

**ECOCRITICISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION – A CRITICAL STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT**

It has become a practice for writers to focus the nexus existing between nature and society. Terms like ecology and eco-criticism have been found in the works of leading writers due to budding consciousness among them. Due to the importance given to nature in their novels, there has been an increasing awareness among the public about it. The proposed paper attempts to bring out the importance given to eco-criticism in Indian English fiction.

**Keywords:** Landscape, Pollution, Eco-balance, Eco-criticism, Ecological balance.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is evident from the works of writers of all ages and cultures that there has been a close proximity between nature and literature. In all avenues of knowledge and progress, a threadbare analysis has been carried out between the social world and the nature. There have been several literary critics who have been trying to understand the manner in which the relationship between social world and nature has been presented in literary works. It is pertinent to note that two terms gain prominence in this context and they are: eco-criticism and ecology. As a nation, India has been blessed with several ecosystems ranging from the imposing Himalayas in the north to the plateaus of the south. Likewise, there has been a thick flora in Sunderbans in the east and the barren Thar desert in the west. All the ecosystems get deteriorated due to the ravages of time and mankind. Due to the change in nature, literature also gets changed by shifting the focus from reverence to destruction.

There are two components of nature namely: organism and environment. They are complex and dynamic. Moreover, they are interdependent, interrelated as well as mutually reactive. Ecology is an offshoot of science and it talks about several principles which influence the nexus between organism and environment. Of late, the term ecology is defined as the manner in which plants, animals and people get related to each other and their environment. In this kind of interrelationship, when one gets disturbed, it invariably disturbs the other. History bears ample testimony to the fact that whenever there is a change in civilization, it has made an impact in the relationship between animals and human beings. The impact of change in civilization has been sometimes so terrifying that it has removed the entire life from earth surface. Therefore, it is imperative to develop a concern for ecology. There arises a dire need among all countries to identify and overcome the factors which cause ecological imbalance .

### **ECOCRITICISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION**

When it comes to literature contributing its part in maintaining the global ecological balance, it is evident that the literary world is flooded with beauty and the power of nature. In spite of it, there has been a shift in the focus among the writers. Of late, several writers across the globe have been emphasizing on maintaining ecological balance. This shift in focus has paved way for Ecocriticism.

In this context, it has to be understood that the term ‘ ecocriticism’ was first employed by William Rueckert in his work named “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” . Although he introduced the term in 1978, it remained dormant for more than a decade. In 1989, in the Western Literature Association ( in Loer d’ A lene) meeting, a student named Cheryl Glotfelty received the term and started using it in literary field. Thereafter, the term ecocriticism , started referring to a study of nature writing. In the same meeting, Glen Love( Professor of English of the same university) endorsed the term ecocriticism and there has been no looking back since then in this genre of writing.

Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Manohar Malgonkar and R.K.Narayan were pioneers in employing nature and natural elements for conveying their ideas in relation to the contemporary regional and social atmospheres. R.K. Narayan has been one of the popular novelists in India. People fondly remember him for his fictional creation of Malgudi town. All novels of Narayan used to have this fictional town as its setting. He made use of its complete social, psychological and regional atmosphere while writing. He employed Malgudi’s nature and its background in all

his works. It is quite apparent in his novels such as *Man Eater of Malgudi*, *Malgudi days*, *The Guide* and *The English Teacher*. In all his novels, Malgudi happens to be the central place. In his novels, nature has been both constructive and destructive. For example, in the novel *The Guide*, the Sarayuriver and the dilapidated temples created an impact in the mind of the protagonist Raju and made him become a saint discarding his profession as guide.

In the novels of Raja Rao also, the readers could perceive him invoking nature and natural elements in his novels. He has made use of them for conveying his ideas on religion, society and mythology. His masterpiece *Kanthapura* is a popular example for this. In the novel, the author has brought out in its true form a south Indian village, its lifestyle, custom, culture in a realistic manner. He has given an account of the nexus between mankind and nature. His *Kanthapura* exhibits the part played by nature and its importance in an individual's life. He has highlighted the importance of co-relationship by depicting mountains, rivers and other natural elements. There are mythological elements employed by the author to drive home the importance of the relationship. The villagers worship *Kenchamma* as great and bounteous goddess. Through the religious sentiments expressed by the villagers, the author is able to make the readers understand the importance of nature.

Kamala Markandaya has been the most popular Indian novelist. She has employed nature and natural elements in a very effective manner to convey her views. For her, nature happens to be a sort of wild animal. She also considers nature to be both constructive and destructive. Her *Nectar in Sieve* happens to be an excellent example for depicting and employing the images of nature. There has been a touch of environmental issue to exhibit the impact of environment over mankind.

It is used to be a practice among Indian writers to portray nature as both constructive and destructive depending on the mood, need and situation. In his popular novel named *So Many Hungers*, Bhabani Bhattacharya has given an account of natural calamity. This novel displays the ravages made by famine over the inhabitants of Bengal. To be very precise, this calamity has been a realistic presentation of Bengal famine which took place in 1943. The novel gives a truer picture of painful, shocking and pitiable lot of the people. The peasants affected by the famine live under miserable, gruesome, terrible and helpless conditions. To make a factual presentation of it, the author has made use of several symbols and imageries. Characters such as Laxminathan

and Samerandra Bose have been compared to Jackals and vultures due to their extreme villainy and deed.

Anita Desai has carved a niche for herself among the Indian women novelists in English. In each of her novel, the readers could perceive a strong presence of nature through flora and fauna. For bringing out the inner recess of a human mind, it was the style of Anita Desai to make use of landscapes. For example, in her popular novel, *Cry the Peacock*, the intricacies of Maya's inner mind has been compared to a landscape as her opposition to her husband due to his inability to maintain cordial relationship with her. She finds herself to be similar with a peacock in the jungle. The peacocks have the habit of quarrelling before they get themselves involved in mating session. While they are living, they are pretty aware of their death. Likewise, when they are dying, they are very much in love with life. This concept is very much evident through an incident involving Maya and her husband. One morning, while the dust storm is blowing, both the husband and wife go to the roof of their house from where wife pushes her husband off the parapet wall and makes him die. Similarly, in *Voices of City* novel, the character Monolisa is very often compared to a caged bird who wants to be let scot free. For attaining freedom in life, she commits suicide. Likewise, in *Clear Light of Day* novel, the son of Baba who is known for leading an austere life is compared to a harmless spider. The inhabitants of the island in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* are compared to goats since they pay heed to Moses's words.

In *The God of Small Things*, the author Arundhati Roy has dealt with nature and environment in it. The village Aymanam has been polluted over a period of time. The author enables the readers to understand it by explaining the changed conditions in beauty, greenery and the appearance of the village and its river Meenachal. She has employed the images of nature for describing the glory and pleasant atmosphere of the village. The present condition of the river Meenachal is compared to its previous condition through a character named Rahel. Rahel opines: It was warm, the water green like reapplied silk. With fish in it. With the sky in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it." (*God of Small Things*, 123). The river seen by Rahel in his adulthood is not the same as what he had seen in his childhood. Earlier it was charming and effective, but now it looks deformed and is repulsive as well. Due to environmental hazards, it looks no more appealing. During adulthood, Rahel happened to visit the river and found it to be loathsome in its appearance.

“ the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thing

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.”. (ArundhatiRoy124 )

In fact, it is due to the pollution created by the public and factories belonging to that region. By this way, Arundhati Roy brings out the ill effects of urbanization and the environmental hazards happening due to it. Very diligently, she has brought out the contrasting images of the village Aymanam in her novel. It is done by her through diligent usage of picture sequence, description of scenery and region. Even the gloomy and loathsome environment of the village is done in a meticulous manner.

Kiran Desai is another novelist who is conscious of environment. Her *Inheritance of Loss* won her Booker prize. This novel focuses on environment. The author has employed both eco-centric and eco-critic approach in it. In the novel, she discusses issues such as political turbulence, racial prejudice and east-west encounter and their harmful effects on eco-system. To start with, she gives a pictorial description of mount Kanchanjunga. In a very impressive manner, she delineates the imposing mountain and ever changing seasons. The mountain is used once again to represent the sullen mood of Sai, an orphan. In the novel, the house of a retired Judge is described as having most blissful and harmonious atmosphere. There are three inhabitants of the house: the retired Judge, his granddaughter Sai and the cook. Apart from them, Mutt, the pet dog also lives with them. The author describes the same as follows:

“ 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 , I).

The author very well describes the relationship between grand-daughter and grandfather along with the relationship between Judge and Mutt. It is very strange to know that the retired Judge has love for human beings whereas he loves his dog Mutt very much. He seeks solace and comfort not from any human being, but only from his dog. By this way, the author has highlighted the importance of nature in an individual's life. She gives a glorious account of the relationship between mankind and nature. She has talked about the impact of social, political and social movements over human beings. The author gives an authentic account of the Gurkha movement and considers it to be the cause of eco-disturbance. In this manner, she has

emphasized on the evil effects taking place due to irrational and irresponsible behaviour of mankind. Kiran Desai has come out with various kinds of atmospheres like religious, racial, political, natural etc. The concern of the author in maintaining ecological balance is very much evident in the novel. The author opines that mankind cannot dispense with nature as it has a crucial role to play in moulding the physique and the mind of mankind. For all living beings to sustain in this world, it is imperative for nature and its vital elements to be maintained. There has to be a coordination between nature and mankind.

Amitav Ghose is another renowned novelist who has attempted to display the importance of eco-balance. Among all novels of Amitav Ghose, *The Hungry Tide* happens to be his master piece. The novel talks about geographical territories of Sunderban islands in Bay of Bengal. The novel delves into two sensitive matters. One is the suffering and pitiable living conditions of Bangladesh refugees. The next is about the current situation and its challenging ecosystem and the prevailing environment. The novel exhibits a very risky eco system and emphasizes on the importance of maintaining human animal relationship. The author concentrates on human-animal relationship. Utmost importance is given to dolphin and tiger on par with human beings. The author gives a vivid description about Piyali, a marine biologist who visits Sunderban to carry out research work on a special breed of Dolphin living in a tide pool. He comes out with his observation that animals are given more importance than human beings in this area. It is made to believe that preservation of Bengal tigers is more important than protecting human lives. He makes a mockery of the attitude practiced by both national and international environmentalists. The novel *White Tiger* brought name and fame to the author and Aravind Adiga became a recipient of Booker prize. The novel discusses socio-psychological and caste prejudiced atmosphere prevailing in our country.

#### **SUMMATION**

Hence, it is concluded that nature has been one of the important aspects and it has been given a predominant place in literature. It can be observed in various forms expressing moods, feelings, status and atmosphere. Literature happens to be an ideal medium for expressing fertile, happy, gloomy, bitter, disturbed, lively, colourful and tragic atmosphere. All forms of atmosphere are expressed with the aid of nature and its allied aspects. In the recent times, terms such as ecology, eco-balance and environment concerns have hogged the limelight and made

academicians as well as writers to think about the importance of them in a serious vein. It has been due to the enormous contributions made by selected writers and the public have realized the importance of maintaining eco-balance. For expressing the importance of preserving nature, writers such as Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghose have made use of nature as landscape in their novels. For them, literature happened to be a medium for talking about the importance of environment and its role in human life and universe. Environmental protection has become an issue of utmost importance in the modern world. Because of the eco imbalance and pollution, the entire world is reeling under the impact of global warming. The world has become a compulsive victim of environmental imbalance and destruction. With this back drop, it has to be understood that it is imperative to have a well balanced environment/atmosphere. There has been a dire need for maintaining proper growth, development, prosperity and sustainability. There have been different kinds of environmental issues such as psychological, biological, social, political, racial... etc. and all of them have been found in the works of Amitav Ghose, Arundhati Roy...etc. It is fair to say that all these writers have given importance to eco and environmental balances. They are votaries for a well balanced nexus between mankind and nature.

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