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41. ECO FEMINISM-A STUDY: WITH REFERENCE TO ANITA DESAI'S FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN

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Abstract

The term Ecofeminism, comparatively a recent trend in literature has gained momentum in the literary circles. Ecofeminism entwines the movements and philosophies that link feminism and ecology. The term suggests the interrelatedness of women and nature and the exploitation of both, the women as well ecosystem by patriarchal dominance. Ecofeminism concepts establish connections between women and nature in particular and the oppressed and the marginalized sections of society as well, therefore this movement preaches the eradication of social injustice in all walks of life. Several women writers of 20th century reflected the ecofeministic, eco critical aspects in their works. Vandana Shiva, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta are a few to name Indian women writers. This paper aims to study ecofeministic aspects in Anita Desai's *The Fire on the Mountain*.

Key words: gender domination, patriarchy, exploitation

The term Ecofeminism, comparatively a recent trend in literature has gained momentum in the literary circles. Ecofeminism entwines the movements and philosophies that links feminism and ecology, coined by the French writer Francoise Chabonne in her book *Le Femimisme ou la Mort* (1974). The term suggests the interrelatedness of women and nature and the exploitation of both, the women as well ecosystem by the patriarchal dominance. Ecology is an umbrella term, encompasses a number of aspects related to earth, environment, living and non-living things. Feminism defines, establishes and strives to achieve gender equality in all spheres of life. Hence feminism and ecology together conceptualizes ecofeminism. Ecofeminism concepts establish connections between women and nature in particular and the oppressed and subjugated sections of the society as well, therefore this movement preaches the eradication of social injustice from all walks of life. Ecofeminists believe that these connections are illustrated through traditionally "male" values such as reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation, which are present among women and in nature." (Wikipedia) Priyanka Chanda quotes that ecofeminists draw connections between menstruation and moon cycles, childbirth and

Modernization, westernization and capitalism reduced the importance of natural and traditional views in the viewpoints. Women leads

Chen Ling "Thus, as a radical green political slogan, ecofeminism aims to reveal the internal link between the natural domination and gender domination, pays attention to its social cause and social criticism so as to realize the dual liberation of nature and women."(C. L.2014)

Women have inclination towards nature more than men. Both of them are fragile and vulnerable, which is a concern for feminist writers. Anita Desai is an eminent writer of contemporary Indian English novelists. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* can be studied under the light of eco feminist, eco critical approach. The study of eco critical, eco feminist aspects enables the readers to understand effect of environmental forces on physical and psychological characteristics of human beings and the characters of the novels, as well physical and psychological balance in accordance with nature and environment. Environment and nature play a major role hence understanding the role and impact of it, is necessary.

In *Fire on the Mountain*, Desai has symbolically used flora and fauna to depict the characteristic features of her creations. One of the major features of her novels is the interconnectedness of nature with inner psyche of her female characters. Her description of nature is a soothing source for a troubled soul and a thing of joy and amusement for the rest. She used nature as imagery and symbolism to dwell into the psychological realms of her female characters: Nanda Kaul, Ila Das and Raka in *Fire on the Mountain*. Nature is a strong binding force in the characterization of *The Fire on the Mountain*.

Nanda lives a solitary life from her family at Carignano, in Kasauli Hills, in the lap of nature searching for solace from the busy life and far away from the maddening crowd of the city. Nanda doesn't want to find any difference between her and the pine trees of her garden. She wants to be one among them. "She was grey, tall" like pine trees "and thin . . . she fancied she could merge with the pine tree and be mistaken for one. To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake." (p.4) Tall pine trees are symbolically used for self-confidence and stubbornness as Nanda left all her family members and living alone without their assistance at her twilight age. She just "wanted was to be alone, to have Carignano to herself in this period of her life when stillness and clam were all that she wished to entertain." (p.18) The postman mockingly enquires "No visitors yet?" When Ram Lal gestured him no, then "The postman gave a snorting laugh" (p.13), which indicates the general male attitude towards a single lady.

Nanda Kaul is so engrossed in her solitude that even news of the arrival of her great grand-daughter Raka pinched her. Raka suffered from typhoid, comes to Carignano to live with Nanda but Nanda is reluctant to welcome her. "She wanted no one and nothing else. Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction." (p.3) Nanda had a busy life as a Vice-Chancellor's wife and managed her husband's guests, rearing of her children and household works

This instance is a clear evidence for the silent suffering of her husband's domination and also tolerating his lifelong infidelity—a lifelong affair with Miss David. At the end of the novel Anita Desai reveals the actual fate of Nanda as "She did not live here by choice—she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing." Nanda's childhood friend Ila Das was raped and strangled to death—an example of atrocity on the marginalised section of the society by the cruel dominating forces just because Ila is fighting against child marriages, for the welfare of the girls.

In the patriarchal set up no one appreciates the harsh realities of how a woman alone shoulders all the household responsibilities without any complaints like Nanda with her "ironic bow to duty that no one had noticed or defined." She is so glad to leave all her responsibilities. "she had been glad to leave it all behind, in the plains, like a great, heavy difficult book that she had read through and was not required to read again." Nanda ponders over her fulfilment of responsibilities towards her family "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing?" The responsibility of Raka at least for that summer was thrust upon her without her consent. Here we can observe the agony of the protagonist. With the arrival of Raka, Nanda "Now, to bow again, to let that noose slip once more around her neck that she had thought was freed, finally." (p. 20)

"Discharge me" Nanda groans "I've discharged all my duties. Discharge." This is clear indication of overburdening of women throughout their lives. In this era nature is also over exploited in the name of development of mankind. Nanda receives letter from Asha, her daughter informing the situations that forced her to send her grand-daughter to Carignano. Asha explains a bunch of responsibilities she is sharing even though she became a grandmother, which depicts the restless life and relentless demands for women throughout the life without any slightest acknowledgement.

Nature and women nurture, protect and conserve yet dominated andjugated by patriarchal society. Capitalist society is destructing nature in terms of development. Nanda, the great grandmother compares Raka to a mosquito "an intruder, consider, a mosquito flown up from the plains to lease and worry." (44) Gradually female instinct of nurturing and caring over takes her initial disapproval and she es to take care of Raka. This is an instance of similarity between the benevolence nature and women attitude in general is an eco-feministic concern or trait.

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