



# “A STUDY ON ECOFEMINISM IN ALWAYS COMING HOME BY URSULA LE GUINN”

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**Abstract:** This study aims to attempt an exploration on Ecofeminism with reference to the novel Always Coming Home by Ursula Le Guinn. Ecofeminism intends to confront feminism to scrutinize complication which troubles nature. Francis D’ Eaubonne is the one who coined the term Ecofeminism in the year 1974. Ecofeminism refers to the relationship between the exploitation and dominance of women in patriarchal society. The novel adopted for this study is an American novel “Always Coming Home” by Ursula Le Guinn. It portrays the story of a young girl whose parents belong to two different cultural groups. The selected book is a perfect example for ecofeminism as it brings out two major concerns as ecology and feminism.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Nature, Women, Patriarchy, Exploitation.

Although Literature has seen so many nature and literature combination, still environmental crisis prevails in the works of writers who are conscious of this situation. The movements related to preserve nature and the organization which are against environmental destruction are seen in many works which raises environmental concerns.

People are becoming increasingly worried about nature and human interference with the environment as a result of steady deterioration of earth on a global scale. Historical causes are one of the main reason for degradation of nature. Specifically, Colonization and Mechanization were the beginning causes for exploitation of nature. The revolution in science is a period of transformation that alters human lifestyle. People have used nature for their benefit for ages since Western Civilization is predicted on the notion of dominance and exploitation. White European men legitimize the plunder of people and environment under the guises of “culture” and “progress”. Western culture have contributed to the current ecological problems.

The proponents of 20<sup>th</sup> century view nature as a nonliving entity that nature should utilized only for the purpose of human benefit. The ecological catastrophe of today is largely the result of usage of high rate of exorbitant natural resources results in such ecological calamity.

To Western society, “nature” is meant to be wild and primitive, whereas “culture” is meant for advancement and progress. Human perceive that everything is tolerable for the progress of human life and nature is just a medium to use for their betterment.

The ideology of man towards degrading nature has resulted in massive destruction to the world. People those who care for nature began organizing movements in order to preserve nature. They began trying to create awareness to society through their movements. Ecological awareness was highlighted by focusing on the subjects of environmental crisis and possible disasters.

As there is a development of people who is concerned for nature, the ecological thinking resulted into a theory called “Ecocriticism” in scholarly world. Eco critics who study Ecocriticism investigates the interrelation of nature and human and their mutual involvement. Nowadays, many writers select subjects related to ecological concerns as it is becoming significant day by day.

Ecofeminism which is a contemplation of nature and feminism is an important theory similar to Ecocriticism. The focus of Ecofeminism is that there is a huge association between oppression of women and oppression of nature. Ecofeminism emphasizes the need for a more integrated perception by arguing that both women and earth are dominated.

The Ecofeminist movements by women were made in 1970’s which became very popular and it helped women to write about environmental issues. The female writers chose environmental related content in their writing in order to showcase their concern towards nature. Therefore, most of the women writer adopted ecofeminist theory. Books related to ecofeminism were published.

Significantly, American women writers were conscious towards the ecological calamity and elicited the ecological problems through American literature. The female writers through their writing denounced that nature and women are considered as “inferior”. Through Le Guinn’s writing it is evident that inequality prevails in Western societies as well. Mc Andrew states that “the destruction of the environment and the oppression of women are easy to do because nature, and women have been objectified as ‘others’” (369).

The present study propagates the idea of equality of genders and equality of all living and non- living things on earth should be accepted and treated alike. The novel adopted for the study is “Always Coming Home” by Ursula Le Guinn, an American women writer. Le Guinn is well known for her ecological writings.

The novel’s main theme is on repressed women and nature’s subordination to men, as well as emphasizing patriarchal culture. Through the adventures of the protagonist Stone Telling the story explores two distinct realms of Kesh and Condor community. It also explores the relationship between women and environment. Moreover, “Always Coming Home” deals with feminist and ecological concerns and showcases the consequences of domination of women and nature.

This paper is an attempt to legitimize human respect for the land and comprehend the interconnection of all life. It aims to illuminate cultural differences through an Ecofeminist perspective.

The novel narrates the tale of a girl whose parents are from quite different cultural backgrounds. Stone Telling, the main character lived with her mother in her village, Kesh which is her mother’s community. When Story Telling was young she met her father, with whom she had been estranged, and she made the decision to move in with him in his community named Condor. The narrative takes place in a post-apocalyptic time. Kesh and Condor the societies depicted in the fiction are two very distinct cultural groups. Respect for the interdependence of all things in nature is ingrained in the Kesh culture, where the protagonist is raised. Gender discrimination does not exist in Kesh Culture. They hold all living and non-living things on Earth in the highest regard. The Kesh people coexist peacefully with the natural world and view all living things as equal to humans. Therefore, the foundation of Kesh Culture is equality of gender and human culture.

On the contrary, the Condors have a system of servitude and a patriarchal civilization. When Story Telling grows fond of her father and was curious to know about his lifestyle among the Condor people she moved in with her father. She was asked to learn about their culture as well. In Condor community, equality of gender does not exist. Nature is only a passive entity that may be controlled and used to promote Condor advancement. Story Telling moves in with her father and the Condors. Her journey and her discovery that the Condor community is rife with inequalities was a great shock for her.

Story Telling began to face major struggles after moving in with her father. Because the life she is living with her father in the Condor community is extremely different from that of Kesh Community. She is offended to witness the happenings in Condor community where women and nature are disrespected. Coming from a peaceful ambience with Kesh people, Story Telling could not accept the lifestyle of Condor people. However, she spends a lot of time with Condors, which aids in the development of Story Telling's traits. Thus, the novel unfolds the story of a girl's personal development and maturation in two distinct cultures.

The experiences of the protagonist in the two culturally distinct civilizations highlight the book's two main concerns- feminism and ecology. Always Coming Home is a prime example of ecofeminist criticism. Condor culture's patriarchal and controlling views towards women and environment damage not just the earth but also their livelihood. But Kesh culture is harmonious coexistence with nature and gender equality protect them from ecological catastrophes. Le Guinn intends to illustrate the perils of patriarchy and the way the opposing system ensures humanity's peaceful existence by presenting these two societies in her book.

Kesh people respect nature. They do farming and they consider animals as significant living beings for their living. They don't possess unnecessary supplies other than their basic needs. They disapprove of persons who always have extraneous items at home and criticize if they do have more possession. The narrator states that:

The Kesh idea of property was so different from ours that any mention of it entails explanations. What one made, or gained, or owned, in the valley, belonged to one; but one belonged to one's House, and house, and town, and people. Wealth consisted not in things but in an act: the act of giving. (117)

Everything on the planet is alive. In Kesh society, non- humans are treated with utmost dignity as humans. They believe the natural calamities are the result of hazardous behavior of humans towards nature. Humans deserve the consequences resulted in calamities. The narrator says that,

The people of Valley did not conceive that such acts as they saw and felt much evidence of in their world—the permanent desolation of vast regions through release of radioactive or poisonous substances, the permanent genetic impairment from which they suffered most directly in the form of sterility, stillbirth, and congenital disease—had not been deliberate. In their view, human beings did not do things accidentally. Accidents happened to people, but what people did they were responsible for. So those things human beings had done to the world must have been deliberate and conscious acts of evil, serving the purposes of wrong understanding, fear and greed. The people who had done these things had done wrong mindfully. They had had their heads on wrong. (167)

The Condor (also known as Dayao) people who are the other community in the novel, exhibit, the exact opposite traits of the Kesh people. In Condor community, all women are slaves and they are closed inside their house by highly patriarchal men of Condor. These men are warriors. Story Telling's father is one such warrior named "Abhao" which means 'kills'. Condors are nomadic and dwell wherever they find rich land. They always travel in quest of fresh resources and sustenance. Exploitation of nature is the foundation of Condor community.

The Condor people seem to have been unusually self-isolated; their form of communication with other peoples was through aggression, domination, exploitation, and enforced acculturation. In this respect they were at a distinct disadvantage among the introverted but cooperative peoples native to the region. (404)

The people in Condor culture takes advantage of anything beneficial for themselves. Condors compel other societies to submit to them, with the help of technology and military forces. They had similar ideas about women, children and slaves as they think nature. Education is restricted to women rather, they are supposed to just involve themselves in household activities. Men doing any household chores as what women does is considered as a disgrace for Condor men. They consider farming as an inferior occupation. Abhao's expresses his disrespect for earth when he visits Willow and his daughter. He states,

.Blue clay, red clay, what does it matter!" he said. "Any fool can dig black mud!"

My mother sat spinning awhile and said at last; "That's crazy talk."

She laughed again. "If any fool can, why can't you, my dear?"

My father said stiffly. "I am not a tyon."

"What is that?"

"A man who digs dirt."

"A farmer"

"I'm not a farmer, Willow. I am a commander of three hundred, in charge of an army, I am—There are things a man can do and cannot do. Surely you understand that!" (33)

Condors are advanced in technology. They use advanced technology as a powerful tool to exploit nature. The narrator describes their technology as,

"[m]etals and

other raw materials needed for their physical plants and technical experimentation were mined by their robot extensions in poisoned areas or on the moon and other planets; this exploitation seems to have been as careful as it was efficient" (157)

Since the Condor are in quest of new supplies for the Condor community Abhao, brings his army to Kesh to take away benefits from nature. The Condors plan to construct a bridge in their valley is fiercely opposed by the Kesh people, who believe it is unnecessary and could go against the laws of nature. However, the Condor people are unable to understand that it is improper to destroy environment. Condors believe that the bridge will benefit them personally, so they don't mind about the nature. The overpopulation and overconsumption of condors is another factor that forces them to constantly relocate.

There are two different kinds of cities Condor people live. They are City of Mind "Yaikach", the other City of Man "Takach". The task of Yaikach is to exchange information among themselves. They depend more on technology. As this is made by man, they believe that there is nothing superior to humans. On the other hand, Tavkach, the city of man lives a rigid patriarchal lifestyle focused on controlling slaves and women. They view women as the lesser gender, just as they view animals as lower species. Men, Women, animals are considered inanimate objects and insignificant. Women are exclusively viewed as men's servants in this in this patriarchal society.

Story Telling's name is changed into "Ayatyu" meaning "woman born above others" (198). Living a normal life with Condor people is impossible for Ayatyu. According to her, men could not oppress Condor women if they did not permit it. She states,

“[t]here is no way that men could make women into slaves and dependents if the women did not choose to be so. I had hated the Dayao men for always giving orders, but the women were more hateful for taking them” (377).

Ayatyu also receives harsh treatment by her father Abhao, and is ultimately forced to marry a condor man. She gives birth to a daughter and raises her in accordance with Kesh tradition. After seven years, she no longer endures Condor persecution and flees with her daughter to Kesh, her own community. In the end, the overcrowding and mistreatment of women and nature cause the Condor people to suffer from starvation and storage of food. Their domination and excessive exploitation of natural resources, which is a foundation of their community gets disappeared.

In Conclusion, Le Guinn demonstrates the distinction between the ecological and feminist system. Through Kesh and Condor culture, we can witness two extremes of perception towards nature. Kesh community people are serene and harmonious towards nature. They respect nature and nurture the environment they live in. On the other hand, Condor people exploit nature and believe that humans are superior to nature. To progress, they extensively use technology for finding materials and to kill nature.

Le Guinn reveals through her writing that a society cannot respect women if it does not respect nature. The destruction of Condor society proves that the exploitation of nature and subjugation of women will result to massive catastrophes. In order, to save the future of the earth, there must be a breakdown in hierarchies. Through analyzing the novel, “Always Coming Home” in an ecofeminist perspective it is evident that ecological problems and oppression of women exist in Western society as well. Exploitation of the nature and Domination doesn’t harm their own society rather affects the harmony of the whole world.

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