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## Woman-Nature affinity in Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* An Ecofeminist Analysis

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### Abstract

*This research paper focuses on the images extracted from natural phenomena in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982), to illustrate the pros and cons of patriarchal society's marginalization and alienation of women in today's world. The article exposes the deep hidden meanings of natural imagery through a feministic sensibility. Desai uses natural and animal elements to create a metaphoric picture of an archetypal feminine figure that works on two levels at the same time. At a primary level, this technique of inserting natural images at various points throughout the novel aims to heighten the magnitude and intensity of the mental and spiritual agony of a victimized woman who faces domestic violence, male oppression, and female suppression while on a secondary level, the role of these images helps the women in the catharsis of that pain, distress, and anguish which is the result of the rejection of her husband and society as a whole. Karen Warren's theory of Ecofeminism which regards both women and nature as oppressed objects, is applied for the purpose of research methodology. This research aims to overturn oppressive patriarchal practices by bringing women and ecology from the margins to the forefront.*

**Key Words:** Woman, Nature, Feminism, Ecology, Ecofeminism

### Introduction

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist whose novels are based upon women's freedom. She vividly constructs the woman relation with nature and asserts that it is nature that helps women in emancipation. She through various female characters of her different novels like *Cry, the Peacock* (2006), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982), and *Fire on the Mountain* (1976) depicts the oppression of women by the male patriarchal society. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982) by Anita Desai is a novel about a middle-class woman's concerns, which deals with the same subject of man's dominance over woman, marginalization, alienation, and enslavement of a woman who remains in quest of her inner self and

finally gets affinity of the nature for her survival. Desai employs a variety of hues, natural imagery, and metaphors to emphasize the marginalization and alienation of women living on the margins. She also depicts the patriarchal society's mistreatment of them, mistreatment impact on women's psychology and mental health, and their escape or comfort through natural objects and pictures. It is her fourth novel, which portrays the internal and external weakness of a woman who is fed up with her daily routine and tries to get her existence by visiting Tanori Island, which has been her dreamland during her childhood. She, throughout the novel, asks for escapism from the city life and tries to get back the

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life of nature which she already had spent during her childhood.

Ecofeminism arose from the earlier theoretical assumptions of feminist theory and ecocriticism. Francoise d' Eaubonne, a French writer, invented the term Ecofeminism in 1974. The Ecofeminist concept reveals an underlying link between environmental imbalance and long-standing gender issues. Since the time of writings of [John Stuart Mill \(Subjection of Women 1869\)](#) feminism, has been on the rise, but all its offshoots were gradually generated under different terms like Radical, Social and Marxist feminism. The birth of the Industrial Revolution, along with scientific progress and a pragmatic viewpoint, has resulted in a utilitarian outlook of life as people are now bound to modernity where a woman is being subjugated everywhere. Nature has been scorned by man, who perceives it as remote, primeval, uncivilized, and uncultivated. Man has not only reversed his course but has also asserted his dominance over nature, resulting in the violation and exploitation of natural life. The Eco-critics protested against the man's behavior to the nature just like the feminists, who were rebelling against the same system, which was rationally and logically designed to create a patriarchal monopoly. As a result, an anti-rational perspective became a common ground for Ecocriticism and Feminism, resulting in the creation of Ecofeminism.

## Literature Review

[Susan Griffin's \(1978\)](#), in her book "*Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*", addresses women's relationship to the planet as both a source of food for humanity and a victim of masculine rage. She examines how patriarchal Western philosophy and religion have used both language and science to promote their rule over both women and nature. Beginning with Plato's disastrous separation of the world into spirit and matter, she concludes her discussion by mentioning the eco-feminist role in challenging the male-dominated society. [Vandana Shiva \(1989\)](#), in her book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* talks about the concept of "Mother Earth" and "femininity of nature" and declares that both of these are supported by cultural ecofeminism, which emphasizes the natural bond between women and nature as exclusive

and distinctive. Furthermore, she also talks about the traditional wisdom and asserts that environmental protection and preservation, as well as respect for women, should be followed in modern urban society.

[Mary Daly \(1978\)](#), a radical lesbian feminist, examines the concept of femininity, its origins, and roots in her critically praised book *Gyn/ecology* (1978). She uses religion to explain how conceptions of the virtuous female came to be and were nurtured, becoming the foundation of patriarchy. Constructivist ecofeminists such as Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1974) and [Sherry B Ortner \(1974\)](#) in her article "Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" dispute the intrinsic relationship between women and nature, claiming that it is a social construct rather than a natural one. They highlight the essentialist and negative consequences of connecting women with nature, arguing that it risks alienating women from the culture by creating binary opposition of man-woman and culture-nature. Simone de Beauvoir argues in her book *The Second Sex* (1974) that man is identified with culture, while women, nature, and animals are detached from it.

[Fouzia Usmani \(2017\)](#), in her article "Ecofeminism in Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer", talks about the oppression of women and asserts that almost all of the novels of the Anita Desai do not altogether accept the patriarchal norms. She says that Sita, the protagonist character of the novel, vehemently rejects the modern urban life and goes back towards the rural life where she finds nature with ease. Bipasha [Majumdar and Debra T.S \(2015\)](#), in their article "Green study of Anita Desai's Where Shall We Go This Summer", discuss the role of ecocriticism in the lives of human beings and assert that man has violated nature by making it anthropocentric. Furthermore, they argue that this anthropocentric attitude to man should be changed into a biocentric attitude so that nature can be escaped from the vicious hands of man. [Sivaranjani & Rajarajan \(2016\)](#), in their article "Eccentricity of ecofeminism in the select novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai", highlight the role of ecofeminism in the lives of different characters from different novels of Virginia Woolf and Anita Desai. They argue that the protagonist character of Where Shall We Go

This Summer becomes fed up by the mundane routine and tries to shelter in nature, and nature provides the best motherlike protection to her.

### Theoretical Framework

The basic content of Ecofeminism research is the interaction between nature and woman. Ecofeminism believes that nature and women are inextricably linked. Ecofeminism research is theoretically founded on the recognition and study of the interaction between nature and women. [Sherry B. Ortner \(1974\)](#), in her article, *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* asserts that nature and women are closely linked together and are not separable due to their cultural symbols. ([Ortner, 1974](#)). Karen Warren is regarded as the major theorist of Ecofeminism. She also, through her work *"Ecofeminist Philosophy A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters"* (2000), tries to consolidate a link between women and nature. She declares that although there is no unified eco-feminist philosophy, different views of different Eco-feminist theorists suggest that there is one major relationship between nature and women, and this relationship keeps the theory in the movie. She asserts that although there does not exist the unified ecofeminist theory, its diverse framework provides different philosophical perspectives which have only one common thing, that is the relationship of women with nature ([Warren, 1994](#)).

Karen Warren's work has a significant influence on the evolution of ecofeminism as a theoretical paradigm. In her essay "Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections" (1987), she argues that feminists need to concentrate fully on environmental issues and ecological dependencies, while environmentalists should pay attention to the links between environmental damage, gender discrimination, and other kinds of social injustice. She says that the preliminary point of ecofeminism relies upon the fact that domination of women and nature by men is interconnected and is wrong, which should be stopped.

There had already been a multitude of ecofeminist poetry, fiction, and political literature, produced before "Feminism and Ecology" appeared in the pages of several magazines of Environmental

Ethics in the 1970s and early 1980s. Karen Warren categorizes the relationship of woman and nature into ten categories: historic, cognitive, societal, economical, linguistic, symbolic, factual, mystical and scared, philosophical, geopolitical, and ethical. She says that the preliminary point of ecofeminism relies upon the fact that domination of women and nature by men is interconnected and is wrong, which should be stopped ([Warren, 2000, p.155](#)).

### Analysis

Karen Warren portrays ecofeminism as a specific set of ecofeminist principles, values, practices and methodologies. Her philosophy is not based upon the principle of universalism; rather, it deals with the wide range of experiences that she gathers through different theoretical assumptions. She asserts that Nature has a profound calming impact on a woman's mind, especially when she can't seem to escape the troubles and stress of her daily existence. Nature serves as a source of happiness and mental freedom, as well as a refuge from a harsh, unpleasant, gloomy, and nerve-wracking routine and environment. It permits a lady to feel free from the shackles of tyrannical realities and life's oppression. She, while relating feminism with eco-criticism, proclaims that feminism is when someone becomes capable of understanding the subordination of women and oppression of men on women ([Warren, 2000, p.1](#)).

Anita Desai constructs her protagonist character Sita as a woman who is not satisfied with all the modernity that she faces during her stay in the city. Sita, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is actually a mother of four children with a fifth on the way, which is extremely depressed by her mundane existence and everyday tasks. More importantly, she feels as though her individuality is lost within the four walls of the house, and she is constantly reminded of her insignificance in the lives of her family members and spouse, who neglect her. Desai employs the contrast of 'white' and 'black' colours to represent Sita's matrimonial life, which is full of contradictions and binaries. Even the death of an "eaglet" by "a horde of crows" is highly symbolic, as Desai quotes in her novel.

The tortured creature cowering unshaded in the sun was as the eagle, wounded or else too young to

fly. With glee, the crows whistled-who; in ecstasy, they waved their wings; crra-crra, they laughed and rapped as they whipped it with their blue bottle wings and tore into it with their scimitar beaks (p.35).

"Eaglet" is a symbol of defenceless, oppressed women who are as helpless as "eaglet." The eaglet is either injured or unable to fly. It alluded to Sita's tumultuous past when she was looking for love and consideration. The brutal male-dominated patriarchal society is symbolized by the throng of crows.' The ravens' black colour emphasizes the patriarchal society's shadows of gloominess that are put on a woman's identity. The 'black' colour of 'eaglet' and 'crows' also represents gloom, dreariness, and long distances in Sita and her husband Raman's lives. A woman, like the 'eaglet,' gets caught in the net of this society and eventually dies, exhausted from attempting to get herself free from the trap and cage and fly in the skies of freedom and individuality like Sita. This also reflects Sita's despair and helplessness, as she wishes to flee the misery of her existence to the 'Utopian land,' which was once her home.

In this novel, Desai makes use of the sea as a device for advancement. Sita, the key character, appears to be fed up and bored with life in Mumbai, and she expects a dramatic shift at 'Manori.' The residents of the island excitedly await the return of Sita, the revered saint's daughter, who was exceptional in human relations and a living legend for all of them, but she comes as a frantic mother, without her husband to accompany her and without any of her wonderful father's characteristics. The sea plays a significant role in their lives because the sea is where Raman and Sita's lives began.

She stood there staring across the sea at the island which rocked and floated there as an aluminium bowl turned upside down, with eyes she shaded with one hand, and face too was drawn up into a lined frown of perplexity (p.14).

Ecofeminism begins with a recognition of the natural world's beauty (or "moral value"), as well as the human inclination towards compassion and caring. Although Ecofeminism seeks to recognize and condemn unjust division by a male-dominated society, it also discusses other alternatives that can change the way of thinking of dominating male society. Ecofeminism's true forte relies upon

pinpointing the inappropriate behavior of males with nature and woman, and it suggests that binaries of oppression should be overturned. As Warren herself writes that the main work of an ecofeminist should be to develop a theory or practice that should be related to the environment, which excludes the male biasness about the woman and nature ([Warren, 2000, p.37](#)).

Anita Desai, through her novel *Where We Shall Go This Summer?* also constructs the relationship of the protagonist character with nature in a way that it seems that nature is like a goddess for her. Throughout the novel, Sita is seen having a strong bond with the water and land, for her sea was like a mother, and returning to the sea was like returning to the mother's lap, which used to give her a soothing and calm feeling. Returning to her motherland and searching for her lost identity was similar to the feelings which she used to enjoy during her stay with her mother. The depth of the sea also refers to the depths of a woman's emotions and feelings that no one has bothered to examine. Sita's existence resembles that of the 'Sea.' she feels tedium from her daily routine, just like a sea swallowed by the waves.

She had come here in order not to give birth. Wasn't this Manori, the island of miracles? Her father had made it an island of magic once, worked miracles of a kind. She had come on a pilgrimage to beg for the miracle of keeping her baby unborn (p.28).

For Sita, the 'Utopian land' represents her identity and 'self,' since she wants to return to the region where she formerly resided. She comes to the island not with the intention of giving birth but with the hope that the mythical island will assist her in some way, avoiding her pregnancy. Desai depicts the island's delineation as symbolic and magical in nature. In sections 1 and 3 of *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Desai uses evocative imagery to address and underscore Sita's existentialist isolation. The most conspicuous and striking imagery of 'prey' and 'predator' is used very beautifully as Sita tries to restrict the crows from attacking the wounded eagle (p.22).

Karen Warren, in her book *Ecofeminist Philosophy A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (2000), discusses oppression and domination and asserts that all human beings are not

dominated by one another; rather, it is the woman who is only being dominated by the male patriarchal society. She, in the very first chapter of the novel (Nature is a Feminist Issue), proclaims that all human being, including male and female, are not ecologically interdependent; rather, women who are sophisticated human being is the only being that is dependent on nature due to male domination. She further proclaims that eco-feminist should be beyond the 'ism', which shows a particular way of domination and oppression. She says that an eco-feminist should be anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and he should only focus upon the logic of domination. Warren asserts that "The boundary conditions specify that an ecofeminist ethic must be anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and opposed to any 'ism' that presupposes or advances a logic of domination" ([Warren, 2000, p.99](#)).

Anita Desai, through her protagonist character, shows that women are exploited by male culture, and this horrible and ghastly imagery from the world of animals has been utilized for communicating the cruel, nasty, and vindictive nature of human beings. Color contrast is utilized to portray the duality and dreariness in a woman's existence, alongside animal imagery and imagery borrowed from natural phenomena. Desai uses her paintbrush to paint her manuscript beautifully on the canvas by dipping it in different colours. She utilizes the colour "white" to describe the status and plight of Sita's house. The white colour is associated with death. The walls of Sita's heart are pale, white, and colourless, just like the walls of the house. They reflect the sheer drabness and monotony of her life in this house.

The pictures of "white walls," "dark foliage," "white pillars," and "leafless palm trees" are utilized to emphasize Sita's dreariness and lack of freshness and

delight. A tree is normally associated with fertility, but the "leafless palm tree" predicts Sita's barrenness because she does not want to give birth to her fifth child. In some ways, she is anti-fertility. More importantly, the novel's title, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* It is also meaningful since it poses a question. It's a symbolic inquiry. Sita, the protagonist, is a perplexed, non-conformist, dissatisfied, and unsettled person, and the title implies a lack of clarity, as she is unsure of the actions and methods that will lead to a happy and healthy married life. Desai wishes to raise the issue of female integrity and individuality under the thumb of male authority by this questioning statement or topic, as females constantly depend on their male guardians. They are thought to be mentally incapable of making independent decisions.

### Conclusion

In Anita Desai's novels, nature plays a very essential, vital, and dominant role since it participates in the human drama and reflects the protagonist's desires and agonies. Natural imagery depicts the psychological and symbolic importance of the female character and asserts that the catharsis of the female emotions can only be told to nature as both nature and women have a common oppressor, that is, the male. Imagery not only aids the novelist in presenting and demonstrating her or his topics and ideas, as well as it gives effective voice to thoughts, but it also aids the reader in developing more critical thinking and a point of view on a certain idea, issue, or argument. The research concludes that the role of natural objects, imagery and metaphors used in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1982) is a pure ecofeminist, and it explores and unfolds the deep hidden, symbolic significance of the natural images with respect to the representation of a woman.

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