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Ecofeminism as a Literary Theory: A Critical Overview

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Abstract

Ecofeminism is an interdisciplinary theory that links the oppression of women to the exploitation of nature. It combines the principles of feminism and environmentalism. It examines how patriarchal systems control both women and the environment. In literary studies, ecofeminism acts as a critical lens for examining the representation of women, nature, ecology and power structures in literary texts. The paper presents a brief critical overview of ecofeminism as a literary theory with the discussion of its origin, major concepts, important thinkers and its relevance to contemporary literary criticism. The study concludes that ecofeminism is still a significant literary theory in understanding the environmental issues and gender inequality in modern society.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Literary Theory, Feminism, Ecology, Patriarchy

Research Objectives

1. To examine ecofeminism as a significant literary theory in contemporary literary criticism.
2. To analyse the relationship between feminism and environmentalism from an ecofeminist perspective.
3. To explore the major concepts and contributions of leading ecofeminist thinkers.
4. To evaluate the relevance of ecofeminism in interpreting literary texts and environmental issues.
5. To highlight the significance of ecofeminism in promoting ecological awareness and gender equality.

Research Questions

1. What are the fundamental principles of ecofeminism as a literary theory?
2. How does ecofeminism establish the relationship between women and nature?
3. What are the major contributions of ecofeminist thinkers to literary criticism?
4. How does ecofeminism help in analysing literary texts from ecological and feminist perspectives?
5. Why is ecofeminism relevant to contemporary literary and environmental studies?

Research Gap

Although ecofeminism has been widely discussed in feminist and environmental studies, many studies focus primarily on its philosophical and ecological dimensions. Comparatively fewer studies provide a comprehensive critical overview of ecofeminism as a literary theory, integrating its historical development, major concepts, key thinkers, and relevance to contemporary literary criticism. This study attempts to bridge that gap by presenting a concise and systematic overview of ecofeminism from a literary perspective.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to literary criticism by presenting ecofeminism as an important interdisciplinary approach that connects literature, feminism, and environmental studies. It enhances the understanding of how literary texts represent women, nature, and systems of domination while promoting ecological consciousness and gender equality. The study also serves as a useful reference for students, researchers, and scholars working in the fields of English literature, feminist criticism, ecocriticism, and environmental humanities.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research method based on textual and theoretical analysis. It primarily relies on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and scholarly publications related to ecofeminism, feminism, ecocriticism, and literary theory. The study critically examines the evolution, major concepts, key thinkers, and literary relevance of ecofeminism through analytical and interpretative approaches.

Literature Review

Previous studies on ecofeminism have explored the relationship between women and nature, environmental justice, and feminist theory. Scholars such as Françoise d'Eaubonne, Vandana Shiva, Karen J. Warren, and Val Plumwood have significantly contributed to the development of ecofeminist thought. While existing studies discuss ecofeminism from philosophical and environmental perspectives, relatively fewer studies provide a

comprehensive overview of its role as a literary theory. This study reviews these contributions and examines ecofeminism as an important approach in contemporary literary criticism.

Critical Analysis

Ecofeminism offers a critical perspective for understanding the interconnected oppression of women and nature within patriarchal societies. As a literary theory, it enables readers to analyse how literary texts represent ecological destruction, gender discrimination, and systems of domination. The theory challenges anthropocentric and patriarchal ideologies while promoting ecological justice, gender equality, and sustainable living. Thus, ecofeminism has emerged as a significant interdisciplinary approach that enriches literary criticism and addresses contemporary environmental and social concerns.

Introduction

Ecofeminism emerged as an important literary and social theory during the twentieth century. This theory studies the relationship between women and nature and the ways in which both are exploited in patriarchal systems. It explores the link between women and nature, and the oppression of both under patriarchal systems. The term “ecofeminism” was first coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974. She argued that the oppression of women and environmental destruction are interconnected.

Ecofeminism combines ecological concerns with feminist perspectives and has become highly relevant in contemporary literary studies. This study explores how literature presents women, nature, environmental crises and systems of domination. The theory also questions the cultural belief that women and nature are inferior to men and civilization. In recent years, issues like climate change, pollution, and deforestation have made ecofeminist studies more important. As a result, ecofeminism remains a key critical framework in literature and environmental humanities.

Ecofeminism as a Literary Theory

Ecofeminism examines literary texts through both ecological and feminist perspectives. It

analyses how literature depicts both women and nature, as well as how both women and nature have traditionally been exploited by humankind. Ecofeminism argues that literature is crucial in establishing our collective attitudes toward both the natural world and how we relate to it through women. Through literature we develop notions of power, domination, culture and ecological responsibility.

Ecofeminist literary criticism examines how female characters are connected with natural landscapes, forests, rivers, animals, and rural environments. In many literary texts, women are represented as nurturing and closely associated with nature, while men are often linked with authority, rationality, and civilization. Ecofeminists question whether such portrayals empower women or reinforce patriarchal stereotypes.

The theory also studies how environmental destruction affects women differently in society. In many developing countries, women depend directly on natural resources such as water, forests, and agriculture for survival. Therefore, ecological destruction often increases social and economic burdens on women. Ecofeminist critics highlight these issues through literature and cultural studies. Ecofeminism further emphasizes that literature should not only entertain readers but also create social and ecological awareness. Literary texts dealing with pollution, deforestation, climate change, displacement, and environmental injustice contribute to ecological consciousness among readers.

Another important aspect of ecofeminist literary criticism is the rejection of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism is the belief that humans are superior to nature. Ecofeminists argue that such attitudes encourage environmental exploitation. Instead, the theory promotes coexistence, ecological balance, and respect for all living beings. Ecofeminism also intersects with other critical theories such as post-colonialism, ecocriticism, and cultural studies. Postcolonial ecofeminism examines how colonization exploited both women and natural resources in colonized nations. Similarly, ecocriticism and ecofeminism together analyze

environmental themes and ecological ethics in literary works.

In contemporary literary studies, ecofeminism has become increasingly important because modern writers frequently address issues related to environmental crises and gender inequality. The theory provides readers with a broader understanding of the interconnected relationship between society, women, and ecology. Ecofeminist critics believe that patriarchal societies associate women with nature and men with power and rationality. This association often leads to the domination of both women and the environment

As a literary theory, ecofeminism focuses on:

- ♦ women and nature connection,
 - ♦ environmental destruction,
 - ♦ patriarchal domination,
 - ♦ ecological awareness,
- and resistance against exploitation.

Ecofeminist literary criticism also examines how literary texts reflect environmental ethics and social inequality. The theory helps readers understand the interconnected nature of ecological and gender-related issues.

One of the central ideas of ecofeminism is the symbolic relationship between women and nature. Women are traditionally associated with nurturing, fertility, and care, while nature is often represented as “Mother Earth.” Ecofeminists argue that patriarchal societies use this association to justify domination and control. Patriarchy is seen as a major driving force behind the destruction of the environment and the oppression of women. This same system that exploits women, exploits the planet's natural resources for profit and power.

Ecofeminism promotes ecological balance, sustainability, and coexistence between humans and nature. It rejects the idea that humans are superior to the environment.

Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced the term “ecofeminism” and argued that patriarchy causes both ecological destruction and gender inequality. Vandana Shiva is an important Indian ecofeminist thinker who criticized capitalist development and environmental exploi-

tation. She emphasized the role of women in environmental protection. Karen Warren explained the “logic of domination,” which justifies the oppression of women and nature through hierarchical thinking. Val Plumwood criticized the dualistic thinking that separates man/woman and culture/nature. She argued that such divisions create systems of domination.

Ecofeminism remains highly relevant in the modern world due to environmental crises and social inequality. Rapid industrialization, urbanization, and technological development have contributed to severe ecological imbalance across the world. Environmental degradation not only affects nature but also creates social inequalities among marginalized communities. Women, especially those living in rural and economically weaker sections of society, are often more vulnerable to ecological crises. Lack of access to clean water, agricultural resources, and environmental security increases their difficulties. Ecofeminism therefore connects ecological justice with social justice and gender equality.

The theory also encourages sustainable development and environmental responsibility. Ecofeminists believe that protecting nature is essential for human survival and social harmony. Through literature, environmental awareness can be spread effectively among readers and society. Climate change, pollution, and deforestation continue to threaten ecological balance.

Women, especially in rural communities, are often more affected by environmental destruction. Ecofeminism helps in understanding the relationship between environmental justice and gender justice. In literary studies, it encourages readers to critically examine how literature represents nature, women, and power structures. The theory also promotes values such as care, sustainability, cooperation, and ecological responsibility.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism is an important interdisciplinary theory that connects feminism with environmentalism. As a literary theory, it examines the relationship between women, nature, and systems of domination in literary texts. The

contributions of thinkers such as Françoise d'Eaubonne, Vandana Shiva, Karen Warren, and Val Plumwood have strengthened ecofeminist criticism in literary studies. Ecofeminism continues to remain relevant in addressing environmental concerns, ecological ethics, and gender inequality in contemporary society.

Therefore, ecofeminism not only enriches literary criticism but also creates awareness about environmental protection and social justice.

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