

**RESEARCH PAPER****An Eco-Feministic Study of “The Gaze” by Elif Shafak****<sup>1</sup>Saima Raza\*, <sup>2</sup>Zoya Hashmi and <sup>3</sup>Sheher Bano Qaiser**

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**\*Corresponding Author** saimarazabukhari@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

Eco-Feminism is a widely known term now that it is been discussed all over the world. The study engages the thought and reasons to how ecology and feminism can relate in this text and employs the idea of both theories combined and merged through the text's lens. Qualitative approach is used to analyze the data manually merging the two theories of “Ecology” and “Feminism.” The analysis of the text takes over various fields of the story from physical to supernatural and spiritual and examines each area with regard to the taken theories individually and by combining them later on. The relation of women and nature, the physical, abstract and mental domination of the male community upon females and nature as well as just nature upon females and the concept of the inferiority of the female gender are driven out of the text. How ‘the cause to the world’s most problems’ is the female gender is the root idea of the text is also looked upon in the analysis. The physical, mental, and patriarchal hegemony can be perceived through the findings and analysis of the text while the clear picture of eco-feminism itself can be understood as the concluding details of the study.

**Keywords:** Eco-feminism, Male Dominance, Patriarchal Hegemony, Women and Nature**Introduction**

One of the captivating words for literature I’ve known add the saying that great literature gives itself to several individual and mindful outcomes that I associate with another supporting idea that if the text supports it, it’s valid. With this mindset I find that one of the most interesting and effective perspectives involve analyzing a story from different lenses. Smith (2017) states that textual analysis basically and widely supports communication but it also engages with psychological, social, political, and historical aspects of human life as well. Different stories are written upon some specific and wider backgrounds depending upon their authors and the authors’ psychologies. The art of words is the key to discover new pictures and ideas that haven’t been discussed in the same sense of the text before through readers that later become researchers.

**Synoptic overview of the Novel**

Stories that can be observed through Eco-feministic include Shafak’s “The Gaze”. Mostly, it is presented as a sociological novel where the main character becomes aware of how she is being used as an object and the text theoretically is presented through the psychological development of the character in a stereotypical society. But the underlying aspects of ecofeminism can be discovered if looked deeply and thoroughly into text. Atayurt-Fenge (2017) uses the term 'juxtaposition of various stories' for this particular novel.

‘The Gaze’ is one of the many unique works of the Turkish award winning novelist Elif Shafak of the twenty first century addressing stereotypes, gender equality and many other social issues of today’s world. The lady has been chosen as one of the twelve people to bring change in the world. Shafak is a known scholar holding several degrees including

International Relations, Gender and Women's Studies a PhD in political science and political philosophy. The novel is basically written in Turkish language and is now translated in English by Brendan Freely who is known as a freelance writer residing in Turkey.

### **Background to the Specified Area of Study**

Before applying the ecofeminist approach to this text, it is necessary to understand the theory thoroughly. The two movements of activists and academics discover the interlinkage between women and nature and try to see the connection between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women through it. Women of the countryside especially in third world countries have been living really close to nature and a lot of their daily chores have been integrated with nature but we see that there's a lot of environmental degradation happening today naturally affecting marginalized communities more than others. The link between ecology and feminism was first introduced in 1974 by the French feminist "Francoise D'Eaubonne" as the third wave of feminism, Roth-Johnson (2013). Young (1983) says that in 1976 "Ynestra King" further developed the concept.

d'Eaubonne (2022) introduces that the Eco-feminists looked over the human being's domination of the non- human world or nature and women, specially how it marginalizes the rural communities. It has been of view that environmental destruction and social injustice that includes racism, poverty and sexism have a common cause. Warren interprets it as the western world's basic beliefs, values, attributes and assumptions about itself and its inhabitants have been shaped by an oppressive patriarchal conceptual framework. The purpose of which is to explain, justify and maintain relationships of domination and subordination in general and men's domination of women in particular.

### **The Key Features of Domination**

Basing upon the idea of men over women and humans over nature by Warren (2000) is where domination starts and it's ket features are as follows. The first feature stated is "**Hierarchical Thinking**" which by means is also called up-down thinking explains anything that is up as more valuable than what is down. The second feature explained is "**Value Dualism**". This concept is named as oppositional or contrasting pairs that giver higher value to one over the other, for example.

#### **The Higher - The Lower**

Male - Female

Light - Darkness

Independence - Interdependence

Reason - Emotion

The third and the final stated feature is "**Logic of Domination**" which means structuring an argument in a way that it justifies the subordination. Hence it functions through the "power-over" concept of power (the power-over concept is one group having absolute power over the other). The logic of domination is quite a widely seen but less understood phenomenon.

The example to this is a common view over the subject that if you are good at singing and a friend of yours is good at sports, both of you possess a skill which should universally be considered equal as there are two people each having one skill but the *value hierarchy and value dualism* will then place sports above singing and the former will be automatically

viewed as a better skill. Further the *logic of dominance* will create this logic that “as sports are better than singing, the other is better than you.”

One of the eco-feministic views is that if something happens in one part of the world will affect others eventually in a way that all threads reverberate from movement at any spot in a web. It seems not to be possible to cut down a forest in one far away country and not suffer the ozone levels in Europe. There are chains of events that connect the world naturally and whether or not we accept the connection the outcome is going to affect badly somehow.

The second conception about the compound theory proposes that a society based on cooperation and balance instead of dominance and hierarchy is a necessity to survive on earth. The noteworthy world problems such as war, hunger, oppression, shortage of natural resources and overpopulation can be directly or indirectly connected with the desire of power and control to greed, prejudices, stereotypes and more which all lead to patriarchy.

The point here eco-feminists trying to portray is we need to change our perspective and general view of community and perceive it as a system of cooperation in comparative with competition or letting someone down to raise any part of one's existence to show dominance. Trying to put down almost everything and everyone that comes in the way to get more or to strive for more is the key feature to leading the world into distress and destruction. When one defeats another or shows power over it, it automatically causes another part of the same world to die or get suppressed.

### **Literature review**

Atyaka (2017) in “Patriarchal Viewpoint on Women and Nature: An Eco-feminist Reading on Dan Brown's *Inferno*” works with two main theories; (a) the theory of Patriarchy (b) the theory of Eco-Feminism. The work signifies the equal state of women and nature at first in the novel. It also explains how nature causes problems and the position of females and thoroughly how the male community tries to dominate the female society. The famine plays a great role for explaining the ecological point of view.

Kalpikli (2014) in “Exploitation of Women and Nature in *Surfacing*” consider the fact that women are seen to be sensitive about nature and environmental problems. It talks about the similar points between women and nature and both of these elements are exploited and dominated. It also considers the suggestions of what should be done regarding the issue of women and nature being exploited in societies and what steps should be taken to avoid the problem completely.

IT-NGAM (2008) in “MEN, WOMEN AND NATURE IN SARAH O JEWETT'S 'A WHITE HERON'” explains vividly the relationship between men and women; women and nature and how men dominate both women and nature in two steps. According to the findings the women are dominated in two ways, the men dominate them at work-places as laborers and through their skill or knowledge. Moreover, it finds out how nature is being dominated in the novel by men.

Bennett (2005) in “Through Ecofeminist Eyes: Le Guin's 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'” gives a detailed and simple idea of ecofeminism and applies theory on a remarkable short story. She quotes how trying to make the system better is more powerful phenomenon than trying to succeed alone and put the opposition down. The idea basically is how nature and earth are being exploited among the dominance approaches as white over black, males over females, light over dark and some animals over other animals. The race to get the most of what you can collect from the world is a cheaper ideology which is

overpowered by the existence and importance of nature where we can work in a better mature system and save so much for our lives than suppressing the other.

Her research talks about the story's different interpretations through an ecofeminist lens which by all means is spectacular. The story based on how people from 'Omelas' who are told to be mature and educated live prosperous lives by making a child suffer in utter cruel ways and do nothing because she is their key to success is compared with America's today life where mostly mentioned destruction of nature and slaughtering animals is the key to advanced living.

### **Theoretical Framework**

An eco-feminist analysis is based on future oriented suggestions. The eco-feminist believe there are high connection between the domination of women and nature, and women here are dominated by the male gender or the society in the same way nature is dominated in the patriarchal societies. In order to overcome domination, one of its forms cannot be addressed without simultaneously addressing others (Warren 2000). Ecofeminism is an action-oriented philosophy, a theory in progress as well as a practice (Lahar 1996). Its goals are to deconstruct oppressive and exploitative social practices, and to re-construct more viable social and political communities (Lahar 1996).

The freedom of nature needs the freedom of women and similarly the other way around. Human societies are able to change the social patterns of oppression and exploitation in the societies. Ecofeminists understand the relationship between human and non-human nature as one of respect, based not only on reason, but also on emotional values of love, friendship and care, Plumwood (1996). The relationship is one of interrelatedness and interconnectedness, with an appreciation for difference and distinctness.

Ecofeminism in this sense is not about judging individuals' decision-making as being good or bad; rather, it is concerned about institutional structures of power and privilege and how they impact on people's everyday decisions and lives (Warren 2000). According to ecofeminist philosopher Warren (2000), ecofeminism draws from feminism, ecology and environmentalism, and from philosophy. From feminism, it draws a sex/gender analysis. It draws insights from ecology and environmentalism into the human-nature interaction, and from philosophy, it draws a conceptual analysis and argumentative justification. The conceptual analysis that makes ecofeminism a philosophy holds that all forms of unjustified domination in the west are based on the same western, patriarchal logic of domination. According to Warren (1996), this logic holds that the female is associated with nature, whereas the male is associated with culture. Nature is regarded as the opposite of culture (including reason).

The analysis is based upon the two main aspects "Patriarchy of men" as to how the male dominance is shown through ideology and how it is related to nature. And embodiment of the abstract phenomenon of how the females are the negative essence of the world who cause problems for the male community and are directly related to the nature. The sub-points of the analysis contain the techniques of merging ecological aspects of the novel merged into the feministic approach.

### **The Textual and Eco-Feminism Analysis of the Novel "The Gaze":**

"As if at her age it will be easy to be divorced, these women have never provided for a household, they've always been looked after by their husbands, they think it's easy to make it to the end of the month, they'll have nothing to eat or drink when they divorce." (Shafak, 2000, p. 15)

These lines are said by male to another male driving a taxi, vividly explaining the male dominant mind set of Turkish society as to how it is understood that a woman alone can never do anything. We can see the female community portrayed as the dependent one, they are not to be self-dependent if a man's name is not sewed to theirs. Moreover, the point of a man telling the other this thing is taken as a normal conversation, neither the taxi driver opposes these words nor the people in the taxi.

"I told my wife they deserve whatever befalls them" (Shafak, 2000, p. 16)

The very dialogue itself is spoken like a universal truth, and its context is that women are the reason to every unwanted or unbearable happening and it is right if it affects them in a negative way. The word 'they' here represents women and information conveyed says that whatever bad naturally happens to the females is because of their own doings. Critically the male figures here are seemingly free of doing wrong. The sentence gives the idea how the male community pretty naturally and unconsciously relate the phenomenon of women's actions to natural everyday problems that simply can be caused due to anything, but the patriarch mindset treats every problem as a creation of women's existence.

The second major point highlighted is that nature punishes women for their acts. Nowhere here it is said or understood that the man does anything wrong or is in a unwanted condition because of nature, but the women are treated naturally for their doings and then the question arises even if the nature treats women for their wrong acts who is the *man* is to judge this, how is it a male figure's right to say what a woman does and how is she naturally affected by nature? The other point is how sociological acceptance has created that whatever is said by a male is considered affirmative and is not questioned?

"Let them do whatever they want from now on, my life is finished, these women have squeezed the life out of me drop by drop" (Shafak, 2000, p. 17)

The man here puts the blame of all his miseries on the women present in his life. Clearly the reason to all negative in the society is regarded and women's existence but another point to be discussed here is that the male figure speaking randomly gives the idea of how doing what the women want is the way to misery. Simply if a woman wants to do something whether it is good or bad for herself it is her own decision but quoting and treating it as the reason to the men's misery. This all shows the abstract male dominance on the women's actions and their results.

"And he would tell this strange story about **her**. What the bright side of the moon feared the most was not being loved, and also being alone when she wept." (Shafak, 2000, p. 27)

Talking about eco-feministic techniques we come across the idea of considering nature and the women in the same context or relating them, this line of the text shows how the 'he' person calls the bright side of the moon 'her' as if he is talking about some lady's preferences. Moreover, the explanation 'feared most was not being loved ... wept' is closely related to common female connotation of a woman's insecurities of being dependent on a man's love, affiliation and affection.

"She combed her hair with a silver comb" (Shafak, 2000, p. 27)

The description of a natural phenomenon of 'a bright side of the moon' is represented as if the writer is talking about a female who is so self-obsessed that she combs her hair with a silver comb. We find the relationship society creates of a female figure to natural elements.

“She believed that she would be unforgettable in the eyes of whomever the hair was with.” (Shafak, 2000, p. 27)

These words can be analyzed in a way that at one-point nature is portrayed as a female and on the second note we see that even nature is explained to be seducing men through the physical attraction of her beauty. Commonly in male dominant societies females are discussed and treated as highly sexual figures who are subjectified and classified for only tempting men through their charisma of physical attraction, in the same way nature here is seen to try tempting men through her beauty. The bright side of the moon personified as a female is the clearest description of the importance of the relationship of a woman and nature.

“She was not far wrong either; those who carried the strands of her hair, not understanding at all why their hearts were so distressed, would stare absentmindedly at the dome of the sky unaware that their worries and their pupils were growing together. She would erase new relationships in two breaths, swallow all affection in a single gulp, devastate every friendship she formed.” (Shafak, 2000, p. 28)

As it is already understood that the bright side of the moon signified as a female in this text represents the female community to be the sexual manipulator; the further explanation depicts that those men are trapped into some magic of her hair and this affiliation of her is leading them towards sorrow and worries.

The deeper analysis of this scene adopts the idea of how both women and nature are disastrous for the male community, in actuality it is the patriarchal hegemony that forces the idea that both nature and women are inferior and are a reason towards the world's mostly the male community's misery and worries. The continuation of the same idea proceeds till the last word of this line. The writer further explains how the 'she' here is the destroyer of new blooming relationships, friendships and everything good. In short, the 'she' figure is the universal negative force as depicted by the dominant force which is leading the world to downfall and is the reason to the unwanted negative ends.

“Yet she still couldn't give up on people. Because she was afraid, so afraid, of being alone, and of crying by herself.” (Shafak, 2000, p. 28)

This line of the text exposes the psychological state of women built up by the social norms explaining the inferiority of this gender sewed into their own minds. As the 'she' figure mentioned earlier here says she was afraid of being alone and crying by herself, suggests her consciousness of depending upon someone specifically a male figure. Moreover, the reader perceives it as a woman who is talking about her complexes but actually it is the bright side of the moon, this signifies the ecofeminist element.

“The Sable-Girl” (Shafak, 2000, p. 32)

The concept of a sable girl here drives to the idea where the author talks about a story of a girl who is neither entirely a human nor an animal. She is half human and half sable. Her upper body looks like an ugly girl while her lower body looks like a sable with the tail and skin. The novel entertains a whole short story of the sable girl in it. This idea gives the description of the relationship of nature and a human, specifically females.

“Finally, having learned this in a dream one night, from a hairless beardless darvish, tied locks of her hair to the thin branches of the blackberry trees in the garden and arranged candles in concentric circles, and her husband, who she'd pleaded with, shaking with embarrassment at having to undress in the innermost circle, not saying it was not because of her cold, but because 'the neighbors will see and we will never live it down', was made to believe her and not change his mind” (Shafak, 2000, p. 33)

These lines of the text are particularly important in meeting all the objectives of this research paper. The first point to analyze is that the woman who has six daughters is made to think daughters are of less importance and she needs a son at any cost. Her mind is trained to interpret her giving birth to daughters and having them as children is not highly respectable but is rather a source of distress. The second point is a 'darvish' who is a male figure dictating a woman to do something and no one retracts to oppose this idea. Another point is the husband wants his wife to conduct the act even if she herself is ashamed of it. A major idea to look up in this text is how the female is asked to tie her hair to the tree branches to conceive a male baby. The relation of females and nature is one phenomenon that is followed throughout the novel. The last point to ponder is how the neighbors are to watch the undressed lady in a private act tied to a tree and no one, not even her husband, stands up for her dignity.

"When the audience saw them hit her, when they saw their belated revenge, their worn-out enmity, their hearts melted and they began to relax" (Shafak, 2000, p.68)

This line is about two sisters beating the third one for some reason. We can see how the reason to relaxation for everyone are the beaten females. The misery of the women is portrayed as comfort to others.

"At this stage of the show, the women who couldn't look into the snake's eyes anymore jumped screaming to their feet." (Shafak, 2000, p.71)

At this point the females are shown terrified of the natural being 'a snake' gives the insight to the reality where nature dominates women and the female community is oppressed through natural actions, laws or creatures to change their ways of thinking and behaving.

"For a deluge, she would spray the place with water; for hail she would break the branches of young trees; for a wind-storm she would tear apart a bird's nest; for a flood she would sweep the crops away; for draught she would burn the soil; for famine she would empty the granaries; for a typhoon she would spray on whoever was in front of her; for a cyclone she would swallow all living creatures; for fire she would roast; for an earthquake she wouldn't leave a stone standing. There was no evil that nature did not inflict on mankind." (Shafak, 2000, p. 72)

This paragraph here is in the connotation of a woman who has ten puppets and shows how the world can be destroyed with a terrifying image. Not just that the woman shows how the world can be destroyed but it also depicts how she uses natural disasters to horrify her audience.

She portrays the analytic image of how nature is in control of a female that through her power the living can be dead, the flowing rivers can stop and most importantly all kinds of creatures can be affected. That is how nature is described in ecofeminism in one school of thought where nature unnoticeably sides with women and punishes the creatures and surroundings for oppressing females.

"It was as if there were two stubborn, invisible packhorses in the room. And the huge bed turned into a carriage, was pulled in two opposite directions by these stubborn packhorses." (Shafak, 2000, p. 126)

The story goes on where there is this French lady giving birth to the two twin siblings. The scene is described in a way that is not usual, the ecology enters when the author imagines there are two horses that are in-charge of the birth of the children. The scene is a weird thing to see but the setting relates directly to eco-feminism where nature is in control of a woman's fate abstractly. As the unstoppable pain is caused by the two horses who are

not seen but are there and the female doesn't find any escape from the pain in both physical and mental states.

"While the woman stared at the angel's wings" (Shafak, 2000, p.127)

Here is the image of the same lady in pain who can see an angle while everyone else in the room is deprived of this fact.

" 'Give me your lips', the young man has said" (Shafak, 2000. P.127)

This small sentence concludes two things. First being the idea of a male figure demanding a woman's lips, treating the females as an object has been a common thing in male dominant societies and considering themselves owner of whatever a woman has a possession of a body, their possession show the patriarchal hegemony. The second deeply rooted idea goes to the understanding of how the 'young man' here is not physically present for everyone else, it is rather someone only the woman can see and feel. And the idea of him is so strong that she is not ready to believe that he is not real. So, it is the idea of how naturally she is ready to be dominated by a male figure in her head, unable to shut down the idea.

"She surrendered herself to the numbness that was flowing through her. The warmer and the more silent the surrender, the colder and more aggressive the flow of the river" (Shafak, 2000, p. 128)

This line depicts how the female in her most uncontrolled form and emotions are metaphorized with the river. Moreover, the idea is not just of her being like the river but also 'her submission to the flow of her emotions' is like submitting herself to the river. An eco-feminist direction where the nature decides for women about what is going to be her fate.

"Here was the devil before her again, disguised as a breathtakingly handsome young man" (Shafak, 2000, p. 128)

These are the woman's views of the male who she spent some highly private time with. She considers him to be the manipulator for leading her the wrong way and thinks of her as a devil. The analysis is of how the female minds are trained to think that if they do something for their own pleasure it is wrong.

"He can take you and knead you in whatever way he wants" (Shafak, 2000, p. 129)

The line simply tells how a woman assumes a candle to be talking to her while it is just her own unconscious giving her the ideas that say females are to be molded in whatever way men want. She interprets herself like 'dough,' something that can be shaped into whatever form the owner wants. So unconsciously the female thinks it is the universal truth that a man shapes the woman in whatever way he wants.

## Findings

Through the deep-rooted eco-feminist analysis of the text of the translated novel 'The Gaze' basically written by "Elif Shafak" elaborates clearly of how the female community portrayed in the novel in made to understand like the passive subjects that their existence does not matter as we see in the story of the woman with six daughters who is unwilling to do the act of undressing and mating in front of the whole neighborhood but does so because a male 'darvish' and her husband want her to, and that too for the sake of bearing a male child. Men are the ultimate rulers and the unspoken hegemony can be seen, that how to conceive a male child a female must be humiliated all her life for committing such an act.



The objective of drawing out how females are related to nature is met highly in the textual analysis of the novel. We see the story of the Sable-Girl who is physically half human and half animal. Moreover, the tied locks of the lady to the tree signify how the community accepts the idea of the relation of women and nature. The author describes the 'bright side of the moon' as a female throughout the novel, the characteristics and actions and emotions are portrayed in a marvelous manner to describe eco-feminism.

The analysis meets the idea of patriarchal hegemony of not only the males but also nature through the analysis of the text. The females at one point are considered and treated inferior to the male community. At the very beginning of the analysis we see how the passenger speaks about the women of his house to the taxi driver and blames them to be the cause of all the miseries of his life.

The last few paragraphs of the analysis explain how the French lady has psychologically accepted that nature is punishing her for committing the sin. And the sin too was committed by both the man and the female but not even a single sentence is spoken by her against the immorality of the man which shows that she has completely accepted the phenomenon that the actions of the males are not to be judges or justified it is the female who has to suffer for the same thing the man lives easy and free about.

Another idea is met through the analysis which interprets that not only 'both females and the nature are dominated by the male community, but the nature also takes control of the female figures and make them suffer more than the other gender.

## **Conclusion**

This thorough study of the novel "The Gaze" through eco-feminist lens concludes that the textual analysis meets all the objectives of the study and even give more insight to the topic through looking deeply into the text. Elif Shafak presents a vivid idea of how females and nature are always talked about side by side or in the same context and how easily the minds accept this idea in the different eras of the different societies that are portrayed in the novel. The physical, mental, and patriarchal hegemony can be perceived through the findings and analysis of the text while the clear picture of eco-feminism itself can be understood through the work in the document.

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