

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ECOFEMINISM IN WANGARI MAATHAI'S "FORESTERS WITHOUT DIPLOMA"

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Abstract

This article has drawn the perspective of ecofeminism as found in the story "Foresters without Diploma" of Wangari Maathai. The women's role displayed in the Kenya under the leadership of Maathai to improve the economic condition of women by planting the trees and nursery management system is carried out only by women and they have turned out to be successful to address their local issues by participating the women themselves with the project of Green Belt Movement. Ecofeminism has not only solved the women's burning issues of the time but also has maintained the natural beauty through Green Belt building project in Nairobi. Women's dedication, devotion, and participation has become effective and it has performed positive impact in the life style of women of Kenya and they have exotified how women are capable to be independent to develop their skills and to change the social structures.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, exotified, Green Belt, empowerment, expectations

Introduction

Eco-conservation stands as a sign of bright future of humanity. It is a positive and inevitable action that humans have to do on time before it turns out to be beyond human conscience and capacity. Ecofeminism refers to the act in which women are involved and they more active in the process of conserving the ecology and the environment. It is more concerned with the women's role to protect, sow and care the nurseries and the plants for the eco-friendly atmosphere. Ecofeminism has got both ecological and economic advancement and the women's role has become more effective as well as praiseworthy as it has become one of the examples in the Foresters without Diploma of Wangari Maathai.

Statement of Problem

The statement of problem is concerned with the role of women for the problem of ecology and environment by ignoring the male's role. The research is guided with

a) How effective does women's role play to conserve the ecology?

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b) What impact does the eco-conservation become in the life of women to address day to day problems?

Objective of the Study

The purpose of the research is to address the burning issues of eco-crisis and to solve the daily problems of life. It aims at:

- a) To investigate women's effective role in conserving the ecology and environment
- b) To trace out the effect of conserving the ecology in day-to-day life of women

Significance of the study

The significance of the study is to explore the real role and dedication of women in the process of eco-conservation. Women's role would be encouraging and ideal example for the global women to follow the steps of Kenyan women to solve the burning issues by participating themselves. Ecofeminist concept would be more effective and pragmatic one. The women are to be motivated and encouraged to participate in the act of the eco-conservation directly or indirectly so that the minor issues of life can be solved automatically.

Methodology

This article has been analyzed on the basis of ecofeminist theory of Greta Gard. Drawing on the insights of ecology, ecofeminism's basic doctrine is that reveals oppression based on race, class, gender, and physical abilities. She has explained the ecofeminism principle via collection of essays, and the feminist scholars and activists discuss the relationships among human beings, the natural environment, and nonhuman animals. The aim of the collection twelve articles is to contribute to the evolving ecofeminists, animal liberationists, deep ecologists, and social ecologists in an effort to create a sustainable lifestyle for all inhabitants of the earth. Among the issues addressed are the conflicts between Green politics and ecofeminism and such practice of conserving the ecology through the tree plantation and changing the life style of women in Africa has been well reflected in the selected story's analysis and hence this theory has been adopted as the lens of analyzing the story.

Delimitation

This research is entirely based on the analysis of the essay entitled "Foresters without Diploma" of Wangari Maathai. It has attempted to reveal the women's dedication and effort to save the forest and to form the Green Belt in Kenya as the women of Kenya have played for the eco-friendly condition and the women's role has brought the change even in the economic activities and the life style of women.

Literature Review

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The essay “Foresters without Diploma” is an autobiographical essay of the author herself but it has offered the real condition of the women in Kenya. The factual information and the writer’s true act performed by the women of Kenya for the contribution of the Green Belt Movement has been mirrored for the global women as an example to imitate. It has become the motivating factor for all and it has even opened the eyes of the struggling women of the poor areas to show the way of how to solve the local issues in the local level by the women themselves. There are very few women who have done such a great deed for the friends and the women. “A very few human activities have the power to affect their friends, neighbors, and families positively. Wangari Maathai one of the rare activists whose courage and actions have transformed the globe (Scott, 299).” It is through her simple act of planting trees sustainable development and creating jobs in the rural women has become possible in Kenya and around the globe. She says, “When we plant trees, we plant seeds of peace, and seeds of hope (Scott, 199).”

Her contribution is for the entire global citizens. Good work can begin from anywhere for the humanity and the living animals in the planet, earth. It can be based on Christianity or for the ecological beauty. “Formed by both her African cultural values and her Christian faith, she developed an ecological spirituality (Rakoczy, 75).” Climate has got extreme form and we have only one home known as the planet earth and humanity is invited to conserve the life of the weather for future generation. In this sense, Maathai is the pioneer and prophet of the climate justice. “Wangari Maathai as a grassroots environmental movement artist focused on social justice by improving the life style of rural women in Kenya (Brooks, 14).”

Her vision was too simple to have the sustainable development through the plantation of the trees. But Maathai found the gender discrimination and felt it as the bitter truth of the society. She wrote, “I had never anticipated that I would be discriminated against on the basis of gender as often as I was. . . . I found myself challenging the idea that a woman could not be as good as or better than a man (Maathai, 2007, pp 117).” Maathai found the gender discrimination in the society and she realized to address the women’s issues through the tree plantation. Just as Maathai’s authentic grassroots leadership highlights the need to build trusting relationships with followers, be passionate about your work, be self-disciplined, be consistent, and be goal-oriented, so must school leaders have passion for their work (Fullan, 2003), behavior that reflects their values (Starratt, 2012), the capacity to build relationships (Eacott, 2015), and the necessary self-discipline and consistency to lead others toward achievable goals (English, 2015). And the ecofeminism theory is expressed in “Advocating people to attach importance to the problems of women and environment, Walker expresses her ecofeminist consciousness to establish a

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harmonious society where human and nature, men and women could co-existent peacefully (Wu, 965).” Other critics too have explained regarding the ecofeminism as

Nowadays, ecofeminism is considered as one of the major disciplines in literature due to its active association of bridging the gender and environment conspicuously in ideological terms. The ecological crisis due to the massive environmental destruction and the oppression of women in male dominated society adjoin the fact that race, class, caste and gender are intrinsically interconnected. (Any, 2 abstract)

Ecofeminism has turned out as the burning case and Any has explained how the women protagonist have become the victims in the novels of Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* respectively in the M.A. Thesis and it is worthy to take this idea for the support of this article to analysis. This principle has newly emerged in the literary analysis and it has played significant role to draw the drastic change in the life style of the women. “The concept ‘Eco-feminism’ originates from last three decades which cuts across two critical perspectives specifically ecology and feminism (Mir, 1 abstract).” Ecofeminism has been considered as the environmental exploitation and gender oppression and it has become the burning issue in the present day. These various critics have researched from different points of views but ecofeminism has yet not properly dealt with in his story so far. So, this research has filled the gap since it has not been done before.

Textual Analysis

“Foresters without Diploma” the real picture of women in Kenya where they have become the models for the women of the rest of the world. They have turned out to be able to change their burning issues of life via their own effort under the leadership of Wangari Maathai who studied in America and returned to Kenya to serve her own nation and society. Maathai married with a politician and knew the women’s problems while she was in election campaign. She thought of various projects to solve the women’s problems but she unable to initiate the right ones until she had ample knowledge in it. She began to explore more. She was invited to join the National Council of Women of Kenya and she got exposed to many of the problems that the women were facing (Maathai 62). She identified the number of problems “problems of firewood, malnutrition, lack of food and adequate water, unemployment, soil erosion (Maathai 62).” These problems are the problems of women and Maathai knew women had to be activated and motivated to rule out their issues by themselves. “I was in women’s organization. Women are the ones most affected by these problems. Women are concerned about children, about the future (Mathai 62-63).” Then Mathai went to women and talked about planting trees and overcoming the problems of firewood and fencing materials as well as to stop soil erosion and

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protecting water systems. All the women admitted in the proposal of Mathai but they had no idea how to do it.

Mathai started teaching women about tree plantation. They called the foresters to learn the process of planting trees. “The foresters proved to be very complicated because they have diplomas; they have complicated ways of dealing with very simple thing like looking for seeds and planting trees (Mathai 63).” But women used their common sense and they did the job perfectly. “They were able to look for seeds in the neighborhood, and learnt to recognize seedlings as they germinate when seeds fall on the ground. Women do not have to wait for anybody to grow trees. They are really foresters without diplomas (Mathai 63).” It signals that training and practical knowledge is much more important than the theoretical knowledge. The women who did their work practically turned out to be far better than those of the foresters with their forestry diploma. “We started on World Environment Day June 5, 1977; that is when we planted the first seven trees. . . . But by 1988, when we counted according to the records women sent back to us, we had 10 million trees surviving- many had already matured to be used by women (Mathai 63).” Women were able to fulfil their needs of firewood and fencing materials. They could solve their problems by themselves. They established their own identity and recognition. “But the most important thing is that women were now independent had acquired knowledge, techniques; had become empowered. They have been teaching each other. We started with one tree nursery in the backward of the office of National Council of Women. Today we have over 15,000 tree nurseries, 99 percent run by women (Mathai 63).” This extract reveals that women are more responsible, hardworking and dedicated ones in their work and the tree plantation project run by women has become effective and women’s burning issues have been solved through this project. They have gained knowledge and learnt techniques of tree plantation and keeping nursery. They have become empowered with skill. They do not need to depend on the men. The Green Belt Movement of women in Kenya has become more for the economic benefit to the women than anything else. The life style of women has been changed and it has made positive in poor’s life.

Women’s role in conserving the eco-system has turned out to be much more effective and fruitful by making them practical and gaining knowledge of nursery keeping as well as making them self-dependent in economic activities in their life. If they quit the job of nursery and caring the trees, the Green Belt Movement will turn out as desert soon since women are involved in fuel gathering and farming. It is explained:

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In Kenya as in so much of African Continent, 80 percent of the farmers and the fuel gatherers are women. Women also keep animals. . . We have been successful there. Yet this is where trees are much needed. Areas that are green now will soon be a desert if not cared for. . . But we are encouraging an establishment of Green Belt Centre in Nairobi, where people can come and experience development that is community oriented, with community decision-making and with development appropriate to the region. (Mathai 64)

The government of Kenya wants to build a building in Nairobi Public Park but women's movement is to build a Green Belt Centre in Nairobi and it has become one of the examples of the community-oriented development in the region.

Women did not get financial support from Kenyan government. The given office too was taken away the moment they criticized it. The women received the funding from the women all over the world through small cheques as it is written:

We never received any financial support from the Kenyan government. They gave us an office which they took away as soon as we criticized them. . . We receive much of our support from abroad, mostly from women all over the world, who send us small cheques. And the United Nations Development Fund for women gave us a big boost, \$100,000 in 1981. We also received support from the Danish Voluntary Fund and the Norwegian Agency, for International Development. (Mathai 64)

The government of Kenya did not in women to fund them for their goal of establishing Green Belt but the women received the financial support from UNO and other international Development Agencies. When they were kicked out of their office, the headquarters of the project moved back to the house of Wangari Maathai and the women made their project successful. "But all over the world, we women do this sort of thing (Mathai 65)." Women are satisfied with their work since they have changed the face of the entire landscape. "My greatest satisfaction is to look back and see how far we have come. Something so simple but meaning so much, something nobody can take away from the people, something that is changing the face of the landscapes (Mathai 65)." The women feel satisfied since they have changed the landscapes of their surroundings and made the Green Belt. Desire to work and the common sense are the vital elements to be the leaders rather than the followers. Women's role in changing the life style of women plays effective and its impact can become meaningful to address the day to today affairs and the burning issues of life as Kenyan women had faced. The limit of an individual is made by the human beings and the society. The potentiality of anyone is reaching to sky. "But when you

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want to do it, you are not allowed, because the political system is not tolerant or encouraging enough (Mathai, 65).” Human beings do have no limit to work but political systems do not encourage it to do. Though we must have the positive thought and hope to do the work in the society to bring the change as required. “But we must never lose hope. When any of us feels she has an idea or an opportunity, she should go ahead and do it. I never knew what I was doing in my backward that I was playing around with would one day become a whole movement. One person can make the difference (Mathai 65).” This extract shows that hope is the source of energy in transforming the world. Mathai herself did not what she was doing at the time of planting seven trees at the backyard of her house but it turned out to be a grand Green Belt making project of women of Kenya in later days. Mathai’s role was the cause to make the difference in the life style of Kenyan women. Ecofeminism brought magical transformation in the entire life of the rural women who were struggling and suffering in their day-to-day life in Kenya. The concept of ecofeminism of Wangari Maathai is supported even by the idea of Hunt as it is well explained. Wangari Maathai’s Green Belt Movement emerged as a response to environmental degradation in post-colonial Kenya. This movement has operated in three dimensions as to resist environmental and political operation, empowering rural women to enact political consciousness towards democracy and environmental justice. It is based on ecofeminist concept of power deriving through the Green Belt Movement (Hunt, 235). Wangari Maathai’s role is just like of a hummingbird to bring change in the rural jobless life of women to empower them through the tree plantation and also to improve their economic and day to day life affairs that the women of Kenya had been facing. Greta Gard’s theory of ecofeminism has perfectly been applied in the process of converting the life style of women in Kenya and they have improved their life standard. The poor women have proved themselves how women would be capable enough to manage their local needs via mobilizations of the local sources if they gain the training, inspiration and the opportunity as the Kenyan women have endeavored to become successful practically.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism has been reflected through the tree plantation movement in Kenya under the leadership of Wangari Maathai and this act has become able to bring drastic and magical change in the life style of women in Kenya. It has brought the turning point in women’s life and it can be taken as the best model for the entire women of the globe to address the local problem by the local women themselves by utilizing the possible local resources as the women of Kenya did. It has conveyed well how a single person’s role can affect the day-to-day life style of women as Wangari Maathai has performed to empower and uplift the miserable condition of the rural women of Kenya.

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Women's role in eco-conservation in Kenya has played effective as well as praiseworthy and motivating act in relation to the life of the entire women of Kenya. They have received techniques, skills, knowledge and day to day needy materials of firewood, water resources as well as the fencing materials. They have become independent economically and the impact of the women in the process of conserving the forest through the tree plantation has become significant to conserve the ecology and the environment. The rural women learnt how to care the nursery well. The financial support that they received was not from the government of Kenya but from the United Nations Organization and other international Development Agencies. The women's role and the impact of their act in Kenya is beyond expectation of the common conscience of people's psyches. It reveals that the women's dedications, commitments, devotions and their active participations as the leadership pragmatically has become successful to bring change in the entire social structures and the life style of rural women of Kenya. The proverb "Women care the plants as they take care of their own babies" has turned out true and fact as reflected by the task of the rural women of Kenya. It has displayed that women's role has greater and more valuable ones than any others in comparisons to the act of transforming the entire rural society of Kenya. The fear of crisis of day to day needs and fencing materials as well as the firewood compelled them to emerge in the act of tree plantation under the leadership of Mathai who has reached to the grassroots levels and mobilized the immobilized energy of women for their own benefits and for the change of their life styles. Ecofeminism has demonstrated a good example to the entire women of the world. Ignoring the women's role means ignoring the possible solution of the burning issues in the society. It has taught all to mobilize the women to get the act truly successful as Kenyan women have reflected themselves as the models for the conservation if the forest.

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