

Ecocriticism - An Aesthetic and Scientific Approach to Literature

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to exhibit the concern for a new discipline which not only shows the relationship between environment and literature but also gives us an opportunity to comprehend green ethics to shield the future values of environment. This branch of knowledge which concentrates on the link between literature and environment is known as eco-criticism. The New Literatures in English among other emblematic representations and manifestations also deal with nature as a very noteworthy theme. The damage of environment resulting upon the immigration including cultural and social retractions has modified affinity of nature in Postcolonial literatures and cultures. Ecocriticism has become a swiftly emerging field and covers a wide range of theories and areas of interest, and consequently there is a shift of emphasis towards the ecological study basically on the affiliation of environment with literature. The perceptions involve eco-critical approach that can be applied to literary and non-literary texts. Nature itself is a new illustrative group in line with other instances such as class, race, identity and gender. Nature appears as the basic theme in eco-critical texts.

INTRODUCTION

Nature inspires Man since the day of his evolution and provides him all sorts of basic comforts. And all because of this, the habitats of the earth have been praising this natural phenomenon. But unfortunately, we humans don't understand its value and focus only on post-modern industrial comforts. There has been a regular deterioration from the last few decades and the things which shield the nature are disappearing at an alarming rate. Our present way of living indicates that the world's extinction is not far away as the good goes worse. Our present, past and future depend on our actions. So, to recover the loss, the ecological balance must be maintained on this green planet. We have right to develop in every sense as the present discoveries inspire us. We should realise that on this planet, every creature, whether small or big, has its importance in the ecological chain and we would lose the entire chain if we lost even a single creature.

The Consequences of Utilitarian Approach towards Nature

The dilemma is that we people are hypocrites and our concern for nature is not genuine. We tend to show high environmental values but the reality is that we do move away from the ecological and environmental morals. To save the flora and fauna for the future generation, we need to show a collaborative environmental dedication on each and every front. It not only reflects the ecological problem of a place where we live, but also the problem which everyone faces like air pollution, water and noise pollution, draught, starvation, malnutrition, unplanned construction, rising of sea level, cutting down of trees etc. Economic freedom is mainly responsible for these problems as it results in the greed for freedom of human will. All these happenings or better say mishappenings create the need to make academic blocks to bring the eco-consciousness in the literary world. That's why; poets and prose writers have made the natural flora and fauna their spirit and have been writing since decades to bring the awareness to protect the natural habitat which is the only source of sustaining life which we seldom heed.

Now the ecological spheres must be created from all sides to preserve the flora and fauna in the deep wild forest bit not in zoos for our progeny. Eco-criticism gives us an opportunity to read the literature texts with ecological perspective and also provides us an eco lens to go through the texts. It demands a certain vision to read a text with the flavour of eco-consciousness. If we talk about the eco-consciousness in the works of Indian writers, many Indian poets have celebrated and mourned the existence and extinction of natural resources. The eco-poetic consciousness among Indian poets will be highlighted through this study and also their feelings while writing about the aspect of Indian environment. The objective of the study is to save the sustainable ecology and to think seriously about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and about how language and literature transmit values with

profound ecological implications. India has a variety of eco-systems which ranges from the dynamic Sunderbans in the East to dry Thar Desert of the West and from gigantic Himalayas in the North to the Plateaus of South. Due to increasing population and avarice of mankind, these ecosystems have been badly affected with the passage of time. Now my emphasis lies on the changes in Indian literature from the glorification of the nature to its criticism of destruction.

PERSONIFICATION OF NATURE IN THE NOVEL 'KANTHAPURA' WRITTEN BY RAJA RAO:

The word 'ecocriticism' first appeared in William Rueckert's essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' in 1978. It became popular when Cheryl Glotfelty and Glen Love seconded the call for 'ecocriticism'. When we peep into the history, we find Raja Rao as one of the most prominent writers of Indian English novels. He truly depicted the man and nature relationship along with the village culture and environmental setting of a South Indian village. He has shown the importance of rivers and mountains in people's living in his novel 'Kanthapura'. The village folk call the mountain as Goddess Kenchamma and they believe that it brings prosperity and their adversity. In the novel, Raja Rao writes about Kenchamma:

"Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she.... never has she failed us in grief. If rains come not, you fall at her feet and say, 'Kenchamma, you are not kind to us. Our field is full of younglings.'"

These lines from the novel remind us the old time of our forefathers when nature was appreciated in its true literal sense. Not only the authors, our Hindu religion also emphasises on 'Karma' theory of birth and rebirth of human beings in the form of animals and plants according to their deeds of the previous life. Birth and rebirth is an endless process as the world is eternal. Only the purified soul can discard this process and go to heaven. There are many gods and deities in Hinduism. All sorts of trees are associated with every god and the household deities. For instance, people treat Peepal and Neem with piety and respect and give divine status to them. Not only to human beings, but domesticated animals such as bulls and cows are also given the names of gods and goddesses.

Now it is a point to think about that how we Indians have become culprit of the ecological disorders. European Imperialism had a deep impact on our social, cultural and economical life. Consequently, irrevocable and irreparable loss of the nature was suffered due to colonization. A peasant is kind and considerate and possesses greater knowledge of the ecosystems as he comes across with nature everyday. He derives some kind of meaning from the sound of birds, receives some message from the swaying trees and plants. The ordinary country folk communicate with environment while leading a simple pastoral life. Amazingly, the nature is not mute but eloquent. It is having its own linguistic system and sounds about which we are ignorant and unaware.

Discovery of Grammatical Rules Based on the Sounds Produced by Birds and Animals:

Many great scholars like Panini used to communicate with birds and beasts every morning. Panini was able to derive some special and specific sense from those sounds. Later on, he formulates certain grammatical rules based on these fourteen distinctive sounds. Sermons are found in every phenomenon of nature by all great men including Panini. Natural mechanism like moving breeze, shivering leaves, flowing water, floating lotus, glowing worms not only satisfy our aesthetic sense but have some unique reason for our existence. We should not think that nature is non-reactive to our self-centred culture and education. It is not deaf and dumb.

According to Christopher Manes:

"In addition to human language, there is also the language of birds, the wind, earthworms, wolves, and waterfalls- a world of autonomous speakers whose intents (especially for hunter-gatherer people) one ignores at one's peril!"

People are likely to think twice before doing any harm to nature if they are able to understand the language of nature. There are many examples in Hindu mythology where animals, birds and trees do start talking like humans. Disputes and problems can be solved by communication. Misunderstandings and entanglements are resolved successfully through bilateral dialogues in the human society.

Michael Foucault highlights this:

"Social power operates through a regime of privileged speakers, having historical embodiments as priests and kings, authors, intellectuals and celebrities!" (Foucault 16)

To understand the unique language that our ecosystem is equipped with, we need a feasible medium to communicate with nature. If we are naive in understanding our environment then it is foolishness to call ourselves superior to all other beings.

In the view of Christopher Manes:

“Some strains of deep ecology have stressed the link between listening to the non-human world (i.e treating it as a silenced subject) and reversing the environmentally destructive practises modern society pursues! (Manes 16)

Just like the stronger silencing and crushing the weaker in human society, nature also is being crushed and made speechless by Man. Nature has become a mute spectator. It exists but doesn't live. Nature's forms would bloom and grow when it is left free to lead an uninterrupted life. We have to learn the language of plants, animals and birds to comprehend the secrets of nature.

EXPANSION OF ANIMISM BY MIRCEA ELIADE

Mircea Eliade is elaborating the aspects of animism a complicated and long-lived phenomenology of nature. Among its characteristics is the belief: 1) that all the phenomenal world is alive in the sense of being inspirited, including humans, cultured artifacts and natural entities, both biological and 'inert' and 2) that not only the non-human world alive but it is filled with articulate subjects, able to communicate with humans! (Eliade 17)

With the passage of time and with the impact of religious concepts which regarded man above nature, the animistic view of nature eroded further and further. The so-called humanism emphasised that there was a metaphysical difference between man and the rest of the beings in the ecosphere. Man believes in self-glorification and thinks that he is the crown of creation.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, there is a perfect example of this tendentious attitude:

“What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason; how infinite in faculties; In form and meaning how express; In action how like an angel, In apprehension how like a god; The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.” (Hamlet 306-310)

Rejection of the Superiority of Man over other Forms of Life by Darwin:

On the contrary, Darwin encouraged our culture to face the truth “in the observation of nature that there exists no one scrap of evidence that humans are superior to or even more interesting than lichen.” (Manes 22)

Darwin's invitation is disagreeable and repulsive and therefore turned down as none of us likes to be compared with lichen. In nature, there is no superior or inferior. There are endless forms of life with different combinations of fundamental cells. Biology provides a humbled picture, although the language of humanism possesses the pre-eminence of human race. The condition of the forest depends on mycorrhizal fungus as the extinction of fungus from the ecosystem would be catastrophic and forest would be disappeared soon causing the turmoil for atmosphere, hydrology and temperature for the entire globe. Disappearance of Homo sapiens would virtually go unnoticed by the extensive majority of Earth's life forms. (Manes 24)

We cannot do justice to our ecology with our faulty rhetoric. A major change is required in human language. The surface level pruning cannot serve the purpose “for the monologue of the human subject is ill-equipped (to voice an impartial and unbiased argument upon ecology.)” (Manes 16)

Nature has been treated with barbarism and insensitiveness and therefore, a new language must be learnt to understand and communicate with it. The new language should be “free from an obsession with human pre-eminence and reflecting the ontological humility implicit in evolutionary theory, ecological science and post-modern thought must leap away from the rhetoric of humanism we speak today...the new language we require can draw upon the earlier practice from our own culture, the medieval contemplative tradition... to promote an understanding of reverence with nature.” (Manes 25)

CONCLUSION

Today, eco-criticism is a rapidly emerging term in the literary domain. It is taught globally; both as a full paper and also as a division of some paper like Literary Criticism or Literary Theory in many educational institutions and University Departments for postgraduate and undergraduate courses. The objective behind the formulation of this paper has been to digging at the roots of the theory of eco-criticism, its derivation and relevance in the world of literature. Many eco-critics advocate, and themselves exemplify, the augmentation of “green reading”, i.e, the investigation of the association of a text for environmental concerns, to all sorts of literature, including poetry, prose and fiction and also to the writings in social and natural sciences. The theory has broad gamut to reformulate the former writings of literature in the new perception of eco-criticism. Thus, the eco-criticism is a globally recognized and remarkable expression in the world of literature.



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