

Ecology and the Cult of Urbanization: An Eco sensitive Reading of Select Recent Indian Works

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Abstract

Eco-consciousness emerged as the mainstream in the late twentieth century, and tracing linkages between literature and nature takes place through ecocriticism. Ecocriticism as an academic discipline began developing in the 1990s, although its roots go back to the late 1970s. The human and non-human attributes of nature are appraised since the classical period of literature. Today's recent corpus of literature has a diverse inclusion of works on nature and this paper analyses some of the renowned works that centre on ecological considerations. Some select modern works from Indian literature are selected to magnify the exploitation done to the ecosphere in the name of urbanization and modernization. The environmental crisis created as a result of urbanized pollutants is addressed in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, in which he spells out the devastated ecosphere in Delhi. Another work with a lot of environmental consciousness is Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy also unfolds the exploited nature and emphasizes the aftermath of maltreatment and denial of nature in terms of civilization. Likewise, Usha K.R's *Monkey Man* magnificently depicts the scenic beauty of Bangalore which has become an emblem of dirt, due to urbanization and cosmopolitanism. Similarly, Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* and Anita Nair's *The Better Man* show how nature is mangled from the past days to the present day and its depletion is endless.

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism, modernization, urbanization, depletion, cosmopolitanism

Eco-consciousness emerged as the mainstream in the late twentieth century, and tracing linkages between literature and nature takes place through ecocriticism. Ecocriticism as an academic discipline began developing in the 1990s, although its roots go back to the late 1970s. Ecocriticism is a recent branch of literary studies that takes "an earth-centered approach to the study of texts" (Garrard, 1) and makes a study of literature in relation to the physical environment. Its scope lies in diverse representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment.

Ecocriticism has developed as a distinct field of academic pedagogy, having drawn worldwide attention in the recent days. It has been regarded as a specialized and focused study since the 1990s. Nature and man, nature and society are identified with each other with a dialectical unity, but the swing moves from social studies to social ecological studies. The human and non-human attributes of nature are appraised since the classical period of literature. Today's recent corpus of literature has a diverse inclusion of several ingredients of nature. After the perception of the suffering borne by nature, it is

significant to analyse the benign qualities of nature. As nature becomes the dominated and looted object and as it undergoes all the woes, it is considered to be the duty of man to protect nature.

Nature and man, nature and society are identified with each other with a dialectical unity, clamouring for social justice for social ecology. The recent works of noted writers reach out for social egalitarianism for the marginalized and the afflicted, which is identified not only by the living modern people, but also by the non human attributes of nature. This paper analyses some of the renowned works that centre on ecological considerations. Some select modern works from Indian literature are selected to magnify the exploitation done to the ecosphere in the name of urbanization and modernization.

Nature has to be preserved because development occurs at the cost of nature, nearly so much to the stage of obliteration of nature. This women-nature link aligns the suffering women with nature. To consider some samples, the portrayal of river in Indian Literature is poignant. In Kamala Markandeya's *Nectar in a sieve*, River Sarayu is said to be polluted with the excretion from the tannery. Nathan and Rukmani name their first born child as 'Irawaddy', "after one of the great rivers of Asia, as of all things, water was most precious to us" (15), as said by them. Raja Rao presents his novel *Kanthapura*, at the backdrop of River Himavathy of Karnataka; Khushwanth Singh shows the refined beauty of River Sutlej in his *Train to Pakistan*; the murdered Sikhs are loaded into the river which moans for them. Again, the river is the place for dumping the unwanted. Baby Kochamma of Arundathi Roy's *A God of Small Things* lives by the river Meenachal, which is ecologically abused in the later days.

The environmental crisis created as a result of urbanized pollutants is addressed in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, in which he spells out the devastated ecosphere in Delhi. In Balram's narration, Adiga points out, "There was a good reason for the face masks; they say the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life" (133). Even the holy water of River Ganga is disgusting – ". . . I urge you not in dip in the Ganga, unless you want your mouth full of faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different of industrial acids" (15). The material world sacrifices the purity of nature at the altar of greed and wealth accumulation.

Cosmopolitan cities have denatured the delight of living and everywhere the landscape is replete with filth, slums, homeless people, hungry children, inferior living, all characterized as the postcolonial experience of a third world nation like India. Environmental degradation is linked with poverty and scarcity, which make man to suffer in abundance. Associated with poverty and anguish are antisocial activities like political corruption, prostitution, shoplifting, stealing from masters, murders etc which are all rampant in Gurgaon and Delhi. Aggression of man is the origin of all tensions, and violence becomes the norm for establishing his power on nature and on all urban territories. Parallel to nature, Balram murders his master to overcome the angst of the generation that traps young men and Adiga offers no redemption to this nexus of interconnected social issues.

Another work with a lot of environmental consciousness is Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel is set at Kalimpong, a peaceful place admired by many.

The postcolonial angst is felt by the lonely retired judge Jemubai Patel who admires nature, but feels no emotions for the suffering of his native Indian people. On a visit to the judge's garden, the officer says, "Beautiful blossom, Judge Sahib. If you see such a sight, you will know that there is God". The novel is a serious discussion of the abuse of the Himalayan landscape, which reveals the victimization of nature in the hands of man. As Peter Barry opines,

Nature really exists out there beyond ourselves, not needing to be ionized as a concept by enclosure within knowing inverted commas but actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it. (252)

Destroying nature is equivalent to destroying mankind.

The novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy also unfolds the exploited nature and emphasizes the aftermath of maltreatment and denial of nature in terms of civilization. For instance, changing trends and encroachment of the river Meenachal utterly ruin the mellifluous atmosphere of the village Ayemenem. Roy points out it as, "... the water was thick and toxic. No Swimming signs had been put up in stylish calligraphy. They had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu's estate" (125). Man corrupts nature as he wishes and callously damages it. Man's political assault on nature creates a kind of maladjustment between nature and him. Ayemenem is a distinctive example of the victim village, where nature is disrupted after the settlement of the British colonizers in Kerala. The plight of Velutha, who is beaten by the Police to death, is parallel to the plight of the landscape there.

Likewise, Usha K.R's *Monkey Man* magnificently depicts the scenic beauty of Bangalore which has become an emblem of dirt, due to urbanization and cosmopolitanism. The cultural transformation has greatly affected the lives of the groundlings and the innumerable plants there, and has caused environmental disintegration. Shrinivas Moorthy, the protagonist of the novel, witnesses how industrialization and urbanization profusely tear down the congenial atmosphere of the village called Ammanangudi. The development of the industries and the cultural changes in the village create "the noise, the traffic, even the sludge of brown mud that flowed in from the excavations on the main road, silting its monsoon drains" (13). Usha in the novel evidently points out that modern civilization which has made a rift between man and nature, has utterly alienated him from it.

Anita Nair's *The Better Man* which seeks geological justice against ecocritical doctrines. In this novel, Nair depicts the character Bhasi who is a profound lover of nature and mongrel medicine practitioner. He in his garden grows a number trees and plants with utmost love and care, and develops a boundless fondness for them. Nair magnifies the catastrophe brought on both the entropic and dystrophic factors on the environment – how the entropic factors or the energy level of equilibrium on the soil becomes disturbed, and dystrophic destruction shows the disastrous effect of man on the living organisms. She describes the character Power House Ramakrishnan who is a big shot of the village Kaikurussi and has brought the idea of building a community hall in Bhasi's pastoral landscape. He joins hands with Mukundan, the protagonist, and his community people and demolishes the house and the garden of Bhasi and chases him out of the village. Destroying the pastoral field, they establish the community hall as an

emblem of their community. Man's oppressive nature harms the course of nature and the lives of subalterns like Bhasi. Finally, Mukundan, having realized his guilt, transfers his wealth to Bhasi and breaks down the community hall. This is a success given to nature. Only when nature is given its sanctity, man can restore his peace.

Man and his efforts to conquer nature are thwarted and nature gains its upper hand in the geopolitics that occurs there. Victory of nature is indirectly a victory for man too, as he is dependent on nature for all his pursuits in life. The title *The Better Man* becomes apt for the novel and it testifies that when man retains his harmony with nature, he can be a better man. Without nature, man becomes worthless, even though he may be a millionaire. Bhasi proves his worth in the novel by his adherence to nature.

Similarly, Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* shows how nature is mangled from the past days to the present day and its depletion is endless. Sarah Joseph, who finds the environmental exploitation unethically practised in her own village, Aathi where poverty overpowers the people in the recent days. Aathi with its exquisite ambiance is immensely mortified by the influx of modern culture and ideas that are brought by Kumaran, who admires modern culture. He wants to reinvigorate the village and Thampuram's temple. He tries to build a bridge to connect the village to the metropolitan city, which ruins not only the land and the livelihood of the people, but also the other living and non living species in the land. At last, nature reveals its destructive face and establishes its authority over the oppressive powers.

Ecological consciousness and awareness have gained much importance in today's world, because we need nature to protect ourselves from disaster. The selfishness of man and his greed for material wealth and power has led to the deterioration of his values, and consequently to the defilement of the surrounding ecosystem along with the living and non-living aspects. The study undertaken reveals the victimhood of nature and the environment with the victimized ecosystem that suffers due to globalization and its varied hazards. It advocates that true love for fellow men as well as on nature, and a humanized yearning to protect them will create a mighty forte for man to dwell on in this planet.

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