
NATURE DIVINE: ECO FEMINISM IN MARGARET LAWRENCE'S *THE DIVINERS*

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Abstract: Eco feminism is concerned and committed to the causes of women and nature. Eco feminists embrace women's closeness to nature and see it as a source of women's spiritual empowerment and political activism. The present study focuses on Margaret Lawrence's novel *The Diviners* which narrates Morag Gunn's self discovery aided by her special bond with nature. Lawrence highlights how women have a definite role to play in healing the alienated human and non-human world which is the need of the hour

Keywords: Destruction of nature, End of life, Eco feminism, self discovery, Empowerment through nature.

**And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks, Sermons in stones and good in
everything**

(Shakespeare- As You like It)

Introduction: Nature remained pristine and invincible in her glory as long as there were votaries who worshipped and deified her. Poets like Wordsworth immortalized the healing touch and moral vision of Nature. But man's greed led to the destruction of nature resulting in environmental disasters. Preservation of eco-system has thus become the dire need of the hour. The literary theory of Eco feminism is committed to both the causes of women and nature. The present study focuses on Margaret Lawrence's novel "The Diviners" which tells the tale of Morag Gunn's self-discovery aided by her special bond with Nature.

Eco feminism is a fairly recent development in critical theory. This offshoot of Feminist theory celebrates women's special relationship with nature arguing that both tradition and biology have situated women in a position to bring about an ecological revolution that may ensure the future of the planet. Eco feminists embrace women's closeness to nature and see it not as degrading or limiting to women but as a source of spiritual empowerment and political activism.

Ecological feminism or eco-feminism is an umbrella term which captures a variety of multi-cultural perspectives, on the nature of connection between those humans in sub ordinate positions, particularly women and the domination of non-human nature. What makes ecological feminism ecological is its understanding of and commitment to the importance and valuing and preserving of eco-systems. It is multicultural by the inclusion of analysis of women-nature relationships and the inextricable inter connections among all social system of domination like racism, ageism, imperialism and colonialism.

According to Joy Nelson: Eco-feminism bridges the gap between ecology and feminism: strands of analysis which have existed side by side over past decades without necessarily intertwining. By making the explicit connections between a misogynist society

and a society which has exploited 'mother earth' to the point of environmental crisis, eco feminism has helped to highlight the deep splits in the patriarchal paradigm (15).

Eco feminism thus calls for an end to all oppression arguing that no attempt to liberate women will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. Northrop Frye and Margaret Atwood emphasized the play of nature upon the Canadian literary imagination. Margaret Lawrence's masterpiece *The Diviners* champions the cause of the symbiotic relationship between women and nature. The heroine of the novel Morag Gunn is a writer. The novel has three major focuses-the relationship of the past to the present, the relationship of mother and daughter and the nature of creativity itself.

Orphaned at the age of four and brought up by loving but marginalized foster-parents Christie Logan and Prin, Morag suffers from a sense of injustice and inferiority complex that engenders self-hate and an antipathy for her past. Like all Lawrence's heroines, she leaves Manawaka at the first opportunity. She gets married to a condescending English Professor but their life together is unsuccessful and the marriage breaks up. Her affair with Jules Tonnerre leads to the birth of her daughter Pique. The flight to England and Scotland in search of her real ancestors finally leads to the realization that her roots lie not in Scotland but in Manawaka from which she had so desperately fled.

In the voyage of self-discovery, Morage often turns to Nature for friendship, consolation and spiritual strength. Barbara Hehner has rightly stated. *The Diviners* comes to grips with the currently debated issues much more explicitly than Lawrence's previous fiction-the search for Canadian identity, the discrimination encountered by women, the unjust treatment of native people and even ecology find a place in the novel (41).

Morag's intimacy with Nature started even from her childhood days. As a little girl she sought the company of the spruce trees around the time her mother fell ill. The spruce trees were really as tall as angels -dark angels perhaps to Morag. When the new

needles sprouted soft and amid the green, the grass there didn't grow right underneath the trees. But Morag used to carry couch grass in armloads and spread it, already drying, in the heat under the spruces.

The fallen spruce cones, the dandelions, wild honeysuckle, the purple vetch and the pink wild asters were the furnishings, chairs, tables and dishes for the invisible creatures who inhabited the place with Morag. She even names the trees as Peony, Rosa Picardy, Cowboy Joke, Blue Sky, Mother Burnstable, Father Old Forty Nine etc. Probably Morag sought the company of the spruce trees to escape from her loneliness caused due to the illness of her parents. Looking back to that time, Morag reminisces: I remember those imaginary characters better than I do my parents. What kind of a character am I? Rosa Picardy, my alter ego, I suppose was somewhat sturdier. She did brave deeds, slew dragons or polar bears and was Cowboy Joke's mate (21).

Morag Gunn's imagined companion and mentor was the Canadian pioneer Catherine Parr Traill. She was a botanist, drawing and naming wild flowers and also managed to write books. Morag imagines Catherine's voice telling her: "No Doubt my dear were you to plant an orchard you would also soon find your writing flowing with grace, not unlike the river yonder" (186).

Karen J. Warren in her essay, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism" asserts, "Eco feminism makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship and appropriate reciprocity-values that presuppose that our relationship to others are central to our understanding of who we are" (379). Morag's friendship with Royland, the water diviner and the influence of Catherine Parr Traill's writing help her a lot in her realisation of her true self. More than these, it was nature that helped her to investigate the relationship between her art and her life. This is revealed in the vision that is granted to the writer-heroine who is attempting to write about herself and her experiences.

Once Morag went out fishing with Royland in her boat. She saw a huge bird, a Great Blue Heron, once populous in that part of the country but then rarely

seen. The sighting of the heron is an epiphanic moment in her acceptance and reconciliation of the warring elements within herself. Laurence weaves the image of the artist's quest and task into her novel by linking Morag's creative thoughts and accomplishments to the beauty, integrity and mortality of the heron's flight. To Morag, the Blue Heron is: Like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out of the world's dawn. Ancient seeming, unaware of the planets rocketing changes. The sweeping serene wings of the thing, unknowing that it was speeding not only towards individual death, but probably towards the death of its kind (380).

Morag's awareness of her inner-relatedness of the planetary system is revealed in her conversation with Royland. She tells the water-diviner, "We think there is one planet called Earth, but there are thousands even millions like a snake shedding its skin..." (188).

The river plays a crucial role in Morag's literary career. River watching was a solace to her in moods of depression. When her daughter Pique leaves, Morag seeks consolation from the river that was moving quietly. One peculiarity of the river is that it flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south rippling the bronze, green water in the opposite direction. This contradiction never ceased to fascinate Morag. She had once believed that nothing could be worse than killing a person. Now she perceived river slaying as something worse.

Morag's special relationship with nature is indeed a source of spiritual empowerment that enables her to succeed in discovering her true identity. So she champions the cause of safe guarding nature and giving due importance to the non-human world. Laurence believes that the patriarchal domination of women is similar to the domination of nature by men. Women have a definite role to play in healing the alienated human and non-human world and this is realized through Morag's special relationship with Nature. Through Morag, Margaret Laurence reaffirms her commitment to rethinking and transforming the relationship between nature and humanity as well as that between the different sections of humanity.

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