



## **Echoes of Oppression: Women and the Mother Earth in Kashwar Naheed's**

### **Poetry**

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#### **Abstract**

The research explores the parallel relationship between women's oppression and the exploitation of nature. Grounded in Susan Griffin's theory of ecofeminism, the study critically examines the *Selected Poetry of Kishwar Naheed* translated by Derek M. Cohem and Baidar Bakht. Focusing on the internal conflicts of women and the physical exploitation of nature, the study interprets that women experience a deep identification with nature, as both are subjected to domination and commodification. Utilizing qualitative textual analysis, the study focuses on literary devices to show how literary symbols reflect both environmental degradation and the marginalization of women. Juxtaposing Naheed's poetry with the ecofeminist stance, the study highlights the role of patriarchal society in the exploitation of marginalized beings like the female gender and nature. In this way, the research seeks to uncover ecofeminist perspectives in lesser-studied poetry by women writers from the Global South, demonstrating how the textual portrayal of nature and women can challenge and resist systems of commodification and control.

**Keywords:** Eco-Feminism, Gender Oppression, Exploitation of Nature, Patriarchal Regimes

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## **Introduction**

The study navigates the maltreatment and interconnected relationship between female gender and nature in Naheed's poetry through the lens of Susan Griffin's theory of ecofeminism. In the context of Griffin's ecofeminism, the text traces the relationship between women and nature because they both face abusive treatment from a male-dominated society. Naheed compared darker natural imagery, like death and night, with the female gender. In postcolonial Pakistan, Naheed, as an indigenous poet, exposes the exploitation of marginalized communities and challenges the erasure of the female narrative in Pakistani literature, emphasizing how the female body is persistently denounced in male-dominated writing (Ramiz, 2023).

As a marginalized gender, women's perspectives are essential to capturing the complexity of internal conflicts. Naheed's poetry reveals these inner struggles and turns to nature for solace, drawing parallels between the oppression faced by women and the exploitation of nature in a patriarchal society. In the ecofeminist narrative, nature is regarded as Mother Earth, a nurturing force that provides comfort to humanity, particularly to women.

The research aims to determine how the oppression of women is intertwined with the objectification of nature. The condition of the same oppression and exploitation creates an intimate bond of friendship between nature and woman. Phallogocentric society suppressed women to maintain its control over them. The male gender is considered superior to women and animals, and that's why men treat women and nature as inferior beings (Griffin 1998). Griffin argues that whenever a woman raises her head, she is reminded of the tradition. The grass mower highlights Griffin's concept of raising the head. A mower cuts the grass when grass grows, which means a grass mower cuts grass heads when they rise. Naheed sketches the feelings of a woman with the exploitation of ecology. The patriarchal system shaped and controlled females as well as nature.



She compares the male appearance with the horrific objects and causes of psychological trauma of women. The research highlights the shared qualities of grief and friendship between the woman and ecology.

The study is guided by the research question concerning the type of connection Naheed creates with nature and the kind of subordinate behavior shared between nature and women. The research paper analyzes the intersection of women and nature, as they both are marginalized. Naheed exposes the harmful effects of societal expectations and injustices on women. She used many natural images, such as moulted wax, night, and deadly water, to convey the woman's internal conflicts and their similar resemblance to nature. Men are not closely associated with nature, as they do not experience the forms of marginalization and deprivation endured by women and nature. A woman develops both internal and external bonds with nature, finding comfort in its presence and engaging with it as a confidant.

Earlier research on Naheed's poetry has been done on the Marxist, political, and religious discourse. All topics of female existence and political discourse in the era of Zia-ul-Haq have been explored in Naheed's poetry. All the above-mentioned discourses, which reveal the exploitation of women by men and political systems, interrogate the very existence of women in Naheed's poetry (Haleem, 2023). The following research significantly enhances the understanding of Naheed's poetry with a novel interpretation of Eco-feminism in the context of Pakistani patriarchal society through the female narrative by conducting a deep analysis of literary devices and symbols. The research project contributed to the new perspective of a woman's relationship with nature as a healer and friend. The research's findings will contribute to the discourse of female existence and its similarity with the ecosystem because the exploitation of women and nature is now a major concern of the literary canon. The study can expand the



theoretical lens about the interconnectedness of females and nature through which Pakistani indigenous narrative poetry can be interpreted.

### **Methodology and Frameworks**

The article presents an in-depth analysis of Kishwar Naheed's poetry. Susan Griffin's theory of eco-feminism is used as a theoretical framework to trace the interconnectedness between women and nature. The primary text used for this study is the '*Selected Poetry of Kishwar Naheed translated by Derek M. Cohem and Baidar Bakht*'. Naheed's poetry showcases the marginalized situation of women in a patriarchal society. Griffin's theory showcases the close relationship of the female gender with nature. The study highlights the resemblance between the exploitation of the female gender and the degradation of nature. The study traces instances of parallel connections between women and nature through literary devices, while also examining how patriarchal society shapes both the female body and nature to conform to male-dominated expectations. The object of the study is to identify patterns or trends in Naheed's poetry to explore how it reflects marginalized perspectives, ecological narratives, and patriarchal regimes.

### **Literature Review**

Naheed extensively wrote against Gen. Zia's regime. Zia has promoted the concept of militant Islam and changed the entire nation into a group of fanatics (Qasim, 2023). Women faced subjugated treatment from the patriarchal society and writings. In male-centered writings, women are always portrayed as a bad omen and villains (Ramiz, 2023). However, the female narratives respond to the patriarchal society. Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz write against the state oppression and patriarchal suppression of the female gender. Naheed creates a separate



bond between ecology and suppression. She connected patriarchal regimes with the marginalization of females and nature at the same time.

The history of the subjugation of women and nature is as old as the history of the universe itself, and eco-feminists have been criticizing gender inequality and environmental injustice since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Batool, 2023). Women and nature both are considered nourishment for humanity, and in return, they get the fury of patriarchal society. Furthermore, in a patriarchal society, the male gender is considered superior to all other genders. In contrast to the patriarchal trend, Naheed chooses the topic of resistance against female marginalization in every sphere. She highlights the role of the female gender in society and her connection with nature. Women need to be recognized as decision-makers, not decision receivers, and nature should be free and not be guarded by society (Susan, 2016). Griffin's theory of eco-feminism argues for the separation of nature and women from the male gender. Naheed also demands the separation of the female gender from the male.

Rosemarie Tong, in her *Ecofeminist Perspective of Woman and Nature*, highlights that women are treated as naturalized and nature is treated as feminized. The woman is naturalized when she is treated as a cow, bitch, old bat, cat, snake, etc., and nature is feminized when she is worshipped as the greatest mother of humanity (Tong, 2022). There is a close-knit relationship between women and nature, and they are interchangeable and interconnected with each other. Whatever humans do to nature, they also do it to women. Eco-feminist demands the liberation of both classes because one relies on the other. Tong argues that eco-feminists should strengthen women's attachment to nature. Naheed also establishes the link between women and nature through her poetry.



## **Results and Discussion**

### **Similar Ways of Exploitation**

Patriarchal society exploits women in the name of tradition and exploits nature in the name of beauty. Griffin highlights the 'pairs ecology and gender' and 'draws a connection between the oppression of women and degradation of the environment'. The depiction of grass and mower follows the Griffin aspects of 'pair ecology and gender'. The grass is used as a metaphor for the female, and the mower symbolizes the male gender. Naheed mentioned that "The grass is like a woman, whenever it lifts its head, the mower cuts it down, softening it into velvet, just as a woman lowers her head each time she dares to raise it." (*The grass is like me*, p.140). Through this metaphor, she captures the persistent suppression of women's agency under patriarchal dominance. As soon as grass raises its head, mowers cut its head off.

Correspondingly, the females do not have the power to raise their voices against the patriarchal society, just like the grass cannot grow longer. The poetess mirrors herself with the grass and examines whether the grass is really like her. They both cannot live according to their choices. Ecofeminist criticizes the male gender, and Naheed also gives cruel attributes to the male gender. The mower is a symbol of cruelty and fake promises. He abuses the grass under the name to make it more beautiful, like velvet. The female notices her reflection in every piece of nature. The rising head symbolizes the resistance of both nature and women against the harmful patriarchal system.

*The Ocean is Just a Tear* projects Griffin's ecofeminist view of the exploitation of a female and nature by the patriarchal society. Griffin highlights the parallelism in the sequence of natural order and female life span. The poetess compares a decade of her life to a season, writing,



“I have witnessed all seasons of my life; my fate was like a night and descended drop by drop to the fireplace, yet it still smiled amidst the burning logs” (p. 198). The season symbolizes the ups and downs of her life, and it explains the strong bond of a female with the Earth. The tree and the woman are exploited, but no one takes care of them. Griffin, as an ecofeminist, explains that nature and females both bear violence and physical torture from the patriarchal society. In the poem, night symbolizes the horrific downfall, and the dry roots of the tree symbolize the body without a soul.

Women have endured life in a male-dominated society for years, much like a trunkless tree standing on bare ground. The poetess draws a parallel between the trunkless tree and the tormented woman, suggesting that both trees and women are violated by society and now stand together like siblings. The fireplace served as a metaphor for a male-dominated society, while the burning logs symbolized the female life journey. Through the eyes of Griffin’s ecofeminism, the poem shows that women, trees, fire, and logs are interlinked and face the same violence in the phallogocentric society

In *The Puppet Show*, Naheed draws a striking comparison between the worn-out soul of women and the beaten state of death and a dead fish. She writes, “death taking a bath in the river, her body is more beaten and sagging than a female, but her body seems shining like a fish in the water. Fish has a rendezvous with the net and fishermen, loses her beauty, and becomes old” (*The Puppet Show*, p. 416). The use of personification in the poems creates more pathetic effects. Poetess gives the human attributes of bathing to death and creates a link between beaten death and a torn female body. The net symbolizes the patriarchal chains, and the fish symbolizes the female body. The fisherman is portrayed as a destroyer of nature and a female. Nature and women are helpless in front of a male-dominated society.



The fish exploited in the water and female troubles in the phallogocentric society.

Moreover, the poetess gives natural references to show the submissive relationship between eco and feminism. The fisherman does not allow fish to live long; he puts his net into the water and steals the freedom of a fish. Likewise, society kept the female in the patriarchal net where the female has no liberty to live according to her choice. The poetess used visual imagery like death takes baths, beaten bodies, and shining fish to highlight the ill-treatment of the patriarchal system of the marginalized communities, including animals and females.

### **Intimate Relationship between Women and Nature**

Anthropomorphism is used to elaborate on the affectionate relationship between the poetess and the night. Griffin concludes that women have a more intimate relationship with nature. The portrayal of the poetess's encounter with the night reflects an intimate exchange: *"One day, night comes to my room and sits on the empty chair. Night laughs loudly and says that women have the misconception that they are incomplete without men, whether a male is made of stone or wood"* (Pepper on My Tongue, p. 504). Anthropomorphism is a literary device that gives human acting skills to non-human things. In the following stanza, night sits on the empty chair and starts talking to the poetess. The night symbolizes a guiding light that teaches her to look around her and think about the completeness of her soul. The night draws attention to the acceptance of violence and exploitation. The night mocks the woman who regards the male gender as her saviour, regardless of whether he is good or bad.

The poetess seeks liberation in nature. The tormented woman turns to nature to soothe her sufferings and struggles in life. The empty chair symbolizes the hollow space in the heart devoid of joy or pleasure. Any dreadful presence can occupy such emptiness, just as the night occupies the empty chair. This image reflects the inner void of a woman whose life revolves



solely around her husband. The laughter of the night signifies the closed-mindedness of women who remain within the confines of their comfort zones. Through this encounter, the night imparts a lesson of resistance, aligning with Griffin's view that both nature and women seek support and affection from one another.

The study traces the link between natural objects with the psychology of a woman, just like Griffin explains that the natural object is closely relatable to the female. The relationship between melted wax and pale women evokes a gothic effect, drawing attention to the fractured cognitive development of the female gender. Naheed writes, "I do not want to talk to a pale woman who is living inside me. I always ignore her, but she is like the wax of candlesticks. Whenever I try to throw her out, she is like molten wax, burnt by my fingers, leaving a spider's cobweb on them" (*Insomnia*, p. 412). This imagery conveys the persistent and painful presence of an oppressed self that cannot be easily discarded, mirroring the psychological entrapment of women in a patriarchal society. The heightened emotions describe the poetess meeting with the supernatural pale woman.

The pale woman symbolizes internal conflicts, desires, and fears, while the molten wax represents the inescapable patriarchal chains that prevent a woman from freeing herself from these fears and desires. The poetess attempts to cast away the pale woman, a manifestation of her inner horrors, but the molten wax burns her fingers. Suppressed emotions and societal pressures take a toll on the woman's mental health. Bound by the dictates of a phallogentric society, the poetess is unable to free herself from the pale woman. In *Insomnia*, the poetess compares her fingers to autumn-smitten branches, her tears to water, and wax to sea foam. The verses establish parallel connections between women and nature through imagery.



Griffin's ecofeminism navigates the earth as a motherly figure that satisfies the needs of women. In the poem *Before Turning to Dust*, Naheed seeks refuge in Mother Earth by envisioning herself transformed into poisoned water: "I want to make friendship with death. I want to turn my life into poison water, and you take the life of Methuselah; I prefer death over life" (558). Naheed demands poisonous water to remove all her worries and sacrifice her life. The poetess shows respect for death, as Griffin shows the interconnectedness of women with nature. Allusion is used in the poem to refer to Methuselah (Khizar Hayat).

Methuselah symbolizes long life, and every man wishes to live long. On the contrary, women do not want to live longer. The poetess describes the desire of a man who wants to live and fight against cancer. A woman, on the other side, refuses to live anymore. The woman does not wish for a long life, as her existence is fraught with hardship. The poetess contrasts poisoned water with honey and milk, suggesting that what is typically seen as poison is, for her, a soothing balm for the soul. By drinking it, she will embrace mortality. While poisoned water is considered harmful to men, it becomes a source of liberation for women.

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of Kishwar Naheed's selected poems through the lens of ecocriticism unveils a profound interplay between the female experience and the natural world. Women and elements of nature, grass, fish, wax, trees, and fire are united by a common narrative of oppression under patriarchal power structures. Vivid metaphors and striking visual imagery portray internal and external struggles of women, aligning them with the exploitation of nature. In doing so, Naheed not only criticizes the phallogentric order but also reclaims the female voice within literary discourse. The male is portrayed as an exploiter, and the poetess gives the first place to the woman and nature. Phallogentric society is metaphorically presented as a jungle full



of animals, and the female is presented as a peacock or a cutting green grass. Research on the experience of the female gender through interconnectedness with nature may enhance the ecofeminist narrative in the Indigenous poetry of the global south. The study develops the merging of Griffin's idea of ecofeminism with Naheed's notion of body politics. By blending personal, political, and ecological concerns, she challenges the invisibility imposed on women and nature. Future scholars are encouraged to engage the different works of Pakistani Urdu poetry with the Western narrative of Griffin's Eco-feminism to enhance the perspective of women and nature in indigenous poetry.



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