

Exploring the Embodiment of Ecofeminism in Contemporary Poetry: *The Sun and Her Flowers* by Rupi Kaur

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the embodiment of ecofeminist themes in contemporary poetry collection, which focuses on how nature reflects women's emotional and physical experiences. The data is collected from text that indicates the ecofeminist metaphor in Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*. To identify and analyze patterns or themes containing ecofeminism metaphors, the researchers employ a qualitative descriptive method that applies a thematic analysis to the selected data. The lens of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist concept is applied as a perspective to highlight the relationship between the exploitation of women and nature in patriarchal and capitalist systems in the metaphor. The findings present that Kaur uses nature themes in every section of her poetry collection, representing the women's emotional and physical cycles. This study also reveals ecofeminist critiques by addressing the conditions and issues in the relationship between women and nature in this era. By discussing this issue, the researchers asserted that there is a close relationship between women and nature in *The Sun and Her Flowers* poetry collection.

Keywords: ecofeminism; contemporary poetry; patriarchy; capitalism; feminism

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perwujudan tema ekofeminis dalam kumpulan puisi kontemporer, yang berfokus pada bagaimana alam mencerminkan pengalaman emosional dan fisik perempuan. Data dikumpulkan dari teks yang menunjukkan metafora ekofeminis dalam *The Sun and Her Flowers* karya Rupi Kaur. Untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis pola atau tema yang mengandung metafora ekofeminisme, peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif yang menerapkan analisis tematik pada data yang dipilih. Lensa konsep ekofeminis Vandana Shiva diterapkan sebagai perspektif untuk menyoroti hubungan antara eksploitasi perempuan dan alam dalam sistem patriarki dan kapitalis dalam metafora tersebut. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kaur menggunakan tema alam di setiap bagian kumpulan puisinya, yang mewakili siklus emosional dan fisik perempuan. Penelitian ini juga mengungkap kritik ekofeminis dengan membahas kondisi dan isu dalam hubungan antara perempuan dan alam di era ini. Dengan membahas isu ini, peneliti menegaskan bahwa ada hubungan yang erat antara perempuan dan alam dalam kumpulan puisi *The Sun and Her Flowers*.

Kata kunci: ekofeminisme; puisi kontemporer; patriarki; kapitalisme; feminisme



INTRODUCTION

From the 18th century to the early 20th century, the role of women was seen as caregivers firmly embedded in society. Women were limited to domestic roles, while men were placed in more dominant and authoritative positions because women were biologically less capable than men (Cowher, 2022). It is also mentioned in article 83, paragraphs 1-2 in the Compilation of Islamic Law in Indonesia (KHI) that a wife must be devoted to her husband and able to manage daily household needs well. Thus, women were required to be responsible for raising children, managing the household, and maintaining emotional stability. Meanwhile, the research conducted by Hanifa and Tianah (2024) discovered that women are also expected to handle multiple roles in the households. They revealed that the underlying factors are caused by the fulfillment of household economic needs and the social construction of a patriarchal perspective. These expectations not only limit women's freedom but also make them targets for exploitation. Over time, especially in the 21st century, women have begun to seek freedom to escape the limitations that have been created in the patriarchal structure (Turan & Erten, 2023). However, traditional expectations and demands of society remain and create dual responsibilities to care for the family and society for many women.

Similarly, nature has long served to support life, providing food, water, and shelter for human survival. Not only that, nature also provides economic value from its energy and raw materials. This enormous natural profit is made by industrial and capitalist societies; forests are openly cut down, and rivers are polluted by waste, thus damaging the ecosystem. Ritchie (2021) showed that between 2010 and 2020, 4.7 million hectares per year of forest were lost globally. This is effected to fulfill human demands that unknowingly do not provide environmental sustainability for the future. If humans continue to exploit ecosystems in the long term, this will impact the provision of natural resources and ecosystem services in the future (Lampert, 2019). Correspondingly, women are also exploited in a patriarchal system. When reviewed historically, Gaard (1993) states that fertility, nurturing, and cycle metaphors have been associated with women and nature, who are seen as caregivers of homes and ecosystems. Here, women and nature are treated as unlimited resources for economic gain. Bhattacharya (2023) reported that the exploitation that has long been carried out reflects how women's nurturing roles are underestimated because women and nature are reduced and considered resources that

must be used and controlled. If we look back at English literature, patriarchal dominance, women who mainly come from rural or Indigenous communities are marginalized (Hiwarkhedka & Sharma, 2024). The same is true of nature, which experiences environmental degradation because both women and nature are considered passive.

In literature, the relationship between women and nature has been a significant theme as a form of expression that reflects society's attitudes towards both (Swami, 2021). The traditional role given to women as caregivers and providers is paralleled by nature, often depicted as strong and nurturing. The relationship between women and nature can symbolize a bond where nature represents life, growth, and resilience. Onipede and Olutoyin (2024) mentioned that literary authors often use metaphors of the earth, flora, and fauna to describe women's experiences emotionally and physically. In addition, strength and vulnerability can also embody what women cannot express. Here, literature plays a role as a medium in criticizing the patriarchal system that marginalizes women and the environment. Many contemporary poets and novelists have proved that women's liberation is linked to ecological justice by using metaphors that draw direct parallels between women's experiences and environmental degradation.

One of the literary works that references nature is *The Sun and Her Flowers* (2017). It is a contemporary poetry collection by a famous poet, Rupi Kaur. She is known as Instapoet because of her popularity in uploading poems to Instagram posts. For instance, her poetry uses flowers, roots, and seasons as metaphors to represent personal growth. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the embodiment of ecofeminism, which focuses on how nature is used as a metaphor for women's experiences in Rupi Kaur's work entitled *The Sun and Her Flowers*. This research is quite interesting to discuss because it can be practically advantageous for readers by emphasizing the awareness of gender and environmental crises and providing insight into the metaphorical portrayal of nature as a reflection of a woman's life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Ecofeminism by Vandana Shiva

To honor women's contributions and respect the environment, these parallels highlight the need for change toward more sustainable practices. As a result, the double oppression induced the emergence of a response called ecofeminism. According to Shiva

(2016), an ecofeminist thinker, validates that environmental exploitation triggers the oppression of women. Here, ecofeminism positions itself at the intersection of ecological concerns and feminism as a defense (Plumwood, 2012); these issues arise based on intersectionality, bodily autonomy, and environmental conditions (Zein & Setiawan, 2019). This reflects that women and nature are subject to control and exploitation by patriarchal structures, which means this is not just as symbolic.

One of the key figures in the feminist discourse is Vandana Shiva. She reveals the intrinsic relationship between these two forms of oppression. *Staying Alive: Woman, Ecology, and Development (1988)* is one of her influential works. She criticized the dominant patriarchal and capitalist structures that have systematically marginalized women and damaged the environment. In particular, her work focuses on the Global South, where colonial and capitalist powers have disrupted traditional knowledge systems and resource management led by women.

The alignment of Shiva's perspective is with the goal of ecofeminism, which is to reclaim the role of women, especially in rural communities and communities, in managing the environment. Shiva argues that they have a place as essential actors in the preservation of ecological systems based on women's traditional knowledge (Shiva, 1986). Shiva's perspective is relevant to the analysis of Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*, where the metamorphic cycles of nature, such as blooming and wilting, reflect women's experiences of emotional growth and healing. Kaur and Shiva both illustrate the deep connection between women and nature. The use of natural elements such as flowers, roots, and seasons are symbols of personal and communal resilience. Applying Shiva's ecofeminist lens, Kaur's poetic imagery can be seen as a reflection of the cyclical processes of nature that also reflect women's life cycles: nurturing, growth, destruction, and regeneration.

On the other hand, the modern capitalist system that treats nature and women as commodities to be exploited is also criticized in *Staying Alive*. Kaur also echoes similar criticisms that emphasize themes of reclaiming autonomy over the body and the environment and challenging the norms of patriarchal society. Vandana Shiva, as an ecofeminist, also argues that the idea of nature is modified and controlled, as are women's bodies and lives in a patriarchal society. The metaphors that Kaur uses to describe these experiences align with Shiva's criticism that positions women and the environment not only as subjects of exploitation but also as sources of resistance and renewal.

Previous research support is compulsory in the process of analyzing this research. To find out previous research on ecofeminism, we can observe innovations to continue by creating different discussions. Related to the highlight, this study provides attention to the broader context of both women's experiences and ecology in the poem by integrating Shiva's ecofeminist theory, so the search for previous research is related to the theory and the data objects used. Several studies focusing on ecofeminism have been conducted, but there is no study on ecofeminism in Rupi Kaur's poetry collection, *The Sun and Her Flowers*. However, the analysis of ecofeminism has been studied by several studies in various literary works, such as short stories, films, and novels.

First, Wardhani et al., (2024) analyzed a study entitled "Fighting Against Deforestation: Ecofeminism in Luh Ayu Manik Mas Hero of the Forests. This study emphasizes environmental activism through the protagonist's struggle against deforestation in Bali, so the focus of this study is action-based ecofeminism. In addition, this researcher integrates local cultural values with ecofeminist principles, which reflect women's empowerment in addressing environmental problems with external actions. In contrast, my research shifts focus to the emotional and personal experiences felt by women.

Second, research related to the depiction of ecofeminism comes from Arwiangsa et al. (2024) entitled "The Role of Women Toward the Environment in "Ainbo" Movie: An Analysis of Ecofeminism". This study explores how female characters actively protect nature and fight external threats, so this study focuses on the role of women in environmental conservation in the film "Ainbo." The analysis that has been done emphasizes women's leadership, environmental activists, and the relationship between nature and traditional traditions. In contrast, my research focused on women's personal experiences, which come from internal feelings, became the focus of this research.

Third, the embodiment of ecofeminism analysis was investigated by Guo (2024) entitled "Ecofeminism in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: The Intertwining of Nature and Women's Destiny." The result of this investigation revealed how nature and women are exploited under patriarchal structures through parallels between women's suffering and environmental degradation. Also, this study focused on how nature is intertwined and connected with the fate of women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, focusing on external forces such as patriarchy in oppression and war. In contrast, my research focuses on women's

emotional and personal journeys internally. After reviewing previous research, this article can provide a newly discovered study in the discourse of ecofeminism in depicting metaphor in poetry. Thus, this article can explore both the literary and the real-world implications of ecofeminism.

RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative descriptive method is applied in this research. This method is very suitable for literary analysis because it focuses on describing and interpreting themes in a text (Kim et al., 2017). An in-depth exploration of ecofeminist themes in *The Sun and Her Flowers* by Rupi Kaur can be achieved using this method. Using this method, researchers hope to understand the complex relationship between women and nature depicted in the poem. Braun and Clarke (2022) stated that the thematic content analysis approach is often used in qualitative research to identify and analyze patterns or themes in the data.

This research design is structured by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The researcher will be the primary research instrument, as is common in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). The research procedure carried out by the researcher follows the following steps: (1) Selection of texts that display significant natural metaphors. (2) Careful reading of selected poems to identify natural imagery and metaphors related to ecofeminist themes. (3) Thematic process of the metaphor. (4) Interpretation and discussion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the 12 nature metaphors contained in the poem, readers will gain learning and understanding about the embodiment of ecofeminism that focuses on how nature is used as a metaphor for women's experiences. This poetry collection contains five chapters, namely wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming; each of the metaphors can describe the embodiment of ecofeminism. In this discussion, all metaphors derived from the text in the poetry collection with an ecofeminist theme can emphasize the awareness of gender and environmental crisis. In addition, metaphors containing ecofeminism can provide insight into the metaphorical portrayal of nature as a reflection of a woman's life. The researchers classified the data found based on Rupi's poetry below:

Nature as a Metaphor for Women's Emotional and Physical Cycles

"wilting falling rooting rising blooming."

The researchers found this part of the poem in each title or name in the five chapters of the poetry collection. This part of the poem uses a metaphor that consists of wilting, falling, rooting, rising, and blooming. The researchers found how Rupi Kaur describes the cycle of a woman's life; she likens women to a tree that experiences withering. It is weathered and overgrown with much moss; the moss keeps the soil moist so that the tree overgrown by this moss does not experience death, but it will rise again to become a new tree and benefit the life around it. This illustrates that every woman will experience physical cycles during her life. A wife will instinctively care for her husband; a mother will have a sense of love for her children until she becomes a grandmother. Every stage experienced by women also has different responsibilities; women are always required to love their environment, and women must place themselves in fulfilling the expectations of men and society, just like the cycle of fallen trees that rise again.

"that people too must wilt fall root rise in order to bloom" p. 112

The researchers found part of the poem on page 112 in the withering chapter, which describes the life of a flower that goes through the stages of withering, falling, taking root, and blooming. The metaphor in the data above describes the inevitable life cycle of growth, struggle, and renewal. The context of the previous lines in this poem is *"my mother said"* and *"think of the flowers you plant in the garden."* by using the image of a flower, the author's mother offers wisdom about the human experience. A flower able to bloom into beauty requires care that must be received; she must be given fertilizer from animal waste to strengthen the soil content for the fertility of her roots, and she must be regularly exposed to sunlight to stimulate chlorophyll, which will produce endorphin in the flower. A flower depicts a strenuous phase to become beautiful, and a woman goes through the same phase to grow emotionally and spiritually.

Reclaiming Nature as a Source of Empowerment

"despite knowing they won't be here for long, they still choose to live their brightest lives" p. 88

In this data, the researchers found that the author uses "sunflowers" as a metaphor for women. Just as sunflowers bloom brightly despite their temporary existence, women

reclaim nature as a source of empowerment by embracing their lives fully, even in the face of adversity. The researchers found that the context of this metaphor highlights women's resilience and inner strength; even though they understand that their life on earth is short, they choose to persevere and strive regardless of eventual death. Moreover, this metaphor also conveys that, like nature, women can demonstrate the power to rise, thrive, and inspire to find strength in their growth cycle.

"the orange trees refused to blossom unless we bloomed first" p. 164

The researchers found in the poem titled *celebration* on page 164 that nature is described as a reciprocal force that responds to women's growth. In ecofeminist terms, this emphasizes how nature and the individual influence each other toward a cycle of renewal by inspiring others. Therefore, it suggests that healing and growth are not isolated but are part of a more extensive ecological relationship so that nature and women thrive together, which serves as a reminder that both are equal and inseparable, nature as caregivers and women as human caregivers. In addition, personal empowerment and emotional development are intertwined with the vitality of nature, as seen in the sentence Orange trees refuse to bloom unless "we bloom first."

"to heal, you have to get to the root of the wound and kiss it all the way up" p. 231

In the part of the poem on page 231 that can be interpreted through the perspective of nature restoration as a source of empowerment, the poem uses the metaphor of roots and growth. Roots here represent the resilience of nature so that nature also experiences similar challenges underground, which will strengthen itself by developing strong roots. This is the same for women who must face wounds and problems to heal and fully develop. In ecofeminist thinking, nature restoration is not only about recognizing the intrinsic value of the environment but also about finding strength and renewal within oneself, similar to the natural growth cycle.

Patriarchal Systems

Critique of Women and Nature in Patriarchal Systems

"that is what the sun does to those flowers. it's what you do to me" p. 170

In the poem titled *the sun and its flowers* from page 170, it criticizes how patriarchal dynamics foster domination and emotional control. The representation of the sunflower

only looking down when the sun is not shining brightly suggests that women can do nothing in the absence of men. It can be interpreted this way because of the previous line about the sunflower's sadness. Therefore, just as the sunflower cycles when the sun sets, it symbolizes the emotional burden borne by women who must be conditioned to depend on others. After that, the power imbalance in the patriarchal structure experienced by women and nature is criticized in a poignant metaphor with the lens of ecofeminism. The effect is to create a sense of dependency and stereotypes about the role of women, who are often placed as subordinates in the patriarchal system. Thus, women's self-worth or fulfillment depends on external validation from men.

"i am the still water and you are the moon" p. 178

The researchers also found a similar context in the poem on page 178. Here, we find a metaphor that symbolizes the manipulation of women and nature under the patriarchal system. The passive existence of women in this metaphor is described as calm water. Hence, there is a control over women and nature often shaped and disrupted by external forces. In this poem, the "moon" reflects the patriarchal power structure and authority that exercises control over women by dictating their movements and emotions. Additionally, the poem criticizes how women, like nature, are often reduced to passive objects of manipulation. The still waters symbolize women's innate stability and potential. Ultimately, the water being pulled by the moon's gravitational influence reflects women under the patriarchal system.

"the jungle cannot become the garden so why should I" p. 241

The metaphorical function found in the poem entitled *it is so full here in myself* is as a solid metaphor to reject the expectations of society that try to tame or control the natural nature of women. In addition, it also reflects the expectations of women who are required to be able to fulfill the desires of men and the society around them. In the context of ecofeminism, this statement criticizes how the patriarchal system imposes rigid roles on women, such as urging them to conform to the ideals of beauty and others. Behavior with a passive nature is similar to how a forest, as a wild and uncontrolled space, is expected to be cultivated into a controlled park.

Voices of Trauma in Patriarchal Systems

"i was a hundred and ten pounds of fresh meat" p. 67

She is in the poem titled home page 67, 4th stanza. There is a metaphor in the form of "fresh meat" that describes the dehumanization and objectification of women in the patriarchal system. This depiction reduces the speaker's that women are just pieces of meat to be consumed and not something valuable. Drawing from the previous stanzas of the poem, "*eyes glinting with starvation*" and "*like you hadn't eaten in a week,*" this reflects how patriarchal violence not only commodifies women's bodies but also silences women's autonomy. In addition, the patriarchal system turns women into objects to satisfy men's hunger. The image of "fresh meat" underscores the brutality of this exploitation, where women are treated as expendable and tradable resources. For this reason, many women echo the voice of trauma, revealing the emotional and physical wounds caused by a system that views women as prey, which reinforces the cycle of abuse and oppression.

"And when he charges to feast on my half moons" p. 91

In the poem titled *the art of growing* on page 91. Specifically, this metaphor is the objectification and predation that women face in a patriarchal system. This line summarizes the voice of trauma, where the writer grapples with unwanted attention. Meanwhile, the author also feels the violation of her body. This metaphor emphasizes how women's bodies are often seen as commodities to be consumed rather than valued. In short, women carry a deep sense of guilt and shame instilled by societal expectations. Quoting from the previous lines, repeatedly words referring to women's breasts appear as in "*boobs they said, "boobs he said," and "let me see yours."* A woman does not feel comfortable when her breasts are described in a way that men sexualize. Therefore, the author writes it as "*half moon*" as a form of beauty that radiates from female beauty. In addition, the word "feast" highlights the brutality of male desire and the trauma it inflicts on women's bodies under the patriarchal system.

Capitalist Exploitation of Women and Nature

"become the bridge between two countries" p. 117

In the poem, which is titled *immigrant* page 117. In this case, the author experiences the burden that must be carried. That is, women are trapped between two worlds symbolized as a bridge. This shows that the capitalist system often exploits women as a link or intermediary between conflicting forces. In ecofeminism's perspective on the context of capitalist exploitation, this is a form of criticism. The content of the critique is

how women and nature are expected to bear the burden of demands from various parties. These parties arise from society, the economy, or the environment without regard to women's welfare. Reflected on these natural resources are also extracted for the benefit of certain parties. This raises expectations of responsibility for women to navigate and reconcile conflicting expectations despite sacrificing their identity and needs.

"Perhaps the sea is your country" p. 124

In the poem, on page 124, the title is *boat*. The line above describes the loss of identity and stability for both nature and women. This leads to speculation that women and nature share the same fate under the capitalist system. Just as the sea does not offer a permanent home, women are like natural resources that are exploited and forced to explore a space of uncertainty and suffering. Quoting from the poem's last line, *"because it is the only place that will take you,"* suggests that women are no longer valuable, so no country wants them. On the other hand, this metaphor critiques how capitalist structures displace women and nature, treating them as tools for economic gain without providing a sense of security or permanence. Ultimately, nature and women are left unprotected, symbolizing the common struggle for survival in the world.

CONCLUSION

Through a series of extensive analyses found from findings and discussions, researchers found a close relationship between the woman and nature in contemporary poetry, reflecting how both are subjected to exploitation. Researchers focused the analysis on metaphors that contain elements of ecofeminism. Through the discussions that have been discussed, there are four main points of classification: Nature as a Metaphor for Women's Emotional and Physical Cycles, Reclaiming Nature as a Source of Empowerment, Patriarchal Systems, and Capitalist Exploitation of Women and Nature. The poems in *The Sun and Her Flowers* show how nature functions as a metaphor and source of empowerment for women, reclaiming their agency in the face of patriarchal oppression. Using metaphors such as blooming flowers, roots, still waters, and others, Rupi Kaur reflects on women's emotional cycle, resilience, and healing process. Researchers also revealed that the poems convey trauma, healing, and strength, showing how the restoration of nature becomes a metaphor for the restoration of self-esteem for women.

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