



Nazi Racial Creed And Radical Environmentalism In Savitri Devi's *Akhnaton*

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Abstract

This study deals with the treatment of the ancient Egyptian king Akhenaten in the works of Savitri Devi, with particular reference to her play *Akhnaton* (1948), in which she associates Akhenaten with the racial creed and radical environmentalist ideology of Germany's National Socialism. The play is an example of the appropriation of ancient Egypt by different groups and ideologies in works of art and literature. In the works of Savitri Devi, a fanatical advocate of Nazism and a passionate devotee of Adolf Hitler, Akhenaten is depicted as an Aryan hero and a preacher of a nature religion. For Devi, Akhenaten is a champion of animal rights and an advocate of a bio-egalitarianism that aligns him with the tenets of Deep Ecological thinking. Devi also depicts Akhenaten as a preacher of a philosophy of pacifism and non-violence that prevented him from attacking the rebellious city states in the Eastern territories of the Egyptian empire. As an allegory of the fall of the Third Reich, Savitri Devi's play *Akhnaton* depicts the ancient Egyptian king as a great visionary whose life and career echo the life of her leader Adolf Hitler. As such, the play also identifies the protagonist's readiness to die rather than relinquish her faith with the author's zeal for martyrdom for the sake of the Nazi cause.

Keywords: Savitri Devi, Akhenaten, *Akhnaton*, National Socialism, Deep Ecology, Aryanism

Introduction

Savitri Devi's interest in the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten¹ is part of the long Western obsession with ancient Egypt and the diverse aspects of its civilization, and the heretic king of the Amarna period has received a good share of that cultural interest. Devi's play, *Akhnaton*, is one in a very long list of cultural artifacts based on the life of the Amarna king, across all forms of artistic,

literary, and performative media. Dominic Montserrat (2014) has noted that literary appropriations of ancient history themes and characters are mostly reflections of their creators' purposes and help serve their particular agendas and that the "multiple and contradictory redrawings of characters from ancient history . . . are always more concerned with the importance of the issues discussed through them than their historicity. In that respect Akhenaten is no exception" (p.1). The king of Egypt has been adopted by a variety of cultural, social, and political groups, dressed in diverse garbs and interpreted in all different and contradictory ways; however, "all presenters of Akhenaten, scholarly or otherwise, have distinctive personal, cultural and generic biases that shape their perceptions" (p. 2). One of the peculiar costumes Akhenaten was draped in was that of a Nazi pharaoh.

Savitri Devi (1905-1982) was an Indianized Greek-French author, a pro-Nazi, a fervent advocate of National Socialist ideology, a fanatic devotee of Adolf Hitler, and an animal rights activist. From her chosen abode in India, Devi propagated Aryanism and Nazi views that became a source of inspiration for several neo-Nazi sympathizers and alt-right groups in Europe and the USA. Devi is the author of a number of books on Akhenaten: Her play *Akhnaton*, published in 1948, was preceded by a number of other works on the same subject. In 1940, she published *Akhnaton's Eternal Message: A Scientific Religion 3,300 Years Old*, and in 1942, she published a children's book, *Joy of the Sun: The Beautiful Life of Akhnaton, King of Egypt, Told to Young People*. Her deepest work and the most comprehensively researched on the Egyptian pharaoh is *A Son of God: The Life and Philosophy of Akhnaton, King of Egypt*, 1946. Devi's *The Lightning and the Sun*, 1958, is dedicated to her philosophy of history, modelled on the examples of Ghenkis Khan, Akhenaten, and Hitler. The book is considered a cornerstone in Aryan supremacy writings. Devi was well versed in the history of ancient Egypt in general, and the footnotes to *A Son of God* shows her knowledge of the literature available at her time on the Amarna period. While she particularly depended on the works of Sir Wallis Budge, J. Baikie, Sir Flinders Petri, and Arthur Weigall, the latter's book, *The Life and Time of Akhenaten*, seems to have had the deepest influence on her.

Devi's play *Akhnaton* is set at the court of Akhenaten's temple at Thebes, the third year of Horemheb's reign. By that time, the anathematization campaign begun with Tutankhamun, the son of the heretic king, had reached its apex; the king's city was almost abandoned, his name removed, his image defaced, and

his monuments demolished. The followers of Akhenaten's sun cult had deserted the new religion and returned to the old gods, and the remainders were harassed and persecuted by the authorities and obliged to forsake Atenism. Only one woman, Zetut-Neferu-Aten, the high priestess of Aten and the protagonist of the play, refuses adamantly to yield to the threats of torture and death and faces bravely all the men of the new régime, represented in the play mainly by Neferhetep, the Amon high priest and by the captain of the guard, who fails to persuade her out of her devotion to the Aten to evade persecution and death.

Savitri Devi's admiration for Akhenaten was partly in accordance with the Nazi's interest in the heretic pharaoh as presumably representing Aryan influences on the ancient Egyptian eighteenth dynasty. Devi refers to the possible influence of the Aryan solar religion on the shaping of Akhenaten's religious thinking through the influence of the wives of his father, Amenhotep III, like the sister of the king of Babylon and Gilukhipa, the sister of Dushratta, the king of Mitanni, a presumed land of origin of the Aryans, and other Mitannian women in his father's harem. But it was the influence of his mother that had the deepest impact on his mind. Although Queen Tiye worshipped other Egyptian traditional gods, her favorite one was the Aten. Devi (1946) considers that Tiye "had probably played the greatest part in the early formation of the king's soul" (p. 62), and she believes that the similarity between Akhnaten's Aten and any Aryan god lies "not in the assumption of any influence exerted upon Akhnaten, but in the fact that he was himself partly Aryan (being the grandson of a Mitannian princess)" (p. 28). Devi also accepted Petrie's theory that Nefertit was actually Tadukhipa, the Mitannian princess, arguing that "if Nefertiti be, as Sir Flinders Petrie suggests, the daughter of the king of Mitanni, then one may suppose that she told her young husband about Mithra and perhaps Surya, the sun-gods of her country" (p. 36). Tiye's Aryan descent makes Akhenaten himself half-Aryan. According to such alleged genealogy, Akhenaten's adoption of sun-worship originated from his Aryan origin, a view that has been refuted by later Egyptologists (Reeves, 2019, p. 51).

Akhenaten in Nazi Egyptology

After 1933, when Hitler came to power, the German field of Egyptology was obliged to align itself with the National Socialist ideology of the superiority of the Aryan race. Egyptologists under the Third Reich were spurred by the need to verify the Nazi's racial creed by investigating the relevance of Egypt to this

program. However, this endeavor did not always lead to consistent conclusions. Whereas for Helmut Berve, Egyptology was not a worthy field of study because it focused on an alien race, the major Egyptologists of the period endorsed the view that the Egyptians were of Aryan origin. Georg Steindorff advocated the existence of an Egyptian race with Nordic features in early Egypt, and Heinrich Schäfer, asserted the “Nordic nature” of the Egyptian art of the Old Kingdom. Walther Wolf, too, one of the ardent advocates of the Nazi interpretation of ancient Egyptian history, affirmed the belief that Egypt’s culture and art testified to its Nordic nature, and detecting Nordic features in Egyptian art, he concluded that the Egyptians could be of Aryan origin (Schneider, 2018).

Adolf Hitler was personally interested in Akhenaten’s religion, “which he saw as a form of pagan monotheism, associating the king with ideas of progress and a refusal to be bound by the past” (Tysdale, 2018, chapter 6, para 7). The dispute over the bust of Akhenaten’s wife Nefertiti, discovered by the German Egyptologist Ludwig Borchardt in 1912, is also related to the Nazi interest in the Amarna period. Adolf Hitler’s infatuation with the Egyptian queen stood in the way of returning the bust to Egypt after Hermann Goering promised King Fouad to give it back to the Egyptian government. Hitler vetoed the plan, considering the queen German heritage:

I know this famous bust. I have viewed it and admired it many times ... It is a unique masterpiece, a jewel, a real treasure ... Do you know what I am going to do one day? I am going to build a new Egyptian Museum in Berlin; I dream that there I will create a hall topped by a dome, where alone, in the middle, this marvel will be placed. And for that reason, I will not renounce the queen’s head. (as cited in Tyldesley, chapter 6, para 8)

Nicky Nielsen (2020) comments that “Hitler viewed the bust as evidence that Nefertiti had indeed been the perfect example of Aryan purity” (p. 76). Speculations of Nefertiti’s Aryan origin preceded the Nazis on the basis of the pale skin and beautiful looks of the Berlin bust which so attracted Hitler. “Apparently her ‘Aryan’ looks had made her particularly attractive to the Führer” (Fletcher, 2013, p. 61). A Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum described one of the queen’s face masks found in Amarna “as being ‘not that of an Egyptian nor a Semite. It is that of a Northerner; it is a Nordic type . . . no Egyptian woman; there never was any Egyptian woman like her, or Syrian or other Semite either. She is a European” (as cited in Fletcher, 2013, p.

61). However, all assumptions of Nefertiti's foreign origin are disproved by modern Egyptology; according to Nicholas Reeves (2019), "on present evidence, the probability is that Nefertiti was Egyptian born and bred" (p. 83).

The Amarna Period and the German *Volkisch* Culture

The particular appeal of Akhenaten to the Nazis can be related to the intellectual atmosphere in Germany that partly furnished the background for the rise of the National Socialist ideology. The Nazi ideology was hugely impacted by the *volkisch* movement of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, adopted by huge sectors of German youth. National Socialism's embracing of *volkisch* thought, encompassing nature mysticism and receiving sustenance from the streams of theosophy, Aryan pagan nature religion, and Aryan solar mythology, aligned it with the cult of the Aten. The *volkisch* milieu that extended roughly from the late nineteenth century to the Nazi seizure of power was partly motivated by what the Germans conceived as signs of degeneration of civilization at the hands of the Judo-Christian tradition, and the forces of modernization and industrialization, which were blamed for the malaise of the German society. *Volkisch* writers advocated a revival of Nordic paganism with the sun at the center as the "sole God of the true Germans" (Moose, 2021, p. 59). Disillusioned with Judo-Christianity and the values of capitalism and repudiating the modern industrial and urban developments, utopian youth groups formed small Aryan utopian communities in rural settlements based on free land ownership:

They were hiking, singing German folk songs, reading Novalis, Goethe, Haekel, Wilhelm Bölsche, Hesse, and Madame Blavatsky, wearing swastika pendants and runic rings, bathing nude in the sun, and dancing around bonfires on the days of summer solstice – the ancient German festival of the changing sun. (Noll, 1997, p. 114)

The celebration of the Germanic sun festivals, the fusion with nature, and nudism were elements that the National Socialists and Savitri Devi associated with Akhenaten's era. The depiction of nude Akhenaten and Nefertiti under the sun disk in Amarna art bore close affinity to the utopian *volkisch* nudist movement glorifying the Aryan sun (Montseratt, 2014, p. 111). This "mixture of nudism, Theosophy, Egyptian mysticism, and anti-Semitism created a Nazi Akhenaten" (Landes, 2011, p. 184).

Savitri Devi's Religion of Nature and Deep Ecology

Deeply immersed in German currents of thought and merging them with Hinduism, animal protectionism and vegetarianism, Devi created for herself a new religion of nature, a “syncretic, cross-cultural, hybrid” form of “esoteric Hitlerism” (Versluis, 2013, p. 121). Jeffrey Kaplan (2012) summarizes the plethora of origins of Devi's intellectual *mélange* that constituted her unique brand of nature religion:

That religion is composed of a bricolage of elements: National Socialism and its nineteenth century German philosophical precursors, the Egyptian pharaoh AkhnAten whom she sees as the first to create a ‘life-centered’ religion, the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Buddhism of the historical Buddha and of the Indian Buddhist king Asoka and, remarkably, elements of Jewish eschatology in her positing of Adolf Hitler as the messiah ben Joseph whose fall was simply the necessary precondition for the future National Socialist avatar who will carry Hitler's work to completion. (p. 8)

Of all the diverse components of *volkisch* thought that National Socialism assimilated, it was the sun worship that occupied the central place in Savitri Devi's thinking, and it is this that mostly accounts for the role Akhenaten assumes at the heart of her philosophy.

Devi's religion of nature can be seen as the bridge between the environmental ideology of National Socialism and Deep Ecology. For Devi, Akhenaten was “the first to create a “life-centered” religion” (Kaplan) that differed from the anthropocentric monotheistic religions which preach a central position of man in the universe and his supremacy over all other creatures. It is this man-centrism that is challenged by the Deep Ecology principles of the equality and interconnectedness of all living things. Devi's adoption and modification of the National Socialist environmentalist creed makes her a forerunner of deep ecological thinking. Rooted in German nationalism, *volkisch* environmental thinking was couched in a celebration of the German folk. It was in the context of the *volkisch* movement that the Nazi environmental ideology matured in the second half of the nineteenth century. Nazi ideology was also deeply influenced by the ideas of Ernst Haeckel, one of the originators of the modern discipline of ecology and one of the chief proponents of Social Darwinism in Germany. Haeckel comes closest to the egalitarian position of the deep ecologists in his

challenging of the European conception of the uniqueness and singularity of the human race and “the inflated importance” which the European civilization attached to the idea of man. Man is “an insignificant creature when viewed as part of and measured against the vastness of the cosmos and the overwhelming forces of nature . . . a tiny grain of protoplasm in the perishable framework of organic nature” (Gasman, 2017, p. 33). The ideology of the Nazi Party as proclaimed by its high echelon members espoused ecological views derived particularly from Ernst Haeckel. For instance, “Hitler and Himmler were both strict vegetarians and animal lovers, attracted to nature mysticism and homeopathic cures, and staunchly opposed to vivisection and cruelty to animals” (Staudenmaier, 2011, pp. 15-16), and in reality, the Third Reich’s practices and environmental laws were the forerunner (Together with the United Kingdom) of the European nature and animal protection movement and legislation (Pluda, 2019, p. 25).

In harmony with the Nazi green ideology, Devi anticipates the deep ecological views pioneered by Arne Naess, George Sessions, and Bill Devall, calling for a deeper probing into the value systems as origins of ecological problems and their solutions beyond the traditional shallow procedural approaches that do not pay attention to the underlying philosophical roots and worldviews. The main tenets of Deep Ecology as formulated in the eight principles proposed by Naess and Sessions in 1984, are based on the belief in the intrinsic value of both human and non-human life, regardless of the usefulness of the non-human world to human purposes and the need for humans to minimize their interference with the ecological system (Devall, 2007, p. 70). Similar to Akhenaten’s pantheistic religion that preached an immanent and universal God, Devi’s religion of nature rejects the centrality of man and the subservience of all living things to man’s needs:

The energy of the sun bestowed its benefits upon all things. This universality was particularly important to Savitri Devi, who decried the existence of gods made in the human image. She compared this universality favorably with the “childish” partiality of man-made gods toward their authors. Savitri Devi did not accept a demarcation line between man and the rest of the living world. She criticized monotheistic creeds from Judaism onward for positing a god who gave special rights to man to use all other creatures for his own benefit. She detested Christianity and other creedal religions for making man, and not life, the

center of their creation myths and the basis of their scale of values. Savitri Devi celebrated an impartial immanent deity in all nature. (Goodrick-Clarke, 1998, p. 99)

Savitri Devi (1946) despised Christianity as “an irrational and unaesthetic creed, fed on miracles, bent on asceticism, strongly stressing the power of evil, ashamed of the body and afraid of life” (p. 279). Above all, Christianity’s God is not as egalitarian and universal as the Aten, for it endowed man a special place above His other creatures:

It was a God who, in fact, never shook off entirely some of the crude attributes which he possessed when worshipped by the Jews as their tribal deity; a God who, of all living creatures, gave man alone an immortal soul, infinitely precious in his eyes, for he loved man in the same childishly partial way as old Jehovah loved the Jewish nation. (Devi, 1946, p. 279)

Similar to Akhenaten’s creed, Devi’s religion of nature espoused a pantheistic monism that contradicted with the transcendental God of monotheistic religions. In Akhenaten’s Aten religion, as well as in the Nazi Monism, man is devoid of the special position he is allotted by Christianity. Even after modern Europe lost its faith in Christianity after the Renaissance, it still adhered to a man-centered type of morality in which “the behaviour styled as ‘right’ is precisely that which is in accordance with Christian standards; that which approaches the charitable, democratic, and somewhat narrow ideal of the Christian Gospel” (Devi, 1946, p. 284). In anthropocentric cultures, living things have value only as long as they are of utilitarian usefulness to man. In contrast, “the religion of the Disk actually transcended man, treating him as but one species among the millions on our biodiverse planet” (Goodrick-Clarke, 1998, p. 104).

Green Akhenaten and Animal Rights

Harking back to Akhenaten’s religion, Devi’s fervent condemnation of anthropocentrism and her passionate defense of birds and beasts against human exploitation in her book *Impeachment of Man*, 1959, make her a precursor of Deep Ecology’s eco-centrism that acknowledges the inherent worth of all living creatures, regardless of their utility to humans. Moreover, Devi’s portrayal of Akhenaten’s religion associates it with Deep Ecology. While she characterizes Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as modern European societies as man-

centered cultures in which people believe in “the right of man to exploit other creatures,” for her, Akhenaten’s cult is the only creed out of India that is characterized as a “life-centered religion” (1959, p. 3):

Perhaps the first in the world — to have had a fully clear consciousness of the supreme beauty of life in all sentient creatures, from the godlike man that he himself was down to plants, and to have loved it in each one of them, impartially, as the wording and the general tone of his hymns show beyond doubt. . . . one of the very first, if not the first of those “lights in the darkness,” as we have characterized the few forerunners of a better world: of a world in which one would help all creatures to live in health and to enjoy the sunshine. (p. 61)

For Zetut, Atenism, being free from the bias to humans found in other creeds, is the only religion that treats all living things as equal: “the one, true natural religion of all the living: men, beasts, birds, and even plants; the joyful song of all that breathes upon earth to the One Sun, to the One God” (Devi, 1948, p. 38). She responds to Neferhetep’s tirade against Akhenaten’s destruction of long-cherished Egyptian traditions, describing Akhenaten as “the herald of a new mankind, further above this present one than all the wise men think themselves above the simple beasts” (p. 55). Similar to the first principle of Deep Ecology, Akhenaten’s religion emphasizes the inherent value of all creatures irrespective of their usefulness for humans: “it implied love towards all creatures, our brothers, which the Sun has brought into life not for our use, but for each one of them to flourish in health and beauty, and to praise Him to the utmost capacity of its species. Even the plants are created for a higher purpose inherent in their nature — ultimately, for the glorification of the One universal Energy — not for us” (Devi, 1948. p. 161).

Hormos, another follower of Aten, deplores the unreadiness of humanity for the perfect egalitarian creed of Akhenaten: “The joyous Teaching, resting on no hopes or threats, or customs; the Teaching of integral, active love towards all living things just for the sake of life’s own beauty, Akhnaten’s Teaching is, I am afraid, too perfect for the world” (Devi, 1948, p. 39). Moreover, for Devi, Akhenaten was probably a vegetarian like Hitler and like herself, she declares on the mouth of Zetut: “My King has never shed the blood of man or beast” (Devi, 1948, p. 50); “she even suggested that Akhenaten banned hunting and bloodsports at Amarna because he loved animals so much” (Montserrat, 2014, p. 112).

Akhenaten's Abstract Religion

Devi took upon herself to defend Akhenaten against all the traditional charges leveled against him by historians and contemporary Egyptologists. The traditional accusations leveled at Akhenaten, as reflected in the play, address the lack of public appeal of his religion and his neglect of the affairs of the empire, which resulted in the loss of the eastern territories to the rebels. In *A Son of God*, Devi elaborates on the failure of Akhenaten's teachings by being, morally and philosophically, far in advance of his time:

If it be the abyss that separates a perfect man from the average human cattle, a rational mind and an enlightened soul from the superstitious crowd of believers; an all-loving, all-understanding heart, from the narrowly selfish majority of men, then, it only helps to render the great one lonely and powerless. The greater the difference between himself and his people, the lesser the immediate success of the man of moral, philosophical or religious genius. His words, his actions meet with no understanding; his lofty example has no imitators; the creation he strives to bring forth remains a dream. (1946, p. 4)

Devi further explains that the cult of the Aten “was too rational to appeal to the average people of any time” (p. 5). For Devi, Akhenaten's religion did not succeed because it lacked the three elements that were essential for the success of all religions: “a mythology; miracles; and a more or less definite doctrine concerning the hereafter. . . but the cult of the Aten was devoid of all three” (p. 6). The cult of the Aten did not have angels, demons, or saints; Akhenaten did not boast of being capable of miracles, and he did not offer his followers any promise of life after death. There are no rewards or punishments or rules of do's and don'ts. People wanted mythologies, wonderful deeds, and the promise of heaven.

Neferhetep, the high priest of Amon, speaking to Zetut, condemns Akhenaten's taking away from the Egyptians their precious mythological stories, their anthropoid familiar gods, their traditional symbols, their long-established religious customs, and the hope in an afterlife:

But see what misery He brought upon this land. All that our people loved, all that, for centuries had been a feature of our life—the homely likenesses of gods that spoke to eye and heart, age-old symbols keeping alive eternal

secret wisdom; the stories that had cradled our childhood, and the hopes of a new life beyond this one; the time-honoured traditions, foundations of society, that rendered tangible and lovable to all the vital truth - He took it all away from us (Devi, 1948, p. 54).

Hormose expresses the same misgivings about the lack of appeal of the Aten to ordinary people: “myths and symbols, I am afraid, humans will always need; and the ethics of nearly all the men of any time, will always be the ethics of the land in which they live” (p. 39). For Zetut, however, it is too early to say that Akhenaten failed: “He is in advance of our times; He is in advance of many barbaric ages yet to come. But wait until the world has perished before thou sayest, ‘He failed.’ As children grow, and their old clothes become too small for them, so men might feel, one day, that they have grown, and cast off superstition, and come to Him” (p. 39).

Akhenaten's Pacifism

While a considerable number of Egyptologists concurred with the view that Akhenaten was responsible for the loss of the Egyptian empire, some have attributed his reluctance to militarily interfere in the Asian arena to his alleged pacifism (Ridley, 2019), a view that Devi adopts in the play and in her other writings on Akhenaten. Savitri Devi's portrayal of Akhenaten as a pacifist in her play is in line with Deep Ecology peace ethics in several ways. According to Deep Ecology, the dominant culture's exploitation of the earth's resources and treatment of other species as commodities is a form of violence that must be opposed; Akhenaten's commitment to non-violence is consistent with the Deep Ecology idea of respecting the value and integrity of all forms of life. Deep Ecology envisions a world free from the destructive forces of greed, exploitation, and violence. Thus, Akhenaten, through his pacifist attitude stands as a symbol of peace with nature and benevolence towards all life forms.

Neferhetep reminds Zetut of how Akhenaten neglected the affairs of the kingdom, which led to the decline of the Egyptian empire that his great eighteenth dynasty rulers helped extend. His reluctance to respond to the calls of his vassals to send troops to support them eventually resulted in the loss of the Egyptian dominions in Syria-Palestine:

All that which Egypt struggled for, all that she had achieved by the strong arm of her great kings and Amon's help; all that it was His duty to

preserve at any cost: the fruit of centuries of toil and sacrifice at home, and of expensive wars abroad; our wealth, our honour, and above all our Empire, won in Asia by streams of blood; that restless Empire within which the all-powerful hand of ten king-gods, sons of Amon, had kept order and peace . . . He lost it all. For His mad dream, He flung it to the winds—that one solid reality which He could not rebuild. . . . A man, at all events, unfit to be a king; an idle dreamer! (Devi, 1948, p. 55).

For Devi, the ecological explains the political, a position that affiliates her with modern ecological politics. Devi provides a rebuttal to Akhenaten's alleged failure in safeguarding the empire and his negligence and political incompetence or lack of interest in the international affairs, which led to the loss of Egyptian dominions in the Levant to its enemies, in terms of his Sun Disk religion. According to her, Akhenaten was opposed to wars and refused to fight to subdue the rebellious nations of the eastern regions of the empire. Akhenaten's pacifism was grounded in his nature religion; as the god of all people of all nations, the Aten is "the God of all nations as opposed to the hosts of national and tribal deities worshipped all over the ancient world. . . . The fatherhood of the Sun implied, in Akhnaton's eyes, the brotherhood of all sentient beings, human and non-human. (p. 150). Moreover, Akhenaten's objection to warfare also springs from the "idea of the right of all nations to live free under the same life-giving Sun, the Father of all" (p. 160). Devi agrees that Akhenaten was responsible for the loss of the empire that his ancestors built, but not because of his purported negligence or incapacity but out of his belief in the equal rights of all nations to autonomous rule:

Akhnaton was not the man able to keep what Thotmose the First and Thotmose the Third had conquered. . . . the reason why he could not keep it is that he was hundreds of years in advance of his times — and of our times. For the principle which guided him, in his systematic refusal to help his loyal vassals in their struggle against the "nationalist" elements of Syria, seems to have been that of the right of the Syrians, as a people distinct from the Egyptians, to dispose of themselves and solve their own problems. (p. 159)

When Neferhetep blames Akhenaten for the loss of the empire because of his neglect of his imperial duties and because he "allowed fair Syria and Canaan to

fall into the hands of Egypt's enemies," Zetut replies that Akhenaten's worldview was far ahead of his time and is not to be viewed in the light of contemporary narrow nationalistic concerns. His universal religion of the sun heralds a new world order based on the fraternity of all people and creatures, which lays the basis for true international peace:

Those gods of thine, just as all other gods who show an undue preference for this or for that nation, or even for the bulk of mankind as a whole, are but the vain creations of their worshippers. Each tribe fights in its own gods' name for nasty selfish ends. But He Whom thou accusest of criminal neglect, He Whom thou hatest, hath beheld all kingdoms and all tribes in the light of His Father Who is also theirs: the shining Father of all life, the Sun. All lands are His, He said, Whom men and beasts all praise alike, in different ways. And that collective greed which urges any tribe to force its sway upon the weaker neighbouring ones, or any monarch to keep down a restless conquered land by might of arms, that greed, I say, was, in His eyes, no better than the lust for riches of a common robber. (Devi, 1948, p. 58)

However, despite Savitri Devi's portrayal of Akhenaten as a pacifist who adheres to the Deep Ecology ethics of nonviolence and respect for all living things, her controversial opinions, which link her to far-right ideologies, and her racially discriminatory beliefs are incompatible with Deep Ecology's inclusive and non-discriminatory ethics.

Allegory: Priestesses of Akhenaten and Hitler

A twist in the plot happens when the captain of the guard confides to the audience that he is in love with Zetut, who does not return his love because the dead king is the only person in her heart. He offers her a plan: He says he will arrange a *coup d'état* to seize power from Horemheb and that he will make her queen and will re-establish the religion of Akhenaten in the land of Egypt and will even spread it beyond the border by increasing Egypt's dominion in Kush and Syria-Palestine:

I swear I shall, by all the gods! Only a single word from thee, a word of hope for me that thou wilt consent to become my queen, and thou shalt be

what thou hast not, even in thy most hidden thoughts, dared to regard as possible: Akhnaton's own Vice-reine, ruling the world according to His will, exerting domination for Him and Him alone, from Kush to Carchemish and further still . . . For I will reconquer all the lands which He forsook for His sublime ideals, and force them to accept the Energy within the Sun as the One God, and Akhnaton, Son of the Sun, as their One King, like unto Him—thysself thou hast admitted that strength of arms alone could restore to Him the world, even now all seems lost to Him. And thou shalt hear His praise, from South and North, in many tongues (Devi, 1948, p. 71).

Although the captain's offer would sound a golden opportunity for the restoration of Akhenaten's religion and even for its spread, Zetut refuses his plea and chooses to die. For her, to accept the captain's love will be a betrayal of her devotion to Akhenaten. Although the reward is great and means the same that the followers of Akhenaten aspired to - the success of the religion of the Aten - the price for that triumph is to lie about one's feelings and to pretend to have feelings that one does not have. "I have chosen to die," she tells him, "[be] it a cruel death, after long hours of torment, it is better than to be a liar before Him," (p. 76). Akhenaten's goal was not success at any cost; his ultimate ideal was to live in truth, regardless of the consequences. Akhenaten "sought spotless perfection, and success. He never would have bought at the cost of a stain," she tells the captain.

Zetut-Neferu-Aten prefers to be martyred rather than to relinquish her faith in Akhenaten's religion. Zetut's steadfastness in adhering to Atenism and her unwavering loyalty to Akhenaten is analogous to Devi's own loyalty to Adolf Hitler and her firm defiance after the fall of the Third Reich. Montserrat (2014) notices that "Devi obviously identified strongly with Zetut-Neferu-Aten, whose speeches in the play set the pattern for the rest of Devi's own life" (p. 112). This identification is attested by Devi's own life after the defeat of Nazi Germany, paralleled in the play by the fall of Atenism and the persecution of its followers. After 1945, Devi acted as a Nazi activist, spreading Nazi propaganda in Europe and communicating with former Nazi Party members and other Nazi loyalists. In her post-war European tours, she witnessed first-hand the extreme humiliation and demoralization that the fallen Germans were subject to, to her own personal chagrin. In the words of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (1998), Devi's "desire to identify belatedly with the defeated Nazi cause and its devotees propelled her

into a quixotic and hopeless mission on behalf of the Third Reich.” Her fanatical sense of mission and her burning zeal for martyrdom for the sake of the Nazi cause led her to commit acts that led to her imprisonment in the Allied prisons (p. 127). At the court, her accomplice denied interest in the subject of her Nazi propaganda leaflets, a position that is repeated by several characters in the play, who surrender to the enemy to save themselves or their families, in sharp contrast to Zetut’s uncompromising stance. Devi expressed to her lawyer her readiness and desire for the death sentence (p. 139). The parallelism between Akhenaten and Hitler is further established by the similarity between Zetut’s long speeches in the face of her persecutors and Devi’s own long speech at trial about the greatness of the Führer and the value of National Socialism (p. 140). While Zetut was finally murdered, Savitri Devi, denied martyrdom, was sentenced to three years to serve only six months before deportation out of the German occupied zone.

Conclusion

As an allegory of the fall of Hitler, Savitri Devi’s play *Akhnaton* depicts the ancient Egyptian king as a great visionary whose life and career echo the life of her leader Adolf Hitler. Devi’s other books on Akhenaten provide the background to the play, filling the gaps in the story of the pharaoh as an Aryan hero preaching an Aryan sun cult. Devi’s *A Son of God*, *The Lightning and the Sun*, and *Impeachment of Man* complement the picture of Akhenaten as a herald of National Socialism’s radical environmentalism and as an early champion of animal rights. In both the play and her other writings on the subject, Devi defends Akhenaten against the traditional charges of negligence to the affairs of his office as a political and military leader of Egypt, eventually resulting in the loss of Egypt’s imperial territories. Devi’s nature religion, rooted in Akhenaten’s cult, provides a link between National Socialism’s environmental program and the Aryan race ideology of the Third Reich and the tenets of Deep Ecology.

Notes

1. Whereas the name of the ancient Egyptian king is spelled as Akhenaten throughout the paper, the spelling of the name as it appears in the title of Savitri Devi's play, as well as in the quotations from the play, is retained as Akhnaton.

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العقيدة العنصرية و الفكر البيئي الراديكالي في مسرحية أخناتون لسافيتري ديفي

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المستخلص:

يناقش هذا البحث التناول الأدبي لشخصية الفرعون المصري أخناتون في أعمال الكاتبة سافيتري ديفي و بالأخص في مسرحيتها أخناتون (١٩٤٨) والتي قدمت فيها الملك المصري كسليل للجنس الآري و داعية لديانة الشمس الآرية. والمسرحية مثال على الاهتمام في الآداب و الفنون الغربية بحضارة مصر القديمة و كذلك على محاولات بعض التوجهات الأيديولوجية تفسير تلك الحضارة تفسيراً يتوافق مع أهدافها الخاصة. و على هذا نجد أن ديفي، وهي المؤمنة بمبادئ النازية، تصبغ أخناتون بصبغة تتوافق مع العقيدة العنصرية للنازية و أفكارها البيئية التي تتفق في كثير من عناصرها مع مبادئ نظرية "البيئية العميقة" *Deep Ecology* التي تنادى بالمساواة بين كافة الكائنات الحية و بتقدير قيمتها الذاتية بغض النظر عن فائدتها النفعية للبشر. كما يظهر أخناتون في أعمال الكاتبة كحامل دعوة للسلام العالمي مستمدة من عقيدته الشمسية. و أخيراً يتناول البحث مسرحية أخناتون كعمل رمزي عن سقوط النازية و فيه تصبح الشخصية الرئيسية، في سعيها للشهادة في سبيل عقيدتها الأتونية، تجسيدا للمؤلفة نفسها التي كانت تسعى للتضحية بحياتها في سبيل العقيدة النازية.

الكلمات الدالة: سافيتري ديفي، أخناتون، النازية، البيئة العميقة، الجنس الآري