
NATURE AS THE HEALER IN ANITA DESAI'S "THE FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN"

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Abstract

The ecological crises and the crises of women are based on the logic of domination and it can be ended through the union of the women movement and the ecological movement. It demonstrates itself as a theory, as a movement, and as a philosophy. As a theory, Ecofeminism connects women and all adjutant group and the exploitation of nature in one analytical view. Although as a movement rejecting all previously dominant ideologies it aims to bring social justice, and as a philosophy, it liberates all the subordinate classes erasing all the kind of dualistic notions. What this paper contemplates to highlight is to appraise Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* from the perspective of eco-feminism. *Fire on the Mountain* exposes various formed of exploitation of both woman and nature. The title *Fire on the mountain* carries a double sense of alienation and union, two opposing factors, essential to bring justice as a whole. Nanda Kaul's alienation from her family and society and the same time her union with nature.

Keywords: *ecological crises, exploitation, eco-feminism, .etc*

Anita Desai is one of a few Indian writers in English in the postcolonial era. She constructs nature in her fictional works by using interweaving legends, experience, myth and cultural history. In some of her works, the settings how a pen picture of the physical environment and human interactions with it, especially the feminine characters. In the writings of Anita Desai's, we find that the inner world of the female character is revealed. She goes deeper into the psychological probing of the female characters so as to unravel their world.

As regards the victimization of women, the narrative represents a discourse on violence that centers on the lives of the three women who are victims, either physically or mentally, of the patriarchal system. Nanda Kaul, a widowed great grandmother, is a victim of her role as a dutiful wife to an unfaithful husband and as a mother of many children. Raka, her exclusive, withdrawn great-grandchild, is the victim of an abusive father. Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend, unmarried and the victim of her selfish brothers and her own reformist idealism. The novel portrays the darker shades of nature and the contemporary conjunction of the darker appearance of the women concerned. Thus this novel makes it clear that environmental issues are connected to women and nature. Desai's three protagonists who is trapped in a male society

in which man symbolizes cruelty, domination, and power while women and nature of victim of them.

Nanda Kaul's life is a life of retirement and renunciation. After her hectic life in the midst of her family, she retires from her earlier life and comes to Kasauli in search of loneliness. The novelist presents Nanda Kaul as a person who also suffers from melancholia as she has detached herself from human society. Earlier she had been fulfilling the demands of the family and now she wanted complete silence. The novelist adopts different symbols and metaphors to highlight the inner world of Nanda. Desai uses some symbols of nature to explain the mental state of Nanda's life. There is the mention of some old aging trees that are seen to be withering away, just like Nanda Kaul's withering life.

Two other characters which get prominence in the novel are Raka and Ila Das. Raka symbolizes an altogether different aspect of Desai's characterization. Desai's writings are remarkable because she has dealt extensively with the feminine psyche of female of various age groups. In the present novel, Desai explores the inner psyche of Raka, a girl who is very young. She is the result of a distressing family situation. It is the traumatic childhood experience that had such a dehumanizing effect on Raka's mind that she becomes indifferent to any childish games and there was nothing childlike in her character. It is significant that several animal images have been used in relation to her. Her refusal to play with toys which are so natural with normal children very well describes her psyche.

Another character which deserves special mention in the course of the novel is Ila Das. The novelist resents Ila Das, as a woman who suffers from mental depression. In Desai's view, Ila Das longs for a life full of human company. She is presented as a disturbed woman who suffers from psychological imbalance. The novelist presents the character of Ila Das from two perspectives as leading an active public life and from the point of view of her intimate personal life. A close analysis of her personal life reveals that she is a loner and a sufferer of inner crises. Ila Das is described as a loner, who occasionally suffers from loneliness and despair. Through Ila Das, Desai presents a totally different character. She can be called a path breaker, who breaks the patriarchal norms of the society and accepts new challenges in life.

IlaDas's alienation from family and job and union with nature through her social work in the village, Raka's alienation from her parents and discovery of the reality of nature through closer union with nature. Fire symbolizes the destruction of the self-identity of women and nature. Mountain symbolizes emotional detachment of the character and their instant trying for seeking self-identity. As nature, human and animals are also losing their identity by degradation of human nature. Alienation and self- identity developed from the domination of the patriarchal power. This novel shows strong connection between women and nature which lead to the term Eco-feminism. Nature plays an important role throughout the novel as well as nature's connection with women men separation from nature and degradation of nature from human

activity are portrayed. Alienation of human being from nature brings natural destruction along with the destruction of human life. This novel exposes various kind of exploitation of both women and nature. Nanda Kaul, windowed great- grandmothers are a victim of her role as a dutiful wife to her husband and a responsible mother for her children Raka, her exclusive great-granddaughter, is the victim of her father. Ila Das, Nanda Kaul's childhood friend, unmarried and victim of her selfish brother.

This novel tells the story of Nanda Kaul who after her husband's death, she goes back to a cottage situated at Carignano in Kasauli there she creates a space of her own. Nanda loves Carignano for its bareness. At the beginning of the novel, the author brings out the nature's bareness with that of the bareness of Nanda Kaul's heart which shows her loneliness. It is only bareness of Kasauli that attracts Nanda. Nanda feels like only to realize that it is difficult for her to keep her past out of her mind. Somewhere in her unconscious, she has become an epitome of devotion, duty, and sacrifice by attending to so many guests, looking after so many children and serving her husband efficiently. In her husband's home, she was the homemaker. She was the center of a bustling joint family. She was acting so many roles simultaneously. She had grabbed the roles of a hostess, wife, mother, tailor, and queen. Nanda was fed up with the monotonous and the endless chores in the life of a housewife. But she never receives emotional and mental sustenance from her husband.

Nanda Kaul's life has two sides- the public and the private. The former is characterized by the role of an ideal mother, a housewife, an organizer of parties and the center of her husband's social life. The latter is a life of silence, memory, and feelings. Women don't have their own identity; they are known through their husband's identity. Nanda Kaul suffers as a vice chancellors wife who is not loved by her husband and one who has an extramarital affair with Miss. Davidson.

She was a dutiful wife attending to the needs of her husband and the children. Although her busy schedule lacked warmth and understanding, she carried on because of her obligation to her husband and children. His extramarital affair with Miss David was one of the reasons for their unhappy bonding of married life. Her husband's frequent visits to Miss David troubled her which could have been the reason for her disillusionment.

Her husband has children with her to keep her engaged while he himself enjoys with his mistress. Nanda appears as a victim, who envelopes herself with a feigned indifference solely to protect from being hurt any further. The life of Nanda Kaul represents Indian women on a whole who live their life for their children, husband, family, and society. Therefore, their wishes, desires, talents are buried deeply in the hearts of the women. Nanda Kaul allows herself to be a victim or a silent observer of his hero archetype was a moment when she watched her husband stealthily this remains a confidential triumph in her mind. She does not try to make it public it is

very easy for Nanda to expose the hypocrisy of her husband and be triumphant and powerful like or more like a man. But she never longs for power.

The position of the 'third world woman' is in between patriarchy and imperialism. Their desires are buried along with them. Their wishes are not revealed to others unless they are brought by these authors who can scan the minds and hearts of the women from different perspective and situations. She vividly captures the hidden tear in the corner of the eyes of the women and pen of the character which has drawn the tear in the eyes of the women. She plunges in the hearts of the protagonist and clearly captures the emotions and sentiments going on in their minds. So she decides to settle in a calm place as she is released from shackles of endless duties after so many years. Nanda chooses to line the rest of her life scheduling herself from society to necessary a deep wound in her heart created by her husband. Their husband does not respect her as a wife. Rather he considers her as a hostess who hosts his guest with a smiling face. Anita Desai describes Nanda's trauma as,

Unfortunately, her relationship with her husband was scared and a source of agony throughout her life due to his extramarital relationship with Miss Davidson, a member of the teaching staff. Though she enjoyed the comfort and social status of the wife of a dignitary, she felt lonely and neglected inside. Emotional deprivation is the root cause of Nanda Kaul's disillusionment with human bonds. Nanda was tied up with the upbringing of her children and couldn't probably provide the required attention demanded by her husband. Possibly things would have been on the brighter side of Mr. Kaul would have not restricted himself to his official and social duties. The traumatic married life of Nanda Kaul is sketched in these lines;

Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen- he only did enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a life- long affair with Miss David... and her children were all alien to her nature... she did not live here by choice- she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduced to doing (145).

Externally everything appears smooth and pleasant but internally Nanda Kaul burning with frustration and suppressed emotions. Mr. Kaul even invites Miss Davidson for badminton parties and compels her to stay at night and later secretly moves to her bedroom. "Have I not done enough and had enough? I want no more. I want nothing. Can I not be left with nothing?" (17). Probably, Nanda doesn't enjoy her motherhood too, because of the mechanical life devoid of human feelings. She could hardly save any time to show her affection towards her children and as a result of which they were not attached to her.

Nanda Kaul wants to lead an isolated life that is one separated from the patriarchal society. In spite of well aware of this her daughter, Asha sends Raka, the great-granddaughter of Nanda Kaul, to accompany her great- grandmother. Raka's arrival at Carignano is not a pleasant one for Nanda Kaul. She sees Raka's arrival as an unwanted entry into her peaceful retirement life. Raka suffers the indifference of her parents. She recalls her father's attitude towards her mother. Her

drunken father beats her mother with a hammer and harshly abuses her. Raka shrinks in fear inside the bed sheet and feels the flow of warm urine. Her mother lies down on the floor and weeps her eye. Raka becomes the victim of this cruelty and her mind becomes psychologically dominated. Raka's a sick girl who loves loneliness instead of any other things. Every child loves to play and enjoy their childhood but Raka is different. At her childhood, she decides to go to her great – grand mother's home in search of loneliness. Unhappy childhood life has always been alive in her memory. She pauses under the pine tree to take in their scented sibilance and curiously listens to the sound of Cicadas merging under the pine needles without having any intention to watch the activities of human beings. She becomes a close listener of nature trying to find out an alternative solace to her pain- trodden existence. Nanda Kaul believes that nature has a healing power and it prompts her to feel peace. To escape from that pain, she longs to live undisturbed. She gets attracted towards Kasauli and wishes to be left alone with nature. She feels the company of nature will bring peace and harmony in her life.

In spite of her willingness to live a peaceful life, without the intrusion of the past, nature and its movements have taken her to the past which was filled with suffocation and oppression. For instance, Nanda Kaul visualizes a woman which is tormented by a hen which indicates the suppression experienced by her at the hands of the patriarchal society. She longs to be one among the pine trees,

She was grey, tall and thin and her silk sari made a sweeping, shivering sound and she fancied she could merge with the pine trees and be mistaken for one. To be a tree, no more and no less, was all she was prepared to undertake (4).

Raka's miserable life experiences made her turn into a hallucinating child. She is a victim of a broken home. She becomes an introvert because of the abnormal circumstances around her. This is portrayed in a party she attends in the club. Violence and using abuse words are seen in patriarchal society. A man has access to economic and social resources this made them show power on women. In this society women are dependent on a man, so they are being suppressed. Violence is a means used to suppress women and they consider violence is their strength and power.

Although Nanda and Raka fell in the same category, each other life shares the same loneliness and suppression of male society. Both of them love Carignano, both facing the same problem of sad memories and wish to be alone from the invaluable society. Eventually, Nanda Kaul discovers that Raka is exactly like her Nanda Kaul observes that Raka has the gift of vanishing into the hills and the forest. "Nanda Kaul never discovered what Raka did with herself. All she discovered was that the child had a gift for disappearing- suddenly, silently." (50). Anita Desai though believing that childhood impressions shape the personality and attitude of the individual, she also states that even adult life contains many traumatic experiences.

Her love for privacy is not something inherent in her, In fact her desire for seclusion is due to the unhappy relationship she had with her husband and children. She initially, resent Raka's arrival because it reminds her of the past memories of her selfish children and a faithless husband. Even when Raka reaches Carignano she tries to keep aloof as the former arrival reminds her of the past life of duties and involvement. But Nanda Kaul's strong resolution to be alone in Carignan begins to crumble in the presence of Raka. In reality, she has tried to feel wanted and be loved. She spends her valuable time with the pine trees, hills and with a forest fire. This Forest Fire indicates the tragic life she crossed. As like a forest fire she is dried up by her father's oppression towards her mother. Due to her father brutal character she turned into a psycho and she feels, she doesn't want the company of any human beings.

The psychological experiment of the writer in the novel can also be seen in the portrayal of ragas character. Psychologist attached great significance to the parent-child relationship because according to them the patterning of emotion takes place particularly during childhood. Childhood is the most formative period of one's personality and socialization of the child begin in the family in the company of her parents who are the first individuals with whom the child interacts. The child learns the pattern of behavior which the parents set out to teach them in order to make them an acceptable member of the society.

Anita Desai's characters have a strange childhood, and their experiences and interactions during this formative period when combined with their congenital hypersensitivity contribute towards their inability to establish and maintain a harmonious interpersonal relationship in later life. Even she is not so much attached to her great grandmother. Nanda Kaul tries to get a company with her great-granddaughter by saying the false story about Nanda Kaul's father and about her childhood life. The great grandmother and the great-granddaughter are suffering from the same feeling. So as the story goes on they both get to know each other. In fact, Nanda Kaul and Raka are the representation of two generations of the Indian female world. Nanda Kaul represents the old generation and Rake stands for the young generation and rebellious young generation of the Indian female world.

Raka finds refuge in Ramlal, the cook at Carignano, who wonders why she is not like an ordinary child. Ramlal informs about the destructive effect of the forest fire to Raka. He also says about the house down the hill which has been burnt down along with two buffalos by the forest 'fire'. Due to the water shortage, it becomes impossible to put out the fire. "There is water storage every summer in Kasauli. There was no water to put out the fire and the whole house burn down and the cowshed with two buffaloes in it" (58). English men lived in that house after its destruction in forest fire she becomes mad and she is taken to the lunatic asylum. While

trying to save her cat her hair and eyelashes are burnt off. From Nanda Kaul, Raka comes to know about the terrible effect of the forest fire, another house burned "down in a terrible forest fire one summer when there wasn't a drop of water to fight it with. An old lady who lived there alone and they say she went mad and was put away" (62). The forest fire is the best example of the cultivation of land which leads to the depletion of natural sources. This is a typical male capitalist ideology and a good example of environmental classism which usually targets the poor people. These indicate the forest fire can destroy anything within a second.

The 'Forest fire' is the best example of a typical male capitalist ideology and environment usually targets poor people. From this, it is proved that poor people are greatly affected by forest fire. "It was burnt down in a terrible forest fire one summer when there wasn't a drop of water to fight it with an old lady lived there alone and they say she went mad and was put away" (62). Again from Nanda Kaul, Raka gets to know about the garden house which is converted into an Army Billet.

The Army Billet indicates the exploitation of nature by modern technology. This proves that the patriarchal society will use modern technology to change a beautiful wild area for an army campfire their economic purpose. It is a good example of environmental speciesism which targets animals as Lori Gruen speculates that reducing animals to mere objects devoid of feelings, "is a common consequence of the scientific mindset by which those engaged in experimentation distance themselves from their subjects" (66). Such an institute is a strong representation of the male's destructive scientific domination. Thus it has been shown that women's oppression and the exploitation of nature are two dimensions of many forms of injustice both women and nature are victimizations of men cruelty. Ecofeminist believes that the separation of man from nature and mother earth the main reason for the exploitation of mother earth and nature. They are craving to oppress both women and nature by using their individual power.

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