

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 3

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Vasanharani, S., and R. Sangeetha. “The Silence of The Earth and The Alienation of The Characters in Anita Desai’s ‘Cry, the Peacock and Fire on the Mountain.’” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2025, pp. 204–07.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS3-Apr.9090>

The Silence of The Earth and The Alienation of The Characters in Anita Desai’s “Cry, the Peacock and Fire on the Mountain”

S. Vasanharani

Department of English

Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Dr. R. Sangeetha

Department of English

Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

“The Human heart likes a little disorder in its geometry” –Anita Desai. Human becomes more humane when they mingle with nature. This research article points the concept of Ecofeminism and the environmental humanities. Earth, water, fire, air and sky are interrelated to human beings in their life and soul. Increase or decrease in this will cause so many problems. The human beings cause the environment to face danger by in-human activities. Anita Desai a lover of nature has written the importance of nature through her characters and her writings. Cry, the peacock and Fire on the mountain are her remarkable works and defines nature. Her characters Maya and Nanda Kaul express a deep sense of connection between them and nature. The change of seasons reflects in her characters. The earth remains silence by watching activities of these two ladies and the happy and sad moments of their lives. It also reflects in the environment. The present paper tries to show the picture of Desai’s fascination on earth and women. It pictures how the earth dominates when the women are misused.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Environment, Fascination, Concept, Importance, Picture.

There are environmental writers like Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhathi Roy speak for nature. The protagonist Maya is the protagonist in Desai’s debut book. She adores nature and frequently draws comparisons between nature and her own life. She finds solace and protection in nature, which also serves as a reflection in her inner existence. She is represented by the peacock, which stands in contrast to Maya’s inner state. The nature around her reflects her unsettling state, which encourages her to struggle and yearn for independence between her thrilling existence and her sorrow. Maya’s incarceration under societal norms is reflected in her unsettling mentality. The limitations placed on Maya and her battle with loneliness has gotten worse due to her mental condition.

This demands that she form relationships of her own and recognizes that she is a member of a superior. The shifting seasons and scenery are reflected in her feelings. The immediate clarity blends perfectly

with the serene natural surroundings, while her external existence reflects the harsher weather that coincides with her inner anguish. Maya is innocent, natural, romantic, beautiful and safe when she has been young. She has enjoyed the outdoor world since her childhood. Maya's experiences show how difficult it is for women to stand together and support one another. But in the end, she discovers that she is alone, underscoring the difficulties women encounter in being considerate and interacting in a world dominated by men. The peacock represents Maya's desire for beauty and independence. Her innate desire is to escape social constraints. The backdrop of nature plays in the life of Maya's high-spirited mood. Her interior life's state of dissatisfaction is reflected in nature. Maya frequently seek solace in nature, utilizing it as a respite for introspection and relaxation.

Peacocks play an essential role in the life of Maya. She feels her life is totally alienated.

I felt their thirst as they gazed at the rain-clouds, their passion, as they hunted for their mates.

With them, I trembled and panted and paced the burning rocks.... (46)

Maya is longing for the life which she can't live. She can't tolerate the practical husband. The love and longing for a child, in between the sound of peacock, the Albino astrologer's prophecy all have made her to push her husband from the balcony. The nature, the earth and everything are watching all her activities in silence. Finally she too commits suicide because of her uncontrollable psyche. The domination of nature is here.

Anita Desai's next character is Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain. To save the environment in India, the Chipko movement has been found in 1973 to protect the Himalayan forests. In addition to trees, the Chipko movement focuses on the relationships between women, people, and nature. This is because woods are closely linked to rural and household life in India. Economy run by women, since they are the main victims of the depletion of forest resources and are more reliant on trees and forest products than male, rural Indian women face serious challenges as a result of tree shortages. The silence of nature has shown in the book "Fire on the Mountain" by Anita Desai as being associated to the darker sides of the women in question, as well as their corresponding oppression and discrimination.

The connection between women and nature has complex association which is well knit by Anita Desai in Cry, the Peacock and Fire on the Mountain. Wangari Maathai of Kenya has established reforestation initiatives in 1977 with the primary goals of advancing women's freedom and a favourable perception of them. The novel Fire on the Mountain depicts the natural life of Nanda Kaul, who settles in a cottage at Carignano in Kasauli after her husband has passed away. She establishes her own space and accepts a quiet and restricted life. Nanda adores Carignano for its barrenness and solitude, its steep heights, frightening ravine and slopes, and how it merges with this harsh scenery. She lives there with just Ram Lal, the cook. This demonstrates a fundamental sort of relatedness between women and nature, as well as a certain interconnection with natural life.

She is similar to other typical Indian women, who are always expected to be responsible, obedient, and loyal. Women have many duties in order to maintain their dignity in the society. Three female characters—Nanda Kaul, Raka, and Ila Das—as well as their relationship to nature, victimization, and the equal oppression of nature are the main themes in Fire on the Mountain. The book illustrates nature's darker face and emphasizes its connection to the more threatening life of women in question. Therefore, it is evident from this book that women are linked to ecological challenges. The three main characters in Desai's book are caught up while men stand for cruelty, dominance, fear and hatred, arrogance, and power.

Indian culture's widespread thinking holds that women should be viewed as having a lower status than men. The social structure of the institutions dominates the physical and mental makeup of women. Thus, myth, education, religion, and social value are employed to suppress women. The victims are not only Indian women, women of all over the world. They are forced to be in silence.

They are not given the chance to express their demands and issues. In every depiction, the lady is positioned second to the guy. She never speaks. If she speaks the society will name her in different titles. She has to fulfill all her responsibilities to the family as a wife and vice versa.

She lives a simple, solitary life. “Fire on the Mountain” investigates the women abuse. The Indian Himalayas, the novel’s setting, provide a backdrop for examining problems of environmental degradation and women’s roles in that context.

Nanda Kaul’s selfish eye on nature looks at the

Ripening apricots and the pair of bulbuls that quarreled over them till they fell in a flurry of feathers to the ground,..a spinning of sunlight or of the globe on its axis (p-xi)

The mountain is an insensitive force. In Fire on the Mountain almost every character embodies both harshness and beauty. It reflects the challenges faced by women, who are in conflict with the environment. Characters that are female frequently represent a strong connection to nature. Their feelings and experiences are connected to the background; show how environmental issues are intertwined with their struggles and individuality. Nanda Kaul seeks seclusion in order to get away from the troubles of her past. She deliberately chose to live in the mountains for privacy. Nanda’s need for solitude and a close connection to nature is symbolized by her retreat to the Himalayan Mountains.

In support of freedom of speech and liberty, the mountains act as a haven. Throughout the book, her connection to nature opposes social pressure and the opportunities that are presented to women, especially in a patriarchal setting. Her decision to live separately in the mountain represents a rejection of traditional roles. Nanda is on a quest of self-discovery. She battles the wounds from her previous period and starts to realize her role in the world. Her transformation might be seen as an Ecofeminist quest for self-determination. Nanda has empathy for others despite her prior lack of involvement, especially the young girl Raka who represents the next generation. These facets of her personality draw attention to the ecofeminist views on human and the environment.

Nanda displays her past’s rigidity throughout the book, and she finds power in her own ecofeminist spirit. In real life Kaul has been neglected by her husband. He has an affair with another lady which kaul couldn’t digest. Kaul has been treated as a family maintainer till the arrival of the mountain. This is about thriving in a world that aims to marginalize nature and women, not just about existing. Class, gender, and ecological use are only a few of the oppressions that Nanda’s character foretells will collide. One of the main tenets of ecofeminism is the unity of these issues, which her understandings demonstrate. Readers are prompted to consider greater universal injustice and the need for a comprehensive approach to social change as a result of analyzing her resistances.

The mountains’ majesty and tranquility add to nature’s emotional therapeutic healing potential. Nature determines her identity and position in the world on her own terms, defying social pressure and conventional roles. This conflict is an adventure in self-determination. The mountains’ harshness indicates resiliency and adaptability. In order to cope and thrive in the midst of a difficult existence, Nanda discovers how to escape her inner turmoil from nature, which echoes violently. Her interactions with the younger generation throughout her life demonstrate her developing empathy and sense of belonging. She transforms from a lady troubled by her history to someone who achieves her independence and purpose throughout the book.

Nandha Kaul couldn’t even believe the death of Ila Das the best friend of her.

‘Ila?’ she murmured, ‘Ila Das?’ Yes, madam’, the sure voice repeated, slightly impatient of her histrionics. ‘Her body was found on the path to the village Timarpur. She was found by the villagers. She has been strangled. The doctor is here. He claims she been raped. She is dead. Kindly come to the police station at the earliest to identify....’(p157-158)

Despite being in a wretched position herself, Ila feels pity for the unfortunate residents of Kassuli hamlet. At the expense of her life, she has been fighting against the spiritual forces and died as a martyr. Nature has a role in Nanda Kaul's life as a reflection of her inner conflicts and a source of healing and empowerment.

Conclusion

Desai examines the dominance of patriarchy in society. How women and nature are ill-treated. The character's dilemma piques our curiosity and cause women and the environment both are neglected. The relationship between social and environmental issues that imply the exploitation of women is emphasized in both novels. The book exhibits ecofeminist topic that promotes sustainability and social injustice. "Cry the Peacock" and "Fire on the Mountain" are excellent texts for ecofeminist analysis because of Desai's work, which challenges readers to consider the complex relationship between nature, gender, and culture. Nature dominates and destroys when there is sin on women and nature. Anita Desai's Maya and Nanda Kaul can both be viewed as ecofeminist heroines because of their journey toward self-realization and self-sufficiency, their conscious relationship with nature, and their defiance of social standards.

References

1. Desai, Anita. *Cry, the Peacock*. Orient Paperbacks, 2024. Print.
2. Desai, Anita. *Fire on the Mountain*. London: Penguin Book, 1977.
3. Dr. Suporna Mitra. "Nature and its relevance in Anita Desai's selected novels" *IJRE Journal*, January 2024; 6(1): 26-29
4. Kapur, Promila. *Love, Marriage and Sex*. Delhi: Vikas, 1973.
5. Swain S.P. The Dialectics of Marital Polarisation in Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*.
6. Panday, Shyam, Ghan. "The Relationship between Female and Nonhuman Entities in Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*". *Journal of Population and Development*, Vol.1, June 2020, p46-53.
7. Mack Carty, Collen. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality". *NWSM Journal*, Vol.16, no. 3, 2004, pp. 154-79, Print.
8. Ms. Jancy.K. "A Strategy of Maya's Inner Dilemma: Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock*" *Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Volume 28, Issue 12, Series 8 December, 2023 p24-28
9. Bita Viswanath. Dr. Ab. Majeed Dar "Isolation in Wilderness: A Protest against Social Norms in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*" *The Criterion, An International Journal in English*, February, 2015
10. Panday, Shyam, Ghan. The Relationship between Female and.. *Journal of Population and Development*, June 2020
11. Anita Desai's *Fire on The Mountain*: An Ecofeminist Reading Maha Abdel Moneim Emara *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* – Vol.4, No.2 Jan. 25, 2017
12. <https://systemicalternatives.org/2016/01/18/ ecofeminism-historic-and-international-evolution/>