



The Song of Solomon – Testament of Nature and Gender

Author-**Chrisma Jerald**, M.A,NET Assistant Professor,
Department of English Literature Mahalashmi Women’s College of Arts and Science
email: chrismaj051096@gmail.com

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This paper examines the song book called Song of Solomon from the Biblical canon, also known as Song of Songs, which was attributed to King Solomon, who is renowned for his wisdom. The songs are often celebrated for their poetry singing the glory of love, desire and the beauty of the natural world. Although the song is often metaphorically interpreted for its devotional insight, it also explores and harmonizes the central themes of nature, gender role and sexuality. As an ancient text, the bible often revolves around patriarchal traditions, where women’s values are depended on man, contrary to that song of Solomon that brings a striking shift of giving a powerful voice to a woman who expresses her feelings and desire. Its vivid description of natural imagery like gardens, vineyards, rivers, flowers, and animals are not superficial; instead it conveys a deep symbolic ecological meaning. The text highlights the importance of ecological understanding and showcases the invisible balance that happens between nature and mankind, emphasizing how song connects with the women’s voices, body and nature. This study showcases ecofeminist ideas from Carolyn Merchant, Vandana Shiva, and Val Plumwood describing how the Song of Solomon connects women’s voices, deep connection of nature, and embodying the sacred experience.



From Patriarchal Origins to Literary Canon:

The Bible's Dual Context: Tracing the records of Eastern literature, which reveals how the tales and social class are constructed based on ancient patriarchal narratives reinforced with strict social expectations. Oftentimes the portrayal of women is to play subordinate roles and has been a victim under patriarchal oppression. The Bible, especially the Old Testament, was composed within the cultural and literary context of Ancient East and showcasing the rich heritage of Israel while recording the political history and their spiritual journey. The Bible also revolves within ancient patriarchal societies where men were considered as the heads of households and had authority in family, religious, and social life.

Reading the Bible as a piece of literature involves in examining its various forms like prose, poetry, epistles, parables and narratives. It ensures us to acknowledge it as a universal literary text influenced, inspired and even contradicted in the passage of time. Great English writers, like John Milton in his famous epic poem *Paradise Lost*, demonstrate a subtle engagement with the Bible as a source of theological based and literary inspiration.

As a reader, by understanding the structure of the Bible it reveals two main divisions like the old and new testament comprising sixty six books. It showcases the contribution of versatile writers like Moses, Joshua, king David, various prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John etc. They together created an intrinsic and divine inspiration about history, prophecy and spirituality.

The Bible was not written in a single sitting, rather, its composition extended over years, the canonization of the Bible took centuries, shaped with various councils and communities. Going back to the 15th century, Johannes Gutenberg chose the Bible to be the first book printed on his new printing press in Germany and later on it became the mass produced book distributed and read across the world. Amidst the books of pentutach, historical and prophetic books, the song of Solomon stands out unique within the strict canonical structure. The book of Solomon celebrates love and nature through the pages by allegorically representing the ever-lasting relationship of love between God and Man.

From the ecocritical perspective, the song of Solomon unveils the passionate connection that links human emotion and nature through vivid figurative language and dialogue. In contrast to anthropocentric affairs that are focused in other biblical books, the song of Solomon is enriched with the rich sensory images of nature which includes flora, fauna and the breathtaking landscape of Israel.

The Biblical canonical text begins with the first book Genesis describing the magnificent creation of the universe and mankind and the woman is the zenith of God's creation. Ironically it ends with the desolation of mankind away from the garden and the woman portrayed as naïve, ignorant and easily deceived by Satan, a perception which is debated even today. In contrast, the Song of Solomon symbolically restores harmony and celebrates women and her sexuality through the background setting of nature.

Reclaiming Female Desire in the Song of Solomon:

Diving deep into the canonical context where women are oftentimes anonymous, silenced, or defined through their ancestors or by their clan names but the Song of Solomon turns the readers attention by introducing a beautiful as well as powerful female protagonist, the Shulammitte woman, who breaks the stereotypes and expresses her needs in a dynamic way.

The passages of Scripture are marked by the fragmented narratives of silenced women like Eve, Hagar, Tamar, Jael, Bathsheba etc who were condemned, abandoned, and erased by patriarchal structures. Even today, rather than being understood from their own perspectives, these women are frequently presented as cautionary figures in religious sermons portraying them as moral failures, or negative examples. Rather than reflecting their perspective and resistance, it reveals the patriarchal order and instructs the framework of how one should fit in to be called as right by the society. In such archetypal silenced women, shulammitte woman voices are heard most frequently throughout the eight chapters; though her name was hidden and named after the place she was raised from, yet the patriarchal text cannot silence her like the predecessors. In the first chapter, she states her passion to kiss her beloved and compares it with enriching wine. This openness of female sexual expression is revolutionary within the patriarchal eastern literature and Biblical tradition. As most of the writing is gender-biased or male-centered, it is often perceived under strict cultural norms.



To the readers, the song of Solomon picturizes the whole chapters as a kind of love letters written between the lovers expressing an erotic love expressed through various metaphors and images expressed in the form of poetic drama. Focusing on the female character, The Shulamite woman who claims her ownership of her own body and her desire. She takes the control of choosing her beloved and searches actively for her beloved through the city streets. She creates a break free image from the traditional courtship setting where women play the role of satisfying the needs of her husband, whereas in contrast shulamite woman was never ashamed for her appearance, when her brothers complain about her sun-darkened skin, she boldly accepts her dark appearance while affirming her attractiveness.”. This self-assurance reflects Vandana Shiva recognizes as the "feminine principle" where a feeling of liveliness is an active force than passive one. The woman in the Song is not hoping someone will choose or desire her but instead she challenges the male society and acts upon her needs and wants.

In the song of Solomon, the Shulamite's sexuality is not tied to marriage norms, social status or of producing offspring that are portrayed in a usual way of patriarchal systems. The lovers in the Song do not worry about social constraints or hierarchies; instead their relationship is built around pleasure, mutual affection, and emotional closeness. This shows sexuality particularly a woman's sexuality as something personal and independent, not as a property or something that is based on rigid criteria. In songs of Solomon, the woman states that she liberates from traditional naiveness to bold expression of her body and her beloved one. She volunteers herself and asks his beloved to join him in the countryside and to spend the night in the nearby villages.

Nature as Sacred Space: Ecological Imagery and Female Agency:

The Song of Solomon not just describes female sexuality and her desire but brings a shift by using nature and making it more meaningful. Though songs of Solomon compiled 2,500 years ago, yet the songs compile the theme of love and the world of nature together. Nature is not just a backdrop setting but it goes beyond in expressing a freeing, intimate sanctuary where the woman's desire unfolds beyond patriarchal boundaries. Though the authorship, date and origin of the book is uncertain, yet it gives a modern perspective of a liberating woman challenging the patriarchal norms and flourishes beyond it.

The garden imagery, particularly the "garden locked" and "fountain sealed" metaphors, positions the woman's body not as a possession that is to be surrendered to a man but as a sacred territory where she controls it. This statement gives a clear contrast to the views of Carolyn Merchant's argument in *The Death of Nature*, where she demonstrates that the symbolic relation between women and nature has historically served as an instrument for submissiveness and been dominated by the social environment to destruction. Thus, it moves beyond, in controlling through patriarchal cultures, and creates ideological grounds for exploiting the environment and regulating female bodies. In the Song of Songs, this connection works very differently. The garden image does not represent something to be taken or controlled. Instead, the woman is described as a locked garden and "sealed fountain," which highlights her privacy and independence.

The descriptions of the Shulamite woman employs rich extensive natural metaphors, her hair is likened to a flock of goats moving down from Mount Gilead and her breasts compared to two fawns. These portrayals occur within a framework where the woman participates in and consents to the poetic language used about her, suggesting a degree of control over her body is represented. Instead of being shown as passive or objectified, the woman is represented as an active contributor who shapes how she is seen and understood. The natural world highlights her vitality and presence, reinforcing the bond of the woman and nature, also it makes Shulamite woman as a dynamic and self-aware figure in the text.

The narrative structure of the song further contributes by elevating the thematic narration of the woman. She expresses her opinions and her love more frequently than the male figure and her voice contributes much to the poem's movements. The distribution of dialogue within the pages prioritize the female perspective within the text, highlighting her central role in shaping the lovers' interactions. The reciprocation of the love language used by both the speakers, their imagery of describing his lady love as an apple among the trees, followed by it describing her as a lily among the thorns showing the



dual image of feminism and the mastery of nature. Hence the song of Solomon is not just considered as a part of a canon but also builds a hierarchical relationship between male, female and nature.

Val Plumwood's Critique of Dualisms Applied to the Song of Solomon:

Val Plumwood an Australian philosopher, in her inspiring work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993), argues how the western thought has been built around a series of hierarchical dualisms like reason Vs nature, mind Vs body, male Vs female, culture Vs nature in which the first term is superior and privileged and the second one is devalued and subordinated. In working closely in terms of nature and women he says these dualisms support each other. In dominating them on the 'inferior' side of each pair.

Plumwood identifies five key features of dualistic thinking : backgrounding, radical exclusion, incorporation, instrumentalism, and homogenization. The Song of Solomon systematically undermines each of these mechanisms.

In analysing the text, Plumwood argues that the first feature of dualistic thinking is "backgrounds" where this way of thinking pushes nature and women into the background. It treats them like passive helpers for men, not as people or beings with their own power and value. In contrast to the feature, the Song of Solomon drastically foregrounds the female voice. The Shulammitte woman's conversation appears to have more lines than her male counterpart, by opening up the entire text with her own declaration of desire by stating how to kiss his beloved and relishes the passion to that of a wine. Thus, she is not a background to his story, instead her narratives drive the poetic movement and frames the entire work rather than silencing it.

Followed by it, in chapter one, she boasts of her skin tone which is black and judged by the people around her instead of treating her as inferior to others. She stands against social judgement and foregrounds herself in recognition on her own terms. Her comparison herself to the expensive curtains of Solomon tells the reader of her self- perception, her demand for recognition instead of marking as inferior.

Next, Plumwood says 'radical exclusion' is the next key factor of dualistic thinking, where it separates the powerful group from the weaker one and treats them as totally different. Men in the canonical text are often seen as the foremost powerful figure in the order and treated much better than nature and women. But the Song of Solomon breaks this division by portraying the lovers through physical and emotional connections and closely connecting them to nature. In the Song of Solomon, the man is not shown as a distant thinker who looks down on a woman linked to nature. Instead, he is also described with natural imagery, where the woman compares her beloved to gold and describes his hair color as the blackness of a raven: His physique is described with the same rich imagery as that of hers. Thus, it breaks free from the hierarchical order and changes the passive role of a woman to an active role through its poetic form. It refuses to instigate the role of mind in the man; the woman is just for body.

Followed by it, Plumwood describes "incorporation" as the process by which the subordinated term is often associated only in relation to the dominant term for example, women are understood only as wives, mothers, or daughters restricted to a limited frame and on the other hand nature is understood only as a resource for human utilization.

The Shulammitte woman rejects and resists this integration by possessing her own history, her own labor, her own relationships beyond the beloved. She explains her hardship and how she was forced to work in the vineyard under scorching sun by her family members. She reveals her untiring life of working, facing family conflict, and self-neglect which exceeds her role as beloved.

Most strikingly, she proclaims her ownership over herself and her beloved in Song of Solomon chapter eight where she calls her beloved and her assets belong to her. Clearly stating a message that what is hers belongs to her alone by saying that King Solomon may possess vast vineyards, but her vineyard meaning her body, her selfhood, her sexuality belongs to her alone. She cannot be treated as one of his possessions or seen only as someone who exists to satisfy his desire.



In her Dualistic thinking, Plumwood identifies "instrumentalism" as the treatment of the subordinated term as a mere instrument to meet the needs of the dominant terms, where nature as a raw material, women's bodies as an instrument to satisfy male pleasure or reproduction.

The garden imagery in Song of Solomon intensely overthrows this instrumentalism. The beloved is described as a garden surrounded and a spring confined, a fountain wrapped. This is not a garden awaiting cultivation nor kept for the amusement of a masculine usage but instead it is already flourishing, already protected encompassing rich spices and fresh fruits. Importantly, the woman herself issues an invitation calling the north winds and her beloved into the garden confirming her own agency through it. She makes sure the garden is not taken nor exploited, which showcases her sovereignty.

Plumwood says that the dualistic thinking 'homogenizes' the weaker group by treating all the women or all of nature as of the same, without their own unique value. But the Song of Solomon does the opposite by paying close attention to small, vivid details. The Shulammitte woman is not just 'a woman' in general but she is a specific person with specific features. The images are unusual and very precise comparing her teeth like washed sheep, lips like red string.

Also on the other hand, nature is also shown in its uniqueness, not as a vague background. The songs of Solomon run over with some real names and real places like Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, Hermon. These are not random mountains but specific locations standing tall with their own stories and meaning. By focusing on these exact details, the Song refuses to treat women or nature as all the same. It showcases their own identity and cannot be reduced to something that is generic or replaceable.

Conclusion:

Thus, the Song of Solomon moves from a canonical text to a powerful literary work that still voices out modern ecofeminist ideas. It is more than just a love poem, as it breaks the barrier of old traditional patriarchal texts and challenges the dualistic ways of thinking that have wounded both women and nature for centuries.

The Shulammitte woman, with her strong voice and poised desire, represents the "feminine principle" highlighted by Vandana Shiva, and defines her own worth instead of accepting the social stereotypes that were forced age after age. Ancient texts often portrayed nature and women as an object of destruction by the patriarchal dominion, but the Song disproves this notion and rewrites a clear message: her identity and her body belong to her alone, a message conveyed through the symbols and medium of nature.

Plumwood's ideas show how the Song of Solomon breaks harmful dualisms by letting the woman speak for herself, by being represented through rich natural imagery, and by representing her own history beyond romance. From this ecofeminist view, the Song of Solomon shows a way of relating human affairs based not on domination but on mutual respect and desire. Written about 2,500 years ago, it offers what Plumwood would call a "non-dualistic" vision by rejecting the logic of mastery found in much of Western patriarchal thinking.

Today, as we face environmental collapse and ongoing gender inequality, the Song of Solomon feels very impactful. It reveals that ancient texts can carry messages of freedom. It reveals the unbreakable link between women and nature, expressing strength and sacredness, rather than oppression. The Shulammitte woman, standing in her garden, owning her vineyard, and calling the winds and her beloved on her own terms, offers a lasting picture of ecofeminist harmony manifesting a society where bodies are not conquered, nature is not consumed, and love grows through equality and mutual recognition. Over with some real names and real places like Lebanon, Amana, Shenir, Hermon. These are not random mountains but specific locations standing tall with their own stories and meaning. By focusing on these exact details, the Song refuses to treat women or nature as all the same. It showcases their own identity and cannot be reduced to something that is generic or replaceable. Through the lens of Val Plumwood's critical perspective, the Song of Solomon emerges as a remarkably unique perspective to dualistic thinking. The Shulammitte woman is not a backgrounded setting but foregrounded as the primary voice. She is not radically excluded but instead shares equally the embodying sensuous beauty with her beloved. Also rather than representing herself as someone's possession, she represents her as an autonomous



selfhood by subverting instrumentalism. And through the text she stands beyond homogenization by presenting as a unique individual, thus offering what Plumwood would recognize as a "non-dualistic" alternative. Through the song of Solomon the dualistic vision of human relationship and human-nature relationship grounded not in domination but in mutuality. The Song of Solomon shows us a different way of Plumwood's non-dualistic approach by offering a beautiful picture of mutual relationships with each other as humans and with the natural world, that are built on being equal partners instead of one person controlling the other. It is about deep respect instead of taking advantage, and a shared, reciprocating yearning instead of a power structure .

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