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Towards an Ecofeminist Poetics: A Study of Exploitation of
Women and Nature in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

The paper attempts to offer an Ecofeminist reading of the novel, *Surfacing* written by Canadian author, Margaret Atwood. The research primarily focuses on the two female characters of the novel, an unnamed narrator and Anna, who have been victims of male domination and oppression. In a feminist standpoint, the paper explicates the psychological sufferings of the two women and through an Eco-feminist perspective it also analogises the suppression of the female characters with the exploitation of Canadian environment, especially the Quebec landscape, which is targeted by male characters. The researchers interconnect the search of the narrator with the search of identity or self. Eventually, The narrator's reconciliation with mother nature is projected as finding her 'higher self' in nature, thus, the paper also negotiates the idea of being one with natures as an attempt of liberation from Male Patriarchal society. Therefore, rejecting patriarchal society and rejuvenating relationship with nature is seen as a radical feminist step towards liberation. The main objective of the paper is to expose way the women and nature are exploited based on 'productivity'. The paper also critiques the capitalistic masculine society for their inhuman activity towards nature and female.

Key Words: Women, Nature, Ecofeminism, Suppression, Exploitation and Dominance.

Ecofeminism, as a political and philosophical theory, combines the feminism with ecology by the standpoint of suppression. The connection, between the two discourses, is made based on the criteria that both 'Nature' and 'Female' are dominated by the same oppressor, who is 'Male'. Feminism is furthermore associated with environment because of the human nature of women. The performativity of women is also compared with nature due to the traditional social role played by women as caretaker and nurturer. By correlating feminism with nature, the discipline of Ecofeminism is emerged.

Ecofeminism can be furthermore elaborated with the definition of Ian Buchanan who elaborates it as,

A philosophical and political position which posits that there is a connection between the social mentality underpinning the domination of women in the patriarchal society and domination and degradation of nature by industrial capitalism. Ecofeminism challenges the meaning of productivity arguing that industrial, value adding productivity is very far from and that the hegemonic form is environmentally unstable. (144).

The domination of patriarchy on female and nature is evident throughout the novel which makes the text as an Eco feministic. The text is seen as an attempt of the author to decentre the masculine hegemony by expressing the sufferings of female and nature. The male dominance is seen as a hegemonic power which ideologically dominates the position of nature and women. The novel presents two female characters who demonstrate a tendency towards liberation from patriarchy. The binary oppositions give way to an oppressor and oppressed state which is manifested through the deeds of the characters.

Exploitation of women is seen in two different cases. The first victim of patriarchal dominance is, the narrator who undergoes several kinds of oppression from his ex-husband and Joe. As a female she is ideologically controlled by her husband and she submissively submits herself as a voiceless victim to the subjugation of her husband. Because of the domination first she loses her identity as a female by aborting the child. The methods of birth control is imposed on her though the effects are dangerous on the narrator. The male dominance is apparent when her ex-husband leaves her by deserting her after aborting the child. Loss of child and protection leaves a great impact on the psyche of the narrator as a victim of patriarchal dominance.

The narrator is exploited as a wife by her ex-husband who uses her for his pleasure and leaves her after aborting the child. The hegemony, here, makes the narrator to wipe off or kill her own child by her own hand. The impact of her action results in her second attempt to give birth to a child in a natural environment. The narrator's search for the father can be associated with search for her own self, as a female. The search is concluded when she locates herself with nature. By associating herself with nature she gains her lost identity as a mother. She learns from nature to be a good mother with natural qualities. The action is a key to liberation from the bond of patriarchal world order. She sees marriage as an institution which controls her with a male dictator. Thus she resists to marry Joe as a result of fear of marriage.

Another victim of Male exploitation is Anna. Anna is exploited cruelly by her husband both psychologically and physically. David appears to be an icon of male dominance; he controls Anna by his ideology and exploits her by using her to act in a film with naked body. The psychological suppression of Anna is seen through her act of hiding inside the lake. When Anna resists David uses his flirting and dominance to internalize his ideology within Anna. Anna is compared with the Heron which was killed by the native companions. The comparison pays way to an Eco feministic picture which is the symbol of domination. The internalisation of power is expressed through Anna's application of make up to appear more elegant before her husband. Anna demonstrates the qualities of ambivalence by both liking her husband as well as trying to escape from his cruel hand. The picture taken by David represents the state of female and nature in the hands of capitalistic male. As the heron, an animal the women are also considered inferior to men. David represents such quality by making the women naked as animal.

Another instance which connects the female suppression and suppression of nature is male characters' notion of female. The male characters see women as an object rather than a living being. The result of abortion pill on the narrator is ignored by the ex-husband but Anna finds a blood clot in narrator's leg and informs the destructive nature of technology and patriarchy. The abortion is compelled by narrator's husband as a result the narrator finds husband and wife relationship as a relationship between master and slave. Joe also tries to exploit the narrator by trying to rape her but the attempt is destroyed by the narrator by saying she will get pregnant. David also tries to seduce the narrator by claiming that Joe and Anna are in relationship. Thus, Both Joe and David try to seduce the narrator and see her as a mere object of pleasure. She is therefore exploited by the men.

The connection of Feminism with Environmentalism is almost everywhere in the text. The author shows female as a part of nature and male as a dominating force which tries to destroy and exploit them. This notion of Ecofeminism can be explained as,

Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from various fields of feminist Inquiry and activism: Drawing on the insights of ecology, feminism, and socialism, Eco-feminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppression such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. (Gaard 1).

The Mother Nature is also exploited in the novel by the capitalistic patriarchy who only concern about the profit. The idea of 'productivity' plays vital role in exploitation of nature. Nature is destroyed by the male who does not want it to grow higher. The real motive behind the exploitation of nature is profit and for their entertainment. The narrator in the beginning of the novel, painfully states "—The trees will never be allowed to grow tall again, they're killed as soon as they're valuable, big trees are scarce as whale. (Atwood 55). The author tries to articulate the concept, destruction of nature cannot be prevented without preventing the exploitation of women. By destroying both women and nature male characters get pleasure. David uses physical union as a weapon to dominate his wife by hurting her; there is no special purpose it, likewise, by destroying the nature men get pleasure.

The first instance of natural exploitation is seen when the Heron is killed and hung on a tree. The act is done by a group of male native Canadians who do it for their pleasure. Killing of the Heron is compared with murder of foetus by the professor. Since life cannot be separated from ecology the killing of child can be associated with an exploitation of nature. American expansion and setting the camp in the forest is also seen as an act of destroying the forest. The two Americans are described as an embodiment of evil by the author who try to destroy the nature by setting camps there and killing wild animals. The author describes the husband's control over her by stating, "The unborn child was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it to me, and he wanted a replica of himself." (39).

Another instance which demonstrates the suppression of nature is, deforestation of Canadian landscape. The author searches for the sceneries which his father had painted but she does not find it due to the water level in the lake. Soon she convinces herself as the

sceneries might be under the lake. Because of the deforestation the water level has increased. Consequently the humanity loses its home and gets a sense of rootlessness by the deforestation. The author gives a solution to the problem by suggesting return to nature ideology. The notion can also be found in Vandana Shiva's essay, "Homeless in the 'Global Village'", in which she says, "The transnational corporation executive who finds a home in every Holiday Inn and Hilton, is homeless in terms of the deeper cultural sense of rootedness. But the culturally-rooted tribal is made physically homeless by being uprooted from the soil of her/his ancestors." (98). in the novel, the author creates a third space by getting back to nature and voluntarily uprooting herself. The voluntary homelessness creates another home which is natural.

As the result of all misdeeds the narrator resolves to go back to nature and live a life neighbouring with nature. She takes the nature as a guide and develops a bond with nature. In the search for identity she finally finds herself in relation with nature. The author's desire for begetting a child with the presence of nature is obviously seen through her statement, which says,

This time I will do it myself . . . the baby will slip out
easily as an egg, a kitten and I'll lick it off and bite the
cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs;
the moon will be full, pulling. In the morning I will be
able to see it, it will be covered with shining fur, as god,
I will never teach it any words. (209)

She identifies herself with nature as a product of nature. She deserts the technology, even her dress, to get a communion with nature. She finds herself a socially constructed one rather than a natural one. The attempt of the author to live with nature is a brave endeavour to liberate herself from the ties of industrial world. The attempt can also be interpreted as an endeavour towards protection of nature. Thus being suppressed by the patriarchy, both, nature and women comes closer as a common victim. The attitude of liberation proves the feministic value of the author. Thus the novel proves to be an Ecofeministic one. The sense of exploitation also goes hand in hand in both cases. Exploitation of Nature as well as women ties them to be together as Eco feministic one.

The notion of tying the nature and women is excellently stated in Karen J. Warren's book which says,

There is no question that ecofeminists broke new ground when they began arguing that the capitalist exploitation of resources was connected to the degradation of nature and women. They introduced a feminist perspective to traditional ways of perceiving and relating to the environment that was badly needed. This type of critique, long ignored in a male-dominated Movement, opened up the discourse and expanded the environmental debates to some extent. (58).

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