

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**AN INVESTIGATION OF ECOFEMINIST CONCERNS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN
ANITA DESAI'S "FIRE ON THE MOUNTAIN"**

Dr. Alok Chandra

Poet and Critic

Former Research Scholar

Department of English, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara (Deemed to be University),

Under Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India, Nalanda (Bihar), India

Abstract:

The misuse of the treasures of nature is bound to culminate in the ecological crisis on the Earth. The ecological crisis refers to the dreadful happenings of wildfires, global warming, deforestation, climate change, scarcity of water, etc. Any sort of exploitation against female and environment is an offensive act or crime. Anita Desai, being an eminent ecofeminist writer of India, has done a humanitarian work to bring into light the deep pressing issues related to female and environment together. The present paper investigates the female oppression and also the unethical tyranny against the environment of nature. An attempt has also been done to unearth the practical remedies of the existing ecofeminist issues through a close observation of the mental consciousness of the leading female characters in their response to the tense circumstances which have been incorporated in the 'Fire on the Mountain'

Keywords: Ecology, Ecofeminism, environment, Subjugation, exploitation, patriarchal, liberty, Crisis, harmony.

Introduction:

It was the French ecofeminist writer, Françoise d'Eaubonne, who used/introduced the term 'Ecofeminism' for the first time in her very popular book 'Le Feminisme Ou la Mort' in 1974. 'Ecofeminism' raises a strong voice against the marginalization of women, children, environment, etc. and opposes/rejects the circulation or existence of any patriarchal institution in the society which is responsible for the exploitation of female and environment. Anita Desai, an Indian woman novelist, has written her novel 'Fire on the Mountain' with utmost commitment so as to make the people being familiar with her ecofeminist concerns in this modern time of global ecological disharmony. She was born in Mussoorie on 24 June, 1937. She pursued her higher

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studies from Miranda House, Delhi University. She is currently a creative writer in English and is rendering her service as the Professor in Massachusetts Institute of Technology(MIT), USA.

This particular novel successfully brings to light how the natural environment reshapes the lonely and unsatisfied lives of the leading female characters Nanda Koul and Raka respectively. The novelist has also taken a painstaking effort to project her heartfelt concern over the catastrophe of wildfire across the hilly area of Kasauli. Infect frequent and massive incidents of wildfires in the different regions of the world have become one of the major ecological issues nowadays. Nanda Koul's husband was the Vice - Chancellor of Punjab University. She had luxuries in her married life but she was a long distance away from enjoying the marital love and care from her husband. It means that the the post or position of her life- partner was not enough to bring meaning in her life. Nanda with the passing of time understands that her husband's love and respect towards her has never been to the terms of an Indian husband. Petra Kelly pinpoints: "Women are sex toys for men, their lives count less than those of men; women who assert their independence and power are in some way defective." (P. 120)

She(Nanda) now sees herself as a dejected soul in spite of having the privilege of being the spouse of a high ranked man in her society. As it is quite natural in case of any married girl or woman that she wants to have a complete merger of her own self with her life partner or husband and Nanda, accordingly, does longer for emotional feelings from her husband for running a peaceful, satisfied and happy conjugal life.

But she becomes hopeless in her life as her husband never paid any heed to her womanish feelings. Anita Desai in her 'Fire on the Mountain' has skillfully unfolded the issue of illicit love affair in a male centered society. Being an Indian woman Nanda is Shocked to know about her husband's secret affair with Miss David. Now she feels herself as a mechanical instrument, mainly to please her husband by serving tea and snacks to the dignitaries having the parallel social status. The hollowness of true affection between Nanda and her husband creates a bad impact on the children because a child's mindset is always the product of the pervading circumstances of his/ her family. That's why she decide to renounce the metro life of utter noise, boredom and subjugation and comes to Kasauli, a perfect symbol of ecotopia wherein she, the protagonist, does not experience any gender discrimination and is in a comfortable position to identify herself with the objects of the environment of Kasauli.

Nanda Koul's close friendliness with pines and cicadas seems to be charming and fruitful when she shifts herself to the hilly region of Kasauli. Nanda conceives of this new place as a

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lively paradise having calmness and energy but she becomes worried to know the unexpected arrival of Raka, her grand-child. She is now a transformed lady in lap of nature; she even detached herself from her domestic affairs or compulsions on ground of the unfulfillment of her deep longings for gaining evergreen love and respect from her husband. That is why she does not want to let a city man or woman visit her residing place and create hurdle in the natural rhythms of her secluded life.

Anita Desai, no doubt, is a very skilled woman novelist in her art of portraying the important female characters who themselves voice out the ulterior motive of the novelist behind writing this ecofeminist novel. The leading female characters named Nanda and Raka pass through bitter circumstances and by virtue of their firmness of willpower they evolve themselves in the natural environment of Kasauli wherein they are free to breath the fresh wind blowing across the hill and enjoy the mutual friendliness with the flora and fauna. Now it is quite appropriate to expose Raka's childhood to understand how deeply she was tormented and neglected in her own family. Her parents did not do any sort of humanitarian justice with her childhood dreams. Her father did not seriously ponder in his mind about the bright future of her daughter and she often observed her father scolding and punishing her mother for no reason.

The novelist in 'Fire on the Mountain' does ample justice with the power of her pen in pinpointing the continuous loneliness and exploitation of a girl child. When the readers plunge deep into the crucial incidents or situations of the novel, they find the parallel line between Nanda Koul and Raka concerning their feminine un satisfactions in a male governed society. P.D. Dubey writes in this context: "She was totally shattered by her husband's infidelity. Nanda discovers herself in Raka, because Raka is what Nanda always wanted to be." (P.118)

'Fire on the Mountain' has undisputedly established Anita Desai an ecofeminist writer par excellence. In other words, this remarkable creative output of the novelist showcases the depth of her ecofeminist concerns which is strongly manifested in Raka's worries about the environmental calamity of wildfire across the mountain. Her soul is restless after seeing the enormous flames of wildfire which is mounting up with the passing of time. She seemed to lose her mental consciousness as "She thought she heard the cries of animals and birds burning in that fire". (P. 75.)

What Anita Desai has conveyed through this particular context is that a girl or woman is more eco-centric towards her environment than her male companion as far as the safety of animals, forests, etc. is concerned. The suffering of even an animal or bird becomes impersonal for her as she correlates it with her own subjugation or oppression in a patriarchal society. A wildfire denotes too much exploitation of the natural assets in name of enjoying a lavish lifestyle. The modern or present time refers to the people's over-dependency on mechanical

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equipment's. The existence of vehicles in bulk is definitely a prime cause of the formation of greenhouse gases which intensify the global warming and the people witness frequent climate change on the Earth. As a result there occurs the dreadful incident of wildfire or bushfires even in the hilly regions. Over-exploitation of a vehicle or engine is liable for hot-sparks which, if not repaired at that time, burns acres of hilly forest. The people often go up the mountain regions for expedition or picnic. They smoke cigarette and throw the used sticks towards the dry leaves of the nearby trees which converts into enormous flames and burns animals, trees, herbs, etc.

Conclusion:

'Fire on the Mountain' mirrors the deplorable conditions in the lives of the female genders in both domestic and social affairs. In a patriarchal society they are treated as an object of life-time slavery. But at the middle phase of their lives they fearlessly reject the established patriarchal bias of the society which emphasizes the dominance of male over female.

Anita Desai in this remarkable novel has artistically exposed the bitter truth of exploitations against two female characters of different ages, a girl child and a married lady respectively. The novelist has also disclosed the environmental tyranny which is observed in the spread of wildfire in consequence of human laid selfish activities. In other words, both nature and female are victimized because of the practice of power politics in the society which prompts a man to be the ruler on the Earth.

The novel is really an eye-opener for the social masses in terms of human laid wildfire, especially nearby the hills. The novelist becomes successful to convince the reading public that both environment and woman are the subjects of timely and proper care and this noble habit by the humanity will ensure a harmonious society leading to ecological balance in all parts of the world.

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