

The Air is Sick: Ozone Depletion as an Ecofeminist Issue in The Fifth Sacred Thing of Starhawk

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Abstract: According to ecofeminist philosophers, the existence of significant linkages between the treatment of women and other oppressed classes and the treatment of natural environment are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, they highlight the insufficiency of those feminist and environmental ethics that fail to consider these connections substantially and admit that they can't be exclusive unless. Subsequently, it becomes mandatory for the people keenly interested in finding solutions to environmental destruction as well as domination of women and other suppressed classes to tackle these kinships interdependently and attentively. From this view point, the crisis of ozone depletion attracts our attention as an ecofeminist issue, duly discussed by Starhawk, in her novel *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. Starhawk, a feminist, an environmentalist and earth-based spirituality activist of America designs and ardently propagates ecofeminist philosophy to offer affordable and workable solutions to glaring environmental problems such as ozone depletion.

Key Words: Ecofeminism, Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), Ozone Depletion, Ozone Hole, Sickness of Air, Ultraviolet Radiations

I. INTRODUCTION

The crisis of environmental destruction encompasses many issues related to soil, air, water and energy elaborated in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* with due share to all of them. These issues include climate change, global warming, melting of ice at polar regions, acid rain, use of chemicals and pesticides, deforestation, toxins in water, ultraviolet radiations, ozone depletion and so on. *The Fifth Sacred Thing* entwines all the environmental pros and cons as a constellation and enables brooding into their entangled linkages; however, the topic of ozone depletion as an air sickening cause will be the focus of the present research pursuit. Furthermore, according to ecofeminist philosophers, the existence of significant linkages between the treatment of women and all other oppressed classes and the treatment of the natural environment are two sides of the same coin. Moreover, they highlight the insufficiency of those feminist and environmental philosophies and ethics that fail to consider these connections substantially and stress that they can't be exclusive unless. Subsequently, it becomes mandatory for the people keenly interested in finding solutions to environmental destruction as well as domination of women and other oppressed groups to tackle these kinships interdependently and attentively. From this view point, all the issues mentioned above deserve to be credited as ecofeminist issues appropriately analyzed in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* by Starhawk. Starhawk, a feminist, an environmentalist and earth-based spirituality activist of America designs and ardently propagates ecofeminist philosophy to offer affordable and workable solutions to glaring environmental problems such as ozone depletion. She asserts that some stern measures and a spiritual attachment with the natural ambience only can reduce the use of ozone depleting substances. She anticipates her protagonists in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* to castigate the political and socio-cultural systems for being unable to control ozone depletion phenomenon.

II. DISCUSSION

1. The Air is Sick

The air is sick! What does it mean in the ultramodern context of advanced technologies? It infers that technologies have contributed to mount the sickness of air. The air has been made sick by the tremendous multiplicity of pollutions. One is not sure to breathe pure and fresh air; rather innumerable poisonous gases are released in the air due to industrial, technological and even domestic purposes threatening the atmospheric chemistry balances. The burning of fossil fuels for industrial, agricultural and domestic purposes increases the rate of carbon dioxide emission in the atmosphere. Additionally, the chlorofluorocarbons utilized in spray cans, refrigerators, air conditioners and foam blowing only intensifies the havoc of air pollution as the

chlorofluorocarbons are the culprits in weakening the ozone shield. Every human being of the world either knowingly or unknowingly contributes to the ozone layer thinning through tremendous use of advanced technology thereby producing chlorofluorocarbons and expanding carbon emission in the atmosphere. In the United States or any other developing or underdeveloped country people have grown immensely materialistic to increase personal materialistic possessions. Consequently, they accord mindless use of fuel guzzling vehicles and refrigeration systems ultimately poisoning the air.

2. Ozone Depletion

Ozone depletion concern happens to be one of the major impurities of pure air. Ozone layer also referred as 'ozone shield' is a region of earth's stratosphere found in the upper atmosphere. The ozone layer absorbs the harmful ultraviolet radiations of the sun which otherwise have created serious problems for planet earth. Alana Lyons documents the importance of ozone shield: There can be no life on this planet without our ozone shield. The ozone layer is a very thin shield of gases fifteen miles above the Earth's surface. It protects Mother Earth like the shell of an egg, from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Without this protective layer, skin cancer, cataracts, and immune system disorders will increase. Climate will be affected. The basis of the marine food chain, plankton, is at risk. And ozone depletion also adds to the risk of global warming. [1] Similarly, a parallel view expressed by ecofeminist thinker Jytte Nhanenge conveys the intensity of the issue significantly, when she asserts, "Greater level of ultraviolet radiation could severely affect human health, plant growth, basic forms of aquatic life vital to the food chain, and the balance of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere." [2] In the same vein, again, Alana Lyons duly mentions the effects of ozone hole on the humanity. She admits that the issue of ozone depletion may be of remote concern for some people of the world, but it is the most concerned for the people who live in Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, or Chile which are closest to the monstrous ozone hole that opens every year over Antarctica from September through November. "This hole is said to be as big as the entire United States." [3]

3. Ozone Depletion In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*

Linking arms with Alana Lyons, Jytte Nhanenge and the people who aspire to protect Mother Earth from the human generated environmental threats, renowned ecofeminist philosopher of America, Starhawk, deliberates on the crisis of ozone shield depletion, the causes thereof and offers remedies to successfully cure this deformity enforced on earth environment, in her fiction *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. She enriches our sensitivity through her narrators Maya Greenwood, a short story writer and an ecofeminist leader, Madrone; her granddaughter who works as a healer and Bird; her grandson who exclusively supports his grandmother and contributes to the ecofeminist movement in the novel. In all, these three narrators, their friends, relatives, their San Francisco community contribute to the upliftment of the oppressed classes and the protection of environment through a proper understanding of their inter-connectedness. The ozone depletion consequences are depicted in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* when the narrator Madrone reveals the effect thereof on her patient Marie who is a victim of skin cancer. Madrone informs, "She too had been a patient of Madrone's; she too was some Madrone had not been able to cure and would lose. The milk-white skin of Marie's Irish ancestors wasn't made to withstand the ultraviolet that poured through the earth's weakened ozone shield. Madrone noticed a new growth next to the old woman's nose. Her skin was papery, transparent, the look of cancer." [4] And like Marie many more deaths due to skin cancer have been predicted in the future. This alarmingly mounting intensity of the crisis of ozone depletion for the United States can be propounded with a quotation from Alana Lyons. She states, "In April 1991, William K. Reilly, then Chief of the Environmental Protection Agency, said that the ozone layer over the United States was depleting 300 percent faster, and that it would lead to 200,000 more skin cancer deaths within the next fifty years." [5] This prediction expects sanity to introspect and change life styles to protect ozone layer. Once, it is proved that the production of chlorofluorocarbons is the major culprit in lessening the ozone concentration in ozone layer, a strict measure to control and cease the generation of CFCs needs to be immediately taken by policy framers not only of the United States but of the whole world though one can't ignore the fact that "USA is one of the three major carbon dioxide emitting countries of the world, the other two being USSR and China". [6] In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, one of the narrators Madrone thought provokingly expresses, "Essentially, we're living in a toxic stew," She continues, "The atmosphere is suffering from an ozone depletion that won't begin to reverse itself for at least another twenty to thirty years - and that depends on what's happened to the rain forests and the consumption of fossil fuels on the rest of the planet, which we don't even know." [7]

Ultimately, she concludes by focusing our ignorance regarding what is being pumped into the air, increasing the intensity of the issue. Besides ozone depletion, 'ozone hole' also deserves attention of the whole world. It is streamlined by Carolyn Merchant. According to her, "In 1985 scientists reported a hole in the ozone layer over the Antarctic." [8] Madrone, too, in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* is utterly conscious about ozone depletion and enquires openly about the banning of chlorofluorocarbons, "When did they ban Chlorofluorocarbons? Back

in the mid-nineties? How many more years before we can hope to restore the ozone?" [9] This uncertainty regarding the decrease in ozone depletion substances enforces humanity to introspect by framing an effective plan for the welfare of future generations. *The Fifth Sacred Thing* not only provides a space for the glaring crisis of ozone depletion and the political actions to be taken by the United States and the world, but it suggests remedies and solutions of ecofriendly life style successfully adopted by the chief narrators their relatives, friends and community. Some significant steps undertaken by the San Francisco city community, where the novel is set, offer insights for eco-harmonious ways of living for the world and particularly for environmentally conscious people to restrict ozone depletion.

III. MEASURES TO CONTROL OZONE DEPLETION IN THE FIFTH SACRED THING

In the city of San Francisco vehicle driving has been adopted for essential purpose only and has been limited also. Subsequently, a number of other substitutes are introduced so that air pollution could be kept to the minimum level. The panorama that plunges Maya into the splendid natural environment of the city suggests some alternatives to decrease the use of vehicles, one is mesmerized to read, "The city was a mosaic of jewel-like colors set in green, veined by streams and dotted with gleaming ponds and pools. Seen from above, blocks of old row houses defined streets that no longer existed. Instead, bicycles and electric carts and the occasional horse moved through a labyrinth of narrow walkways that snaked and twined through the green. Above the rooftops, gondolas like gaily painted buckets swung from cable, skimming from hilltop to hilltop, moving between high towers where windspinners turned. To the northeast, Maya could see a long train moving across the lower deck of the Bay Bridge, bringing early grain to the central market." [10]The point is that, using public transport instead of private or individual, using a bicycle and other means of transportation that too run on either solar or wind energy like the gondolas, option of walking on the pathways are some cost-effective, affordable measures to rescue from carbon emission, nitrous oxide production and all other air pollutions. The advanced technology can be implemented to introduce hybrid or electric zero-emission engine. At the most, the habit of sharing is demanded. Natural and herbal cleaning products for domestic and even industrial cleaning purposes can be optimally installed. Pesticides have been incorporated as the easiest way to get rid of the weed, but they are fatal for the ozone layer. Hence, best alternatives can be sought through natural or environment friendly remedies. An elaborate discussion over organic gardening and aquaculture and the principle of permaculture took place when Madrone is enquired by the people of the South about their food growing methods. Madrone analyzes their ecological philosophy to utilize everything to avoid every kind of pollution. She conveys: "We don't just plant a garden, we create an ecosystem that can sustain itself as much as possible with a minimum of outside energy-including our own. Everything serves more than one function. For example, we used to keep a couple of geese, who ate weeds and insects and scared away stray cats. Their wastes fertilized the soil, and we ate their eggs and used their feathers in quilts and jackets." [11]This is the philosophy of no garbage-no pollution that the world direly needs to adopt, no threat to ozone layer, and the soil also will be kept in good condition. Besides, these measures, rocket launching process also leads to ozone depletion and is expected to be controlled. All types of rocket engines generate combustion by-products which are ozone destroying compounds. During the rocket launching process these ozone depleting substances are directly expelled in the middle and upper stratosphere layer which is extremely near to the ozone layer. So this process requires research and control to minimally harm the environment.

IV. CONTRIBUTION

The literary giant, William Shakespeare, recognized the threat of air pollution in his days and argued how he had to be careful about it. To quote him, "I durst not laugh for fear of opening my lips and receiving the bad air." [12] However, today, humanity is reluctant to introspect and to act accordingly. Hence, the present research enterprise alerts and accelerates humanity to awaken to the 'nature's strength' to wipe out the whole world within no time due to the blunders of maldevelopments. The present study intends to reconstruct and reshape the world by alarming about the dangers of ozone depletion as a major cause of making the air sick. Moreover, it demarcates high sensitivity for revaluing natural environment. Besides, this endeavour hopes to generate consciousness to imply stern measures to control ozone depleting substances by adopting the use of non-conventional energy. Subsequently, it offers numerous ecofriendly life styles. Further, the study suggests organic farming methods to avoid the use of harmful pesticides that are a major threat to the purity of air, soil, and water etc. Besides, it hopes for a habit of sharing in case of transportation measures as it is the best essential option to lessen and avoid the use of vehicles. It also suggests other pollution free means of transportations for the protection of air from impurities.

V. CONCLUSIONS

1. The narrators Maya, Madrone, other women characters and the discriminated group members like Marie and Rosa spread consciousness regarding ozone depletion and air pollution by stating the fact that no development can sustain without accountability to nature.
2. They practise, cherish and forward workable and lucidly applicable models to control the ozone depleting substances by providing some ecofriendly alternatives so as to be adopted by human beings affordably.
3. They highlight the unavoidability to acquire and inculcate ecofriendly lifestyle to save our environment i. e. ultimately the earth and her resources.
4. Limited vehicle driving, other pollution free measures of transportation, and organic farming offered through the characters of the novel certainly increase awareness to decrease ozone depletion and help enhancing the earth environment.
5. Alternative energy sources of solar and wind energy have been practised, propounded and propagated by the writer to minimize the loss of ozone layer. Moreover, a measure to reduce carbon emission percentage thereby maintaining equilibrium in the environmental factors has been put forth.

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