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## Eco Feminist Perspective In The Autobiographies Of Dalit Literature

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### ABSTRACT

French feminism is the intellectual ancestor of the ecofeminist literary critique school. It was Françoise d'Eubaine who originally used the word "feminism," not Simone de Beauvoir who popularized the phrase. As a feminist social movement, ecofeminism encourages females to speak out against the unchecked exploitation of both women and the environment. The goal of this campaign was to stop the destruction of the environment. Dalit women, who are otherwise equally instrumental in nature's nurturing and excel in their sense of affinity and belonging to their family and community, have had their suffering compared to that of women from both the upper and lower castes to highlight the severity of their plight. Ecofeminism is a political ideology that emerged from the convergence of feminist and environmentalist perspectives. Ecofeminism, as a social and literary movement, advocates for the worth of all forms of life, including human life, to be held at the same level. Books written by members of the Dalit community often serve as a means of social protest. The criticism is used to Dalit literature to analyze it on the grounds that it lacks depth and simply presents a negative perspective on uprising. However, it is certain that the early poetry, in particular, is a genre that often erupts in rage, releases a load of hate and disdain built up over generations, and even sometimes hurls obscenities at and spits out back on upper castes the poison that they had for decades.

**KEYWORDS** Feminism, Ecofeminism, Dalit Women,

### INTRODUCTION

A "new term for an ancient wisdom," "eco-feminism" emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of convergences between the feminist movement, the peace movement, and the environment movement. The phrase "ecological disaster" was coined by Françoise D'Eaubonne, but it gained widespread use in the wake of several rallies and actions aimed at halting environmental degradation. Françoise D'Eaubonne believes that the subjugation of women and the degradation of the natural world are inextricably linked; the emancipation of women and environment must occur simultaneously. Large numbers of American women gathered in March 1980 at Amherst for the inaugural Eco-feminist

conference, entitled "Women and Life on Earth: A Conference on Ecofeminism in the Eighties." This was in response to the Three Mile Island nuclear disaster. The intersections of feminism with militarism, healthcare, and environmental protection were discussed at length. When discussing Eco-feminism, one may take either a "Ecology of feminism" or "feminism of Ecology" perspective. Ecofeminism emerges from the feminists' contemplation of the natural world and active engagement in the environmental movement, spurred on by Ecofeminist ideas and the broader ecological movement.

A written narrative of one's own life is called an autobiography. William Taylor, writing in the English journal *The Monthly Review* in 1797, coined the pejorative term "autobiography" by suggesting it as a hybrid but then condemning it as "pedantic." However, the first time it was used in its current connotation was in 1809, by Robert Southey. E. Stuart Bates defines autobiography as "a narrative of past of a person by the person concerned" in his book, *Inside Out*. First-person autobiography, which wasn't given its modern name until the early nineteenth century, has its roots in antiquity. According to Roy Pascal, "an autobiography is a review of a life from particular moment in time, while the diary, however reflective it may be, moves through a series of moments in time" (autobiography is a review of a life from a particular moment in time; diary is a review of a life at various times). From the time of writing, the autobiographer takes stock of the autobiographer's life. Autobiographies, in contrast to biographies, may be based only on the author's recollection of events, rather than any other sources. Memoirs are a subgenre of autobiography that, according to Pascal, tends to shift the spotlight away from the author and onto the people who shaped his or her life.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Divyendu M et.al (2021)** Dalit women in India's poorest communities bear the brunt of environmental degradation's effects. Since their everyday existence need such intimate engagement with environment and natural resources, they are more reliant on the natural world than any other groups on the Indian subcontinent. When seen via an ecofeminist lens, the poetry of Kalyani Thakur Charal and Jupaka Subhadra reveal strong connections between the female protagonists and the natural world. The fact that Dalit women are both "other" and "oppressed" may help them find common ground with the natural world. These poems foretell crucial realities that need to be seriously handled by humanity, such as the predicament of the tyrannized, by which I mean those who are not in power. It has been said by Vandana Shiva that "we are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth, or we are not going to have a human future at all." The purpose of this research is to investigate how Dalit literature presents feminist and environmental concerns from an underrepresented viewpoint.

**Manisha Desai et.al (2021)** In this chapter, I look back at a significant discussion about dalit feminism that appeared in the pages of the Economic and Political Weekly, an influential Indian newspaper, between 1995 and 2000. In this article, I reexamine this debate within the context of contemporary dalit and savarna feminist activism, and I argue that, while it was crucial in making visible (1) the previously unmarked savarna nature of autonomous feminism and (2) the male domination of dalit politics, in the decades since the debate, dalit politics has remained primarily male, and autonomous feminism, while aware of and conversant with dalit feminism, is not necessarily transformed by dalit standpoint. Moreover, although dalit feminism is prominent nationally and transnationally, it has at home mostly concentrated on "difference," from savarna feminism, without effectively addressing the distinctions among dalit subjectivities in neoliberal India, so restricting the potential of radical, coalitional politics.

**P. Gopika Unni et.al (2020)** Feminism from the Dalit perspective is more important in today's casteist culture. It seeks to promote social justice on behalf of society's most marginalized members, the Dalit women. The essay "A Dalit Woman in the Land of Goddesses" by Aruna Gogulamanda focuses on the double marginalization that a Dalit woman faces in the patriarchal casteist era: as a woman and as a Dalit. She is a poet who speaks out for the marginalized, particularly Dalit women who suffer at the hands of male chauvinism.

**Mukul Sharma et.al (2019)** 'Nature writing' in India has historically included topics like ecology, geography, and sacrality, but has largely ignored Dalit literary traditions. Over the last several decades, environmental writing has broadened its focus to include discussions of the ways in which nature, society, and culture all intertwine. However, the issue still remains as to why the greater canon of environmental literature does not acknowledge the ecological roots in the works of lower castes. This essay discusses the marginalization of the Dalit community and investigates the connections among caste, the natural world, environmental imagination, and the Dalits. Using Dalit autobiographies written in a variety of languages and geographical contexts, this study sheds light on a hitherto untapped facet of Dalit literature while also expanding the range and viewpoint of environmental writing. Nature's beauty and caste burden, space and identity, land and bondage, social injustice and environmental "othering," are all highlighted in this essay via the perspective of eco-literature, eco-criticism, and eco-justice. It examines the anguish and stigmatization, as well as the vitality and energy, in Dalit eco-narratives of the self by weaving together selected topics including the beauty of nature, caste exploitation, labor, and animals.

**Sibanga et.al (2019)** This research was an ecofeminist analysis of three autobiographies written by black women (Wangari Maathai's *Unbowed: A Memoir* (UM) (2007), Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), and Lydia Shaketange's *Walking the Boeing 707* (2008)). In literary studies, the human-

nature connection is still substantially unexplored, especially in Africa. This pairing is not coincidental, but rather the result of a deliberate worldview and way of life. The interdependence of human and non-human nature is increasingly worthy of serious discussion. Based on the ecofeminism theoretical framework, this research examined the depiction of women and environment in black African women authors' autobiographical and semiautobiographical works. The research was framed by ecofeminism, which investigates links between women's dominance and nature's dominance. This research was based on the solid groundwork created by a thorough literature assessment and consultation of other relevant sources. Since this was a qualitative desktop study, the researchers used content analysis. There was zero field research. The study that led to the conclusions showed that the primary goal and all of the sub-goals had been met. The research found almost identical outcomes, meaning that the cultures were mostly patriarchal, especially in the cases of UM and NC. The struggles Maathai endures throughout the book are indicative of the harsh character of the society in which she lives. Tambu, Maiguru, and Nyasha, the protagonists of NC, are all victims of patriarchy and the colonial system's viciousness. Since they have nowhere to go, the novel's female protagonists are figuratively and practically enslaved by the system they have helped create. It is recommended in the paper that future research include a wider variety of texts, including those that address environmental concerns and elements of women's oppression. This might help ecofeminist ideas spread.

## **ORIGIN OF THE MOVEMENT**

French feminist Simone de Beauvoir is widely regarded as the movement's pioneering ecofeminist. She argues that it is not merely material gains that motivate people to go forward with progress; rather, she points to psychological incentives and considerations as being just as important.

'Mother Earth' may have been the inspiration for this ecofeminist rhetoric. Until patriarchy established its dominant framework based on a hierarchy of the high and the low in which women were viewed as inferior to males, most early faiths thought of God in feminine terms. Through the indigenous traditions practiced in separate faiths, a belief in the superiority of males was insidiously imbibed into the minds and consciences of the people, mainly men, and spread across practically all communities throughout the globe. It opened the door for decades of systematic abuse of women's labor. Whether or not they were spouses, the women who were viewed and objectified as sex objects were nonetheless the mothers, the caregivers, and the most selfless members of society because of the roles they played in their families and communities. Carl Jung's brilliant student Eric Newman wrote an extensive book titled *Great Mother* in which he discussed the 'great mother' and her connections to the natural world. One additional canonical work in this vein is *The Return of the Goddess* by Edward Vieland.

However, it is argued that ecofeminism shouldn't be conflated with a project that aims to merely revive and rejuvenate the old agenda on a religious plane that became a grand cause to glorify women and use their services by making them sentimental and exploiting them in the name of the respective Goddesses.

In 1972, French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne launched a new initiative dubbed the "Ecology, Feminism Center," which is often seen as the beginning of the ecofeminism movement. She wrote the seminal book *Feminism or Death* in 1974. To describe women's potential and role in bringing about an ecological revolution, she coined the term "ecofeminism." To save the world and rebuild it for a better future, the author argues in a chapter titled "The Time for Ecofeminism," we must save it from the male progeny. There is no hope for humanity's future if we don't accomplish this. Put another way, in her own words:

"The planet placed in the feminine will flourish for all."

It is common knowledge that as the 'patriarchalization' project took hold in societies throughout the globe, males gained control over not just women but also the earth's fertility and the means by which it was produced. As a result, phallocracy became synonymous with the problems caused by a growing population and the environmental disaster that results from the resulting stress on the planet's finite resources.

### **THE MAJOR PREMISES OF ECOFEMINISM**

The guiding concept of ecofeminism is that all life on Earth, in all its variety and richness, is of equal worth to human life. It is opposed to using wealth for one's own hedonistic gratification, save in the case of meeting basic requirements. It cares for nonhuman life in and of itself, not only in terms of what we can get out of it. It takes issue with what it sees as men's overbearing meddling in the affairs of women and the nonhuman world. (in the sense that they are feminine, liberated, and sexual). It urges scientists and academics to reconsider the ways in which their ideas about women and the environment have led to harmful effects on fundamental ecological systems and cultural norms. Instead than prioritizing increased material comforts and a dedication to environmental practice, this philosophy seeks to develop a worldview based on the principles of equality, sustainability, and quality of life.

Since its inception, ecofeminism has been the subject of several interpretations and schools of thought. The ethos of the phrase varies widely, depending on the context in which it is used and the ideology that is being referred to. When seen from a more nuanced perspective, however, ecofeminism becomes clear as an effort to go beyond the simplistic binaries that have been drawn between the fights for women's rights and environmental justice. One of the main goals of this

movement is to find ways in which women's dominance over the natural world might be achieved on a global scale, and from there, if at all feasible, to find solutions to this problem. The same logic might serve as ecofeminism's guiding principle.

Ecofeminism's leading leaders in India, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, say:

Theory and practice within ecofeminism are seen as interdependent and integral parts of a totality. (The notion completeness relates to man's devotion to nature as a whole and his feeling of belonging to the natural). Vandana Shiva considers corporate warriors' (MNCs') destruction of the planet and humanity, as well as the danger of nuclear annihilation by military warriors, to be feminist issues. For her, it's evidence of a male-dominated ideology that suppresses women's agency over their own bodies and sexualities. Shiva says it's because of the numerous oppressive social and political structures in place.

When it comes to solving the difficulties that contemporary societies face, no one country can do it alone; ecofeminism addresses the concerns of both women and the environment by contrasting utilitarian ideology with postmodern consumerism. Issues related to women and the environments are being addressed from a number of theoretical vantage points. It is widely held that proponents of "deep ecology" and "nature feminism" see all forms of life as fundamentally equal to humans (what some call "radical egalitarianism"). In toto, many people oppose human-centered perspectives. The ground-breaking *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered* (1989) by George Sessions is a prime example. This line of thinking has a number of flaws, one of the most significant being its disregard for social justice. Even if there is much discourse, people are unable to develop workable answers to the issues at hand. Thus, the label "environmentalism of the poor" persists.

### **ECOFEMINIST APPROACH IMPLICATIONS**

As the means of reproduction, care, and nurture necessary for the well-being of the society as a whole, this perspective urges us to maintain respect for Nature and Women as caring moms.

Women, like Nature, are celebrated for their resilience, generosity, and generosity.

Women are the ideal role models because they show their children how to love and care for others, how to sacrifice for others, and how to appreciate the natural environment (both living and nonliving). The survival of the international community is seen as dependent on upholding these ideals. The goal of an ecofeminist approach is to make people feel responsible for their own pain, which is the result of patriarchal, social, and political ideas as well as artificial categories

of class, caste, gender, and race that have been created to serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful.

### **AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DALIT WOMEN: MAJOR TITLES**

Here are a few examples of Dalit women who, if not prolific, have at least written works of autobiography and poetry, some of which have been translated into English and are on the verge of publication.

#### **Autobiographies**

Mukta Salwe, a young lady from the Mang group, has written what could be the first unwritten autobiography of an Indian woman.

1. *The Prisons We Broke* is the English translation of Baby Kamble's "Jeena Amucha." April Narkar,
2. "I Follow After" is the literal translation of Laximbai Tilak's "Smritichitre." Josephine Inkster's Translation.
3. *The Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* of Shantabai Kamble
4. Beginning with a description of the desolate terrain of the Konkan area, Urmila Pawar's "Aayadan," translated (by Maya Narkar) as *The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*, sets the tone for the rest of the book.
5. The situation of Dalit women was made public through Mukta Sarvagod's "Closed Doors" (Mitlelei Kavade).

All of the aforementioned books are written by women of the Dalit group who have experienced extreme hardships such as poverty, hopelessness, oppression, and hate at the hands of the upper caste. All of the hardships and triumphs described in these memoirs are real since the writers themselves have experienced them. They have a special bond with the locals and the place they've called home for as long as they can remember. They saw themselves as an integral part of the natural world, together with all other forms of life and nonlife. Family members often had to resort to eating the flesh of dead animals or rely on the stale food provided by the upper class. They valued the flesh of the dead more than the "value added" food that the Savarnas relied on for sustenance. All the aforementioned books could not possibly be reviewed. For illustration's sake, maybe this analogy will help to illustrate the point.

#### **The Autobiographies of Upper Caste Women and the Dalit Women: A Comparative View**

Women of the upper caste tend to focus on their own families and concerns, whereas Dalit women tend to focus on issues affecting their larger community. The members of their family make up the whole of their social circle. Dalit women's exploitation is multifaceted and mechanized by both internal and external agencies; caste women's protests against stereotypical patriarchal domination and exploitation from within their own community are recorded at the interpersonal level.

In contrast to the caste women who are shown as pursuing equality, individual freedom, modification, advancement, and liberation, the Dalit women are represented as anonymous and faceless.

Dalit women are expected to relinquish their 'self-respect' and 'bodies,' which are seen as public property, in contrast to caste women, who are respected for their individuality.

An autobiography, *Joothan* was written by Dalit author Om Prakash Valmiki. Arun Prabha Mukherjee did the translation from the original Hindi publication. Specifically, it examines the ways in which Dalits are marginalized in three key areas: the workplace and in the classroom. Valmiki describes three minor Dalit tribes, the Chuhras, the Chamar, and the Jhinwar, who were exploited by those of higher castes. A *Joothan* is a little of leftovers, or a crumb of food. In order to survive, the lower classes relied on the leftovers of the upper classes. The first section examines the daily struggles of the Dalit people. Their living conditions were unsanitary, dangerous, and depressing. A body of water separated their home from that of the ruling class. The economic downturn is mirrored in the low status of the positions they were given. They served the higher castes by sweeping floors, cleaning out stables, and tending to the animals. They labored for pay or free at times, but they never spoke out against the ruling elite for fear of retaliation. Neither they nor their families could afford a decent supper. There was a chance to get an education, but nobody was let in. Abuse, humiliation, and penalties substituted education and training for those who did make it into classrooms. Separate seating was allotted for them to ensure their privacy. Not even a mat could be used to sit on by these people. Their fight was like that. The hardships Valmiki endured through no fault of his own are highlighted in his writing.

## **AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN DALIT LITERATURE**

There were many different ethnicities and faiths represented among the vast population that inhabited India. Most major religious traditions—including Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity—have established clear-cut dominating sects. Most of these groups had really attempted to effect societal change, but they had been unsuccessful. Because of this, several different schools



of thought emerged on Indian canvas. The religious beliefs of one group were challenged by another group who were adamant about maintaining the status quo. Alterations to the manner of life were required by another group. Change throughout the 19th and 20th centuries was given more weight as a result. This divides people into exploiter and exploited groups in society. Christianity and Buddhism are the only two Indian religions that show any compassion for the untouchables, often known as Dalits. In contrast, Hindu culture places a premium on religious devotion, sacred scriptures, and rituals known as *rushimuniyas*. Despite being a part of the Hindu faith, the Dalits are not respected. For this reason, works by Dalit authors tend to use a vocabulary and style distinct from those of classical and early modern texts. They speak their native tongue, which is derided as primitive by more modern authors. The history of the Dalit people is an intriguing topic for contemporary authors. As a result, they adopt the language and dialect of their ancestors without making any changes to it. Dalit emotions are a product of the Dalit language. There is just no such phrase in any other language. The culture of the Dalits is defined by the Dalit way of life and the Dalit tongue.

This literature serves as a powerful tool for the Dalit struggle since it is a protest literature that accurately portrays the real-life experiences of Dalits. Chokhamela, a Bhakti poet from Maharashtra, was familiar with the first Dalit writer. Writings by and about Dalits, as the word is used now, first appeared in print in the nineteenth century, mostly in regional Indian languages. Dalit literature in the contemporary age was given a boost in Maharashtra by Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Ambedkarist thinking remains the driving force behind most Dalit writing.

“It is disgraceful to live at the cost of one’s self respect. Self-respect is most vital in life. Without it man is a chipher to live worthily with respect one has to overcome difficulties. It is out of hard and ceaseless struggle alone that one derives strength confidence and recognition.”

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

The Dalits, a social group marginalized by the rigid caste system, are the subject of a distinct literary genre known as Dalit literature. Sekkizhar’s *Periya Puranam*, written in the 11th century, depicts Dalit women as half-naked and sexually exploitable and praises the massacre of thousands of Dalits on Kazhumaram at the hands of Gnasambandan. This is only one example of how Dalit tales have been a part of Indian societal narratives for centuries. After 1960, there was a dramatic emergence of Dalit literature as a single, collective voice expressed in poetry, short stories, and memoirs written in a variety of languages, beginning with Marathi and progressing through Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Tamil. The similarities between the two genres are most obvious in the depiction of African Americans and the prevalence of racial prejudice and discrimination in the Slave tales.

## CONCLUSION

Since untouchability is embedded into the caste system, it cannot be diminished without first eliminating the caste system altogether. An outstanding leader of the outcastes, Dr. Ambedkar himself endured untouchability at the hands of upper-caste Hindus in his day. The authors of autobiographies make it abundantly evident how much social pressure shapes their daily lives. No sympathy for oneself may be detected. This is his objective, first-hand account. The materialistic fight for money. Dalit literature is a kind of literary protest against oppression of any kind, including but not limited to class, race, caste, and/or occupation. The current research on autobiographies explores topics such as protesting voices, identities, conflicts, and awareness.

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