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## Interrogating Gender, Nature, and Violence: An Anarcho-Ecofeminist Reading of Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*

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### ABSTRACT

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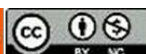
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This research is an anarcho-ecofeminist reading of Ana Castillo's *So Far from God*. The work reflects the issues of gender, nature, and violence in its American South culture. I employ Murray Bookchin's concept of 'anarchy' and Greta Gaard's idea of 'ecofeminism' as reading props for the analysis of the selected text. The argument of this study questions the status of patriarchal norms that provide justification for the oppression of women, devastation of nature, and practice of violence as presented in the text under scrutiny. This research also argues that Castillo uses her narrative as intellectual device in order to expose the ills existing in her society. As the American South is economically weak, mostly its social system is also unjust. The position of humans vis-a-vis nonhumans is not satisfactory. Since Castillo stands inseparable from her society, her work affirms a close link with her respective soil, ecosystem, people, and their problems. Therefore, she protests by holding out the issues of gender, nature, and violence in her novel and these concerns make it a good fare for an anarcho-ecofeminist reading. Catherine Belsey's concept of "textual analysis" supports my reading perspective.

**Keywords:** anarcho-ecofeminist, gender, nature, violence, patriarchal norms, ecosystem

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## I

This research examines the South American novelist, Ana Castillo's 1993 novel *So Far from God* in order to explore the issues of gender, nature, and violence by invoking Murray Bookchin and Greta Gaard's concepts of anarchy and ecofeminism respectively. Bookchin elaborates the concept of social anarchy in *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*, in the following argument:

Our world . . . is breaking down institutionally, culturally, and physically. The reconstructive and destructive tendencies in our time are too much at odds with each other to admit of reconciliation. . . . Intertwined with the social crisis is a crisis that has emerged directly from man's exploitation of the planet. Established society is faced with a breakdown not only of its values and institutions, but also of its natural environment. (p. 18-19)

Greta Gaard (1993) explicates the idea of ecofeminism in the essay, "Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature" in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, edited by her:

Ecofeminism is a theory that has evolved from . . . peace movements, the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements. Drawing on the insights of ecology [and] feminism . . . ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions . . . based on race . . . gender, sexuality . . . and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions . . . to liberate women . . . [and] to liberate nature. (p. 1)

The nexus of social anarchy and ecofeminism is effective in interpreting the primary text that contains the issues of gender, nature, and violence in it. Both of the theories catechize the norms of discrimination and oppression of women and nature. The primary text also plays out gender discrimination and oppression in the Southwestern American culture. Since these theories and the text of the novel have certain common concerns, I use anarchy and ecofeminism as props for textual analysis in this project.

This study is delimited to Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* with its setting in Tome, a small village in Southwest America. Castillo, in her novel, is in consonance with Donella Meadows in "A Reaction from a Multitude" included in *Placing Nature: Culture and Landscape Ecology*. Meadows holds that "we are essentially inseparable from the earth, from its creatures, and from each other. We are they, and they are us, and when any one person, species, or ecosystem is impoverished, we are all impoverished" (p. 17). Having a sincere concern for her people, Castillo highlights the social evils like injustice, exploitation of workers, and violence against women and animals in her society. As the selected novel is the product of first-hand experience of the writer, it would be useful to examine those conditions after a brief introduction of the novel.

The writer, in her novel, deals with the impact of the political, ethnic, social, and economic conflicts in Chicano culture. As a convention, Chicano literature shows the deep-rooted patriarchal system as its essential part. Women are victims of social

norms that keep them at lower tier of the society. The novelist records her resistance in order to reject the patriarchal standards of the Southwestern America by creating dynamism among women folk. She wants to bring a positive change in her cultural, social, and religious values that uphold the rigid standards of maternal pain and suffering.

Therefore, *So Far from God* depreciates patriarchy by putting forth matriarchy as a challenge to it. Castillo (1993) foregrounds her concern with the practice of gender discrimination in her society through the protagonist of the novel, Sofia, who gains accomplishment through self-determination. She traverses the way of complete transformation from an oppressed wife to an independent woman. The more she suffers at the hands of patriarchy, the stronger she becomes. She becomes a symbolic ideal figure for women of her society. She poses strong resistance to male exploitation. During the course of her suffering, Sofia succeeds in learning the art of controlling her mind. In this way, she becomes the master of herself. She gains strength enough to restore the position of her home as well as the womenfolk around her. The novelist also tries to expose the exploitative victimization of the female labourers in factories and other working places. She shows her resistance against commodification of women in the American South culture. She challenges inhuman values of the institutions that maltreat the already marginalized humans of the New Mexican society.

Therefore, the main objective of this investigation includes investigating Castillo's contribution in exposing the issues of gender, nature, and violence in the selected novel from the American South. By recording her resistance against the traditional and unjust paradigms, she wants to expose the social and political conventions that have marginalized Chicano and the native scholars. In doing so, the author poses an anti-essentialist reaction to biased modes of thought. The text appears to reflect the inhuman ways of life prevalent in her culture. Therefore, I set up the anarcho-ecofeminist convention as the theoretical framework to have an inside look at the prevailing conditions of gender, nature, and violence in the respective areas. In line with the objective(s) of my research, I have to try to find answers to the following questions: 1) How does the selected work engage with anarcho-ecofeminist concerns?; 2) How do gender and nature play out against patriarchal and institutional control in the selected novel?; 3) How does the selected text reflect the practice of violence? Moreover, since research methodology is qualitative in nature, I use Catherine Belsey's idea of textual analysis as research method in this essay.

In order to trace gaps and locate my research work in the former writings, a review of the related literary pieces is instructive. In *Social Ecology and Communalism* (2006), Murray Bookchin maintains that social ecology emerged from the social and theoretical issues near the first half of the twentieth century. The World War second affected everything including economy. With this backdrop, capitalism gained strength to the maximum and wage labour had to face economic exploitation. The development of social ecology in the USA in 1960s had anticipated ecological crisis. In this context, capitalism began to grow stronger in that it had its roots in "hierarchical domination" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 70). There were chances of hostility between capitalist economy and the movement of natural world. On the other hand, social

ecology encouraged more eco-communities to create democratic and nonhierarchical human relations. In addition, social ecology paved the way for early feminism and antinuclear movement. However, social ecology was not something new but it had its ideals placed, some two hundred years back, in Enlightenment and revolutionary conventions.

Historically, social ecology has been in close relation with revolutions and radical thoughts. Social ecology opposes all attempts against the initiatives to denature Enlightenment and revolutionary work. Bookchin (2006) is of the view that ecology and feminism have similar functions to perform. Ecology counteracts social hierarchy and seeks for a useful interaction of humankind and environment. In Bookchin's words, "feminism . . . a universalized challenge to hierarchy [,] has [served] ecofeminism" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 72). In his view, capitalism has made human condition irrational. In modern era, ecology is as much in crisis as modern culture. The 'commodity fetishism' (to borrow from Frederick Jameson) has overwhelmed life completely. Moreover, capitalist economy has adopted the form of capitalist culture. It has decomposed social and cultural fabrics. Therefore, this erosion should be resisted with oppositional ideas. Further, capitalism has little concern for rationality, ethics, and coherence in society. Quite contrary to it, social ecology has its historical soundness and supports rationality, ethics, and coherence. It caters for its ideals of greater awareness and revolutionary social and cultural changes in the era of "cultural twilight" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 75). Social ecologists believe that social problems give rise to ecological problems. With this background, the philosopher asserts that social forces should come to the fore "to demand for social change" (Bookchin, 2006, p. 75) to establish a coherent society.

As for locating my work in the former body of critical literature and finding gaps, I discover that the novel highlights the issues of gender discrimination, violence, oppression of nature. Bookchin (2006) exposes the dangers lurking in capitalism against social and cultural flourishing. Since Bookchin's concepts of social ecology and social anarchy seek the betterment of humankind, ecofeminism also has similar aims because it maintains that women have a strong bond with nature. Bookchin elaborates social ecology, feminism, and ecofeminism in relation to capitalism. The review shows that the first three concepts are related to the issues of gender, nature, and violence that are treated in the novel, but capitalism is counteractive to them. It reflects that Bookchin's article does not address all the concerns raised in Castillo's novel. Thus, my essay intervenes in the existing critical scholarship and nuances it in a productive fashion.

In essay, "Eco-feminism" in *Green History: A Reader in Environmental Literature, Philosophy and Politics* (1994), Derek Wall traces the relation between women and nature in the context of history. In his view, ecofeminism involves survival of ecology and liberation of women. Ecofeminism shows protest against missiles and nuclear weapons. As a movement, it included great strife for collective justice in society. The revolutionaries such as anarchists and socialists favored ecofeminism. "Capitalism and hierarchy stem from a patriarchal system of male rule" (Wall, 1994, p. 168). According to him, as early as Bronze Age, there was witnessed an appreciable harmony between matriarchy and nature. Evils of war, injustice, and

inequality were very rare in ancient society. The writer believes that women are intrinsically more ecological than men. At the same time, some scholars take this idea as a supposition. In Janet Biehl's view, to pronounce women as "Greener and nurturing may risk placing them back in the kitchen and nursery" (Biehl in Wall, 1994, p. 168). Such a background of ecofeminism has been considered as a sexist project that refuses to value the intellectual as well as domestic roles of women together. In the twentieth century, women have served in wars too. Moreover, women like Mary Shelly have recorded their sympathy for nature and resistance against oppression of nature. Besides, Wall criticizes William Morris (1890) as misogynistic in his utopian novel, *News from Nowhere* because of his biased attitude towards women. Women served at communal meals and played their active role in the progressive movement of Roosevelt in America in the beginning of twentieth century. At present, ecological feminists participated in the peace movement and environmental groups with slogan such as "Earth First."

After reviewing this article, I find out that ecofeminism is an anti-foundational concept and a movement. Further, the article contains resistance against patriarchy. Moreover, the article was written in 1994 but the novel was written in 1993. Although the article is different from my project in theory and genre yet it shows that both belong to the same era. Moreover, the article does not mention anything about anarchic and ecofeminist perspectives in fiction. My work is a textual analysis of a novel through by employing the lenses of anarchy and ecofeminism. I situate my research by comparing and contrasting this article with the primary text. My research aims at filling all these gaps.

In his article, "Violence and Anarchism" in *Anarchy!: An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (2012), edited by Peter Glassgold, Alexander Berkman says that government uses various tactics "to preserve society as it is [and] to preserve things as they are" (p. 27) to safeguard the grabbing and hoarding of the rich. Warships, police, jails, and penitentiaries are meant to suppress, kill, and maim those who resist plutocracy and the rich. It is said that these are all necessary evils to preserve the status quo. On the other hand, a well-disciplined society should mainly focus on the greatest good of its people. In view of Berkman (2012), the working class is the backbone of social system. Therefore, they should have chances to benefit themselves from social organization. It is the foremost duty of society to bring up its individuals as balanced persons because it is the workers who suffer from the social evils like poverty, exploitation, and injustice.

Further, Berkman (2012) criticizes that both law and government help the rich to grab and digest the stolen wealth. They also support them to suppress the voice of discontentment and protest for the sake of their own vested interests. The writer says that social life of the "civilized" states is nothing less than that in the present context. The people have to live a miserable life in the social system that is characterized by exploitation, deprivation, suppression, discrimination, injustice, lawful brutality, and judicial murder in it. If these conditions prevail, the society is called an organized one. The writer contests in this regard that better, happier, and freer life is possible only when there is nothing like fixed and preserved. He maintains that anarchism is the science of social order. It is, in fact, a science against existing disorder, legal

oppression, robbery, and universal misery. This condition calls for a fresh social order as a better replacement. It demands a holistic change of the social system from an exploiter to an ameliorator for all individuals in the society. Therefore, if people are enlightened, they can discern the evils of the non-welfare government. They become aware of the systems of justice and equity. In unjust societies, as a reaction, people become violent and resort to violence.

In this article, the writer mentions history of hierarchy and its constructs in society. The article also highlights the importance of social ecology in human life. However, there is no mention of any specific society. Moreover, the idea of social ecology has been elaborated in general. My research locates itself by filling the gaps by applying anarchic and ecofeminist theories to interpret the text in order to expose hierarchy, violence, and injustice in Castillo's American South society. In addition, my research tries to find out violence against women and nature. Furthermore, Berkman's essay stresses the need for organic society whereas my research traces an effective role of women to establish a society that gives value to human reason and human freedom.

In the light of review of relevant critical sources, I want to establish my argument in the context of available scholarship in the forthcoming paragraphs through analysis of the primary text.

## II

In *So Far from God*, Castillo portrays the memorable characters including a New Mexican mother, Sofia, her wayward husband, Domingo, and her four unlucky daughters, Esperanza, Fe, Caridad, and La Loca, in a small village, Tome, in New Mexico. The author elaborates the story of Sofia who marries a stereotypical man who cares little for his wife and four daughters. Sofia has to work hard all alone to raise her daughters. She breaks the marriage norms. Her love marriage is a failure. Domingo runs away from home leaving Sofia alone to face hardships single-handedly. The novelist, through Sofia's family story, exposes the vices such as exploitation, environmental hazards, rape, and injustice in the Chicano society by presenting these characters. She highlights patriarchy and its bad effects on her society. The writer points out the vices of gender discrimination, practice of violence, devastation of nature, and anarchic trends. In this way, the writer, being a Chicano voice, stands for feminism and social justice and questions the position of vices prevalent in her society.

The novel presents a Chicano family's saga. In accordance with the views of Theodore M. Anderson (1967) in *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*, the novelist introduces her characters in the beginning of the book in line with the family saga tradition. She observes that Domingo is not "a tractable man" (Anderson, 1967, p. 7). He often remains away from home to gratify his wander lust. It is Sofia who has to take care of her home. She puts "the baseball bat" (Anderson, 1967, p. 7) under her bed and keeps it in her hand while checking her house. In case some rogue is hiding in her house, she may teach him a lesson by beating him well. The author writes to the effect that the whole Tome knew that Domingo was not a good match for Sofia. Unbefitting activities such as drinking, cockfighting, flirting, and gambling are more important for him than his family. The text also reflects that "marriage had a black ribbon on its door from the beginning" (Castillo, p. 21).

The text mirrors Chicano resistance to the native cultural norms. The novelist makes Sofia a symbol of resistance to the age-old patriarchal dominance in the society. On the other side, Domingo represents the male domination of his culture. According to Ylce Irizarry (2016) in *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad*, Castillo, in *So Far from God*, has "[focused] on women . . . to bring the realities of border life into sharp relief" (Irizarry, 2016, p. 85). Working in accordance with Chicano theory, the writer has developed the narrative of Chicana feminism in Sofia as an example of "subversion" from the mainstream of New Mexican male-dominated norms. The main subject of the novel is navigation of "the reclamation of losses" (Irizarry, 2016, p. 85) at the marginal areas of the Southwestern America. The writer highlights the fact about neocolonialism and its vicious impacts upon the freedom of expression. The writer records her protest against suppression of the voice of people living at the margins. She gives expression to Chicano rejection of the indigenous cultural standards.

Moreover, Chicano culture is a heterogeneous amalgamation of material and spiritual traits. It is also a complex mixture of old and new, social and political, and economic and religious norms. The text also contains a mixture of materialism and spiritualism in it. This hybridity shows two extremes of values in the society. Both are entirely opposite to each other. The spiritual values, however, are not modern but very old in their origin. In other words, there are old spiritual values having their foundations in the past as far back as the seventeenth century.

The New Mexican society has had double experience due to hybrid spirituality. However, hybrid spirituality is the outcome of "hybrid culture" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). Mexican and American cultures constitute a hybrid culture. In her article, "Forms of Chicana Feminist Resistance: Hybrid Spirituality in Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* (1993)," Theresa Delgado avers that Chicana individuals are victims of oppression as well as subjugation at the hands of a patriarchal church. The female characters, as a reaction to subordination to patriarchal values, resist within their limits. The author reflects that Chicano struggle finds its expression in spiritual, religious, and metaphysical ways. Chicano feminist movement posed challenge to "subjugation of women within and without Chicana/o cultures, the marginalization of other sectors of the USA society, and the destruction of environment" (Delgado, 1998, p. 888).

Moreover, in the novel, Father Jerome stands as a representative of Catholic hierarchy, but he has so little spiritual power that he cannot create connection with La Loca when she levitates upon the roof of the church. At the time of La Loca's funeral in the church, there is a spiritual contest between La Loca and the priest, Jerome, in the very opening scene of the novel. Father Jerome questions La Loca, "Are you the devil's messenger or a winged angel?" (Castillo, p. 23). He is afraid that she has returned to expose his spiritual inability to expose the truth about her resurrection at the age of just three years. When she terms him as backward, she wants to disclose the weakness of the church as an institution. The priest, the representative of the church, lacks spiritual power to lead the masses to the right direction. Though the people of Tome follow traditional Christianity in marriages and funerals, they attach more importance to the native beliefs than to Christianity. That is why, Sophia is

"unable to tolerate" (Castillo, p. 23) the evil words of Father Jerome. As a reaction, "she screamed at Father Jerome, charging at him and beating him with her fists" (Castillo, p. 23). However, the priest "staves off her attack with his arms over his head" (Castillo, p. 23). She also calls him a "pendejo," a stupid person, which is a "blasphemy" in the eyes of the masses at the spot.

By referring to La Virgen de Guadalupe, the writer has created a connection between the past and the present with respect to cultural, social, and religious values of pre-hispanic Mexico and the present New Mexico. The acceptance of La Virgen de Guadalupe as a saint-figure by Catholic Church has multiple interpretations. One is that the Catholics win the Indian women through this acceptance of the worship whether they like it or not. They are bound to do so for their material gains. The other is that they cannot afford to counter the resistance movement of the Chicano women because of its momentum in the present times. Castillo presents the intensity of native beliefs in the life of New Mexicans. Thirdly, devotion to La Virgen de Guadalupe, on the part of the new Mexican women, is not simply submission but it indicates a strong link between "La Virgen de Guadalupe worship" and Indian women's resistance. Delgado's words explain it further: "The analogy that Castillo's text creates between Caridad and La Virgen de Guadalupe brings the history of Indian women's resistance into the present" (Delgado, p. 898).

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud maintains that the process ". . . to direct one's libidinous urges into another direction [is termed as] sublimation" (p. 94). In other words, sublimation means directing energy or urges into useful activities. Women in the novel, particularly Sofia and her four daughters, undergo sublimation. After their transformation, in the wake of their respective individual experiences, they cease to show their interest in useless activities. After Sofia's betrayal, she gets transformed into an entirely new person. In reality, Sofia's resistance to the traditional subjugation to her husband is a rebellion against the patriarchal dominance.

Therefore, after transformation, Sofia rebukes Domingo on his question: "What are you thinking of, silly Sofi?" (Castillo, p. 109). She responds in an aggressive manner to record her forceful reaction to her husband's derogatory remarks. She protests: "And don't call me 'silly Sofi' no more neither" (Castillo, p. 109). This stern response unfolds the secret of rebellion against the patriarchal norms on the side of women who have been suffering from affliction of injustice and exploitation. Sofia has surpassed sexual forces. She sets forth a new aim of loftiness in her life. She is "sounding mysterious and full of importance, all of sudden, like a changed person actually" (Castillo, p. 133). Sofia experiences change from oppression to sublimation in the same patriarchal society. She begins "to work for community improvement" which has been getting worse and worse off" (Castillo, p. 138). Before her, nobody has tried to do something to improve it. According to her friend, Sofia is "starting to sound like [her] daughter [Esperanza], the revolutionary!" (Castillo, p. 138). She determines to bring change in the life of community. In fact, Sofia perceives the desire of fulfillment that presses her forward. She names her desire of fulfillment as "Faith." She says that "Faith" has kept me going" (Castillo, p. 38).



Sofia's three daughters, Esperanza, Caridad, and La Loca also undergo change. Fe is physically destroyed by the poisonous chemical. She works with Ether to clean metal sheets in the weapon making factory. As a result of the fatal chemical, Fe is eaten up by cancer. Fe's health hazards at Acme International cause her miscarriage. The "nasty smelling chemical" (Castillo, p. 180) takes away her fertility. Her body has actually absorbed the smell so profusely that it has infused into her pores. As a result, Fe's lungs, liver, kidneys, nails, and fingers are affected badly. Fe's wish to have a baby remains unfulfilled. Further, after the terrible attack on Caridad and her miraculous speedy recovery, she experiences a big change in herself. So much so that she goes to a cave in the mountains to hide herself from the people. A big change takes place in her when she goes with dona Felicia for pilgrimage. Caridad "who had not been in love with anyone since Memo, fell in love that Holy Friday . . . and every other marvel around her paled in comparison"(Castillo, p. 74). Moreover, in the process of transformation, Caridad begins to stay near dona Felicia. Instead of adopting anti-social behavior, she undergoes the sublimatory process. Her stay in the cave, in a way, is a refining period for Caridad.

Besides, there is a close association of nature and women. The term "nature" signifies plants, birds, animals, and land. The abuse of nature includes violent conduct with the natural world. Man's relation with environment and women is as important as old. However, man has proved himself as an abuser of nature and women. Therefore, the ecofeminists have highlighted this connection by terming nature as "Lady Nature" [as well as] "Mother Nature"(Heller in Gaard, 1993, p. 219). To dramatize the close link between nature and women, the ecofeminist critics have used the same metaphors. In *Cross Procession*, a woman says, "We live on dry land but we care about saving the whales and the rain forests . . . and the responsibility we have to 'Our Mother, and to seven generations after our own'" (Castillo, p. 242). They seem to do so to idealize nature at equal level with women. This effort means to deconstruct the concept that allows exploitation of nature and women in the same hostile manner. To save women and nature, tender feelings are must "to take pity on poor, ideal "Mother Nature [and Mother Woman]" (Heller in Gaard, 1993, p. 219).

On the contrary, if nature and women are not safe, it would deeply affect the ecosystem. Therefore, environmentalists have always made efforts to keep environment clean in order to ward off health issues in society. Marcel Wissenburg in essay, "The Idea of Nature and the Nature of Distributive Justice"(1993) in *The Politics of Nature*, edited by Andrew Dobson, stresses importance of relationship between nature and human existence: "We ought to judge our actions from the point of view of nature as a whole, rather than from the partial position of man . . . because 'mother Nature is the . . . most important condition of human existence . . .because [of its] intrinsic value" (p. 6). In fact, nature is the sum total that exists, living as well as non-living. However, at the same time, nature is dependent on everything in the surrounding for its existence. In line with this idea, Castillo (1993) has highlighted the issue of misuse of nature in the shape of land in that Chicano are suffering from acute poverty due to their infertile land.

Moreover, the author exposes the exploitative role of the industrialists. She exposes how industrial units are spewing smokes to pollute atmosphere and how the

use of lethal chemicals is spoiling the soil and vegetation in the farms and pastures. The "dead cows in the pasture, or sick sheep" are the victims of fatal toxins blown into the air by the factories. Something is "slowly killing them", and that something is fatal pollution (Castillo, p. 172). People would wake up each morning to find "it raining starlings. Little birds dropped dead in mid-flight, hitting like Superball hail on roofs." Since people live under the oppression of the capitalist factory owners, they do not "want to think about it" (Castillo, p. 172). W. Wesley Eckerrlelder Jr. writes in *Industrial Water Pollution Control* (2000) that "industrial wastewaters are nutrient deficient [and] they lack nitrogen and phosphorus" (p. 367). Therefore, they spoil fertility of soil. The same has happened with the land of the people of Tome due to the wastewater released by the industries of the area.

The novel plays an instrumental role in dismantling the stereotypical traditional standards in relation to patriarchy versus matriarchy in Chicano culture. The text is the record of rejection of the paradigm of gender discrimination. Taking history of patriarchy and matriarchy into consideration, the novelist makes the reader recall the account of resistance against oppression on the side of the critics in the past. In line with it, Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that "gendered behaviours" (Butler in Felluga, 2015, p. 115) are not natural but imposed upon women by the process of demarcation of femininity and masculinity. She says that this stigma has been thrust upon women by normative heterosexuality.

Castillo, like Butler, interrogates the limits to which women can constitute themselves. Women are defined by their place within language and convention. For affirmation of their identities, Chicano women pose resistance to the symbolic order after facing a series of horrible incidents like kidnapping, mutilation, rape, and murder. Besides, having faith in "stable identities and gender differences" (Butler in Felluga, 2015, p. 116) is the result of social restrictions. Therefore, women in the novel are throwing off the bond of subjugation in New Mexican society. The resistance they show is an anti-foundational initiative aiming at getting rid of the biased history of gender discrimination. This revolutionary change is a much-cherished motive of the feminist activists and writers. *So Far from God* depicts fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, side by side to appraise patriarchy versus matriarchy.

In consonance with the views of feminists like Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, Castillo deals with the issues of Chicano women as subjugated and silenced in relation to men. The novel presents the sad stories of women such as dona Dolores, dona Felicia, and Sofia. They are living as traditional submissive wives. Dolores' "drunken and foul-mouthed husband" makes the worst of his dominance by engendering as many as eleven children in twelve years of their marriage. One by one all children die due to a rare bone disease transmitted through his bloodline. By using his patriarchal status, he "drank up everything they owned". He is one of the Chicano men who are the worst heads of their families. Dona Dolores suffers "the pangs of labor through eleven births, all fated to die during infancy" (Castillo, p. 20). Being the head of family, he has full authority to destroy Dolores' health.

The text displays discrimination and its harmful consequences in detail at three levels including in groups, institutions, and personal. The outsiders overused the land to the extent that they made it barren. Sofia knows that most of the people

have been suffering from poverty for the past fifty years due to the futility of their land. However, she is fully confident to bring a change. She exclaims. "I know I am, Sofi!" She knows how to overcome the hardships. After some days of convincing, the people around her "start to like the thought of being able to engender some new spirit back into Tome, land of [their] ancestors" ((Castillo, p. 140). To the full surprise of Domingo, Sofi's female friend "with a little tone of cockiness" discloses to him, "We're just sitting here making plans for Sofia's campaign to run for mayor!" (141). Moreover, before launching her campaign, she divorces Domingo. She begins to relish her great idea and names it "big news" (p. 130) for her close womenfolk. Chicano women represent themselves as symbols of transformation from subjugation to self-reliance in the face of patriarchy under the leadership of Sofia.

Since the novel brings to notice a revolutionary change in Chicano women, it is termed as women's liberationist book in Chicano literature. It contains anti-patriarchal traces and challenges the conventional norms of demarcation of roles of men and women. The text includes an imagined and ideal human society that presents transitional standard of excellence in which oppressed women break traditional bounds of their society. They awaken their potential to question the justification for gender discrimination, violence, rape, oppression, and exploitation at work places, schools, and restaurants, and this is what vindicates the argument of this essay.

After an elaborate analysis of the text of the novel, the argument draws to a close in the next section.

### III

Catillo's novel examined through the reading props of of anarchy and ecofeminism offers evidence of gender discrimination, oppression of nature, and violence against women in New Mexico. I have attempted to explore how Castillo questions the justification of these issues at patriarchal and institutional levels in her society. Since "Research is expected to make a contribution to knowledge; [to] uncover something new [. . .]" (Belsey in Griffin, 2005, p. 163), this investigation is an effective addition to knowledge in terms of exploring the condition of Chicano women, their unjust culture, and their resistance against oppressive patriarchal norms. My research also finds out the reflection of a big shift in the former image of Chicano women because they are moving from the former exploitative context to an independent status under the headship of Sofia. The novelist portrays complete miserable condition of women in order to expose inhuman values of the native culture. She also depicts Sofia who stands as a symbol of Chicano resistance to all discriminatory norms. Further, the text records various incidents that justify the novel to be termed as an iconoclastic text. The end of novel is redemptive for women have got freedom to earn, learn, and strive to save the future generations from oppression, violence, exploitation, rape, and diseases like AIDS and cancer.

The author's recording the ills of her culture in the text amounts to interrogate the status of gender in the face of patriarchy, treatment of nature at the hands of industrialists, and violence perpetrated by rogues. In fact, the writer intends to reform her social system in a way that there is collective justice, economic independence of women, and no incidents of violence. If a society enjoys an ideal

system, it would be a heaven on earth. Such a society would also be in accordance with Bookchin's concept of anarchy and Gaard's idea of ecofeminism because both the scholars aim at establishing a society where peace and harmony prevail. This critique establishes that the patriarchal standards and hierarchical norms have a characteristic closeness with each other. To resist one is to resist the other and to support one is to support the other. No society can flourish in the presence of oppressive patriarchy or hierarchy or both because they allow the perpetration of gender discrimination, oppression, and violence in society.

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