Hence, *Jainkyrshah* plays a significant role in the film selected and forms the main focus of this paper.

4. ONAATAH (DAUGHTER): OF THE EARTH

The film, *Onataah: of the Earth* revolves around the life of a rape survivor and her journey towards healing from the consequences of the grotesque act upon her body and depicting the society's reaction to such an incident and its stereotypical stance on the matter. This paper employs textual analysis to examine dress as instrumental to the narrative in the backdrop of ecofeminism and also trace upon the impact of nature in giving the female protagonist, Onataah a new perspective and healing in the process. The significance of the use of different dresses will be highlighted and discussed as characterized with special reference to the main lead. It will also further discuss the role of the attires for men and character in the film and its significance not only the individual characters but also in the representation of the society.

The title of the film, *Onataah: Of the Earth* draws about a parallel between the protagonist and nature referring metaphorically to the meaning of the term 'Onataah' – daughter. The depiction of the shared connection between these two exemplifies and illustrates not only their deep association but also the way in which nature enables Onataah to heal. Onataah by profession is a nurse who embodies the virtues of caring, nurturing and selflessness, identical to traits found in nature.

Ecofeminism traces a connection between the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature by demonstrating a prevailing masculine patriarchal mindset

behind the analyses of these interconnected oppressions and exerting power dominance over both women and nature through authoritative power structures based on dualisms such as men/women, nature/culture Nese (2015). A similar analogy can be witnessed in this film. The film is divided into two geographical locations – Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya and the village. The city is a mirror to the changing culture in the matrilineal society of the Khasis opening up to the dawn of modernization and globalization. It is representative of the decadence and regressive outlook among the new patriarchal, misogynistic population of the city dwellers who have no regard for themselves or the traditional belief of nature being sacred. This is a huge contrast from the close symbiotic relationship with nature that had existed so far, being in harmony with nature. Onaatah goes through her own journey of finding herself and the director presents to us this journey from both within and outside the body of the protagonist. The urban life of Shillong with its modernity, where the gruesome act of violence that takes away from Onaatah her agency and ownership over her body is juxtaposed against the rustic and simplistic way of life in the village in the abode of nature where she gets a renewed perspective on life and starts the healing from within.

Onaatah: Of the Earth, by Pradip Kurbah, narrates the journey of the protagonist from being a victim to a survivor and change in her perspective towards one's worth. Onaatah is a nurse who is passionate about her job and compassionate towards her patients. On the fateful night she is raped by three men in a moving car, one of whom, as revealed later, was her batch mate. The incident changes her and her take on life. Peter, her fiancé, and his mother tries to stop her from filing a case against the culprits, but she goes ahead with her decision to seek justice for herself. She feels humiliated and despondent because the society continues to put the burden of blame on her regardless of the fact that the perpetrators get convicted for the heinous crime that they had committed. She continues to question 'did she really get justice' in the true sense of it. She goes through turmoil within herself and experience emotional struggles. She starts getting scared of darkness and finds it difficult to walk in her own house when it is dark. She continuously struggles between being worried for her younger sister and also blaming herself for the present plight of the family. She feels responsible for it and at one instance decides to end her life by taking sleeping pills but does not go through with the plan. Later on, request of her Father, she decides to visit her uncle, Khrawbor and her aunt in the village and spend some time there. Her first encounter with Duh is on her way to the village in the bus. Duh, who is later revealed to be her admirer, plays a significant role in her transformation. She was not much impressed by him; rather felt him to be an annoying person. She goes on to stay with her uncle for a long time during which she meets the village folks and gets acquainted with them. She starts feeling rejuvenated among the simple village people and the rustic village life. Her interactions and bonding with them, especially Dariti, Charming, Duh, Khrawbor, and Dondor helps her get a new perspective towards life and helps her in healing the scars. Her uncle, Khrawbor, is the head of the village who takes care of all the responsibilities pertaining to the maintenance and welfare of the village and its people. Onaatah, experiences a different world in the village where everyone tries their best to help each other. Duh and Charming are best friends. Charming's father is an alcoholic and because of this habit of his, charming's mother faces a lot of difficulty in managing the house and working in the fields. Most nights and evenings, Onaatah sees Duh Carrying Charming's father on his back and taking him home, as he is in a highly inebriated state after drinking. This changes Onaatah's perspective of Duh and starts to see him as a hardworking person. Charming and Dariti love each other but due to class difference, Dariti's father does not approve of their relationship. Later, it is shown that Dariti is pregnant with charming's child and her

parents feel being dishonored by their daughter's act. This is a crucial phase in Onataah's journey. She feels for Dariti and Charming and as a nurse also for Dariti's health. She takes a stand for her and in the presence of all the village elders speaks up for Dariti. This is when they develop a close bond, and from this point onwards share a close friendship with each other. Dariti's father, after much discussion and coaxing by the villagers agrees to the relationship. Another crucial moment that makes Onataah realize that self-pity is futile and that everybody fights their own battle; when she finds out that Bah Dondor, an elderly respected person, is blind. At first, she always thought that he disliked her because he never smiled back at her. One day when she took a walk with him, his profound thoughts on life, struggles and enjoying life changes her perspective from self-pitying to overcoming the trauma. The most astounding moment for Onataah was when she does not accept Duh's proposal and tries to explain why she is not fit for him. Duh tells her that just because she was raped, it does not mean that her worth has lessened. She is left aghast at how did he know about it. He informs her that everyone in the village knows about the incident, but it does not define her as a person. These episodes prove to be turning points in changing Onataah's perspective and helping her in healing process. After a long time staying in the village, reviving herself and gaining back her confidence, she goes back to Shillong with a new sense of autonomy, confidence, and renewed self-esteem. She continues to support Dariti through the pregnancy over series of phone calls. Onataah finds herself back because of the support and understanding of the people of the village and the simple rustic environment of the village aids her in healing process.

5. A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF ONAATAH: OF THE EARTH

The film opens with Onataah walking in the deserted lane all by herself after administering an injection to Sarah's aunt. She is seen wearing jeans and top which is layered with a black shawl. She is seen wearing the black shawl from the starting scene up until the time she goes to the village. Through the entire court ordeal, she dons the black shawl. The significance of this item of clothing lies in it forwarding the narrative of the protagonist experiencing loss of confidence, culpability, and going towards darkness. When she is fighting for justice in the courthouse and even wins the case, she is still seen in the black shawl. This resonates with her feeling of disappointment, unable to equate the acquittal of the convicts to her getting justice. She keeps asking herself has she really won and got justice just as she had been subjected to victim blaming by the society. The usage of the black shawl is an early indication of the horrifying incident that is about to occur. Very early into the film and the horrid turmoil makes its way into Onataah's life and disintegrates her life both professionally and personally, in a matter of few appalling minutes when she is raped by three men in a moving car. It is important to notice the kind of distinctiveness brought in terms of selection of western dress that the protagonist adorns at that time. There is a visible congruence between the dress and respective societal judgement. Eventually, the protagonist's morality and sanctity get questioned based on her dress both at the judiciary level in courthouse as well as by the society. As stated by [Jubimol \(2017\)](#), 'patriarchy is based on a pattern of hierarchical dualisms that creates a category called "the Other" --the marginalised, the discriminated and the dehumanized upon whom it deems to exercise its dominance by inflicting violence' (p. 2). Onataah, an independent, caring, nurturing nurse loses her autonomy and agency over her own self when the men, a product of patriarchy and misogyny, seize from her the right to her 'own' body.

The use of black and grey shawls over jeans and top, and the use of dark coloured clothes are continuous throughout the court ordeal until she leaves for her uncle's village. The other female characters in the film, primarily her mother is shown in *Jainkyrshah* which signifies modesty and is an integral part of the Khasi culture, and Sarah, in one scene, in *Jainsem*. The women are shown in these attires in an attempt to draw an understanding of the society's outlook towards women and how perceptions are created based on one's choice of dress.

Onaatah, even after getting judicial justice, faces disappointment by the society which is keen on 'victim-shaming'. This leads her to question the credibility of justice served in court and the plight of survivors thereafter. She is filled with despondency and after talking to her uncle decides to go and live in the village. Onaatah's physical movement from the city to village also encounters a transition in her way of dressing and a gradual change in her perspective towards life. The western cloth is replaced by more rustic and traditional *Jainkyrshah* to present the characters as can be seen in Khasi society. All the women in the village from Duh's grandmother to Onaatah's aunt to Dariti wear traditional dress irrespective of their age, status, or place. This attempt at using the traditional dress for the women folk is at its brilliance in portraying them closer to their roots and nature without exterminating or subjugating their individuality and authenticity. It suggests the importance of individual freedom of choice as opposed to forced beliefs and choices rendered. The same can be seen reflected in the film where the characters in the village make a choice for themselves to wear the traditional *Jainkyrshah* and Onaatah too starts wearing it on her own terms when she is in the village. The attributes attached to *Jainkyrshah* had historically witnessed a change from being merely a piece of cloth to keep women safe from stains in the kitchen to safeguard their modesty and status. As opposed to the use of *Jainkyrshah* throughout the film by the different female characters, it has been noticed that the use of *Jainsem* only once by Sarah in the beginning of the film. A clear contrast between the two women characters is depicted in the scene – Onaatah with her shawl over top and jeans and Sarah with *Jainsem* – and how each is perceived and analysed by the glaring eyes of the society that they are a part of solely on the way they dress.

The gradual change in the colour scheme of Onaatah's shawl and *Jainkyrshah* is a metaphorical representation of the stages in her journey. She transitions from losing ownership over herself to getting a hold of herself and healing in the process. Healing takes place once she starts connecting with the simplicity of village life and lets nature give her a different perspective that aids in healing her inner scars. This eventually leads her in becoming a whole once again by joining the revived fragmented pieces of her broken dreams, aspirations, and self-esteem. This transition is captured in the film by the usage of different coloured shawls and *Jainkyrshah* worn by Onaatah. She is seen wearing black shawl during the incident and all throughout the court ordeal. The phase during which she is filled with a sense of hopelessness- she wears black, brown, and grey *Jainkyrshah* and shawl. When she starts reviving her faith in herself and people around her, she can be seen mostly in brown *Jainkyrshah*. She wears vibrant coloured *Jainkyrshah* like red, maroon, and purple cardigans when she accepts that she is also capable of being happy and is ready to start her life afresh.

Ecofeminism also emphasises on the relationship between nature and religion. It has 'a spiritual side, encompassing many expressions of feminist concern with religion based on nature' [Tøllefsen \(2011\)](#) Onaatah goes through a spiritual rejuvenation in the village. The horrendous incident leaves her in an internal dilemma and makes her question her faith in the higher power –God. She shares her doubts with her father in the pine grooves – amidst nature – which provides her a

safe space to speak out her mind without any judgements. She claims that God abandoned her the very moment the three men raped her, and God did nothing to stop that from happening. Ecofeminism in the context of this dilemma in the film, can be viewed from a spiritual perspective, where she goes through the process of 'reconnecting' and regaining faith through immersing in the depths of nature and allowing it to administer its healing process. Her time in the village in the lap of nature helps her overcome this dilemma and help her 'reconnect' with God as well as restore her faith in the religion.

People around do not spare her from the agony by asking and taunting about the accident. These moods are well presented with dark colours, but she is not seen in *Jainkyrshah* or *Jainsem* till the time she in Shillong city. The shift in the dresses is witnessed as the audience travel along with Onataah to the village. However, her reliance in God and so in life rejuvenates when she interacts with villagers especially with Bah Dondor.

Her faith in humanity is rekindled the way villagers help her to heal the wounds. Though everyone is aware of her being rape survivor, no one points it out and gives her a chance to live a normal life by boosting the faith and confidence in herself. This too is supported with the help of the attire. Onataah is seen wearing mostly blacks and grey when she loses her faith in God and feels indifferent towards cultural obligation but imbibes (*Jainkyrshah*) her tribal dress when she feels reconnected with God and gets a spiritual understanding of herself.

The villagers in the film share a close relationship with nature. The farmlands and the landscape of the village represent the natural conventional feminine space. The space is attributed with characteristics such as benevolence, trust, kindness, cordial, and reciprocity, which are attributed to the people of the village throughout the film. On the other hand, the people of the city remain connected to patriarchal rule and can be attributed with the characteristics of being dominative, insensible, violent, and narrow-minded.

Onataah covers a journey from shattered dreams and losing faith in God to gaining faith to hope for happiness that earlier she thought she did not deserve. Hope has a significant role to play all this while. It gets evident later in the film which is visibly seen on the screen with the presence of bright coloured attires and bright outdoor scenes of the village with nature as its supremacy. Hope is integral to all the major characters in the film, and it carries different essence for each. For Onataah, it meant gaining back her authority and autonomy, and being able to do what she loves the most i.e. to take care of people; for Charming and Dariti it meant their relationship to be accepted by Dariti's father; for Charming's mother it was to do with her husband being sober; for Khrawbor it meant to run the village in an orderly fashion and see to it that everyone in the village is happy, but most of all wanted Onataah to heal; for Duh it meant seeing Onataah happy and hopes for her acceptance of his affection towards her.

Duh's look with the red-boots, shawl and an umbrella are a quintessential young rural Khasi man who depicts the true cultural representation of men in rural Meghalaya. Other men of the village too are seen using shawl and umbrella. Examining the attire of men in the film shows the dynamics of the society it portrays. The women are shown in all modest traditional dress but the men, even the ones who blamed her for what happened to her (Chris and Peter) and the ones who perpetrated the violence against her are all seen in western shirt or T-shirt and trousers. This is a clear case where the custodian of safeguarding the culture and tradition is levied upon the women of the society. Men on the other hand are rarely

seen in the traditional dress rejecting the moral responsibility of being 'correct'. This is a representation of the matrilineal Khasi society adhering to patriarchal notions. Another instance is the placing of the weight of the blame on the victim by trying to assassinate her character in court, gossiping about the victim and blaming her for the act, and 'dominating' her into not seeking justice by deciding for her to not to file a case against the rapists. This depicts that 'patriarchy is inherent to bourgeois society' - city people of Shillong with higher status in the society as compared to the villagers, and that 'sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences' [Kroløkke and Sørensen \(2006\)](#)

The blatant reaction from the neighbours and specially, Peter, her fiancé at the time and his mother's reaction is what leads Onaatah to leave the patriarchal space of Shillong for the freedom of a feminine space – nature, her uncle's village. Onaatah gradually enjoys the liberating feature of nature in contrasts to the 'oppressive' and 'dominating' of the cultural sphere – Shillong, and in doing so embarks on her journey to heal. Onaatah embodies the ecofeminist idea that both nature and women are oppressed but chooses to strengthen this bond over other issues to empower her. She goes to gain confidence and makes a deliberate choice to resist the confinements of the society. She moves beyond the private female space embodied by the village to the public male sphere in order to establish her life and dreams, challenging the realm of oppressive patriarchal notions. Another crucial factor to be observed is the role of women, as a product of the patriarchal system that silently stimulates violence and encourages the ostracizing of fellow women. In the film, Onaatah is blamed despite being the victim, especially by women. Her fiancé, Peter's mother does not approve of her filing a case against the perpetrators. She goes on to blame Onaatah, by telling her not to embarrass her son and the family, and to forget whatever happened. At one instance, Onaatah's mother also, unintentionally, in the process of cautioning her younger sister, Oritaah, ends up saying things that made her feel like she had brought dishonour to her family and that she is responsible for making her family suffer.

It is the ecological space where women feel free to place their trust on another woman and befriend her. Onaatah and Dariti develops a special bond of friendship that bloomed in the most devastating of times for both the characters and they continuously rendered their support to each other to overcome the hurdle. Onaatah and Dariti placed their trust on each other to help out the other. Onaatah employ her female nature of nurturing and caring within the masculine public sphere when she speaks up for Dariti and her child-to-be-born, thus 'breaking the segregation between the gendered spaces'. Dariti also supports Onaatah in her journey of healing by being her confidante and listening to her.

6. CONCLUSION

Onaatah: Of the Earth traces the connection between gender, nature, polarization of feminine and masculine spaces, the attributes adorned to them and their interplay in the society. The disconcerted ideas behind dress selection and their identification with gender is evident in the film. The analysis depicts that the treatment of Onaatah in the masculine space marks the exploitation and oppression of women as well as nature. The subjugation of women in the film further challenges the patriarchal notion that considers 'nature as the inanimate object and women as the inferior identity', by juxtaposing the two spaces – masculine space represented by the city and the feminine space of the village [Nese \(2015\)](#) As Onaatah moves to the feminine space, she starts connecting with her roots and nature which eventually help to overcome her fears and makes her strong enough to pursue what

she had always aspired – to take care of the people. In the same space, she is seen wearing *Jainkyrshah* which implies her connection with the roots. The dress with variation in the colour scheme is instrumental in the narrative of the film and binds it together as a unit with fractions of different emotions and meanings being depicted in each phase. The film rejects the anthropocentric notion of hierarchical difference between nature and human and goes onto portray the harmonious cohabitation of human and non-human (nature) Nese (2015). One crucial notion that is presented in the film is 'patriarchy's discriminatory structure that denies access to justice for women' Nese (2015) This is evident from the constant humiliation by her fiancé, friends, neighbours, and others render an agony she has to endure irrespective of the fact that she had won the case in court. It also portrays the significant role that nature plays in the healing of the protagonist Onaatah and empowering her to take back her authority of herself. The film presents the journey of Onaatah, and the director presents the gradual changes in the character by drawing it parallel to the way she looks different during the different phases of her journey.

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