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Ecocriticism in Indian English fiction

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Abstract

Ecocriticism as a branch talks about interconnection between nature and culture, specifically the culture artifacts of language and literature. The word “ecocriticism” first appeared in William Rueckert's essay “Literature and Ecology: An experiment in ecocriticism” in 1978. However, it was only in 1990s that ecocriticism emerged as a separate discipline.

Keywords: Ecocriticism and Indian English fiction

Introduction

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that covers the study of subjects like science, literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, etc and attempts to study the attitude of mankind towards nature. It attempts to explore the expressions of environment in literary texts and theoretical discourse.

In many literary works in English, nature has been a primary issue. Colonialism has been a significant factor in the devastation of environment worldwide and for long people felt that nature was some sort of never ending source. In Indian English fiction, too, there are many that reflect this theme in them. There are many authors who use it as central theme while others use it as secondary to narrative. In this paper I would attempt to understand ecocriticism through Indian English fiction.

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 novel 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.

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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. 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.

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 novelist, Amitav Ghosh, has also tried to show the value of eco-balance. *The Hungry Tide* is the master piece of Amitav Ghosh. 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.

Conclusion

To sum up, as a distinctive approach to the practice literary criticism, ecocriticism gives increased attention to literary representatives of nature and is sensitive to interdependencies that ground the author, character or work

in the natural system. This approach shifts critical focus from social relations toward natural relationships and views the individual as a member of ecosystem. It values highly the 'literary sense of place' not as setting but as an essential expression of bonding with or alienation from a specific natural context.

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