

INTERROGATING THE ECOFEMINIST ELEMENTS IN ANITA DESAI'S FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

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Abstract:

The recent surge in interest in feminism and "ecological or environmental" movements has given rise to eco-feminism, a brand-new movement. Eco-feminism is feminist in that it provides strategies for identifying and combating male favouritism while also being ecological because the preservation of ecosystems is one of its main goals. Why women are viewed as less valuable than males and why are they only partially represented in the cultural sphere? These are questions that fascinate feminists. Environmentalists are interested in the reasons why people are often left out of portrayals of nature and why nature is seen as inferior to culture.

The story examines how repressive behaviours associated with patriarchal society exert pressure on levels of environment and gender. The association of the feminine principle with nature, particularly in India, has a unique significance. Eco-feminists have long placed a high priority on the relationship between the natural world and the experiences of women. Since that reproduction and caring are at the core of nature's activities, she is often compared to a woman. Women's responsibilities are seen as natural comparably. The philosophy of ecofeminism emerged from a variety of feminist activists, including the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Political, Philosophical, Woman, Nature, Ecology, Environment.

The term, Ecofeminism, often known as ecological feminism, was originally used by Francis d' Eaubonne in 1974. The merger of feminist and ecological principles led to the development of a way of thinking and a movement. The paper investigates the connection between women, animals, and violence from the viewpoint of material postcolonial ecofeminism.

In the context of ecofeminism, this topic has not got much attention, especially when mixed with postcolonial issues. Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* offers the chance to re-examine some of the postcolonial themes found in male authors' literature from a gendered viewpoint while also thinking about the mechanisms that place women and animals in inferior and stereotypical places. The Chipko movement was founded in 1973 to protect the forests of the Himalayas. The primary goals of the reforestation initiatives in Kenya, which Wangari Maathai established in 1977, were to advance a favourable perception of women and their independence. In her influential, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Carolyn Merchant explores the historical relationships between women and nature, bringing them to light and showing how nature's role as a nurturing mother led to a link between the history of women and nature.

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* depicts a connection between the darker aspects of women and their corresponding oppression and victimization and the darker colours of nature. The paper will examine how language and the many pictures with complex connotations relate to women. Culture vs. nature dualisms have been a major worry of modern feminism. This extremely fundamental presumption about women is clarified by Simone de Beauvoir's famous line about women as the "Other" in *The Second Sex*. According to her, "man seeks the Other in the woman as Nature and his fellow being. But we are aware of the conflicted emotions that nature arouses in people. She is the wellspring of his being, the domain that he subjugates to his will, and even though he exploits her, she crushes him. (Simone de Beauvoir, 1974: 62-63).

This identification is how De Beauvoir describes man's ambivalence towards nature and women. But, because males are unable to define their relationship to both women and nature, this

becomes a major issue. According to Maureen Devine, an ecofeminist from more recent times, "woman is a victim not only of individual men, but of patriarchal power institutions that treat women and the environment as objects and within these power structures both become victims" (Maureen Devine, 1992: 52). Beasts, public of color, "Third World" groups, and the inferior category are all considered to be part of the "other," or all the marginalized inferior groups, in the eyes of ecofeminists. (Gruen, 1993: 80).

Ecofeminists draw attention to the language connections between the rape of the soil and the oppression of women. The pronoun "she" and the phrase "Mother Nature" are examples of terms that are used to describe nature as feminine. They also compare women to nature, calling them "wild" and "untamed." Some Indian women authors have explored environmental issues and female subjectivity in literature with an awareness of the concurrent oppression of together, females and the environment as a result of ladies-led movements in India. The research and analysis conducted for this work emphasize a comparative approach, reading Lee Yew Leong's 2010 small tale "*Honey, I'm Going To Be A Jellyfish Now*" through the prism of Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*.

The concept of violence is key to exploring how women and animals are oppressed by patriarchy in both Desai's novel and Lee's short story. One of the primary themes of this essay is that even though women and animals are portrayed as being outside of civilization in both the novel and the short tale, they nonetheless play an important part in both. In turn, the animal's figure mediates the relationships and politics between men and women, and the woman herself takes on the role of the intermediary through which animals are read. Since these women are completely either a part of the natural or cultural worlds, the protagonists in both the stories occupy ambivalent situations.

The significance of the environment and women as one of Anita Desai's key themes is highlighted by an ecofeminist approach to her works. By the use of organic images, even the mysterious female psyche may be comprehended in her works. Her sculptures passionately and successfully depict how deeply ingrained human life is in nature.

Anita Desai expressed concern about the current state of environmental depletion in her novel. It revolves around the interconnection, victimization, and oppression of three female individuals. A victim of her duties as a mother to several children and a devoted wife to an unfaithful husband, Nanda Kaul is a widowed great-grandmother. Raka, her quiet and withdrawn great-grandchild, has a violent father. A childhood friend of Nanda, Ila Das, is single and the victim of both her egotistical brothers and her idealistic reformism. This essay discusses eco-feminism, which supports the notion that women and nature are interrelated. The political perspectives connected with social ecology and eco-Marxism as well as deep ecology's ethical and spiritual components are linked by ecofeminists to their agenda.

To allow for fundamentally different approaches to its two primary discourses, Giorel Curran contends that eco-feminism is better separated into two categories. This can be applied to the book. The first group is the "cultural feministic approach," which uses the link between Nanda and Raka, two key characters in the book *Fire on the Mountain*, as the basis for a fresh perspective on nature that is defined by a loving attitude. This approach attacks oppression of all kinds, which arises from social, political, economic, and economic frameworks (Curran 116). Ecofeminism emphasizes environmental justice in the context of women. The oppression of women by a patriarchal society, which is reflected in the environment around us, is the focus of ecofeminism, which combines feminism and radical ecology.

In Desai's tale, Ila Das is brutally raped in the pitch-black fields that are intended to support life. Raka, who ultimately ignites a woods flame, is the conclusion of the atrocities that the ladies experience in Desai's book (Kaur, 389). Indian women writers from the 20th century onward have supported the idea of ecology concerning women in their literary works. The darker features of nature are highlighted in the work, along with their connection to the darker sides of the women it is about.

This story shows how ecological difficulties are linked to women, non-human species, and the environment. In her story, Desai constructed central characters who are caught in Manichaeian patterns in which male stands for cruelty, control, fear and hatred, arrogance and power, and women and nature are always the victims. The exploitation of women and the environment in numerous forms is revealed in this fiction. In terms of females' victimization, a story serves as a discussion on violence that focuses on the three women whose lives are affected by the patriarchal system physically or psychologically.

According to B.R. Nagpal (2014) a victim of her duties as a mother to several children and a devoted wife to an unfaithful husband, Nanda Kaul is a widowed great-grandmother. Raka, her quiet and withdrawn great-grandchild, has a violent father. Ila Das, a friend from childhood who is alone, unmarried, and the victim of her idealistic reformism and arrogant siblings, is Nanda's childhood buddy. The female characters are depicted as being victims of an aberrant metropolitan environment, patriarchal family structures, and a bourgeois, bureaucratic, imperialist, colonized social environment. Because of this, the characters are forced to deal with dualism and disintegration while also being in a condition of revolt, melancholy, and depression (B.R. Nagpal, 2014: 49).

According to Shiva's introduction to *Ecofeminism* (2014), violence against women has existed for as long as patriarchy. Traditional patriarchy has affected people's thoughts as well as the social and cultural spheres because of men's power over women and the denial of their full humanity and the right to equality. In the end, it took on more vicious forms, as evidenced by, among other things, the murder of the Delhi gangrape victim and the suicide of the Chandigarh rape victim, both of whom were 17 years old. (Mies & Shiva 2014, p. xiv). Shiva goes on to claim that violence against women has evolved into new, more severe forms as outdated patriarchal systems have "hybridized with the frameworks of capitalist patriarchy" (Mies & Shiva 2014, p. xiv).

Ecofeminists contend that the concurrent rape of the planet and the rape of women, both physically and metaphorically, are closely related, as shown by groups like the National Commission on Women and the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology. In reality, ecofeminist narrative makes use of pictures that help the connection of the various facets of living and inanimate connections in a meaningful way. Raka and Nanda have symbolic perceptions of one another. Nanda is to Raka "just another pine tree" in the desolate countryside. Raka appears to be a threat to Nanda, but an "intruder, an outsider, a mosquito flown up from the plains" (Anita Desai, 1977: 40), a "newly caged" desolate beast "newly tamed" (Anita Desai, 1977: 41), a "soundless moth" (Anita Desai, 1977:46) and "a lizard-like" (Anita Desai, 1977: 42) with "a gift for disappearing" (Anita Desai, 1977: 45).

Raka is frequently explained using animal metaphors. Nanda is decisively compelled to receive Raka as "the finished perfected model of what Nanda Kaul herself was simply a courageous, flawed experiment" because, with such ease and naturalness, Raka establishes a home among the ravines, gorges, and slopes. (Anita Desai, 1977: 47). She is a special youngster who is wild, independent, silent, and completely uninterested in frivolous activities. Raka appears to be "a magician's created rabbit" (Anita Desai, 1977: 47). Even though magic and fairy tales have no place in her existence, she is merely a "bird fallen out of its nest, a nest fallen out of a tree". (Anita Desai, 1977: 50).

Nanda Kaul, the central figure in Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*, moves to Kasauli, a former British hill station, presumably to spend her golden years in solitude and tranquillity at her house called Carignano. Her quiet life is disturbed by the arrival of her great-granddaughter Raka, who is being treated for a disease. In the book's conclusion, it is revealed that Nanda Kaul's husband has been having an ongoing relationship with Miss David, a maths teacher. Nanda's banishment to Kasauli is therefore forced upon her even though it is claimed that she chose to do so.

When she finds out that her former acquaintance, Ila Das was murdered and raped, she finally accepts the truth of her self-imposed seclusion. Raka also starts a fire in the area of the house's surrounding forest. The novel provides a distinct type of presence of women and even their agency is

radically different from Nanda's through her great-granddaughter, Raka. Raka's name, which translates to "moon," is a "complete misnomer," according to Nanda Kaul, since of "her likeness to an insect". (Desai, 39).

The zoological stereotypes of Raka shift throughout time as Nanda's viewpoint for her doings and as Raka's personality gradually transforms from a timid youngster to one who is eager to explore her environment. Raka's acts are still depicted as being animalistic and she is still compared to a wild animal. She hunts in the woodland for sustenance, "down on all fours to come scrambling up the hill" (Desai, 73), Raka is elusive because of her inherent wildness and animalistic tendencies. Instead of choosing the "secure, warm, civilized society in which Raka had no part and to which she owed no attachment," she prefers the chaotic, wild, and untamed countryside surrounding Kasauli (Desai, 91).

It seems to imply that it is difficult to control Raka at this time because she has consciously rejected the socio-cultural domain and all ties and restrictions that formerly bound Nanda. Raka is depicted as being upset by the suffering of the animals nearby or by the cruelty being perpetrated on them. Using these cases of animal abuse, Desai makes a connection between the oppression of animals and women, arguing that it is instructive to consider all instances of male-instigated violence. Two chapters from the novel, which take place at the Pasteur Institute and the Kasauli Club, illustrate the height of this macho brutality. When Raka asks about the Pasteur Institute, Ram Lal replies that it is where doctors create a serum for injections. Once a dog got out of control and bit everyone in the neighbourhood, it was necessary to euthanize the dog.

After being severed, its head was brought to the institute. They are sliced open by the doctors, who examine them. There are several animals there, including rabbits and guinea pigs. Yes, they're usually boiling when they use them for tests. The inner and outward lives of Desai's characters coexist. The three main characters are caught in a dualism in which man stands for cruelty, dominance, and violence. *Fire on the Mountain* explores a staggering array of topics, including motherhood, femininity, loneliness, mortality, exile, violence, patriarchal dominance, and the exploitation of the natural world. It also depicted the dichotomy of nature versus civilization, wildness versus domesticity, and free will versus fate.

The connection between women and the environment is highlighted in the book's numerous pictures. Even though Raka and Annie are significant characters in works by Desai and Lee, readers learn in the conclusion that they are shunned by society and classified as "others" by these authors. Without aiming to favour one over the other, this article has examined the interactions between these females and the animals. It's important to note that neither author offers any utopian solutions to the issues any of the characters are facing. According to the concept and movement is known as eco-feminism, the same masculine attitudes that harm nature also oppress women.

The Kasauli Hills' ecosystem was gradually destroyed in this fiction which shows how an ecosystem was ultimately destroyed by a massive forest fire. Its slow desiccation is also echoed in the book's characters. Natural imagery has been used to externalize the female characters' reactions to reality and spread their inner consciousness. The inner and outward lives of Desai's characters coexist. The three main characters are caught in a dualism in which man stands for cruelty. In reality, *"Fire on the Mountain"* explores and confronts a staggering array of topics, including motherhood, femininity, exile, death, and violence. It also explores patriarchal dominance and the exploitation of nature.

The complex status of women in the authors' works is revealed by rereading and reinterpreting these texts to disturb the dichotomies of society and nature and human and animal through fictional representations. It is impossible to say that Raka and Annie share a romantic affinity for nature and the natural world. Aggression reveals the instrumentalist patriarchy's attitude towards both women and animals. It has been essential to examine how the patriarchal oppression of both women and animals works. The pain caused by this violence to women and animals is therefore intrinsically related to the need to address wrongs committed against both groups.

In conclusion, the concept and movement of ecofeminism asserts that the same masculine attitudes that harm nature also oppress women. The Kasauli hills' ecosystem was gradually destroyed and it was ultimately destroyed by a terrible forest fire. Its slow desiccation is also echoed in the characters of the novel. Natural imagery has been used to externalize the female characters' reactions to reality and spread their inner consciousness. Desai depicted the psychological struggles, oppression, and eventual ecological annihilation of the Kasauli Hills by a devastating forest fire. Natural imagery has been used to illustrate the female characters' reactions to life and their underlying unease. The inner and exterior lives of Desai's characters are dualistic, with each of the three protagonists caught in a cycle wherein man stands for brutality, domination, and violence. Also, it represents dualistic concepts like nature vs civilization (Emara 206). Ultimately, the story offers a variety of imagery that supports the link between nature and women.

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