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Nature, Gender and Power: Eco feminist Critique in Selected Women's Writings

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Abstract: This article examines the intersection of nature, womanhood, and control by delving into the works of female authors who emphasize environmental degradation, female empowerment, and ecological justice. It focuses on Sylvia Earle's *The World Is Blue: How Our Fate and the Oceans Are One*, Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*, and Wangari Maathai's *The Green Belt Movement*, illustrating how these authors challenge male-centric notions of progress, revive ancient earth wisdom, and assert active roles in global stewardship. Tracing from early nature writings by women to contemporary activist thought, it contextualizes each work, analyzes their techniques and central ideas, and argues that ecofeminism addresses pressing modern issues. In conclusion, it highlights gaps in comparing global women-led environmental literature and initiatives, suggesting potential areas for further research.

Keywords: ecofeminism, women and nature, gender and ecology, Vandana Shiva, Wangari Maathai.

Introduction

The profound and complex connection between women and the natural world has attracted the interest of those exploring stories, identity, and land. This link appears not only in traditional rural poetry or modern environmental criticism but is continually emphasized by female writers who highlight how the marginalization of women is intertwined with the destruction of ecosystems, revealing shared systems of domination. In this context, nature is more than just a backdrop; it serves as a layered foundation where meaning is created, actions take place, and resistance emerges. Many women, closely connected to the earth—as caretakers of homes, protectors of biodiversity, or witnesses to climate change—recognize the flaws in dominant ideas about progress, expansion, and exploitation. By expressing themselves from this perspective, they challenge male-centred hierarchies and develop new ways to assert power within living systems. Over time, reclaiming nature's significance has involved crossing gender boundaries—moving from domestic life into political activism; linking feminist consciousness with environmental concerns; and viewing nature as a partner rather than a passive resource. The following discussion examines how female writers—from



traditional nature-focused literature to contemporary ecological activism—have articulated these connections, culminating in detailed analyses of works by Sylvia Earle, Vandana Shiva, and Wangari Maathai.

In early literature, women turned to nature not only for solace but as a subtle form of resistance against strict social expectations. Rather than conforming to societal rules, they shaped images of forests, rivers, and storms to reflect their inner experiences. In this way, the untamed woman, like the wild landscape, symbolized freedom but also provoked controversy. Associating women with natural forces suggested a deeper worldview—one that values relationships over dominance, embraces cycles rather than straight lines, and prioritizes growth over control.

During the 20th century, female authors gradually shifted away from symbolic language to address concrete issues. Instead of relying on metaphors, they confronted the impacts of industrialization, mechanized agriculture, chemical use in food production, and urban sprawl—demonstrating how these changes disrupted environmental balance and disproportionately affected women. This shift revealed a deeper insight: the oppression of women and environmental degradation arise from similar forces embedded in male-dominated economic systems. After World War II and amid decolonization, women writers from developing countries directly connected land destruction to gender roles and imperial domination. Their work emphasized that the takeover of forests, appropriation of farmland, and promotion of monoculture farming not only devastated ecosystems but also undermined women's livelihoods, erased traditional ecological knowledge, and weakened community support networks.

Some writers stand out in this context. Consider Vandana Shiva's 1988 book *Staying Alive*, which makes a clear connection between women, the natural world, and advancement. Her story demonstrates how the Green Revolution and large-scale dam construction in India diminished natural diversity, ignored women's environmental responsibilities, and exacerbated sex-based discrimination. Because male-dominated growth plans disregard women's practical expertise, she believes that harm to environment is linked to sexist oppression. Ecofeminism underwent a sea change as a result of that book, which attracted female intellectuals who began examining environmental issues by focusing on gender relations and control. Beginning in 1977, Wangari Maathai's Green Belt Movement places women's environmental initiatives at the intersection of hardship, destroyed forests, equitable governance, and female power. She blurred the lines between protecting



the environment and empowering women by encouraging rural Kenyan women to plant trees. Greenbelt Movement demonstrates how women transcend traditional gender norms, making the planting of seedlings a kind of silent protest. These ladies ended up influencing their own lives as well as entire areas; they weren't simply concerned with dirt.

When discussing tales related to marine life, Sylvia Earle's 2010 book *The World Is Blue* offers an ecofeminist perspective on ocean research and global environmental decisions. Even if it isn't traditional "women's literature" in the sense of narrative, Earle's position as a female oceanologist lends her work significance in a field dominated by males. Her perspective connects our personal survival and the invisible efforts influenced by gender to the health of the oceans, which are sometimes perceived as far or distinct. As a result, female perspectives penetrate new areas of ecology, highlighting neglected ecosystems and the ways in which their harm affects genders differentially.

Women broke through preconceived notions by transitioning from family life to open society, from abstract conceptions of nature to practical environmental action, and from local initiatives to global discussions. Their experiences demonstrate that environmental issues are central to feminism and not merely incidental. This revision alters the definition of power to include connected control formed by sex, skin color, money, and land rather than just people dominating nature. One thing is evident from what they challenge: gender inequality must be addressed in order to address Earth's challenges.

These days, ecofeminist discourse is always evolving; women writers from many locations address issues such as climate change, extinct species, indigenous land rights, and global injustice. Rather than adhering to conventional wisdom, their literature incorporates cross-border initiatives, anti-colonial viewpoints, and overlapping injustices. In addition to opposing male-driven exploitation, these voices also address ingrained racial prejudice, the expansion of contemporary empires, and the transformation of Earth into a commodity. By speaking up, female intellectuals emphasize how diverse genders are affected by environmental collapse, which means that genuine change requires a completely new approach to interacting with nature.

Since the 1980s, research on ecofeminism has grown significantly. Initially, influential intellectuals investigated connections between environmental damage and women's subjugation; authors like as Françoise d'Eaubonne and Maria Mies questioned rigid conceptions of femininity associated with earth imagery. These



days, scholars are increasingly interested in overlapping social issues, physical experiences, and real-life repercussions. Due to Vandana Shiva's impact, these ideas were brought into discussions on global development, highlighting the resilience of hard-hit communities and the environmental knowledge of women. Furthermore, Wangari Maathai's practical endeavors demonstrate how this kind of philosophy inspires local action and changes in government.

The Open University+1 Sylvia Earle is rarely mentioned in feminist environmental works on ocean research and global discussions about seas, despite the fact that she makes important connections between female viewpoints and marine ecosystems. Some blind spots remain unaddressed, despite the fact that she is now more frequently mentioned by academics investigating women scientists, green leadership, or environmental narrative, demonstrating how women change perspectives on ecology. There is little research on how women's ecological discoveries become actual policy; the role of gender in saltwater and inland water science has not been thoroughly examined; and there is a dearth of work comparing women's environmental texts across locations. By focusing on particular authors and their works and establishing side-by-side evaluations from various cultures, locations, and ecosystem kinds, this article fills in such gaps.

Research Gap

While advancements have been made in ecofeminism studies, there is a lack of thorough examination regarding the connections among women's environmental writings when contrasting different terrains, such as land versus sea, or comparing regions like the Global North with the Global South. A significant aspect that remains unaddressed is the direct comparison of female scientists and activists operating in diverse environments—whether on land or in maritime settings—and hailing from regions including Asia, Africa, or major global centers. Influential figures such as Shiva, Maathai, and Earle navigate these boundaries, but their perspectives on gender, nature, and power dynamics are seldom analyzed together. Moreover, there has been insufficient focus on how women effectively translate grassroots initiatives into tangible policies or systemic transformation. This article aims to fill that void by providing a comprehensive and insightful analysis of how each woman confronts sexism, engages with ecosystems, and challenges authority.



Research Methodology

The present analysis employs a flexible and reflective methodology centered around close reading and comparative examination of distinctions. It engages with pivotal texts—*The World Is Blue*, *Staying Alive*, and *The Green Belt Movement*—through the lens of ecofeminist theories, situating each within its contextual reality while exploring the interrelations among gender, nature, and power dynamics. Additional literature, encompassing scholarly discussions on ecofeminism, the involvement of women in environmental issues, and the gendered connections to natural resources, contributes to the foundational concepts and contextualizes the positioning of these authors. A comparative approach illuminates converging themes across these works, such as the interconnections of nature and gender, individual empowerment, activism for transformation, and epistemological frameworks, alongside an examination of recurring motifs across various contexts. The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To trace the evolution of women's narratives regarding nature, transitioning from initial symbolic representations to later emphasis on pressing environmental issues.
2. To analyze how these female writers—Shiva, Maathee, Earle—articulate notions of gender in conjunction with nature and authority through their literary contributions.
3. To investigate how these authors challenge traditional gender constraints while asserting their roles in ecological activism.
4. To posit that ecofeminism retains significance in the current era of environmental crises, given the profound interconnections between women and nature under stress.
5. To propose directions for future research that aligns with practical applications, drawing from women's contributions to narratives about nature.

The present ecological crisis—characterized by species extinction, climate variations, and deteriorating ecosystems—is fundamentally linked to human practices of extraction, commodification, and domination. Women's insights, which have often been disregarded, have become increasingly essential for understanding and transforming these detrimental behaviors. Ecofeminism establishes connections among sexism, environmental degradation, racism, and social inequities, thereby proposing a more comprehensive pathway towards environmental justice. Amidst escalating planetary challenges, the knowledge women possess



regarding sustainable land management—such as seed preservation, organic farming, afforestation, and marine protection—proves indispensable. The selected authors illustrate how women's perspectives and activism contest conventional paradigms, while paving the way for novel interpretations of stewardship, interconnectedness, and mutual support. Consequently, ecofeminism emerges not merely as a niche within feminism, but rather as an essential epistemological framework that resonates with the current ecological epoch. Examining the work of Vandana Shiva reveals how her transition from a career in physics to activism fosters a synthesis of scientific critique and pragmatic ecofeminism. This interdisciplinary approach connects the decline in biodiversity to the marginalization of women's daily contributions in agricultural contexts. Shiva's critique of the Green Revolution highlights how male-centric, profit-oriented agricultural practices undermined traditional roles that women occupied in food production and land stewardship. By framing women as active agents rather than passive recipients, she emphasizes their resistance through initiatives such as seed conservation, organic agriculture, and forest preservation. In this manner, she dissolves the dichotomy between academic theory and practical action, positioning women as pivotal to the creation of sustainable environments.

Wangari Maathai exemplifies the tangible impacts of ecofeminist activism. As the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in East and Central Africa and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, she initiated community-based forestry projects, empowering Kenyan women to cultivate indigenous tree species which simultaneously restored degraded soil and improved their livelihoods. Through her writings and activism, she linked environmental conservation to democratic resilience and gender equity. The act of tree planting emerged as a collective endeavor driven by women, fostering both ecological restoration and social transformation. Her legacy illustrates the interconnectedness of environmental justice and gender equality, demonstrating how grassroots women's actions can lead to significant systemic changes both locally and globally.

Sylvia Earle's contributions to marine ecology resonate with feminist environmental care principles. In her work, *The World Is Blue*, she draws direct connections between oceanic ecosystems and human survival, illuminating neglected areas of the ocean floor while underscoring the urgency of protecting these regions. As a woman operating in predominantly male scientific domains, she exemplifies how female narratives



challenge and expand environmental discourse. Earle's advocacy encourages a re-envisioning of oceans, not merely as resources to be exploited, but as vibrant ecosystems wherein women's knowledge and perspectives can foster meaningful environmental engagement.

Analyzing the contributions of these three individuals highlights an emerging trend. They engage in domains traditionally overlooked by women—including small-scale agriculture, community-driven reforestation, and marine research—redefining the narrative by prioritizing women's roles in ecosystem restoration. Their empowerment is not characterized by exploitation; instead, it is rooted in rejuvenating life, acquiring profound insights, taking initiative, and driving transformation. Gender differences influence perceptions of equity concerning nature; they advocate for transforming land into spaces of activity rather than silence, framing influence as a form of connection rather than dominance.

The manner in which women articulate their relationship with nature has evolved significantly. It has transitioned from poetic interpretations of the natural world to feminist critiques of landscapes, culminating in ecofeminist activism that situates women within ecosystems. These authors combine incisive analysis with tangible action, demonstrating that their writings do not merely convey ideas—they catalyze action. They compel a reevaluation of women, knowledge, land, and authority simultaneously.

To foster further progress, it is essential for educational institutions and intellectuals to endorse interdisciplinary collaborations among feminist ecology, environmental studies, gender theory, and public policy. Such integrations foster a comprehensive understanding of the interplay among culture, gender roles, and nature on a global scale. Additionally, documenting, disseminating, and incorporating local women-led environmental initiatives—such as seed preservation, forest restoration, ocean protection, and sustainable agriculture—into decision-making processes is crucial. The narratives of figures like Shiva, Maathai, and Earle illustrate that storytelling can mobilize action; diverse narratives from various regions deserve equal recognition. Furthermore, coursework in environmental science, gender studies, or literary analysis should prioritize readings authored by women that focus on nature, rather than relegating them to supplementary materials. This approach enhances students' understanding of ecology through an equitable and gender-aware lens, inspiring future generations.



Conclusion

The interconnectedness of nature, gender, and authority is most prominently expressed in the writings of women who integrate science, culture, and activism. Thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Wangari Maathai, and Sylvia Earle employ knowledge gleaned from land stewardship, activism, and narrative crafting to challenge male-dominated, profit-driven systems while advocating for sustainable equity. They reframed the perception of women from that of the oppressed to becoming agents of change, illustrating that social justice for humanity and ecological justice for the planet are inextricably linked. By examining diverse ecosystems, including soil, forests, and oceans, across nations like India and Kenya, this discourse elucidates the significance and urgency of a feminist perspective within ecology. In light of escalating climate challenges, these insights are not only relevant but also imperative. Ecofeminism stands not on the periphery of feminist discourse but at its center, particularly in addressing contemporary environmental crises. Addressing the root causes of ecological degradation is impossible without recognizing the profound connections among gender, power, and nature.

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