



Gieve Patel's Ecological Concern in "On Killing a Tree": A Reflective Discourse

Dr.Sunita Malik

Associate professor

Department of English

Dr.B.R Ambedkar College

University of Delhi

Main Wazirabad road

Yamuna Vihar, Delhi -110094

Abstract:

Since humanity began using natural resources without considering the consequences, the world has been experiencing environmental disaster after disaster. Many ecological disasters have prompted some to consider alternative transportation strategies known as "greenways" to mitigate further damage. Consideration of environmental issues and action to improve human behaviour have been on the global agenda for quite some time. Humans are incredibly harmful to the ecosystem since they only care about themselves and their comforts. If we want to keep the planet habitable, we must consider mitigation strategies immediately. Literary representations about how humans have been selfishly thinking about themselves and harming nature have been one of the most important topics in recent times and a matter of ecocritical discourse in diverse fields. Gieve Patel's poem "On Killing a Tree" is one such ecological writing that makes the readers aware of the disasters we bring upon ourselves by felling trees. The paper "Gieve Patel's Ecological Concern in "On Killing a Tree": A Reflective Discourse" attempts to understand the ecocritical approach to literature and how it should be part of the academic syllabi.

Keywords:

"On Killing a Tree," Ecocriticism, Ecological disaster, Felling, Gieve Patel, Sustainability, Tree

Known for his contributions to Indian English poetry, Gieve Patel lives and works in Mumbai. He deeply appreciates the natural world and often writes about how it might be safeguarded from human abuse in his poetry. It is not easy to kill a tree, by mere cutting. The ruthless, barbarous and brutal attempt to cut down a tree by uprooting it from its foundation is the subject of the poem "On Killing a Tree" The poem uses harsh words, like killing and choking an ,not cutting or uprooting tree to portray the oppression and outrage done to nature in the hope that readers may feel its impact and be motivated to refrain from engaging in such behaviour in the future. It's because of Gieve Patel's ecological concern, he comes across as a morally upstanding person deeply involved in the world's sustainable development.

Born in Mumbai in 1940, Gieve Patel is an accomplished English-language poet, writer, and painter. Another well-known Indian poet, Nissim Ezekiel, had his early writings published. Several volumes of his poems were published in the decades that followed World War II, solidifying his position as a leading figure in the evolution of Indian English poetry. A supporter of environmental protection and an opponent of human cruelty towards the natural world, he identifies with the "Green Peace Movement," His sensitivity and creative output reveal his distress and outrage about humans' thoughtless destruction of natural environments. Poetry India and New Writing in India, two of India's most prestigious literary journals, have featured his work.

The study of eco-criticism is a relatively new academic topic. It is an area desperately needed, but its precise definition is still being worked out. Literary studies and literature are valuable for the aesthetic pleasure they provide and the humanity they advance. In today's globalised world, it is only possible to consider development by first assuming the impact on culture and the environment. It is taken a while, but finally, people are starting to understand that protecting society and future generations requires protecting the environment. Sustainable development is the goal of the philosophical and political philosophy known as "Eco-Criticism," which combines environmental concerns with a social, political, and cultural agenda for progress. By analyzing literary texts, co-critics shed light on humanity's relationship with nature, environmental justice issues and the urgent need for ecological sustainability .Eco-Criticism serves as a powerful platform for individuals to rethink their relationship with nature and contributes to the formulation of effective environmental policies and practices.

Vandana Shiva, a prominent Indian environmentalist, has said, "While gender subordination and patriarchy are the oldest of oppressions, they have taken on new and more violent forms through the project of development" (Shiva, 1989: 80-81). As a result, more and more women are joining environmental groups in the hope of protecting their

communities and the planet from the harmful effects of a male-dominated society. Women worldwide are slowly awakening to the political need to redress centuries of patriarchal persecution and injustice. That encouraged women writers in India, like Anuradha Roy, to tackle ecocritical topics in their works.

Ecocriticism aims to raise public awareness about the importance of protecting the planet's natural resources from the destructive actions of humans. In recent years, learning about the weather has received much attention. The way nature is viewed is shifting. There has been a shift in perspective, with people realising that protecting the environment does not need them to feel like masters of nature. In the Poem On Killing a Tree, the poet makes us aware that a lot of nature's energy goes into nurturing a tree. It takes many many years for a tree to mature and it's not easy to kill it, because it keeps springing back to life, even if there is little life left in it. To kill a tree one has to be very cruel and brutish and uproot it completely and then leave it to dry in the sun. It is akin to murder.

Many authors nowadays are concerned with environmental issues, but it is essential to consider how male culture has contributed to the problem. The world should look for solutions to its problems after determining what they are and why they persist. After examining the environmental disaster we are experiencing, ecofeminists have pinpointed the masculinist culture as the origin of the ecological problems.

Women authors in India have recently shown increased environmental awareness. They geared their efforts against annihilating natural habitats and the environmental degradation. Some contemporary works by women writers that address ecological issues include *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandya, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) by Anita Desai, *A Riversutra* (1993) by Gita Mehta, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, *The Madwoman of Jogare* (1998) by Sohaila Abdulali, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008) by Anuradha Roy.

All of these works try to highlight issues facing women and the planet. They also discuss women's profound connection to nature and how they have helped save the world. For prominent Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva, "the development project has given new and more violent forms to the oldest of oppressions, namely gender subordination and patriarchy" (Shiva, 1989: 80-81). A close reading of all these books reveals that women have always been at the forefront of political commitments to combat the many forms of oppression they have faced throughout history, from patriarchal victimization and suppression to capitalist oppression, colonial victimisation, and environmental destruction. Overall ecofeminism seeks to challenge and transform the dominant paradigms of power, recognizing that the liberation of women and the protection of the environment are deeply intertwined. It promotes a holistic and interconnected view of the world, advocating for the

recognition of the inherent values and rights of all living beings, human and non-human alike.

Greta Gaard writes, "The central thesis of ecofeminism is that the ideology that permits discrimination based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or physical ability also permits discrimination against the natural world." Sexist dominance over the natural world, racism, speciesism, and other forms of social inequality are all factors that ecofeminist thinkers consider. (1993: 64). Ecofeminists, as was previously mentioned, attribute the bond between women and nature to their shared experience of oppression by a patriarchal society. "Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements while simultaneously offering a challenge to beat both," says renowned ecofeminist Mary Mellor. It borrows feminism's concept of humankind as gendered in ways that subjugate, exploit, and oppress women and the green movement's concern for the influence of human activities on the non-human world (Mellor 1997: 1). Valuing Women's knowledge and experience: Ecofeminism challenges the dominant worldview by valuing women's traditional knowledge and lived experiences in relation to nature. Women have historically played integral roles in nurturing and sustaining communities and ecosystems, developing a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of life.

In the poem "On Killing a Tree," the tree stands for Nature, and the harsh treatment it receives at the hands of humans is made clear. Gieve Patel's description of a tree being cut down in great detail indicates that people are very callous and cruel to nature. How a person treats nature determines how his fellow humans feel about him. Most people, however, are oblivious to this fact, and as a result, they ruin the natural world while seeking only to benefit themselves through exploiting nature. The poem also brings out the resilient quality of flora. It inspires humans to not to give up and start and strive again after being knocked down, like a tree which sprouts again more prolifically from where it is cut.

Poems such as "On Killing a Tree" are part of a more significant literary movement by Indian and other authors to raise awareness of the need to preserve natural habitats and wildlife populations worldwide. We are a part of the natural world, but we must always remember that exploiting the environment for our benefit always has severe moral and spiritual repercussions. The rapid increase in the population of India has resulted in the destruction of the country's forests and the extinction of many species. Many animal populations have declined or even vanished because of human activities that have destroyed their natural habitats, such as the felling of trees.

Gieve Patel's description of a tree being cut down is bleak and grim. He powerfully demonstrates how modern man destroys nature and its essence for his benefit, disregarding future generations. The tree is the nature, which we are always trying to destroy. Cutting down or killing a tree harms the ecology and way of life without realising it. The poet pens these words to emphasise the brutality of the assault:

“No,
The root is to be pulled out -
Out of the anchoring earth;
It is to be roped, tied,
And pulled out-snapped out
Or pulled out entirely,
Out from the earth cave,
And the strength of the tree exposed,
The source, white and wet,
The most sensitive, hidden
For years inside the earth. (Patel, n.p.).

The poet demonstrates that a tree may persevere despite human intervention, such as removing branches. However, being monstrous beings, we do not stop there; we take out the tree's roots, completing the murder. To ensure the tree's final doom, we work hard to tear its roots out of the earth that has supported and nourished it for ages and reveal its white origin. It is like snatching a child from mother's lap.

The poet depicts violent scenes to show how humanity has harmed the environment. Expressions like "pulled out," "snapped out," etc. represent how humans interact with the natural environment. We are extracting all the precious materials we can from it. We exploit Earth's natural resources as if they were worthless. It is to our advantage that we delude ourselves into thinking that our harsh and selfish behaviours are meaningless, but we are always sorely let down when the truth finally sinks in. Despite all efforts to save the tree, we have all been cutting it down, which hurts nature and will lead to its final retaliation and destruction. The destruction we inflict on the natural world will one day haunt us just as surely as a tree's white roots, which are "most sensitive and hidden," hurt when torn from the ground.

Gieve Patel shows that the tree's present height and form are the result of the tree's long-term adaptation to the environment (including the availability of oxygen, water, and sunlight). The intensity is so high at this stage that cutting it up will not do any good. As such, the tree has come to symbolise the strength and flexibility of nature in the face of human pressures. But the tree in the poem is a metaphor for our treatment of nature when our needs are not being supplied, and we become acquisitive. Because of this, poet Gieve Patel portrays a man who decides to remove and destroy a tree entirely.

Humans persist in cutting down forest cover. The poet explains what he did to the tree after that:

Then the matter
Of scorching and choking
In the sun and air,
Browning, hardening,
Twisting, withering,
And then it is done (Patel np.).

The man does not just sit around doing nothing after cutting down the tree; he immediately gets to work processing the wood so he may make a profit. He dries the roots out in the sun until they are firm and completely brown, all signs of life drained out, his desired outcome. This poem is the poet's explanation of how man makes the most efficient use of trees, but the entire process is barbaric, brutal and boorish.

While we understand and share the poet's compassion for the tree, we also witness its forcible removal and death at the hands of others motivated by profit. The poet feels sympathy for the tree and goes into graphic detail about cutting down a tree so that the reader might experience what the poet felt. One can take this poetry to mean something profound about the state of the planet today. Nature's imbalance resulting from human interference has created a host of environmental, social and economic consequences. It is important to realize the interconnectedness of ecosystems and take immediate action to restore balance and prevent further deterioration.

To sum up, it can be said that in the name of progress and development and our selfish pursuit of self-interests, we, as humans, have forgotten that if the world with its beautiful green is not there, then all our interests would not matter because we would not be around to enjoy the fruits of those interests even if they were achieved. Then, a curriculum must be created to foster a more empathetic worldview. Sustainable practices should be taught alongside environmental awareness in the classroom. We need to educate everyone

about the SDGs to work together to rescue the earth and our own lives. Gieve Patel's poem "On Killing a Tree" is an apt entry point for students and academicians to start thinking about the ecological aspects of our lives and how we can bring some part of sustainable practices into our everyday living by inculcating sustainable habits and not just ruin the nature which will ultimately lead to our extinction. Let us stand together to save trees, which are magnificent guardians of our planet. Respecting trees is not a choice but an urgent necessity to combat climate change, preserve biodiversity and ensure a sustainable future for generations to come.

Works Cited

- Greta, G., New Directions for Ecofeminism: Toward a More Feminist Ecocriticism. ISLE, 2010. 17(4): 643-665.
- Mellor, M. Feminism & Ecology, New York: New York University Press. 1997.
- Patel, Gieve. On Killing a Tree. <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/on-killing-a-tree/>.
- Shiva, Vandana. Development, Ecology, and Women, in J. Plant (ed.), Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism, Philadelphia, USA: New Society Publishers. 1989: 80-81.
- Shiva, Vandana. Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India, New Delhi: Kali for Women. 1988.