

Eco Feministic and Ecological Facets in Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*

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Abstract

This present study portrays the eco feministic and ecological facets in Alice Walker's *The Temple of My Familiar*. Walker tries to bring out the real harmony of nature. She portrays the human nature towards the nature and giving the vision of coexistence. Walker believes that people can retrieve some of their past wisdom having connection with ancestry. So it is very necessary to have some link with ancestors and have past belief. If it is like that one will not lose their connections with relations. she shows that traditional female are so strong with their abilities. They are equipped with artistic talents, art forms and creating feathered capes. Forest is the vital resource of all living beings. If we are not protecting our forest our future generation will face the consequences of it. Alice Walker has given much priority to forest and Earth especially the nature. She obviously states that the Earth should be protected. The destruction of nature will bring harmful to the present and future living beings. She clearly implicit the basic lives of Africans, Native Americans and other tribal peoples of Ancient America. The lives of this people is being interconnected with nature and animals. Moreover women are connected with nature and they portrays the eco feministic nature basically.

KEYWORDS: Eco Feminism, Ecology, Relations, Tribe, Nature.

Alice Walker in *The Temple of My Familiar*, visualizes the characters are intimate with the nature and animals. She also clearly describes about the ecocentric relation within the characters. The originality of our life is being restored only with the connection of forest and nature. With the connection to the nature we can experiences the wholeness of life in the peaceful manner. Walker shows how the present American people longing for their past ancestry. People from Africa is brought as slaves in America lost their relationship with their family, land, identity, culture, peace, and nature. Africans lives are connected closely with the forest and its atmosphere but after replanted them in a new place they felt various problems in their lives. Walker has discussed the African goddess to show the lives of people with nature. She states that "The Goddess, who long before she became Isis, was known all over Africa as simply the Great Mother, Creation of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth" (*The Temple of My Familiar* 269). This quote strengths the people's relationship with the nature and spiritual beings.

Religion is also playing a vital role in connection with the deforestation and the relation of living beings with forest. Especially the Christianity in America, the way of worship and other things take part in this religion is not based on nature. Usually the African, Native American and other tribal people worship the god and goddess based on nature. This natural way of worship is washed out because of the influence of modern

religions Christianity and other forms. Tribal people lost their culture and tradition and they started to worship the new forms of god. People started to forget Mother Earth and the natural beings to inherit the new forms. “the spirit of Mothering, of Creating, of Blessing, and Protecting AIV “ (TMF 269). Most of the goddess temple where destroyed As Miss Lissie opines:

There were, in the earliest days, raids on the women’s temples, which existed in sacred groves of trees. . . . The men had decided they would be creator, and they went about dethroning woman systematically Mother worshippers would be the hardest of the Africans to break, for they were devoted to the Goddess. (TMF 63-64)

Ancient people worshipped Earth as mother. They created goddess and given much priority to female member even they worshipped goddess and constructed women temples. They follow the concept of Mother like Mother earth, mother tree. They even worshipped large trees and consider as god. This picture of unity with people in worshipping the natural objects show their attachment with nature. The tribal people brought to America lost their identity and their way of worship.

Women play a vital role in all tribal culture. Most their worship is based on goddess rather than god. Fanny’s sister, explains, “the Great Mother, Creator of All, Protector of All, the Keeper of the Earth. The Goddess” (TMF 268). But the patriarchal modern religion destroyed this culture and forms of worship. The originality of worship and other traditions were affected. The Goddess has protected and take care of all children, men, women, animals, plants but later this is changed with the patriarchal religion and converted this to male gods and men. This sudden change in the culture and tradition which after the destroying the nature men took power. “has let himself be taught that his own mother is evil ” (TMF 196) and that he can “eat up the earth, since . . . “everything is for man” (194-5).

With the new form of religious worship the concept of Mother, Earth and Goddess has been changed. The new form of religion Christianity brought out a vast difference between the concept god and nature. Ancient religion gives more space to women and consider them as life givers. But the new religion show the life is secondary in this universe and have a life after death. In this religion there is no separate room for female especially to nature. As Miss Lissie shares with Suwelo:

We brought their children into the world; we cured their sick; we washed and laid out the bodies of their dead. We were far from evil. We helped Life, and they did not like this at all. Whenever they saw our power it made them feel they had none. They felt themselves the moon to our sun. And yet, as every woman knows, the moon also has great power. We are connected to all three planes-past, present, future-of life; so is man, but he will not let himself see it. (196)

Lissie believes that women lost their spirits in the new circumstances. In her memory she recollects that men and women lived separately for a time. Women and children sharing within themselves this company is also enjoyed by Lissie in her childhood. These women had their options and times they enjoyed the freedom life in forest. Then enjoyed with different sports in the forest and shared the same fire. “shared favorite spots in the forest,

or stared by night into the same fire” (366). On this circumstances men started jealously on women. This created a tragically situation. Lissie remembers:

By the time I was fully grown. . . the men’s camp and the women’s had merged. And they had both lost their freedom to each other. The men now took it on themselves to say what should and should not be done by all, which meant they lost the freedom of their long, undisturbed, contemplative days in the men’s camp; and the women, in compliance with the men’s bossiness, but more because they now became emotionally dependent on the individual man by whom man’s law now decreed they must have all their children, lost their wildness, that quality of homey ease on the earth that they shared with the rest of the animals.” (366-7)

Miss Lissie, a black woman she remembers her past memories. She states to Suwelo, “Lissie means the one who remembers everything” (52). She possess a strong foundation of her past memories. She always remembers her past life which she enjoyed in her native. She says that “Though I myself had the body of a woman, I could still see my lion inside” (370). The various thought within her connects her thought with her ancestors life. She believes that peace can attained only from the ancestors life. She always find time to tell about positive aspects from her ancestors life and her ancient memories. Walker too believes that peace can be connected with ancestry. In her interview with Dreifus, Walker opines that:

What I’m doing is literally trying to reconnect us to our ancestors. All of us. I’m really trying to do that because I see that ancient past as the future . . . if we can affirm it in the present, it will make a different future. Because it’s really fatal to see yourself as separate. You have to feel. . . more or less equal and valid in order for the whole organism to feel healthy. (Alice Walker Interview 31)

Lissie refers her past life as a goddess, Walker portrays the past life of female and their priority in the society. In present day male are consider as more valuable God and Father. Walker clearly revising back the Goddess worship of ancient people. She wishes Goddess practice should be empowered in the belief system. This is also being said by Carol P. Christ opines that, “Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected, they must be replaced” (275). To empower the women and their lives the old practices should bring back. Women enjoyed their own freedom in their past life and with their ancient culture and practices. But modernity and slavery changed their life in a new manner. Christ asserts that Women can attain their freedom through Goddess of symbols:

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed barebellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember. . . . Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent. (Christ 277)

The patriarchal nature of men creates to disturb the women in the forest. Men tried their level best to attack the peaceful nature of women. Men’s nature also disturbed the animals around as. Women started to feel that their own freedom is ruined by the action of men towards them. Their nature of love and originality of spirit loosed moreover the familiarity of their life is ruined. Women lost their identity of their own and they are

used as household objects. Men treated women as weak, dependent, useless, women lost their dignity and integrity. Lissie states that, “were not prepared to share [the women’s fate] ‘they left “the site of contention” in quest of peace (368). Lissie believes that again we need the originality of nature only if the women could come back with the with the spirituality of nature. This situation will restore the ancient culture and tradition again in this universe.

Fanny is a character of wisdom, her inner nature and source of wisdom is clearly portrayed by Walker. Suwelo states that Fanny “second sight,” or “two headedness” (TMF 277). Walker’s Fanny the woman character is well efficient to handle the situation. Fanny can acquire the knowledge very easily and she can collect the information she needs. According to Suwelo Fanny is “to work very, very hard” (277). She is a best example for strong woman. Fanny openly attacks the white people. She clearly states that white people are responsible for the destruction of the earth and nature. Fanny confesses to Suwelo: “I hate white people . . . sliding off the planet, and the planet...I can breathe again!” (TMF 301). She strongly attacks the action of white people. White people destroying the nature and they were not realizing the reality of the future cause. Without the proper knowledge of the self-destroying the nature and making the living people in problem. White are ruin the life of the surviving people.

Carlotta’s mother Zede is an ancient woman she always possess the knowledge of her childhood. Her mental stamina is so strong that is very clear with action. She begins a sexual relationship with her own son-in-law Arveyda, husband of Carlotta. This relation shows her strength in her decision and freedom of selection. Later Carlotta realizes that her mother is not only gave birth to her, she cared her in her childhood and treated her well. Moreover she has the freedom to have her sexual desire. Zede travels south along with Arveyda to her homeland. She shares her memories of her homeland and stories of her mother. On saying the story of her in her memory she is in exciting mood. She becomes a different woman on narrating her memory:

Under the open sky, the reflections of the turquoise water near her country’s shoreline brightening her sad eyes, Zede became a different woman. . . she spoke with an eloquence that startled Arveyda, who held on to her as she talked, not as a lover, but as the ear that might at last reconnect her to her world. (Temple 45)

People love each other without any kind of restrictions. They love the sun, the moon, the animals, the living beings, the plants and other creatures. “love all the colors of all the human beings, as they love all the colors of animals and plants; none of their children, nor any of their ancestors, nor any parts of themselves, shall be hidden from them” (289). The unrestricted love among the people and other living and nonliving things in this universe gives the best example of ancestors relationship. Zede says that women played a vital role in ancient society. They are respected both by women and men, women took various roles as diviners, healers, seers, priestess. Zede states to Arveyde: “The men both worshipped and feared the women. They kept their distance from them, but spied on them when they could” (49).

Suwelo is a lesbian, she has the practice of worshipping Goddess. Lesbians lived in the ancient days used to worship Goddess. “Lesbians were all around us...This was when they were just discovering the Goddess, and it was all the time Goddess this and

Goddess that. . . Goddess knows. It blew me away” (241). The act of Slavery ruined the freedom of female and the symbol practices of Woman as Goddess. Woman are considers as slaves and workers. They lost their identity, culture, tradition, and practices.

Olivia, Fanny’s mother believes that white people will realize their own mistake very soon. White are doing harmful actions in the earth as Olivia states Fanny that whites cannot understand:

what they are doing. . . . when they suck all the oil out of the earth on one side of the world and complain about earthquakes on the other. . . . when they fill the sky with space junk and rockets whose important “missions” to spy on other planets are meaningless to ninety-nine percent of the people and to absolutely all of the plants and animals on earth . . . when they invent the things they have invented and forced on the world, especially on our worlds. (TMF 307)

In Ancient times life was a simple in forest. It provide as food and shelter. In the forest one can find the liberty, equality, delight, and peace. But this peace place is being destroyed they killed the animals and cut trees in the forest this is remembered by Lissie: until the idea of ownership-which grew out of the way the forest now began to be viewed as something cut into pieces that belonged to this tribe or that-came into human arrangements. Then it was that men, because they were stronger, at least during those periods when women were weak from childbearing, began to think of owning women and children. (86)

Greed within a man will a man will destroy everything. Nature is create is there but we have to protect it. If the nature is not protected than we have face the consequences. “human and animal tribes. . . . [T]he whole tribe of creation [was] climbing an enormous plum tree. The little brown and black people. . . the monkeys, the birds, and the things that today have vanished” (359).

Walker tries to bring out the real harmony of nature. She portrays the human nature towards the nature and giving the vision of coexistence. Walker believes that people can retrieve some of their past wisdom having connection with ancestry. So it is very necessary to have some link with ancestors and have past belief. If it is like that one will not lose their connections with relations. she shows that traditional female are so strong with their abilities. They are equipped with artistic talents, art forms and creating feathered capes. Forest is the vital resource of all living beings. If we are not protecting our forest our future generation will face the consequences of it. Alice Walker has given much priority to forest and Earth especially the nature. She obviously states that the Earth should be protected. The destruction of nature will bring harmful to the present and future living beings. She clearly implicit the basic lives of Africans, Native Americans and other tribal peoples of Ancient America. The lives of this people is being interconnected with nature and animals. Moreover women are connected with nature and they portrays the eco feministic nature basically. John Muir states that “The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness” (brainyquote)

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