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Reflection of Ecofeminism in Nayantara Sahgal's Fictional Oeuvre: An Overview

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Abstract
Ecofeminism is an attempt to outline a new utopian horizon, addressing the environmental issue from the categories of patriarchy, androcentric, care, sexism and gender. This research paper investigates the intersection of feminism and ecology in the novels of Nayantara Sahgal, one of India's foremost political novelists in English. The study posits that Sahgal's novels dismantle the patriarchal logic of domination that subjugates female bodies, democratic institutions and natural landscapes under the same authoritarian impulse. While Sahgal is primarily read as a political novelist chronicling post-Independence India, her fiction reveals a consistent eco-feminist sensibility where the domination of women and the degradation of nature are linked outcomes of patriarchal, colonial, and neo-colonial power structures. Through a close reading of selected novels particularly This Time of Morning (1965), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), The Day in Shadow (1971), Rich Like Us (1985), and Plans for Departure (1986)Sahgal shows that how women are marginalized in patriarchal culture and male dominated society. This paper argues that Sahgal constructs female protagonists who reclaim both bodily and environmental autonomy.
***Keywords**: Ecofeminism, NayantaraSahgal, Indian Writing in English, Patriarchy, Political Fiction, Nature.*

Introduction

Ecofeminism, a term coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, posits that there is a conceptual, symbolic, and economic connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Both are treated as resources to be conquered and managed by patriarchal capitalism. Ecofeminism argues that the exploitation of nature and the subordination of women are not coincidental but structurally connected, rooted in a patriarchal domain that values domination and dualistic hierarchies i.e. man over woman, culture over nature colonizer over colonized. NayantaraSahgal niece of Jawaharlal Nehru, has consistently written about power. Her lens is inevitably political and her fictional world is populated by women caught in the interstices of personal life and national politics. Though not an explicitly self-identified ecofeminist, Sahgal's narrative framework aligns with what Vandana Shiva calls the feminization of nature and the naturalization of women and the resistance to both. As several UN World conferences and reports by numerous NGOs point out women are the first victims of environmental deterioration but play a crucial role in the conservation of nature. Ecofeminism is the thought and praxis that addresses this double-sided issue.

Objectives

1. To identify ecofeminist tropes in Sahgal's fiction.
2. To analyze how Sahgal links political authoritarianism with patriarchal control over female bodies and natural resources.
3. To examine how her female protagonists move from victimhood to ecological consciousness.
4. To study Sahgal's deep concern towards situation of women and nature.

Methodology

The study uses qualitative textual analysis, drawing on theoretical frameworks from Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, and Karen J. Warren. Descriptive research method has been used for this paper.

Data Collection : The data has been furnished from the primary sources, related articles, books and novels. The secondary sources have also been used for writing a paper.

1. **Analysis and Discussion-**

The Domestic as Ecological Space:

The Day in Shadow_In*The Day in Shadow*, Simrit is trapped in a loveless marriage where her husband Raj treats her as property. The denial of alimony and her struggle for maintenance is not just economic oppression. Sahgal parallels Simrit's barren, airless marriage with the suffocation of the urban, industrialized home. Simrit's eventual emancipation, when she finds love with Raj Garg, coincides with her reclaiming of open, natural spaces and light. Her freedom is described in images of air, sunlight, and growth a move from patriarchal confinement to ecological openness.As a post-colonialist writer GayatriSpivak interprets the position of woman in Indian society, thus: "Women are silenced by both colonialism and patriarchy."(Riach 11)*The Day in Shadow* discusses various possibilities of resistance, signifying its inevitability in the contemporary Indian context. In the book *Points of View*Sahgal points out:

> "For the first time I came across the shocking assumption of inequality. A man's ego and ambition, I learned, must be served first. In case of conflict the man's will and desire must prevail. I was uneasy and restless, adjusting to the demand of a personality and an environment whose goals and a texture were different from anything I had known or been comfortable with." (P-29)

2. The Political and the Personal:

Storm in Chandigarh and Rich Like Us-

In *Storm in Chandigarh*, Saroj, married to a powerful bureaucrat, faces sexual violence within marriage. Her body is treated as territory to be possessed, just as the political partition of Punjab is treated as territorial domination. The novel develops on a double plot: the political storm over the division of Punjab and the marital storm in the life of Saroj and her husband Inder. The novel suggests that political corruption is akin to ecological corruption both are about unnatural control. The "storm" is both emotional and ecological the violent disruption of natural harmony by masculine ambition.*Rich Like Us* sets during the Emergency, makes the link most explicit. Sonali, an IAS officer, represents ethical governance. In contrast, the male political elite engage in rampant capitalism, hoarding, and resource exploitation. Dev son of Ram is plundering the earth's resources while the emergency suspends human rights. The exploitation of the poor, the silencing of dissent and the plunder of the nation's resources are presented as the same patriarchal mindset that silences women. Rose, the Englishwoman abandoned in post-colonial India, embodies the double colonization of woman and nature by imperialism.

3. **Woman as Custodian of Life:**

Plans for Departure_sets in 1914, *Plans for Departure* presents Anna Hansen, a Danish woman seeking freedom in India. She rejects the colonial, masculine view of the Himalayas as a landscape to be conquered and catalogued. Instead, she engages with it spiritually and respectfully. Sahgal presents Himalayan tribal communities where women have a more organic, sustainable relationship with land, contrasting it with the extractive logic of the British Raj. Anna's search for self is an ecofeminist pilgrimage; freedom from patriarchy is freedom to belong to nature, not own it. Anna learns to see the mountains not as a landscape to be conquered but as a living presence to be inhabited. Her friendship with Henry Brewster who values both her intellect and the local ecology, stands in contrast to the imperial marriages around her.

4. **KeyEcofeminist Features in Sahgal' fictional Space:**

Deconstruction of Dualisms: Sahgal rejects the culture/nature, public/private binary. Her heroines move from the private sphere into public political life, collapsing the divide.

Critique of Developmental Patriarchy: Her male protagonists — politicians, industrialists, bureaucrats represent what Vandana Shiva calls "maldevelopment": progress measured by domination.

Language of Nature for Female Resistance: Moments of female awakening are consistently coded in natural imagery: monsoons breaking drought, plants sprouting, dawn light. Nature is not passive but an active ally in female liberation.

The future of ecofeminism involves a clear stance in favor of women's access to free decision-making on reproduction. Women must be recognized as subjects with decision-making power in demographic matters; in other words, subjects with their own life that choose it they will have children or not and if so, when and how many to give birth to in the framework of an ecological culture of equality. The emphasis on the identity of the woman as a mother linked to the Earth that we find in some forms of ecofeminism can involve a regression with respect to the feminist principle of motherhood as a free and personal choice. Calling for equality and self- empowerment involves promoting sexual and reproductive rights. The founder of the word Francoise d'Eaubonne argued that the overpopulation of the planet, an issue of concern for ecologist, was the result of the patriarchal refusal of women's right to decide on their own bodies. Theoreticians such as Maria Mies(1988) even reject any technological resource as they consider it an element of domination of capitalist patriarchy. They thus return to the image of women defined by their role as mothers.

Conclusion

Nayantara Sahgal's fiction, therefore, can be read as a form of liberal ecofeminism specific to the Indian context. She does not romanticize women as inherently closer to nature. Rather, she shows how both women and nature suffer under the same authoritarian structures whether it is the patriarchal family, the colonial state, or the Emergency regime. Her protagonists achieve emancipation not by dominating nature, but by re-establishing a relationship of care, respect, and interdependence with it. In Sahgal's world, to free women is to heal the ecological rift, and to protect nature is a feminist act. Her work is prophetic. She reminds us that a democracy that cannot respect its women cannot respect its rivers and a development that poisons its soil will eventually ruin its freedom. This makes her work highly relevant today in the context of climate justice and gender justice across the world.

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