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The Relationship between Female and Nonhuman Entities in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*

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Abstract

The major finding of this research is to draw the association between how women are suppressed and exploited by patriarchy and nature has been exploited and disbursed by humankind in different pretensions. By reading the novel 'Cry, the Peacock' in the light of Ecofeminism, the issue of domination and exploitation of women and nature has been brought out. In the novel, Maya, the protagonist, is the daughter of the rich father, is brought up by him in absence of her mother. Maya's father finds a lawyer friend Gautama as her husband who could fulfill all her desires and needs. Ultimately, Gautama's realistic and rational presence cannot satisfy the emotional attachment to Maya. As Maya cannot establish proper communication and understanding, she feels loneliness and desolated in Gautama's house like that of exploited and disbursed nature cannot provide shelter to humans and other creatures.

Key words: Ecofeminism, eco-criticism, patriarchy, father-fixation & androcentric.

Introduction

Maya, a female protagonist in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*, is oppressed by her husband Gautama. This novel embodies the pivotal association between nature and human portraying woman as a main character. Zoological, botanical, or physical as the images correlate with the feelings, actions and states of mind of the characters, particularly woman with the ecological framework. Desai exploits the stream of consciousness technique to fill in details of Maya's past. As the narrative of Maya progresses, the corrosion of both Maya's relationship with her husband, Gautama, and her own mental state that she is a slave to the fate she has feared with then, she kills Gautama following the divination of astrologer that one of them would die within four years starting from that day. The novel ends with her total mental ruin.

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Through Maya, a female character, the novel deals with the rigidities between the pastoral village life and incursion of industrialization on the land as well as its dwellers. Landscape as a physical and geographical entity fundamentally attributes in the life of the women in the novel. Through female characters, this text has magnificently characterized environmental deterioration and women's exploitation, thereby illustrating the eco-feminist point of view.

Maya is the sensitive, poetic, intuitive, and unstable type of personality who appears as a consistent character in Desai's novel. She loves the flowers and fruits in the garden, the trees and plants, the sky and the seasons, her pets and other animals around her. She seems to be full of passionate feeling for the nature and natural elements. Unlike Maya, Gautama, her husband, is totally opposite to her character and behavior. He is a rationalist and shows insensitivity towards transient beauty. Similarly, while Maya revels in the world of senses, Gautama completely rejects even the astrologer's prophecy that one of them must die within for years.

Desai's novel portrays the dark shadows of nature and simultaneous coalition of the darker aspects of the women concerned. As a result, eco-criticism envelopes not only ecological issues in this novel but also those natural images that contribute to a pertinent link between human and nonhuman relationships. Maya pushes her husband Gautama from a terrace to terminate her struggle as she is unable to resolve her conflict with him and for her, Gautama is already dead because he has rejected all that make life worth living.

Objectives

The major objective of this research is to show the women's condition as compared to ecology that both women and ecology are suppressed and exploited by males to the former and by all human beings to the latter respectively.

Limitations of the Study

This research is strictly confined in the critical inquiry into how women and nature are exploited as portrayed by the novelist through a protagonist character Maya in the novel in a patriarchal society.

Methodology

The researcher makes use of the theory of ecofemism. The thoughts of different ecofemists like Collen Mack-Canty, Vol Plumwood, J. Karen Warren are quoted in this research. With

this methodological conception, the researcher proceeds to produce the thorough analysis of the text. In addition, the researcher will consult different websites and external links to collect the pertinent ideas. The researcher's own insight can of some help.

Ecofeminism is a literary criticism concerned with the portrayal of nature in relation to women. It focuses how traditional depictions often examine the land as innocent, vulnerable female and as ripe for exploitation. Furthermore, it is a political enquiry that explores the connection between androcentric, and environmental maltreatment and manipulation. As it is the newest version of criticism, ecofeminism is an amalgamation environment and women, focusing on a value system, a social movement, and an interdisciplinary approach. Ecofeminism is a newly developed practice according to Karen Warren as cited by Irene Sanz. Alonso in her essay 'An Eco-feminism Perspective' which claims that "There is the parallel connection between the domination of nature and the domination of the woman" (21).

The term 'Ecofeminism' was first introduced by Francoise D'Eaubonne in France in 1997 and developed during the second wave of feminism as an activity and developed along with the third wave of feminism as a movement. In Colleen Mack-Canty's words in her essay 'Third Wave Feminism and the Need to Re-Weave the Nature/Culture Duality:

In the west, an ecofeminism focus in activism emerged during the second wave of women's movement and was predicted on seeing environmental damage. It took up additional issues such as a toxic waste, deforestation, military and nuclear policies, reproductive rights and technologies, animal liberation and domestic and international agriculture development (171).

Instead of focusing on racism, militarism, and environmental damage as problem, Mack-Canty criticizes and enquires over the capitalist way of life stepped onto materiality and technology. Eco-feminists believe that the major cause of different problems and environmental dilapidation are due to technology and hunger for material prosperity.

Eco-feminists believe that there is connection between women and nature as they see the oppression and domination of all subordinate groups to the oppression and domination of nature. Western patriarchal society gives value to men. Susan A. Mann, an eco-feminist and professor of sociological and feminist theory associates "the beginning of eco-feminism not with feminists but with women of different race and class backgrounds who made connections among gender, race, class and environmental issues" (12).

Maya, brought up by her father, always feels that the world is the heaven because of extreme care and warmth by her father though her mother already passed away. When she gets married, she expects the same love and attention from her husband Gautama but she

fails to get it. Her husband is so much cogent and opposite of her thought which creates tension in her psyche. When Maya's pet dog Toto dies, Gautama instead of calming her, he gives importance to the cup of tea. For Maya, Toto's death brings her into loneliness and it shatters her that she is left unaccompanied in the world of frustration and discontent.

Patriarchy doesn't give importance to her (Maya) household works like that of working in the garden rather, it sees both land and women negatively when they become unproductive. Maya producing fruits and vegetables shows her direct connection with nature. The extract below best reflects the notion:

The moon did her utmost. With sweet, pale coolness, she shone and shone, turning all that was grey to either black or white, so that suspicious half-tones, disturbing shades all vanished, and there was no gloom left. Nor was it white heart at all, I found, but cooling menthol, a lucid balm that bathed my tingling skin. But it was a sharp, penetrating balm, for not only did it play upon me and wash me, but it pierced my body and surged through my veins so that my blood ran to its calling, rose to my brain, and I was in a fever. It was all so clear now, so magically clear... the disturbing memory, half-remembered, had turned to a vision of albino eyes, of dyed finger nails pointing at my forehead, at the stars, and its reality was as mistakable as that of white moon. (32)

The above extract best suggests that Maya goes on struggling to give value to nature, environment and animals. The women are suppressed and exploited by patriarchy. They are abused, underestimated and they are left alone with problems. Ecofeminism as an emerging discourse is associated with anthropology and it tries to develop the public awareness against any kind of suppression over both women and the nature.

Based on the understanding of well-established eco-feminist critique Val Pulpwood, the following extract echoes something of quite similar concerns in this way:

Nature as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotion, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the nonhuman world, matter, physically and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and madness. Eco-feminist does share the same notion that everything is related to everything else. (19)

The above mentioned lines clearly state the human world isolated from the natural world. Eco-feminists see the relation in terms of nature and human and claims that only such relationship results in the complete world. Nature is understood in relation to the nature with human world. To mean this, the eco-feminists use the phrase, 'nonhuman nature'.

Maya's father Rai Sahib makes a lot of attempts to fill the gap in her life of her mother's absence and provides everything to her. She spends her majestic childhood days and so that such life continues in her life, Rai Sahib marries Maya to Gautama, his own middle aged lawyer friend. However, the expectations of Maya are not fulfilled because Gautama is reasonable in each and everything anytime Maya demands him to be romantic. They face skirmishes in their spousal life. Gautama blames Maya's father for her naivety. This shows that woman are just like the nature, exploited for the men's pleasure and needs. Nature is also conquered by the human for their survival.

Maya's father brought her up in the way a princess gets her needs and desires fulfilled. When she is married to Gautama, she feels famished, fragmented, and desolated because of the cool hearted and serious-minded lawyer. She falls prey to the problem, psychical not physical, as she antedates love and affection from her husband the same way as she was provided by her father before her marriage. Her obsession with death as prophesized by an astrologer, her penchant towards father that is her father-fixation, and her matrimonial cacophonies are the three aspects on which the plot has been developed. The nature related agony that Maya experiences is expressed in the following lines:

By then, it was spring. As ever. Spring came with the brain fever bird whose long, insistent call rang imploringly from the tree-tops all morning and again, at twilight. I woke each morning to its call, the first sound dawn, as it begged, who are you? Who are you? In that early peach light that ripened to bronze- on- fire before, we even rose, to breakfast to on tea and papayas sprinkled with lemon and sugar. It was an untidy season for spring was combined with the qualities of autumn, and trees shed leaves even new grew tumescent, for there was no winter too freezes the bare twigs. (33)

Maya, daughter of rich father, having grown motherless, coddled by the father, Rai Sahib, she is treated as a child rather than a mature, willing to be heard and spoken to. To fill the gap of her mother's loss, Sahib crafts the world of fantasy for his daughter so that she wouldn't feel any paucity in her life. For this, he marries his daughter to his middle aged lawyer friend Gautama but the situation is not promising. Rather, it turns upside-down. Her childhood upbringing and the rest of her matrimonial life with Gautama remains contrasted from each other because what world of love and affection she gets in juvenile is not provided in connubial life by her husband, Gautama.

Ecofeminism as an academic movement tries to disrupt the hierarchies and has as an issue of social transformation mounting from the struggles of women who resist themselves against the masculine supremacy and environmental degradation. Both the women and

nature are in ruinous state because of indiscriminate exploitation and consumption.

No matter what luxury Maya got during her childhood and upbringing from father, she still represents a class of women who quietly suffers at the hand of men. It means that in patriarchy, no women are free to use their conscience and knowledge and they have to accept everything for their survival as imposed by males. Though she attempts to show many actions and reactions against that patriarchy but these don't draw the sympathy from any person. At present, mothers living away from children in the name of jobs and opportunities and children living away from parental care have become fashion which has caused the ruin and disorder in the society. The changing patterns of the society and Maya's degenerative stand and devastating nature are best presented in the following lines:

Poppy petals. There was always something about Leila that reminded me of poppies. White poppies, I qualified to her, though I have never seen one. Perhaps you make me think of Opium, Leila, and I touched her white wrist slashed with azure veins that plunged to the surface, and then disappeared beneath thick swellings. They were always bare-she wore no jewelry. She laughed. I like that-considering my day twice as long as yours and you have caught me in the middle of my housework. (52)

Maya, the daughter of rich father, cherishes a feeling of romance and she has the inner feelings of love to be fulfilled but that has remained unfulfilled. Gautama is realistic and cold so that he doesn't understand the feelings of Maya. Even, instead of soothing her when she has been suffering from the grief over the death of her pet dog, Toto, he stands cold and insensitive. For her, Toto isn't only a pet but also a mate with whom she feels sharing her feelings when she finds her husband to be too realistic to do so with. On the other, Maya is a childless woman who loves her pet more than any people love theirs. The death of Toto shatters Maya and she is left alone in the world of loneliness and frustration because she doesn't get love and care from her husband the way she expects, instead being blamed as turning vulnerable.

Ecofeminism as a global movement criticizes all forms of suppression and domination along with the oppression of women and nature. This theory (Ecofeminism) advocates a synthesis of ecological and feminist principles as guiding lines for politics. Moreover, by presenting questions over hierarchies constructed by patriarchy and creation of structures of binaries and dualisms, it tries to seek the position of women in the society. By questioning the patriarchal domination and creating boundaries for females, gender biasness, subjugation of voices and exploitation of nature, ecofeminism tries to disrupt the exploitation of nature and hierarchal power structure imposed in the society in the

name of order and systems.

Ecofeminism is a practical movement that began in 1997 AD as a new movement for social change emerging from the struggles of women to sustain in the patriarchal society and environmental dilapidation. Men's extreme control over women and indiscriminate exploitation of nature by the humans have brought a significant problems there by resulting in natural devastations and rise of voice for empowerment of the women. To meet the context, the lines from Karren Warren best tells:

Adequate analysis and resolution of such environmental issues as deforestation, water pollution, farming and food production, and toxins and hazardous waste location must be integrally connected to an understanding of the plight and status of women, people of color, the poor, and the children. One understands how mainstream environmental practices and policies often reflect, reinforce or create practices and policies that devalue, subvert, or make invisible the actual needs and contributions of women, people of color, the underclass, and children. (14-15)

Warren in the above lines opines that feminism and environmentalism are intrinsically connected and they cannot be separated. Furthermore, he makes the clarity that the issues related to environment are inseparably the issues of feminism. By understanding the issues of environment, it helps one understand the status and plight of women across various cultures. The plight of both women and environment are same in the sense that they are controlled and suppressed by patriarchy.

It is obvious that those women who are dominated and suppressed are pushed to alienation and loneliness. They try to get rid of such suppression committing suicide, living separately and running away from the family life. This drives them to have struggle against such suppression and domination instead resulting in futility. This leads them to be frustrated and depressed. In the novel, initially, Maya also struggles to adjust with her husband expecting to get love and care but as he turns to be indifferent and cold hearted and blames her to be naïve, she then becomes insane and kills her husband. The lines extracted below show Maya's matrimonial trap:

Maya grew impatient. You have not exactly sold your soul to the devil, have you? You have left your pretty backwoods and taken to the big city. You have only given up a bloody frustrating job as a village schoolmaster and become a prosperous, successful young box-wallah on his way to becoming director of a reputable business concern. He took a cigarette stub out of his mouth and flung it with violence at the incessantly wakeful budgerigars. My dear chap, you are too innocent, you just do

not know what you are talking about, what really goes on there. (103)

Maya attempts to experience romance and bliss in her life, but because of dullness of her husband and his realistic presence, none of them bears fruit. Gautama, her husband, seems to be right in every side and every nook. There is no other way to overcome than to accept the bitter truth of marriage life as she has been tossed to.

Conclusion

Women seem to be free and independent but they are suppressed in one way or the other. Maya from her childhood has to experience the loss of her mother and been reared by her father. She gets all her desires fulfilled. Maya's father makes sure that she does not experience any lack of love and materiality and later she is married to a rich lawyer, with

Gautama expecting that he would fulfill the gap. But it does not happen. On contrary, she has to experience loneliness and is devastated due to Gautama's indifference as he fails to show love and care towards her. Even, the fear that albino astrologer created in her psyche after her marriage that one of them, either Maya or her husband would be killed within four year from that day. Finally, she kills husband and commits suicide.

From the perspective of Ecofeminism, women and nature are used as symbols and they are consumed and exploited by males and humans respectively to have momentary pleasure whereas human kinds in the name of production and development and other so many pretentions. They consume the nature and natural elements that invites the ruin of humans ultimately as Gautama failed to impart the visible love and care to Maya that ruined the life of both Maya and Gautama.

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