Chapter IV

Eco-feminist Interest in Selected Plays by Shaw

Although ecofeminism as a movement started around 1970s much after Shaw’s death, his plays depict how foresighted he was with regard to the association that existed between nature and women that started this movement. His plays are mostly seen in the light of reformation of society at which they are aimed but they also abound in instances that reflect the undeniable association and dependence women and nature share with each other. This aspect of his writings has been largely overlooked. This chapter is written with the aim to explore and unearth this association in Shaw’s plays Pygmalion, Candida, St.Joan and Mrs. Warren’s Profession. The chapter indicates how Shaw’s plays provide an insight to the objectives of ecofeminism and its off-shoots like vegetarian ecofeminism. It also performs interpretation of these texts in ecofeminist light and relates the first few decades of twentieth century English writing to Eco-feminist movement.

Eco-feminism is a term that combines in itself two disciplines that are relevant in the contemporary times, namely, Ecology and Feminist studies. Ecology is a term that is understood as a scientific analysis and study of interactions among organisms and their environment. As a discipline, ecology addresses the full scale of life, from tiny bacteria to processes that span the entire planet-the various physiological processes, cycles and interaction that go on continuously in various ecosystems to maintain the balance among much cherished life-forms on earth. Feminist studies however are the study of ideologies that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve equal political, economic, cultural, personal and social rights for women. In the light of above definitions of these two disciplines, the question arises that what is it that
unites these two disciplines with their different goals in the form of ecofeminism. It is the marginalisation of the interests of women and nature alike by the patriarchal and industrial society that sees both the women and nature as a source for exploitation, entertainment and oppression. Ecofeminism as a movement, thus, voices the common wants and needs of women and nature against their shared oppression at the hands of men.

The hunting and food gathering theory in anthropology state that in the process of evolution of human beings, the role of food and water gatherer was assigned to women while the role of hunting the game was given to men. Women thus have historically held the role of primary food, fuel and water gatherer for their families and communities. Vandana Shiva, a leading exponent of eco-feminism, also recognizes the same when she says that women in subsistence economies who produce “wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes.” Because of all these, they have also had a major interest in trying to prevent or undo the effects of deforestation, desertification and water pollution and as such are associated with nature as its preserver. Any major change in environment affects women directly. For instance, construction of dam on a river creates the issues relating to household consumption of water for women who have to fetch water directly from the river. Thus, any adverse or exploiting effect on nature has great impact in the lives of women as both are closely related.

Throughout history, nature is portrayed as feminine and women are often thought of as closer to nature while men are the founders and closer ones to the culture. The menstrual cycle, which is linked to lunar cycles, is also seen as evidence of women's closeness to the natural rhythms. Women's physiological connection with birth and child care has partly led to this close association with nature. These connections are illustrated through traditionally "female" values
such as reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation, which are present both among women and in nature. This association between women and nature is clear in the poem *Three Years She Grew* by William Wordsworth:

   Nature said, ‘A lovelier flower
   on earth was never sown;
   This child I to myself will take;
   She shall be mine, and I will make
   a lady of my own.’

However, women and nature are also united through their shared history of oppression by a patriarchal society. This undeniable association between women and nature gave rise to ecofeminism, a movement that can be seen as one stemming out in reaction to androcentricism and anthropocentrism. Ecofeminism describes movements and philosophies that link feminism with ecology. The term is believed to be coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974). (Merchant 184) Eco-feminism in many ways is a third-wave phenomenon. It identifies the industrial capitalism as the main culprit behind the ruthless exploitation of woman and nature; unlike earlier feminists who identify patriarchy as the chief oppressor. It is thus, post-feminist in the sense that it admits that both men and women are affected by ecological damage and environmental concerns though the degree of this effect is higher for women when compared to men.

Ecological Feminism, or Eco-feminism, is an interdisciplinary movement that calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. Eco-feminist theory has particular and significant connections between women and nature. Ecofeminism interprets the repression of women and their exploitation in terms of the repression and exploitation of the environment.
Eco-feminists argue that traditional androcentered approaches involving exploitation of and supremacy over women are echoed in patriarchal norms and discourse with respect to the environment. Karen Warren points out in her critique of the ‘logic of domination’ in the essay, ‘The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism’ that the subordination of one group by another generally requires a conceptual dichotomy in which the first group is seen not only as different but as inferior to the other. In rejecting such value-laden, dualistic patterns of thinking, ecofeminism is transformational rather than merely reformist. Eco-feminists believe that social and political institutions must be radically restructured to eliminate such pernicious dualisms as the superior male versus the inferior female or superior human beings versus the rest of nature. Eco-feminism is non-hierarchical, egalitarian, and non violent. And the same approach was adopted by Shaw decades earlier.

Though Eco-feminism was coined as a term in the 1970s, women have been active participants in the environmental movements- mainly preservation and conservation much earlier to this. In late 19th century, women worked in efforts to protect wildlife, food, air and water. Susan A. Mann considers the roles women played in these activisms to be the genesis for ecofeminism in later centuries. After 1970s, the feminists that took interests in these movements explored how oppressions were linked through ‘gender, race, class and ecology, as well as species and ideas of nationhood.’ The ecofeminist movement developed through texts, such as Women and Nature (Susan Griffin 1978), The Death of Nature (Carolyn Merchant 1980) and Gyn/Ecology (Mary Daly 1978). However, in the 1990s the advancing theories in ecofeminism began to be seen as essentialist. Through analysis done by post structural and third wave feminists it was argued that ecofeminism equated women with nature.
In 1993, an essay entitled ‘Ecofeminism: Towards Global Justice and Planetary Health’ authored by Greta Gaard and Lori Gruen outlined what they call the "ecofeminist framework." The essay provides data and statistics along with laying out the theoretical aspects of the eco-feminist critique. The framework described is intended to establish ways of viewing and understanding our current global situations so that it can be better comprehended how such a situation arrived and what may be done to better the situation. “The four sides of the frame are: the mechanistic materialist model of the universe that resulted from the scientific revolution and the subsequent reduction of all things into mere resources to be optimized, dead inert matter to be used, the rise of patriarchal religions and their establishment of gender hierarchies along with their denial of immanent divinity, self and other dualisms and the inherent power and domination ethic it entails, and capitalism and its intrinsic need for the exploitation, destruction and materialisation of animals, earth and people for the sole purpose of creating wealth.”

Feminists before this period were focussed on deemphasizing the differences between men and women, but ecofeminists started a study of particularly female ways of “being and thinking about nature”. Thinkers in various fields, from science to anthropology, sociology, history, and politics began to question and analyse traditional attitudes toward the environment from a feminist perspective. The primary aims of eco-feminism, thus, are not the same as those associated with liberal feminism. Eco-feminists do not seek equality with men but aim for liberation of women as women. Central to their liberation is the recognition of the value of the activities traditionally associated with women like childbirth, nurturing and the whole domestic arena.

Critics and eco-feminist reformists have identified five unofficial principles for this ideology. The first position as explained by Ariel Kay Salleh in ‘Deeper than Deep Ecology: The
Eco-Feminist Connection’ states that women do not need abstract ethical constructs to help create a consciousness of their connection with the rest of nature; women already have it. What women (and men) need to do is to recognize the value of women’s experiences, something which patriarchal societies fail to do. Salleh asserts that while the masculine sense of self worth in our culture has become entrenched in scientific habits of thought, “women, on the other hand, socialized as they are for a multiplicity of contingent tasks and practical labour functions in the home and out, do not experience inhibiting constraints of status validation to the same extent. . . . In place of the disdain that the feminine roles receive from all quarters, “the separate reality” of this role could well be taken seriously by ecologists and re-examined as a legitimate source of alternative values.” (Salleh 342)

The second principle Vandana Shiva discusses in ‘Development as a New Project of Western Patriarchy’. Here, Shiva does not supply a definition of the feminine principle but she associates it with conservation and nurturing. She writes of the Western patriarchal concept of development: “Such development becomes mal-development—deprived of the feminine, the conserving, the ecological principle” (Shiva 191).

In the 1990s, a field of study called ecocriticism—an earth-centered approach to literary studies began. Ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment, asking how nature is represented in literary works. Ecocriticism has been defined as “the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view, where literature scholars analyze texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature.” Third eco-feminine approach within ecofeminist literature assumes women have some special understanding of nature, even if the source of this special understanding is unclear.
Fourth Eco-feminist position is well explained by Raine Eisler in ‘The Gaia Tradition and The Partnership Future’ where she points out that societies that worshipped Goddesses were more like the kind of society that should be constructed in present times:

Prehistoric societies worshipped the Goddess of nature and spirituality, our great Mother, the giver of life and creator of us all. . . . They were societies which had what we today call the ecological consciousness: the awareness that the Earth must be treated with reverence and respect. And this reverence for life-giving and life-sustained powers of Earth was rooted in a social structure where women and “feminine” values such as caring, compassion, and non-violence were not subordinate to men and the so called masculine values of conquest and domination. Rather, the life-giving powers incarnated in women’s bodies were given the highest social value. (Eisler 23-4)

This principle clearly manifests itself in Shaw’s works as well as in his philosophy of Life-Force. Fifth principle shuns those connections between nature and women which may be satisfying the need of feeling intimate with nature but are detrimental to nature like hunting. This principle also links eco-feminism to ‘vegetarian eco-feminism.’

While ecofeminist literary criticism is similarly concerned with the depiction of nature, it emphasizes how traditional representations often see the land as innocent, female, and ripe for exploitation. The ecofeminist literary criticism may explore a text in the light of following elements to aid the investigation:

- The coercion undergone by both women and nature.
- Unravelling the association and cooperation between women and nature.
- Depiction and comparison of women and nature.
Interdependence of women and nature on each other for survival, protection and existence.

An ecological vision encompassed in feminist analysis that may indicate or propose a potential solution to ecological damage.

A feminist analysis of natural processes or happenings to suggest a potential solution to the problems of women.

For most female writers, concern with the environment is not tied to a romantic longing for the openness of the rugged landscape or the withdrawal from society which is a common theme in men's nature writing. Rather, the earth is seen as sustaining human life and relationships, and the fragile boundary between nature and humanity is emphasized. Critics who study these women's writings have been particularly interested to show how the “gendered” female landscape is given more complex expression in works by women. They also show how female writing about the environment weaves together concerns about ordinary life and explores questions of community, gender, domination, and exploitation.

However, where Shaw’s plays are concerned they were written by a male dramatist which makes some of the new generation feminists dismiss his work from the purview of feminist analysis. But one cannot forget that although Shaw was a male dramatist his role had been pivotal in making the ‘New Woman’ characters acceptable on stage as well as in society. His insight had presented female point of view boldly and objectively as the women themselves had wanted in his times. Thus, he was definitely a champion figure when it comes to liberating the much oppressed Victorian woman. As such, perhaps no aspect of women suffrage and psyche escaped his notice and treatment in his plays; and so is the case with the unique bond women and nature share among themselves.
Most of his plays have urban settings; still they do not fail to highlight the bond between women and nature in an important light. The degree of proximity he believed that women shared with nature would not have been something lesser than a direct, unadulterated contact as it is evident from Act III of *Pygmalion* where Prof. Higgins tells his mother that one of the safer subjects on which Eliza can talk without giving herself away is weather:

HIGGINS. She’s to keep to two subjects: the weather and everybody’s health.

(Shaw 23)

Weather being directly related to a place’s natural conditions was a safer subject because it brought other women closer on a subject of shared interest that couldn’t be affected by individual biases. It is something where a woman’s “cunningness” as mentioned by Rousseau cannot come into play as nature and women both in their unexploited forms are innocent and devoid of such manipulations. Shaw didn’t fail to show how a conversation that should have been based on scenic observation of nature turned into a speech filled with the intrusion of scientific information under the influence of Prof. Higgins’s training who in this play emerges as the oppressor when seen in the feminist light after coming in contact with whom Eliza lost what was natural and innate in her. With the refinement of her language, naturalness left her speech.

MRS. HIGGINS. Will it rain, do you think?

LIZA. The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in the easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation. (Shaw 58)

She talked like a battery operated doll repeating what has been recorded earlier. So deep is his influence on her that all she seemed to be concerned about was the correctness of her pronunciation and grammar of her speech:
FREDDY. Ha! Ha! How awfully funny!

LIZA. What is wrong with that, young man? I bet I got it right. (Shaw 58)

Further, how a change in the natural condition directly affects the life of women is presented in Mrs. Eynsford Hill’s concern about influenza.

MRS. EYNSFORD HILL. I’m sure I hope it won’t turn cold. Theres so much influenza about. It runs right through our whole family regularly every spring.

(Shaw 58)

Even spring, which is otherwise a season for rejoicing, becomes one of concern to the ladies due to the change in weather. How closely nature and the life of home-makers is related can be clearly understood from here.

The association between man and culture and woman and nature can be clearly found in the respective settings of Prof. Higgins’s and Mrs. Higgins’s room. In Act II, the play introduces the Wimpole Street laboratory of Prof. Higgins. This room faces the street and is well equipped with all the furniture depicting the cultural taste of his times along with various apparatuses and devices that help Prof. Higgins in his scientific study of language. This room shows the progression of culture and cutting off with the natural surroundings as evident from the presence of portraits on the walls:

It is a room on the first floor, looking on the street, and was meant for the drawing room, . . . a flat writing-table, on which are a phonograph, a laryngoscope, arrow of tiny organ pipes with a bellows, . . . on the walls, engravings; mostly Piranesi and mezzotint portraits. No paintings. (Shaw 20)

In contrast to this is the drawing room of Mrs. Higgins at Chelsea Embankment which has its windows facing the river and the balcony decked with flower pots. Although, Mrs. Higgins does
not remain untouched by the influence of culture as is reflected in her taste of furniture and paintings, nature has not lost its hold upon her as the sole landscape on her wall finds a special mention in the description:

Her drawing room, in a flat on Chelsea Embankment has three windows looking on the river. . . . The windows are open giving open access to a balcony with flowers in pots. . . . A few oil-paintings from the Grosvenor gallery thirty years ago (the Burne Jones, not the Whistler side of them) are on the walls. The only landscape is a Cecil Lawson on the scale of a Rubens. (Shaw 51)

“A blinding flash of lightening followed instantly by a rattling peal of thunder” (Shaw 8) introduces Galatea of Shaw’s Pygmalion- Eliza Doolittle. Thus, the connection of the female protagonist with the physical nature is immediately established as soon as she is introduced in the play. Soon after she regrets the loss of her flowers by Freddy which though was due to economic reasons showed empathy for the flowers spoiled in mud. Shaw’s dramatic technique is not only limited to the purpose of connecting the flower girl with flowers but also draws a parallel between the condition of the flower girl and her flowers- both being beautiful yet smeared with mud and dirt due to which they appeared to be spoiled in the eyes of bystanders. This mud and dirt are the result of the pollution that industries and capitalism has driven into the world of nature and also the corruption and exploitation in the society. As such, man again takes the role of oppressor against both woman and nature through his industrial advancement by polluting the nature as well as through the feminisation of poor.

THE FLOWER GIRL. [picking up her scattered flowers and replacing them in the basket]. Theres menners f’ yer! Tǝ-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad.

She sits down on the plinth of the column, sorting her flowers, on the lady’s right.

She is not at all a romantic figure. She is perhaps eighteen, perhaps twenty, hardly
older. She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the
dust and soot of London. . . . (Shaw 8)

This image of the flower girl with her flower basket recurs in almost all Acts of the play and this basket becomes the symbol of Eliza’s connection to the nature where she is free from the oppression of Higgins and her father as she mentions in act V:

LIZA. Oh! If I only could go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I’m a slave now, for all my fine clothes. (Shaw 100)

In this wailing of Eliza it can be clearly seen how the aristocratic culture forced on her by Higgins cut off her connection with nature to which she now finds difficult to return. There is a parallel drawn here indicating the modification of physical environment which is not always renewable and sustainable and totally undesired for. Man’s domination over nature and women for his own selfish interests make them a slave to their circumstances.

Interestingly, Eliza’s conduct at the Ambassador’s garden party has been compared by Shaw to a sleepwalker in the desert who was “so content on her ordeal that she walks like a somnambulist in a desert instead of a debutante in a fashionable crowd.” (Shaw 69) Eliza has been introduced in the play as a flower girl who comes to Higgins to learn perfect English speech that would make her eligible for the job of a lady in the florist’s shop. But when she actually perfects the art of correct pronunciation in English language her surroundings became devoid of flowers. The desert symbolised a sense of complete isolation and alienation from her present world where she is taken as a Princess as well as from her former world at Drury lane. The image
of sleepwalking in desert is ironical and in keeping with the aimlessness and the question of future belongingness that Eliza faced in the next Act, Act IV:

   LIZA. Whats to become of me? Whats to become of me. . . . I sold flowers. I didnt sell myself. Now youve made a lady of me I’m not fit to sell anything else. I wish youd left me where you found me. (Shaw 75, 77)

Due to her transformation at the hands of Higgins she cannot revert back to her previous low class self but she has no means to keep up her lifestyle as a lady. Thus, her situation and the damage done to her natural self becomes irreversible. She thus becomes a permanent victim to the demands of middle class society. Her transformation from a blooming flower to a desolate and barren state finds its parallel in the world of nature also where the exploitation and artificial additions renders the fertile land barren. She becomes that beautiful mirage herself that she seems to be following in the desert- an illusive pursuit of better prospect; however, on reaching the destination, she finds herself craving with thirst more severely than before.

   Just like Pygmalion, the major action in the play Candida takes place indoors. Thus, most of the associations with nature are in symbolical or metaphorical forms. And yet neither the stage setting nor the text is devoid of allusions and presence of visible nature. In all the three Acts nature finds mention and the play opens and ends with a reference to it. The play opens with the image of an oasis in the desert that was a reference to the park that stands as the only natural and beautiful location in a man-made settlement. However, its beauty could not stay long in the eyes of an onlooker as it is surrounded by the concrete jungle and is becoming increasingly drowned in smoke:

   This desert of unattractiveness has its oasis. Near the outer end of the Hackney Road is a park of 217 acres fenced in, not by railings, but by a wooden paling, and
containing plenty of greensward, trees, a lake for bathers, flower beds which are triumphs of the admired cockney art of carpet gardening, and a sandpit, originally imported from the seaside for the delight of children, but speedily deserted on its becoming natural vermin preserve for all the pretty fauna of Kingsland, Hackney, and Hoxton. A bandstand, an unfurnished forum for religious, anti-religious and political orators, cricket pitches, a gymnasium, and an old fashioned stone kiosk are among its attractions. Wherever the prospect is bounded by trees or rising green grounds, it is a pleasant place. Where the ground stretches flat to the grey palings with bricks and mortar, sky signs, crowded chimneys and smoke beyond, the prospect make it desolate and sordid. (Shaw 2)

Soon after, it is mentioned that an unadulterated view of this park is only visible from the front window of St. Dominics Parsonage where the window is left open to cheer the Parson, James Morell with the view of the park whenever it pleases him. And with this description nature is shown as an object to entertain men, catering to their wishes and automatically relegating in the background and into the oblivion when he does not wish. Nature is a permanent existing reality but forgotten by man. Same is the condition of Candida in her household. Her being the mistress there is an objective reality and yet her worth is taken for granted. Candida is his “greatest treasure on earth” when he wishes to feel so; else he is not even concerned to attend to her wish of having some private time with him even after recognizing that:

MORELL. [exploding good-humouredly]. Why, you duffer- [But this boisterousness jars himself as well as Eugene. He checks himself]. No: I wont put it in that way. [He comes to Eugene with affectionate seriousness]. My dear lad: in a happy marriage like ours, there is something very sacred in the return of the
wife to her home. [Marchbanks looks quickly at him, half anticipating his meaning]. An old friend or a truly noble and sympathetic soul is not in the way on such occasions; but a chance visitor is. [The hunted horror-stricken expression comes out with sudden vividness in Eugene’s face as he understands. Morell occupied with his own thoughts, goes on without noticing this]. Candida thought I would rather not have you here; but she was wrong. I’m very fond of you my boy; (Shaw 20)

Poet Marchbanks was equally unconcerned about nature in its all pervading form and just used the natural references for dumping off the responsibilities he didn’t want Candida to do:

CANDIDA. What is it Eugene? The scrubbing brush? [He shudders] Well, there! Never mind. [She sits down beside him.] Wouldn’t you like to present me with a nice new one, with an ivory back inlaid with mother-of-pearl?

MARCHBANKS.[softly and musically, but sadly and longingly] No, not a scrubbing brush, but a boat: a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot! to carry us up into the sky, where the lamps are stars, and don’t need to be filled with paraffin oil every day. (Shaw 188)

Through these lines, Marchbanks not only wishes to call several elements of nature to Candida’s service but also establishes the connection between domestic work and feminine aspect of nature thereby presenting himself as the stereotypical man who sees the domestic labour as an indispensable feminine necessity while proclaiming to free Candida from the same.
The only time Candida makes a reference to something present in the nature is moon and its shine:

CANDIDA. Come and sit down on the hearth-rug, and talk moonshine as you usually do. I want to be amused. (Shaw 48)

At the surface level, Candida appears to be talking about Eugene’s poetical speech. But when seen in relation to the ending of the play, it gives another signification. Candida was quite detached from her surroundings few moments ago where she might be contemplating about her status in the household. Eugene has constantly been trying to make her worth be realized to Morell as well as to herself. Moon is a symbol of femininity that Shaw has used in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* too but in a different sense. Here, by moon shine she may have meant the shine of her own worth that she was craving to feel and see.

However, since *Candida* was mostly about the realisation of domestic labour- a thing imposed through gender roles and culture, it focussed on women’s association and existence in a cultured setting rather in a natural one. Contrary to this, Eco-feminism lies in the core of the play *St. Joan*, the theme of which is a farm girl’s resolution to free her motherland from the oppression of English men. It has been noted that when a major change, may it be, some natural disaster, economic depression or war etc happens, men have the option to migrate and take some better prospect at a relatively less disturbing place but the women, children and the aged are left behind. Eco-feminism thus stands with the most disadvantaged women who refuse to leave their “feet and hearth”. In Scene V, Joan explains her motive, inspiration and her resolute purpose as under:

JOAN. My father told my brothers to drown me if I would not stay to mind his sheep while France was bleeding to death: France might perish if only our lambs
were safe. I thought France would have friends at the court of the king of France; and I find only wolves fighting for pieces of her poor torn body. (Shaw 59)

A simple farm girl despite opposition from her family sensed the oppression her motherland is undergoing and decided to fight for her (France’s) freedom singlehandedly because she was able to empathize with her land in a way that no men, including the King, did. And thus, nature helped her in the ways in which she (nature) never helped the fighting folks of her land.

Though Joan’s faith, courage and determination are central to the play, the cooperation nature extended in her miracles is unquestionable. An alliance between nature and woman is evident right from the first scene of the play where we find hens and cows refusing to provide for the Squire who refused to give assistance to Joan in her enterprise. It’s like the nature and the female protagonist forming a sisterhood based on non-cooperation against men.

ROBERT. No: not oh sir, oh sir, but no sir, no sir. My three Barbary hens and the black are the best layers in Champagne. And you come and tell me that there are no eggs! Who stole them? Tell me that, before I kick you out through the castle gate for a liar and a seller of my goods to thieves. The milk was short yesterday, too; do not forget that.

 STEWARD. [desperate] I know, sir. I know only too well. There is no milk: there are no eggs: tomorrow there will be nothing.

ROBERT. Nothing! You will steal the lot: eh?

STEWARD. No, sir: nobody will steal anything. But there is a spell on us: we are bewitched.
ROBERT. That story is not good enough for me. Robert de Baudricourt burns witches and hangs thieves. Go. Bring me four dozen eggs and two gallons of milk here in this room before noon, or Heaven have mercy on your bones! I will teach you to make a fool of me. [He resumes his seat with an air of finality]

STEWARD. Sir: I tell you there are no eggs. There will be none—not if you were to kill me for that—as long as the Maid is at the door. (Shaw 3)

Here the application of ecofeminism to animal rights that has been established as vegetarian ecofeminism can be seen. Vegetarian Ecofeminism combines sympathy with the analysis of culture and politics to refine a system of ethics and action. (Gaard, 23) The demand of such an amount of eggs and milk within few hours by Robert de Baudricourt shows how man relentlessly exploits the flora and fauna in nature without any consideration for the latter’s capacity, health and life. How men establish their undeniable and authoritative control on means of production as well as reproduction is evident in these lines. As a dramatist Shaw could have induced comedy in the act by a completely different set of dialogues which would not have overtones of vegetarian ecofeminism but these dialogues clearly point towards his hidden agenda which was not just the portrayal of ecclesiastical atrocities.

However, how these animals supported Joan in her endeavour by withholding their productivity and reproduction clearly shows the bond of mutual alliance and reliance that exists between nature and woman which they released only when Robert agreed to assist her towards the end of scene I:

ROBERT [to Joan]. Have what you please . . .

STEWARD. Sir, Sir-

ROBERT. What now?
STEWARD. The hens are laying like mad, sir. Five dozen eggs! (Shaw 14)

This part of the play also emphasizes how the entire scheme of natural processes and all the life-forms exist in perfect harmony with nature until man with his industrial and land expansion schemes intervened. The idea that only the female species, the feminine aspect of nature can produce, provide for and sustain life is given in the above as well as the very opening lines with a pun on eggs showing a parallel between nature and women.

ROBERT. Blasphemy. You tell me there are no eggs; and you blame your maker for it.

STEWARD. Sir: what can I do? I cannot lay eggs. (Shaw 1)

Thus, the importance of females in the world of nature for a balanced and healthy sustenance is indicated.

Another miracle performed by Joan was in the lap of nature beside the river Loire in Scene III. At Orleans, Dunois, exasperated from the strong East wind is desperately urging the West wind to come to their assistance by composing verses on it. Even the kingfisher which is often considered as a good omen for the change of wind and to whom Dunois requests, “Blue bird, blue bird, since I am friend to thee, change thou wind for me”, couldn’t help him. The west wind assists Joan in moving a step closer to her canonization by letting its course change only upon her arrival when “Joan, in splendid armour, rushes . . . The wind drops; and the pennon flaps idly down the lance”. Realization of this miracle came to them right when Joan was about to go to church and pray for the West wind, which ultimately forced Dunois to seek Joan’s leadership:

THE PAGE. The wind, the wind, the wind [pointing to the pennon]: that is what made me sneeze.
DUNOIS. [looking at the pennon]. The wind has changed. [He crosses himself].

God has spoken. [kneeling and handing his baton to Joan.] You command the
king’s army. I am your soldier.

The page [looking down the river]: The boats have put off. They are ripping
upstream like anything. (Shaw 35)

Throughout the play nature’s assistance is extended to Joan. The alliance that Joan
receives from nature finds its roots in her empathy with nature. She can feel what the nature tries
to convey her. To the much asked question on her insights and orders from God, she finally
speaks in Scene IV which testifies her direct contact with the world of nature:

CHARLES. Oh, your voices, your voices. Why don’t the voices come to me? I
am king, not you.

JOAN. They do come to you; but you do not hear them. You have not sat in the
field in the evening listening for them. When angelus rings you cross yourself and
have done with it; but if you prayed from your heart, and listened to the thrilling
of the bells in the air after they stop ringing, you would hear the voices as well as
I do. (Shaw 54)

In return what Joan supplies is her love for nature which becomes evident to us at several
occasions like her childlike enthusiasm and excitement at the thought of seeing a kingfisher in
Scene III and her will to fight for the freedom of her motherland. So great is her love for nature
that she decides to embrace death under the open sky than living a life in man-made prisons
away from the lap of nature as she tells in the Scene VI:

JOAN. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread
and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more? It is no
hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never ride with soldiers nor climb the hills . . . I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; . . . (Shaw 81)

Unlike the three plays mentioned above, in Mrs. Warren’s Profession, nature and the leading ladies appear to be quite divorced from each other. In fact both the Warren mother and daughter duo show some resistance in coming with direct contact with nature. And when, the character of these ladies unfolds its various facets, this distance between the nature and their selves become clear. The very first Act of the play is set in a garden with all the beauty of a summer afternoon. And yet Vivie Warren prefers to shield herself from the sunlit atmosphere as she reads. The description given by Shaw suggests that Umbrella wasn’t there to provide protection against the sun but to keep it off. These very words introduce us to the resistance and distance Vivie maintains from the nature:

Summer afternoon in a cottage garden on the eastern slope of a hill, a little south of Haslemere in Surrey. Looking up the hill, the cottage is seen in the left hand corner of the garden, with its thatched roof and porch, and a large latticed window to the left of the porch. A paling completely shuts in the garden, except for a gate on the right. The common rises uphill beyond the pailings to the skyline. Some
folded canvas garden chairs are leaning against the side bench in the porch. A lady’s bicycle is popped against the wall, under the window. A little to the right of the porch a hammock is slung from two posts. A big canvas umbrella, stuck in the ground, keeps the sun off the hammock, in which a young lady is reading and making notes, her head towards the cottage and her feet towards the gate. (Shaw 16)

The action in Act II starts with Mrs. Warren’s coming indoors and complaining about the country life on a beautiful starlit night:

The cottage door opens, shewing a fine starlit night without; and Mrs. Warren, her shoulders wrapped in a shawl borrowed from Vivie, enters followed by Frank, who throws his cap on the window seat. She has had enough of walking, and gives a gasp of relief as she unpins her hat; takes it off; sticks the pin through the crown and puts it on the table.

MRS. WARREN. O Lord! I don’t know which is the worst of the country, the walking or the sitting at home with nothing to do. (Shaw 31)

The same scenario and landscape that Mrs. Warren finds tiring, Frank suggests is quite enjoyed by her daughter Vivie. While Mrs. Warren is not used to the summer air as is evident from her borrowing the shawl from Vivie owing to her being away from the nature, Vivie took a walk up to the hill:

FRANK. Better not wait for them, Mrs. Warren. Praed will stay out as long as possible. He has never known before what it is to stray out over the heath on a summer night with my Vivie. (Shaw 34)

At the time of supper again she finds the air too cold:
MRS. WARREN. Leave the door open, dearie. [Vivie frown; but Frank checks her with a gesture, and steals to the cottage door, which he softly sets wide open].

Oh Lord, what a draught! Youd better shut it, dear. (Shaw 36)

Next Mrs. Warren’s fear of cold air again is displayed towards the end of the second Act when she warns Vivie who was awestruck at the beauty of moonlight against catching cold:

VIVIE. [She opens the cottage door, and finds that it is broad moonlight]. What a beautiful night! Look! [She draws the curtains of the window. The landscape is bathed in the radiance of the harvest moon rising over Blackdown].

MRS.WARREN. [with a perfunctory glance at the scene] Yes, dear; but take care you don’t catch your death of cold from the night air. (Shaw 36)

Mrs. Warren’s aversion to cold air might be due to the inconvenience she had in her past of which cold atmosphere becomes a reminder or a symbol. As she mentions:

MRS. WARREN. Well, one cold, wretched night, when I was so tired I could hardly keep myself awake, who should come up for a half of Scotch but Lizzie, in a long fur cloak, elegant and comfortable, with a lot of sovereigns in her purse. (Shaw 45)

In the above lines, Shaw has drawn a contrast between “cold, wretched night” and warm “fur cloak”. Both thus, became symbols for Mrs. Warren- cold for poverty and hardship and warmth and fashion for luxury and comfort; cold air is a symbol of exposure and vulnerability while cloaks and shawls are a symbol of protection. Also, it suggests that materialism drives one away from nature. Thus, Mrs. Warren preferred the fur cloak made from animals which is totally against vegetarian eco-feminism to the natural cold air.
The moon on the other hand becomes the symbol of femininity and newly found feminine empathy for Vivie in the last few lines of the closing scene of Act II mentioned above. Moon’s lunar cycle has traditionally been associated with women’s menstrual cycles and hence moon is a conventional feminine symbol. The full harvest moon not only witnesses the mother-daughter empathetic reunion but also became a symbol of the same. The harvest moon signifies the ripe product of the harvest or motherhood that Mrs. Warren would have received from her daughter who with the knowledge of her mother’s past had embraced her femininity proudly, giving up her former akin to man, ‘New Woman’ character momentarily. And in that moment under the effect of harvest moon she herself might have toyed with the idea of motherhood. This is what Eco-feminists have considered as one of the essential conditions of their critique- that is embracing of her femininity by a woman. But this state of hers was soon to wane like the moon.

Mrs. Warren is not of the motherly type and surely Vivie wasn’t a planned child as Mrs. Warren herself wasn’t certain about the identity of her father. This might be another reason why the two had seen so little of each other in the past twenty two years. Mrs. Warren’s genuine lack of motherly affection is quite evident in several places. A woman with nurturing instinct shows affection even to those who are similar in age, prospects or anything to their own children. But this is not the case with Mrs. Warren. Mrs. Warren states that she pities and empathises with the poor young girls who took to her profession but at the same time justify it as just the same as other professions:

MRS. WARREN. I’m sure I’ve often pitied a poor girl, tired out and in low spirits, having try to please some man that she doesn’t care two straws for- some half drunken fool that thinks he’s making himself agreeable when he’s teasing and worrying and disgusting a woman so that hardly any money could pay her for
putting up with it. But she has to bear with disagreeable and take the rough with the smooth, just like a nurse in a hospital or anyone else. It’s not the work any woman would do for pleasure, goodness knows; though to hear the pious people talk you would suppose it was a bed of roses. (Shaw 47)

Despite knowing this, instead of giving up the business when she reached a monetarily stable position in life like her sister, Mrs. Warren continued to be a part of the institution that exploits women and girls for their bodies while taking and distributing the majority of the share of money made between herself and her partner, Crofts. She is unashamed and relentless to profess that she would have preferred her own to daughter to have the same life of prostitution if they were still poverty stricken:

VIVIE. Mother: suppose we were as poor as you were in those wretched old days, are you quite sure that you wouldn’t advise me to try the Waterloo bar, or marry a labourer, or even go into the factory?

MRS. WARREN. Of course not? What sort of mother do you take me for! How could you keep your self-respect in such starvation and slavery? (Shaw 47)

Even though Mrs. Warren professes this to be in the best interest for her daughter, her sole concern would have been to have enough money to lead a comfortable life. Shaw had mentioned in the preface of this play that it was to draw society’s attention to its share of responsibility in the sustenance of the evil of prostitution. And here, even a mother would have had a share too had they been poor.

Eco-feminists argue that separation from nature makes women separate themselves from their natural motherly instincts. Nature is being seen by the radical feminists as unfair with regard to the motherhood which women are burdened with and hence, they too advocate
women’s distance from these natural instincts. It is important to note that all these ideas were given by the feminists after Shaw’s time and yet Shaw had incorporated this phenomenon of separation with nature leading to separation with motherhood more than once in this same play.

Mrs. Warren’s least interest in the moon-bathed landscape therefore may be because of her being divorced of the basic feelings of femininity and motherhood. For her everything is commercial— even her emotions and tears which she later uses with shrewd cunningness. Thus, Rousseau’s “power of cunningness” seems to come to play when women divorce themselves from the influence of innocent nature. Thus, again how materialism distances an individual whether woman or man from nature is emphasized. Here, Mrs. Warren stands in line with men who oppress and exploit women. And the mutual bond of shared oppression being broken in her case detaches her from nature. Mrs. Warren knew that her show of pathos and sentimentality has affected Vivie to a great extent. Her warning of catching the cold may thus have been a way of warning Vivie for not being carried away by her newly found feminine feelings.

The next encounter with nature happens in the rectory garden next morning in Act III, when Frank compares Mrs. Warren to the rectory garden:

  FRANK. Ever so delighted to see you, Mrs. Warren. This quiet old rectory garden becomes you perfectly.

  MRS. WARREN. Well, I never! Did you hear that George? He says I look well in a quiet old rectory garden. (Shaw 53)

Given to her natural aversion to nature, this statement from Frank might have been intended to be satirical. If there is anything natural about her, that is her unnaturalness and nature-aversion. And Mrs. Warren affirms to this with quite conviction when she said “I never!” The metaphor not only demonstrates the impropriety of the presence of a lady with Mrs. Warren’s character
and profession within a Church’s premises but also her presence in the garden as Church garden’s are supposed to be one of the best places to provide solace and transcend the materialism of world. Had Shaw intended to contrast Mrs. Warren’s character with the purity and sanctity of Church, he would have made the characters compare her with the Church or would have given any allusion to it. But instead he clearly points towards her, contrasting her with the elements of nature. And thus, with her innate unnaturalness and capitalist materialism, she proceeds to view the church that too has in a way lost its originality due to the restoration done to cater to Samuel Gardner’s materialistic interests:

FRANK. Bravo, gov’nor! Now look here: lets have a treat before lunch. First lets see the church. Everyone has to do that. It’s a regular old thirteenth century Church, you know: the gov’nor’s ever so fond of it, because he got up a restoration fund and had it completely built six years ago. Praed will be able to shew its points.

PRAED. [rising] Certainly, if the restoration has left any to shew. (Shaw 53)

Soon after, Vivie’s newly acquired kinship with nature is being described where she agrees to play “the babes in the woods” game with Frank. This was her first expression of harmless and guilt free sexuality and femininity:

FRANK. The babes in the wood: Vivie and little Frank. [He nestles against her like a weary child.] Lets go and get covered with leaves.

VIVIE. [rhythmically, rocking him like a nurse] Fast asleep, hand in hand, under the trees.

FRANK. The wise little girl with her silly little boy.

VIVIE. The dear little boy with his dowdy little girl. (Shaw 55)
The above lines may also allude to Adam and Eve’s newly acquired knowledge of their sexuality, realizing which they covered themselves with leaves. In the next lines, both Vivie and Frank confessed it was an unprecedented feeling they felt that made them feel like adults:

VIVIE. What a pair of fools we are! Come: sit up. Gracious! Your hair [She smoothes it]. I wonder do all grown up people play in that childish way when nobody is looking. I never did it when I was a child.

FRANK. Neither did I. You are my first playmate. (Shaw 55)

This entire action was taking place under the Yew tree. Yew trees in the churchyards have mystical significance. The Yew trees are trees of resurrection and eternity. They are associated with knowledge of the unknown. The knowledge that is to be gained from them makes us overcome our fear of our own death and by freeing us from this fear, brings us a greater stillness in our lives. Death heralds the ending of something. It may be a physical death, or the death of our old selves, an old way of life or an old way of looking at things. And under this Yew tree, Vivie gave up her old ways of life twice—once by embracing her sexuality with frank and then giving it up due to Crofts’s revelations.

Crofts proposes Vivie under the Yew tree and in the process hinted that his business with Mrs. Warren is still flourishing. He knowingly “slashes of the daisy” while approaching Vivie. And this gesture of his to the nature becomes symbolic of his ruthless intent to possess Vivie. Vivie shocked by his revelation about her mother’s business and her probable father, gives up her newly found way of life that would have helped her to embrace motherhood and her femininity. She becomes disillusioned of the momentary haze that the moonlight of femininity had caught her in, which she expresses in Act IV:
VIVIE. [almost hysterically] I was sentimental for one moment in my life-
beautifully sentimental- by moonlight (Shaw 68)

After Crofts revelation she gave upon both- sentimentality and romanticism; sexuality and
motherhood. With this came her decision of remaining permanently single and taking refuge inside the concrete walls of Chancery Lane, thereby cutting off all her connections with nature as nature ought to be reproductive and cyclic- mending and recycling what has become corrupt to ensure re-functioning unlike Vivie who decided to move on linearly without looking back:

VIVIE. If we three are to remain friends, I must be treated as a woman of
business, permanently single [to Frank] and permanently unromantic [to Praed].
(Shaw 68)

It is important to note that Shaw has not only shown how women are related to nature but also what will happen if this nature-woman tie breaks i.e. loss of all sentimentality and what has conventionally existed and beautiful. This loss of sentimentality which was essential for Vivie to win against her scheming mother would definitely not favour her throughout her life. And because of this, she deprived herself from a lifetime association that would have comforted her even in her spinsterhood. Praed as Shaw’s spokesperson points this out in the very first Act of Mrs. Warren’s Profession:

PRAED. [revolted] What a monstrous, wicked, rascally system! I knew it! I felt at once that it meant destroying all that makes womanhood beautiful! (Shaw 20)

Although radical feminist have seen Vivie as a triumph over patriarchy and its set norms, eco-feminists and eugenics will always regret her decision.

In St. Joan, all the aspects of nature that Joan lists down show nature at its innocent, unadulterated beauty and form. Here, the criticism done by the radical feminists seems to be true
that in the comparison of women with the elements in nature, writers are often driven towards what is meek and positive. Eco-feminism firmly correlates the social status of women with the social status of nature, rather than the view that women and nature both have masculine as well as feminine qualities. As such those aspects of nature that are symbolic of aggression are mostly deemphasized in relation to women. This kind of depiction can be more frequently found in the male writings as is the case here. Any parallel in nature to the way Joan won the war for her countrymen is not to be found in the text. In Pygmalion too, a parallel in nature can’t be found to the aggression Eliza showed while conveying her annoyance at Higgins’s indifference. The nature and women are both shown to be sisters in relation to the oppression they receive but the retaliation aspect is deemphasized. However, when nature retaliates there is destruction everywhere and as it is said “Hell has no fury like a woman scorned”, women, too, retaliate as aggressively. So, this kind of association is generally found to be missing in male feminist writings.

But again, in Candida, the only allusion to nature was to point out how women and nature are connected through the tie of domestic atrocities. Shaw’s intention was to point out how the minds of people are stereotyped within the realms of domesticity when it comes to feminine attributes which is a result of gender roles. The fact that in all four plays the opening scenes juxtaposes the world of nature and the world created by men cannot be without some purpose: in Pygmalion people are found to be taking shelter under the human construction, i.e. portico of St. Paul’s church against the nature’s rain; in Candida, the concrete jungle of houses has an oasis in the form of the park’s view from St. Dominics Parsonage; in St. Joan “the fine spring morning on the river Meuse” is juxtaposed against the castle of Vaucouleurs; and in Mrs. Warren’s Profession, the summer afternoon in the garden is kept along Vivie’s sheltering herself
from the sun rays through an umbrella instead of some tree. The purpose of the playwright here might have been to relate an urban setting to the broader context of all spread nature.

All the heroines are being shown as coming from the world of nature (Eliza rushed in from rain, Candida enters from outside, Joan from her farm, and Vivie was in the garden only) into the shelter of man-made urban setting (Eliza in the portico of St. Paul’s Church, Joan to the castle) only to crave for freedom and the desire to escape back to where they came from: Eliza to her flower basket and Joan to her meadows. The slight exception to this pattern was provided by Candida who instead of escaping into the starry night solace with Marchbanks decided to stay at her workplace; and complete exception to this pattern was offered by Vivie who actually found peace and freedom from her mother’s tarnished income and dependence at her wall-confined workplace. But Candida and Vivie were ‘New Woman’ in every ounce and inch of them while Eliza and Joan had certain conventional air about them even though they too displayed characteristics of ‘New Woman’. Nature thus signifies a sense of ultimate freedom to these female protagonists where they would be free from the oppressions of men. And this is where Eco-feminist movement joins hands with liberal and radical feminism; when women achieve or seek to achieve their freedom in the nature and in the causes related to nature.
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