

# Psychological Insight: A Comparative Ecofeministic Approach Through The Characters In The Select Works Of Margaret Atwood and Roda Ahmed

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**Abstract :** *Ecofeminism is a social and philosophical movement that explores the connections between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment. In Psychology, it is involved in examining the interplay between gender, environmental experiences and mental wellbeing with a focus on empowerment, activism and holistic perspectives that consider the intersecting forms of oppression. The psychological study with ecofeminism helps in understanding the tendency of humans connect with nature in spite of their undergoing mental trauma to find a solace in it. Nature, through the lens of literature, helps to feel the wonder and warmth in reality and imagination. The humans being dependent on nature for their needs and nature being a healing factor for their survival shows the serious ecological imbalance in today's living; because nature is a destruction and the responsibility to protect and preserve turns out to be a question. Thus, the present paper focuses on Ecofeminism, through psychological insight of Margaret Atwood's 'Surfacing' and Roda Ahmed's 'Mae Among the Stars' Ecological version in exploring the relationship with nature for the upliftment in the room of one's own.*

**Key Words:** *Ecofeminism, Psyche, Characters and Nature.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that combines aspects of feminism and environmentalism. The exploitation and oppression of both women and the environment is seen with the issues being interconnected. The Ecofeminists argue that, the patriarchal society exploits and dominates the society being subjected to ideological hierarchies such as higher and lower ranking categories. Man over woman and culture over nature. The dualistic world existing in the society approach that, feminine principle represents mother nature, intuition and emotion. The masculine principle represents rationality, logic and separation and reality Ecofeminism in psychology seeks to challenge and transform psychological paradigms in addressing the social and environmental justice issues through a feminist lens. The environmental degradations with the gender roles and identities influence the human experiences in response towards environmental issues. Here, the Ecofeminist psychology explores the emotional, mental and psychological toll of the crisis in environment. The individual well being and ecological concerns results in receiving a healing from the nature. Race, class, gender inequality and environmental issues with interconnection is rooted in system of domination and oppression.

## 2. ECOFEMINISM- SURFACING:

According to Andrea Koehle Jones in 'The Wish Trees' states that "I'm planting a tree to teach me to gather strength from my deepest roots" talks about Ecofeminism, the bond between women and tree in finding the energy to heal from the wounds, as the planted tree grows the intensity of power increase from within. Similarly, one such character from Margaret Atwood's 'Surfacing' highlights plants tree to increase the strength and confidence through it. The characters in any story are interlinked with the reality of life and nature. The effectiveness of the protagonist is known with the insight of critical circumstances. Here, the protagonist returns to her childhood home in a remote wilderness area, where she gradually reconnects with nature and. The society filled with domination and inferiority affects the character where she undergoes a process of deep self-analysis throughout her journey in finding her father. This journey of the protagonist helps her in finding herself and she starts to embrace herself.

### 3. DUALISTIC WORLD:

According to Gaard and Murphy ecofeminism with dualism is pointed out clearly that the patriarchal society is filled with dualism of the world such as, feminine and masculine.

“Dualism of white western patriarchal culture, such as self/other, Culture/nature, man/woman, human/animal and white non white Which construct male human identity as separate form and superior To the identities of women, animals and the natural world” (Gaard and Murphy, 1998:9)

The character's awareness of the dualistic world appears early in her life and she remembers of her past that, her father explained everything to her. The answers for all her questions lies in search of her father. The female protagonist fights the belief of split society like mind and body. Head is traditionally being a masculine element and body being a feminine element. The protagonist struggles to live in the masculine dominated society, where she feels herself to be completely cut off from her own self as a result of these struggle the character confronts these dualistic concepts. The relevance in these concepts of dualism reclaim the whole body as a feminine element. Likewise, the human identity is traditionally linked solely with mind and body is feminized and viewed as inferior. As head and body, the society and the natural world has been set apart from each other similarly the protagonist feels the separation in the society and rely on nature.

The protagonist's sees the environmental destruction and her living struggle to be the same. The society always finds them to be above nature similarly the main character leads her life being submissive in the society. She deconstructs her version in dualism as herself and reality, where she ends up in wilderness and disparity, she realizes the gap between her natural self and her artificiality only when she encounters with nature. “If you look like them and think like them then you are them”(Surfacing;165) The character starts to think like the nature and finds herself to be like them.

Through the tree the sun glances; the swamp around me smoulders,  
energy of decay turning to growth, green fire. I remember the heron;  
by now it will be insects, frogs, fish and other herons. My body also  
changes, the creature in me, plant- animal, sends out filaments in me,  
I ferry it secure between death and life, I multiply. (Surfacing;217)

She becomes a plant, animal, earth and woman at the same moment, finding herself to be powerful. She is no more the same person of the past. “A new kind of centerfold” (Surfacing;248). She understands the strength that she has gained from all the degradations.

Towards the end she realises that she cannot turn from society but she can be cautious. The loss of true self has been recovered and cured by mother nature. She is healed and starts to multiply her inner strength. She finds herself to be prepared for the challenges of life. She emerges as a brave woman physically and mentally.

### 4. ECOFEMENISM- MAE AMONG THE STARS:

The bond of earth and woman is like heart and soul. One such relationship is dealt in ‘Mae Among the Stars’ by Roda Ahmed is a real-life story of Dr. Mae Carol Jemison the first African American Woman in Space. Mae the protagonist pastoral childhood atmosphere promoted by her loving parents, dreams of seeing Earth from the stars and always imagined herself surrounded by billions of stars, floating, gliding and discovering. The protagonist abundant love for earth and space describes how she feels about the glimpse of earth looking green filled with variations from space, this thought of Mae reciprocates the love she has towards nature.

Mae shares her dream of becoming Astronaut in school, her White teacher discourages her and asks her “Mae, are you sure you do not want to be a nurse? Nursing would be a good profession for someone like you.” The classmates also makes fun of her and rejects her, where Mae feels disappointed and discouraged, her spirit became low from loss of hope and courage. Sometimes when she sit alone, beneath the trees she feels completely lost and lonely. She remembers of her parents encouraging words. “If you believe it, and work hard for it, anything is possible”. The encouraging words of her parents paved way for her incredible success. Even though the protagonist's dream of looking earth from a different point of view made fun of others, she never gives up her hopes and determination, “The amazing power of being able to stand with total courage in the face of total power and not be afraid. That is stri shakti.” (Vandana Shiva). Similarly, she finds her parents words to be a mantra in her life.

The thought of the protagonist, viewing the earth from above shows the love of her, towards the environment where, she always considers the nature to be above. The distance of looking space from earth cannot be measured likewise, the bond of earth in the views of protagonist is immeasurable. When ever the society pulls her down the view of nature in her heart wakes her up. Her dismay was short lived, as she is buoyed up by her parents continuous support and encouragement.

Annie Bryant says, "One of my rules is never to look sideways at what other people are doing but instead, do what I feel is right." This is what exactly the protagonist of the Mae Among the Stars does. Mae felt a new upliftment within her and promises to wave her parents from space. Mae went on dreaming, believing and worked hard. At the end she just did what she said becoming the first Black Astronaut. According to Bell Hooks "what we do is more important than what we say or what we say we believe" The story mentioned above has connectivity to the real-life incident of believing in achieving. The crestfallen protagonists went on dreaming, believing and working hard and never stopped following her dreams in going to Space. The obstacle she faces was nothing to stop her goals. As the life pushes down harder and harder the protagonist grew higher and higher; she believed what she said since childhood until it turns out into reality.

### 5. THE PROTOGONIST'S AS ACHIEVERS:

'Surfacing' explores the protagonist's reconnection with nature and her liberation from societal expectations, highlighting the interconnectedness of personal and environmental struggles. 'Mae Among the Star' aspire to explore and protect the universe with the principles of inclusivity and environmental stewardship. Both the female protagonists facing challenges in their lives develop their deeper connection with the environment. The dualism in 'Surfacing' and discrimination in 'Mae Among the Stars' intertwines the eco-psychological elements. Both the protagonists struggle to find their own identity and voice in patriarchal society. The self-discovery of the protagonists in the wilderness, increasingly connect with nature. The personal transformations in the unnamed protagonist results in her growth toward the consciousness of environment and her own mind. Mae's transformation turns out to be her determination to reach stars in spite of their challenges towards gender and racial stereotypes.

### 6. CONCLUSION:

The rejections of the unnamed protagonist being a female and Mae being dark skin experiences towards the killing of a tree. The characters immerse themselves into the nature in order to turn away from all the negativities faced by the patriarchal society. Both the characters dealing with oppression, triumphs in the end with accomplishment of newly acquired identity. The protagonists redefine themselves in order of subjugation and above all they refuse to see them as victim. The journey dealt here by the protagonist of the Surfacing in spite of her trauma leads her to find herself in overcoming and winning her past and the protagonist of Mae Among the Stars leads her towards triumph. The lines from Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" as an ignition of fire to be born again new and strong well connects with the success and overcoming traumas of the characters states that;

"You may shoot me with your words,  
you may cut me with your eyes,  
you may kill me with your hatefulness,  
but still, like air, I, ll rise!"(And Still I Rise;1978)

The example of killing a tree symbolizes with the characters as a victorious note. If a tree is cut down, it does not die rather it grew again with new birches with the help of the root that is deep inside the ground. Similarly, however the society shuts down the protagonists they grow with new spirit in their life having deep desire of winning inside their heart.

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