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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder provides a warm, ambient light. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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The Ecofeminist Approach in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple***Dr. Shivaji Sargar***Professor, Department of English, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, (M.S.) India***Moushmi Thombare***Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Mumbai, Mumbai, (M.S.) India***Abstract**

Environment is said to be the inspiration of literature as there is an intimacy between man and the surrounding environment. The ecofeminists also thought that there is a close relationship between women and nature. The ecofeminist activists and writers relate woman's naturalness with that of nature's cycle and even blames that the exploitation and oppression of nature parallels to that of women's domination by the patriarchal society. They believe that there is a shared history between them. Hence, ecofeminism is a term very closely associated with women and nature analyzing the domination and exploitation of both women and nature. Many writers and thinkers around the globe then came forward and focused on this problem. The African-American women suffered a dual oppression, one at the hands of the White through racial discrimination and another by the Black men due to patriarchal system. The sensitive African-American writers like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker paved voice for this deprivation through their works. This paper is an attempt to analyze the exploitation and oppression of Black women and ecology along with culture by the white British imperialism and by the Black men of the African society in Alice Walker's novel 'The Color Purple'. This novel intends to unravel the Ecofeministic perspectives through ecological destruction of the African tribal territory and the oppression of the African black female characters through patriarchal society.

Key Words: Feminism, ecofeminism, The Colour Purple**Introduction:**

The post-industrial phase of the modern era and the age of globalization saw too much ecological deprivation and catastrophe. The environment around us is getting threatened day by day due to human intervention and activities. We can see trees cutting down on a larger scale for modern development, for the building of larger roads and infrastructures in big cities. This we can see is infecting and injecting the rural areas too. This oppression and exploitation of the environment in various ways is affecting the whole ecosystem that may prove fatal to our

future generations. This awareness became inevitable for man to think about its protection and conservation. Many writers then thought to reevaluate nature through writings of the authors that paved way for ecocriticism that studied the linkage between literature and physical environment and to understand ecological value. Ecology is an inseparable aspect of human being, and man has always thought himself to be more powerful to the nature. It is his innate tendency to dominate and oppress the other living being according to his own will. Similarly the 'patriarchal' system has always degraded, oppressed and devalued

women. Women and ecology are being equally oppressed dominated and exploited by the patriarchal system. The feministic consciousness through the feministic movements and the ecological exploitation in the post industrial phase brought the awareness that there is interconnection between ecology and women. But ecofeminism is a different thing that colligates the exploitation and oppression of women with that of ecology and argues that there is a bond between women and nature. Ecofeminism, a word itself gives the essence of the connection between ecological factors and feministic perspectives. This thought linked together the two major terms on a global stratum and came to be known as Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a term closely associated with women and nature/environment and analyses and relates the oppression and exploitation of woman and ecology. Ecofeminists relate women's naturalness (menstrual cycle) with the cycle of nature.

Ecofeminism thus, is a broad term and cannot be encapsulated in a single definition. Ecofeminists explain it as the domination and exploitation of nature and women by the male dominating society and asserts that there is a historical connection between environment and women. The ecofeminists advocate obviating this domination and deprivation of women and nature in order to save mother earth from ecological destruction. Hence ecofeminism is defined as "A philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society" (Wikipedia).

The term is said to have been first coined by the French writer Francoise d'Eaubonne in her book, *Le Feminisme Ou La Mort* (1974). Ecofeminism focuses on the domination of ecological elements and its relationship with feministic consciousness. Their bondage shares a history of oppression by a patriarchal society. It is said that the western society treated women as inferior to men and nature inferior to culture. Human beings always thought nature and its elements as inferior to them and imposed power to oppress it. The patriarchal society also imposed the same power for the domination of women. Hence, Ecofeminists finds them connected with nature as the cycles of the moon, comparing the naturalness of their menstruation cycle. They found the potential of the natures nurturing the land identical to the natural childbirth and nurturing their families.

Ecofeminism paralleled the first and the second wave of feminism in 1960s and 1970s with the awareness of parallel deprivation of nature and women by the patriarchal society. Ecofeminism bloomed in 1970s and created the awareness about environmental concerns and supported the environmental movement provoking the study of females connected to nature. According to Marry Mallore; "Ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. It emerged in the mid-1970 alongside second-wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movement, while at the same time offering a challenge to both. It takes from

the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women.” – (The Introduction to “Feminism & Ecology” by Mary Mallore, University Press, New York, 1997, pg-1 ed.)

The ecofeminists participated in the environmental movements and exposed the relation of the oppression and domination of man on ecology and women through the gender, race and class through their texts such as ,the Death of Nature (Carolyn Merchant 1980), Women and Nature (Susan Griffin, 1978). Ecofeminist authors and activists like Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies are of the views that the modern technologies and science has restricted man’s naturalness thereby disintegrating ecology. Hence, expressing their grievances they deplore against the development in the globalized world. However the feminist and the social ecologist Janet Biehl and Rosemary Reuther have critically pointed ecofeminism as over mystical connection between woman and nature. Hence, ecofeminism aspires to be dynamic in order to conserve and honor all the species, living beings, nature and culture on this earth.

Ecofeminist literary criticism is concerned with the examination of the depiction of nature in literature through feministic perspectives. Many writers and activists from England and America took the cognizance of the study of environment and its elements during the industrialisation period and reflected its significant place in man’s life. Many female writers showed their interest in exposing woman’s

relationship with the nature in their writings. One of the famous American novelist Sarah Jewett’s “The Country of the Pointed Firs” (1896) explores women as manifestation of nature. Another important work by Susan Cooper “Rural Hours” (1850) portrays the natural world of women and ideal rural society and man’s harmony with the natural world. Margaret Fuller’s travelogue “Summer on the Lakes” (1843) shows the virgin beauty of Niagara Falls, The Great Lakes, Chicago, and the Wisconsin territory. The Indian novelists like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya and many reflected the relationship of nature with woman and their deplorable condition through their works. The African American women novelists like Toni Morrison, Alice Walker showed their love for nature and reflected the depriving condition of woman and paralleled it to nature. During the 19th century the writings of women about nature changed into various forms. They emphasised the connection between human beings and natural environment and began to show their concerns for ordinary life, animals, plants and natural habitat. This explored questions about ecological exploitation, domination and their oppression. The black women writers identified themselves different during the feminist movement and represented themselves as “Black Feminists”. Alice Walker the American Black woman novelist loves nature and has high concern for the protection of ecology. She is the one who enhanced the Black women writers from the title “Black Feminism” to “Womanism” as they explored their dual experience of domination and exploitation, one as a black

(through racial discrimination by the whites) and the other as a woman(by the black males). She sees God everywhere and in all things, even in nature, trees, plants and animals. Being a Black woman she has also faced sufferings at the hands of male dominated patriarchal society. Her novels reflect the deplorable condition of black women in African American society along with the exploiting condition of the nature. In one of her interview with J. O' Brien, she said openly that she is alive and did not commit suicide only due to the love and cause for nature and for Black Women, she said, "I realized how much I loved it, and how hard it would be not to see the sunrise every morning, the snow, the sky, the trees, the rocks, the faces of people, all so different" (cit. in O'Brien, 1994: 58). Her love and concern for nature is reflected in her poetries, essays, short stories and her novels. She is of the view that in the name of modernization, capitalism, industrialization, the human being is destroying the environment and as a whole is disturbing its harmony with mother Earth. It seems that she is very close to nature and considers herself as worshipper of nature. She not only depicts the oppression of black women by the white race or white people for racial discrimination but also dual oppression by the black male society.

'The color Purple' (1982) by Alice Walker is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel. On the 10th anniversary edition of "The Color Purple", she stated that the color 'Purple' is everywhere in the nature and associates it with gender and nature. 'The color purple' is the story of physical and sexual assault of the uneducated black girl, Celie and other

black female characters in an epistolary form which has a series of 90 letters addressed to God by the poor black female protagonist Celie. This shows that there is nobody to share her feelings except God. This spiritual connection helps to harmonize her from the external sufferings. That is why when she is raped at a tender age by her so called step father Alphonso and also becomes pregnant by him. He threatens her not to tell to anybody and says, "You better not never tell nobody but God. It 'd kill your mummy." (*The Color Purple*, Alice Walker, 1982, P.1). He also snatches her babies and sells them. He marries her to an abusive husband. But Celie cannot protest and says that "It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree." (*The Color Purple*, 1982, P. 23). This shows that the protagonist relates her grievances with the nature and directly calls herself as 'wood' and 'tree'. It is through Celie that Walker compares her deplorable condition with nature, as nature is too helpless like her. Moreover she is beaten physically and abused sexually and socially. Hence, she finds no God in the man but in trees, birds and the surrounding nature. Here, Walker seems to show the feebleness of both the nature and women at the hands of the male society. This also shows her empathy for nature. Nettie was the younger sister of Celie. Even she was raped and was tried to marry to Mr. .. but she ran away from there and went to Africa to Mr. Sammuell and Corroine to take care of their adopted children and to preach and convert her brothers and sisters. She gets very happy to be with her people. Here Walker is of the view that a man gets the real happiness only

when he goes towards his roots. Eventually we come know that their father was a white, business man.

Celie befriends Shug Avery her husband's mistress and further develops sexual relationship with her. In this way she is reflected as having bisexual character, which she thinks is very close to nature. She also has a sisterhood relation with her as she teaches her to embrace her body and imparts in her self confidence and awareness of life's view. Shug Avery, herself is a very strong and independent woman. She helps Celie to build herself strong financially, sexually and even psychologically. She is the one who tells her that God is not he or she but it, as nobody has seen God. In the novels last letter Celie portrays Shug's reformation having deep empathy for mother Earth as "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God." (292). This shows her spiritual transformation and her worshipping of the nature as God.

Sofia Butler wife of Harpo, is a very strong woman and would never be subservient to the domination of any white male. She was sentenced to jail for 12 years for defying the Mayor. But it was culminated into 12 years of labor to him as his maid. Her punishment was due to her reciprocation to the Mayor. Hence, the women in this novel are oppressed either by the black males of their own society or crushed by the white males.

It is through Nettie's letters to Celie that we get acquainted with the African Olivian tribe and their oppression by the white missionaries. The Olivian tribes worshipped the roofleaf and they considered it as their

life protector. It was very auspicious to them. They told a story about its significance and how when the village chief instead of planting the roof leaf he planted crops, cassava, millet and groundnuts that cursed him into a huge storm for the village and every house got roofless. Thereafter it took many months for it to grow and the village houses remained roofless and many died due to storm. Through this story Walker tries to convince that how the disrespect of nature ruins human being and makes us realize the ultimate strength of nature. In one of her letters Nettie writes that "The ancient, giant Mahogany trees, all the trees, the game, everything of the forest was being destroyed and the land was forced to lie flat." ('The Color Purple' Alice Walker, P.144). This shows that how the nature and the naturalness of the Olinka village was being destroyed by the white men.

Though this novel shows the gender difference through domination and oppression of the Black women by their males and the racial discrimination by the white officers it also illuminates the ecological exploitation by them. Thus, this novel depicts the domination of women as well as the ecological deprivation of the Olivian tribes, in Africa by the white missionaries. The domination of the White officials and their inclusion in the Olinka Village and finally capturing it shows their imperialism and colonization. Nettie writes "tarmac road running straight through the middle of it (village)," which now "seems gutted". ('The Color Purple' P. 175). We find the cutting of the tress for the sake of building roads and plantation of such plants which cannot be eaten by the human beings.

The rubber plantation and the destruction of their crops by the white traders actually ruined their farms, leveled their homes and the news that their land belonged to the white traders of England i.e. the rubber manufacturers ruined not only their identity but also their souls. They eventually rout out the Olinka people from their territory for their own material gains and progress. The Olinka villagers bereft for the loss of their territory “The women spend all their time in the fields, tending their crops and praying. They sing to the Earth and to the sky and to their cassava and groundnuts. Songs of love and farewell” (The Color Purple, P.179). This shows the grim effects of the British imperialism and their invasion on a natural virgin land of Olinka and how this territory was being raped by them. Walker speculates the African’s nature boundedness. The exploitation of the Olivian tribe and their expulsion from their own land by the White authorities is very sorrowful. Thus Walker projects the domination and deprivation of black women at the hands of male society

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and ecological deterioration through the annihilated land of the Olivian tribes by the white missionaries very aptly.

Conclusion:

Hence, we can say that ecological destruction and the deprivation of the Black women reflects the similar predicament in ‘The Color Purple’, as both are powerless and feeble and suffer the same distortion at the hands of the male authority. Alice Walker tries to focus on how nature is getting destructed and exploited at the hands of man and at the same time how black women are oppressed by the white men and the Black male society. Similarly she also tries to edify that how the nature element plays a significant role and shows it’s wrath and curse by destroying mankind due to man’s unnatural behavior, through the story of the Olinka tribes. This seems that she endeavors to create consciousness about ecological concerns and create honor for both women and environment.

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