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Book Review

Dipak Giri (Ed.), *Woman-Nature Interface: An Ecofeminist Study*, Kolkata: AABS Publishing House, 2019, pp. 275, Rs. 899 (Hardback), ISBN: 978-93-88963-60-2

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In recent years, the resurgence of ecofeminism as a discipline has had a captivating influence and made significant contributions to its expanding field. In this context, the book *Woman-Nature Interface: An Ecofeminist Study* (2019), edited by Dipak Giri, stands out as a compelling anthology that delves into the intricate connections between women and nature through the lens of ecofeminism. This collection of essays presents a rich tapestry of perspectives, reflecting on how literature and cultural narratives have historically intertwined the fates of women and the natural world. Giri's compilation is timely and resonant in addressing the urgent ecological and gender issues of our era.

The foreword by Soumyajit Samanta sets the stage by quoting Adrienne Rich, emphasizing the intertwined experiences of women and nature. This introduction adeptly frames the book's central thesis, which integrates the parallels between narratives of women's lives and ecological health. Shaped by social orders and cultural contexts, the selected essays in this edited collection explore the conceptual link between ecological consciousness and humanity.

The anthology is divided into various thematic sections, each examining different facets of the woman-nature dynamic. The opening essay by Chinmayee Nanda analyzes Katherine Mansfield's "Prelude" (1918), illustrating the symbolic parallels between women's experiences and the natural world. Nanda's analysis underscores how the characters' relationships with their environment reflect broader societal dynamics. Sanjukta Bala's exploration of Arundhati Roy's "Folded Earth" and Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve" further enrich the discourse by juxtaposing these narratives against the backdrop of ecofeminist theory. Bala dissects the complex and dynamic relationships between women and nature, challenging simplistic and essentialist views. The joint article by Bhaskar Ch. Sarkar and Nabanita Barman examines Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) and K.R. Usha's



Monkey Man (2010). Their analysis underscores the exploitation of women and nature within Indian society, advocating for liberation from oppressive cultural constructs.

Mahendran U.'s essay on "Gone with the Wind" (1936) provides a nuanced view of the devastating impact of war on women and the environment. The author explores the traumatic experiences of women, the emotional connection between humans and nature, and the disruption of biodiversity due to the intense conflicts. Highlighting themes of patriotism and humanity, the chapter critiques the glorification of war and underlines the shared suffering of women and the land, advocating a compassionate and sustainable approach to addressing the consequences of war, while making it a valuable contribution to ecofeminist literature and offering insights into deeper themes of gender, ecology and humanity. Jyoti Biswas's examination of the Bengali ballad "Mahua the Gypsy Girl" provides a poignant analysis of the abundance of natural resources and the scenic interactions between nature and humans. This critical study explores how ballads and songs express a harmonious relationship with nature, reflecting the richness and joy found in gypsy culture through their daily acrobatic skills. Additionally, nature is portrayed as a witness to the love story and is analyzed as a maternal figure that nurtures and teaches her children, offering a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of human and our environmental experiences.

Parimal Kumar's study of Anita Desai's *In Custody* (1984) presents a grim picture of ecological imbalance and its impact on women's lives. The essay reveals how environmental degradation exacerbates the struggles of female characters, highlighting the necessity of ecological awareness and gender equity. Additionally, Kumar discusses the threats posed by natural imbalances, emphasizing the urgent need to address environmental issues to improve the conditions of women and ensure a more sustainable future. Shantanu Siuli's reconceptualization of ecofeminism bridges the gap between feminist and environmental ethics, advocating for a holistic approach to addressing the interconnected crises affecting our planet as well as its inhabitants. This theoretical essay stresses the moral imperative to integrate ecofeminist principles into broader ethical frameworks by emphasizing that feminism is also a movement to end naturism. Ecofeminism is structurally pluralistic and inclusivist, emerging from the voices of women who experience harmful domination. Siuli's work highlights the importance of incorporating diverse female perspectives to create a more comprehensive and equitable approach to environmental and gender issues.



Lucky Dey's chapter highlights the rising influence of ecofeminism in India. It critically examines the active participation of Indian women in environmental protection and natural resource management, advocating for their inclusion in policy and decision-making processes. The chapter concludes that for women's social and political situations to improve toward genuine empowerment, their methodical aptitude and propensity must be harnessed to effectively safeguard the environment.

Subhrajit Samanta's article provides a profound portrayal of nature and womanhood by comparing Shakespeare's Miranda with Shakuntala. The analysis delves into the concept of ashramas (places of exile) through the interface between nature and culture, exploring Indian natural metaphors found in rich religious texts like the Ramayana, the Kavyas of Asvaghosa, and Kalidasa's Kumarasambhava. The aranya (forest) is depicted as representing the natural, disordered, and wild, symbolizing the untamed aspects of human nature and the inner shades of human experience.

Atanu Ghosh, in his chapter, provides a critical insight into the feminization of agriculture, revealing that while women's increased involvement in farming was intended to enhance their economic independence, it has largely failed to improve their social status or decision-making power within the households. Despite their significant labor contribution, women remain economically dependent on male family members, and their increased workload has exacerbated their overall burden without achieving substantive gains in gender equality.

Guptajit Pathak's article highlights the crucial role of historical awareness in shaping the identity and resistance of Deori women in Assam, suggesting that a deeper and broader engagement with their historical knowledge could enhance their representation and self-recognition. Despite its importance, the study indicates that further efforts are needed to raise awareness and address taboos in order to harness potential of historical identity for community empowerment.

Dipak Giri's analysis of Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) effectively explores how Desai employs her characters to subvert traditional gender binaries and the nature/culture dichotomy. By juxtaposing the victimization of women with the exploitation of nature, Giri critiques both patriarchal and capitalist ideologies as depicted in the novel. Despite the challenges her characters face, their resistance against gendered stereotypes offers a transformative vision for future generations.



Therefore, the anthology delves into critical essays on numerous important topics, such as the impact of globalization on women and nature, the feminization of agriculture, and the role of ecofeminism in South Asian environmental movements. It provides a nuanced exploration of the complex relationship between women and nature, integrating literary analysis with theoretical insights. Particularly notable is the concept of *Eco family*, which integrates ecological principles within the family life to promote environmental sustainability and mutual well-being, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches to both environmental and familial dynamics. Additionally, the anthology's reference to Shakuntala and other significant epic poems of Indian culture, along with its discussions on environmental ethics and human responsibilities to the non-human environment, contribute novel perspectives to the discourse, addressing long-standing issues at the intersection of ecology and gender.

The conclusion to emerge is that the book *Woman-Nature Interface: An Ecofeminist Study* (2019) is both a thought-provoking and essential in the field of ecofeminism, literature, and cultural studies in South Asia. Dipak Giri has curated a valuable resource that not only highlights the critical intersections of gender and ecology but also calls for a (re)evaluation of how we understand and address the interrelated issues of women's bodies, identity, and natural functionalities. Evolving as a significant contribution to the field, this anthology fosters greater awareness and encourages further research and activism in ecofeminism and cultural studies. Despite minor limitations, the book's strengths make it a must-read for academic scholars interested in ecofeminism, environmental studies, and gender studies. Through its diverse and thought-provoking essays, the book not only advances academic discourse but also inspires readers to envision and work toward a more equitable and sustainable world.