Exploration of Eco critical perspective in Amitav Ghosh’s Hungry Tide and kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve

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Abstract
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 analysed and emphasized in all branches of knowledge and development. Ecocriticism is the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. As a separate movement or school of literary criticism, ecocriticism started developing in the 1990s. There is a close relation between ecocriticism and literature. Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study of Ecology and Literary Criticism which is unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. There are not many novels in Indian fiction that deals with the theme of ecocriticism though; nature has been used as a backdrop against which the story develops. It is because a serious concern with ecology seems to be lacking in the works of earlier writers. Of late, writers prefer to create awareness of the consequences of human actions which damages the planet's basic life support system. This paper discusses the term ecocriticism and the role of ecocriticism in literature. It cites examples of how the theme of ecocriticism can be interpreted through the reading of two Indian novels namely nectar in a sieve by Kamala Markandaya and Hungry tide by Amitav Ghosh.
INTRODUCTION:
The word ecocriticism is a semi neologism [Buell 1999: 1091]. Eco is short of ecology, which is concerned with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment. The relationship between man and nature is not just interdependent but also interrelated. The word „ecocriticism” first appeared in William Rueckert’s essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. However, it was only in the 1990s that ecocriticism emerged as a separate discipline although it is a fact that the relationship between man and his physical environment had always been interesting to literary critics (Volkmann pg. 370). Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man’s relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. The term Ecocriticism has a broad domain and has been expressed through many literary genres. Some of the most widely known ecocritics, are Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch and Glen A. Love. The interest is at the scientific level as well as various forms of literary expressions. Human beings have a natural quest to find their „roots” and be a part of the natural environment that they belong to. But the same time, they have over exploited natural resources and exploited nature to its fullest.

Ecocriticism is a branch of literary criticism which has is being discussed worldwide as an interdisciplinary study of literature and the environment. It covers the study of subjects like science, literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology etc. and attempts to study the attitude of mankind towards nature. Some popular names for this relatively new genre are Eco poetics, green culture and environmental literary criticism. It is study in which has invoked the interest of scholars worldwide. Ecocriticism is not only the application of ecology and ecological principles but also the study of literature and theoretical approach to the interrelations of nature, culture and sometimes even supernatural elements in nature. It attempts to explore the expressions of environment in literary texts and theoretical discourse. It is also a study of language through which literature is expressed. Literature renowned for imitating the contemporary problems could not have remained untouched from this concept. This uprising threat to humanity from unceasing misuse of our ecosystem has seized the attention of the writers in recent past. The textualization of aforementioned environmental
problems in literary works has given rise to a new division of literary theory, namely ecocriticism. According to Wikipedia, “Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyse the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation”.

Literature and environment studies commonly called “ecocriticism” or “environmental criticism” in analogy to the more general term literary criticism comprise an eclectic, pluriform, and cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental concern not limited to any one method or commitment. In this, ecocriticism concurs with other branches of the environmental humanities ethics, history, religious studies, anthropology, humanistic geography in holding that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today’s burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. At least as fundamental to their remediation as scientific breakthroughs and strengthened regimes of policy implementation is the impetus of creative imagination, vision, will, and belief. Even though, as the poet W.H. Auden famously wrote, “poetry makes nothing happen” in and of itself, the outside-the-box thought experiments of literature and other media can offer unique resources for activating concern and creative thinking about the planet’s environmental future. By themselves, creative depictions of environmental harm are unlikely to free societies from lifestyles that depend on radically transforming ecosystems. But reflecting on works of imagination may prompt intensified concern about the consequences of such choices and possible alternatives to them.

Reflections of Ecocriticism in Indian Literature:
In many literary works in English, nature has been a prime issue. Colonialism has been a significant factor in the devastation of environment worldwide. The transformation in the social and cultural environments of the world have completely changed the representations of man’s attitude towards nature in literary expressions. Ecocriticism is a rapidly expanding area of research covers wide range of texts and theories which study the relationship of man and nature. Environmental studies in literary texts through nature imagery, gender construct, feminism, man-woman relationship, tourism, culture etc. have wider meanings than what is
portrayed through their literal expressions. In Indian writings in English too there are many literary books that reflect the theme of ecocriticism in them. There are many ways that authors have explored environmental issues. In some books it is central to the book, while in others, it is secondary to the narrative and other themes. When history is examined we find Raja Rao as one of the most prominent writers of Indian English novels. His depiction of the South Indian village culture and environmental setting is a true depiction of relationship between man and nature. In his novel ‘Kanthapura’ he has shown how rivers and mountains play an important role in people’s lives. They have names for them. In this novel they call the mountain as Goddess Kenchamma and they consider it responsible for both – their prosperity and their adversity. Raja Rao writes about Kenchamma in the novel, “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 first few pages of ‘Kanthapura’ reminds us of the age old practices of our ancestors when nature was revered in the true literal sense. Besides these few pages in the beginning we, however, do not find any further discussions on it in the novel. R. K. Narayan wrote in the same decade and has given life to a place, Malgudi, or it can be said that he has developed a place as a character which can be seen in almost all his prose fictions bearing the same features. In other words he used landscape as an important theme and as mentioned in the earlier chapter this is also one of the important considerations under ecocriticism. In ‘The Dark Room’ the river and the ruined temple leave a benign influence on Savitri. The flowing Sarayu, the ruined temple and the stone slabs influence Raju in ‘The Guide’, and contribute to his sainthood. It is the spirit of Malgudi that helps him to face the ordeal of fast in the right earnest. It is the retreat across the river that almost transforms Jagan. Thus Malgudi is a character. When it is material, it is a villain like the gutter in ‘The English Teacher’ and ‘The Financial Expert’. Under the salubrious influence of serene nature Krishna becomes so spiritual that he begins to communicate with the soul of Susila. Professor Iyenger rightly advocates the theory that Malgudi is the real ‘hero’ of ten novels and the many short stories of Narayan and that underneath the seeming change and the human drama there is something the ‘soul’ of the place that defies or embraces all changes and is triumphantly and unalterably itself. Malgudi becomes the symbol of the transitional Indian shedding the age old traditions and accepting the modern western civilization.
The Hungry Tide: Ecological Issues in Indian English Fiction:

Amitav Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide (2005) is one of the first Indian novels to strongly raise ecological issues in Indian fiction. Ghosh's novel reveals the interactions between the state, the poor, the fauna and flora, and the physical environment, and in doing so this work highlights both the tragedy and the hypocrisy that were inherent in the conservation efforts in the Sundarbans. In The Hungry Tide Ghosh problematizes the tensions between and within human communities, their respective relations with the natural world, and the extra-discursive reality of nature that changes and is simultaneously changed by humanity. The friction between land and the sea in the Sundarbans creates a constant friction between the plant and animal life. Man’s constant encroachment of the ecosystems of the Sunderbans only justify the tensions between the various elements of nature. The Hungry Tide is set in the Sunderbans, an island in the Bay of Bengal which is not just beautiful but also fascinating. For settlers, the Sunderbans offer an extremely unpredictable and insecure life.

Unrest and eviction are constant threats and attacks by tigers are most common. Tidal floods destroy the stability of life on the island without any warning. Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide constantly discusses the conflict between man and nature in the context of the Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh. The novel reflects the conflicts between the residents and the aquatic and wild life of the Sunderbans. Amitav Ghosh has warned mankind against the overt exploitation of nature. The Tide Country is a harsh landscape, full of peril and death in many forms. „At no moment can human beings have any doubt of the terrain's hostility to their presence, of its cunning and resourcefulness, of its determination to destroy or expel them. Every year, dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by tigers, snakes and crocodiles.” (Ghosh 7). Rajender Kaur in his essay on The Hungry Tide titled, "Home Is Where the Oracella Are" says, „Ghosh's selection of the Sundarbans for his setting was aptly chosen” (Kaur 127).

‘The Hungry Tide’ unfolds through the eyes of two upwardly mobile, educated individuals who undertake a journey to the tide country. Kanai Dutt, the Bengali born, Delhi- settled businessman arrives in Lusibari to visit his aunt Nilima and claim the package left for him by his uncle, Nirmal. The package, he discovers is an account of his uncle’s last days, which
revolved around Kusum and her son Fokir, who are portrayed as the victims of eviction from the island of Morichjhapi. Ghosh weaves together two temporal narratives: one unfolding through Nirmals’s journals recounting the Morichjhapi episode that happened 28 years earlier and the second through Piya’s expedition, to study the threatened Gangetic River dolphins. The juxtaposition of these two narratives highlights the problems and issues of wilderness conservation and its related social costs in areas populated by the socially and economically disprivileged both in the past and the present. Water is of special significance in Hindu mythology. Water is chiefly associated with fertility, immortality, place, creation and the feminine. Running water is deemed sacred in Indian mythology. According to the Rig Veda, the river is a continuation of the divine waters that flow from heaven to earth. Mythology has it that when the Ganges descended from the heavens, so mighty were its currents that it threatened to drown the earth itself. Shiva anticipating the deluge captured the river in his dreadlocks. It is only when the river nears the sea that it untangles into a thousand strands forming a vast archipelago of the Sunderbans. The water that shelters tigers, crocodiles and snakes and nurtures the mangrove tree also protects the area from large-scale deforestation and even frequent natural calamities like storms and typhoons.

**Nectar in the Sieve-Eco critical issues:**

Kamala Markandaya’s novel Nectar in a Sieve (1954) describes the female protagonist Rukmani’s attempt to retrieve and revive elements of her family’s “rural life and a strong sense of rootedness to their land. Both, she and her husband toil on the land and have a special sense of belonging to it. However, their sole dependency on this piece of land for survival is also a cause of their poverty. The relationship between land and Rukmini becomes an important insight into understanding Rukmini’s sense of belonging to her rural environment. The very beginning of the novel focuses the relationship between Rukmini, the land and her rural environment. This is how Rukmani recalls her early married days: „While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?“ (Markandaya 8). Rukmini associates her husband’s praise for her beauty with the beauty that she sees in her fields. However, this harmony with nature that she associates her rural life with is extremely short lived. Very soon modern technology which takes man away
from nature and ultimately completely destroys their relationship with nature enters the life of Rukmini’s family. The tannery symbolizes of modernity. It transforms both, the environment and the economic conditions of the village. It also brings about a drastic change in the relationships between the villagers. While Kunthi is glad about the tannery, Rukmani sees it as a threat to the village life. The Tannery became the main factor for the loss of her three sons. The tannery helped Arjun, Thambi, and Raja to deal with the dire poverty that they were struggling with. While it created employment for them, it also took them away from their family members, thus, degrading the importance of their family life. This oft-quoted passage from the novel is seen to romanticize the relationship that Rukmani has with her land and to nature. The quote highlights that for a peasant woman, happiness consists of bare necessities at the elemental level made up largely of food, clothes, shelter and the idyllic beauty of the countryside (Srivastava, 1998). Nature, the sun and the beauty of the green fields appear as Rukmani’s source of well-being. Two other themes emerge from the quote above: the symbolism of grains/seeds and women’s sexuality. Grains and seeds represent the overriding symbol for life itself in Nectar in a Sieve. When Rukmani tends to her garden and plans pumpkin seeds, she marvels at the life concealed within each of the seeds she sows, thinking that their growth to me was constant wonder—from the time the seed split and the first green shoots broke through, to the time when the young buds and fruit began to form. ...it seemed to me that...each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf for safekeeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch or sight. With each tender seedling that unfurled it small green leaf to my eager gaze, my excitement would rise and mount; winged, wondrous. (Markandaya, 2002).According to Beth Zeleny, “Markandaya implicitly connects woman and landscape through her recurring use of seed imagery. ...As giver and nurturer and endure of life, woman participates in the cycle of life as seed, then seedling, which ultimately becomes part of the soil that supports future seed” (Zeleny, 1997). Here, the biological role of procreation (reproduction) is intimately linked to Rukmani, land and seeds. Procreation is seen to be a critical role for a woman in Rukmani’s society. A woman who fails to conceive early in her marriage may be renounced by her husband, as Ira is later on in the novel. Here, the claim that women are closer to nature rests on the premise of women bringing forth life from their bodies, undergoing the pleasures and pains of pregnancy, childbirth and nursing. In a social sense, childrearing and domestic caretaking have kept women close to the hearth and thus
closer to nature. Cultural Eco feminists celebrate the relationship between women and nature by reviving ancient pre-patriarchal rituals centred on goddess worship, the moon and linking this to the female reproductive system.

**CONCLUSION:**

Ecocriticism is the combination of ecology and expressions of the theory. It seeks to inquire into its reach and studies the interdependence of man and nature. The study is a cautionary warning to mankind that the exploitation of nature over a period of time will lead to an outburst of nature. Nature imageries have been used by many writers to express the desires, shortcomings and emotions of their characters. Ecocriticism shares with critical animal studies an interest in redefining humans’ relations to other species. But whereas animal studies have privileged the social, cognitive, and emotive abilities of higher animals and humans’ consciously perpetrated violence against them, ecocritics have tended to focus on systemic and often unintentional damages to other species, including a wide range of both animals and plants. These two approaches converge in some cases, but they conflict in those where ecocritics accept violence to individual animals or species in the interest of maintaining ecosystem functioning.
References


