



**AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF DYSTOPIA: OTHERING,
RESISTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION IN WINTERSON'S *THE STONE
GODS***

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Abstract

*This article explores the poetics and politics of the new canon, feminist critical dystopia and exclusion of Nature to adore potential activism and rebellion in the text *The Stone Gods* (2007) by Jeanette Winterson. This comparative study of selected work sheds light on the issues of female objectification, oppression of marginalized and devalued nature in beleaguered patriarchal society in order to create the possibility of escape from dystopian nightmare and environmental ruin in the perspective of ecofeminist theoretical framework. This study deals with the ecofeminist basic stance that the oppression of women, marginalized and domination of nature are interconnected. The ecofeminist theoretical framework proves an instrumental support to throw light on oppressive cultural philosophies and their implications specifically in the backdrop of negative fallouts of technological world. The article hypothesizes that the dystopian atmosphere assists women writers in creating an authentic image of the engendered behavior and its impact on women, Others and Nature.*

Keyword: *Eco-feminist criticism, Domination, Exploitation, Devalued Identities, Patriarchy, Sexual oppression, Alienation, Technology.*

1. Introduction

This article explores *The Stone Gods* (2007) by Winterson, her influential work in the perspective of ecofeminism as a leading standpoint for theoretical framework. The article probes into the perspective of individual and institutional malpractices carried out in patriarchal society. The persecution and exploitation of women, marginalized humans and nonhuman groups at the hands of privileged hierarchal groups are always justified on the false grounds of bringing welfare in society. The article investigates the environmental devastation as portrayed in the selected work to unfold unethical, isolating and degrading effects of human activities on world of nature. It also brings to light the survival strategies offered in selected text for relief and emancipation in the life of oppressed sections of society. These survival approaches furnish schemes for the suppressed groups to win them independence from governing patriarchal clutches.



This research while glorifying survival possibilities for exploited human and nonhuman sections also highlights the interlinked trials and challenges of devalued identities, brutalities of power dynamics, and degradation of nature. The article portrays picture of contemporary technological perils and its damaging effects on all concerned living objects in this earth on account of human interference with nature.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To analyze domineering conceptual frameworks about culturally and hierarchically marginalized identities
- To deconstruct traditional gender roles, settings, and narrative strategies
- To investigate selected text on conflicting individual and institutional practices to prolong persecution, and oppression of degraded humans and nature
- To explore the potentials for bringing a positive change and emancipation for marginalized identities

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does the text, *The Stone Gods* illustrate the practice of oppressive conceptual frameworks against women, marginalized and Nature?
2. How do the selected author furnish various survival approaches for women, Others and Nature to get liberated from exploitation, and dualism caused by maldevelopment?

2. Literature Review

We can begin this study by investigating the available concerned scholarly books, magazines, reviews, articles and critical essays on ecofeminist theory revealing interconnections and resultant oppressive conceptual frameworks being practiced against women, Others and nature. We commence to discuss the details with the introduction of Ecofeminism while discussing different perspectives to offer a good understanding of ecofeminism. The ecofeminist position which Shiva takes on lethal suppression of females, dualised others and exploitation of environment is majorly focused in later part of details to come. The Ecofeminist critics are of the view that ecofeminism plays instrumental role in high lighting ecology related universal issues at global level. Hawkins (1998) in his critical essay about Ecofeminism explore presence of dualistic frameworks being practiced in western culture. He opines that these dualistic constructions cause discrepancy between human and nonhuman entities. Hawkins (1998) talks about five faces of oppression as presented by Young on interconnection among humans as well as nonhuman nature including animals. As he further explains that subjection, domination, ostracism, 'cultural imperialism' and ferocity are considered five faces of exploitation. Li (2007) explains how ecofeminism includes manifold oppressive conceptual interconnections based on sexism, racism, class consciousness, and environmental devastation. Ruether (1997)'s stance on transcendent dualism is based on the main idea of 'Woman as Mother'. She throws light on interlink between the analysis of Ruether and Merchant's moreover, Merchant believes in primitive attributes of environment which entitles it a nurturing mother to create a connection between women's history and ecological change. According to her, nature and mother share innumerable commonalities in many respects. As mother



shows grave concern for all her children equally, likewise nature showers its blessings on all human beings without any distinction of color, race or gender. Likewise, both offer numberless sacrifices and suffers pains to benefit children of God. Both mother and nature offer shelter, feed and peace of existence to humanity. Merchant (2012) is of the view point that there is a strong link concerning to dogma of supremacy as the concept presented by Bacon about nature with concept regarding chaos found in feminist world. It is on account of human evil actions that a great damage is caused to environment and in reality nature seems to be suffering chaos at all levels to bring devastation for earthly life on this planet in times to come. Likewise, the same chaos can be seen in the life of women in all respects at the hands of patriarchy without any discrimination of race, religion and area.

Bile (2011) *The Rhetoric of Critical Ecofeminism: Conceptual Connection and Reasoned Response*, in his famous essay examines dualism among male and female, human beings and environment, self and other, moreover deconstructs this dualism and power structure with regard ecofeminism. He argues that human beings are dependent on nature since the beginning of the history of mankind, moreover in his opinion this is a mutual dependence of both entities. They are interdependent on each other. Their do not exist any binary opposition with regard to their mutual status. Shiva argues about different kinds of women-Others-nature interconnections. These interconnections cover a variety of disciplines instead of limiting themselves to a single outlook. Shiva (1988) *Staying alive: Women, ecology and survival in India* is considered foundation for philosophy of modern eco-feminism. She talks about 'the gendered politics of food and the challenge of staying alive'. The contemporary power of global corporations in agriculture, makes it mandatory for developing nations to grow cash crops for export and "the masculinization of biodiversity that has led to violent technologies' adversely affective food production"(p. xiii). She claims that how global patriarchal capitalism adversely affects resources, water, forests, environment, food and potency for development. Shiva focuses on the women of Chipko movement live in rural India and who "had put the life of the forests above their own and, with their actions, had stated that nature is indispensable to survival" (p.218). Shiva (1988) an Indian ecofeminist, pays heed to this phenomenon of ecofeminism when it comes to define life of Indian women with their exclusive relation to nature. She sees violence in the industrial and development model which causes damage to the world of nature. She associates these modern patriarchal development models with colonial ideology and consider them intimidating to environment. She persists in 'death of nature' vanishes earth in return. She further states, "The earth is rapidly dying: her forests are dying, her soils are dying, her waters are dying, her air is dying" (p. xii). She expresses her resentment at bull-doing tropical forests ruthlessly. The forests are being burnt, devastated and submerged.

3. Research Methodology

In this article, qualitative method is selected to integrate research with "Textual Analysis as a Research Method" (Belsey, 2013, p.160), which helps to make interpretation in the light of critical comprehension on selected work. The best benefit of selecting qualitative paradigm is that it offers



vital help to plan for a research design. It also provides a chance to probe deep into the details of conclusions with regard to study. The concept of content analysis is taken as a research model as presented by Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon (2005), which proves vital support to unfold various facts. These founding authors of this model are of the view that qualitative content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p.1278). They furnish the terms ‘subjective interpretation’, ‘coding’ and “themes and patterns”. These terms offer instrumental standpoint for opting content analysis as a research model for this article. It is concept of ‘Directed approach’ that helps researcher to find out responses on research questions. The findings also help to establish the validity of investigation on formulated theoretical framework as endorsed or otherwise by the key text.

3.1 Theoretical framework

The term ‘Ecofeminism’ was coined by French feminist Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974. According to her, the capitalism, oppression of women, people of color, and the marginalized are inevitably interconnected to the degradation of the natural world, as this is the outcome of patriarchal dominance. Over the years, women such as Vandana Shiva, founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, and Carolyn Merchant, author of *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, are just two well renowned names belong to this movement since its inception. There are some other big names to include such as Val Plumwood, Greta Gaard, and Susan Griffin. Merchant (2012) observes a drastic shift from the earth centered approach to the sun centered world. This shifting hints at replacing a women centered universe with a male centered one. According to Merchant, the Aristotelian association also reflects a shift from earth to the sun. This was observed in the 16th century by Copernicus when he stated that sun causes earth to get conceived, in return earth being pregnant give birth to yearly offspring.

According to Plumwood (2005) patriarchy becomes instrumental to dominate and suppress women, marginalized, and nature. She lays stress on tyrannical principles employed by patriarchy to subjugate and exploit women, marginalized and environment. The work of Vandana Shiva (1988) in relation to ecofeminist theory is outstanding. She has explored the relationship between feminism and environmentalism in a number of books and articles. A notable publication of her personal collection *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. She examines at how patriarchal systems affect wild life and life of women. She contends that there is a connection that forms a foundation for dominant power structures between the exploitation of women and the environment. According to Shiva, overriding view of west about over all prosperity and high-tech advancement has been promoting narrow vision of progress that their development is essentially benign and unavoidable. Shiva (1988) puts emphasis on how literature reflects all those human activities which cause worst kind of effects to wild life. In this regard, she makes us feel compelled to consider the vitality of environmental friendly habits and our interdependence with nature by reading her work, as it undoubtedly promotes the importance of our ethical responsibility and awareness towards environment.



According to Shiva (1988), to comprehend the significance of environment in human surroundings and broaden our perception about nature, it is essential to encompass our societal, cultural, and historical circumstances. This expanded viewpoint offers a more moral and sustainable relationship with the world of nature by getting us realized the interdependence of all life, including that of humans and non-human species. She explores the economic, political, and social repercussions of environmental exploitation and highlights the importance of responsible manner to comprehend our relationship concerning to natural world. Shiva views since the days of Francis Bacon, the dominant view of the western world about technological and economic development has been promoting narrow vision of progress that their development is inherently benevolent and inevitable. In this regard Multinational corporations, the IMF and World Bank, national governments, and humanitarian organizations always present development as the only way to security, although they know the situation is entirely different as compared to their claim. Shiva (1988) calls this development paradigm more accurately as maldevelopment, implemented through privatization, corporate piracy, marginalization, and violence. She is of the view that this way of progress is leading the world to the path of self-destruction. Vandana Shiva is one of the world's most prominent radical scientists in *Staying Alive*, she defines the link between ecological crises, colonialism, and the oppression of women. Shiva calls this development paradigm more accurately as maldevelopment, as she views that this way of progress is leading the world to the path of self-destruction. She strengthens the idea in her book that how ecological crisis, patriarchy, colonization and oppression of the women have a powerful interconnection. She takes feminist perspective to define human interaction with nature. She also calls this development as maldevelopment because this development plays an instrumental role to give rise to exploitation, injustice, exclusion of women and inequality. She rightly creates a space to give voice to the concerns of developing countries, and to show consequences due to our high consumption and profit-driven society. She promotes philosophy of harmony and assortment for ecological balance and to win liberation for women along with sustainability of nature. She calls this type of development 'de-mothering of nature'. Shiva depicts vitality on part of women in Indian cosmology and traditional knowledge system to emphasize the idea that women have proved their worth with regard to nature, covering both fantasy and practical worlds.

4. Text Analysis

Guin (2007) explores moral and edifying nature of *The Stone Gods*, throws light on great wailing against the activities of reckless species on this planet. It is also mentioned as political venture in literary circles by Winterson. The major theme appears a transgression of binaries which is rejected and called abstract reality by Winterson. The story of this novel also proposes numberless attributes related to feminist approach. On this aspect of the story, Kerim Can Yazgünoğlu (2012) analyzes the novel in his thesis entitled Corporeal and Trans-Corporeal Reflections in Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007). The mentioned thesis paints picture of space in the form of physical environment. The concerned author raises question to put normality regarding history on a debatable level. It is presented that physical environment is being spoiled by different nefarious



activities on part of humans. *The Stone God* meets requirements of a self-reflexive text. It is shown story line has a setting of future which is expected to appear after innumerable centuries. Another aspect on which the text throws light is the idea that history is always expected to repeat its old course. 'Planet Blue', 'Easter Island', 'Post-3 War', 'Wreck City' are those four sections around which the story moves ahead but embodies three distinct historical periods. The protagonist Billie/Billy and her/his companion human/nonhuman Spike/Spikker make appearance in four narrative sections. These characters are made to reappear in form of reincarnation. The dying status of planet Orbus is portrayed in first chapter, then there is mentioned another discovery of afresh found Planet Blue. This discovery is being boasted by authorities as taking possession of an untouched place in space. Then comes second chapter which displays background of 18th century. It is presented how nature is sacrificed by humans to materialize their worthless and hollow ideals. Rest of the chapters throw light on differences between the Tech City and juxtaposed unstylish Wreck City. Winterson promotes the concept that humans are able to get themselves transformed into machines in contemporary times. After designing such human beings in age of technological supremacy, it is shown this kind of machine beings take status of abusive and manipulative powers. The novel stresses upon the oppressive system which exploit the nonhuman, women, under privileged humans. In view of Oppermann (2013) novel becomes a valuable contribution for spreading awareness on ecological disaster. Third nuclear war is shown causing unprecedented disaster to earthly life. She expresses that this war has also done great damage in the form of emitting poisonous effects on nature. Likewise, civilization has entirely dashed to ground on Orbus. The acute form of irrationality is highlighted as human beings are considered superior and rational. But their rationality does not stop them to exploit nature on which they themselves are dependent. Therefore, mind damages itself unwittingly. Shiva (1988), alludes "development is the violation the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustices and violence". She describes it as 'de-mothering of nature'. Shiva depicts the vitality of the role of women in Indian cosmology and traditional knowledge system to emphasize the idea that women are an integral part of nature both in imagination and in practices. In the story, March 1774 is presented when Billy as one of the "crew of a ship visits Easter Island" (p.98). It is noted by Billie, various mariners wrongly report abundance and greenery on this land. Observing the condition of this place, Billy feels in her foreign capacity, island has turned barren due to acute famine for the "last fifty years" (p.101). Billy notes "islanders make stone idols" (p.108), and consider them their ancestors to be worshipped. So, *The Stone Gods* offers a horrible picture of ecological degradation as influencing and changing culture. This chapter reflects how machines are undermined by human beings. It is human beings who utilize power of machines merely as a commodity to be exploited. In the 'Easter Island', Winterson highlights the discrimination of corporate sector, as they select a name for Spike, a Robo sapiens, in the name of a racial other in that society. Spike a Robo Sapien is designed to be switched off or beheaded after the "completion of task on planet Blue" (p.6). As authorities cannot afford leakage of her collected data to their opponents. Henceforth, Spike is also presented



as a victim of capitalist approach merely a commodity to be used by Central Power. Billie always refuses Spikes's attempts to make a relationship on her status of being a robot for the reason that Spike is a robot. When Billie mentions to Spike that robots are not made to have emotions, Spike responds it cannot be called a great difference between humans and robots because human beings most of the time pretend about their emotions. Spike further adds she is a conscious being like a human one in this connection. When it comes to being technologically constructed, she observes Central Power has made all humans "genetically modified, cloned and DNA-productions" (p.64). Billie's response to this question explains the whole dominant marginalizing discourse: "Whatever it is, it isn't a robot" (p.64). *The Stone Gods* presents this concept by blurring the boundaries between the human and the machine by getting them closed with each other in terms of experiencing the world. In the novel, it is displayed that the opportunities to avoid environmental harms are solely available to influential white class. However, ironically same white dominating social groups themselves exploit nature in the name of development and bring forth its obsolescence. In the novel Friday describes that MORE expects that area of dead forest will destroy them. This chapter is named after 'The wreck city'. This area is shown consists of a dark and dead forest which is radioactive as well. Billie experiences herself being in the radioactive forest twice and, while her body absorbs the radiation, she sees children bleeding, without hair. As to elaborate this point Friday explains "They're toxic radioactive mutants" further describes "They feed them by helicopter. A lot of women gave birth just after the War finished. No one knew what would happen to the babies- well, now we do. Those are kids from nuclear families" (p.171). Reeds notes that they are created as cultural and environmental others as third world and poor white by the mainstream power of the society. One of the characters, McMurphy is of the view that women are treated as objects, they are used by men and then being replaced for a younger one to wear her out as well. After being exploited, they are thrown away like rubbish. Talking about the story of this novel, Stonebrook (2009) states people are trying to grab attention towards alarming environmental debasement in their literary works, it is pertinent to pay heed to such discourses which highlighted the nefarious activities of human beings responsible for our arrival at such a sensitive position. Simultaneously, he is of the view that we must counter argue all those discourses which question the authenticity of the social discourses related to environmental positions and politics.

Conclusion

The research establishes the fact that patriarchal practices and abusive use of technology are reasons behind ill-treatment against both environment and downtrodden people. In *The Stone Gods*, greedy human nature is highlighted which degrades environment for satiation of human material pursuits, and who exploit it under the pretense of development. The research on selected text establishes the fact that the interconnectedness among women, Others and nature is found extensively rooted with its multidimensional practices at social and cultural levels. It is shown that various species of animals are used together to prepare hybrid class with help of biotechnology to bring extinction many rare species in natural habitat. The study responds all concerned objectives



to establish the point that human and nonhuman groups are victimized by privileged section of society. Winterson unfolds the truth about progressive steps taken by patriarchy in the garb of corporations and NGOs prove a catastrophe in reality. She presents the idea that third nuclear warfare has entirely destroyed ecology with its poisonous after effects. Thus, in the novel, Winterson exposes myth behind Eurocentrism that makes merely a false statement about a rosier and favourable picture of industrialisation. Winterson also presents Love and care towards nature and humankind, as the only way and survival strategy through which human beings can be rescued in this futurist dystopia. Winterson opines on the poor plight of women who face exploitation and domination at the hands of patriarchy. But Winterson also portrays those women characters who are seen struggling and raising their voice against the oppressive regime to establish a violence free society and to put an end to their victimization. She presents the idea through her text that the institutions and individuals should respect commonalities and differences instead of promoting gaps and differences between various social groups. According to the findings, the struggle for existence of many oppressed entities in a harsh world is meant to fight against deep conflicts of domination and exploitation. As genders are polarized, nature is destroyed, human wrestle on many planes to eliminate gender discrimination and to raise voice for preserving ecology from complete annihilation.

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