

## Chapter-8

**A World of Exploitation Where Women and  
Nature Found Themselves at the Same Place:  
*An Ecofeminist Reading of Anita Desai's Fire on  
the Mountain and The Village by the Sea***

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### **Abstract**

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) which won the National Academy of Letters Award in 1977 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978, explores three facets of Indian women in the postcolonial era through ecological symbols and imagery. Ecofeminism, or ecological feminism, is a term coined in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne, which is a movement born out of the union between two movements, i.e., the feminist and ecological movements. It shows how women and nature are being exploited by the patriarchy in the same way, and thus their exploitations are interconnected phenomena. The protagonist Nanda Kaul, a widowed great-grandmother, is a victim of her role as a dutiful wife to an unfaithful vice-chancellor husband and as a mother to many

children. Raka, her great-grandchild, is the victim of an abusive father. Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, is unmarried, and the victim of her selfish brothers and her own reformist idealism. Nanda Kaul identifies herself with the condition of Carignano, a hill station at Kasauli because of its barrenness, isolation, and privacy. She considers herself a pine tree, not more or less than it. Raka feels insecure and lonely at home where her drunkard father tortures her mother and wishes to be left alone with nature. If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation, her great-granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct. A parallel representation of oppression is represented through the killing of Ila and the killing of non-humans at the Pasteur Institute and through the fire at the hill. On the other hand, *The Village by the Sea*(1982) explores how maldevelopment, especially industrialisation destroys the greenery of Thul and the nearby villages of Alibagh, Maharashtra. The villagers, especially the women worshiped the rock, the sea, and the trees that provided them with all their needs. But in the name of civilization and modernisation, the patriarchal government is going to destroy the huts and fields of poor farmers and fishers and in their place, they will build factories for various chemicals. As a result, it exploits not only trees or the sea but also the underprivileged people which includes the women, children, and poor peasants. It makes the lives of the underprivileged people like Hari and Lila more miserable who fail to make both ends meet. The men fought against it by marching in Bombay and also by giving a petition to the minister's mantralaya. However, they lost the case. This paper argues how patriarchal society exploits women, the underprivileged

poor people, and nature in the name of modernisation, and how these people react against the patriarchy.

## **Keywords**

*(Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Industrialisation, Exploitation, Underprivileged, Maldevelopment)*

## **Introduction**

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and *Village by the Sea* (1982) are typical texts illustrating ecofeminism. The term 'Ecofeminism' was initially used by the French feminist writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book, *Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or death)* in 1974. According to her, ecofeminism is concerned with the exploitation and domination of all marginalized groups including women, children, the poor etc., and the exploitation and domination of nature including animals, land, water, earth, forests etc. Encyclopedia Britannica puts it, 'Ecofeminism' which is also called 'ecological feminism', "is a branch of feminism that studies the connections and relations between women and nature."

Ruether recalls in her autobiography *My Quests for Hope and Meaning*: "I sought to connect ecology and feminism, both in recognition of the way the domination of the earth is metaphorically interconnected with the domination of women in patriarchal ideology, and also to reveal how women's use and abuse in society interfaces with the abuse of nature" (Ruether 2013, 27).

With the advent of civilization, human beings who lived their lives in the lap of nature once, have revolutionized from

hunting-gathering to food gathering to agriculture to present day's industrialized machine human beings. In the name of development, we are going towards a future where the environment is neither good for human beings nor for non-humans. This developmental attitude is mostly imposed by the patriarchy. Vandana Shiva wrote, "What is currently called development is essentially maldevelopment, based on the introduction or accentuation of the domination of man over nature and women."

Ecofeminism is mostly concerned with nature and women's relationship, women's resemblance to nature, their fight against patriarchy who oppressed both women and nature in a similar way. However, Anita Desai showed in *Village by the Sea* that the men also fought against maldevelopment and expressed sympathy towards nature and non-humans. This is actually true of the men belonging to the marginalized communities where all the people irrespective of their gender fight against patriarchal maldevelopment. Thus the text can be termed as a text of ecohumanism.

Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* explains ecofeminism through three women characters Nanda Kaul, Raka, and Ila Das by placing them in parallel with the nature and environment of Kasauli. Nanda has served the role of a mother and provided everything the family expects from a mother like mother-nature which provided everything we need in our daily life. In order to get rid of this life of a housewife, Nanda retired to Kasauli after her husband's death. There she resembles nature and wants to become a member of the pine trees. She wants nothing but loneliness

surrounded by nature. She doesn't interfere in the growth of the tree as she respects the freedom of the tree she never got into her in-law's house. She expresses her inner feelings in parallel with natural objects.

Raka, Nanda's great-granddaughter, is attracted to nature instinctively. Through her role and voice, Raka discovered the true beauty as well as the adversity of Kasauli Hill. She discovered both colonial impact and present developmental institutions. She discovered the Pasture Institute which stands for modern developmental attitudes that patriarchy holds. It is more of a maldevelopment as Vandana Shiva explained.

Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, lost her life at the hands of patriarchy just because of her idealism. Desai presented the parallel representation of oppression through Ila and nature. On one hand, Desai showed Ila's rape and on the other hand showed the rape of nature and non-humans both at the hands of patriarchy.

Anita Desai's novel *The Village by the Sea* (1982) explores how maldevelopment, especially industrialisation destroys the greenery of Thul and nearby villages of Alibagh, Maharashtra. In the process, it destroyed the livelihood of indigenous people and their surrounding nature of which environment and women are the worst affected.

In *Village by the Sea*, women are described as more nearer to nature. They love non-humans more than men do. Lila represents the age old Indian culture who worship nature.

Lila is the mother figure who fulfills the needs of her family like mother-nature does. In the absence of Hari, she worked in De Silva's house and fed her family. She also expressed sympathy towards non-humans, i.e, their dog named Pinto. Desai showed that men are also concerned about nature. Even men are more concerned about the depletion of natural resources. Hari and other villagers fought against the patriarchal mal-development which is going to build fertilizer factories in Alibagh. They ultimately lost the fight. Desai also showed that men are also animal lovers through Sayyid Ali. *Village by the Sea* illustrates that environmental problems are human problems particularly true to the indigenous people and not stick to gender. The novel goes beyond ecofeminism and explores ecohumanism.

### **Literature review**

Anupam Pandey, in "Globalization and Ecofeminism in the South: Keeping the 'Third World' alive ", highlights a practical resistance offered by a materialist ecofeminism in combating the devastating impact of multinational corporations in the South in the fields of food and nutritional security, deforestation and the protection of biodiversity. Pandey concludes that Southern materialist ecofeminism serves as a moral as well as practical guide to resist economic globalization in the South through care, ethics and responsibility.

Sangita Patil's *Ecofeminism and the Indian Novel* explores the ecofeminist theory in Indian context by analyzing select Indian novels. Patil's main argument is that Indian ecological texts conceptualize ecological crisis as a human problem and are gender neutral. Patil takes select Indian

texts as examples to show the struggle of both the men and women to fight against patriarchal developmental attitudes. She concludes that ecological texts in the West may be women oriented but in India it is gender neutral and therefore she named it ecohumanist.

Ecofeminist concerns in Anita Desai's novels with special reference to *Village by the Sea* and *Fire on the Mountain* is the title of my term paper. Ecofeminism illustrates that both women and nature are oppressed by the patriarchy. They resemble each other and therefore, they are interconnected with each other. Desai's *Village by the Sea* explores how maldevelopment, especially industrialisation destroys the greenery of Thul and nearby villages of Alibagh, Maharashtra. It tells the story of Hari, Lila and their fight against industrialization. Scholars like Neelam Jabeen have examined the novel through the ecofeminist lens. Women belonging to different categories of social status have different relationships and attitudes toward their environment.

They are indigenous people. Women in the village live in a natural environment where they see the men catching fish every day. Their concern for their livelihood from the fish as a resource may appear to be resulting from their living by the sea. However, women in the cities are also depicted showing their concern for a sustainable living. Women belonging to the different strata of society and from rural and urban settings, all have a varying degree of attitude toward their environment. The more they depend on natural resources, the more concerned they are for their natural environment.

Women are more responsive towards nature than men. Children like Kamal, Hari and Lila's younger sister, are also depicted as caring for the non-human, especially a dog named Pinto and a mongoose.

Neelam Jabeen (2013) pointed out the clash between the traditional ways of living and modernization. Scholars showed how some women are callous about the poverty and hunger of others, and it also portrays men who are concerned about the depletion of natural resources. They highlight how at the end of *Village by the Sea*, Hari and the villagers lost the fight against patriarchal maldevelopment.

*Village by the Sea* has not been examined solely through ecofeminist light. There are some gaps in presenting ecofeminism in this novel. There is a symbiotic relationship between nature and women. Indian women worship nature like goddesses which can be seen at the beginning of *Village by the Sea*. Women and nature are intricately connected with each other. They both act as a mother towards humanity. Women are more sympathetic towards non-humans than men. However, men are also depicted as non-humans lovers. Sayyid Ali is a bird lover.

Desai's *Village by the Sea* goes beyond ecofeminism. She gives the message of eco-humanism through this text. She portrays the characters as eco-humanist. Even the men are more concerned for natural destruction and depletion than women. Hari and Sayyid Ali Sahab are always in the front in the fight against industrialization. Men like Sayyid Ali and Hari express concern about non-humans. Through the voice

of Hari, Desai presented an antithesis between green village and industry filled city. Hari expressed his concerns for the future of his village. He became anxious thinking that one day his village might look like this city. *Village by the Sea* illustrates that in India, environmental problems are human problems and not stick to gender. The novel can be read as a key text of ecohumanism.

Scholars like M.A.M Emara, Neelam Jabeen, Ripunjoy Bezbaruah have written many articles and reviews about ecofeminism in these two novels. They have explored *Fire on the Mountain* from ecofeminist light by pointing out three women characters' struggle against patriarchy with nature in the background. Nanda, a widowed great-grandmother, is described as a victim of an unfaithful husband, Raka, her exclusive, withdrawn great-grandchild, is the victim of an abusive father. Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, unmarried, is the victim of her selfish brothers and her own reformist idealism.

Raka, Nanda's great-granddaughter, is the victim of a drunkard father. She came to Carignano not because of any trouble but instinctively. She is attracted to Kasauli because of its ravaged, destroyed and barren places. At Carignano, in the company of nature, there is no crying, no terror, only peace in which one can hear the voice of silence. The uncivilized landscape of the mountain mirrors the damaged emotional landscape of her childhood. Raka finds out the beauty and the scarcity of Kasauli. She finds out about the industrial developmental institute that is working on killing non-humans by the name of exercise and creating serum and

injection. Nanda has only been able to see the effects of patriarchy on herself and the environment while Raka observes the effects and causes of colonization too.

Ila Das is a victim of patriarchy because she stops a child marriage. Preet Singh, the father takes his revenge on her by raping and killing Ila. Raka's setting fire at the end of *Fire on the Mountain* is expressive of Raka's resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural. If we consider Nanda playing the role of an early feminist, then Raka acts here as a modern radical feminist.

There are some gaps have been found in previous articles and reviews: the ecofeminist feature of resembling between nature and women, the point of nature and women both act as provider, both act as mother towards humanity, the instinctual connection women feel towards nature, women's inner feelings are represented through natural objects and images, the parallel representation of women's oppression and the destroying of nature. Women should not be submissive as Nanda was in her in-laws' house but they also should not be as disinterested and careless as Nanda became after coming to Carignano. Desai presented Nanda as ambiguously as the nature of Kasauli. If Nanda is representative of early feminism, Raka is the representative of contemporary radical feminism.

### **Ecofeminism in Anita Desai's *Village by the Sea***

Anita Desai's novel *The Village by the Sea* (1982) explores how maldevelopment, especially industrialisation destroys the greenery of Thul and nearby villages of Alibagh,

Maharashtra. They depend on nature for their livelihood. The villagers, especially the women worshiped the rock, sea and the trees that provided them with all their needs. But in the name of industrialization and modernisation, the patriarchal government is going to destroy the huts, fields of poor farmers and their fishery and in its place they will build factories of various chemicals.

One interesting point about Indian ecocritical concern is that they worship nature as goddess. They have deep respect for natural objects, especially women. The women have a kind of symbiotic connection with nature. Nature provides everything the women and overall the human beings need ; women in return respect and love nature. Desai begins the story with this theme of worshiping natural objects by its characters, the women character. *The Village by the Sea* begins with Lila's offering of flowers to the rock which they consider as "sacred rock, a kind of temple in the sea" (Desai, 1982, p.8). It is not only Lila who did it but all the women of the village who "would come and offer flowers at the sacred rock." They believe that their little prayer serves "as the safety of the fishermen at sea"( Desai, 1982, p. 9).

Lila represents those indigenous people whose lives are solely based on the environment. They fully depend on nature. They can't think of anything without nature. Women are in the forefront of these indigenous people. Lila is so devoted to natural objects and towards her duty that she "couldn't face the dead ashes or the dirty cooking pots of the night" (Desai, 1982, p. 9) until she offered flowers at the rock. Anupam Pandey (2013) wrote, "Ecofeminism is based

on its ability to care for those on whom we depend for our very survival and flourishing.” It is best evident through Lila and other villagers.

Nature is considered as mothers who provide for human beings. Women like nature are also considered as the providers for their family who did everything to feed their family. Desai showed that while the men catch fish at the sea, the women do so much housework to feed their family. Lila after her prayer for a rock at the beach “would collect firewood, light it and make tea for the family” in the morning ( Desai, 1982, p.11). She along with her two younger sisters Bela and Kamal go to the sea to “collect the molluscs” which are served as their dinner ( Desai, 1982, p. 23-24). After Lila’s brother went to Mumbai, she is the lone earner of her family as their drunkard father didn't earn for them. She worked at the house of De Silva.

After the De Silvas left Alibagh, Sayyid Ali Sahib came to stay in the Mon Repos house and Lila got the job to look after him and the house. In the process, she got her salary from the Sahib with which she looks after her two sisters. She regularly visited her ill mother at the hospital with fruits and milk. Desai writes that Lila feels “it was wonderful to earn money. There was enough now to stock their kitchen with rice and tea and sugar” ( Desai, 1982, p. 142). She even brought milk, fruits and other foods for her mother with that money.

Desai showed how women are sympathetic towards animals. In *The Village by the Sea*, Lila’s sister Kamal gets distressed

when she sees a little mongoose being hunted “with a dozen sticks, a pack of wild dogs and a band of howling men” (Desai, 1982, p.55). She couldn’t believe that drinking water from the coconuts was a big crime for which the men could kill the mongoose so badly. Moreover, Lila is also depicted as caring for animals. She showed love and care for a dog named Pinto.

When Hari goes to the city, he is surprised to see women marching and protesting by holding banners, raising their fists in the air with the motto, “‘Bring down the prices! ‘We want oil! We want sugar! We want rice at fair prices’ and ‘Long live Women’s Society for Freedom and Justice’” (Desai, 1982, p.76). These women were protesting for a sustainable life just as the women did in the village. The difference however exists in their approach. Jabeen (2016) wrote, “Those who directly suffer from the lack of resources are more aware of their environment.” Man is the common culprit in both these protests.

Jabeen (2016) wrote, “women in the village are only concerned about the fish in the sea, or the agricultural land that the factory will snatch from them, women in the cities are concerned about the high prices of the edibles.” Each group of people have different concerns about nature. As per their place, financial condition, people show different attitudes towards nature. But both groups of people have a common thing that nature fulfills their material needs. There is a problem that we never witness women in the protest march in Bombay where the men were protesting against factory building. We didn’t see women directly protest

against this maldevelopment. Only the men belonging to marginalized communities were protesting against the maldevelopment. Lila's friend Mina told them, "Have you heard?... 'All the men have set off for Bombay with a petition to the government'" (Desai, 1982, p. 104).

Nature, women, poor and marginalized people are worst affected because of these developmental attitudes. *Village by the Sea* explored how marginalized people irrespective of gender, and nature are affected by these developmental attitudes. According to Vandana Shiva, development is actually maldevelopment that "ruptures the co-operative unity of masculine and feminine, and places man, shorn of the feminine principle, above nature and women, and separated from both" (Vandana, 1988, p.5). Vandana concludes, "what is currently called development is essentially maldevelopment" (Vandana, 1988, p. 5). It helps the men to dominate both the women and nature. In the process, the patriarchy presents these two as the 'other'.

Desai showed that it is not only women who love nature but also the men. In fact, Desai showed that the men are more effective when it comes to protesting against the industrial factory that the government is going to build in Alibagh. The men directly participate in the protest and go to Bombay to attend the procession. At the end of the novel, Desai showed Sayyid Ali's love for non-humans. Sayyid Ali Sahib, the birdwatcher, who did research on birds and cares a lot about birds, explains "The birds are the last free creatures on earth" (Desai, 1982, p.198). Except the birds Everything else has been captured and tamed and enslaved. The tigers are

captured behind the bars of the zoos, lions stared at by crowds in safari parks, men and women in houses like matchboxes working in factories that are like prisons.

The central theme of *The Village by the Sea* revolves with the fight against industrialization. It describes through Hari and Lila the villagers' fight against maldevelopment and their subsequent loss against this industrial maldevelopment. Ramu, one of the villagers, informed Lila's brother Hari that in place of these hill and temple areas "the government is going to build a great factory here" ( Desai, 1982, p.16). Ramu said that "soon they will be sending bulldozers and earthmovers and steamrollers" to clean this area. In Hari's enquiry about the hill and temple, "Ramu made a cutting gesture with his free hand"( Desai p.16). He indicates that their hill and houses will be destroyed and factories will be built in its place.

In a conversation with a man who came from Bombay, Hari learnt that the government is going to build a fertilizer factory in Thul, "It's not going to be just one factory anyway – it is going to be a whole city of factories. Factories, housing colonies, shopping centres, bus depots, railway heads, engineers and workers – a whole city is going to be built here."( Desai, 1982, p.52). The man said that it will stretch "from Thul to Vaishet, Vaishet to Rewas, and Rewas to Uran" ( Desai, 1982, p.52).

Here the government is the representation of capitalist structures. Materialist ecofeminists talked about these capitalist structures. Anupam Pandey (2013) wrote, "The

materialist ecofeminists focus on capitalist patriarchy, highlighting the devastating impact of capitalist structures on nature and, as it follows, the lives and livelihoods of poor women across the planet. The fundamental contribution of materialist ecofeminism is that it shows that feminist social justice cannot be achieved without addressing environmental issues in the South.”

Hari and Ramu thought that at least boys like them will get an opportunity to get some work in the factories but the man replied that “I don’t know about these boys – I only know about the engineers and mechanics who will have to be brought from elsewhere to run the factories’ ”( Desai, 1982, p.77). So their future is at risk.

Hari, Ramu and Biju who has the biggest boat in this village became infuriated by this news. Biju said that they have been living here by fishing in the sea and growing crops for many decades. They will never accept it. Biju replied that the government shouldn’t build the factories here as they have been fishing here for decades and ““Always will. And if there is not enough fish for us, there is plenty of food anyway – paddy and vegetables and coconuts” (Desai, 1982, p.75). Anupam Pandey (2013) wrote, “A Southern materialist ecofeminism... offers an indigenous version of development where human beings exist in symbiotic relationships with nature and each other.” It is true to *Village by the Sea* where men and women belonging to indigenous communities exist in a symbiotic relationship with nature. They roared when patriarchal structures came to destroy their surrounding nature.

A man from Alibagh came to Thul to ask the people to join them to oppose the decision of factory building in this area. The man said, “We are all concerned in this matter – all of us who live here in these fourteen villages along the coast from Rewas to Alibagh”( Desai, p. 76). The man came to spread awareness and told how their life, profession and land would be destroyed if they couldn’t oppose it. He told them that agricultural land will be destroyed and in its place, factories will be built. The man said, “All the filth of their factories – for when you produce fertilizers, a lot of effluents are created which have to be disposed of – these will be dumped in the sea and will kill the fish for miles around” ( Desai, 1982, p.77).

A villager called Adarkar asked people to join them and go to Bombay to protest against this industrialisation, ““Go on, go on – if you are willing to fight for your village and your livelihood, into the boat with you” ( Desai, 1982, p.92). The Bombay man said, “I have come here to speak to you, and speak for you” (Desai, 1982, p. 98). In his opinion, the green fields and the sea are as valuable to the city dwellers as they are to the villagers. The trees, birds, fishes, cattles should be protected.

Hundreds of villagers like Hari went to Bombay for the protest by boat. In Bombay the man named Sayyid Ali reminds them about the after effects of factories. It will not only harm the people but also pollute the air, soil and the sea. The factories from “Thul-Vaishet will pump deadly chemicals into the air – fertilizer cannot be manufactured without polluting the air for miles around. Sulphur dioxide,

ammonia and dust will be scattered far and wide” ( Desai, 1982, p.99). According to government rule “no fertilizer complex should be located within fifty miles of big cities” but the distance of “Rewas from Bombay – it is only fourteen kilometres as the crow flies” ( Desai, 1982, p.99).

Sayyid Ali said that they have come to tell the government that they don't want the miserable sums of money as their “land is too valuable to sell. He asked the people to “march to Mantralaya and give our petition to the Chief Minister himself” ( Desai, 1982, p.101-102).

When Hari sails to Bombay, he exposes the dark realities of the city. He described a comparative picture of the dirty city and their green village. Hari finds that here- sky is dirty, sea water is oily, air is stale, everything is noisy and in the name of greenery there is only a city park- “a dusty square with some patches of worn grass iron benches, rows of canna lilies and some palm trees – surrounded by very old and shabby buildings” which can not be “compared with the beach and the coconut grove at home” ( Desai, 1982, p. 133). The city is full of filth, slums and foul-smelling gutters. In the name of urbanization and modernization lush green areas have been turned either into commercial sites or slums. Mr. Panwallah recollects, “fifty years ago, there were hills, gardens, beautiful palaces and villas where you now see slums, shops and traffic crowds” ( Desai, 1982, p. 166).

On his way back to Thul from Bombay, Hari was shocked to see the pathetic condition at Thana. He saw that “the factory belt of Thana, pouring out evil-smelling smoke and

chemicals into the discoloured sky, all the land around blighted and bare, not a blade of grass to be seen and the few remaining trees coated with suffocating dust” ( Desai, 1982, p. 174). He became sad and “wondered if this could possibly be the way that the green coastline from Rewas to Alibagh would look like one day.”

When Hari informed Sayyid Ali Sahib that he went to Bombay to stop the factory building, Sayyid Ali replied that “we lost the case in court. The politicians won – so they can make plenty of money from the sale of land and licenses in the name of progress. Thul is lost” ( Desai, 1982, p.199). He is heartbroken that ““Everything is doomed. The fish in the sea will die from the effluents that will be pumped into the water. The paddy fields will be built over by factories and houses and streets” ( Desai p.199). The novel ends with sadness as the indigenous people lost the case against industrialization.

It is clear that the text explored ecofeminism. But Desai showed more than ecofeminism. The men belonging to indigenous community fought against patriarchal maldevelopment although they ultimately lost it. *Village by the Sea* illustrates that in India, environmental problems are human problems and do not stick to gender. It is true to the men belonging to marginalized communities. In her book *Ecofeminism and the Indian Novel*, Sangita Patil writes, “Indian novelists’ narration of environmental problems of India compels us to rethink these theoretical formulations of ecofeminism which segregate women and nature from men. That is, the environmental problems are not merely feminine

problems but they are human problems.” She “proposes to reconsider ecofeminism as ecohumanism.” *Village by the Sea* can be called a text of ecohumanism.

### **Ecofeminism in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain***

*Fire on the Mountain* (1978), for which Anita Desai got Sahitya Akademy award, explains ecofeminism through three women characters Nanda Kaul, Raka and Ila Das by placing them in parallel with the nature and environment of Kasauli. The novel illustrates their interconnectedness with nature and how they are oppressed and victimized by the patriarchal society. The novel parallelly shows the oppressive condition of these women and the nature of Kasauli hill. They resemble nature.

These women characters faced violation both physically and mentally from the patriarchy. The nature around Kasauli hill is exploited by the colonial Britishers in the past and now by the patriarchal developmental attitudes. Three women characters' idea of victimization varies from each other. Emara (2017) wrote, “Nanda Kaul, a widowed great-grandmother, is a victim of her role as a dutiful wife to an unfaithful husband and as a mother to many children.” Raka is the victim of an abusive father, Ila Das is a victim of selfish brothers and her own reformist idealism.

In ecofeminism, there is an interconnection between nature and women: the women identify themselves with nature. In *Fire on the Mountain*, Nanda Kaul resembles herself with nature and thinks that her condition is very much like nature. This identification of a woman with nature is a key feature

of ecofeminism. Kasauli fulfills her solitude and in return she lets the tree grow and doesn't interfere in their natural growth as she knows how it feels when somebody is in confinement. Widowed Nanda Kaul in her old age decides to spend the rest of her life in the lap of nature in Kasauli. She makes her loneliness suitable by letting everything go naturally in a house surrounded by pine trees and gardens. She abandoned her earlier life of a frustrated housewife for the life of barrenness and isolation of Kasauli. For "it was the place, and the time of life, that she had wanted and prepared for all her life" (Desai, 1977, p. 13). She loves Carignano as she finds herself resembling the Kasauli hill. Even though she has so many children, Nanda is a barren lady as they are not a type of her nature and this is why the barrenness and starkness of Kasauli pleases her most. Nanda "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" ( Desai, 1977, p. 13-14).

Like nature the women act as the providers. Mother nature gives us everything we need in our daily life either it is food or any other material things or oxygen. Overall nature acts as a mother to us. Nanda before she came to Kasauli did the same role of a mother. Nanda had the role of a dutiful housewife who is submissive and calm. Her role was inferior to the male and never gets paid for it. She had to make too many trays of tea and carried them to her husband's study, to her mother-in-law's bedroom, to the veranda that was the gathering place for all, at all times of the day. She had to make "too many meals, too many dishes on the table, too much to wash up after" ( Desai, 1977, p. 41).

Nanda is irritated with her previous life as a housewife. She just wanted to block all the things she was familiar with in her in-laws house. It becomes clear when at Carignano, she encounters the postman as the sight of him reminds her of her previous life of duty. Desai wrote, “The sight of him, inexorably closing in with his swollen bag, rolled a fat ball of irritation into the cool cave of her day” ( Desai, p. 13). She wanted to get rid of letters, messages and demands, requests, promises and queries. She just wanted to be left to the pines and cicadas alone.

Nanda just wanted to be alone in Carignano and nothing else. This loneliness is like freedom to her which she was seeking all her life. Desai writes, “Whatever else came, or happened here, would be an unwelcome intrusion and distraction” (Desai, 1977, p. 30). This is why later she felt irritated when her great-granddaughter, Raka came to stay with her. It also became clear when she got a phone call from her childhood friend Ila Das who wanted to visit her.

Nanda Kaul is described through natural objects. She lay still in her bed till late morning and revived herself with a cool stir breeze in the late afternoon. This stillness was the thing she sought in her in-laws house around nonstop noise but failed to attain it. Desai described her lying with natural imagery :

She would be a charred tree trunk in the forest, a broken pillar of marble in the desert, a lizard on a stone wall. A tree trunk could not harbour irritation, nor a pillar annoyance. She would imitate death, like a lizard ( Desai, 1977 p. 34).

Desai presented her women characters as victims of patriarchy. The idea of victimization is represented through natural images throughout *Fire on the Mountain*. When Nanda was talking to Ila over the phone, she watched “The white hen dragged out a worm inch by resisting inch from the ground till it snapped in two. She felt like the worm herself, she winced at its mutilation” ( Desai p.32). Emara (2017) wrote, “this prey-predator image of hen pecking at a worm is a cruel reminder of her past suffering at the hands of the adulterous husband and her present awareness about the harsh realities of life.”

She abandoned her earlier life of a dutiful wife and chose the life of isolation in the lap of Kasauli “out of vengeance for a long life of duty and obligation” ( Desai, 1977, p. 60). She was entrapped in her life. The whole family had only used her as a servant. She was loved neither by her husband nor by her children because “the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them” ( Desai, 1977, p.164). “She did not live here alone by choice – she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do” by this patriarchal family ( Desai, 1977, p.165). But now at Kasauli she feels solace as she is free from all the duties.

She wished to become the epicurean lady of Sei Shonagon’s *The Pillow Book* surrounded by plants and bushes, ponds and weeds. She quotes, ““When a woman lives alone, her house should be extremely dilapidated, the mud wall should be falling to pieces, and if there is a pond, it should be overgrown with water plants.” ( Desai, 1977, p. 39). Her inner ambiguous feminine feelings and her present situation

is depicted through these natural objects. Her suffering is represented by the images of pond, weed and water plants. Nanda is careless and devoid of interest in material things. Neelam Jabeen (2016) writes, “Nanda’s lack of interest in the garden and the birds around not only reflects her abhorrence for responsibility but also reflects her interest in the things as they are.” It is because she wanted to get rid of things she did at her in-law’s house. It also symbolizes her wish to be like those pine trees which grow without the interference of human beings.

The idea of victimization at the hand of patriarchy is also depicted through the character of Raka. Nanda’s great grandchild, Raka came to Carignano, Kasauli to recover from the after effects of typhoid as her parents went abroad. She is a victim of a drunkard father who doesn’t care about his family. In the age of joy and fun, she came to Carignano in search of loneliness, solitude and natural fragrances. Nanda came to Carignano to get rid of her oppressive duty and to find some peace in the lap of nature. While Raka is in love with nature by her instinct. Desai wrote, “her great granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct: she does not arrive at this condition by a long route of rejection and sacrifice, she was born to it simply ( Desai, 1977, p. 60).

She is able to escape the house where a drunkard father lives in which Raka had no part and to which she owed no attachment with. Raka feels a connection with nature that drew her to Kasauli. Desai said that “It was the ravaged, destroyed and barren spaces in Kasauli that drew her” to Kasauli ( Desai, 1977, p.107).

Emara (2017) wrote, “Raka’s troubled familial experiences have a great effect that it turned her into a scary, hallucinating and agitated child.” It became clear when Raka observed a drunken orgy in the club. It helps to remind her home where her father used to beat her mother after coming home drunk. Desai points out this recollection as “her father,[coming] home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night” ( Desai, 1977, p.87). Her father’s harsh, filthy abuse made Raka cower under bedclothes and wet the mattress in fright.

The idea of victimization of nature at the hand of patriarchy is represented side by side with the struggle of the women character. Desai showed the industrial development through Raka. It is through Raka that we witnessed the true nature of this place, the beauty of it as well as the exploitation at the hands of patriarchal society. Neelam Jabeen (2016) wrote, “Nanda has only been able to see the effects of colonization/patriarchy on herself and the environment while Raka observes the causes too.” It is through Raka that we came to know that Kasauli is exploited in the era of colonization and it is continuing with the modern developmental attitudes which is shown through the Pasture Institute.

The common connection between women and nature in ecofeminist perspective is patriarchy. Both nature and women are oppressed by patriarchy. Nanda, Raka and Ila are victimized by the patriarchy. Nature and non-humans are victims of patriarchy which Desai illustrated through industry and maldevelopment. When Raka mistakes the

Pasteur institution as ‘the factory’ (Desai, 1977, p. 43), Ram Lal clarifies that it is a place ‘where doctors make serum for injections’ (Desai, 1977, p. 44). The institute stands for the modern developmental attitudes. Ram Lal goes on to explain that the chutes Raka has noticed earlier is the place where they empty the bones and ashes of dead animals down into the ravine. At night the jackals come to chew the bone and go mad and bite the village dogs. “‘The mad dogs run around, biting people’” (Desai, 1977, p. 44) At night people hear jackals howling because of the poisonous animal bones they consumed.

The major theme of *Fire on the Mountain* is a parallel depiction of oppression which the patriarchy executes. Desai showed the oppression of nature and non-humans in parallel with the oppression of women. Women like Tara, Raka's mother are like those animals who got abused by her husband, a representative of patriarchy. The madness of the jackal and its howling and crying at night can be compared to the crying of Raka's mother and her chronic nervous breakdown which is a direct result of the physical abuse she had gotten from her husband.

This parallel depiction of oppression finds its culmination in the killing of Ila Das. Ila Das, Nanda's childhood friend, is a virtuous and enlightened lady. She also falls prey to patriarchy. It is through Ila that Desai showed the rape of women and the rape of nature side by side. She fights against child marriage and tried to educate the people about the evils of this practice. Ila Das once stops Preet Singh from marrying his seven year old daughter to an old widower with

six children. To take his revenge on her, Preet Singh “raped her, pinned her down into the dust and the goat droppings, and raped her. Crushed back, crushed down into the earth, she lay raped, broken, still and finished” ( Desai, 1977, p.162).

The forest fire is the main metaphor for the representation of women’s struggling feelings. Ram Lal explained the fire began from a bonfire, ‘This is how forest fires do start...I can’t tell you how many forest fires we see each year in Kasauli” ( Desai, 1977, p.66). An old lady’s house was burnt down in a terrible forest fire. And for that “she went mad and was taken to the lunatic asylum with her arms and legs tied with rope” ( Desai, 1977, p.67). Desai parallely shows the rape of women and the rape of Kasauli hill. The rape of Ila Das and the rape of the earth are intimately linked-both metaphorically and materially as exemplified through the Pasteur Institute, a place of oppression and violence of non-human species. While the forest is burning by some patriarchal subjects, Pasteur Institute is killing non-humans cruelly, Ila Das is being raped by patriarchy on the other side. Nanda Kaul is an ambiguous lady. Desai represented her as a woman who in the process of achieving a lonely, solace life with nobody disturbing her, ended up as a loser. She came to Carignano as a loser to achieve solace. But her over disinterestedness in talking and caring about the things surrounding her resulted in the death of her friend. Indirectly she is responsible for the death of Ila Das as she did not tell Ila to stay for the night when she was leaving her house in the early evening. If Nanda prevented her, Ila might have survived.

At the end of *Fire on the Mountain*, Raka actually sets fire on the hill: “Look, Nani, I have set the forest on fire. Look, Nani-Look-the forest is on fire” ( Desai, 1977, p. 164). Emara (2017) wrote, “Against this backdrop, the utterance of Raka, ‘Look Nani, I have set the forest on fire’ ( Desai, 1977, p.165) attains a great symbolic significance.” It is described by R. S. Sharma as, “expressive of Raka’s resolve to destroy a world where a woman cannot hope to be happy without being unnatural” (quoted in Emara). If we consider Nanda playing the role of an early feminist, then Raka acts here as a modern radical feminist.

## **Conclusion**

Ecofeminism which is a part of feminism, concerned with critically analyzing and understanding the relationship between gender and the environment. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* and *Village by the Sea* deftly explored the issue of ecofeminism. *Village by the Sea* highlights ecofeminism through Lila. She worshiped nature like goddess which represents India's age old culture respecting and treating nature as mother and goddess. Lila is the mother figure who fed her family by working in De Silva’s house just like mother nature does the role of mother providing every material thing.

Nevertheless, Desai, in *Village by the Sea*, shows that men are also concerned for the destruction of nature. Materialist ecofeminists acknowledge the detrimental impact of capitalist patriarchal structures directly on marginalized genders and on the environment. Hari and Lila belong to this

marginalized community who are affected by the capitalist patriarchal structures. Desai showed the men as sympathetic towards non-humans as women are. Even men are more concerned about the depletion of nature than women. The men fought against patriarchal maldevelopment although they lost it ultimately. There is no doubt that *Village by the Sea* is an ecofeminist text. However, it goes beyond ecofeminism and explores ecohumanism through Hari, Sayyid Ali and other villagers. Therefore, the text can be termed as a text of ecohumanism.

*Fire on the Mountain* highlights the relationship and resemblance between women and nature which is the main characteristic feature of ecofeminism. The novel describes the parallel representation of oppression, i.e, how women and nature are being oppressed side by side at the hand of patriarchal structures. Raka's, Nanda's great-granddaughter, discovery of Pasture Institute exposes the maldevelopment, the detrimental impact of capitalist patriarchal structures on marginalized genders and on the environment. *Fire on the Mountain* is thus a typical ecofeminist text.

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