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Ecology In Indian English Poetry

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Abstract :

The world of literature while dealing with beauty and power of nature always painted 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.

Nature has been the subject of different forms of art and its treatment, particularly in poetry .The Indian poets like keki N Daruwalla,Sarojini Naidu, A.K.Ramanujan ,Dilip Chitre and many more have celebrated different aspects of nature for different purposes and from different perspectives. Their treatment of nature points out how nature acquires different interpretations and meanings. Sometimes it appears as a divine spirit, a holy mother and friend of man and the other hand ; it plays the role of a violent force that acts as a supernatural agency to punish human beings for their wrong deeds. In whatever form it appears, nature forms a prominent part of thematic as well as artistic elements in poetic expressions. Different elements of nature including river ,sky ,plants, animals, and creatures often acquire symbolic significance that awards complexity to poetic creations and enrich their texture. contemporary Indian English Poetry is marked with a Eco conscious attitude and perspective which appeals our globalised minds and even warn us from upcoming calamities due to destruction of nature. The paper seeks to explore select poets in Indian English literature and their work from an ecocritical perspective.

Key Words : Ecology , Eco criticism , Symbolism ,Nature

Introduction

In contemporary Indian English Poetry, the treatment of nature marks a noteworthy presence in spite of contemporary socio cultural and political issues emerging against highly capital oriented, technical world. Writers of this age consciously painting the nature through their pen to make the world aware about the nature . It appears as a prominent concern in the poetry of commonly called eco-conscious writers who concentrate on the evil and destruction of nature.

Nature and literature are closely related with each other .We find this utmost

In the works of many poets and writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today this intimate relationship between the nature and social world is being analyzed and emphasized everywhere. The literary critic tries to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers in their works. In this context two terms have

become very important today – ecology and ecocriticism.

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With time, however, these ecosystems have been continuously affected due to increasing population and interference of mankind.

Ecology relatively a new science, deals with the various principles which govern such relationships between organisms and environment. 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. Ecocriticism is the interrelationship between literature and the environment, about how the environment is reflected in literature. The paper seeks to explore select poets in Indian English literature and their work from an ecocritical perspective.

Although there has been many poems

Many writers of Indian English literature deals with the nature. There is an aesthetic appreciation of nature or a philosophical and mystical attitude towards nature. The paper makes an ecological analysis of select Indian English poems to present the general deterioration of the earth's environment.

Nature has been the subject of different forms of art and its treatment, particularly in poetry. The poets like William Wordsworth, P.B.Shelley, Robert Frost and many more have celebrated different aspects of nature for different purposes and from different perspectives. Their treatment of nature points out how nature acquires different interpretations and meanings. Sometimes it appears as a divine spirit, a holy mother and friend of man and the other hand ; it plays the role of a violent force that acts as a supernatural agency to punish human beings for their wrong deeds. In whatever form it appears, nature forms a prominent part of thematic as well as artistic elements in poetic expressions. Different elements of nature including river ,sky ,plants, animals, and creatures often acquire symbolic significance that awards complexity to poetic creations and enrich their texture. contemporary Indian English Poetry is marked with a Eco conscious attitude and perspective which appeals our globalised minds and even warn us from upcoming calamities due to destruction of nature.

Nature in Keki N. Daruwall's Poetry-

Nature and landscapes occupy a vital place among the themes of Daruwalla's poetry. Unification of the nature and human passion together is striking feature of his poetry. Keki N. Daruwalla has written many poems on places with utmost power and vivid imagery. He is called as a poet of landscapes. Many romantic poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly and Indian poets like Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Arun Kolatkar, and Daruwalla also took many symbols and images from nature and landscape. Daruwalla's sense of landscape is not just presenting the beauty of the places, but it also brings out the bare reality of the environment. He translates the picture of landscapes in words with his emotional, intellectual and moral response to his readers. He quotes the words of the poet to assert his preoccupation with landscapes, "My poems are rooted in landscape, which anchors the poem. The landscape is not merely there set to the sense but to lead to an illumination, it should be the eye of the spiral, I try that poetry relates to the landscape, both on physical, and on the plane of the spirit" (*Two Decades of Indian Poetry* 21). "Mandwa," is an excellent poem on landscape and seascape. Through various images and symbols, he portrays the nature. The season in the coastal area

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was summer, the sun was scorching and it was like “an egg-yolk frying in the sky.” And the coastal area was arrayed with fish-scales, “The beach white with fish-scales.” Daruwalla puts all these things very beautifully in his poem,

Mostly when I arrive at places

it is winter. Here it isn't.

The sea pants, the islands smoulder,

the sun is an egg-yolk frying in the sky.

And so to this anointed strip o the beach white with fish-scales,

girdled by islands that seem to float like pieces of a broken carafe. (191)

“Boat-Ride along the Ganga” is a poem on the other side of the reality of the river Ganges. For the Hindus, Ganga is a mother, divinity, life giver, and river of salvation. However, the Zoroastrian poet, Daruwalla, views it differently and states the sad reality of the river. On the banks of the river, he finds death, disease and staleness. Through the lines of the poem, he utters his embarrassment to see things in the river and its banks, while he is riding upstream a motorboat, with a boat rider, at dusk, he states

Slowly the ghat-amphitheatre unfolds

Like a diseased nocturnal flower in a dream

That opens its petals only at dusk.

Palm-leaf parasols sprouting like freak-mushrooms

Brood over platforms that are empty. (97)

He expresses his indifference with the words of panda and the things which he happens to see while rowing, “I listen avidly to his legend-talk/ striving to forget what I changed to see: / the sewer-mouth trained like a cannon / on the river's flank” (97). These lines show his sense of uneasiness and disenchantment. It may be due to his religious background, or misunderstanding of Hindu beliefs and rituals or his ignorance. Bruce King writes that, he seldom appears at ease among the passivity, fatalism and rituals of Hindu culture (as qtd. in R.A. Singh 82)

Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Naidu's concept of nature is also tinged with an innate bent of romanticism and renaissance ideals. She is the keen perceiver of the inherent aestheticism of Nature. The colourful Indian landscape with its 'crimson gulmohars', 'champa boughs', 'lotus buds', cassia woods and 'boughs of tamarind', with its wild forests and a variety of animals and birds, 'water-lily pools', rivers and hills thrill her with ecstatic delights. For her 'a thing of beauty is a joy forever'. Just like Wordsworth, she delights in Nature and seems to be inspired by the sights and sounds of beautiful surroundings around her. All this finds a full-fledged expression in her poems. In her poems, she not only renders but also recreates

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magnificently the beauty of life and nature, the aspects of love within these natural surroundings and the exquisite rhythm in movement and music of Nature. She is fascinated by the sights and sounds, colours and odours of the wonderful and vivacious Nature. “She has a keen sense of observation and her fine sensibility responds more emotionally than intellectually to the sense impressions from nature” (Nair 99). Escape from the Mundane Realities of Life: “Village Song” Nature offers her a kind of escape from the mundane realities of life. Her nature poems are romantic effusions of varied aspects of nature. One such poem is the “Village Song” where we find a glimpse of an idealized life of peaceful surroundings and sensuous manifestations of glorious Nature. The girl child in the poem seems to be “disgusted by the false shows and boastful claims, the fever and fret of life” around her and “finds peace and joys in the sanctuary of Nature” (Kumar 96). She seems enchanted by the mystical world of fairies and nature as she tells her mother:

O mother mine! to the wild forest I am going Whereupon the champa boughs,

the champa buds are blowing

To the koel-hunted river – isles where lotus lilies glisten

The voices of the fairy folk are calling me, O listen! (Singh 49)

For the girl-child, the lure of forest-call is more powerful than all the glittering externals of materialistic life. The world of fairies of the forest and the world of nature is full of ecstatic delights even than the real world. For her, the sounds of nature, of “the forest notes where forest streams are falling” are sweeter than that of the cradle or cradle-songs. This poem reminds us of W. B. Yeats, a poet of escapism and his poem “The Stolen Child” which describes the ‘fairy’ world and where fairies are calling away a human child.

“Summer Woods” Sarojini Naidu’s another poem also strikes the same note of escapism. In the poem, the persona has not only become “tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors” and “sick of strife and song and festivals and fame” but she also longs “for wind-blown canopies of crimson gulmohars!” and “to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame”. She craves for freedom from the “toil and weariness, the praise and prayers of men” and desires to escape her sufferings as she says:

O let us fling all care away and lie alone and dream

‘Neath tangled boughs of tamarind and molsari and neem

And bind our brows with jasmine sprays to play on carren flutes

To wake the slumbering serpent-kings among the banyan roots. (Singh 53)

The whole poem gives us a vivid picture of various ecological aspects of nature such as trees (like cassia-woods, tamarind, molsari, neem and banyan), flowers (like crimson gulmohars, jasmine and water-lily), animals (like serpent-kings and golden panthers) and birds (like

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koels) and of pools and rivers as in the following lines: “And roam at fall of eventide along the river’s brink/And bathe in water-lily pools where golden panthers drink” (53). These lines present the scenic natural beauty of the evening time. This poem reveals the beauties of nature that arouse in our hearts feelings and emotions that are at once romantic and mystical. Naidu regarded Nature as a refuge from the cares of human life though she is no Nature-mystic, unlike Wordsworth nor does she subscribe to the Keatsian sensuous apprehension of Nature.

The poems of Sarojini Naidu thus in a way pay a kind tribute to mother Earth instilling in us a deep reverence for the ecological treasure of India. Her nature poetry is a mosaic of melodious sounds, vibrant colours, natural odours and “vernal breezes” of fragrance that remind us of Keats, Wordsworth, W.B. Yeats and Pre-Raphaelites. Her nature poems such as “The Village Song”, “Summer Woods”, “The Quest”, etc. have two predominant traits – a sensuous appreciation of the beauty of the opulent Nature and an unmistakable ability to express vaaspects of nature in a most picturesque manner through the use of metaphors, similes and symbols. A silken fabric of sensuous nature-images runs through her poems and various natural elements have been so magnificently intertwined and interwoven in the fabric of her poems that “a network of exotic combinations of two or more sense impressions” (Nair 100) tend to emerge before our eyes.

A.K.Ramanujan-

The poems of A.K Ramanujan are deeply rooted in this Indianness. His poems respond to the subtle nuances of nature. His poems abound in ecological wisdom .. Deeply rooted in Indian culture and tradition, Ramanujan’s Poems violate the anthropocentric culture of the West. They appreciate and respond in a delicate or subtle way to the impressions and influences of nature. Ecological sensibility in Ramanujan’s poetry cannot be restricted to any particular concept. It shows varied responses to nature. Nature is the soul of his poems. He is aware of the mysterious link between man and the environment. In the poems like Ecology. A Game of Chess., A Minor Sacrifice, Snakes, the Striders, The Black Hen etc we find the kinship with the animal, vegetal and mineral worlds..The idea of oneness of all creation is expressed in many of the poems of A.K.Ramanujan. His metaphors are taken from Indian myths and folktales. Hinduism has a holistic outlook. In Ramanujan’s poetry, the sacred, men, animals, plants and microbes stand in relation to each other. The language of Ramanujan’s poetry is symbolic and full of images like trees, mountains, birds, animals and water. Ramanujan is also concerned about environmental devastation and cruelty to animals. He exhorts us to protect nature. He sympathises and empathises with nature

Dilip Chitre

His poem " The Felling of the Banyan Tree" shows his excessive interest in ecology and his feeling for nature. Dilip chitre is essentially a product of modern age.He has witnessed aforestation, technological

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development, urbanization, progress in science and its effects on both-Nature and human beings.

In “The felling of the Banyan Tree” the narrator's house is situated on a hill. His father tells his tenants to vacate their houses. The narrator's house is surrounded by them. All the vacated houses were destroyed one by one and there remained the only house of the narrator and many trees. There was a huge Banyan tree of 200 years old having long association with the house. But the father decided to cut all trees. The process of destruction, it is interesting to note here, is in the middle of the natural phenomenon. Secondly, Dilip Chitre used the word “house” instead of ”home ” the connotation of which is known to all . Thirdly, the attitude of “Old” generation evident by grandmother's statement, is remarkable. The grandmother has always invoked love of Nature. She used to say that trees are sacred and to chop them off is the greatest crime. But the narrator's father has massacred them all. All types of trees - the sheoga, oudumber, neem- were cut down. But the huge banyan tree stood like a problem whose roots were deeper than his father's attachment to the land. Finally his father ordered to remove or cut down the tree.

But, behind the apparent simple theme lies the poet’s deep concern for ecology. Not only the houses of the tenants were brought down, but all the trees surrounding the poet’s houses were cut down one by one. The poet’s grandmother protested against this cutting down of trees:

Trees are sacred my grandmother used to say

Felling them is a crime but he massacred them all(05-06)

Since the poet’s writing is essentially imbued with his culture, a reading of his poem also gives an idea about his religious worldview about his culture, environment and ecology. To understand the grandmother’s aversion at the cutting down of trees one has to understand her cultural and religious background; the concept of ‘sacred’ in Hinduism--- sacred species, sacred grooves and sacred landscapes. These religious and cultural norms link Man to Nature.

Nature has always proved to be stronger than man. It has often shown its power by controlling manpower through natural calamities like famine, drought, flood, earthquake etc. Man’s life and nature are so interlinked that it is not possible for human beings to separate themselves from its influence. Our irresponsible actions cause irreparable damages to nature. This is how the chain of ecosystem works in which everything is related to each other and therefore affects each other . Thus the concern for the environment and ecology as presented in these poems not only mirrors our personal and cultural attitudes towards the environment, it also gives a message among the masses towards the preservation of nature, environment and ecology.

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