

DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE
AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE PROGRAM
MASTER’S THESIS

**NURTURED BY NATURE: AN ECOFEMINIST READING
OF DELIA OWENS’ *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING***

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Supervisor
Prof. Dr. Nilsen GÖKÇEN ULUK

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APPROVAL PAGE



DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this master's thesis titled "Nurtured by Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing*" has been written by myself in accordance with the academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honor.

07/07/2023

Saniye Özge ÇINAR

ABSTRACT

Master's Thesis

Nurtured by Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing*

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From the first humans to the present day, women and nature have a deep bond because of their similar characteristics. Although their similarities of giving life and nurturing caused women and nature to be seen as sacred entities often referred to as "Great Mother" and "Mother Goddess" respectively in Paleolithic and Neolithic societies, this bond has also led to their exploitation especially with the rise of patriarchy.

Ecofeminism as a movement, which emerged from the merging and development of feminism and ecology, attempts to raise consciousness against this exploitation. The ecofeminism movement aims to raise awareness of the oppression of a patriarchal society and lead an egalitarian, oppression-free, sustainable life with high prosperity. Ecofeminist thought is a radical critique of patriarchal capitalism because ecofeminists challenge Western binary oppositions, which lie at the root of all hierarchies and exploitative ideologies.

This thesis will demonstrate how Delia Owens's novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* challenges these dichotomies especially by offering an alternative unity in the Paleolithic image of the Great Mother, whose wholeness was divided in the Neolithic image of the Earth Mother. Whereas the Great Mother encompasses oppositions between light and dark, life and death, good and bad in a continuing

cyclicity, the Earth Mother, whose sole purpose is to serve humans, was created in the image of men. While making this analysis, the views of various ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, and Val Plumwood have been referred to; especially Catherine M. Roach's references to the binary opposition of good mother and bad mother has helped analyze nature's nurturing and destructive features. In examining and analyzing the undivided image of the Great Mother as it is manifested in *Where the Crawdads Sing* in the continuity of the marsh and swamp, life and death, light and dark, day and night, this thesis aims to provide an ecofeminist alternative to the existing patriarchal norms based on binary oppositions that exile disobedient women such as the protagonist Kya and wild nature to margins and non-existence.

Keywords: Paleolithic and Neolithic Period, Great Mother, Earth Mother, Ecofeminism, Mother Nature, Good/Bad Mother, Delia Owens, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Doğanın Yetiştirdiği: Delia Owens'ın *Where the Crawdads Sing* Adlı Romanının

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Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Programı

İlk insanlardan günümüze kadar, kadınlar ve doğa, benzer özellikleri nedeniyle derin bir bağa sahiptirler. Hayat verme ve besleme gibi benzerlikleri, kadınların ve doğayı Paleolitik ve Neolitik toplumlarda genellikle sırasıyla “*Magna Mater*” ve “Anne Tanrıça” olarak adlandırılan kutsal varlıklar olarak görülmesine neden olmuştur. Ancak bu bağ, özellikle ataerkil toplumların yükselmesiyle birlikte sömürülmelerine yol açmıştır.

Ekofeminizm, feminizm ve ekolojiyi birleştirerek ortaya çıkan bir hareket olarak, bu sömürüye karşı bilinçlenmeyi amaçlar. Ekofeminizm hareketi, patriarkal bir toplumun baskısına dikkat çekmeyi ve eşitlikçi, baskısız, sürdürülebilir bir yaşamı yüksek refahla yaşamayı hedefler. Ekofeminist düşünce, patriarkal kapitalizme karşı radikal bir eleştiridir çünkü ekofeministler, tüm hiyerarşilerin ve sömürgeci ideolojilerin temelinde yatan Batı'ya ait ikili karşıtlıkları sorgularlar.

Bu tez, Delia Owens'ın *Where the Crawdads Sing* adlı romanının, özellikle Paleolitik *Magna Mater* imgesinde alternatif bir birlik sunularak bu ikiliklere nasıl meydan okunduğunu gösterecektir. *Magna Mater*, ışık ve karanlık, yaşam ve ölüm, iyi ve kötü arasındaki karşıtlıkları sürekli bir döngü içinde kapsarken, yalnızca insanlara hizmet etmek amacıyla yaratılan Toprak Ana, özellikle bu türün erkeklerinin hayal ürünü olarak oluşturuldu.

Bu çalışmayı yaparken, Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva ve Val Plumwood gibi çeşitli ekofeministlerin görüşlerine başvurulmuş; özellikle Catherine M. Roach'ın iyi anne ve kötü anne ikiliğini, doğanın besleyici ve yıkıcı özellikleri çerçevesinde tartışması tez içindeki analizlere önemli katkı sağlamıştır. Bu tez; Ana Tanrıça'nın bölünmemiş imgesi olan *Magna Mater*'in, *Where the Crawdads Sing* adlı eserdeki bataklık ve sazın sürekliliğinde, yaşam ve ölümden, ışık ve karanlıkta, gündüz ve gece içinde nasıl ortaya çıktığını inceleyerek başkaldıran kadınları ve vahşi doğayı çeperlere ve yokluğa sürgün eden ikili karşıtlıklara dayalı mevcut ataerkil normlara ekofeminist bir alternatif sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Paleolitik ve Neolitik Dönem, *Magna Mater*, Ana Tanrıça, Toprak Ana, Ekofeminizm, Doğa Ana, İyi/Kötü Anne, Delia Owens, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

**NURTURED BY NATURE: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF DELIA OWENS’
WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING**

CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE	II
DECLARATION	III
ABSTRACT	IV
ÖZET	VI
CONTENTS	VIII
INTRODUCTION	1

**CHAPTER ONE
WOMAN AND NATURE**

1.1. WOMAN AND NATURE: AN ANCIENT CONNECTION	7
1.1.1. Great Mother in the Paleolithic Period	8
1.1.2. Earth Mother in the Neolithic Period	13
1.2. GREAT MOTHER FIGURES IN MYTHOLOGY FROM GAIA AND ISIS TO DEFILED AND DEMONIZED MOTHERS: DEMETER-PERSEPHONE AND MEDUSA	17
1.2.1. Gaia	21
1.2.2. Isis	22
1.2.3. Demeter and Persephone	23
1.2.4. Medusa	25

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS ECOFEMINISM?

2.1. THE INTERSECTION OF ECOLOGY AND FEMINISM	30
2.1.1. Ecology	30
2.1.2. Feminism	31
2.2. ECOFEMINIST ISSUES	32
2.3. ECOFEMINIST THEORIES	36
2.3.1. Liberal Ecofeminism	37
2.3.2. Cultural Ecofeminism	38
2.3.3. Social Ecofeminism	39
2.3.4. Socialist Ecofeminism	41
2.4. NATURE AS A MOTHER: WHAT KIND OF MOTHER?	42
2.4.1. Nature as the Good Mother	43
2.4.2. Nature as the Bad Mother	45

CHAPTER THREE

MOTHER NATURE IN WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING

3.1. DELIA OWENS AND <i>WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING</i>	50
3.2. PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION	51
3.3. MOTHER NATURE AS THE GOOD MOTHER	57
3.3.1. The Marsh	58
3.3.2. The Animals	61
3.3.3. The Sea	63
3.3.4. The Moon	65
3.4. THE ABSENCE OF A HUMAN MOTHER	68
3.5. MOTHER NATURE AS THE BAD MOTHER	71
CONCLUSION	75
REFERENCES	78

INTRODUCTION

From the earliest communities to the present throughout human history, there has been a deep connection between women and nature. This deep connection is believed to manifest itself in an inner and permanent bond between the two. The source of the special bond is often explained in reference to the similarities between the female body and nature: Both women and nature have cycles in their lives manifested in day and night, seasons, and years in nature and menstruation, gestation, and lactation in the female body. The most outstanding similarity between the two is motherhood in terms of creating, nurturing, and raising a living creature. Just as a mother gives birth to and raises her baby by feeding and protecting it, nature gives life to all living things in the ecosystem and nurtures them.

The earliest religions or systems of faith are based on the marvel of humans at this miraculous capacity in nature, which the female sex manifests. Therefore, the female members of early human communities were approached with reverence and respect. However, nature is not only the source of life but also it is a force that commands the end of it, namely death. Especially as the mysteries of childbirth began to be solved and the role of the father was understood so that the female and, by extension, nature were not seen as miraculous as before, nature's "dark" aspect began to be seen as a hindrance, a disturbance to be overcome by domination and taming. Both nature and women have taken their share of these attempts, nature by being domesticated under stone and cement, and women by being subdued within walls domesticity. As a result, both nature and women have become prisoners of patriarchy without a say in their lives. In order to achieve total control, patriarchy employed other tools: For example, this mentality expressed its fear and hatred of women in its narratives ranging from the tales of mythology to those of monotheistic religions. A closer look at these narratives will reveal a theme in common in all these stories: If women are not immediately punished by death, they are marginalized outside civilization and exiled to live in wilderness among wild beasts and plants.

Now we all know the destructive and deadly results of this double domination. Women have been reduced to property to be exchanged, bought and sold at the will of their fathers, husbands or chieftains; they have been deprived of all the rights—life, liberty, education, citizenship, representation—recognized to their male counterparts, and nature and its products have been exploited to the point of depletion and extinction and an ecological crisis that we all have been facing today manifested in air, water and land pollution, climate change, and hunger. However, patriarchy and capitalism have been using their ideological tools to cover these injustices and total destruction. For example, in history, especially in mythology, oppressed women trying to dominate have been demonized and stigmatized. Likewise, capitalist patriarchy has described natural events such as earthquakes, floods, and global warming arising from the cruelty and destruction inflicted on nature only as “the wrath of God” and taken refuge behind it. However, instead of hiding behind this opinion, human beings must learn to live in harmony with nature in a sustainable way without harming them. As a result, the relationship of nature and women emerging from this connection and the exploitation of both due to increasing patriarchal societies have been reflected in philosophy, mythology, art, and literature for centuries.

Against such discourse, however, protesting voices from women have been raised demanding justice, equality, living in harmony with nature. These women were first organized along the lines of feminist thought and movement that arose in the 19th century Europe. In the second half of the 20th century, another group of women, mostly from the feminist movement, emerged to demonstrate the connections between the domination of women and domination of nature. They were ecofeminists who approached critically the ecological thought dominated mostly by men and male bias and feminist thought that tended to ignore the domination of nature and the ties between women’s and nature’s domination. Their most radical critique was directed at the binary opposites that underlay Western patriarchal thought according to which life is formulated by opposites such as male and female, culture and nature, reason and emotions, soul and body, life and death, light and dark. According to Val Plumwood, “Dualisms are not just free floating systems of ideas; they are closely associated with domination and

accumulation, and are their major cultural expressions and justifications” (Plumwood, 1993: 42). Thus, the relationship between these two cannot be defined merely by their being opposed to each other; there are value-ridden differences between them: The first concept/entity in each pair is thought to be superior to the second to the point that it practically has no value. Ecofeminists, in turn, envision a worldview in which there is continuity and harmony rather than division and opposition. Such a vision bridges the gap between the two poles of what seem to be oppositions and recognizes the inherent value of both so that hierarchy, domination and exploitation cannot find ideological grounds to exist between men and women, human and nonhuman among others.

What ecofeminists do is in fact change the stories that have upheld domination and destruction with new ones. It is here that literature becomes utterly important. Ecofeminist literary theory has also been widely used as well to approach and evaluate existing literary works as to create stories that show their readers that another world based on harmony is not only possible but desirable because it is in it that we can find the seeds of ending the suffering among humanity as well as our ecological problems that loom large in the horizon.

Delia Owens’s 2018 novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* is among the many contemporary American novels written with an ecofeminist awareness. In it she describes a young girl Kya abandoned by her family and her human community—except a few that lend a helping hand—who is nurtured by the marsh and its rich ecosystem. Nature becomes her mother that sustains Kya in the absence of her parents and human family and community. The marsh, however, is accompanied with the swamp that remains underneath it. It is the place of death, decomposition and decay, yet it is what keeps the life on the surface of the marsh to continue. Owens’s portrayal of nature, especially the marsh in this novel is closer to the Paleolithic image of the Great Mother, the creative force that sustains all life in all its continuing cycles without generating opposites and hierarchies. Therefore, this thesis will demonstrate how Delia Owens’s novel *Where the Crawdads Sing* challenges patriarchal dichotomies especially by offering an alternative unity in the Paleolithic image of the Great Mother, whose wholeness was divided in the Neolithic image of the Earth Mother. Whereas the Great

Mother encompasses oppositions between light and dark, life and death, good and bad in a continuing cyclicity, the Earth Mother, whose sole purpose is to serve humans, was created in the image of men. In examining and analyzing the undivided image of the Great Mother as it is manifested in *Where the Crawdads Sing* in the continuity of the marsh and swamp, life and death, light and dark, day and night, this thesis aims to provide an ecofeminist alternative to the existing patriarchal norms based on binary oppositions that exile disobedient women such as the protagonist Kya and wild nature to margins and non-existence.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will explore how early humans were shaped by nature's influence during the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods. In the absence of scientific knowledge and reason, people created sacred myths, stories, and archetypes to explain natural events and turned them into a belief system. These belief systems, which defined and redefined the relationship between women and nature, are the products of the social and economic conditions in which they took shape. In the Paleolithic Period, people lived in harmony with nature by living a life based on hunting and gathering, relying on nature's resources. Nature became their home, and they perceived it as feminine and nurturing. As a result, a belief system based on the Great Mother appeared with the idea that a woman created the world and everything on it. These beliefs were expressed in cave paintings, totem symbols, and stone carvings. "Based on this evident, nature as the Great Mother may, indeed, be the oldest human idea and the first religious practice" (Roach, 2003: 30). In the Neolithic period, societies had more control over nature by switching to agriculture. The agricultural revolution enabled people to move beyond being dependent on what nature offers and begin to manipulate and exploit it actively. Unfortunately, this shift has resulted in the exploitation of both women and nature. The celebration of the creative and fertile femininity was replaced with the celebration of male "hero" whose mettle is found in domination and subduing others. Among the dominated and subdued were women who were pushed into the background. This imbalance of power has led to the demonization and the negative portrayal of female goddesses in mythology. Figures such as Gaia, Isis, Demeter, Persephone, and Medusa exemplify female deities subjected to pain and abuse by male gods.

The second part of this thesis examines the emergence of the ecofeminism movement by integrating feminist thought with ecological awareness. Feminism's primary goals range from advocating equal rights in education, and employment to dealing with women's health issues, combating harassment and rape, and eliminating the exploitation of women. In this context, critical ecological problems such as environmental pollution and destruction reveal that nature and the exploitation of women converge. Women, particularly in their roles as mothers, are the individuals most affected by these ecological challenges as they give birth to and raise future generations. Ecofeminism, as a movement, aims to raise awareness and oppose the exploitation of both women and nature within this framework. This chapter will also examine the comprehensive and inclusive nature of various sub-branches of ecofeminism that seek solutions to different issues. Furthermore, this thesis will delve into the nurturing, protective qualities of Mother Nature and the dichotomy of nature as the good mother and nature as the bad mother, as discussed by Catherine M. Roach in her book *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, which explores the contrasting aspects of nature such as chaos and destructive properties. I will conduct a detailed examination of the subject by providing examples from mythology, religious figures, and literary works.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will analyze Delia Owens' 2018 bestseller book, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, which explores the enduring similarity between nature and women from ancient times to the present. The author's own life, intertwined with nature since childhood, is also reflected in the book. In her work, the author vividly portrays nature as a character itself. The protagonist of the book, Kya, tries to survive alone in the marsh after being abandoned by her family members. Nature becomes Kya's mother figure, providing her with food, shelter, and companionship through animals that become her friends. The marsh not only sustains her life but also makes her a part of its ecosystem as she leads a solitary existence away from society. Kya faces the pressures of a patriarchal society because she, like the exiled female figures of mythology, defies the role assigned to women as secondary to men and in need of their help and protection while also striving to prevent the destruction of the marsh she calls home by human

development. In this context, the reader is made aware of the pressures Kya faces due to the similarities between women and nature. This thesis aims to analyze the representation of the unified Great Mother in *Where the Crawdads Sing* and provide an ecofeminist perspective challenging patriarchal norms that marginalize non-conforming women like protagonist Kya and the untamed aspects of nature through the continuity of natural elements.



CHAPTER ONE

WOMAN AND NATURE

Nature and women are linked in many ways. While nature is the source of life for all living things on earth, women have been the source of life because of their capacity for pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. From the earliest humanity, humans have been aware of these deep ties while adapting and making sense of their environment. However, early humans' respect and reverence for the female and Nature have later deteriorated to fear and the need to dominate both as source of these fears. This long process of transformation has taken place due to a variety of changes in human history.

1.1. WOMAN AND NATURE: AN ANCIENT CONNECTION

The belief in the connection of women with nature comes from ancient times, especially from the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages, during which time, women's understanding of herbs and their nurturing, healing or poisoning powers helped communities survive. "Woman ... is the ally of nature, and her instinct is to tend, to nurture, to encourage healthy growth, and to preserve ecological balance. She is the natural leader of society and civilization" (Davis, 1971: 336). Because in the past, women had quite a role in their living only by hunting and gathering. Many duties were undertaken by women, such as gathering food, collecting herbs for diseases, and taming animals for use as protection or for use in agriculture. As Vandana Shiva indicates, "women produce and reproduce life not merely biologically, but also through their social role in providing sustenance" (Shiva, 1988: 41).

At the root of the bonds between women and nature can be found in the cycles of the female body. For example, women's menstrual cycles were thought to reflect the cycles of nature such as seasons, day and night, and life and death. Women's bodies were then thought to have an inner knowledge of the cycles that determined life. Such knowledge has been passed down through generations, causing women to be seen as the guardians of the world in many cultures. Ancient people believed that the world was a

woman who gave birth alone with her own consciousness and gave birth to everything, that they were just tiny beings breathing in the world, microcosms to the macrocosm; therefore, they thought everything was interconnected. As such, they saw it as their responsibility to maintain the balance between themselves and nature and pass this on to their next generations. These ideas were strongly followed especially in the Paleolithic era.

1.1.1. Great Mother in the Paleolithic Period

In the Paleolithic era, also called the old stone age, people lived as hunters and gatherers. Therefore, they depended on nature for nourishment and survival and had to adapt to it. These people lived in small camps because they were constantly nomadic in search of food sources. Their primary food sources in nature were fruits and nuts, edible plants, and the prey they hunted. They settled where they saw abundant food resources, and when the resources began to run out, they set off again in search of a new place. Their diets varied according to environmental factors such as climate, geography, and the availability of resources in their destinations. When the food they consumed during drought periods or hot weather did not come out enough, they turned their diets to another plant or animal and started to consume it.

This lifestyle resulted in a culture and belief systems based on harmony, not opposition to, nature. People began to study the life cycles in nature, manifested in birth, death, and rebirth. For example, while they could consume certain plants in certain seasons, they observed their reappearance in certain seasons, which taught them that nature worked in cycles of birth, death, and rebirth. Another factor that strengthened this teaching was the seed. After discovering the seeds, Paleolithic people observe that when the season comes, seeds spontaneously germinate from the soil, bear fruit, and disappear until the next renewal period when time passes. This observation led Paleolithic humans to seek a spiritual meaning expressed in their unique cave art depicting women, goddesses, animal representations and scenes from hunting. These engravings symbolized the Paleolithic community's deep-seated spirituality and their desire to

understand the mysteries of life itself. Paleolithic people had an intimate relationship with nature, and they believed in being one with nature because it was their home. Also, they “thought that nature was alive, assumed that the entire world of plants and animals—even land—was sacred, and regarded nature as intrinsically feminine” (Oelschlaeger, 1991: 12).

Evidence shows that Paleolithic people revered the feminine and believed in sustaining, life-giving power known as the “Great Mother.” She is viewed as a powerful and divine feminine presence, representing the maternal aspects of life and the natural world. She was considered the first deity or entity to exist; her existence makes life possible on Earth. In some myths, the Great Mother was a primordial or cosmic source from which she was born. For these people who believe in the Great Mother, this birth was the start of the world, a symbol of creation. In the beginning, life did not gestate within the body of any creature but within the ocean, a womb containing all organic life. For two-and-a-half billion years on Earth, all life forms floated in the womb-like environment of the planetary ocean, which, according to Charles Darwin, is manifested in the female bodies’ menstrual cycles, organically echoing the moon pulse of the sea. “In the course of evolution, the ocean--the protective and nourishing space, the amniotic fluids, even the lunar-tidal rhythm--was transferred into the individual female body” (Sjöö and Mor, 1987: 2). During this period, many symbols support the idea of the Great Mother and her sacredness.

This cosmic continuity is also reflected in totemic beliefs. The totemic images emerged during the Paleolithic period and held a significant role in the life of the early human community. Totemic symbols are more than just mere representations of a clan’s ancestral lineage. As ancient origins of clans, they hold within them a wealth of information detailing the complex interrelations that exist between a clan and nature. Totemic symbols serve as a symbolic link in the union of people with the natural world. The Paleolithic mind saw totems as more than just symbols but as a vital interdependence between humankind and nature, revealing the kinship that exists between the two. Through these symbols, our ancestors were able to understand and appreciate the importance of nature and their place within it (Oelschlaeger, 1991: 13).

These totemic symbols were often portrayed in various techniques as cave paintings, rock carvings, and small portable figures. These depictions describe animals, the people of that period and their abstract views, how they saw the world, the daily events they lived, and their beliefs.

Especially cave paintings have an important place in the Paleolithic age. As Paleolithic people migrated, they relied on nature's natural shelters. These natural shelters provided early humans with a safe and sheltered habitat. For them, the caves were more than just a place to seek refuge from harsh weather conditions or predators—they were sanctified spaces considered a gift from mother nature. The idea that everything in nature was a gift from Mother Nature, who fed and raised them, was a deeply ingrained belief among these people. Thus, the caves were seen as one of the many gifts offered by the natural world that protected them from harm and provided them with a sense of security. "Caves were, therefore, special places dedicated exclusively to the expression and possibly the celebration of symbolic imagery, whether mythological, magical, or spiritual" (Desdemaines-Hugon, 2012: 10). They were complete pictorial representations of deeply held cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs. As archetypal images, caves were believed to be the womb of the Great Mother. These natural grottos provided more than just shelter, warmth, and protection from the elements. They were seen as sacred spaces where the divine feminine energy could be felt in its purest form. Just like how a mother's womb provides a safe haven for her baby, caves offer a similar sheltered life for these communities against the dangers of external life. These communities have adapted to their surroundings and have learned to utilize the caves' resources, such as freshwater sources and natural protection from harsh weather conditions. Some caves even have unique ecosystems and microclimates that have allowed these communities to thrive for generations. Archeologist Marija Gimbutas wrote, "the caves, crevices, and caverns of the earth are natural manifestations of the primordial womb of the mother" (1989: 151). Psychoanalysts Harold P. Blum argued that "the cave itself was a birth canal and womb" (2011: 201). Joseph Campbell explained further, noting, "the cult of the Goddess goes right back to those early caves. There, she is the cave itself, so that initiates who passed through the rites deep under the

Earth were returning to and reborn from her womb” (2013: 6-7). Baring and Cashford note that “Entering one of those caves is like making a journey into another world, one which is inside the body of the Goddess...Inside the cave were placed the stones that represented the souls of the dead who would be reborn from her womb” (1993: 16). The concept at hand is undeniably intriguing, as it postulates the notion that navigating through a subterranean cavity may serve as a symbolic transition into the divine inner workings of a deity, leading to the subsequent rekindling of one’s spiritual essence. This serves as a remarkable testament to the multifaceted and unique beliefs and rituals held by diverse cultures and religions concerning the concept of mortality and the afterlife. Nevertheless, many paintings or sculptures were body shaped. “Sometimes the vulva images are picturized as having seeds and sprouting drawn over or beside them, or even the rippling movement of water, suggesting cosmic womb was recognized as the source of the vegetative world and the waters of life” (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 12-13). Such depictions reflect the ancient beliefs and reverence for the power of the female body and its role in creating and sustaining life. These archetypal totemic images emphasize Paleolithic people’s practices as female-centered societies.

The animals portrayed in totem depictions were particularly significant. Animals were essential to existence providing food, clothing, and tools, and are vital in the spiritual and symbolic realms. The choice of animal species in totemic images varied by region and period, reflecting the respective societies’ specific ecological context and cultural practices. Often depicting animals such as horses, mammoths, deer, and bison, shows their strength, agility, and importance as prey. They were associated with specific powers, and certain animals were considered sacred. These beliefs were often reflected in the art and symbols of the time, with many Paleolithic cave paintings featuring depictions of animals and other natural elements. The animals must have been seen as the embodiment of divine power, the gift of life to the tribe. It is likely these animals “were already regarded as diverse expressions of the all-encompassing reality of the Great Mother Goddess, who was carved outside the caves, which held inside, on their womb-like walls, images of the bewildering variety of forms to which she had given birth” (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 27). Many bird carvings and sculptures had a

significant place in Paleolithic people's Great Mother belief. Because "the bird who appears out of a distant sky has always been a messenger of wonder as the visible incarnation of the invisible world. In many Bronze Age myths, the cosmic egg of the universe was laid by the Cosmic Mother Bird, and its cracking open was the beginning of time and space" (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 13). The elements of nature depicted in totemic images emphasized the sacred connection between early humans and their environment.

For these early people in the history of humanity, the moon was seen as a representation of the Great Mother. The different phases of the moon were associated with different stages in the life of a woman. The crescent moon symbolized the young girl, the full moon represented the pregnant woman, and the darkening moon was associated with the wise old woman (18). Because Paleolithic people believed in rebirth after death, "they would have felt that they were taken back into the Mother's dark womb and believed that they would be reborn like the moon" (19). They also believed that the moon had a profound impact on the natural world, influencing everything from the tides to the growth of crops. Many Paleolithic cultures used the moon's phases as a calendar to track the changing seasons and plan their hunting and gathering activities accordingly. Throughout ancient mythologies, spanning up to the Iron Age, the moon was revered as a supreme symbol of the Goddess. It represented the unifying power of the Mother of All, governing cycles of time and influencing both celestial and earthly realms. The moon's relationship with the natural world reinforced its spiritual significance, as it governed fecundity, sea waters, and all phases of increase and decrease. This connection is what the Paleolithic people saw as a powerful force intimately connected to their daily lives. The waxing and waning of the moon represented duality, but its totality transcended this duality. Life and death were not perceived as opposites but rather as phases that succeeded each other in an endless rhythm (21). The moon, trees, rivers, mountains, and celestial bodies are also common elements of nature. These images reflect reverence and recognition of the profound interdependence between humans and the natural world.

By depicting aspects of nature in sculpting and carving, Paleolithic societies celebrated the abundance of resources provided by the environment and acknowledged their dependence on it. Besides these natural elements, totemic images also contain abstract forms, which include geometric patterns, concentric circles, and spirals. Although their exact meaning is open to interpretation, these abstract forms may have symbolic meanings that convey spiritual or cosmological concepts. They may represent concepts like cycle of time, fertility, transformation, or the connection between humans and the spiritual realm. Rituals, rites, and practices are performed in the presence of these totemic images for protection, fertility, successful hunting, and spiritual guidance. The image of Great Mother gradually gave way to the image of Earth Mother during the transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic period. The new image, however, differed greatly from the original image in quite significant ways.

1.1.2. Earth Mother in the Neolithic Period

People living in the Neolithic period developed agriculture and animal husbandry, unlike their ancestors who lived in the Paleolithic period, who lived by hunting and gathering. Thus, they did not have to live as nomads for the resources they could consume like their ancestors but started to live where they could do agriculture and settle down. Discovery of agriculture and domestication of animals played a significant role in this transformation. “With the realization that certain seeds changed into wheat and corn, which could be transformed into bread, and that certain animals would live close to the home and provide milk, eggs, and meat, a new spirit of conscious cooperation between human beings and their world was born” (Baring and Cashford, 1993:46). This change was called Agricultural Revolution, which refers to the human’s discovery that they could use nature according to their wishes and obtain the foods they wanted. While humans provided adequate food, they also learned to tame animals. While this provided them with benefits from their meat and milk, it also helped them with agriculture as beasts of burden and hunting small game.

At the same time, domestication and the agricultural revolution gradually awakened something in humans that they had never realized before, other than the food and aid these resources provided. People began to gain a sense of ownership of the land. Now they would be able to make a living not only from what nature provided them but also from the products they had grown. Therefore, in this process, the effect of climate and geographical conditions on them decreased, and in fact, they began to establish their domination over the forces of nature and continue their lives without being exposed to these processes of nature and without changing their place. They came to a position where they could make a living independently of nature. Along with these, they began to build strong and secure dwellings where they could protect themselves and the animals they had domesticated as well as the crops they had grown. Instead of living in cave-like shelters that nature offered them in the past, they now started to build sheltered, comfortable dwellings according to their own needs. The transition to the abodes they had built also represented their release from dependence on Mother Nature's nurturing power. Now, realizing their power over nature, people started to create agricultural irrigation systems. This showed that they were becoming more and more adept at managing nature to provide the most favorable conditions for crop growth while at the same time showing a waning reliance on untouched nature. In this period, as people's control over nature increased to meet their ever-expanding needs, the direct dependence of human beings on the forces of nature ended, and nature was reduced to a sum of resources, a habit of thought that continues today.

Yet despite their increasing control over their immediate environment, humans still remained attached to the greater forces of nature. Our Neolithic ancestors carefully observed the earth and sky and drew some conclusions from them. Feminine religious continued to occupy the centerstage in their faith as a result of these observations. The power of the female figure, however, decreased as a result of the socio-economic changes. The discovery of agriculture represented a turning point in human history as people began to understand the cyclical nature of the world around them. They saw that they were rewarded with useful nutrients when they planted crops in the soil. However, they also discovered that the soil could become unproductive in a cyclical way, and they

began to worry about interrupting this natural process. This led to the formation of the cult of fertility, which sought to prevent these interruptions from occurring. Although the ties between the fertile and healing creative process of nature and women's fertility and motherhood continued into the Neolithic period, now the focus was not on harmony with these cycles but how to increase their fertility to meet human demands; it is here that the Mother Goddess figure was born. Therefore, "there is the same recognition of an essential relationship between an invisible order, governing the revolving phases of the moon, and a visible earthly order, embodied earlier in the cycles of human and animal life and now in the cycle of the seasons and the agricultural year" (Baring and Cashford, 1993:48). As gatherers, the role of women in the discovery of agricultural methods is paramount. Through experimentation with natural seeds, women were able to develop and cultivate grains that would become the primary source of food. Although their knowledge of earth and plants as the cultivators of grain is based on their former special connection with nature, in this new period grain exclusively became a symbol of the Goddess's abundance, and bread as the fundamental sustenance of life (Gadon, 1989: 22). During the Neolithic era, with the emergence and development of the agricultural revolution, a new image of the Goddess emerged as the guardian of wheat, corn, and harvest rituals. This Goddess was seen as a reflection of the moon-like cycle of life, death, and regeneration and was connected to the growth and regeneration of wild and cultivated plants, which was also linked to the fertility of women and seeds. This connection showed that women keep society alive both in their own bodies and with the products they grow. This wheat and corn goddess became an inspiration for people who saw it as a vital force.

Joseph Campbell writes that women 'participated--perhaps even predominate--in the planting and reaping of the crops, and, as the Mother of life and nourisher of life, was thought to assist the Earth symbolically in its productivity.' By the very fact that her body in the act of giving birth portrays the mysteries of creation, she becomes in some sense endowed with the magical power to embody the relationship between the invisible and visible orders, helping the crops to grow, the trees to bear fruit and the animals to remain fertile. (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 50)

Although the essential bond between nature and women remained intact, they were approached differently in Neolithic period. As people moved away from hunting for food and focused on domesticated animals and crops, the role of religion shifted

from maintaining harmony to fertility. Totemism was replaced by animal idolatry, particularly the worship of the Mediterranean bull. Throughout the evolution of Paleolithic culture, the Magna Mater gradually transformed into the Earth Mother, who is now revered as a goddess of fertility instead of being perceived as an all-encompassing mother figure responsible for creation (Oelschlaeger, 1991: 34). In this era, animals were included in the sculptures of goddesses. They were half animals, half human bodies, or the Goddess figure with an animal mask. The monuments or images of Goddess shows that animals were part of a divine figure. At the same time, Neolithic people saw animals as their mentors, which had the same characteristics as nurturing, protecting, and guiding. Therefore, they also worshipped some animals as if they were gods. Çatal Höyük, located in Anatolia, is the most important Neolithic site in the Near East. During the Neolithic Era, the goddess figure became essentially a Goddess of Regeneration in Old Europe who would evolve into Demeter. “She was the giver of life and all that promotes fertility, and at the same time, she was the wielder of the destructive powers of nature. The feminine nature, like the moon, is light as well as dark” (Gimbutas, 1982: 152). This expression describes that the goddess figure supports basic processes such as fertility, growth, and maintenance of life as well as wielding the destructive powers of death and decay. “She is the Earth Mother, the Mother of Life, ruling over everything that rises up and is born from her and over everything that sinks back into her” (Neumann, 1972: 106). Plants grow by obtaining nutrients from the soil and live in harmony with the soil. When they die, they give birth to new life because as a result of the death and decay of plants, the soil is nourished and becomes fertile again. Therefore, this goddess figure represents the source of life and rebirth.

During the Bronze Age, as people began to improve their living standards and settle in larger communities, their religious beliefs began to develop as the adventure of survival was now put into the background. With the development of agriculture and the merging of other communities, the division of societal labor and the increased prominence of men in society contributed to the formation of social hierarchies, concentrating leadership roles and superior positions among men. The increasing role of men in society led to the greater significance of the father figure in community. Fathers

were emphasized as protective and leading figures within families and communities. This, at the theological level, resulted in the elevation of a father god.

Creation was no longer imagined as a birth from the mother, but as 'the word' that speaks all things into being. ... The separation of heaven and Earth is an image of the birth of consciousness in which humanity is set apart from nature. ... This new development of consciousness finds expression in a god who orders from beyond rather than the Goddess who moves from within. This new era is called the myth of the hero. (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 153-154)

As men's roles in society increased, the desire to have a greater say came, both in their social lives and in their ownership of land and resources. As a result, women became more dependent on the home environment, and domestic responsibilities were often delegated to them. This change in gender roles led men to believe that they had greater power over nature, which played an essential role in the evolution of patriarchal societies.

1.2. GREAT MOTHER FIGURES IN MYTHOLOGY FROM GAIA AND ISIS TO DEFILED AND DEMONIZED MOTHERS: DEMETER-PERSEPHONE AND MEDUSA

After the agricultural revolution, the increasing role of men in society was the beginning of the concept of a "hero." In the Bronze Age, these heroes were highly respected for their heavy responsibilities in society and their ability to protect society. Power was in the hands of men in many areas, such as economy, religion, and politics. Condemned to ever increasing domestic responsibilities and bound by the dictates of men, women began to be pushed behind in matters that required decision making. Even when they were able to voice any women's opinions, ideas, or responsibilities were not valued. This has led to the gender inequality that continues to this day. In fact, the severity of this situation increased in some cultures, and in the cultures of tribes such as Babylon, women began to be seen as the property of men. This meant that men had not only power over how their wives and daughters would lead their lives, but they also wielded power over their death. Sons inherited from their fathers, whereas daughters inherited nothing and could be sold into slavery by their fathers and brothers. The birth of a son was hailed as a blessing, while a daughter could be exposed to death.

Also, during this period, death took on a new significance. In contrast to the Paleolithic and even Neolithic periods, death was characterized by a feeling of permanence, fear, and unforgiveness, with no assurance of reincarnation (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 159). The Great Mother gradually assumed two separate roles: life and death were no longer regarded as two complementary aspects of her divine totality, but as opposite excluding each other (Neumann, 1972: 168). Erich Neumann, who was a student of Carl Jung, in his book *The Great Mother*, explores the “Great Mother” as an archetype, building upon Jung's studies. Carl Jung states, “Just as all archetypes have a positive, favorable, bright side that points upwards, so also they have one that points downwards, partly negative and unfavorable, partly chthonic, but for the rest merely neutral” (Jung, 2003: 123). This holds true for the mother archetype as well. In his book, Neumann categorizes the types associated with the mother archetype into two groups: “elementary” and “transformative”. The elementary types encompass both positive and negative attributes. The positive aspects of elementary types may transform into negative qualities depending on societal changes, such as social, economic, political, and so on. The positive and negative attributes of the Mother archetype are the result of a transformation emphasized by Erich Neumann. In his *Four Archetypes* book, Carl Jung demonstrates that the mother archetype represents a set of qualities and symbols deeply ingrained in human culture and psychology. On the positive side, it embodies maternal care and compassion, the mysterious power of femininity, wisdom that transcends rational thought, nurturing instincts, and all that is kind, supportive, and conducive to growth and fertility. Conversely, the mother archetype can have a negative aspect. It symbolizes secrecy, darkness, and the unknown, including the underworld. It can also represent elements that consume, seduce, poison, and evoke fear, akin to inescapable and fateful forces (Jung, 2003: 15). Therefore, in his book Erich Neumann describes the Mother Goddess as separated into two opposing functions: ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ – the ‘good’ Mother, who gives life, and the ‘terrible’ Mother, who takes it away. Mythological stories are treasure troves of female figures embodying different aspects of the mother archetype. For example, while Isis is a goddess known for rebuilding and reuniting the dismembered body of her husband Osiris, Demeter stands out for agreeing to send her punished daughter to the underworld to have her reborn.

An example of this negative and dark side of the mother archetype is the story of Medea, who killed her own sons. Medea kills her own children to take revenge on her unfaithful husband, Jason, because she wanted to protect her children from being used by Jason and harmed by him. Even in our daily lives, it has been seen that if a kitten is born sick, the mother cat eats this sick kitten to protect her other kittens to increase their chances of survival and to prevent them from fighting the disease in the future. Although it represents a protective side, it is seen as brutality by most people. According to Neumann, Medea is an ancient Mana figure that clearly represents the transformation of its principles into negative, with Mana figures typically symbolizing psychological and anthropological concepts of spiritual and magical power. “[I]n her the declining matriarchate is already devaluated by the patriarchal principle, and the mythical reality she represents is personalized, that is, reduced to a mere personal level and so negativized. Like Circe, she was originally a goddess, but has become a ‘witch’ in the patriarchally colored myth” (Neumann, 1972: 288). Other examples include Hecate and the Gorgons in mythology. Hecate is a virgin goddess associated with the dead, the underworld, and witchcraft. Gorgons are female monsters with sharp teeth and live snakes on their heads instead of hair. The most well-known of these female snake-haired monsters is Medusa who was caught with Poseidon in Athena’s temple and was cursed by Athena, transforming her into a monstrous creature with snakes for hair.

However, to attribute certain characteristics to females, as Neuman does, is to oversimplify the concept of femininity. To limit female identity only to motherhood is to ignore its other aspects. Archotyping as good and bad mothers likewise causes certain female archetypes to be stigmatized as witches or villains. This narrow perspective of the female archetype is detrimental to women’s empowerment, as it limits their potential and reinforces harmful gender stereotypes. It is evident that language plays a significant role in shaping our understanding of female archetypes. The language used to describe women’s roles and identities impacts how society perceives and treats them.

As Jung and later Neumann have noted, the feminine archetype encompasses every stage of femininity, such as maidenhood, motherhood, and grand-motherhood, along with all the feminine elements in nature and all the positive and negative symbols attributed to women. In psychoanalysis, too, these opposing aspects are manifested in

the duality of the caring and fruitful mother and the cruel and neglectful mother who disregards her children. This complexity is mirrored in her personality, which seems to change with the seasons. She displays tenderness and compassion in spring, nurturing her offspring like a warm sun that brings life to the earth. During the winter, as the temperature drops, she retreats like an old witch into a darkened cave. She has to go deep into the ground and recharge herself. If the leaves are falling, the ground is freezing, the animals are starving, and famines are beginning, it means that the mother goddess of winter appears as the witch-mother, the frightening image of the good mother. All nature hibernates and lies fallow. Here, the mother goddess appears as the Goddess of death, which is a negative representation of the mother's great power. But as the weather warms and the season progress, she emerges from her hiding place, rejuvenated and renewed. In the summer, she turns into a fertile mother goddess, uses seductive power like Aphrodite, and attracts the attention of men. The concept of the mother goddess is also highly connected with the lunar cycle. The crescent moon represents the young virgin and her sense of incompleteness. The full moon represents the erotic Goddess glowing in the dark. The new moon symbolizes death and the renewal of nature. These symbols are also reflected in the colors over the seasons. While spring stands out with white, representing the innocence and purity of the young girl, the summer season is red, which represents passion, blood, and the season's scorching heat. The winter season appears with the color black, representing the unknown and darkness. This whole process symbolizes the cycle of rebirth from the Paleolithic era to the present day.

Various goddesses embody the above-mentioned different aspects: Gaia, Demeter, Isis represent nurturing and law-oriented elements, while Hecate, Medusa, Gorgon, Lilith, Circe symbolize the chaotic and witch-like aspects that can impede the progress of men on the path of culture.

1.2.1. Gaia

Old European societies worshipped many female goddesses traceable to the Mother Goddess in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Periods. In pre-Hellenistic Greece, Gaia was one of those Mother Goddesses who was seen as a giver of life and sustenance. In Greek mythology, once there was chaos, darkness, and silence. From this nothing, Gaia created the earth and everything on it. Therefore, De Gaia declares, “Gaia name derived from ge or ga, the Greek common noun for ‘land’; also called Gaea, Gi, Ge, and, in the Roman pantheon. ... Earth ultimately symbolizes Gaia’s womb and emerges in Greek mythology as the physical location out of which and from which creation develops” (De Gaia, 2019: 42). Gaia spontaneously emerged from this chaos. Furthermore, “Thus, one can trace the development of the physical features of the universe as successive gods come into being” (Trzaskoma, Smith, and Brunet, 2004: 130). Gaia not only created the earth, but she also created Uranus as a companion to herself. Uranus and Gaia had more than one child, the most significant of whom is Cronos. Uranus did not like his children at all because they were creatures of different shapes and sizes. Uranus even forced Gaia, who was writhing in agony before giving birth, not to give birth, as he did not like it at all. Gaia wanted to take revenge on Uranus, who was able to show her teeth against him, so she incited her children against their father. Cronos was the most affected by this provocation, and he began to yearn for revenge on his father. One night when Uranus came to Gaia, his son Cronos hid and cut off his father's testicles. After Cronos deposed Uranus, Gaia realized that Cronos’ cruelty was too much to control. Aware of Gaia’s being conscious of his own power, Cronos decided to eat all his children. Gaia and her daughter Rhea planned together so that Cronos would not eat Zeus, and having succeeded in their plan, they trained Zeus to defeat Cronos. After Zeus won this war, he made Gaia even angrier by imprisoning all of the Titans in Tartarus, that is, underground. Thereupon, Gaia started another war.

In all these stories, Gaia, as a female goddess, rebelled against all this masculinity and went against her son, husband, and granddaughter. Gaia initially represents the good mother archetype, symbolizing the generosity, abundance, and

source of life as the Earth Mother. However, Gaia's transformation comes as a result of her painful birthing process and tragic story at the hands of her husband, Uranus. Gaia's subsequent efforts to raise Zeus to defeat Cronos, who grew increasingly powerful, to prevent Cronos from devouring all of his children, could symbolize Gaia's transformation into the bad mother archetype. This archetype actually represents a part of Gaia's resistance against Uranus, who caused her pain during her birth process and rejected their own children for being monstrous, and her own son Cronos, who, in his increasing ambition, sought to devour his own offspring.

1.2.2. Isis

Isis is an ancient Egyptian goddess known for her protective and healing role. Isis is revered as a powerful and compassionate goddess who represents the natural cycles of life and death, and she is often associated with the annual flooding of the Nile River, which brought fertility and abundance to the lands of Egypt (Merchant, 1996: 57).

According to what is told in the book *The Myth of Goddess*, the whole story begins with the world covered with water. Later, from the waters of the Nile, the sun, mounds, plants, and animals emerge. The story of Isis unfolds as follows: Isis and Osiris fall in love, but the jealous brother Seth plots against Osiris. Seth tricks Osiris into a sealed chest and throws him into the Nile. He decided to guarantee Osiris remained dead by dissecting the body into fourteen pieces and scrambling them over Egypt. Isis starts out on a mission to discover and rejoin the scattered pieces of her husband's body. Isis and her sister Nephthys are able to discover all of Osiris' body parts, but in spite of their efforts, he cannot rule over Egypt and instead becomes the ruler of the underworld. This myth represents the hidden reality that explains how nature works. "The rising Nile was seen as the tears of Isis; for when the Goddess was mourning for the lost Osiris, the tears dropped from her eyes and swelled the waters of the Nile, giving their moisture to the parched, inert body of her brother-husband" (Baring and Cashford, 1993: 233). Isis is always depicted in this story as Osiris's faithful and loving wife. This depiction has been the subject of many temple paintings and rituals. Their brother Seth's lust for power did

a lot of damage to both Osiris and Isis. What Seth did with Osiris in this story arose out of his jealousy, which he wanted to overcome by showing power by taking Osiris' place on the throne. Despite Seth's long efforts, Isis's ability to bring her husband Osiris back from the dead and protect her son Horus from harm and bringing fertility and abundance to the lands of Egypt is an indication that she embodied the characteristics of good mother archetype. Matrilineage, the dominant ties recognized in Ancient Egypt, plays a negative role in identifying the root of Seth's evilness, which is directly associated with the mother line. For example, Erich Neumann points out that Seth symbolizes the negative mother archetype. He explains that the guardian spirit that controls Seth's actions is female or ambiguous. "Characteristically, this devouring guardian spirit represents the anger of the ancestors. And these ancestors are precisely 'the male representatives of the maternal line, mother's brother, mother's mother's brother, and so on; in other words, they are matriarchal ancestors, and the guardian spirit is the evil masculine side of the matriarchal woman'" (Neumann, 1972: 174). According to Neumann, Seth's guardian spirit is an entity transmitted through an inheritance from ancestors. The origin of this guardian spirit is rooted in the male representatives of a matriarchal lineage among ancestors. In other words, the guardian spirit that controls Seth's characteristic traits is viewed as a reflection of the heritage passed down through family ties, particularly the maternal lineage.

1.2.3. Demeter and Persephone

The protector of agriculture, grain, and fertility, the goddess Demeter was a revered figure in Greek mythology. Her value is linked to the growth of plants, the abundance of harvests, and the soil's fertility. Demeter had a highly influential position as the goddess of agriculture in Greek mythology and society. Her existence represented a role that emphasized the vital importance of agriculture and was essential to the welfare of society. Respected among farmers and cultivators, she gained the trust of the community by providing fruitful harvests. She is seen as a mother figure and protects Earth's livelihoods.

Moreover, her influence goes beyond agriculture and is intertwined with the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Demeter's nurturing nature ensured the flow of life and the continuation of natural processes. Demeter was often portrayed as a wise and authoritative woman. She was usually depicted wearing a crown or wreath made of grain, symbolizing her power over agriculture. Demeter often held sheaves of wheat or barley to represent abundance. Sometimes, she had been depicted carrying a torch, searching for her daughter Persephone, who was abducted. Once again, she was grasping a cornucopia, symbolizing the abundant harvest of the Earth under her watchful care.

Demeter is celebrated as a remnant of the ancient cultures that held women and nature sacred. In ancient Greece, there were many temples and sanctuaries devoted to the worship of Demeter. The shrine of Eleusis, near Athens, was the most famous among them. The Eleusinian Mysteries were a series of sacred rituals and ceremonies held in honor of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Only the initiated could participate due to their secrecy. These mysteries focused on themes of fertility, death, and rebirth, providing devotees with a deeper understanding of natural cycles and spiritual enlightenment. Thesmophoria is another major festival, a women-only gathering that celebrates the cycle of fertility and agriculture.

Demeter's story represents the shift of the central significance in relationships from the mother-daughter ties to father-son ties. The main legend associated with Demeter centers around the abduction of her daughter Persephone by Hades, ruler of the underworld. Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and Zeus, was abducted by Hades while she was gathering flowers. Demeter, the goddess of harvest and fertility, was very upset by her daughter's disappearance and stopped working with crops. This break on fertility created a food crisis in Greece. Other gods made great efforts to have Demeter lift her curse on the land, but Demeter refused until her daughter was released. Zeus sent Hermes to Hades to request the release of Persephone. Hades agreed to release her, but not before having her consume pomegranate seeds. Because of consuming fruit from the underworld, Persephone became bound to the realm of the underworld and to Hades himself. Worried about the crops, Zeus sent his son Hermes to make a deal with Hades. The deal was that Persephone would marry Hades and spend six months of the year as

the queen of the underworld and the other six months on Earth with her mother. Demeter agreed to the deal, and each spring, she welcomed her daughter back with blooming flowers. Demeter's determination to get her daughter back displays strong and nurturing maternal instincts. Her determination to protect and provide for her child reveals maternal feelings. When Persephone returned to Hades each fall, Demeter let all the crops die until spring. This myth was used to explain the cycle of fertility in nature.

In addition to that, the myth of Persephone and Demeter portrays the contrasting aspects of the ancient Great Mother that the Greeks sought to balance. It captures the profound relationship between the upper and lower worlds, the light and the dark, as a dynamic cycle of life and death that encompasses all beings (Woolger, 1989: 261). At the same time, Demeter is quite conducive to the transformation of Erich Neumann's archetype of the good mother into the archetype of the bad mother. Demeter's transformation begins with the abduction of her daughter Persephone. As the goddess of agriculture and fertility, she represents the growth of crops and the abundance of harvest. She has a deep bond with her daughter Persephone and protects her with love. All these characteristics of Demeter are those of the good mother archetype. However, the abduction of Persephone by Hades reveals the "bad mother" archetype within Demeter. Demeter responds to her daughter's loss with deep sorrow. She neglects agriculture and the plants, causing the earth to wither, leading to a famine. At this point, Demeter can be associated with the archetype of the "bad mother" as the effects of her daughter's loss have a negative impact on society and people.

1.2.4. Medusa

Medusa was a Gorgon in Greek mythology, known for her ability to turn people to stone with a glance. Her hair was said to be made of snakes, and her appearance was so frightening that she struck fear into the hearts of anyone who stood in her way. "Thus, the terrifying figure of the Gorgon with the snakes writhing around her head--the sight of whom turns men to the stone--is a projection of the Terrible Mother" (Neumann, 1972: 22). She was unwittingly cursed into a monstrous being by the goddess Athena.

She was a beautiful mortal who was a priest at the temple of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war. Medusa, however, attracted the attention of Poseidon, the sea god. They had a sexual relationship in the temple of Athena, which is a sacred place. Athena punished Medusa for her actions because she was angry at this sacrilege in her temple. She turned Medusa's hair into a nest of poisonous snakes, giving her a monstrous look. In addition, she cursed Medusa's gaze, turning anyone who looked directly into her eyes into stone. Her petrifying gaze belongs to the province of bad mother archetype. "This effect of the terrible stands in opposition to the mobility of the life stream that flows in all organic life; it is a psychic expression for petrification and sclerosis. The Gorgon is the counterpart of the life womb; she is the womb of death or the night sun" (Neumann, 1972: 166).

In fact, Medusa is an extremely ancient mother goddess representation. Being a woman and having snake hairs represent eternal life, an immortality motif. Mythology tries to masculinize immortality, to draw it to the side of men. Interestingly, it has been noted that Medusa never killed a woman, only men who gazed upon her. This observation can be interpreted in the context of the relationship between nature and culture. Culture often asserts its dominance by claiming to understand and manipulate nature, thereby controlling it. This cultural impulse tends to ignore the intrinsic value of nature and limit it to a purely utilitarian role. However, nature encompasses much more than physical landscapes that can be cultivated and exploited for productivity. It embodies a harmonious symphony where all elements are linked. Culturally motivated individuals sometimes only interact with nature for economic gain. For example, they may focus solely on cultivating land for high-yield potato production. In doing so, however, they may not fully understand and appreciate the complex dynamics of natural systems. When a potato crop is severely affected by an insect infestation, people who rely on it for food may find themselves at risk of starvation. In fact, even pests are parts of nature doing nature's work, for nature works like a symphony, constantly working for balance and trying to fix problems to maintain equilibrium. This contrast between the human perception and the inner workings of nature reveals the incompatibility between culture and nature. In nature's system, survival as a system is a fundamental objective.

Nature evolves by harmonizing and balancing its components. Culture often disrupts this delicate symphony. It tries to rationalize and control nature and does not recognize the existing mutual relationships. It is important to recognize that the effort to understand and make sense of nature is not an exceptional human prerogative. Nature itself contains a system that establishes harmony and synchronization with humanity.

Nature's constant search for balance becomes evident as we observe its complex workings. It is important to interpret Medusa's ability to turn people into stone as a symbolic rather than a literal representation. The idea that Medusa's gaze primarily affects men can be seen as a metaphor for how hegemonic masculinity and its relationship to power dynamics can affect and shape our perceptions. The idea that the male body is seen as primarily focused on self-serving reproductive pursuits prioritizes traditional notions of masculinity, often motivated by dominance, control, and egocentrism. This means that societal expectations can shape how men perceive and prioritize their actions in relation to power dynamics. This view implies that the male figure tends to use power and influence for its own interests, ignoring the general balance of nature.

Medusa's story ends in her defeat by Perseus beheading her to present it to Athena, the goddess of wisdom and strategy. This act represents the destructive aspects of masculinity based on conquest. Athena adds Medusa's head to her shield. This symbolizes the acceptance of the natural balance in nature. Though it may be interpreted in totally opposite ways, this gesture may also be interpreted to express the Olympian gods' understanding of and respect for the superiority of nature. It also shows that they accept that even their own forces are subject to the influences of nature. This interpretation highlights the importance of recognizing the interplay between culture and nature, particularly in relation to traditional gender roles and power dynamics. It suggests that true wisdom lies in recognizing and embracing the delicate equilibrium of the natural world, even for powerful entities like the Olympian gods.

Moving on to a different perspective, Christian teachings have often presented women as complementary to men and as having less power. This was reinforced by a patriarchal society established at a time when rulers defined religious and social norms.

This societal norm heavily influenced the works of writers and artists and negatively represented women by portraying them as seductive and limiting them to domestic roles. In the story of the Fall, Satan appears in the shape of a snake to deceive the gullible Eve. The association of snakes with Satan and demonic behavior in Christian symbolism further supported the idea that women are inferior to men. Shifting to the realm of literature, in literary works such as *The Divine Comedy* by Dante and *Paradise Lost*, women are often portrayed as being limited in their abilities to participate in broader social realms beyond the domestic sphere. An example of this limitation in mythology is Persephone depicted as having no power to leave the border between the world and the Underworld. This symbolizes the societal limitations placed on women and their ability to participate in broader social realms beyond the domestic sphere (Pertiwi, 2018: 3).

The transformations of mythological figures such as Gaia, Isis, Demeter, and Medusa are reflections of the complex human nature that lies deep within. These myths emphasize the demonization of certain characteristics and the separation of the original unity of good and evil, highlighting the “othering” of what is considered bad or evil. However, the mother archetype reveals two complementary aspects or powers of a woman. Birthing, nurturing, and feeding are simultaneous with frightening, destroying, and killing, forming the two complementary parts of the mother archetype, just like life and death, day and night, and light and darkness. “There is no position without its negation. In spite or just because of their extreme opposition, neither can exist without the other. It is exactly as formulated in classical Chinese philosophy: yang (the light, warm, dry, masculine principle) contains within it the seed of yin (the dark, cold, moist, feminine principle), and vice versa” (Jung, 2003: 48). The loss of this original unity has left us a world that has divided into two as well as a schizophrenic human soul.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS ECOFEMINISM?

Ecofeminism is a communal and political movement that points out the link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature by integrating ecological concerns with feminist analysis. Ecofeminism accepts the fact that both women and nature are exposed to various exploitations within patriarchal and capitalist systems. It challenges these oppressive systems to create more sustainable and equitable lifestyles that align with social justice and environmental well-being. While including different points of view and approaches, its main idea continues to be the recognition of the connections between gender, social justice, and environmental problems.

French author Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced the concept of ecofeminism in her book *Feminism or Death* in 1974, and due to that, she is commonly credited for the concept itself. In her book, d'Eaubonne challenged patriarchal societies for exploiting both women and nature and defended combining women's freedom and environmental concerns (Luca, 2017: 11). She showed the importance of maintenance of societies to convert them into more sustainable and gender-equal structures. Besides, notable figures such as Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, Ynestra King, Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva have contributed to the development of ecofeminism, and they also investigated the connection between the oppression of women, exploitation of nature and the dominance of patriarchal and capitalist systems.

Though ecofeminism movement appeared back in the 1970s, its roots can be traced back to feminist and environmentalist thinking. It appeared as a search for the problems of environmental disruption and as criticism towards the patriarchal system. In the 1970s, feminist researchers and activists realized that women were impacted by environmental damage disproportionately, with underprivileged populations being more sensitive to problems like pollution, deforestation, and resource consumption. While this encouraged a deeper investigation into the connections between gender, social inequality, and ecological concerns, ecofeminism was also influenced by various enlightening traditions such as environmentalism, feminism, and social justice

movements significantly. It unites the ecological point of view on the interconnectedness of all living creatures and the interdependence of ecosystems with feminist issues. Also, it is known that ecofeminists make use of feminist theories to examine power structures, gender roles, and oppression.

2.1. THE INTERSECTION OF ECOLOGY AND FEMINISM

Ecofeminism provides an attractive and thought-provoking study area while examining the link between feminism and ecology. It explores the complex and diverse relationship between feminist goals and the urgent need to deal with the ecological emergency.

2.1.1. Ecology

According to King, “The ecology movement, in theory and practice, attempts to speak for nature, ‘the other’ that has no voice, and it is not conceived of subjectively in our civilization” (1898: 20). By acknowledging nature as an entity existing beyond our own subjective experiences, we can begin to understand its importance and make efforts to protect it. The idea is to shift our perspective from one that places human needs above all else to one that values the interconnectedness of all living things.

In today’s world, all humankind faces ecological disasters brought about by the pervasive disruption of our natural surroundings and our unsustainable way of living. The fact that climate change causes existential dangers such as pollution, deforestation, and a decrease in biodiversity in ecosystems pose a threat to both living and non-living entities. The ecological crisis is an issue involving the natural environment’s degradation and the unsustainable consumption of resources. It poses an existential threat to both human and non-human life, and it includes problems such as climate change, deforestation, pollution, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss. The main causes of these are anthropogenic activities, dynamics of power, unsustainable consumption patterns, and pursuit of profit within a capitalist framework. To be able to understand the

ecological crisis, one needs to examine implications for ecological systems, human communities, and future generations, including altered weather patterns, social inequities, disrupted ecosystems, and the violation of human rights.

One of the most influential figures in the development of ecological thinking was the German biologist Ernst Haeckel, who introduced the term “ecology” in 1866, whose history dates back to ancient Greek and their understanding of the interconnectedness of all things in nature. The word “ecology” comes from the Greek “oikos,” which means “house” and “logos.” This field of science explores the complicated relationships between living organisms and their surroundings, including the chemical, physical, and biological factors that shape their behavior, population dynamics, and evolution.

In her book *Earthcare*, Carolyn Merchant finds the word meaning of ecology similar to households. She highlights that women have historically mediated the link between the Earth and the house (Merchant, 1996: 139). Women have always had an intimate connection with the natural world around them, from caring for the land and gardens to gathering herbs and plants for medicinal purposes, and this context brings women and the Earth to a position oppressed under patriarchy starts here.

2.1.2. Feminism

Feminism has an abundant and complex history that dates to the 1800s. Various activist associations and organizations joined forces in their efforts to redefine the concepts of gender and sexuality in contemporary society, and this collaboration played a crucial role in shaping the movement. With time, the movement has evolved and adapted to new challenges, resulting in a dynamic landscape divided into a series of “waves” by scholars. All these different waves have been characterized by their own struggles, victories, and pitfalls. Women from different origins, cultures, and backgrounds have come together in each wave to address and criticize the oppression, discrimination, and violence they face. As the feminist movement has evolved, activists have assessed different approaches and techniques to effect change. “Despite its multiple forms, it has unanimously mobilized toward alleviating women’s subjugated positions,

private and social alike, by exerting impact on the economic, political, and cultural fabrics of modern societies” (Malinowska, 2020: 1). The feminist movement, with its unity, adaptability, and unwavering commitment, remains dedicated to the relentless pursuit of gender equality. It continues to address the diverse forms of subjugation that women face and actively strives to effect transformative change across various facets of society.

2.2. ECOFEMINIST ISSUES

Ecofeminism links the ecological crisis to oppression based on gender and social inequalities. One needs to understand the comparable forms of oppression and devaluation women have endured to be able to grasp the link between women and the natural world. Women have always been marginalized in patriarchal societies throughout history, their voices silenced, and their rights limited, which bear close resemblance to the negligence of the inherent value and autonomy of the natural world. Many ecofeminist academicians indicate how women and nature are oppressed, exploited, linked, and mutually strengthened. The exploitation of nature and women are mainly because of the patriarchal and capitalist system’s ideology of domination and objectification. Exploitative practices and prioritizing profit-driven motives victimized both women and the natural world. The consumption of natural resources and the regulation of women’s bodies are interconnected concerns that disproportionately impact minority communities, placing additional burdens on women who face ecological harm.

Ecofeminism aims to raise a wider perspective that includes both women and nature. Ecofeminism centers on taking transformative action and exploring various paradigms that promote ecological sustainability, gender equality, and social justice. This includes addressing complex difficulties and implementing holistic approaches prioritizing the well-being of humans and the natural world.

The association between women and nature often refers to their maternal qualities. For some ecofeminists, this bond that defines both women and nature in terms of nurturing should be at the center of ecofeminist thought. Looking at nature as a

mother through the lens of ecofeminism helps us appreciate its life-sustaining qualities and its nurturing attributes. However, this perspective only confirms the limitations of showing nature solely in this way. Many ecofeminist scholars believe that this point of view simplifies the image of nature and strengthens gender essentialism because it may also lead to new behavior patterns. For example, “the identification of women and nature implicit in phrases like ‘virgin lands,’ ‘man’s war on Mother Nature,’ and ‘penetrating the secret springs of Nature,’ are suggestive of sexual assaults that render both women and nature passive and submissive” (Merchant, 1996: 142). Expressions like these have “been the basis for associating women and nature with the base, the inferior, the degraded, both of them to be appropriated, used, abused and discarded” (Granadason, 1996: 76). Instead, these ecofeminists defend reimagining nature as the mother in a way that accepts the diversity of women and the natural world, challenging traditional gender hierarchies.

Environmental justice is one of the main foci of ecofeminism which highlights the unequal impact of environmental damage and corruption on marginalized communities. This especially applies to women, indigenous people, and those living in poor areas. The movement recognizes that environmental injustices are not accidental; it originates from systemic inequalities and power imbalances. Marginalized communities, particularly women, indigenous peoples, and those living in poor areas, are irrationally affected by environmental damage and corruption. The unequal distribution of environmental threats, such as toxic waste sites, industrial pollution, and hazardous facilities in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, often results in negative health consequences, such as respiratory problems, cancer, and reproductive disorders. “Women experience the results of toxic dumping on their own bodies (sites of reproduction of the species), in their own homes (sites of the reproduction of daily life), and in their communities and schools (sites of social reproduction)” (Merchant, 1996: 161). Environmental justice intends to correct the unequal distribution of critical resources, which can result in marginalized communities being denied access to a secure and healthy environment, thereby worsening pre-existing social and health inequalities. Ecofeminism is highly concerned with the efforts of indigenous land domination and

rights to attain environmental justice. Women-led indigenous communities possess important traditional knowledge for sustainable practices. However, they also suffer resource extraction and land damage. Therefore, it is important to highlight the recognition of indigenous land rights and give importance to their perspectives in decision-making for land and resource management. It is crucial that the communities should be empowered by environmental justice to challenge oppressive systems, call to account industries that pollute, and promote sustainable and equitable solutions through grassroots activism and participation in decision-making.

One of the major topics of ecofeminist movement is sustainable development, which involves social and economic advancement along with the protection of nature. Sustainable development supports the values of viable economic systems, social fairness, and environmental management that prioritize sustainability and the well-being of individuals and the planet (Blewitt, 2015: 16). Sustainable development struggles to promote transparent, inclusive, and context-specific solutions that point out local needs by including diverse knowledge systems and being long-term focused. Ecofeminism is aligned with sustainable development principles that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Merchant, 1996: 211). Sustainable development challenges the dominant development paradigm and proposes a future in which human societies thrive while respecting the ecological limits of the planet, promoting justice, fairness, and harmony with nature.

Ecofeminism mainly aims to address the intersection of agriculture and food with issues of environmental sustainability, gender equality, and social justice. This movement underlines the importance of alternative approaches, such as local food systems and agroecology, to promote food sovereignty while building a sustainable food system. As commercial agriculture grew, middle-class rural women began buying butter, eggs, and cheese instead of making them at home, while poorer and isolated farm women continued to rely on homemaking. This shift away from home production reduced women’s direct involvement in the natural environment while engaging in farming activities (104). Accordingly, ecofeminism defends women’s empowerment in agriculture and underlines the need for food justice through community-led initiatives,

food sovereignty, and the recognition of the rights of marginalized communities. Ecofeminism's goal is to create a food system that promotes justice and well-being for all individuals, regardless of their social status.

Ecofeminism highlights the connection between environmental health and reproductive rights, pointing out the impact of environmental damage on women's reproductive health. The primary aim of ecofeminism is to promote reproductive justice by ensuring that women can make decisions in a safe environment. Exposure of women to environmental toxins causes hormonal imbalances, infertility, and even dangers that may occur during childbirth. One of the aims of ecofeminism is to create a safe environment for the health of mothers and children who may be affected and harmed by these environmental toxins. Certain methods are applied to create this safe environment and avoid potential dangers. Ecofeminism also aims to ensure reproductive equality. Considering the link between the well-being of the ecosystem and that of women, children, and future generations, it emphasizes the importance of a sustainable and healthy relationship between the environment and people. In order to achieve this, ecofeminism advocates reproductive autonomy and the necessity of combating oppressive systems. It supports and advocates methods and policies that protect the health of women and children while promoting sustainability. In short, one of the ultimate goals of ecofeminism is to create and sustain a healthy and fair society by ensuring the well-being of women, children, and the environment.

The continuing ecological crisis poses a significant threat to the stability of ecosystems, putting important sources such as clean water, food, and medicinal plants at risk. The effects of human activities on the Earth's ecosystems, such as climate change and the ecological crisis, are pressing issues that concern ecofeminism. While tackling the challenge of climate change, it is crucial to acknowledge that its consequences are not affecting all people and communities the same. The effects of climate change, such as waterborne diseases, where pure water means health, impure means disease, death, and malnutrition, can disproportionately affect women's well-being (Merchant, 1996: 116).

In marginalized communities, women may come across challenges like accessing crucial sources such as healthcare and finding nutritious food. Ecological crises can result in the displacement of entire communities, raising the number of environmental refugees. Ecofeminism underlines the social and gendered aspects of environmental displacement, with women often suffering the impact of its effects and coming across specific problems such as resource availability and decision-making power. Ecofeminism is driven by the idea of equitable and empathetic responses to environmental displacement, making sure the safety of those who are forced to relocate because of environmental changes. Ecofeminism imagines a world with sustainable practices where intersectional environmentalism is promoted and where humans and nature live in harmony. This vision also includes the understanding of gender equality and social justice and the protection and restoration of ecological systems.

In conclusion, ecofeminist issues shed light on the intricate connections between gender, society, and the environment. By recognizing the systemic inequalities that women and nature often face, ecofeminism encourages us to adopt a more holistic and sustainable approach to our relationship with the planet. Ecofeminism is divided into four main branches in terms of evaluating the causes of societal inequalities and proposed solutions.

2.3. ECOFEMINIST THEORIES

Ecofeminism has experienced significant changes and diversifications since its beginning, and various lines of ecofeminism have appeared, such as liberal ecofeminism, cultural ecofeminism, social ecofeminism, and socialist ecofeminism. Each of these lines highlights different aspects of the movement's principles and objectives.

2.3.1. Liberal Ecofeminism

Liberal ecofeminism has an outgrowth of liberal feminism, which has played a significant role in the history of feminism, starting from the seventeenth century, and continuing until the 1960s. The liberal phase of the women's movement that erupted in the 1960s was a powerful and transformative moment in history. Originally, this movement demanded equality for women in all areas of life, including the workplace and education. The goal was to create a world where women could pursue their dreams and achieve their full potential without facing discrimination or barriers based on gender. While many people believe that capitalism is the best economic system for promoting human progress, liberal feminism maintains that everyone should fight to reach their full potential to contribute to a society that benefits all individuals. Some liberal feminists believe that women are just as rational as men and that they haven't been given equal opportunities in education and work, which has handicapped their potential for creativity in all areas of life. Simone De Beauvoir, who affected the twentieth century of liberal ecofeminism mostly, "argued that women and men were biologically different but that women could transcend their biology, freeing themselves from their destiny as biological reproducers to assume masculine values" (Merchant, 1996: 9). Women should also have the right to pursue their own interests and passions rather than being limited by societal expectations of femininity.

Liberal ecofeminists, like liberal feminists, focus on the rhetoric of rights and the need for legal solutions to gender inequality and environmental problems. According to Merchant, it is important to understand that environmental corruption and the oppression of women are connected issues that need to be handled together. She proposes that by giving importance to sustainability, gender equality, and environmental ethics, one can create a society that is fair and just for all. To be able to achieve this, it is crucial to understand and address the diverse experiences and specific needs of women while including them in decision-making processes. Therefore, liberal feminism plays an important role in understanding and addressing both social and environmental injustices.

2.3.2. Cultural Ecofeminism

Cultural feminism, out of which cultural ecofeminism came into existence, emerged as a part of the second wave of feminism during the late 1960s and 1970s following the women's suffrage movement in the early twentieth century. This movement sought to address a variety of social, cultural, and political injustices that women were experiencing at the time. Cultural ecofeminism has arisen as more of a fresh response to the perceived mutual association and undervaluation of women and nature in Western culture and society. Cultural ecofeminism recognizes how different cultural constructs, such as philosophy, spirituality, religion, and societal frameworks, influence our understanding and perception of nature and the role of women in relation to it. It also surveys how cultural norms and values shape our perception of the environment and women's bond with it.

For instance, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” by Sherry Ortner’s 1974 article argues that women have traditionally been associated with nature due to their social roles, psychology, and physiology. While men have had greater freedom to participate in public affairs and engage in abstract thinking, women have traditionally been tasked with childbearing and chores around the house (Merchant, 1996: 10). The idea behind cultural ecofeminism suggests that patriarchal and anthropocentric structures and language are the reason behind the corruption and disruption and treatment of nature as a commodity to be managed and exploited.

Cultural ecofeminism aims for the liberation of women and nature through direct political action. They celebrate the prehistoric era when women were seen as a symbol of abundance because of their gift of fertility and nature was symbolized by pregnant female figures, and women were held high in society. The idea of “Mother Earth” is often seen as a metaphor in cultural feminism. However, the patriarchal culture replaced mother goddesses with male gods and possessed this metaphor to rationalize and dominate nature as a way to support patriarchal ideologies. Later, the scientific revolution further corrupted nature by viewing it as a machine to be controlled from the outside. Cultural ecofeminism celebrates the relationship between women and nature

through ancient rituals and goddess worship. Nature is held high as the mother and goddess figure, which inspires and empowers ecofeminists, while spirituality is seen as a source of personal and social change.

The philosophy of cultural ecofeminism also strives to overturn the power dynamics in the binary thinking that separates nature from culture, male from female, and mind from body. Instead of promoting the culturally privileged one in each pair, they promote the underprivileged one aligned with women and nature. The movement holds a more interconnected and holistic perspective that recognizes the inseparable bond between humans and nature.

As such, cultural ecofeminism aims for a world where nature and people can exist together in harmony and balance. It seeks to transform our relationship with the environment by challenging dominant cultural narratives and values. It engages in creative expression and explores spiritual and philosophical connections to nature. Ultimately, cultural ecofeminism aims to raise a more sustainable and respectful relationship between people and the natural world based on all beings' true value and connection.

2.3.3. Social Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminism is a branch of ecofeminism that separates itself from cultural ecofeminism by focusing on the social and materialist side of early radical feminism, which aims to take issue with the oppressions that were imposed on women by various institutions such as marriage, the nuclear family, the capitalist state, and patriarchal religion. Unlike cultural ecofeminism, which often delves into symbolism and mythology, social ecofeminism remains grounded in the political and economic realities of our time. It also differentiates itself from liberal ecofeminism, which tends to seek gender equality within existing structures, and from socialist ecofeminism, which focuses primarily on class struggle. Social ecofeminism's commitment to systemic analysis, intersectionality, and its call for radical change makes it a powerful and distinct

approach to addressing the pressing issues of environmental degradation and gender inequality.

In her book *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, published in 1991, Janet Biehl can be seen withdrawing her support from ecofeminism. She has also decided to abandon social ecofeminism since she believes that it has lost its rational side and become more self-contradictory. Biehl argued that this undermined women's aspirations for a society that is ecologically liberating. Early radical feminism demanded a complete restructuring of society and aimed for equality in all areas of life. However, according to Biehl, the cultural feminism that supported much of ecofeminism rejected rationality by accepting goddess worship and essentialized the nurturing and caretaking traits that have been assigned to women by the patriarchy. Furthermore, this group also rejected scientific and cultural progress because it was promoted by men (Merchant, 1996: 14). Biehl's critique highlights the tension between embracing feminine qualities and rejecting patriarchal norms. While it is important to celebrate traditionally feminine traits, it implies that it is equally important to do the same in a way that does not reinforce gender stereotypes or reject rational thought.

The Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries, as scholar Carolyn Merchant suggests, marked a profound shift in society's perception of nature. Rather than viewing it as a dynamic force, nature was reduced to a passive entity to be controlled for human benefit. This mechanistic perspective was, in part, a reflection of the hierarchical and patriarchal society of the time, which reinforced the subjugation of women, often associated with nature, and considered inferior. This perspective had a significant impact, shaping scientific inquiry, cultural behaviors, and social structures that persist to the present day. This transformation in the understanding of nature's role relates to the principles of social ecofeminism, which examines the complex interplay of gender, society, and the environment. Social ecofeminism investigates historical and cultural relationships between women and nature and their effects on societal structures, including the perpetuation of gender hierarchies and the exploitation of both women and the environment.

2.3.4. Socialist Ecofeminism

In the center of socialist ecofeminism, there is a deep critique of the capitalist system and how it exploits women and nature. It is a movement that seeks to prioritize the role of reproduction over production. The capitalist system stands at a point opposing the idea that ecofeminism stands for.

Socialist ecofeminists believe that human societies must strive to create a balanced world in regard to both their own needs and the needs of nature. They also point out how capitalist production often relies on the exploitation of women's labor and the environment, which ultimately leads to social and ecological injustice. Throughout history, women have played a vital role in sustaining life across many different areas of life. However, after colonial and capitalist societies, their role has been limited and often overshadowed by men. Traditionally, women took part in activities such as agriculture, midwifery, and healing. These roles helped in the balance between people and nature by being not only essential for the survival of their communities.

In time, men have taken over these traditional roles in many societies, leaving women to labor only in domestic sphere and childcare. Inevitably, this has resulted in a significant loss of knowledge and skills that were once passed down from generation to generation. The contribution of women to these important and critical areas of life, whose expertise was taken away from them, was also undervalued and ignored.

Capitalism is an economic system that emphasizes profit-centered growth and strong competition, often at the expense of environmental sustainability. This system neglects the long-term impact of detrimental human activities on Earth, and it inevitably leads to results such as climate change. In contrast, rather than pursuing economic growth, socialism prioritizes the basic needs of the people and promotes social equality. Theoretically speaking, socialist societies are envisioned not to rely on constant expansion and consumption, therefore, to establish a more sustainable relationship with nature.

There are newly emerging forms of socialist ecology that aim to find a balance between human production and the natural world. These approaches recognize that

human societies are part of the bigger ecosystem and that we must work within the limits of nature to make sure a sustainable future for everybody on the planet happens. The economy of nature and the economy of man can form a complementary relationship and become a partnership (Merchant, 1996: 16).

The central focus of socialist ecofeminism is the reproduction of life. In nature, species can only survive and reproduce within their local ecosystem through biological reproduction. However, many different factors can change the survival of offspring to reproductive age, such as lack of food, water, soil chemicals, adverse weather conditions, disease, and competition from other species (Merchant, 1996: 17). Also, socialist ecofeminists argue that “women’s bodies are being turned into production machines to test contraceptives, for in vitro fertilization experiments, to produce babies for organ transplants, and to produce black market babies for sale in the northern hemisphere” (18).

In order to address these issues, socialist ecofeminism advocates the transformation of the capitalist system and the development of alternative systems that prioritize social and ecological justice. They argue, by doing so, we can create a society that values and respects labor and nature and promotes sustainable and equitable practices for all.

2.4. NATURE AS A MOTHER: WHAT KIND OF MOTHER?

As already mentioned earlier, one of the most common conceptualizations of nature, one that emphasizes the linkage between women and nature, is nature as mother. Yet nature involves not only nurturing qualities but also death and destruction. Therefore, there are two faces to nature as mother. The perception of nature as a good mother or a bad mother reflects the diverse and complex ways in which humans have conceptualized their relationship with the natural world throughout history. Nature, which is often perceived as a mother figure, has been depicted as both life-giving as well as capable of creating chaos. Mother nature embraces both concepts that are on both ends of the spectrum. Rather than defining the qualities of nature, however, these

contrasts capture the paradox within our nature and experiences with nature, where it offers comfort, sustenance, and beauty but also poses threats and puts people in challenges. Catherine M. Roach, who is a professor of Gender and Cultural Studies, examines the various manifestations of nature as “mother” and what that idea implies for the way we approach the natural world by categorizing it into three characteristics as the good mother, the bad mother and the hurt mother in her book *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*.

2.4.1. Nature as the Good Mother

For every human, nature is associated with beauty. It brings a sense of warmth and peace to the soul. Many people away from nature in big cities miss this feeling and seek a getaway in our current time. Everything that mother nature has given to humankind feels like a mother tending and caring for her children. The gifts she sends us from her bosom make us feel her love for us. It reminds us of the importance of these gifts and how they should be celebrated. It has every possible source to feed and nourish us. The power of the earth gives us whatever we need to continue living on this planet. To sustain our planet, it's amazing to think how much humankind depends on nature. Everything comes from the world around us, from the air we breathe to the food we eat. It is as if we are all connected in this web of life, with each piece depending on the others to live on, creating the cycle of life. The world cares and nurtures its creatures, just like a mother does for her child, so perhaps that's why people have been using the metaphor of nature as a mother. Due to this connection between humanity and the environment, many cultures consider nature as “Mother Earth” or “Mother Nature.” Earlier than these images is “Great Mother,” which represents nature as a loving and nurturing mother. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the representation of nature as Great Mother is considered to be the oldest human idea as well as the center of first religious practices for centuries. For instance, nature was seen as a maternal figure, nurturing the people and providing life in the Paleolithic era. During the first century, a Jewish scholar Philo from Alexandria, believed that nature is the source of life. He emphasized the

importance of the breast as the primary source of nourishment, referring to it as a “font of abundance”:

Nature has equipped every mother with a highly essential (bodily) part in the form of breasts like fountains, and so has prepared food in advance for the child that will be born. It seems that the Earth, too, is a mother. For this reason, the first humans decided to call her Demeter, combining the words for mother (meter) and Earth (gê). (Runia, 2001: 81)

Both earth and women have the ability to bear life and provide for their offspring with an abundance. Such a thought also projects the common belief that women should be the main caregivers of the environment. This concept has continued throughout history, and as a consequence, the societal norm that assigns women the responsibility for the well-being of nature was born. As mentioned earlier in the section on Cultural Ecofeminism, a well-known anthropologist Sherry Ortner, made significant contributions to the discourse on culture and gender. Her piece, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” which was published in 1974, is considered a pioneer. In her work, Ortner argued that women are often seen as naturally being closer to nature than men, and this idea has contributed to the oppression of women across cultures. Ortner argues that this is because nature is often undervalued in many cultures, leading to subjugation, and then this is projected onto women.

Like Ortner, also in her compelling and lyrical work, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, Susan Griffin vividly demonstrates how the abiding link between women and nature has led to their lack of agency and influence “by assigning women the roles of passive and obedient reproducer and nurturer (in the chapter ‘Cows’); obstinate and dull-witted drudge, bred for the labor the breeders do not wish to do (‘Mules’); and well-trained and well-groomed gratifier of her master (‘The Show Horse’)” (Roach, 2003: 38). Instead of being seen as individuals with their own unique personalities, women are constantly seen as submissive resources just as nature is regarded. On the other hand, nature is often portrayed as this powerful force with its own will; with this power, it has the ability to present its intentions in a way that is almost human-like. Humanity has traditionally assigned women the role of motherhood that provides comfort and sustenance. However, when they fail to deliver what is desired

from them, they are easily blamed and exploited. This mindset inevitably led to the exploitation of both women and nature.

Nature was once seen as a living body with a will of her own, but now it is often viewed as an inert machine. This shift in perspective occurred during the Scientific Revolution, as science began to favor mechanistic models of nature over natural and organic ones. Carolyn Merchant argues that this change reflects a larger cultural shift towards viewing the cosmos as a lifeless system rather than a living entity. “Nature is no longer seen as a ‘nurturing mother, sensitive, alive, and responsive to human action.’ It becomes instead a ‘disorderly and chaotic realm to be subdued and controlled’ and a machine to be operated and managed” (Roach, 2003: 39). Catherine Roach indicates that some feminists and ecofeminists argue that women are closely linked to nature as part of a larger viewpoint on gender distinctions that tends to depict men as more violent and harmful than women. In contrast, women are seen as more compassionate and peaceful. Françoise d’Eaubonne’s argument that “the destruction of the planet is due to the profit motive inherent in male power,” highlights this idea (qtd. in Roach, 2003: 41).

The interplay between the concepts of women, nature, and their historical and cultural representations has deep-seated roots. From the ancient metaphor of the ‘Great Mother’ to the mechanistic view of nature in the Scientific Revolution, the connection between women and the environment has been significant. This connection, however, has often led to the subjugation of both women and nature, with women being perceived as passive resources and nature as a machine to be controlled.

2.4.2. Nature as the Bad Mother

Women have always been portrayed as evil, tempter, seductor, the creator of chaos and destruction throughout the history in religion and mythologies. These negative portrayals of women have caused to create harmful stereotypes, and they also marginalized the women in many societies, causing them to be tamed forcefully by patriarchy. One notable example is the biblical story of Adam and Eve. In the biblical narrative, Eve, the first woman, is mentioned as the companion of the first man, Adam.

The story tells the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve lived in peace with nature while God watched over them. However, Eve got tempted by the evil, which appeared to her in the form of the serpent, to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. She then offered the fruit to Adam. This act led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and to their introduction to sin and suffering in the world. This story has been interpreted in many ways, but one popular interpretation associates Eve with the downfall of humanity, portraying her as the initiator of original sin. "The punishment of Eve for her refusal to acknowledge Jehovah's monopoly of the tree of knowledge is a mythical device to justify male dominance and authoritarian rule" (Eisler, 1990: 28). As Carolyn Merchant states in her book *Earthcare*, "As fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece of Satan as serpent" (Merchant, 1996: 33). Adam, the man, will be there to dominate and rule the land and bring order to the world. This perception has contributed to the belief that women's true self is inherently sinful or morally inferior to men and influenced cultural, societal, and religious attitudes toward women. By limiting their autonomy and reinforcing gender hierarchies, it has been used to justify the oppression of women.

Western cultural portrayals of motherhood have often depicted mothers as both life-giving and life-taking throughout history. For instance, as mentioned in the first chapter of the paper, in Greek mythology, the goddess Demeter was revered as the bringer of life and fertility. Still, her grief over the loss of her daughter Persephone led her to release chaos on earth. Another example of women being shown in a negative light and held responsible for the sins of humanity in mythology is the story of Pandora. She was the first mortal woman created by the gods, according to the myth. She received many gifts from the gods, like beauty and charm, but it also included curiosity. As a result of this last particular gift, and despite the fact that she was warned not to open a box often known as "Pandora's box" or "Pandora's jar," she succumbed to her curiosity. Upon opening the box, all evil and misery spread all over the earth. This evil and misery brought sorrow, suffering, and disease throughout humanity, leaving only hope remaining within the box. This myth has often been seen as a cautionary tale about

women's role in bringing misfortune or evil and the consequences of the curiosity of women. It portrays women as inherently curious and easily deceived creatures that bring suffering to humankind, and it reinforces harmful stereotypes. Similarly, in Christian iconography, the Virgin Mary is often portrayed as the nurturing mother of Jesus but also as a sorrowful figure who experienced the painful loss of her son. These portrayals reflect motherhood's complex and multifaceted nature, which encompasses both joy and sorrow, creation and destruction. Catherine Roach uses Toni Morrison's best-seller novel *Beloved* as an example of the "giver of death." The main character, Sethe, embodies both the deep emotional complexities of motherhood and the impacts of slavery. The memory of Sethe's daughter Beloved weighs heavily on her awareness and shapes her present reality. The feeling of love and protection made Sethe prefer to kill her own child rather than allow her to be a slave. Mother Nature has the same behaviors as Sethe. Also, while nature provides us life-living sources such as air, water, and food, it is also portrayed as a dangerous, unpredictable entity that should be controlled by human beings to ensure that the human entity survives.

Starting from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the early modern period witnessed a disturbing and, unfortunately, widespread event that is known as witch-hunting. During this time, women were disproportionately targeted and accused of practicing witchcraft. The association of women with witchcraft and evil was deeply rooted in societal fears, religious beliefs, and the desire to control and suppress women's autonomy and power. They were seen as sexually dangerous because they supposedly copulated with Satan and "destroyed the fertility of men, women, animals, and the fields" (Roach, 2003: 82). Even in more modern times, women who spoke out against social norms or challenged traditional gender roles were often labeled as witches or deviants.

Likewise, nature is depicted as wilderness, chaotic, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. The occurrence of natural disasters has led to the perception of nature as a mother with life-taking characteristics. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and floods, droughts, famines, have caused immense destruction, loss of life, and suffering. Greta Gaard describes a cartoon in a newspaper in 1989 which is about the big earthquake in San Francisco and a hurricane in

Charleston: “The cartoon depicts a buxom, almost Valkyrie-like woman towering above the cities of San Francisco and Charleston, whose buildings are quaking, swaying, or crushed. On her dress is the word ‘Nature,’ and her voice bubble says, ‘...just in case you’ve forgotten how insignificant you really are’” (Roach, 2003: 110). Instead of seeing nature as a hostile satanic force, however, Gaard sees the great power of nature which should teach humans their smallness. Rather than trying to suggest ways to deal with this power and dominate nature, she suggests standing in awe of her.

One of those who recognized this superior power in another way was Val Plumwood, who contributed a lot to ecofeminism. Plumwood’s life was profoundly impacted by her experience in the Australian wilderness, particularly her frightening encounter with a crocodile attack, which she discusses in her book *The Eye of the Crocodile*. On each of the three occasions, Plumwood was subjected to a death roll which usually results in a fatal outcome by the crocodile, but despite the brutality of the attacks, Plumwood survived each of these three times.

Even though losing a lot of energy in the process, Plumwood was released by the crocodile eventually. As this event forced her to confront the reality of being prey to a predator, Plumwood’s worldview was completely affected. The human-centered thinking that humans are on top of the food chain was challenged by her encounter with the crocodile. This experience showed, when faced with violent animals, how vulnerable humans really are. Plumwood’s experience served as a reminder of this reality as humans often fail to understand as they can be preyed on by other animals. As Plumwood experienced the predator’s gaze, she came to an understanding of how the human body can be so fragile and how the truth of her own morality can be harsh. As a result of this event, her perception of nature completely changed as she got away from the life-changing attack with a brand-new understanding of violence when it’s experienced from the victim’s perspective.

It forced her to reassess her own control over the natural world and reevaluate her connection with it. As a result, she began to recognize the importance of acknowledging the autonomy and individuality of non-human entities. Carolyn Merchant expressed the similarity between mother and nature’s superior power, which

can both nourish and bring destruction, in one of her important books, "Death of Nature," as follows:

The images of both nature and woman were two-sided. The virgin nymph offered peace and serenity, the earth mother nurture and fertility, but nature also brought plagues, famines, and tempests. Similarly, woman was both virgin and witch: the Renaissance courtly lover placed her on a pedestal; the inquisitor burned her at the stake. The witch, symbol of the violence of nature, raised storms, caused illness, destroyed crops, obstructed generation, and killed infants. Disorderly woman, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled. (Merchant, 1980: 127)

This duality reflects a deeply ingrained societal need for control and stability. Both nature and women were seen as potentially disruptive and in need of regulation. The fear of desire for control and disorder eventually led to the oppression of women accused of being a witch and the attempt to suppress their autonomy and power.

In conclusion, perceiving nature as a good or a bad mother reflects our multifaceted relationship with nature. The perception of nature as a good mother emphasizes its sustenance, peace, harmony, and beauty and its life-giving qualities, which nurtures humankind. It evokes a sense of gratitude and awe as it symbolizes the connection between mankind and the environment. On the other hand, the perception of nature as a bad mother highlights its power which can bring destruction, disasters, diseases, and other sorts of chaos and harsh truths of reality. It serves as a reminder that whatever she gives us can be easily taken away from the source and reminds us how unpredictable the natural world can be. Its great powers can expand on both sides of the spectrum of good and bad at any moment. This approach views nature as a continuum rather than a duality, where nature's positive and negative aspects complement each other within a continuous balance. Nature coexists with its favorable and unfavorable attributes, and these aspects influence one another.

CHAPTER THREE

MOTHER NATURE IN *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING*

3.1. DELIA OWENS AND *WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING*

Delia Owens is a zoologist and American author who wrote a coming-of-age novel, *Where the Crawdads Sing*. It was published in 2018 and topped the *New York Times* fiction bestsellers of 2019 and 2020. The author spent most of her life in Southern Georgia, a true wilderness. She grew up riding horses in the woods around Thomasville. Her mother, also an outside girl, encouraged Delia to explore far into the oak forests, saying, “Go way out yonder where the crawdads sing.” Her mother taught her how to hike without stepping on rattlesnakes and, most importantly, not to be afraid of “critters.” Young Delia went on to spend most of her life in or near the true wilderness and, since childhood, has thought of nature as a true companion, one of her best friends. Her intimate connections with nature have influenced her studies and writing. Since her family spent some of every summer in the mountains of North Carolina, Owens has a special attachment to the wild and beautiful places of nature. *Where The Crawdads Sing*’s setting is in the lush Carolina coastal marsh, she received a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology and Ph.D. in animal behavior. She has transposed her keen observation of the natural world to her bestseller novel with vivid and evocative descriptions of the marshes.

Where the Crawdads Sing tells the story of a young girl named Kya Clark, who grows up alone after her parents, brothers, and sisters have left her when she is seven, in the marshes of North Carolina and becomes known as the “Marsh Girl” to the local community. As Kya navigates a solitary life in the wilderness, she forms deep connections with the natural world. The novel explores themes of isolation, the power of nature, and the human connection to the environment. It depicts Kya’s deep connection with the marshes, her love for the plants and animals that inhabit there, and her struggles with human interconnections and social expectations. The novel mainly focuses on nature that shapes the personality of Kya. The novel not only highlights the nurturer

elements as a mother in Kya's growing up process, but it also depicts the patriarchal society's oppression of both Kya's life and nature.

3.2. PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION

Delia Owen's *Where the Crawdads Sing* is a novel that clearly illustrates the contrast between nature's beauty, the nurturing properties of mother nature, and society's brutal realities. The main character, Kya, is a little girl abandoned by her family and struggling to survive alone in the desolate swamps of North Carolina. As the author describes in the novel, Kya has become a part of nature as a person living in nature and therefore has been declared an outsider by society. Additionally, since the community in the novel reflects its patriarchal characteristics, this reveals both the pressure on women and the pressure on nature in the context of the relationship between Kya and Mother Nature. "In patriarchy, nature, animals and women are objectified, hunted, invaded, colonized, owned, consumed and forced to yield and to produce" (Collard, 1989: 1). While nature is frequently seen as a resource for material gains, women are also objectified and seen as "tools" that men can use for their benefit. In the context of this exploitation movement, both women and nature are reduced to inanimate objects that have no intrinsic value. As the quote from Merchant, just "as a woman's womb had symbolically yielded to the forceps, so nature's womb harbored secrets that through technology and industry could be wrested from her grasp for use in the improvement of the human condition" (Merchant, 1980: 169). While nature is seen as a wild entity that needs to be kept under control, women are suppressed and reduced to this passivity due to the belief in male superiority. This leads to the marginalization of both nature and women.

The novel also reveals that both Kya and nature are trying to overcome this oppressive patriarchal society. Kya and her mother also live in a society with traditional gender roles where women are expected to conform to certain norms. One of the most prominent features of a patriarchal society is the father figure in the family. Kya's father, who is shown to be domineering and alcoholic, uses violence to assert control and power

over his family. The mother's lack of financial independence and education causes her to be socially isolated. The mother is expected to obey her husband, and her ideas and choices are ignored. In other words, the mother's voice is suppressed by her husband. She endures the greatest suffering, for she is compelled to leave the house. This forced choice is purely a desperate attempt by the mother to escape the exploitative situation and protect herself from further harm. Additionally, this situation reveals the devastating impact of domestic violence on women and their ability to make choices.

These behaviors are not only imposed by the father figure but also by the brothers, who emulate the characteristics of the patriarchal society. Kya's brothers also continued to assert their dominance over Kya even when she was a young girl. For instance, when she is allowed to play with her brothers and their friends, she is forced to play as a slave girl, serving hot biscuits. Even as children, the traditional division of labor based on gender is reflected in their behaviors.

After the mother's departure, Kya's other siblings in the house also leave the house one by one in an attempt to escape violence. "Kya knew Pa was the reason they all left. ... She'd thought of leaving too but had nowhere to go and no bus money" (Owens, 2018: 19). Consequently, she is left alone with her father. Regardless of her age, Kya's father expects a little girl to fulfill the stereotypical female roles of cooking, cleaning, and managing the household. In the book, the author describes the father's presence at home as follows: "Pa not there. He had two settings: silence and shouting. So, it was just fine when he slept through or did not come at all" (16). The father figure in the house is either very dominant or totally absent. This situation dramatically impacts the life of a growing girl, as she loses her mother figure when she needs her most. Furthermore, the absence of a healthy father figure in her life leaves deep wounds that are difficult to heal for Kya. Since Kya is unable to leave the house like her mother and siblings, she becomes the new mother figure who has to take care of all household chores at a young age. Even when Kya feels hunger, her father shows no interest, and she takes it upon herself to cook, relying on her memories of her mother. "Kya and Pa did this two-step, living apart in the same shack, sometimes not seeing each other for days. Almost never speaking. She tidied up after herself and after him, like a serious

little woman” (25). In these instances, the author highlights society’s expectations that women should solely engage in domestic work and act as if she does not exist beyond the confines of the home. In a male-dominated house and society, Kya is compelled to rely on herself and learn to navigate life independently.

After some time, Kya begins to adapt to her challenging living conditions on her own. However, she becomes ostracized and isolated due to her unconventional lifestyle and living in the marsh, far away from the local community. She experiences exclusion and mistreatment because she does not conform to society’s expectations regarding appearance or lifestyle. When she attends school, she lacks proper clothing like the other children, her hair appears dirty, and she lacks shoes to wear, which causes reactions from many people when she leaves the marsh and comes to the city. The city’s inhabitants are well-dressed, educated, and stylish individuals. In town, mothers keep their children away from Kya, viewing her as unclean and even fearing that her presence may lead to their children being infected. These reactions cause Kya significant anxiety when she is required to leave the marsh, where she feels most secure, non-judgmental, and accepted as she is, to attend school in town. When she attends school, her classmates taunt her with phrases like “where ya been, marsh hen? Where’s yo’ hat, swamp rat?” (33), serving as a striking example of why Kya dreads going to school. She encounters societal expectations rooted in her marsh lifestyle, which results in frequent judgments and despises for her failure to conform to traditional gender roles.

Chase is the major character in the book who embodies the traits of a patriarchal society. He and his family are known in society for their material wealth and social status. His family owns a store called Western Auto, and they plan to pass it down to Chase in the future. This store represents the contrast between nature and society, with cars being prominent symbols of capitalist societies. The conflict between Chase and Kya emerges from this point. While Kya is deeply connected to nature, Chase represents the values of a capitalist society, possessing all the material and societal traits associated with it. He lacks emotional regard for women, viewing them merely as objects of entertainment, manipulating them through his appealing appearance. Throughout the

book, he is consistently depicted as engaging in womanizing and displaying abusive behaviors toward women.

As Kya grows older, she blossoms like an innocent, untouched flower in nature, like the way Mother Nature is portrayed as a flower blooming in Erich Neumann's book. Chase is fascinated by Kya's existence in the wilderness and her resemblance to a wild animal, perceiving her as vulnerable prey. In this context, his desire to capture her reflects the aggressive instincts of a hunter, establishing a connection between Chase's behavior and the colonialism of men over nature, given that Kya is a person who is integrated with the natural world. As Chase is drawn towards Kya and his interest grows, we can observe how selfish he actually is. The fact that men think they are superior to women causes Chase to ignore Kya's feelings and thoughts. Chase begins to manipulate Kya's thoughts as their relationship progress. For instance, when Kya wants to participate in a party in the town with Chase, he refuses to take her with him and says by manipulating, "I know how shy you are, how ya don't even do stuff in town. I know you'd be miserable. You wouldn't know anybody, ya don't have the right clothes. Do ya even know how to dance? None a' those things are what you do" (175). Chase breaks her courage by manipulating her and making her conceive that she cannot fit into society. The actual reason he behaves like this is that he does not want to be seen with her because society isolates her as "the marsh girl." He does not want to be heard that he is together with the marsh girl by either his friends or family; this gossip would take down all his popularity and authority.

Trying to find the attention she could not receive from her family in her life, Kya gradually becomes interested in Chase. However, she is unaware of how much she is being manipulated. Their first solo date is at a picnic, and on their second date, Chase engages in sexual acts against Kya's will. It was something Kya wanted too, but the suddenness of it made her feel very uncomfortable. The most important thing she wants is an emotional relationship and companionship. "But these hurried groping hands were only a *taking*, not a *sharing* or *giving*" (147). She is aware that what he wants has to do fulfilling his own desires, not achieving an emotional union with her. The author's references to his behavior in terms of taking are reminiscent of the exploitative behavior

of men. It is not only directed towards women but also nature. Because human beings think they are superior to nature, they are only interested in taking from it without considering the consequences. Since Kya is like an untouched wilderness and Chase wants to be the first to invade this wilderness as a hunter. This is a picturing of women as a wild nature that a patriarchal society should tame.

The author gives many descriptions which can refer to prey and hunter throughout the book. Towards the end of Chapter 43, the chase between Chase and Kya draws an image of hunting in the reader's mind:

She turned into the channel, panicked that he could roar in her direction at any second. Her motor just above idle, so she could hear his boat, she eased into a backwater thicket of overhanging trees and brush. She reversed deeper into the undergrowth, pushing limbs aside until layers of leaves and the falling night hid her. Breathing hard, she listened. Finally, she heard his engine screaming across the soft evening air. She ducked lower as he approached, suddenly worried that the tip of her boat was visible. The sound came very close, and in seconds his boat zoomed by. She sat there for nearly thirty minutes until it was truly dark, then cruised home by starlight. (254)

The first person who takes Kya out of the marsh is Chase. He drives her into the city and rents a motel room for them to stay. Along the way, Kya witnesses how gruesome and suffocating city life can be. "Every house, the same shoebox shape, squatted on sheared lawn. A flock of pink flamingos fed across a yard, but when Kya whirled in surprise, she saw they were plastic. The deer, cement. The only ducks flew painted on mailboxes" (172). Chase's reaction to this whole grim and unsettling scene is, "Isn't it great?" The fact that Kya departed from her own natural world and reacted differently than Chase to humankind's domination of these beautiful lands and the abandonment of their natural habitat is a significant indication of their belonging to different worlds. Not surprisingly, Chase views the marsh primarily as a place for his own pleasure, like fishing, without truly understanding its natural beauty as Kya does.

Both Kya and Chase desire a connection, but she doesn't feel safe in the artificial environment of the hotel room. She imagines herself and Chase lying together in the marsh, but when she looks back at the hotel room, everything seems artificial to her. Their first intimate encounter occurs in the hotel room. Previously, when Kya felt a sudden connection, it was in a place where she belonged, giving her the strength to

resist. However, this time, their initial encounter occurs in a human-related setting, where Chase mostly belongs to. While Kya embodies nature, Chase represents culture. Thus, Chase asserts his dominance in this environment. Although Kya questions the reality of her pain, Chase authoritatively assures her that it will pass, and he falls into a deep sleep. At that moment, Kya gazes at the "vacant" sign at the motel, symbolizing her overwhelming emptiness in a society where Chase becomes even more authoritarian and distant. Through these lines, the author symbolically emphasizes the nature/culture distinction, inviting the reader to reflect upon it.

In the novel, the most visible form of social pressure on Kya is observed during her trial for killing Chase. Throughout the trial, Kya faces challenges, such as bias or discrimination due to her background or social status, pressure from the prosecution or defense, and emotional distress as she deals with the accusation and the potential consequence of the trial. Kya's lack of privilege or connections resulted her to face unequal treatment in the trial compared to those with more privilege or resources, like Chase's mother. During the court, Kya observes the judge and prosecutor, and with this observation, Owens portrays how Kya imagines men of patriarchal societies. Kya refers to the judge as an alpha male. She defines the prosecutor as someone who relies on wide, bright ties and broad-shouldered suit jackets to enhance his status. During Tom's speech, who defends Kya as a lawyer, he clarifies what townspeople do and how they isolate her with prejudice. He asserts:

But, ladies and gentlemen, did we exclude Miss Clark because she was different, or was she different because we excluded her? If we had taken her in as one of our own—I think that is what she would be today. If we had fed, clothed, and loved her, invited her into our churches and homes, we wouldn't be prejudiced against her. And I believe she would not be sitting here today accused of a crime. (305)

Many town residents know nothing about the deep ties between Kya and the marsh. Fear is a result of this ignorance, and fear breeds prejudices against Kya. They perceive her as strange and make assumptions about her based on her appearance and where she lives. Due to their prejudices against her, they see her as an outsider who is capable of violence. They also view her as an easy target because of her lack of finances and social isolation.

“Wilderness is the raw material out of which man has hammered the artifact called civilization” (Leopold, 2002: 32). Marsh is also a wilderness in the book that is away from any human structure, like buildings. There are also evident destructive events in this wilderness depicted in the book. The most obvious one is the drainage of the swamp, which is thoroughly explained in Chapter 31 of the novel, where the planners aim to construct hotels. This destructive situation indicates their disregard for natural life and the prioritization of material gain, reflecting human desires to ignore nature that nurtures and sustains them. “Man is the enemy of nature: to kill, to root up to level off, to pollute, to destroy are his instinctive reactions” (Davis, 1971: 335). The hotel planners perceive the swamp as an unused, unremarkable land, overlooking the fact that it is home to thousands of plants and animals that rely on it for nourishment. Kya’s safe haven is in danger due to these hotel plans for the swamp, posing a threat to her home, encompassing all her cherished animals and plants. This situation exemplifies the pervasive impact of patriarchal oppression and society’s ignorance regarding women's and nature's values.

3.3. MOTHER NATURE AS THE GOOD MOTHER

The main character uses the name “Kya” in the book instead of her real name Catherine Danielle Clark. The name Kya reflects her deep connection with the world because it evokes the Greek goddess “Gaia,” who represents the world as a living, interconnected organism. Like Gaia, Kya exhibits similar characteristics due to her close connection with nature. The life she lived alone in the marsh, intertwined with nature, gave her a deep connection with her surroundings. She has developed a sense of interconnectedness with the natural world and adapted herself to nature. At this point, Kya and Gaia share certain similarities as nurturing figures and their connection with nature.

3.3.1. The Marsh

The marsh, which is also the name of the first part of the book, is not just a setting but a living entity that gives life to all living things in the ecosystem and allows them to flourish. The author paints a vivid picture in the mind of the reader by describing the marsh beautifully. Kya finds a sense of belonging in this world that provides her shelter, nurture, and protection. For instance, Kya learns how to fish and gather food in the wild; these skills enable her to stand on her own feet without any outside support in her life. She also learns about every corner of the marsh, allowing her to find a place to hide when she feels threatened. When social services come to the marsh to take Kya, she hides among the bushes, or when Chase comes to Kya with threats, she hides again in the marsh. The marsh is a place of refuge and comfort for Kya, a place where she can escape from life's difficulties and find a sense of peace. The isolation of the marsh becomes a protective barrier, giving Kya the freedom to grow and explore without interference from the outside world, away from the prying eyes of society. The marsh separates Kya from the stifling air and prejudiced people of the town, giving her the freedom to explore, roam, and live on her own terms within her own boundaries. In other words, it gives her the freedom to be her authentic self, unconstrained by societal norms and expectations.

Each year, the marsh goes through a continuous cycle of seasonal transformations witnessed by Kya. Each season brings its own unique beauty and challenges. The rise and fall of water levels and the adaptation of plants and animals to these changes teach her that her life is full of cycles and that she, too, can adapt and grow. Just like the first hunters and gatherers in Paleolithic Period, Kya learns to adapt to these changes by altering her routines and strategies accordingly. The marsh becomes a dynamic and ever-evolving home reflecting Kya's life's ebbs and flows. Also, the marsh provides Kya with a deep emotional connection and sense of belonging. The ever-changing moods of the marsh, from misty mornings to vibrant sunsets, mirror Kya's own emotional shifts and experiences. In fact, it can be said that Kya even learns the naturalness of emotional changes from Mother Nature.

Other creatures in the marsh become her life companions on her journey of survival and growth. Kya's bond with the marsh teaches her that love and support can come from unexpected sources. For instance, while exploring the marsh, Kya comes across her mother's old metal and plastic buckle. This moment, symbolized by the marsh, can be interpreted as Mother Nature presenting a precious gift to Kya. It is as if Mother Nature offers Kya a tangible reminder of her past, enabling her to reconnect with her mother's presence in her life, albeit a small object. In a story centered around Kya's deep connection with the natural world, the discovery of her mother's clasp further highlights her bond with the marsh and how nature provides her with comfort and support.

However, Kya sometimes feels a profound sense of helplessness as she faces various difficulties. During one such challenging period, she experiences intense hunger and a strong desire to learn how to read and write, so she thinks of surrendering herself to the authorities. However, she cannot bear to leave behind the only thing she had—the place where she felt the safest. At that moment, she thought, “no, I can't leave the gulls, the heron, the shack. The marsh is all the family I've got” (72). After undergoing this process, the swamp indeed provides her sources of collecting food, such as by fishing and collecting mussels, which alleviates her hunger. It also affords her, which is also really important for Kya's making connections with other people, the opportunity to encounter someone who would teach her how to read and write, someone like Tate, who shares her love for and commitment to nature.

In the marsh, Kya experiences a deep sense of belonging that she had previously lacked. She is no longer isolated or alone; instead, she becomes a vital part of the marsh. Unlike the townspeople, the marsh accepts her unconditionally, offering her a place where she can be herself without judgment or rejection. The marsh becomes the background for her growing process, providing a nurturing environment where she can discover her identity and place in the world. As a child raised by the marsh, Kya is intertwined with the marsh, almost completely shaping her perception of the world. When she ventures out of the marsh, she finds the world outside of the marsh startling, unnatural, and frightening. It starkly contrasts with her own familiar environment, with

buildings, people, and pollution dominating the landscape. There is no place where she feels “alive” except the marsh. Having never witnessed such sights during her growing-up process, the places outside the marsh feel like an entirely different world to her. In stark contrast to the way she sees the marsh, the townspeople initially gave her the nickname “marsh girl” to emphasize her uncleanness and distinction from them. Although this nickname initially made Kya feel alienated and excluded, it was ultimately transformed into an honorable inscription on Kya’s tombstone by Tate, who recognized her identity as intertwined with the beloved land because she really is the marsh girl, the daughter of the marsh that nurtured her.

Kya was aware that the marsh was acting as a nurturing mother figure to her. “She knew the years of isolation had altered her behavior until she was different from others, but it wasn’t her fault she’d been alone. Most of what she knew, she’d learned from the wild. Nature had nurtured, tutored, and protected her when no one else would... Rooted solid in this earth. Born of this mother” (323). Thus, without leaving a will, she had assumed the responsibility of preserving the land from development, solely with the intention of protecting mother nature. Just as Mother Nature had protected her, Kya wanted to uphold and protect the ecosystem in the marsh.

The concluding pages of the book highlight, through Kya, that death is not truly an end but rather a new beginning. She originated from this land, and she would eventually return to it. She would become one with the marsh and continue to give life to other creatures in the ecosystem. The marsh protected Kya even when she passed away. Tate finds the necklace she took right after killing Chase and keeps it a secret between the marsh and herself. After Kya’s death, Tate finds the necklace and places it in the sand. “The tide was coming in, and a wave flowed over his feet, taking with it hundreds of seashells back into the sea. Kya had been of this land and of this water; now they would take her back. Keep her secrets deep” (328). The notion that life and death represent a continuity rather than a duality reflects a profound sense of unity with the natural world. In this perspective, human existence is not a separate entity but an integral part of an unending cycle in the grand tapestry of nature. It suggests that life and death are not opposing forces but rather interconnected stages of this eternal journey. Every

birth is a celebration of this ongoing cycle, and every passing is a return to the source, a seamless transition where individuals become one with the very environment that sustained them. It's a harmonious worldview that emphasizes the interdependence of all life forms, where the boundaries between the living and the deceased blur, and the essence of one's being is forever woven into the fabric of the Earth.

3.3.2. The Animals

Animals have been mentors to humans since ancient times, often aiding in improving hunting activities and social lives through studying their behaviors. Many societies have protected and revered animals as a source of inspiration and wisdom. In ancient times, women were believed to have a closer bond than men in understanding animals and internalizing their behavior. Therefore, women played crucial roles in domesticating and caring for animals. As a result, many female depictions in the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods appeared on cave walls as half-animal, half-human figures or as embodied in small statuettes. Kya's deep bond with animals is also emphasized many times in the novel. Animals are not just part of the ecosystem; they have become Kya's inspiration and companions. As a young girl growing up in the marsh, Kya becomes fascinated by the wildlife that surrounds her, and she develops a deep understanding and respect for the creatures that inhabit the ecosystem. Kya's affinity for animals is a result of her social seclusion. She is primarily left to fend for herself as a child, so she seeks solace and company in the marsh animals. These ties with animals provide a kind of emotional support for Kya, who is largely isolated from other people in society. In the second chapter of the novel, she calls the gulls "kee-ow, kee-ow, kee-ow" as she knows their language. One large gull settled onto the sand near Kya. She says, "It's my birthday" to the gull. The gull is the only living thing with Kya at that moment to share her feelings, like a friend. Not only as friends but also, she sees the gulls as a family. She imagines "them all packed in her bed, a fluffy bunch of warm, feathered bodies under the covers together" (34). In time, Kya has no one around but the gulls. The more she is isolated from society, the more she is attached to the gulls. Also,

throughout the novel, she collects feathers from birds she observes in the marsh and uses them to create complex works of art that reflect her deep respect for the beauty and complexity of nature.

Kya adapted to her life alone by observing the memories of nomadic animals. She observes various animals in the marsh, learning from their behaviors to ensure her own life. She did not even get upset when she had to drop out of school because of the bullying she experienced, as she had animal companions in the marsh from whom she knew she could learn a lot. For instance, she observed how herons track and catch their prey and applied these tactics to her own feeding habits. She also learned to hide from animals when they are in danger of other predators. She uses this observation to protect herself by finding a safe place when she feels in danger. Thanks to the animals, she learned not only about hiding but also about the physical violations she experienced. Because she had no guiding figure in her life to teach her and lived alone in the wilderness, she even learned a great deal about sex from observing the mating process of animals. Upon realizing Chase's closeness to her during the picnic was simply driven by an animalistic mating instinct, she recognized that her feelings for him were merely a consequence of her longing for companionship and manipulation. She thought, "even male birds woo the females for a while, flashing brilliant feathers, building bowers, staging magnificent dances and love songs" (146). She interpreted Chase's behavior towards her through the lens of the courtship rituals exhibited by male and female pigeons during their mating season. The author also draws too many similarities between animals, their traits, and Kya. Throughout the novel, Owens often likens the characteristics of animals to Kya's behavior. Because Kya grew up in the wilderness, away from people, we can say that she is now a part of that ecosystem and is like them. Her skills to navigate the marsh with ease, climb trees, and move silently echoes the movements of predators and prey in the animal world. She can detect approaching footsteps like the other animals when they feel in danger by the predators. Just like the character Tarzan, who was raised solely by nature, Kya too learned everything from observing animal behavior and became one with them. As a result, she often acts with animal instincts, and the author describes her moods and behaviors by comparing them

to animal behavior and appearance. The author sometimes describes herself hiding in danger as a sand crab, while other times, she compares herself to a timid gazelle. These comparisons not only emphasize Kya's resourcefulness and self-sufficiency but also highlights her affinity for nature, blurring the line between human and animal.

When Kya is imprisoned for killing Chase, she also reminds the reader of an animal captivated in a cage, as she is a piece of the wilderness. While she is in her cell, her longing for nature increases every day, and she feels awful. Just then, a cat named Sunday Justice, who is wandering around the prison, enters Kya's cell. This cat is quite significant for Kya, as it is on a concrete floor behind the bars, serving as a source of support sent by Mother Nature to make her feel less alone. Having Sunday Justice behind bars with Kya also provides her with a different perspective, giving her the strength to endure. This is because the cat, like Kya at that moment, is isolated from nature. Sunday Justice's support for Kya shows that, although she is ostracized and prejudiced by humans, she is always protected, embraced, and supported by Mother Nature.

3.3.3. The Sea

The connection between the sea and the womb has become figurative and symbolic, with references in various cultures and beliefs. Both have similar characteristics in mythology and literature. The sea and the womb are associated with the concept of beginnings, holding a place in the collective psyche of humanity. There are similarities between the way the seas around the world and the water in the womb envelopes the baby, as both create a nurturing environment for the beings they bring forth. In the beginning, there was only chaos in the world, which transformed into the sea, and from the seas emerged the land – a parallel to the evolution of creation in the womb. While the sea provides nourishment and shelter to the organisms residing within it, the mother's womb offers a safe environment for the development and nourishment of the fetus. Both the sea and the womb are associated with nourishment and protection. Simultaneously, they hold a sense of mystery as their secrets remain unknown. When

diving into the sea and hearing the buzzing sounds coming from outside, one experiences both silence and peace outside of it, similar to a baby's contact with the outside world in the liquid of the mother's womb. The humming sounds in both cases are alike. Both the sea and the mother's womb symbolize rebirth, as life in the sea grows, develops, and eventually perishes, giving rise to new life through rebirth. Consequently, the womb is also linked to the process of rebirth, ushering in a new life. Due to the resemblance to the mother's womb, swimming in the sea is often regarded as a profound connection, believed to purify individuals from their sins. This belief stems from the understanding that the most innocent state of a living being is in the mother's womb.

Kya also has a significant amount of interaction with the sea throughout the book. Firstly, she began to sustain herself by fishing. Like the nourishing fluid that supports a fetus in the womb, the sea provided Kya with food as she grew up. Additionally, while collecting mussels by the seashore, Kya was able to earn money by selling them and using the proceeds to purchase various items. By observing the tides, she had the opportunity to acquaint herself closely with the ecosystem. Moreover, the seaside has become a place where she feels safe. Children's first days of school are often very traumatic because they will spend the first time without their family, home, and reassuring mother. That is why, usually on the first day of school, and maybe even for the first week, mothers drop their children off at school and pick them up afterward. However, since Kya didn't have a mother to drop her off or pick her up from school, after experiencing severe bullying on her first day, she ran to the seaside, where she felt safest. The sea is a place where a mother first communicates with her fetus. Kya goes to the spot where she can feel closest to her mother and cries, just as if seeking a mother's consolation, "the sea opening its arms wide" (34). She is deeply impressed by the scenery she observes while cruising on the sea: the coastal grasses, the diverse creatures, and the way the sea nurtures and gives life to so many beings. Kya describes this experience as follows: "The view a chick gets...when it finally breaks its shell" (43). The marsh and the sea not only provided sustenance and nurtured Kya, but they also served as sources of healing her wounds. When Kya injures her foot, she applies cool

and salty mud to heal the wound, a technique she learned from her mother before leaving. Similar to the nourishing properties of the fluid in the womb, the sea provides nourishment and aids in healing for Kya. This is why she perceives it as a place of healing for her wounds. Furthermore, we can attribute her mother's knowledge of utilizing the healing properties of nature to the women who were once regarded as witches in ancient times, employing herbs for their healing properties. It is pretty symbolic that Kya declares, "the marsh became her mother," shortly after finding solace in the healing powers of the sea.

Because she was accused of killing Chase, she yearned for the marsh, just as she longed for family or companionship while she was in prison. Like a caged animal, she was cut off from her nature and deprived of all life-giving resources. That's why, as soon as she got out of prison, she ran straight to her mother, to the sea where she felt the closest connection to her mother, driven by longing. Perhaps she wanted to be purified of her crime that only she knows.

3.3.4. The Moon

The novel delves into the intricate relationships between the cycles of the moon and the different stages of a woman's life. The moon serves as a symbolic representative of nature and the female experience. Through these symbols, readers are offered a window into understanding the evolutionary nature of a woman's life and the deep interplay between nature and humanity. Kya becomes synonymous with these symbols, and the various phases of the moon symbolize different stages of her life. New moon, full moon, and waning moon phases, in particular, reflect Kya's character development and life journey. Furthermore, the symbolism of the moon can transcend the traditional duality of light and dark, representing a continuous process with deeper significance. The moon symbolizes a perpetual cycle, moving from dark phases to light phases and then back to darkness. This highlights not just a steady progression in the stages of Kya's life but also transformation. Portraying the moon as a continuous cycle underscores that life and death, challenges and achievements, are not mere opposites but

rather phases that follow each other in an endless rhythm. In this context, the symbolism of the moon reflects the complexity of Kya's character and her life, where change is not linear but cyclical. The moon, in this interpretation, not only aids us in understanding the nature of Kya's life and the intricacies of the human experience but also symbolizes a cyclical evolution, moving beyond classical binary thinking.

In the second chapter of the book, right after Ma left them, the author describes Kya's first night alone in the house. "When light from the quarter moon finally touched the shack, she crawled into her porch bed—a lumpy mattress on the floor with real sheets covered in little blue roses that Ma had got at a yard sale—alone at night for the first time in her life" (19). The crescent moon, often associated with a young and innocent phase, reflects Kya's earlier years as a child. The use of the quarter moon as a symbol for her young age suggests a connection between her innocence and the lunar cycle. The quarter moon is a specific phase in the moon's cycle, and in this context, it may represent a transitional phase in Kya's life. Just as the moon moves from a half-illuminated state to another, Kya's life appears to be in a state of transition or transformation. The imagery of the moonlight reaching her porch bed suggests a connection between the lunar cycle and the phases of Kya's life. The quarter moon phase of the moon is typically considered a transitional period between light and darkness. However, this transition also signifies a continuity. The moonlight that reaches Kya's shack, bathed in partial illumination, accentuates the moon's role as an uninterrupted source of light. The moonlight, representing the stages of Kya's life, not only signifies a dichotomy between light and dark but also conveys a continuity present throughout all phases of Kya's life. This continuity of the moon illuminates the complexity and changes in Kya's life. In short, the moon symbolizes not just a transformation or binary thinking but a continuity beyond.

Also, the appearance of the moon aids Kya in estimating her own age and understanding her journey of growth.

MA HAD ALWAYS SAID the autumn moon showed up for Kya's birthday. So even though she couldn't remember the date of her birth, one evening when the moon rose swollen and golden from the lagoon, Kya said to herself, "I reckon I'm seven." Surely Ma would come back for her birthday, so the morning after the harvest moon she put on the calico dress and stared down the lane. Kya willed Ma to be walking

toward the shack, still in her alligator shoes and long skirt. When no one came, she got the pot of grits and walked through the woods to the seashore. (25)

In this passage, we see Kya's birthday associated with the appearance of the moon. The moon's appearance is used as a reference point for Kya to determine her age. First, the 'autumn moon' is said to show up for Kya's birthday, and since Kya can't remember her birthdate, she uses the moon's condition to estimate her own age. The moon is used as an indicator of aging or growing up for Kya. The description of the moon as 'swollen and golden' emphasizes the concreteness of this estimation. Kya waits for her mother to return on her birthday, and the moon is mentioned in connection with this special day. However, when her mother doesn't come, Kya acts as her age dictates and prepares her own meal. The moon's role here helps determine Kya's age and growth and reflects her transition from childhood to maturity. Therefore, the moon represents significant moments in Kya's life and her growth.

The full moon phase of the moon is also used as a powerful symbol to emphasize the changes and transformation in Kya's inner world.

Kya stood and walked into the night, into the creamy light of a three-quarter moon. The marsh's soft air fell silklike around her shoulders. The moonlight chose an unexpected path through the pines, laying shadows about in rhymes. She strolled like a sleepwalker as the moon pulled herself naked from the waters and climbed limb by limb through the oaks. The slick mud of the lagoon shore glowed in the intense light ... She slid her hands along her sides and up her neck. Then moved them along her thighs as she held Chase Andrews's face in her eyes. She wanted him to touch her this way. Her breathing deepened. (143)

The full moon phase of the moon generally signifies the moon's complete illumination, symbolizing maturity, clarity, and potential. Kya's sexual desire for Chase Andrews during this phase of the moon may reflect her transition from childhood innocence to a more mature woman. Childhood is often associated with innocence and pure emotions, while maturity includes more complex feelings, including sexuality and romance. Kya's desire for Chase Andrews in this way may indicate that she now views herself as a more mature woman, ready for emotionally intricate relationships. In this context, the full moon of the moon and Kya's internal transformation seem to be parallel. This bright phase of the moon symbolizes Kya's maturation and emotional development. Therefore,

Kya's desire for Chase Andrews in this manner might suggest that her childhood innocence is now behind her, and she has evolved into a more mature woman.

In the 51st chapter of the book titled "Waning Moon," witnesses' testimonies of the day when Kya committed the murder are being taken in the courtroom. When the attorney asks, "What time did the moon rise that night?" one of the witnesses responds, "It was waning" (288). This detail in the book seems to indicate that the state of the moon is used to emphasize the situation Kya is experiencing. The waning moon phase represents a period in which the moon gradually becomes less illuminated. This reflects a time when the moon in the sky becomes less visible. In the context of Kya's experiences during this period, it can correspond to the darkness, uncertainty, and difficulties in her inner world. Simultaneously, the "waning moon" phase can symbolize that the story and Kya's life are approaching their conclusion.

The connection between the periodic changes of the moon in the book and the experiences Kya goes through reflects the deep symbolism of the story and the evolution of the character. The change in the moon's shape symbolizes Kya's internal transformation in alignment with the challenges and experiences she undergoes in her physical growth process. This illustrates that the changing shape of the moon not only represents an end but also signifies a continuous process, and it shows that the "light-dark" duality is a continuity.

3.4. THE ABSENCE OF A HUMAN MOTHER

Kya's family life is filled with a deep sense of pain and incompleteness due to her mother's absence. This abandonment not only leaves a deep scar in Kya's heart but also deprives her of the guidance she needs during her formative years. Without a caring mother to rely on, Kya is compelled to seek solace and understanding from other sources. While the marsh acts as a surrogate mother by providing her with substance, shelter, and a sense of belonging, Kya also yearns for human companionship, a connection where she can talk, communicate, and interact. That's why she feels the need to seek other sources as well. This is one of the primary reasons she is driven into a

destructive relationship with someone like Chase. The thing that she wanted with Chase was a purely emotional, mutually supportive relationship. However, Chase saw her merely as the wild and predatory individual he desired to be with, the prey that he wanted to possess. It was actually Chase who ruined her life at one point. Due to Chase's predatory approach towards Kya, she was forced to kill him. While an irreparable lack of maternal presence from childhood drove Kya to seek affection, her misguided attempt to connect with the wrong person took a toll on her life at some point.

In contrast to Chase, Tate always embodied the essence of someone from the marsh. Simultaneously, he approached Kya with a desire for connection, understanding the absence of a mother figure in her life. Tate consistently treated Kya differently from the townspeople or Chase. Despite the ostracism Kya faced, Tate saw her innocence and her loving, resilient side of her. Even in their initial interactions, Tate treated Kya as if she were a timid creature. He even initiated communication through bird feathers before engaging directly in the manner that made her most comfortable. Because Tate knew now that Kya had become a part of nature. As his communication with Kya progressed, he began to realize Kya's shortcomings in the field of education. "She knew more about tides and snow geese, eagles, and stars than most ever would, yet she couldn't count to thirty" (98). Tate discovered that Kya was illiterate, being aware of the townspeople's rudeness towards her and her inability to attend school. However, he recognized that the knowledge she could gain from nature surpassed that of anyone else. Consequently, he embarked on teaching her literacy to proper her forward.

Kya didn't just lag behind the townspeople in terms of education; she was physically unlike the other girls. "Tate noticed that while her face and body showed early inklings and foothills of womanhood, her mannerisms and turns of phrase were somewhat childlike, in contrast to the village girls whose mannerisms—overdoing their makeup, cussing, and smoking—outranked their foothills" (93). Similar to Tarzan's character, she spent her days immersed in nature, with minimal interaction with others and little exposure to societal norms. Therefore, she placed little importance on appearances, such as makeup, which were significant in the outside world. On the one hand, unlike other women, her age, makeup-free appearance, and inability to smoke

exemplify Kya's innocence. They highlight how she remains as pure and untamed as the untouched marsh. She lacked a mother or sister to guide her in these matters. Even during her first menstrual period, she could not comprehend what was happening because, once again, there was no guiding presence in her life to explain such things. Despite the vast knowledge imparted by Mother Nature, there were still gaps in certain subjects that she could not fill. The one who taught her about womanhood was Mabel, who always stood by Kya in town and approached her as a maternal figure. Mabel has been instrumental in providing Kya with clothing ever since she began living on her own. Additionally, she has supplied her with books to read and offered support to prevent her from starving and going hungry. Acting as a surrogate mother figure, Mabel filled the void left by the absence of a maternal presence in Kya's life, becoming a close and influential character to her.

The book's title is mentioned in a chapter where Tate and Kya are searching for a safe and secluded location to keep Kya hidden from Social Services. Tate suggests that "where the crawdads sing" should be their hidden spot. Tate's familiarity with the phrase takes Kya aback, as it was something her mother used to say to her. Later on, Kya explains the meaning of the phrase to Tate, stating, "it just means deep in the bush where animals are untamed, still acting like animals" (103). In other words, this place remains untouched by humans, allowing all wild animals to live freely in their natural state. Kya also demonstrates that as a creature of the marsh, she can seek refuge there, feeling safest where people are unlikely to discover her. Tate's familiarity with this phrase, passed down by his mother from childhood, indicates that he is also connected to nature. Sharing the same belief with her mother emphasizes the sense of maternal comfort it provides for Kya. In order for Kya to become self-sufficient, Tate advised her to create a book using the shells and feathers she had collected from the marsh. Similar to mother nature, Tate had immense trust in Kya and believed she could succeed. Following Tate's guidance, Kya soon acted upon his advice, published several bestsellers, and profited from them. This young girl, isolated and labeled as "marsh girl" by everyone, now has the ability to stand on her own feet, thanks to this marshland that mother nature nurtured and raised her in.

3.5. MOTHER NATURE AS THE BAD MOTHER

Just as mother nature possesses nurturing, protective, and healing aspects, she also has destructive, harmful, and hurtful aspects. These negative characteristics are also reflected in the portrayal of the marsh in the book, highlighting the connection between motherhood and nature. The book is divided into two parts: the first is titled “Marsh” and the second is titled “Swamp.” The opening paragraph of the book effectively establishes this distinction for the reader. The author explains the difference between marsh and swamp with these lines:

Marsh is not swamp. Marsh is a space of light, where grass grows in water, and water flows into the sky...Then within the marsh, here and there, true swamp crawls into low-lying bogs, hidden in clammy forests. Swamp water is still and dark, having swallowed the light in its muddy throat...There are sounds, of course, but compared to the marsh, the swamp is quiet because decomposition is cellular work. Life decays and reeks and returns to the rotted duff; a poignant wallow of death begetting life. (1)

As the author states in this section, while the marsh possesses a nurturing, life-giving, and protective side, the swamp, on the other hand, is equally intimidating, destructive, dark, and deadly. In the novel, during the marsh part, Mother Nature’s attempts to help Kya forget the absence of a human mother is highlighted, emphasizing nurturing, feeding, and raising her. However, in the second part, called Swamp, it becomes evident that Kya’s life takes a turn for the worse in the swamp, particularly due to the crime of murder. In other words, the book’s negative features of Mother Nature are attributed to the swamp’s characteristics.

It is also stated several times in the book that mother nature does not accept what is not her own. For instance, houses built by the sea were affected by sea humidity; their walls were rotten and damaged. No matter how hard humans try to renovate their walls, mother nature will still damage those houses because nature does not accept an external structure in its own nature. The fire tower, which is quite symbolic in the novel, is another example of this. It is also rotting in the middle of the marsh. Nature is trying to remove it just like the other houses nearby the sea. While Kya is referred as “marsh girl” due to her connection with the marsh, Chase stands for the opposite side as the golden boy, the town in Kya’s life. The fire tower in the middle of the marsh symbolizes Chase

in Kya's life. As the fire tower invades the pure wild marshland, Chase tries to violate the innocence of Kya with his sexual harassment and her rights by using it at will. He is a symbol of the overpowering and destructive forces in human nature. He is described as someone who wants to seek control over and influence the people and the environment around him for his own benefit. How the marsh tries to destroy the fire tower in time because it does not fit into its own natural process; it also kills Chase glancingly because he harmed Kya, who relates to it. Kya prefers to kill Chase in the fire tower because those are the ones who don't belong to their nature. As the marsh teaches her how to survive, this is one of the results that she must kill Chase to survive. Tate was as accepted by the marsh and the creatures in it as Kya, so she always felt comfortable and safe with her. "With Chase, she felt exposed, as if someone were filleting her like a fish" (152). That's why mother nature took Chase's life because he was a dominant character for Kya. Mother Nature doesn't directly kill Chase herself. Instead, she demonstrates to Kya how he hurts her through the behavior of animals towards each other, guiding her and creating a sense of awareness. In fact, the author expresses these words in a book that Kya reads: "Nature is audacious enough to ensure that the males who send out dishonest signals or go from one female to the next almost always end up alone" (165). In fact, these pieces of advice Kya reads remind the reader of Chase exactly. Chase is also quite flirtatious and someone who spends time with many girls. He also attempts to manipulate Kya by sending false signals. Towards the end of chapter 41, Kya witnessed a male praying mantis forcefully courting a female and ultimately biting her head off. The male praying mantis was so focused on mating that he did not even notice his body slowly disintegrating. The female praying mantis continued to consume him until only her last lower body remained, and yet the male praying mantis persisted in mating with her even in that state. This actually illustrates to the reader that, most of the time, men also act based on animal instincts, similar to the character of Chase. However, even female animals do not tolerate such behavior, as demonstrated in this example. "Female fireflies draw in strange males with dishonest signals and eat them; mantis females devour their own mates. Female insects, Kya thought, know how to deal with their lovers" (246). The courage Kya gets in killing Chase comes from the fireflies, so it is

pretty symbolic in the book as well. At first, fireflies lighting up the swamp at night guided Kya to live alone in the swamp at night. They brightened Kya's life to a great extent, just as they brightened the darkness of the marsh. In the book, although the reader does not see the exact moment when she killed Chase, the poem "The Fireflies" written by Kya, which Tate finds at the end of the book, is interpreted as Kya telling how she killed Chase.

All this time, Mother Nature, who looked after Kya and raised her, is trying to destroy Chase, who is not accepted by the marsh, because of her behavior towards Kya. Because as Kya has stated before, nature does not want what is not hers. On the one hand, thanks to Tate, Kya continued to learn more as she read more books. He talks about a text he reads where the negative aspects of mother nature are actually created by an instinctive and protective characteristic of the destructions she brings:

In nature—out yonder where the crawdads sing—these ruthless-seeming behaviors actually increase the mother's number of young over her lifetime, and thus her genes for abandoning offspring in times of stress are passed on to the next generation. And on and on. It happens in humans, too. Some behaviors that seem harsh to us now ensured the survival of early man in whatever swamp he was in at the time. Without them, we wouldn't be here. We still store those instincts in our genes, and they express themselves when certain circumstances prevail. Some parts of us will always be what we were, what we had to be to survive—way back yonder.
(213)

The author highlights the ruthless behaviors observed in nature, particularly in relation to motherhood and survival. These ruthless and instinctual behaviors in even early humans were essential for their survival. Behind all this beauty, there's a pounding or thundering mystery and drama. Mother nature is both nurturing and tough. As Kya figures out what nature will provide her, she also learns what she needs to provide for herself. The marsh can be dangerous to those who are unaware of its rhythms and patterns. However, it can also provide some security for those adepts at navigating its waters and comprehending its mysteries. Kya and Tate are two characters who keep up with the changing harmony of the marsh.

While the marsh symbolizes the optimistic and positive aspects of nature, the swamp represents the tougher and more challenging side of nature. However, these two terms are inseparable parts of an ecosystem. A swamp cannot exist without a marsh, and

vice versa. Therefore, in the book, when the marsh represents the optimistic aspects of nature and the swamp represents the more demanding aspects, it shows that nature encompasses both aspects and does not label them as opposites but rather as complements to each other.



CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the similarities between women and nature and where it comes from, how this similarity affects the lifestyles of people from the earliest people to the present day, the ecofeminism movement formed by the meeting of women and ecology on common ground, and the fact that nature also has negative aspects like destruction while having good aspects like nurturing, and an ecofeminist alternative to the existing patriarchal norms based on binary oppositions that exiled disobedient women, and the reflections of these issues on the novel called *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

In order to better express the woman-nature interaction, why nature sees a woman as a woman, and why it has become a belief system, I have made a detailed analysis starting from the lifestyle and beliefs of the first early humans. At the same time, I also discussed the roles of women in these societies, and the parallelism of women, like nature, with the awareness that men can dominate nature with the agricultural revolution. I have exemplified the stigmatization or punishment of mythological goddesses, most of whom are identified with nature as evil characters, to underline the relegation of women under male domination.

I have examined the theoretical concept of ecofeminism and its sub-branches, the feminism movement, the ecological problems, and the negative aspects of these problems, especially on women. While examining these subjects, I integrated various ecofeminist perspectives to provide a background for analyzing the selected novel. Throughout this process, I inspired from such influential ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Catherine M. Roach, whose book *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics* guided my exploration of the notions of the good mother and bad mother dichotomy. Within these theoretical frameworks, I expressed the information that there may also be negative aspects of nature that are destructive and damaging, as the bad mothers when they tried to dominate or suffered, besides its good aspects like nurturing, as I mentioned the mythological deities in the second chapter of the thesis. And I examined this information

in line with Roach's book, that besides good mother there is also an active bad mother in nature as well. While nature has positive features that nourish and grow, just like the mother, it also has the negative features of the bad mother, which brings obscurity and causes death by natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods. Nature encompasses both of these aspects, and these aspects are not opposites, but rather complements to each other.

Delia Owens' novel *Where the Crawdads Sing*, which is the focus of this thesis, reflects all the above-mentioned theoretical knowledge and ideas. The main character Kya, who was left to live alone in the marsh by her family members when she was a child, learns to stand on her own feet and becomes an individual of that ecosystem, with the good mother characteristics of the marsh that is providing her with food, shelter and supporting companions with marsh animals. However, on the other hand, the townspeople stigmatize her as a "marsh girl" for being a girl outside of traditional social norms; the patriarchal society ignores feelings, behaviors, and ideas. Chase, who has the same mentality as the townspeople, sees Kya as a wild animal in nature and becomes his only desire to have her. This instinctive feeling, which is equivalent to the desire of an American white male to own the wilderness, is not welcomed by Kya's foster mother, mother nature; therefore, a bad mother image with negative features emerges in front of the reader. The marsh, mother nature, does not accept the man-made fire tower or the houses nearby the sea mentioned in the book, nor does Chase, who does not belong to Kya's world and manipulates Kya, even sexually harasses her. In the absence of a biological mother, she is inspired by all the knowledge she teaches Kya through animals and helps her to kill Chase and keep this secret deep down inside. The book is divided into two parts the first is called "Marsh," and the second is called "Swamp." Also, the author explains the difference between the two of them, starting from the novel's first lines. At this point, the book distinguishes both the marsh's good and bad mother characteristics. The place where Chase dies is the swamp, dark waters, and the place representing chaos, and the safe place for Kya is the marsh. While, just as how nature treats one well who learns to live in harmony with it, the marsh embraces Kya, who best

adapts to it, and Tate, the only person she trusts; on the other hand, it destroys those who give harm and cannot adapt to its rhythm.

The fact that mother nature has the roles of both good and bad mother, which is stated in the theory part of this thesis, and the analyses I have made on this subject within the novel, can form a basis for researchers who want to examine novels or texts in this context. This work can broaden the deep understanding of how nature serves humans as protective and cruel beings. At the same time, Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing* contains many ecofeminist elements, opening the door to different analyzes and perspectives, and these ecofeminist issues can be explored further in other works. This thesis can highlight how ecofeminist thought is represented in literary works and how these representations have the potential for social and ecological justice.

During my thesis writing process, I aimed for the reader to realize the similarity of women and nature from the past to the present, while the similarity becoming a belief system at the same time leading to the exploitation of both, and that while nature has nurturing good features, we can also encounter negative features due to this exploitation. Humankind should move away from the traditional social norms of the patriarchal society, give women the opportunity to make their voices heard and gain an equal position in society, and learn to live in harmony with nature in a sustainable way. Only this way we can provide a world to future generations where they can exist in society as individuals and benefit from every opportunity to live in health and prosperity.

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