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A Look Of Ecofeminism In Alice Walker's Meridian And The Temple Of My Familiar With A Focus On Eco-Linguistics

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Abstract

The focus point of this paper is to study the eco-feministic aspects highlighting eco-linguistics in Alice Walker's *Meridian* and *The Temple of My Familiar*. Ecofeminism is the male ownership of land and women leading to a dominant culture (patriarchy) and an activist movement displaying human-nature clash. Ecofeminists say the degradation of nature adds to the degradation of women. Feminist Environmental Justice campaigner Vandana Shiva stated that women-nature relationship is to sustain life. Eco linguistics is a term for approaches that investigate language and various kinds of interaction that will help the readers understand the importance of saving nature and culture. In the select two novels, *Meridian* and *The Temple of My Familiar* Alice Walker's perspectives of ecofeminism are based on the life she has lived, the relationships she has experienced, and the people she has grown up with. Walker finds consolation in nature's refuge as she negotiated the burdens of her life. Walker sees her mother as a "goddess" and "the most sincere worshipper of nature". As did her mother the "ecological ancestors" before her have had worshipped nature and the African Americans retained their sense of "ecological belonging". *Meridian* deals with her own story who wishes to change the plight of black women who are often seen as baby-producing machines and the protagonist Meridian struggled to overcome poverty, old customs and practices that enslave women. *The Temple of my Familiar* deals with several 'black women' who have been cut off from health and harmony with the Earth by poverty, slavery, and the theft of their lands.

Keywords: Culture, Ecofeminism, Eco linguistics, Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

Ecofeminism is the social and political movement claiming a considerable common ground between environmentalism and feminism. Feminist Environmental Justice campaigner Vandana Shiva, who has authored more than twenty books, makes it clear that one of the missions of eco-feminism is to redefine how societies look at productivity and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been deemed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used. For example, she draws a picture of a stream in a forest. According to her, in our society it is perceived as unproductive if it is simply there, fulfilling the needs for water of women's families and communities, until engineers come along and think with it perhaps damming it and using it for generating hydropower. The same is true of a forest unless it is

planted with a monoculture plantation of a commercial species. A forest may very well be productive, protecting ground water, creating oxygen, allowing villagers to harvest fruits, fuel and craft materials, and creating a habitat for animals that are also a valuable resource. However, for many, if it isn't for export.

Vandana Shiva upholds that modern science and development as Western 'patriarchal projects' is responsible for the subjugation of women and the destruction of nature. During the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, the scientific revolution and the industrial revolution occurred. Shiva maintains that the emergence of modern science, technology and economic development rooted in patriarchy converted nature from '*Prakriti*', the 'living force' into a machine and as a resource for economic exploitation which sanctioned the denigration of nature and are responsible for current ecological crisis. Vandana Shiva makes it clear that one of the tasks of eco-feminism is to retell how societies must look at yield and activity of both women and nature that have mistakenly been believed passive, allowing for them both to be ill-used.

The list of ecological terms given below tell the readers the importance of saving our nature and culture: ravaged farms, displaced people, devastated ecosystems, disappearing diversity, climate chaos, divided societies, and an intensification of violence against women. Vandana Shiva warns that we are amid an epic contest... between the rights of mother earth and the rights of corporations and militarized states using obsolete world views. She says, "the rape of the earth" and the rape of the women are intimately linked- both metaphorically, in shaping world views, and materially in shaping women's everyday lives.

Eco linguistics represents entities of nature and human beings with green language and analyses language to reveal the stories we live by, judges those stories from an ecological perspective, resists damaging stories, and contributes to the search for new stories to live by.

Alice Walker, an active environmentalist and an ecofeminist was born on February 9th, 1944. She has written seven novels, three collections of short stories, three collections of essays, six volumes of poetry and many children's books which are translated into more than a dozen languages. Alice Walker says, "You have poisoned your rivers and your children turning into critters before your eyes".

Walker traces the history of women from the early 1800, learning stories about women from her great great great paternal grandmother May Pool. May Pool is the 7th generation woman and for 75 years she was held in bondage. May Pool, with a baby straddled on each hip, who was sold on the auction block in Virginia, worked as a servant to a white woman to whom she has been given as a wedding gift. Walker lived to be 125 years of age. Walker's father was just seven years old when May Pool died. Sharecropping and tenant farming helped Walker's parents to feed the family. Alice Walker says that the land is red where she came from. The red colour is due to the shedding of blood of her ancestral women who lived in the land, suffering in the hands of the male dominated society.

Meridian, her second novel, published in 1976, is a semiautobiographical novel in which the protagonist Meridian Hill, reflects the character of Alice Walker herself who in her real life is a political activist, who made literature a non-violent weapon and fought to win freedom dignity and identity for women dreamers. The title *Meridian* connects between the protagonist Meridian Hill and natural Meridian, which means the highest apparent point reached by a heavenly body in its course and Meridian Hill, like the natural meridian reached the heights of her fame at the end of the story. Meridian Hill's story tapestry events that happened over twenty-five years from 1960 when the Civil Rights Movement started and the present.

Meridian was only seventeen years old, when she became a deserted wife, a drop out from school, a mother, a daughter in law and so on. She could not bear the thought of being expelled from the school; she was angry with the school management; but learned more than Eddie by watching TV quizzes, reading many books, and learnt from Women Magazines. Women Magazines like *Sepia*, *Tan*, *True Confessions*, *read romances and Jet* taught her the ideas that woman is a mindless body, a sex creature; creature usually refers to animals, birds, insects, etc. and not human being. 'Being' means living in the

present; but woman is a creature and man is a being. Eddie who had been permitted to continue his studies in the same school did not read books.

Men get always privileged at all situations; on the contrary, women suffer not only for their mistakes but also for the mistakes done by men on them. Finishing school means 'education'; but Meridian enriched herself with knowledge from all the available resources non-stop, hoping that someday she would go to college and continue her higher studies and become a graduate.

In Saxon college, there was a tree named 'The Sojourner' which means 'The Music Tree', a tree, which could talk, make music, was sacred to birds and possessed the power to obscure vision, which was there in the churchyard of their hostel, has a great connection with the women of the hostel. When Meridian Hill was studying second year, there was a talk of cutting down 'The Sojourner'. Many students including Meridian Hill protested the management, and the tree was spared. The main reason why the tree was to be had to be cut was that many students used that platform to make love and Meridian Hill too was one among them because that being a secret place, and no one can see them. Some other stories were also there about the tree. There was one Sojourner ceremony that united the love of all the students irrespective of their colour and creed.

Once a young girl named Mary became pregnant, gave birth to a child, chopped the infant into piece and put into the commode but she was caught and flagged before her teacher and parents, later hanged herself when she was shut in a room without even a window. The girls who wanted to have their periods to come prayed 'The Sojourner' and danced around the tree holding their hands tightly. The Sojourner was said to be fast Mary's only comfort and friend, in Saxon campus. While Chile's body was not allowed inside the chapel for the funeral rites, by the President of the Chapel, the students along with Meridian Hill and Anne Marion, Meridian's friend shouted against the President and tried to make open the Chapel but failed. So, they decided to bury the corpse under The Sojourner and some of the students made wreathes from The Sojourner's fallen leaves and The Sojourner herself, even generous to her children dropped a leaf on the chest of Wile Chile's body, wore for the first time in her casket a set of new clothes. (Meri.38) The students rioted and despite Meridian Hill's respect to dismantle the President's house. The students cut off frustration destroyed the tree. The Sojourner that mighty ancient, sheltering, music tree.

At the end of the story, she became a social activist fighting for the rights of people in her surroundings, taught them the importance of voting so that they could together bring a huge change in their lives. She emerged as a leader and became a significant personality in the mind of help the people in her surroundings and those people provided her food and everything she needed. She helped them by whatever means she could, and she became an icon.

The Temple of My Familiar contains millennia of repressed, forgotten and wilfully abandoned human history. The story is a mixture of intertribal warfare, slave-raiding, that sort of thing. Many stories are interwoven. Walker foregrounds the myth, lore, and history of indigenous population in South and Central America.

The stories of the three couples: (1) Suwelo and Fanny, (2) Arveyda and Carlotta and (3) Lissie and Halform the core of this novel.

The first couple is Suwelo and Fanny; Suwelo, an American history professor shares a lot about the history of women all over the world, especially black women in Africa and America, how they suffered, how they earned their living, many untold stories about the pathetic condition of women, who were suppressed not only by white men abut also by the black men. Fanny is a feminist, who wants to get away from her husband because Suwelo sleeps with other women but finally they both reconcile. Fanny has a craze for Arveyda who sings songs telling the story of women, their past, their pain, their wounds, their winning, etc. Fanny analyses the status of women some five six generations ago and understood how women are supposed to be with their husbands and finally reconciled with her husband Suwelo.

‘A Woman without a Man is like a Fish without a Bicycle.’ (TMF. 383)

The second couple is Arveyda and Carlotta; Arveyda is a musician who wants to discover and explore his past. Carlotta is his Latin American wife who separates from him, and finally seen in the house of Suwelo, having a relationship with him. She is a less important character, but a type character, Walker creates to categorize different women, distinguishing her from the other women in this novel, especially Zede, Carlotta’s mother and Fanny.

Walker presented the character Arveyda, a rock star who hails from India who can be compared with the ‘King of Pop’ Micheal Jackson, who had a magical power to impress the women and can make the women dance to his tune and cry to his lyrics. Fanny cried hearing Arveyda’s songs about the sufferings of women. Micheal Jackson in his ‘Earth Song’ expressed his concern for environment and Arveyda sings about India,

‘...a song about a country that wore green as its favourite dress ... a land of rivers and of boats – pods of dried vanilla beans. ... a song of the people who came to this country long ago from a land called Sun’ (TMF.125)

The third couple is Lissie and Hal. Lissie, the grandmother of Fanny reminisces her childhood days, which is almost a prehistoric life as a Pygmy girl who loved to visit the neighboring tribe of gentle gorillas, and she says that the world’s first white man must have been forced to leave the Eden of Africa because of the lack of melanin to protect him from the sun, thus explaining the connection between nature and black women. As a child Lissie felt that Hal was the only person she had known before. As a child, Lissie felt that Hal was someone familiar. He was comfortable and emotionally recognizable. Without Hal she felt she would have died. Hal was an artist, a painter.

The story of Lissie which started even before the Great War has a lot to learn about the aspects of eco feminism. Lissie has a pet bird, which was part bird and part fish, part reptile that moves gracefully and cleverly, Lissie feels the pet is full of humour and at one point she understands that her pet bird wanted freedom. Lissie learnt that freedom is very necessary for women from that bird, by keeping the bird in the cage, she understands that she is destroying their relationship; despite the bird being her familiar. She was surprised to find the little creature break through metal of the cage and freed itself with its fragile head and flew away happily with its wings, which it had never used before. Lissie understood that freedom is one of the basic needs of women too from that tiny creature ‘her familiar.

Lissie was taken as a slave with many other black women in a ship like fishes, closely packed in a small slot, Lissie found no place to turn sideways, so closely packed women with no dress on them, no hair, no nails, no food, no water, not even air to breathe; when some died, they were thrown into the water and the others got some space for relaxing. Lissie found the answers for the questions why the sea water is salty, why is the salt white when the sea is not white and grainy as it is in the packet. Lissie overheard Aunt Nettle saying to her mother that it was the tears and sweat of all suffering people of the earth. Lissie cried so much on that voyage.

The novel has a happy ending with the story of Arveyda and Fanny, Suwelo and Carlatto and Lizzie and Hal have a happy ending even though there is tragic incidents and accidents throughout the novel.

In *The Colour Purple*, Walker relates Celie with nature in the way that at the end Celie turns into a tree, her toes grow roots into the ground and her body morphed into a tree. *The Temple of My Familiar* discusses on the idea that black women have been cut off from health and harmony with the earth. Alice Walker had used a strange technique of intertwined characters, plot and settings connected with one another. The history of man, the depth of the characters and the possibilities of life are explored in this novel. African American culture prevails throughout both the novels. The ecological terms used by Walker help in teaching ecological thinking to children and adults.

In *The Temple of my Familiar*, it is not what happens to the characters but the stories the characters tell one another form the core of the book but in *Meridian* the only story of the protagonist Meridian Hill is told by Alice Walker was said by many critics as her own story; a semi-autobiographical novel. Alice Walker's sufferings, her schooling, education in university, later joined the Civil Rights Movement, inspired by Martin Luther King Jr.

2. Conclusion

The recent pandemic Covid -19 has taught us the necessity of preventing our environment and women. It is high time to seriously view on the problems faced by common people due to environmental degradation and suppression and oppression of women. Unless or otherwise women and nature are prevented from the male dominated society, the future generation cannot survive on this planet. Food deserts about our freedom and food after all is life. The recent lockdown threatens people seriously about the problems that may be encountered in future due to the calamities caused to the farmers who are not free to produce their seeds because seeds are patented. Even if the seeds are invented by an individual, it is not fair to patent seeds. The future generations have the danger of having their life on poisoned planet. Stephen Hawking says we have a century on things planet to extinct and then we must look for other planets. Extinction which comes from irresponsible relationships with the earth and escape to unlivable planets. Scientists spend so much money to cultivate food in Mars, with that money they could have cultivated all the gardens. According to Shiva "Patriarchy has labelled women, nature and other groups not growing the economy as "unproductive". Women and nature play their social role as a nurturer, care giver. Save women to save earth and life on earth.

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