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THE THEMES OF NATURE: AN ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM DIFFERENT POSTCOLONIAL COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Ecocriticism can be described in terms of literature and environment which includes the exceeds of the human, where human beings are interrelated and conceptualized. This article creates literary studies of ecology in the twentieth century from three different postcolonial countries. Much critical analysis has been done on Canadian landscapes, Canadian environments, climate, 'new' places, language, flora, fauna and peoples of Canada in connection with the colonial and postcolonial cultural studies and Diasporic literature. Canadian ecological sensibility is only identified after the 1960s and 1970s till then there was a fearful response to nature. During the late eighteenth century, the relationship between the environment and literature bound the colonization of the Australian continent. This focuses on the representation of ecology in Australian literature.

Key words: Nature, Eco criticism, Post colonialism, Canadian landscapes, Canadian environments

India is a country with the variety of ecological systems such as the Himalayas in the North and dry Thar Desert in the west and so on. This eco-system is seen affected due to increasing population. But at the same time literature could not remain unaffected from this point of view and thus this article focuses on how the concern for nature changes in Indian literature. This attempts to change even the life to other perspectives in relation to the Natural world. Nature is metaphorically linked with human body, mind and personality of an individual.

Canadian Ecology:

The world of literature throngs with works dealing with beauty and power of nature. However, the concern for ecology is continuous in progress. Our environment poses on humanity has caught attention on many critics nowadays. (Shikha 1).

In these lines as quoted above, Kumari Shikha highlights the functionality of Ecocriticism or literature's role in reflecting the nature and society. Despite this, eco-criticism was recognized as one of the latest critical tools across the world. This is because the human culture is so closely connected to the physical world and easily go unnoticed. In this context, ecocriticism, being one of the important streams of literary criticism, identifies the conceptual gap between nature and culture, their interconnections, and the significance of their literary representation.

Generally, the very notion of nature in literature is always associated with the physical setting, plot and character, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. The important role it plays becomes visible with the ecocritical reading. In this way, in addition to class and gender, 'place' becomes a critical category, in which the effects of the environmental crisis is seen in the contemporaneous literary representations. Literature plays a significant role in conditioning our philosophical understanding of nature, this is revealed through the theoretical approaches to the texts taken for study. Most of the ecological concepts share a common thread in most of the countries and their literature too.

Australian Ecology:

During the late eighteenth century, the relationship between the environment and literature bound the colonization of the Australian continent. The focus was mainly on the relationship between human and environment in Australia. The written description on the natural environment of Australia includes the botanist Joseph Banks (1743-1820). He sailed towards the eastern coast of the Australian continent and landed in Botany Bay. Thus he saw that the land was fertile. Later in the nineteenth century, more attention was on the environment.

Fire is one of the features of the Australian environment. Many Australian ecosystems depend on fire, but the fire in the Australian environment destroys the nature and the human. More specifically, Indigenous Australians use fire, over many eras. For example, Grace Moore has recently written on the descriptions of bushfire. Henry Kingsley's *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn* (1859) and Harpur's poem "The Bushfire" (1851) are telling examples for the process of destruction taking place before their eyes in the name of pioneering the land.

In the twentieth century, Australian bush is referred to both the nature and the land of settlers. The writers associated with this bush studies were, A. B. Paterson (1864-1941), Henry Lawson (1867-1922), Barbara Baynton (1857-1929), Joseph Furphy (1843-1912) and Miles Franklin (1879-1954). This 'bush studies' encompasses the stories like Lawson's "The Drover's Wife" (1892) and Baynton's "Squeaker's Mate" (1902) and shows the life of small-holding settlers trying to eke a precarious living from a seemingly hostile land (27). In this way, Australian ecology is sometimes painful and anger and sometimes the bush becomes safer for the women. This struggle against the land persists in the works of Katharine Susannah Prichard's first novel, *The Pioneers* (1915) and Patrick White's modernist epic *The Tree of Man* (1955). This is recorded in Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* as:

Ecocriticism deals with the relationship between physical environment and human beings. It brings attention to the human and non-human world particularly on the connections of self, society, nature and truth. It investigates the ways in which writers represent different environments in literature and how this influence real-world attitudes to place of the person (6).

It explores how metaphors of nature are used across a range of literary texts. Ecocritics mainly work on landscape, place, region, urban, nature of the environment. This chapter focuses on the representation of ecology in Australian literature. Australian Literature operates as both symbol and participant in environmental conditions. Baynton and Henry Lawson appear to be the early writers with strong but not so obvious naturalist affiliations.

Indian Ecology:

As a representative of literature, this awareness stands as an environmental restoration. Indian ecology is defined by Kumari Shikha as, "The way in which planets, animals and people are related to each other and their environment." (Ecocriticism in Indian Fiction 2).

From the beginning some Indian writers like R.K Narayan, Kamala Markandya focus on nature, culture and landscape. In the novels of R.K Narayan landscape is more of a theme than a mere description whereas Kamala Markandya's novels show the natural calamities and its consequences. Later, such writings, heightening the human-nature relationships increased in number and thus widening the scope of eco-criticism.

Generally, literary representations highlight (not always consciously) the close relationship between ecology and literature. This was prevalent in the writings of almost all cultures. Remarkably, the eighteenth and nineteenth century writings show a slant towards nature. Today the intimate relationship between the natural world and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all aspects. These two terms have become more important today, ecology and nature.

India is a country with the variety of ecological systems such as the Himalayas in the North and dry Thar desert in the west and so on. This eco-system is seen affected due to increasing population. But at the same time literature could not remain unaffected from this point of view and thus this thesis focuses on how the concern for nature changes in Indian literature. "Environment is complex and dynamic but also mutually reactive and inter-related". (Shikha 3).

This becomes evident that man is always dependent on environment. History has proved this every now and then and it (environment) is capable of wiping out a whole civilization from the earth. Concern for ecology is one of the most discussed issues today. This can be seen in few short stories in the history of Indian English literature. In this context, this thesis takes up short stories from four different regions of India. These stories from the early twentieth century, reveal the writers' concern towards ecosystem and

its relationship with the human beings. In the earlier writings, nature has been used merely as a backdrop against the plot.

Nature has always been stronger than man. Nature shows its power by controlling man's power through natural disasters. Man's life and nature are interlinked with each other so, one has to accept the nature's beauty and adversity. Our irresponsible actions cause damage to nature like destroying the forest, exploiting soil, etc, This is how the chain of ecosystem works in which everything is related to each other and then affects one another.

Ecology and Literature:

Ecology can be defined in three ways. The scientific study of the relation between the organism and the environment is the Haeckelian definition. The second is the deep ecological definition which adopts a philosophical/metaphysical approach in the study of the relation between the organization and the environment. The third defines ecology as the study of the Oikos, Oikology. A few new disciplines like social ecology and Human Ecology have also emerged. The former is an attempt to associate human society and natural phenomena whereas the latter is an alleviant to bring to better humans and environment (Selvamony and Alex. K. Rayson 1).

From the definition of ecology, a fourth one can be defined in the *Ecocriticism Reader* as, "The study of the relation between literature and the physical environment "(Glotfelty xviii). Identically, Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism in his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* as "the environment-oriented study of literature and the arts more generally, and to the theories that underlie such critical practice" (Buell 138). He defines two phases of ecocriticism, "the first wave ecocriticism" and the "second wave eco criticism or revisionist ecocriticism"(Buell 138). The first wave ecocriticism focused on genres such as, "nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction" (Buell 138). The second wave eco criticism inclined towards environmental justice issues and a "'social ecocriticism' that takes urban and degraded landscape just as seriously as 'nature' landscaper" (Buell 22). Buell automatically looks upon this ecocriticism as 'environment criticism'.

By this wave ecocriticism, the thesis focuses on the different ecological perspectives on human and environment issues in the literary representation.

In general, ecocriticism can be described in terms of literature and environment which includes the exceeds of the human, where human beings are interrelated and conceptualized. This chapter creates literary studies of ecology in the twentieth century from three different postcolonial countries.

During the first half of the twentieth century there was an increase in growth, loss of wild and natural area, increase in contamination of earth, air, water and land. Ecology of the twentieth century, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), describes on the major work of the contemporary environmental movement, with a novelist's art and a scientist's knowledge about the dangers posed by the indiscriminate use of chemical biocides. Arnold Toynbee, in his narrative *Mankind and Mother Earth: A Narrative History of the World* (1976), expounds on the environmental disaster that reflected upon the biological health of the planet. Despite this, he concludes that human beings are further behind than ever in efforts to protect Earth's ecosystem and thus our future on the planet becomes uninhabitable (9).

Literature involves in teaching on the part of the earth and its atmosphere in which life exists. To raise the level of human consciousness in developing ecology teaching and learning about the natural world becomes compulsory. For this reason, writes Mark Turner in his book, *Reading Minds*, "to the extent that it treats objects in the literature that can be seen only by means of the theory: in that case, if the theory vanishes, its objects vanish" (4).

In 1985, Frederick. O. Waage edited the book on *Teaching Environmental Literature: Material, Method, Resources*, where it includes on the various description on awareness of "environment in literary representation" (xvii). Even in America in 1989, Alicia Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, the purpose of the book was to publish more essays and reviews on writing on nature and environmental issues in literary journals. In 1990, the University of Nevada, Reno, created the first academic position in literature and the environment.

Cheryll Glotfelty, an avid reader and nature lover and co-founder of Association for Study of Literary and Environment (ASLE), with an interest in literature and environment, wrote her book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996). She describes:

...environmental histories, studying the reciprocal relationships between human and land, considering nature not just as the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama....

Psychology has long ignored nature in its

theories of the human mind. A handful of contemporary psychologists, however, are exploring the linkages between environmental conditions and mental same regarding the modern estrangement from nature as the basis of our social and psychological ills (xxi).

Like all other cultural studies in literature, ecology has now become a part this new field. In the literary texts, *Literary Studies In An Age Of Environmental Crisis* by Cheryll Glotfelty portrays on the study of environmental issues in postmodern era and the natural world.

Leacock is known for his humorous writing and is considered to be the natural heir of Mark Twain and O. Henry. The *Sunshine sketches* of Stephen Leacock (1970) is not a novel but has a strong appearance that he would further write a novel based on this (91). Select incidents in the sunshine sketches has been taken for analysis in the thesis since they represent the environment of human and describe the setting and the landscape of the imaginative town, called Mariposa (as Malgudi and Manawaka)

Conclusion

Through this study, it becomes evident that nature affects human only when there is a change in atmosphere or struggle in human mind. Sometimes, nature protects and harms the human. Human feels separated with Nature only when they shift from one place to another. This separation makes him/her leave the place. This is faced by each and everyone in the life. Taking Nature as a part of human life, the next chapter attempts to highlight the Natural elements. This attempts to change even the life to other perspectives in relation to the Natural world.

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