

The Victimization of Women and Nature in Tony Morrison's *Sula* and Anita Desai's *In Custody*: an Ecofeminist Study

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Abstract

Ecofeminism is a socio-environmental movement that asserts a connection between the exploitation of the natural environment and the oppression and marginalization of women. The purpose of this research is to undermine the ideology of male dominated society in which men oppress both woman and nature. It analyzes Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Anita Desai's *In Custody* in light of ecofeminist perspectives with a brief analysis of the textual and conceptual principles of ecofeminism in the selected novels. It compares the ideology of how those writers portray the victimization of woman and nature through the male and female characters. To accomplish this, it is necessary to elucidate pertinent ecofeminist theory of Francoise d'Eaubonne which highlights the victimization, and oppression of women are inextricably linked to the devastation of the environment and natural world.

Keywords: ecofeminism, woman, nature, victimization, interconnection.

إيذاء المرأة والطبيعة في رواية توني موريسون *سولا* ورواية أنيتا ديساي في الحجز: دراسة نسوية إيكولوجية

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المستخلص

النسوية البيئية هي حركة اجتماعية وبيئية تؤكد العلاقة بين استغلال البيئة الطبيعية واضطهاد المرأة وتهميشها. الغرض من هذا البحث هو الحد من أيديولوجية المجتمع الذي يهيمن عليه الذكور والذي يضطهد فيه الرجال المرأة والطبيعة. وأنه يحلل رواية "سولا" لتوني موريسون ورواية أنيتا ديساي "في الحجز" في ضوء وجهات نظر النسوية البيئية، ويحلل بإيجاز المبادئ النصية والمفاهيمية للنسوية البيئية في الروايات المختارة. وهو يقارن أيديولوجية كيفية تصوير هؤلاء الكتاب إيذاء المرأة والطبيعة عبر الشخصيات الذكورية والأنثوية. ولتحقيق ذلك، من الضروري توضيح النظرية النسوية البيئية ذات الصلة لفرانسواز دوبون التي تسلط الضوء على أن الإيذاء واضطهاد المرأة يرتبطان ارتباطاً وثيقاً بتدمير البيئة والعالم الطبيعي.

الكلمات الدالة: النسوية البيئية، المرأة، الطبيعة، الإيذاء، الترابط

Introduction

Eco feminism as an ideology contends that patriarchal society's male-dominated views and behaviors are intertwined with the oppression of women and the natural world. This persecution still exists in the present day. This study aims to explain the novels *Sula* by Tony Morrison and *in Custody* by Anita Desai. It demonstrates how the male-dominated society oppresses both women and nature, and how both women and nature resist this dominance in their own ways. All female characters in both works are affected by nature in some manner. In the selected novels, the deeper hues of nature correspond to the darker characteristics of the women involved and their concomitant dominance. The relationship between women and nature will be explored to demonstrate how the chosen authors encode their thoughts in their works of literature. Understanding the relationship between women and environment is essential for making an equitable shift, and it might be a means of preventing oppression. Analyzing the selected books from an ecofeminist viewpoint affords the chance to reevaluate the treatment of women in the modern day and to prevent environmental abuses in the era of global warming. Their concern for the environment and the uneven treatment of women inspires current authors to reflect on and encapsulate their ideas in their writings. They emphasize the relationship between humans and nature and convey concern for both humanity and nature.

Ecofeminism in The Novels of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison

Theoretical Background

French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne coined the term “ecofeminism” in 1974. According to her, the marginalization, victimization, and oppression of women, people of color, and impoverished communities are inextricably linked to the devastation of the environment and natural world, as both were the result of patriarchy or a society dominated by males. Francoise uses the term ecofeminism “to call upon woman to lead an ecological revolution to save the planet” [1:p.184]. The connection between woman and nature contains to the classical mythology. Nature is portrayed as a woman as its essential duties includes cultivate and reproduction. Likewise women’s duties are planned as natural to her. Imelda Martin draws attention to the discrimination and marginalization that have resulted from the historical and societal associations between women and the natural world in her article. Women have traditionally been associated with nature due to their responsibilities in reproduction and nurturing, such as childbirth and childrearing. This association has led to the belief that women are intrinsically linked to natural processes and cycles. Martin notes that this association has produced negative results. Women have historically been regarded as passive, submissive, and subordinate to males, much like nature. This is consistent with traditional gender norms that have positioned women as subordinate to males and perpetuated a power hierarchy in which men are at the top. This association with passivity and submission has constrained women's opportunities and autonomy, reinforcing gender inequalities and stereotypes. Martin argues that this association between women and nature parallels the treatment of other marginalised groups, including ethnic and sexual minorities. Those in authority have also discriminated against and imposed passive and submissive roles on these groups. By drawing this parallel, Martin highlights the intersectionality of oppression, in which

multiple forms of discrimination intersect and exacerbate the difficulties encountered by marginalised individuals and groups. Martin states “Women, traditionally associated with nature because of their reproductive and nurturing qualities, have been discriminated and identified with the passive and submissive attitude attributed to nature as well as other ethnic and sexual minorities”[2:p.1].

Consequently, comprehending the relationship between women and nature is best summarized by Nature naturalizes women and women feminize nature. Nature is typically depicted as feminine, with kindness and sensitivity. This interaction highlights the interconnectedness of gender and environmental issues. To explore the relationship between women and nature, it is vital to comprehend the analogous behavior of men and women in patriarchal societies. The function of women has been to satisfy the needs of males. Similarly, nature is believed to have an inherent disposition to meet human requirements. Patriarchal rule therefore oppresses both women and nature. Due to the oppression of women and the natural environment in recent decades, ecofeminism's underlying ideology has been investigated by critics, who have demonstrated their strong support for it. Since the inception of ecofeminism, Vandana Shiva, founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, and Carolyn Merchant, author of *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, have been regarded as prominent figures. Shiva and Merchant have contributed significantly to the understanding of environmental challenges and the relationship between gender and ecology. They have made an impact on academic discourse on women's involvement in environmental conservation and the need for more equal approaches to environmental management.

To define the connection between women and nature, cultural ecofeminism emphasizes the unique and exclusive relationship that occurs organically between women and nature and supports the notion of "Mother Earth." They argue that traditional values of respecting women and preserving and safeguarding the environment ought to be incorporated into modern culture. In her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*, Shiva stated, “The violence to nature as symptomatized by the ecological crisis, and the violence to women, as symptomatized by their subjugation and exploitation arise from this subjugation of the feminine principle”[3:p.23].

The transformation of the natural world from a living, spiritual, and nurturing mother into inanimate and economic matter suited the exploitation of an expanding capitalism. Merchant stated, “in investigating the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connections to science, technology and the economy, we must re-examine the formation of a world-view and a science that, by re-conceptualizing reality as a machine, rather than a having organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women” [1:p.21]. Destruction of the environment and marginalization of certain groups, such as women, children, and people of color, are consequences of patriarchal supremacy, which is founded on the notion that masculine characteristics are superior. This tyranny is encouraged by capitalism, which places efficiency above all else and, as a result, devalues many feminine characteristics, including nature itself.

As it is portrayed as a patriarchal agenda, the contribution of contemporary science to oppression of “mother earth” is crucial. The mechanical paradigm, which

dominates modern science, is a particular response of a particular demographic. The recent years feminist activists have begun to realize that, Shiva mentioned “The dominant science system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole, but as a masculine and patriarchal project which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women” [3:p.33].

Evelyn Fox Keller is an American physicist and science historian renowned for her research on gender and science. She has critically examined the historical context of science and its relationship with gender and has been an influential figure in feminist science studies. Keller has emphasized, in her book *Reflections on Gender and Science*, the historical underrepresentation of women and minorities in the scientific community, especially in the early stages of modern science. She noted that the majority of today's scientific knowledge was influenced by white, middle-class men, and that their perspectives had a significant impact on the development of scientific theories and methods. Keller's research has highlighted the significance of understanding how social and cultural factors can influence scientific inquiry and the creation of knowledge. By recognizing the historical context and biases within scientific practises, she advocates for a more inclusive and diverse scientific community, which she believes can lead to a richer and more thorough understanding of the world. Keller states, “Science has been produced by a particular sub-set of the human race, that is, almost entirely by white, middle class males. For the founding fathers of modern science, the reliance on the language of gender was explicit” [4:p.7].

Ecofeminism aims to transform a society that is characterized by its dominance over nature and women into one that is characterized by its ethics of caring. When decisions are made to equalize the human and natural worlds, ethics and morality are meant to be taken into account. With an ethics of care, an approach to morality based on feminine elements of ethics, and a priority for caring for all species regardless of gender, race, and color, ecofeminism advocates replacing the entire masculine system of dominance and oppression. Equal rights for individuals, the natural world, animals, humans, and nonhumans are promoted by ecofeminism. Ecofeminist activists and supporters avoid being verbally or physically abusive to all living things. They avoid using oppressive and discriminatory naturist language when discussing women or the natural world. A recent report in eco-educational site by Dr. Heidi Hutner shows that half of the heat-related death cases in United States from 2000 to 2012 were from black communities. Those poor communities which have been affected by toxic materials due to injustice distribution of the natural resources and locating the chemical factories in specific area. **Dr. Heidi Hutner, states;** “When we poison the Earth, we are poisoned, and it all comes from this history of patriarchal domination where whoever holds the most power has this right to dominate, control, and exploit everyone else” [5].

Victimization of women and the natural environment is not acceptable under ecofeminist ideology. Women, people of color, and indigenous people face specific challenges, and when these challenges intersect, the consequences compound. Shiva states; “Environmentalism then becomes a new patriarchal project of technological fixes and political oppression” [3:p.64].

Understanding the relationship between women and the natural world is crucial to achieving equality, according to ecofeminism. Ecofeminism emphasizes comprehending the relationship between woman and nature in the context of patriarchal society's dominance over women and the natural world in order to have a positive impact on the oppression of women and the natural world. According to Shiva, the scarcity of these natural resources is causing an unparalleled form of impoverishment for women and marginalized groups because these resources are fundamental to both the natural economy and women's means of survival. "Since these natural resources are the basis of nature's economy and women's survival"[3:p.29]. Shiva argues that natural resources are critical to both the functioning of the natural world and the survival of women. She claims that women frequently rely on natural resources for living and economic activity. She emphasizes the significance of sustainable resource management for both environmental protection and women's empowerment.

Ecofeminism in Toni Morrison's Sula

Toni Morrison is a prolific writer of the twentieth century, and her works were awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. In fact, she was the first black female novelist to receive the award. In her novel, she encodes her thoughts and passion towards woman and the natural world. She presents the picture of women associated with nature in a male dominated society. Her novels focus on the oppression of women of color, marginalized people and the impact of patriarchy on the natural world. Due to the oppression of "Mother Earth" in the recent decades, Morrison has promoted the stereotyped black woman with strength and wisdom.

In a male dominated society, women have not been treated equally to men. They have been considered as inferior to their partners. Simone de Beauvoir states in her book *The Second Sex* "The fact that woman is weak and of inferior productive capacity does not explain this exclusion; it is because she did not share his way of working and thin! because she remained in bondage to life's mysterious processes, that the male did not recognize in her a being like himself" [6:p.104]. The same masculine dominance has similarly subjugated nature in order to satisfy their own desires regardless of environmental principles. In her book, Morrison expresses her views on how unfair power that takes into account the uneven treatment of both women and the natural environment has mistreated both nature and women. In the context of a neighbourhood affected by commercial interests, Morrison's novel addresses discrimination, ethnic oppression, and environmental degradation. The maltreatment and marginalization of marginalized communities, especially African Americans, and the natural environment are recurring themes in Morrison's works. She frequently explores the complexities of these issues and depicts the fortitude and efforts of the affected communities to maintain stability and health despite the obstacles they face. Morrison depicts discriminatory racial oppression and the community's struggle for stability and prosperity. While commercial interests have substantially eroded the neighbourhood, the remnants of its enduring characteristics are what attract the attention of the "valley man"—the stranger observes or could have observed these enduring characteristics. Morrison mentions, "neighborhood has been almost completely swept away by commercial interests but the remains of what sustained it are what the "valley man" the stranger, sees or could have seen"[7:p.11].

Morrison highlighted the inequality of indigenous people of Africa in the way of distributing the natural sources. In *Sula*, Morrison presents the image of a farmer asking for equal access to natural resources. The exploitation, injustice and violence of the powerful domination over natural resources and women would lead to unexpected crises as Mahatma Gandhi said, "There is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not for some people's greed" [8]. The brutality and greed towards environment will result in ecological catastrophes, while the violence against women will result in the exploitation of feminine values. Consequently, the equilibrium between man and nature should be preserved and protected in accordance with feminist and environmental principles. Morrison emphasises the concept of exploitation and broken promises, which resonates with the novel's larger themes. "*Sula*" explores the complexities of power dynamics, race relations, and the repercussions of shattered community trust. The story of the farmer and the slave reflects historical realities during slavery and after emancipation, when black people were frequently exploited and had their promises violated by white landowners and authorities. The farmer's initial pledge of freedom and land can be interpreted as a manipulative ploy to extract labor from the slave by exploiting his desire for a better future. Morrison identifies historical and systemic oppression, shedding light on the enduring effects of such exploitation on marginalised communities. Morrison states, "A good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would perform some very difficult chores" [7:p.14].

In her novel, Morrison depicts female characters in a variety of ways to demonstrate how women may defy all societal constraints and reject patriarchal authority. Morrison, on the other hand, depicts a woman who has been encircled and controlled by a culture ruled by men. *Sula* and *Eva* fight the established laws of patriarchy, whilst *Nel* stays encircled by traditional bounds until the novel's conclusion, when she realizes the power of femininity. As a feminist, *Sula* rejects the concepts of woman as a subject in her society and opposes the tradition of women. It was very challengeable to be accepted in her society and to adapt the image of independent woman who start to raise her voice in a male dominated society. Morrison mentions,

"Those with husbands had folded themselves into starched coffins, their sides bursting with other people's skinned dreams and bony regrets" [7:p.109].

In Morrison's *Sula*, the picture of a woman's role to rejecting patriarchal tyranny and her love for the natural environment is shown clearly. As Vandana Shiva describes the relation between women and nature, the concept of the feminine principle presents a challenging category that positions both nature and women as origins of life and prosperity. In this capacity, they emerge as dynamic agents that sustain and generate processes of life. she states, "The feminine principle becomes a category of challenge which locates nature and women as the source of" [3:p.62].

Natural imagery in Toni Morrison's *Sula* compares women destiny with nature, and discovers the oppression and violence from white culture, criticizing dominant rules which gives oppression to women and nature. The works of Morrison produce a sense of transformation and a connection to the natural world. "the Bottom," which is likely a reference to a neighbourhood, will be wiped out by a fundamental transformation or devastation, according to Morrison. The phrase "nothing left" implies total annihilation,

alluding to the concept of impermanence and the ephemeral character of human creations. Morrison emphasises that the Bottom was not recognised as an official town. It existed as a modest, unpretentious "neighbourhood." This distinction between a municipality and a neighbourhood highlights the diminutive and potentially marginalised nature of the Bottom. Morrison explains The natural world is evoked by the description of "valley houses" and the image of hearing birdsong. The phrase "valley houses" implies a connection to the landscape, reinforcing the notion that the community is inextricably linked to its surroundings. "There will be nothing left of the Bottom but perhaps it is just as well, since it wasn't a town anyway: just a neighborhood" [7:p.13].

The novel by Morrison emphasizes the transformation and loss of natural landscape elements. She highlights the impact of human actions on the environment as well as the interdependence of nature and community. The phrase "road shaded by beeches, maples, and chestnuts" suggests a natural setting. These trees are important for the environmental services they provide, such as oxygen to the environment and preservation of biodiversity, in addition to their natural beauty. Morrison also mentions the absence of the beeches and pear trees under which children used to sit and speak. The loss of trees and the natural environment is a result of human activities such as urbanization, which may devastate ecosystems.

Morrison underlines the effects of placing human needs prior to of environmental conservation. It implies a separation between the people and the natural environment, as the loss of trees and the disappearance of pear trees where children formerly played represent a shattered relationship between humans and nature. Morrison's description of the place refers to a route that was formerly connected to a valley. A variety of trees, including beeches and chestnuts, lined the route, providing shade and a natural surroundings. Morrison emphasises the road's idyllic location, portraying a picture of a tranquil and picturesque landscape. "One road, shaded by beeches, oaks, maples and chestnuts, connected it to the valley. The beeches are gone now, and so are the pear trees where children sat and yelled down through the blossoms to passersby" [7:p.13]. The selection of tree species highlights the richness and diversity of the former natural environment. Morrison focuses on the passage of time, the impermanence of nature, and the alteration of landscapes. She also alludes to the presence of change, loss, and the vanishing of cherished memories.

Morrison depicts the natural beauty of the environment in her novel; she begins her story by describing the beauty of the Bottom prior to the intervention of man. She describes her natural beauty as a bridge between spiritual and material resources. As stated by Rachel Carson, "Nature and women, as maintainers of soil fertility, protectors of plants, and managers of pest control, as well as reproducers of genetic wealth in all its diversity" [9:p.108]. *Sula* depicts the grandeur and significance of the Bottom, an area of Medallion that retains its natural landscape. The fact that the Bottom is described as "lovely" suggests that it represents a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Heavy trees provide shelter and attractiveness to the shacks in this area, as described. This depiction emphasizes the significance of nature to individuals and communities.

The Bottom can be seen as a symbol of the relationship between women and the natural environment in the context of ecofeminism. Historically, women have been closely associated with nurturing and caregiving duties within families and communities. The presence of the massive trees and their protective nature could be interpreted as a metaphor for the nurturing and protective characteristics that are typically associated with women. Morrison describes the urban environment of Medallion as being humid and gritty. She suggests that as the city expands and urbanization advances, the natural environment and its intrinsic value may be degraded and exploited excessively. Morrison emphasizes the significance of protecting and valuing the natural world. Recognizing the positive impact that the natural environment can have on individuals and communities, she emphasizes the need for a balance between human progress and the preservation of nature. "The farm land turned into a village and the village into a town and the streets of Medallion were hot and dusty with progress" [7:p.15].

Ecofeminists claim that women and environment should not be regarded objects in order to fight the anthropocentric and patriarchal culture. Humans are their primary concern, regardless of gender, color, or any non-humans. Morrison represents the anthropocentric belief that both women and nature are inferior. Patriarchy and anthropocentrism show less regard for women and the natural environment in order to satisfy their own demands, which disrespect indigenous people and serve the citizens' agendas. As Shiva states "Modern science as patriarchy's project" [3:p.33]. Morrison shows her ecofeminist consciousness through the victimization of women and nature under the anthropocentric and patriarchal domination.

Ecofeminism is a viewpoint that examines the interrelationship between the subjugation and exploitation of women and nature, which frequently occurs within patriarchal and anthropocentric systems. In this instance, *Sula* implies that both women and nature suffer at the hands of these systems. By depicting the consequences of such dominance, Morrison's work sheds light on the interdependence of social and ecological issues, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to society. The mention of the collapse of the Bottom and the movement of people to the valley indicates a shift in the landscape and the displacement of the community. This can symbolize the marginalization and disempowerment of certain groups, including women and communities living in harmony with nature. "Nobody colored lived much up in the Bottom any more" [7:p.145].

Ecofeminism in Anita Desai's *In custody*

Anita Desai (1937) is an Indian novelist, her novels deals with the experience and inner lives of Indian women. She encodes politics and gender issues into her works. Desai has been awarded the Royal Society of Literature Winfred Holtby Prize (1978) and the Guardian Award for Children's Fiction (1982). The world of Anita Desai's literary works is domestic, her main concern is to highlight the woman and nature in the modern age. She presents the concept of "Mother Earth" in her fictions, that could be seen very obvious through the interconnection between woman and nature. Desai attempts to establish a connection between the outward scenery and the inside state of mind. Her female characters recognize the effect of nature and the natural world around them. This

is indeed depicted in the selected novel by Anita Desai titled *In custody*. In her work, Desai demonstrates the contemporary approach of writing the Indian novel. Female authors begin to write in the voice of women and relate their hardship and enjoyment in both male-dominated and autonomous communities. Focusing on modern concerns, Desai depicts in her story a mute woman and a woman who speaks her opinion and stands against the patriarchal standards of her community.

In custody by Desai depicts the interaction between women and non-human beings; it demonstrates conclusively that women are more connected to nature than males. Desai has an understanding of the human psyche. At many places in her novel, she relates female pain to natural images, which demonstrates the ecofeminism theme in her work. Similarly, she illustrates the patriarchal and anthropocentric perspective of her male characters towards women and environment, who are used solely for their own profit. She examines the impact of colonization and western technology on the production of food, the damming of rivers, the removal of women from food production, and the destruction of ecosystems and soils to extract wealth for specific corporations, while creating insufficiency and poverty for local communities.

Desai's novel also depicts the consequence of industrialization on rural landscape. It characterizes the metamorphosis of the land between Mirpore and the capital into an industrialized stretch, where factories, workshops, teashops, and bus stops have replaced the formerly pleasant agricultural appearance. The depiction of desiccated and desolate fields represents the loss of fruitful agricultural land as a result of industrialization. The presence of smokestacks emitting black, foul-smelling smoke, as well as the mention of sugar-cane processing facilities, cement factories, and brick kilns, further accentuates industrialization and the pollution it causes. The description of debris, industrial paraphernalia, and effluent, such as concrete, zinc, smoke, pollutants, decomposition, and devastation, emphasizes the negative environmental effects of industrialization. Desai argues that the pursuit of progress and prosperity has resulted in environmental degradation and the disappearance of rural appeal. Her portrayal raises concerns regarding the equilibrium between industrial development and environmental preservation. It encourages consideration of the effects of accelerated urbanization and industrialization on landscapes and communities, highlighting the potential loss of traditional and sustainable lifestyles.

“most of the fields looked withered and desolate, and tin smokestacks exhaling enormous quantities of very black and foul-smelling smoke, sugar-cane crushing works, cement factories, brick kilns, motor repair workshops and the attendant teashops and bus-stops were strung along the highway on both sides” [10:p.8].

Desai portrays woman as a victim in her story, highlighting the female character “Sarla” to illustrate the ecofeminist concept in her work. The image of Sarla illustrates how Indian women are oppressed by patriarchal culture. Desai portrays Sarla as a victim who has no right to express herself and is surrounded by her husband's patriarchal norms. As with other women, Sarla suffers in a culture ruled by males. Desai emphasizes the relationship dynamics between a married couple from an ecofeminist standpoint. Within a patriarchal and oppressive society, the issues of victimhood, isolation, and the search for liberation are examined. She illustrates through her characters how oppressive social

systems have influenced the appearance of women. This could represent the ways in which women are frequently portrayed as victims due to patriarchal norms. Mentioning the husband's perpetually forbidden appearance implies that he, too, has been subject to the same oppressive forces. Despite comprehending the shared cause and experiences of defeat, there is no spiritual bond between the couple. They experience a sense of separation between the two victims and they believe they should avoid each other.

Desai's work depicts the notion that victims of an oppressive system frequently experience feelings of helplessness and isolation. Instead of seeking support from others who have experienced similar victimization, they may perceive a need for a liberator who can provide liberation. This quotation can be interpreted as emphasizing the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression in a patriarchal society from an ecofeminist perspective. She suggests that the pursuit of liberation and empowerment transcends individual experiences and calls for collective action and assistance. It stresses the importance of challenging oppressive systems that perpetuate victimization. "They made her look forbidden, and perhaps that was why her husband looked so perpetually forbidden" [10:p.22].

The novel "In Custody" by Desai emphasizes a character's motivation to write about the suffering of women as a result of his wife's influence. She recognizes the husband's awareness of the wife's experiences and her effect on his understanding of the challenges women have to face. This demonstrates a recognition of gender-based inequalities and the need of putting a focus on the pain faced by women in patriarchal countries. Meanwhile, ecofeminism examines the link between the exploitation of women and the exploitation and destruction of nature. Desai underlines the link between women's subjugation and environmental degradation.

Women and the natural world are frequently subjugated and mistreated by patriarchal and exploitative systems. By emphasizing the plight of women, the character demonstrates an awareness of the larger structural issues that perpetuate injustice. This is consistent with ecofeminist principles that aim to challenge and abolish oppressive systems by recognizing the interplay between gender, social justice, and environmental concerns. The character's intention to write about the suffering of women can be interpreted as an act of giving marginalized individuals a voice and agency. It represents an awareness-raising endeavor aimed at attaining gender equality and environmental sustainability. Desai portrays Sarla as a victim because she asked her husband to include the pain of women in the story. "My dear wife has inspired me to write on the subject of the suffering of women" [10:p.43]. Desai demonstrates the dramatic irony of a man addressing his wife with utmost respect while doing the opposite behavior. Desai makes a remark on how man perceives woman, what women's duties are intended to be, and the psychological effects of being regarded for such roles.

Roy Basudhara as an ecofeminist critic emphasizes the gender dynamics associated with voicing. According to Roy, the novel's male characters are predominately concerned with issues of cultural expression, while the female characters' voices are purposefully suppressed and subdued. She argues that males wield more influence and control over cultural and literary narratives due to their ability to articulate their thoughts and experiences. In the meantime, the marginalization of female voices indicates the

suppression of women's perspectives in the formation of discourse. She recognizes the connection between the oppression of women and environmental degradation. Roy writes, that “the entire male action in the novel revolves around the issue of voicing—of linguistic, cultural and poetic voicing while the female voices are conspiratorially muted, silenced, stifled”[11:p.205]. Desai highlights another example of male patriarchy in her novel through the behavior of Nur when he insult the woman impolitely “He curses the woman in the filthiest language, and “the dark room reeked-of filthy abuse, rotten gums, raw liquor, too many years and too much impotent rage”[10:p.87].

Desai depicts Sarla's struggle utilizing environmental imagery to encode her mind and soul from an ecofeminist standpoint. The damaging and smokey nature is comparable to Saela's persecution in the literature. As a melancholy and alone lady, she takes solace in nature and portrays every aspect of her existence via natural imagery. As Garrard presents the concept of eco-feminism, he focuses on the identification of the Scientific Revolution as an ecological disaster from the perspectives of deep ecologists and ecofeminists. He examines the intersection of environmental issues and gender dynamics. He emphasizes the interconnectedness and intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems. From their viewpoint, the Scientific Revolution, characterized exploitative approach to nature, is seen as a turning point where humans began to detach themselves from the natural world and prioritize domination and control over ecological harmony. Ecofeminists, on the other hand, explore the links between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. They argue that the patriarchal systems perpetuated during the Scientific Revolution perpetuate a worldview that devalues and exploits both women and the environment. Thus, ecofeminists also view the Scientific Revolution as a significant event that resulted in the loss of a more balanced and sustainable relationship between humans and nature. Garrard suggests that deep ecologists and ecofeminists view the Scientific Revolution as a pivotal moment that led to the disconnection, exploitation, and loss of authenticity in our relationship with the environment. This interpretation reflects the concerns of ecofeminism, which seeks to challenge and transform the underlying systems of oppression that contribute to both environmental and social injustices. “Thus deep ecologists, ecofeminists and Heideggerian ecocritics identify the Scientific Revolution as an ecological disaster in and through which a primal authenticity was lost”[12:p.70]. Desai attempts to emphasize on her characters and themes by employing feminine and natural images. She frequently describes herself as a writer who concentrates mostly on the inner lives and universal issues of her characters. She wants to give her Indian community a voice of inferiority while also portraying their hardships at the hands of the elements.

Desai makes an effort to include her ecofeminist philosophy into her novels; she illustrates how human anthropocentrism and patriarchy have impacted the natural beauty of the country by depicting towns, wells, and trees. Desai skillfully portrays the image of the natural world's gradual destruction through the image of Devan's town in her novel to make the reader aware of the future of the environment in a postmodern industrial world and to call the decision makers to rethink about the ecosystem to save the plant. “Only a few trees remained -mango, pomegranate, tamarind -looming around the

compound wall shaggy guardians even if they were drooping from drought and pollution”[10:p.45].

Exploring the patriarchal subjugation of women and animals in Desai's story is crucially dependent on the concept of victimization. In her story, Desai depicts four types of women who are victims and oppressed in their society. These ladies disregard opportunities to pursue their aspirations and express their opinions. Basudhara Roy states “The women in the world of In Custody are sealed in silence and not just ideologically but literally defined by patriarchal discourse symbolized by the development of the narrative through Deven’s point of view”[11:p.199]. For instance, Sarla faces a great deal of suffering in her life since she is solely considered as a wife and mother; her womanhood is constrained by male-dominated norms. In contrast, she actually aspires to be a magazine girl and lead a contemporary life. Devan acknowledges that his marriage was arranged by his family and is not based on a mutual affection. Desai wants to throw the light on this kind of marriage which is based on family selection and agreement without asking girls to give their own decision either accepted or not, “Of course she had not been his choice but that of his mother and aunts, crafty and cautious women”[10:p.68]. Safiya, Nur's first wife, who lives in the background and is usually doing all of the housework. She is angry because Nur gets married again, forcing her to share her spouse. Safiya is another victim of patriarchy who strives against oppression, is unable to voice her views; she is another example of the victimization of women in the present world.

In the age of globalization, Desai's ecofeminism shows her worry over the victimization of nature. She emphasizes the destructive nature of contemporary technology, the subjugation of indigenous cultures, and the marginalization of women who care about the environment. As a female author, Desai is concerned with conveying to the public the sorrow of those whose voices have been silenced. In the novel, class and gender oppression are tied to environmental concerns. Desai works skillfully to prove the ideology of understanding, the behavior of humans and their connection with the exploitation of nature. “Then where was freedom to be found? Where was there fresh air to breathe? He looked up at the dusty pelt of the sky for some chink that promised”[10:p.44].

Desai claims that the connection between woman and nature arises from the fact that women are the victims of environmental damage, a situation in which many people struggle to meet their basic requirements. In a patriarchal culture, Desai depicts women who depend on natural resources for their livelihood and sustenance. Women share their caring for environment in order to foster a sense of life and increase productivity. Maria Mies defines “women's work in producing sustenance” as “production of life”. She views this as a substantial and legitimately beneficial connection to nature. Mies emphasizes that the role of women in the process of sustenance extends beyond simple harvesting and consumption of what nature provides. Rather, women play a transformative role by fostering the expansion of resources. Not only do they collect what nature provides, but they also actively contribute to the growth and propagation of these resources. Mies’s perspective challenges conventional notions of productivity, which frequently prioritise profit-generating activities. Instead, she acknowledges the crucial role women have

historically played in the rebirth of life. Mies has called “women's work in producing sustenance the production of life and views it as a truly productive relationship to nature”[13:p.16].

Desai is one of those authors who wishes to amplify the voice of Indian women in opposition to injustice towards women, plants, and natural resources. *In Custody* depicts the future of a postmodern woman in a society ruled by men. It also depicts a woman whose demands are satisfied by males through traditional marriages centered on materialism, social contacts, and love. In order to convey her ecofeminist outlook, Desai continues to depict nature in her narrative. The depiction of communities, rivers, water scarcity, and dust storms demonstrates the progressive effects of climate change and environmental crises. Desai presents a vivid image that encourages readers to reconsider their decisions regarding natural resource utilization. Desai emphasises the effect of the described situations on the perspective of the reader. She uses the word “painful” to evoke distressing images, compelling the reader to consider their actions regarding the utilization of natural resources. By employing the phrase “reconsider twice”, Desai emphasises the significance of cautious deliberation prior to making decisions with environmental consequences. Desai portrays a distressing portrait of environmental degradation and mismanagement in her novel. By invoking these disturbingly vibrant images, Desai seeks to stimulate the reader's awareness of the effects of human actions on natural resources and encourages them to reconsider their environmental preservation and protection decisions “Those painful images allow the reader to rethink twice before making any decision related to the use of natural sources”[10:p.7]. The landscapes in Desai's work illustrate a strong connection between many aspects of the connections between women and nature. *In Custody* depicts mother earth and the protagonist's connection to the natural world. Sarla is fascinated by the energetic flowers planted in her yard.

Conclusion

Through a close reading of Anita Desai and Toni Morrison's novels, both novels show how patriarchal and anthropocentric society practices the oppression and victimization of gender and environment. The portrayal of nature as a feminine entity in their literary works can be attributed to its essential roles in caring and reproductive processes. In Toni Morrison's *Sula* and Anita Desai's *In Custody*, the characters only become aware of the distinction between their natural selves and their artificial creations when they come into intimate contact with nature. Their links with nature heighten their awareness of women's subjugation. Since the novels introduce feminist and environmentalism-related issues, they serve as a literary example of ecological feminism. The language, events, and characters in these works represent a society in which women and nature are oppressed and dominated. *Sula* and *In Custody* reflect the most fundamental ecofeminist ideas. Through their connections with the men in their lives, the narrators illustrate the dualistic links between the male and female roles. Both novels illustrate the most prominent notions, such as how men abuse both the female body and nature, and how they undervalue women by putting them to fixed places. Both writers stress the importance of maintaining the natural environment and the necessity for a

balance between human growth and nature protection. Furthermore, they show that living in harmony with nature is critical for the health of both people and communities. Furthermore, they call for an understanding of the link between human advancement and environmental conservation. They stress the need of a long-term strategy that recognizes the worth of the natural world and its beneficial impact on our environment.

CONFLICT OF IN TERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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