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THE PANCHATANTRA AND AESOP'S FABLES THROUGH THE LENS OF ECO CRITICISM

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Abstract: Eco-writing, in the form of children's literature becomes one of the best medium to develop and enhance the environmental awareness among children. Books and texts which are written for them and which are prescribed in their syllabus must focus on the theme of the importance and protection of the environment. *Aesop's Fables* and *The Panchatantra*, through the lens of ecofriendly consciousness, show relationship between nature and man in the stories and thus helps to develop a sense of environmental consciousness among children. This is because in today's world environmental problems are very prominent and immediate actions are needed for control for them. For this not only adults, but children must also inspire to participate and engage in environmental protection programmes. This is because in today's world environmental problems are very prominent and immediate actions are needed for control for them. For this not only adults, but children must also inspire to participate and engage in environmental protection programmes.

Index Terms - Eco consciousness, Eco friendly, Environmental participation programme.

Eco-consciousness or environmental consciousness, means to develop awareness among humans about the significance of surrounding natural world and to maintain their harmonious relationship with the non-human world. at the beginning of the new millennium, serious environmental problems like global warming, rainforest destruction, shortage of natural resources, extinction of animal and plant species, and so on have begun to show themselves as a serious consequence for a man. all these ecological crises in turn lead to the end of nature and causes loss of human's emotional "unconscious identity" with their surrounding natural world. they feel a sense of alienation because their non-human environment, consisting of the trees, clouds, microorganisms, and many other non-human phenomena, has a great impact on their psychological life. therefore, a countless number of problems, like physical as well as mental, are becoming prominent due to the environmental crisis. in order to pass on a safe and healthy environment for the younger generation, it is necessary to make children aware of these environmental problems through books, and through various curricular and co-curricular activities. targeting upon the sensitisation regarding environment and knowledge, reynolds in radical children's literature avers, "children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it" (14). children are like future pillars of every nation; therefore attempt should be made to promote the development of ecological or environmental empathy and environmental literacy among them. sobel, in his book *beyond ecophobia*, suggests some good ways to foster children's likeness and understanding towards the environment. the knowledge imparted during initial stage of growth and development of a child assists in shaping their overall persona. in the echo of the same mcgee and richgels in literacy's beginnings: supporting young readers and writers state: "children 's concepts of reading and writing are shaped more by what they accomplished in preceding developmental stages than by their simply imitating adult's behaviour or following adults' directions" (10). sobel argues that children should be encouraged to take an interest in and regularly establish contact with nature and natural phenomena. they should be socialised in such a way right from their early childhood that they consider themselves as a part of nature and vice versa. whatever value, attitudes, experiences, lessons, etc. children learn during their childhood stage, remain with them throughout their lives. thus, their socialisation starts right from their early childhood or rather from their birth. they learn valuable lessons of life, not only from books, but also by watching the actions of their adults. therefore, knowledge and learning about surrounding natural environment consisting of plants, animals, birds, etc. should be given to them right from the early years of

their lives. this helps them to become competent and responsible future citizen of their respective society as well as of nations. apart from this, sobel advocates that environmental empathy and understanding among children is also cultivated through their personal relationships with nature. young children feel a sense of natural belongingness to animals and generally talk to them.

They consider animals like themselves and give those animals human shapes and emotions. The present study involves the analysis of two classical texts, namely the Aesop's Fables and the Panchatantra, in order to trace out environmental problems in these texts. Some of the stories in both the Aesop's Fables and the Panchatantra develop eco-consciousness among children and adults alike. These stories reveal human attitudes towards non-human life and his/her relationship with the non-human world. Humans have always used nature for their own benefit and try to extract maximum advantage from the nature. Some of the stories in the fables by Aesop clearly depict this human relationship with the surrounding world and these are: "The Master and His Dogs", "The Ass and His Masters", "The Farmer and the Stork", and "The Walnut Tree". These fables depict animal as a slave to humans. In case of "The Master and His Dogs", a man once gets detained by a storm and in order to satisfy his hunger, he eats all his pet animals who help him in his daily chores. This shows the selfishness of humans (in a way how he in order to satisfy his hunger slaughters his pets) and innocence of the animals (in a way that his pets consider this act of his master as natural). In "The Walnut-Tree" it is depicted that in order to get nuts from the walnut tree, which is standing by the roadside, the passers-by break its branches with stones and sticks. The walnut tree pathetically exclaimed, "O wretched me! that those whom I cheer with my fruit should repay me with these painful requitals!" (Townsend 206). This shows how humans in order to get maximum out of the nature always, consciously or unconsciously, destroys it. In the story "The Farmer and the Stork", the farmer places nets in order to save his agricultural land, where he has sown seeds, from the cranes, which come every day to eat seeds. Once with cranes he traps a stork with a fractured leg. The stork pleading for life, but the farmer laughs aloud and kills him for his own reason (i.e., to save his newly-sown plough land). And "The Ass and His Masters" shows relationship of an ass with his masters who try to take maximum benefit from him by giving him heavier loads to carry without giving him proper food to eat. Therefore, here these stories try to develop awareness about the ill-treatment of animals. This is because every living creature has an equal right to live and flourish in his own life. It is not right to use nature for oneself rather one's relationship with nature should be symbiotic. One should not destroy nature rather try to create and rehabilitate it. In the Panchatantra, human's egocentric attitude and relationship with nature can be seen in the tales like, "The Loyal Mongoose", "The Snake Who Paid Cash", "The Unforgiving Monkey" and so on. In all these tales it is clearly shown that humans use nature and animals in it for their own benefits. They do not feel pity for natural life and destroy it. As in "The Unforgiving Monkey", the king orders his attendants to kill each and every monkey in his premise as according to human's scientific studies, monkey fat acts as a relieving agent in burn sensation as his horses suffer from severe burn injuries. Human selfishness as shown in this fable is very well described in the verse below:

The educated and the rich,
Befooled by greed,
Plunge into wickedness, then feel
The pinch of need. (Ryder 363)

Similar depiction can be seen in the tale "Slow, The Weaver", where a weaver goes to the shore in order to cut woods. There he tries to cut a great sissou tree and while cutting that, a fairy, which lives there in that tree, requests him not to cut the tree. But the weaver does not agree so she promises him that if he will not cut the tree, then she will give anything he wishes for. Thus, it shows self-centeredness of humans that how humans try to extract maximum benefit from nature. "The Snake who Paid Cash" shows how in order to get gold dinars from the snake, the farmer's son kills it. Therefore, all the tales give valuable lesson that one should be generous to all living things.

Moreover, in both these texts, the natural world is portrayed as inferior, marginalised, silenced and "pushed into a backdrop against which the rational human subject struts upon" (Rueckert 16). In the Aesop's Fables, the fables like, "The Shipwrecked Man and The Sea" where a shipwrecked man blames the sea and portrays the sea (nature) as a destructive force. In 118 "The Flea and The Man", when one analyses the language of the conversation between the flea and the man, then it becomes clear that how man puts the nature beneath him. "The flea replied, 'O my dear sir, pray spare my life, and destroy me not, for I cannot possibly do you much harm.' The Man, laughing, replied, 'Now you shall certainly die by mine own hands...'" (Townsend 309). In this conversation a flea prays to the man for life, so, here man gives himself the position of God for flea. This places him in the superior position. The marginal and inferior status of nature and natural objects can also be noted in the fable "The Boys and The Frogs", where frogs (as slaves

and inferior beings) are seen offering their prayers to children (as master and superior being) pleading for their life. Here, in this fable, children find pleasure in throwing stones on frogs. This directly shows how superior class, being self-centered, gets pleasure by giving pain and anxiety to those who are inferior. In “The Peasant and The Apple Tree” the powerful status of a man is shown in the sense that he has the power to cut the apple tree with a single stroke of his axe. Here, self-centeredness of man is also seen when he suddenly stops cutting the tree as soon as he finds a honeycomb there. He wishes to sell honey and gain the handsome amount of money.

In the Panchatantra, too, the inferior status of nature is seen in: “The Wedge-Pulling Monkey” where the monkey is portrayed as an uneducated and foolish animal who tries to imitate man and meets his death. Here, man is shown as a superior and his actions are imitated by the foolish monkey. In this tale the issue of eco-consciousness is raised in the way that it gives knowledge to humans that how their selfish actions sometimes lead to the death of innocent animals. By reading the tale, one gets touched and develops a sense of emotional bondage with animals. And in “Mouse-Maid Made Mouse” man transforms mice into a beautiful girl and when in the end he feels anxious for her marriage and he fails to find any suitable match for her, he again transforms her into a mice. Thus, here, the whole circle of mice’s life is operated by a man who places himself in the superior position.

Sense of eco-consciousness is also developed in the way that animals and trees are related to the gods and no religion allows disobedience towards the gods and animals related to them. Like it is seen in the fable from Aesop entitled “The Trees under the Protection of the Gods” where gods take the responsibility of the protection of certain trees, like, oak for Jupiter, Poplar under the protection of Hercules, Laurel under Apollo, and so on. Similar can be seen in the 119 Panchatantra, where birds and animals are connected to the gods. For example, serpent to the god Shiva, garuda to the Vishnu, lotus flower to the goddess Lakshmi, dogs to the Yama, and so on. As in the tale, the writer has used these birds or animals in a number of stories and when children and adults find these animals associated with gods they try to save them and respects them as gods. Like for example, one gets the reference of the garuda bird in the tale “The Shrewd Old Gander”, “How The Birds Picked A King”, and “The Weaver who Loved A Princess.”

This is how both the Aesop’s Fables and the Panchatantra, through the lens of ecofriendly consciousness, show relationship between nature and man in the stories and thus helps to develop a sense of environmental consciousness among children. This is because in today’s world environmental problems are very prominent and immediate actions are needed for control for them. For this not only adults, but children must also inspire to participate and engage in environmental protection programmes.

Eco-writing, in the form of children’s literature, thus, becomes one of the best medium to develop and enhance the environmental awareness among children. Books and texts which are written for them and which are prescribed in their syllabus must focus on the theme of the importance and protection of the environment. Glen A. Love, in his seminal essay, “Revaluing Nature: Toward An Ecological Criticism” throws light upon nature/environment as a valuable component of life when he states:

The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world... Paradoxically, recognizing the primacy of nature, and the necessity for a new ethic and aesthetic embracing the human and the natural-these may provide us with our best hope of recovering the lost social role of literary criticism. (qtd. in Wenzell 5)

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