



## **SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE AND ECOCRITICISM IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**PRAMOD KUMAR**

D.A-V.COLLEGE,CSJM UNIVERSITY,  
KANPUR. (UP) INDIA.

### **ABSTRACT**

*Now-a-days the literary critics pay attention on study and analysis of the strong bond between nature and society. Ecology and ecocriticism are the significant aspects for the literary study and research. Ecology or environmental study is the center of attraction for literary personalities as well as the need of time. People are becoming conscious about the environment. Environment balance is very important in this globalize world. Therefore, so many plans/schemes are being launched for saving the environment and making the people environment-conscious.*

*Many poets and novelists have become eco-conscious or environment conscious. They have used Nature as landscape, as beautiful atmosphere/lively atmosphere such as R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jayant Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Bhavani Bhattacharya. The literature has become a mode of expression about environment and its important in human life and universe. Environment balance/protection has become the hot issue of the present time in the whole world. It is the issue of international importance. Due to the eco-imbalance and the environmental pollution, the whole world is under the curse of global warming. The world is becoming the prey of the environmental imbalance and destructions. The healthy well balanced environment/atmosphere is the need of time. It is like the life blood for the universe. In June 2013 that ravaged Utrakhand, the flash flood gave an immense pain to Indians and it has been called as a man-made disaster or an unplanned development by man in political and social context. Now this has become a one of the greatest example of (Ecocriticism) Man's attimate result of Nature's curse on Man, "a tit for tat assassination." The present paper seeks to outline eco-critical examination to the relevance and presence of the non-human to human environment and vice-versa in Indian fiction in English literature. They have focused their attention on the value of eco-balance and environmental balance. They advocate the balanced co-relation between nature and mankind.*



**Keywords:** *Ecocriticism, Ecological, Nature, Environment, Indian Diaspora, Eco-balance, Landscape, Pollution.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development. The literary critic tries to study how this has been textualized by the writers in their works. In this context two terms have become very important today – ecology and ecocriticism. India is a country with variety of ecosystems which ranges from Himalayas in the north to plateaus of south and from the dynamic Sunderbans in the east to dry Thar of the west. With time, however, these ecosystems have been adversely affected due to mankind. Literature could not remain unaffected from this depletion and my paper is on that how the concern for nature changes in Indian literature from reverence to destruction.

The two components of nature, organisms and their environment are not only much complex and dynamic but also interdependent, mutually reactive and interrelated. Ecology relatively a new science, deals with the various principles which govern such relationships between organisms and environment.<sup>1</sup> Today ecology is defined as the way in which plants, animals and people are related to each other and their environment. In this relationship they are so much interdependent on each other that any disturbance in one disturbs the other. History has proved this every now and then that with every change in the civilization the relationship of animals and human beings have also changed and the effect on civilization of the changes in environment has been so acute that sometimes it has wiped the whole civilization from the face of the earth. Therefore, concern for ecology is one of the most discussed issues today. It is the concern of every country to replenish the diminishing factors of ecology which threatens human beings the most.

Literature well known for reflecting the contemporary issues could not have remained unaffected from this theme. The world of literature throngs with works dealing with beauty and power of nature. However, the concern for ecology and the threat that the continuous misuse of our environment poses on humanity has only recently caught the attention of the writers. It is this sense of concern and its reflection in literature that has given rise to a new branch of literary theory, namely Ecocriticism.

The word ‘ecocriticism’ first appeared in William Rueckert’s essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. Yet apparently it remained inactive in critical vocabulary until the 1989 Western Literature Association meeting (in Loer d’ Alene), when Cheryll Glotfelty (at the time a graduate student at Cornell now Assistant Professor of



Literature and Environment at the university of Nevada, Reno) not only received the term but worked for its use in the critical field which hereafter had been used as 'the study of nature writing'. Glen Love (Professor of English at the University of Oregon) too seconded the call for 'ecocriticism' at the same WLA meeting. Since that meeting in 1989 the usage of the term 'ecocriticism' has bloomed.<sup>2</sup> However, in the beginning scholars working in this field of literary theory remained marginal until the early 1990 when the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was established in 1992 along with the Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) in 1993. In 1996 it is said to be officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works: *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell.<sup>3</sup>

Earlier, the writers such as R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, and Anita Desai have invoked Nature and nature-elements for expressing their views, their contemporary regional and social atmospheres. R.K. Narayan is a very famous regional novelist. He is well known for his imaginary creation Malgudi. It is an imaginary world invented by R. K. Narayan. Narayan's novels and short stories have this Malgudias specific region as a backdrop. The novelist has exploited the entire social, psychological and regional atmosphere in his writing. He has used nature as the setting and background in his novels and short stories. It can be noted in his stories and novels such *Malgudi Days*, *Man Eater of Malgudi*, *The English Teacher*, and *The Guide* etc. Malgudi can be considered as the central setting of his writing. Nature plays both the positive and negative roles. The flowing Saryu River and the ruined temples affected Raju, the guide and transformed him into a saint in the novel, *The Guide*.

Raja Rao has also applied/invoked Nature and nature elements in his novels. He has used the elements for expressing his mythological, regional and social views. His famous novel, *Kanthapura*, is the glaring example of this. Raja Rao has depicted the South Indian village, its customs, culture and environment realistically and precisely. He has portrayed the co-relation between mankind and Nature. His *Kanthapura* projects the role and importance of Nature beautifully in the human life. Through the depiction of rivers, mountains and other natural elements, he has proved value of this co-relationship. The mythological elements introduced to reflect the significance of this clearly. Kenchamma is regarded as the great and bounteous goddess. The novelist has proved the respect of the people for nature through their religious belief.

Kamala Markandaya is one of the greatest Indian novelists in English. Markandaya has also used Nature and natural elements for her effective and flawless expressions and descriptions of views. She considers nature as a wild animal. She thinks nature a destroyer and preserver both. Her well known novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, is the fine example of the depiction and use of



nature imagery. There is the touch of environmental issue. She shows the effect of environment on mankind.

Nature can be portrayed benign as well as aggressive and destructive. According to the need, mood or situation the qualities are applied by the writers. Bhabani Bhattacharya has depicted the natural calamity realistically in his famous novel, *So Many Hungers*. This novel demonstrates the tragic effects of famine on the inhabitants of Bengal. Actually, this calamity is the factual presentation of the real Bengal famine of 1943. The novels deals with the painful, shocking conditions of the people. It reveals the miserable, terrible, gruesome and helpless situations of the famine affected peasants. The writer has employed various nature symbols, imageries for different types of comparisons. For example, the characters Laxminathan and Samerandra Bose are compared with Jackals and vultures because of their villainy and greed.

Anita Desai is a very prominent and popular woman Indian novelist in English. Nature which includes animals, plants and birds, has a strong presence in almost all her works. Known in Indian-English fiction for ushering in the psychological novel, Desai uses external landscapes to portray interior states of mind. In *Cry, the Peacock*, the complexities of Maya's inner life is effectively brought out through the landscape as is her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. Maya compares herself with the peacock in the jungle. The peacocks are said to fight before they mate, living they are aware of death and dying they are in love with life. This is reflected towards the end in the novel when one day during a dust storm both husband and wife go up to the roof of their house, she pushes him off the parapet and he dies. In *Voices in the City* Monalisa is repeatedly compared to the encaged bird in her house who wants to be free. Her condition reflects the plight of the imprisoned bird whose need is no one's concern and its life is for the pleasure of the others. She finally commits suicide to free herself. Baba' the autistic son in *Clear Light of Day* is described as a harmless spider. In *Where shall We Go This Summer* the island people are described as goats as they listen to Moses.

*The God of Small Things*, the masterpiece, of Arundhati Roy deals with the topics of nature and environment. It points out the environmental pollution through the description of the changed condition of beauty, greenery and the look of Ayemenem and the river Meenachal. She has used nature images not only for describing the beauty or glorious atmosphere of the region and landscape but also for exposing the polluted atmosphere of Ayemenem. Through the depiction of the river Meenachal. She contrasts the earlier condition of the river with its later condition. Earlier Rahel feels: *It was warm, the water green like reapplied silk. With fish in it. With the sky and it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it. (God of Small Things, 123)*. The river, during the childhood of Rahel, has become deformed and repulsive in her adulthood. Its charm and effect was deteriorating due to environmental pollution. Later,



when the adult Rahel visited the river, it was different in look and had lost its inspiring appeal:

*...the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver fish. It was choked with a succulent weed,...*  
(Arundhati Roy, 124)

Actually, this is because of the pollution created by the inhabitants and factories of the region. The novelist tries to show the harmful effect of urbanization on environment. She has delineated the picture of beautiful, lively green Ayemenem as well as the polluted and disturbed Ayemenem. By the help of many picture sequence, descriptions of scenery and region, the degenerated gloomy environment of the region.

The other renowned environment conscious novelist is Kiran Desai. She received the Man Booker prize for her famous novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. She has focused on the issue of environment. Her approach is eco-centric and eco-critic. She has also focused the environment of east-west encounter, racial prejudice, political turbulence and its harmful effect on the balance of eco-system. Her novel starts with the delineation of the natural beauty of mount Kanchenjunga. She delineates the beautiful mountain, and the changing seasons charmingly. The mountain is also used to reveal the gloomy mood of the orphan girl, Sai. Desai describes the house of the retired Judge which is situated at blissful and beautiful atmosphere. The Judge lives with his pet dog Mutt, grand-daughter Sai and the Cook. The novelists start her description in the following manner:

*“A crumbling isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga lives an Embittered judge. He wants to live in peaceful atmosphere by isolating Himself from the messy world.” (The Inheritance of Loss, 1)*

The relation of grand-daughter, grand-father as well as the relation of the Judge and Mutt are described. Here, the embittered, prejudiced judge has no love or feeling for human beings but he is very fond of his dog Mutt. The isolated, prejudiced, and ruthless man gets solace and feeling of intimacy from the animal (a product of nature). The writer has tried to focus the role of nature in human life. She shows the co-relation between mankind and nature. She has also dealt the effects of the political, racial and social environment on human-beings. The description of Gurkha movement reflects the political atmosphere. The movement has become the cause of eco-disturbance. Through this, the novelist has focused the harmful effects on environment due to the irrational behavior and the reaction of the mankind. Kiran Desai has projected various types of atmosphere and environment such as religious, racial, political, natural etc. Through this, she shows her concern about environment balance. She points out that the co-relation between Nature and Mankind cannot be ignored because, Nature plays very pivotal role in molding the mind and life of human beings. Nature and its





vital elements are essential for building as well as sustaining lives of all living-beings especially of human-beings. The nature-man co-ordination is must.

The other renowned novelist, Amitave Ghose, has also tried to show the value of eco-balance. *The Hungry Tide* is the master piece of Amitav Ghose. It deals with the geographical areas of the Sunderban Islands in the Bay of Bengal. It focuses the two significant issues. The one is the misery and plight of the refugees from Bangladesh and the other is the very relevant aspect of the present time, the complicated eco-system and the environment. It demonstrates the risky eco-system. It highlights the human-animal relationships. He focuses on animals like dolphin and tigers vis a vis human beings. The visit of a marine biologist, Piyali, in Sunderban for the research study of a special species of Dolphin in a tide pool is delineated. The environment imbalance is projected by the novelist. He shows that the human beings are treated badly. It appears as if the animal protection is more important than the saving of human beings are treated badly. It appears as if the animal protection is more important than the saving of human lives. It seems as if the Bengal Tigers are more precious than human race. He reveals the attitude of the national and international environmentalists. *The White Tiger* has brought prestige and recognition to Arvind Adiga. He has received the Booker Prize for this novel. The novel deals with the socio-psychological and caste prejudiced environment of India.

Thus, Nature is always a supporting element in Literature. It can be seen in multitudinous forms. It reflects various atmospheres, moods, feelings and status. It is an expressive form for literature. It is very significant mode of expression for describing fertile, colorful atmosphere, happiness, gloominess, bitterness, disturbing, lively, tragic atmosphere etc. All types of environment can be presented through the help of nature and various elements of nature. Now-a-day's ecology, eco-balance, environment concerns are the points of attraction and concern. The prevalent environment imbalance has completed the intellectuals and rational people to consider this seriously. Therefore, the literary figures have used their strength for strengthening the attitude of people towards environment protection and eco-balance. Many poets and novelists have become eco-conscious or environment conscious. They have used Nature as landscape, as beautiful atmosphere/lively atmosphere such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jayant Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Bhavani Bhattacharya. The literature has become a mode of expression about environment and its importance in human life and universe. Environmental balance/protection has become the hot issue of the present time in the whole world. It is the issue of international importance. Due to the eco-imbalance and the environmental pollution, the whole world is under the curse of global warming. The world is becoming the prey of the environmental imbalance and destructions. The healthy well balanced environment/atmosphere is the need of time. It is like the life blood for the Universe. The world needs eco-friendly atmosphere for the proper growth, development, sustainability and prosperity. The various kinds of environmental issues such as biological, political, social, racial, regional, seasonal, and psychological etc.



have been projected by those intellectual writers. But, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghose, Bhavani Bhattacharya and Kiran Desai have dealt the subject matter with the environmental concern. They have focused their attention on the value of eco-balance and environmental balance. They advocate the balanced co-relation between nature and mankind.

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