

The Determination of Ecofeminism in the Selected Novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai

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Abstract—*This paper will be committed to search the determination of ecofeminism in the selected novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai. I will explore ecofeminist behavior of the two contemporary writers. Although both the writers belong to two different ages and countries but both of their thoughts have unique features. I will explore how the affirmation of the feminine subjective in both narratives is in constant opposition to the oppressive nature of the dominant patriarchy, on all levels of the treatise. I will also discuss how the novels' epilogues influence our relation to the narrative and the establishment of the eco feminine subjective. The women's position and the state of the environment are mirrored on several levels, and the women seem to draw strength from their natural surroundings. I hope to elaborate on this paradox.*

SUB THEME- ESCAPISM

Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. This term is coined in the year 1974 by the French writer Françoise d' Eaubonne. Ecofeminists embellish the nurturing and assistance of female values which is present both in nature and in the women. The main aim of ecofeminists is not to chase equality with men, but they need liberation of women as women.

Following are some of the name of the branded ecofeminists movement which has been followed in different parts of the universe, such as Anti-Militarist Movement in the US and Europe, Anti-dumping hazardous wastes movement in the US, Chipko Movement in India, and Green Belt movement in Kenya. These movements are trying their level best to conduct their minor levels of power contribution between the women and nature.

Many writers have written and are also writing their views in their writings, such as Susan Griffin and Mary Daly in (1978), Carolyn Merchant at (1980), Ynestra King in (1981), Ariel Kay Salleh at (1984), Karen Warren from (1987-1900), Vandana Shiva at (1991), Val Plumwood (1993) and many others. In literature, there are mainly ten types of ecofeminism which has been discussed widely such as conceptual, historical, epistemological, empirical, socioeconomic, spiritual and religious, linguistic, symbolic and literary, ethical and political interconnections.

Virginia Woolf is one of the eminent novelists in the telling-off of the general mode of writing fiction and the exploration of the naturalism, humanity and realism personified. Her characters cannot be explained as in the style of naturalism, but they can be analyzed by their way of thinking and constructing events. In order to attain omniscient chronicler the characters have to be out of the scene and also from their inner perception and consideration of their existence has to take out to a new aura.

Virginia Woolf's manifestation of dejection and her mood style can be seen in her novel. She committed suicide at the age of 59 in the year 1941. Her writings itself speak about her glory in the literary world.

Woolf replaced the trend of conventional technique to an absolute smash. Her novels carries all the characteristic mark of-modernism, naturalism, internal monologue, camera-eye technique, poetic style, suppression of plot, stream of consciousness and objective character descriptions.

Woolf usually deals with the historic and exciting moments but with the ordinary experience of life. What she presents in her novel are the chained moments of the lives of her characters. Fertility of women and the fertile earth are reshaped through technological creativity of the male and male domination which is a central position in society. Earth and women are the passive terrain for the intervention by male experts, agronomists, agribusiness men, medical doctors.

Anita Desai is also a renowned eco-feminist Diaspora writer who depicts nature by using camera eye technique and with a finest describing language. She describes her characters through intense imagination and takes us to worship and cherish the beauty of precious nature. Due to hectic work schedule of a man leads him to get away from nature, therefore most of the people are suffering from psychic or neurotic blockage.

Anita Desai won Winifred Holt by Memorial Prize in the year 1978 for the novel *Fire on the Mountain* and in the same year she also received the Sahitya Academy Award for the same novel. Her two novels *Clear Light of the Day* and *Fasting*

Feasting shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the year 1980 and 1999. In 1983 she won the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize for the novel *The village by the Sea: an Indian family story*. In 1993 she received Neil Gunn Prize, in the year 2000 she acquired Alberto Moravia Prize for Literature (Italy) and she recently received her Padma Bhushan award in the year 2014.

Anita Desai in the "*Fire on the Mountain*" indicates ecological treatise as nature, women, culture and their religion. She pictures the life of women as totally accommodated and is totally biased by nature.[1] Women and nature are always connected and devouring unique familiarities. Desai explains how nature is organized and framed by carnivals and culture of different people in different environments which are entirely different from each other. Desai showcase the character of Nanda Kaul's as an Indian woman, feels and believes proud of her environmental culture. She illustrates her character having empathy with culture and as well as strong hold over nature.

Both Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai share some common features in their selected novels. I took Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and *Where shall we go this Summer* for analysis. The impact of nature and its effect on their women characters are divulged meritoriously in all the four novels. Their heroines tried to escape from the current busy schedule of life and loved to be with nature. They want to seek support from nature. These novelists moved away from the crowd, noises, traffic and humdrum of cities towards silence and solitude, nature of small landscapes and islands of less-frequented mountains and hills.

Virginia Woolf's fourth novel *Mrs. Dalloway* completely breaks the trend of conventional techniques. This novel starts on a "day in June" and ends at Clarrisa's party at the same evening, the parallel strands of the Septimus and Clarrisa stories are aesthetically linked together in a pleasing unity. Her narrative techniques smoothly flow without any limitations into chapters. In *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa longs for the happiness that might happen if she would be with Peter and regrets her passionless marriage to Richard. To start with, Clarissa, relish her present life, but whenever she encounters with Peter on the scene, uneasiness sets in. She experiences a feeling of isolation whenever she looks at her regretful past.

Clarissa sees people passing through the window. She discovers all the minute details of the nature like open air, ark plunge, kissing and vibrating of waves. She passionately loves life in the midst of nature. Virginia Woolf never fails to represent the jingling and modernistic picture of busy joyful city life with high singing of aeroplane overhead. She loved all these and too in the middle of June. The aerolpane twists, curls and writes one letter after another in the sky in order to draw the attention of the city people. It invents extraordinary peace and silence. The bar of smoke curved behind and it dropped down, a child crying rightly far away due to a horn sound there from the busy city.

She never missed to describe the entirely relaxed and peaceful park. She highly dissolved in air when she passes laden circles. She ardors her life in the hub of nature. Although she never hides her personal life but she declares her love for her husband as like arrow striking in her heart. But only thinking about the presence of Peter helps her to relax all her urgings and give support to her restless mind.

Literally Mrs. Dalloway rarely read a book and hardly knows anything like history and language, yet she is sheer observer of nature. She always has the positive attitude towards the trees. By looking at the trees at her home she carries the mist and spread all over and as like a branches of a tree she also thinks about her life full of memories.

Woolf usually uses canto to describe nature. Her main character Mrs. Dalloway experiences the elegant coolness of evening primroses and inhales the rich scent of lilacs and roses. She feels that the world quivered, wavered and threatened to burst into flames. She relates London to "Grass grown path". She recalls diminishing and disappearing cars to glittering stars, blaze among candelabras, breasts stiff with oak leaves. She considers human body as millions of fibers.

Whenever she watched from her window she gives eye-catching vibrant description of nature. The white and blue blared with black branches, the sparrows rising, falling and fluttering in a jagged foundations were some of the patterns. These results into a creation of premeditation and harmonious significance in the sounds and creation of nature. She represents joys and sorrows with the help of nature. The character Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway* silently depicts sadness in nature. He hates "sky and tree, children playing, blowing whistles, dragging carts, falling down." [2]

Septimus note the chirping soft voice of the sparrow which sits on the opposite railing and he believes that there is a life beyond a river "everyman has its ways" and he observes and said that there is a God in everything and so therefore men must not cut down trees. In order to create a positive aura Virginia enlightened the reader's that "Fear no more the heat of the sun." She depicts the June morning as "soft glowing flowers of the day sent by nature, charm of a woman with some folly." [2] Man commonly observes landscape as a blaze of lightning, although we expect them millions of times but it always have the imperceptible contraction.

The character of Peter is being represented as the by-product of modernism. He exhibits his damage towards the earth by smoking the opulent cigar; it whirls down coolly down on his throat. After smoking he bravely rings it out in the air in a blue, circular shape. He hears rising, falling and humming sounds of traffic, down and down he sets himself into the plumes and wraps himself into feathers of sleep. Although he felt excited when he convicted himself as an atheist but on the other hand he longed for relief, solace, comfort and something outside preferable pigmies.

Peter often had a hallucination like hearing of humming sounds like siren lolling away on the green sea waves, great cornucopias full of fruits to the solitary traveler; or rise to the surface like pale faces which fisherman flounder through foods to embark, or are bunches of roses being dashed in face. As a solitary traveler he advances the general peace of the earth for a substitute of yearning to return to the sense of the earth.

Woolf mainly focuses on the inner experiences of life. But on the other hand in the favor of fantasy she never sacrificed the truth of life. She exhibits the association of mind with external facts. We learn about the mosaic of moments in the works of Woolf, which is attached together with the capricious seamstress of moments. She vividly describes about the landscape of her country. She is deeply connected with the classics of her country. Her novels cannot be separated from geographical context. Her novel answers about the nature of nature itself and about the nature of man withdrawing into Wordsworthian communion.

Jawaharlal Nehru in one of the letters to his daughter has written thus about Virginia Woolf:[3]

“I have been reading Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*). The more I read her the more I like her. There is a magic about her writing, something ethereal, limpid like running water, and deep like a clear mountain lake. What is her book about? So very little that you can tell anyone; and yet so much that it fills your mind, covers it with a gossamer net, out of which you peer at the past, at yourself, at others. Did you ever meet her?”

Her writing is not simple as any other writer of her age and everyone must support and agree to what Jawaharlal Nehru had written about such a prodigious legend. This intellectual biography is one of the classic studies of Woolf's life and work.

“*To the Lighthouse*” mainly focuses in the year between 1920 and 1930 and about the Ramsay's and their trip to the Isle of Skye.[4] In her writing Woolf used mere feelings and interpretations and bantam dialogues. It acmes adult relationships and at the same point of time recalls childhood emotions. The character of Mrs. Ramsay is shown as bulbous. She begins with a positive note “If it remains fine tomorrow, you'll have to be up with the lark and we will reach the lighthouse tomorrow. “ But this optimistic prediction is being denied by Mr. Ramsay by declaring that the weather will not be clear. This particular kind of incident of rejection and denial further continues throughout the relationship of Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay.

The Ramsay's and their eight children gathered in the Isle of Skye at the house of associates and colleagues. Woolf describes the character of Lily Briscoe in the opening of the novel, as a young and ambiguous painter who tries to portray the picture of Mrs. Ramsay and her little son James. Lily is shown as full of stress when she hears a remark about women from Charles Tansley, another guest, who asserts that

“Women can neither paint nor write”. This statement creates a lot of hatred in the mind of Lily after excellently completion of her painting in the end she find relief.

The character of Mrs. Ramsay emerged as an innate and loving mother who always tries to indulge herself into her family and guests. She always helpful to nature and considers her existence with a wave. Her life has various occurrences and curled experiences. According to her all people must accept crowning and dashing experiences of life just as waves have its own ups and downs. She does not like when her son Jasper pleased himself by shooting birds. But Mr. Ramsay always defends his son by saying that it is a natural boyish stage and he will outgrow with time. But it seems that his youthful practice of controlling nature will mature into masculine practice of controlling his wife and children. Mrs. Ramsay not only associate herself to people but also to nature.

“Often she found herself sitting and looking, sitting and looking, with her work in her hands until she became the thing she looked at-that light, for example.... It was odd, she thought, how if one was alone, one leant to inanimate things; trees, streams, flowers; felt they expressed one; felt they became one; felt they knew one, in a sense were one; felt an irrational tenderness thus (she looked at that long steady light) as for oneself.” [3]

Woolf compares thoughts to the leaves. “He began to search among the infinite series of impressions which time had laid down, leaf upon leaf, fold upon fold softly, incessantly upon his brain” (184). Leaves are not just introduced as countless times but it also described in particular states. For instance the topmost leaves of a tree are being referred as a number of times and the newest part of leaf referred as a new growth of self.

The determination of ecofeminism is mainly defined in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977). She depicts the life of women as fully integrated and inclined by nature. Women and nature are contrast to each other but are always devouring unique familiarities. Desai explains in her novel that women is the manifestation of nature and she also tells that nature, woman and their inner self cannot be separated from each other. She describes how nature is organized with culture and also carnivals the culture of different environment with different people and how all are different from each other. Desai represents the Indian woman through the character of Nanda Kaul who believes and feels proud of her feminine stability with environmental culture.

Anita Desai's style of writing is like a jockey who is having an ecofeminist trait in her hands and we readers are like a horse who obeys its master. We grasp the novel through her eyes. By her clear pictorial representation we aesthetically arouse all our five senses. We feel the presence of nature throughout her novel, we see the honey crammed flowers and the sweet fragrance of the ripen fruits, we tastes the delicious nectar overflowed from the ripen fruits and jams, we also hear the

sweet voice of bulbul singing in the forest lawn, we closely sees the fire on the mountain and symbolically notice the fire on the minds and eyes of the Nanda Kaul, Ira Das and even Raka.

The title *Fire on the Mountain* supports double awareness of union and alienation, the both contrasting factors, in order to bring justice to both. Nanda Kaul's alienation from the society and from her family and same time her union with nature, Raka's alienation from her parents and through close union with nature her discovery of the reality of nature, Ila Das's alienation from job and family and through her social work in the village her union with nature. While fire signifies destruction of the self identity of both nature and woman, on the other hand mountain signifies character's emotional detachment and their fight for trying to get self-identity. According to ecofeminists "trees, water, animals, toxics and nature language are feminist issues", since the arrangement and fight of women can be made aware through such kind of issues.[5]. Patriarchal power is the main cause of both alienation and identity crisis. Val Plumwood states "... both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power"[6]. Anita Desai begins the novel with the bringing together of barrenness of both nature and Nanda Kaul's heart and they don't want anything except solitude. Once she rigidly told to Ila Das that "I never cared for music myself. It makes me fidget. I greatly prefer silence. [1]

Whatever she wanted it was available here on the ridge of the mountain, in her house, at Carignano in Kasauli. This was the time of her life and place, which she prepared and wanted all her life- with a cool, great flowering of relief she realized on her first day in Carignano and finally she had it. Whatever happened or came here, would be an undesirable diversion and intrusion. Both garden of Carignano and Nanda Kaul are the victims of barrenness. Nanda Kaul while uniting with garden says, "Like her, the garden seemed to have arrived, simply, by a process of age, of withering away and elimination, at a state of elegant perfection..." (*Fire on the Mountain* 33). Anita Desai depicts how the inner self of Nanda Kaul is attached with nature from where not only she feels the movement of nature with her but also she gets support from nature in times of disturbance.

Although everyone knows about her need and liking of leading a secluded life but still her daughter Asha forces her to keep Raka with her. This commitment of keeping her granddaughter again brings out unpredictability of leading a life of her choice in her heart, and moreover she fears to be suffered and attached to domestic duties again. But she tried and cried to be free from all these duties. Anita Desai through the character of Nanda Kaul shows the trauma she underwent as a Vice Chancellor's wife who not only knows that her husband does not love her but also knows about his extra

marital affair with some other woman but still played a role of an ideal wife and who gradually suffered from identity crises and forced herself to the isolated region. Nanda Kaul's need to lead an isolated life, free from obligations victimizes Raka who was not welcomed by her great- grandmother properly.

In the essay titled "Ecofeminism and Children" Ruthanne Kurth Schai illustrates that children oppression issues could be included in the feminist issues as it challenges to end all kind of oppression. Raka's thinking about her past lead her to shrink herself under the bed sheet and feels the flow of warm urine in her bed. She remembers her mother after being beaten by her drunken father sitting in the floor and shutting out her wet eyes. Ruthanne Kurth Schai states that the oppression of children is never talked about either publicly or privately. Barrie Thorne remarks that "Both feminist and traditional knowledge remain deeply and unreflectively centered around the experiences of adults. Our understanding of children tend to be filtered through adult perspectives and interests... their full lives, experiences, and agency obscured by adult standpoints". [5]

Later Nanda Kaul discovers that Raka can disappear instantly into the mountains and forests. "All she discovered was that the child had a gift for disappearing--suddenly, silently" (FM 50). Raka through Ramlal came to know about the effect of forest fire towards the environment. He also informed that due to forest fire, a house with two buffaloes has burned and it was impossible to put it down as there was a scarcity of water in the village. It was a house of an English Mem. After the destruction she became mad and was sent to an asylum. Further, she came to know from Nanda Kaul about the Pasteur Institute which has captured the pleasant cottage. Once it was looked after carefully but "its used chicken run now" (FM 63). Val Plumwood remarks that the development of the ecological crisis is due to related human/nature dualism and rationalist culture. Ila Das is represented by Anita Desai as an essence of movement and embodiment of justice. She tries to stop the marriage of Preet Singh's seven year old daughter to a rich land owner. Because of this Preet Singh brutally raped and murdered her. Here capitalized patriarchy has victimized both Ila Das and Preet Singh's daughter.

'Nani, Nani,' whispered Raka, shivering and crouching in the lily bed, peeping over the sill. 'Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani- look - the forest is on fire. Look, Nani,-look- the forest is on fire'. (FM 158)

Raka's whispering reveals both destruction of nature and of women's identity. Fire signifies oppression, due to which, both nature and women are burnt and destroyed. Both the voices of nature and women are merged into one voice and both represent physical degradation and degradation of moral nature of human being in the society through the frequent fire on the mountain. Anita Desai challenges the strategies of patriarchal society, and thus through the strategies of survival she empowers the women. Therefore, *Fire on the Mountain* not only connects ecological land feminine issues into one

thread in term of the logic of domination but according to ecofeminism it philosophies "...just and compassionate relationships among children and adults , men and women , and humanity and nonhuman nature..." ending all oppressions. [5]

Anita Desai in her fourth novel "*Where shall we go this summer*" (1975) portrays the character of Sita in different dimensions. The novel describes about the story of Sita who is fed up with boring and meaningless routine of her existence. She feels suffocated and struggles hard to break away from all her duties and from her well-ordered posh flat in Mumbai. In order to seek peace, happiness and rest in her life she wants to go back to her golden days of childhood in the island Manori with her father.

The befitting style, the concrete form and the minute details make this novel similar to Woolf's *The Lighthouse*. Likewise to *The Lighthouse* this novel has also three parts Part one, Monsoon '67; Part two, Winter '47; Part three, Monsoon'67; each part talks about time, space and season. The first part talks about the island Manori and shows the present life of Sita. The second part connects her present life with the past and the third part shows about her acceptance as her fortune of future life.

Anita Desai in the first part dealt with the entry of Sita into the Manori Island after leaving the life of "dull tedium of hopeless disappointment". The island has been depicted as heaven to Sita which is free from suffering and hopelessness and filled with nature. She feels that all her problems would be magically solved on the island and she would be comfortable, calm and relieved from her mental and physical anxiety. So in search of her futuristic world she decides to go to Manori. She thinks that this world is not fit to receive the child so she refused to give birth to a child.

Manori extends Sita's inner psyche beautifully and also supports her suffering soul. She loved to surround by the waves, sea, sky and the rugged. Manori combines into one span of time i.e. of past, present and future and life span of childhood, youth and old age.

But Sita's daughter Menaka is shown as contrast to each other. For Sita past is the foremost thing in her life and she always wants to live in the midst of nature. But Menaka prioritizes more on future; as she gives less importance to art and nature. When Sita encourages her to choose painting as her profession, she firmly refuses her advice and choose medicine as her profession. She tells about the special talent of her daughter, she can excellently sketch her inner feelings in the form of paintings. She wants that by joining some course she could give life to her souls of paintings and which would help her to do best in her painting career. Sita's husband Raman and their children are shown clearly standing in the formalism, meaningless and practicality side of life. In *To the Lighthouse* the Character of Mrs. Ramsay shares the same value as of Sita which is a role of a responsible mother. In Woolf's *To the*

Lighthouse the whole family comes for the vacation and here the Sita comes with her children for the vacation without her husband, but later on he joined them and take back them to their own place.[7]

This paper intended to include the theme all over that is if we would connect with nature it would instinctively solve all our mental problems. It would also allow us to live in a more comfort zone and also minimize our dilemma and stress. Nature has a power to heal us from all psychological and physiological pain and help us to live stress free and peaceful life. Our solution to present problem cannot be solved by just being with nature, but also we have to save our earth as it protects us from any inward and outward hazardous suffocating situations of life.

The character of Nanda Kaul in *The Fire on the Mountain* and the character of Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway* shares unique features. Both the characters find solace in the nature and both of them have deep feelings towards nature. The both feel nature as their best healer and love to enjoy life in the company of nature. Nature has a potential to solve all our problems and rectify all our hurdles of life. We are playing with it by ignoring its power. If we would generous to it, then it would also give us all comfort and would behave like a nice mother. But if we misuse it, then it would take more dangerous revenge like in the form of tsunami, earth quake and all other kinds of natural disasters.

Hereby it is concluded by stating that we realize mosaic of moments sewn together with the irregular seamstress of moments in the works of Woolf and Desai. Both the writers are not concerned about any kind of movement regarding woman but they are concerned on womanhood as a whole. These authors have a deep root in the classics of their own country. Therefore, their novels echo the nature of itself and the nature of nature disappearing into a Wordsworthian communion.

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