

Ecological Implications in the Poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Gieve Patel: An Ecocritical Approach to Indian English Poetry

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Abstract: *Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature and has been a rich contribution to the world of literature. "Indian poets writing in English have succeeded to nativize or indianize English in order to reveal typical Indian situations" (Wikipedia). An ecocritical approach entails how we look at the literary works with special reference to the depiction of nature and environment. This research paper tries to study the ecological implications in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Gieve Patel dealing with their sensitivity towards nature and the environment. The aim of the study is to evaluate how their poetry reflects the eco consciousness in broader sense of the term. It is not merely the aesthetic beauty of nature and the landscape the poets are concerned in the poetry, but they are more concerned with the deterioration of ecology due to man's actions. Their poetry serves as an eye-opener to show the man a true picture that he is just a part of nature and not the master of it.*

Keywords: ecology, ecocriticism, environment, Indian English poets, landscape

It is obvious that the literary works produced in India has a special place for nature. The literature of ancient times or the religious texts has treated nature whether it be the Biblical Garden of Eden or the forest where Lord Rama was exiled. It is observed that trees and wilderness have played the crucial role of the provider, protector and destroyer. A closer look at the green writing of Indian authors will reveal many hidden aspects of Indian landscape. Apart from delineating the aesthetic beauty and power of nature, many Indian English poets and writers have started depicting the concern for ecology with an alarming threat of disaster due to nature exploitation by the humans. Many ecocritics draw attention to this aspect of environmentalism where the concern for ecology is mentioned in the literature being known as Ecocriticism. It is a systematic study of the relationship between literature and ecology or environment. The term 'ecocriticism' was first used by William Rueckert in his essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' (1978). But even before that, there were practices of nature worship in India. The Indian tradition and culture give prime importance to worshiping the objects of nature and the animals considering them holy. But it was Nirmal Selvamony who introduced the course titled 'Tamil poetics' at Madras Christian College in 1980 and with his endeavour, we witness the beginning of ecocritical studies in India.

Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature and has been a rich contribution to the world of literature. "Indian poets writing in English have succeeded to nativize or indianize English in order to reveal typical Indian situations. [1] Many Indian English poets like Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, Keki N. Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre, Gieve Patel and many more have delineated nature and environment in their poetry. Natural elements like the rivers, the sky, hills, animals, and other creatures keep coming in their poetry as a form of their poetic experiences. The close study of the contemporary Indian English Poetry brings out the nuances

of eco-conscious warning the humans to witness the catastrophes due to annihilation of nature. The paper seeks to explore the ecological implications in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan and Gieve Patel.

The growth of life on earth is not possible without the ecological balance and therefore, the natural objects play a crucial role. For instance, the importance of trees on the earth. They provide us oxygen to breath, foods to fill our stomach and shelter to live that can make life convenient. Each and every living creature on the earth serve in the ecosystem being a part of the food chain. The disturbance in the ecosystem by way of overexploitation of nature and the natural resources can lead to the disaster in the entire ecology. Literature of today has started addressing the environmental issues with an intension to bring awareness about the environmental damage. Eco-criticism has emerged as a new branch of "the study of relation between literature and physical environment" (Glotfelty Cheryll xviii). The writers of green studies dealing with ecological consciousness aim at bring the ecological consciousness among the people regarding the fact that Earth is losing its health because of the abuse of nature by the humans.

The role of ecocriticism is to helps the humans to see nature from a bio-centric view to recognize the inevitability of nature for the sustenance of the living organism on the earth. Indian English poetry, for instance, throws the light on the unavoidability of the human-nature relationship. During the pre-Independence era, Toru Dutt wrote poetry with Indian sensibilities which exhibited her consciousness for environment. Her works "Sita", "The Lotus", and "Baugmaree" reflects how she loved nature. Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" is the best example of how she cherished for childhood memories associated with the tree in the following lines:

LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, intended deep scars,

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Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live (Our Casuarina Tree by Toru
Dutt-Poem Hunter).

Trees are worshipped as they are sacred and their importance is seen for the humans to live on the earth. As far as the Indian mythology is concerned, especially among the Tamil Brahmins, the neem and peepal trees can be reunited in wedlock and it will bring prosperity to worshipers of them. Moreover, the women in India used to take bath early in the morning just to circumambulate these trees. Even the trees are personified. For instance, the neem is considered as a lady dreaming

...her bygone bliss,
Of the splendor of her husband in his prime,
Whom barren women had circumambulated
A hundred and eight times the week's immediate day
(Gokak 254).

Indian poets writing in English delineate the aesthetic beauty of nature but they do not miss the opportunity to exhibit the dark reality of the exploitation of nature and animals by the humans. In the poetry of Nissim Ezekeil (1924-2004) we can see the treatment of love, loneliness and human foibles. For instance, the poems "Squirrel" and "Sparrows" show nature from eco-critical point of view. According to Suresh Fredrick "Both the squirrel and sparrows are animals that live close to human beings. . . . But human culture devalues these animals, making symbiosis impossible" (Frederick 139). If you read Keki N Daruwalla's poem "A Boat ride along the Ganga" from an eco-critical viewpoint, you will come to know that only man is accountable for polluting the holy river. Another remarkable example to consider is to read A. K. Ramanujan's "Snakes" from his first collection *The Strider's* to observe how the persona in the poem is afraid of the snake and the fear compels him to kill it in order to feel safe in the woods.

My night full of ghosts from a sadness
in a play, my left foot listens to my right footfall,
a clockwork clicking in the silence
within my walking.
The clickshod heel suddenly strikes
and slushes on a snake: I see him turn,
the green white of his belly
measured by bluish nodes, a water-bleached lotus-stalk
plucked by a landsman hand. Yet panic rushes
my body to my feet, my spasms wring
and drain his fear and mine. I leave him sealed,
a flat-head whiteness on a stain.
Now
frogs can hop upon this sausage rope,
flies in the sun will mob the look in his eyes,
and I can walk through the woods. (Snakes by A. K.
Ramanujan-POETRY FOUNDATION) "

The poet remarks that the fear of snakes dominates him throughout his life. If you read the poem, you will notice his remark, "No, it does not happen when I walk through the wood". The poet mentions that this fear dominates him even when he is walking through museums or libraries. Moreover,

the poet mentions that the book of yellow vein, as well as yellow amber would frequently remind him of the snakes. There is nothing to get feared from any creatures, as they do not harm anyone but the poet's mind is always obsessed with the fear of snakes and ultimately kills it to be safe.

When it comes to making the protest against the abuse of environment, the name of an eminent poet, Gieve Patels taken with due respect who is also a playwright and medical practitioner and a supporter of 'Green Movement' which is a group of writers with their intention to protect the environment. According to an eminent critic C. V. Venugopal, "The poet's total social commitment, his concern for the oppressed, his ire at discriminations, above all his love for anything living, make his poetry stand apart" (Venugopal 184). Patel's poetry entails the ecological implications and man's approach towards nature. His notable poem "On Killing a Tree" poses as a plea for the readers to protect the environment. The poet mentions that the existence of the tree which cannot be eliminated by humans with an ease. It is not an easy task to 'kill' a tree as its roots are rooted deep down to the soil. The tree has grown strongly by consuming water, sunlight, and oxygen for years.

Will do it. It has grown
Slowly consuming the earth,
Rising out of I, feeding
Upon its crust, absorbing
Years of sunlight, air, water (On Killing A Tree Poem
by Gieve Patel-Poem Hunter).

Through this poem, the poet sarcastically mentions that the modern man's approach towards nature is cruel and unacceptable. And therefore, the poet is of an opinion that killing a tree is not merely an act of chopping the tree down, but it is like killing a person. Similarly, in the poem "Felling a Banyan Tree" Dilip Chitre mentions that it is not merely an act of felling a tree with an axe, but it is an inhuman act in which the nests of the birds and the abode of many living creatures living on the tree lose their home. It is an inhuman act of making someone to be deprived of their abode.

It is to be noted that trees provide oxygen which is inevitable for the existence of humans as well as other living beings on the earth. The poetry of Indian English poets makes the reader aware that "we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support systems" (Glottfelty Cheryll xviii-xix). It is the high time for us to preserve nature and protect environment for the betterment of the next generations to come.

An ecological consciousness demands to have the impersonal relationship with nature and environment for the better co-existence. All living and non-living beings are connected with each other in the ecological system. An array of poetry written in India during different periods, from varied viewpoints and tones have the same message to convey that it is the need of an hour to form the harmonious relationship between man and nature.

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