

Environmental Concerns in Select Regional Novels Translated in English

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Abstract: Literature has the ability to portray environmental issues in order to raise awareness and provide appropriate solutions to these concerns. At present environmental concerns are manifested in the unprecedented degradation of the planet's biodiversity so understanding the gravity and urgency of the deepening climate crisis is all the more important. Indian literature sheds light on the life-altering dangers of natural disasters even before 'ecocriticism' as genres became part of our literary pursuits explores these issues in its work and seeks to speak out for environmental protection, which plays an important role in protecting the environment. In addition to locating the natural world in literary works, environmentalists advocate change. This shift is being driven by the environmental justice movement, questioning the role of privilege in shaping environmental ideologies. In India, the dynamics of rapid industrialization and technological development have given rise to a wave of environmental justice movements such as Chipko Movement, Apiko Movement, Bishnoi Movement, Silent Valley protests and Narmada Bachao Andolan. Works surrounding themes of environmental protection and the environment are mainstream. Popular authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Ramachandra Guha and Vandana Shiva have made a noteworthy contribution through their influential writings. India also has a rich history of regional environmental literature. Unfortunately, the regional poets and writers remain relatively obscure. These novels are limited to the original language and are rarely translated. The research article proposes a study of environmental issues in the selected regional language novels translated into English *The Upheaval* by Pundalik Naik, *Dweep* by Na D'Souza, *The Book of a Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi and *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph.

1 INTRODUCTION

The word 'eco' has its origin grounded in the Greek root of the word 'oikos' which etymologically means household or earth and was coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866 and the word 'logy' from 'logos' which translates to logical discourse. Ecology is the scientific study of the relationships between living organisms, including plants, animals, and microorganisms, and their physical and biotic environments. It seeks to understand how these organisms interact with one another and with their surroundings, as well as how these interactions influence the distribution, abundance, and diversity of life on Earth.

Arne Ness and George Sessions have discussed a significant research article by Jelica Tosic to elucidate on the attempts of ecocriticism to bring attention back to acknowledging the well-being and growth of non-

human life forms on Earth and serve as a reminder of their intrinsic value. Whether or not a means of gain for humans, this intrinsic value is intimately tied to the richness and diversity of life on planet Earth. Human actions should be intentional and refrain from diminishing this richness and diversity unless vital needs necessitate such actions. While promoting the growth of human life and culture, it's imperative to acknowledge that a significant reduction in the human population's impact on nature, is essential for the growth and sustenance of non-human life forms. Presently, excessive human interference is leading to fast and irreversible deterioration of nature, necessitating policy alterations. These policy changes, with profound impacts on economic, technological, and ideological structures, have the potential to create a vastly different future from the current one. The core of this ideological shift lies in the appreciation of life, departing from an

unsustainable pursuit of ever-increasing standards of living.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The term ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his notable critical work "Literature and Ecology: Experiments in Ecocriticism". In his work, Rückert states that ecocriticism draws on environmental or ecological values and uses them for research writing. In his book "The Environmental Imagination", ecocriticism is defined as: "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment in a spirit committed to environmental practice" (Buel 430).

Cheryl Glotfelty the first professor of literature and the environment was the pioneer of ecocriticism in the United States of America. In her book *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) she defined Ecocriticism as -"The study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as Feminist Criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious- perspective, and Marxist Criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to literary studies". This work offers a new perspective to the global ecological crisis and paves a way for scholars to view the intersection of literature, culture and ecology from a fresh lens. Her work is a widely read and cited source of ecocriticism since its publication and serves as a foundational text for the scholars of literature, environment and culture.

Grotfelty and Harold Fromm introduced Rückert's work in their edition of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996), this played a vital role in the emergence of ecocriticism and its acceptance as a principle. Meanwhile, Fredericko Waage wrote *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources* in 1985, in which 19 scientists presented their knowledge about the environment and its reflection in literature. To further develop this theoretical perspective, Harold Fromm organised a special session at the MLA conference in 1991 titled *Ecocriticism: The Greetings of Literary Studies*. Another important event was the American Literature Association's conference titled "American Nature Writing- New Approaches."

In 1992, at the annual meeting of the Western Literary Association a new association was founded - Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE). The main purpose of this association is to support new nature writings, traditional and to encourage innovative intellectual

approaches to environmental literature. It is noteworthy that ecocriticism has developed almost miraculously in the decades since its birth. Lawrence Bull has been influential in the development of ecocriticism, and his book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1996) examines the work of Henry David Thoreau through the lens of ecocriticism.

He elaborates further on the early stages of ecocriticism in *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and the Literary Imagination* (2005), seeing it as a "first wave" of the criticism movement majorly focused writing concerned with nature, ecology and the natural history of planet Earth. This "first wave" formed the basis of the "second wave" of ecocriticism, often also referred to as revisionist ecocriticism. Second-wave ecocritics were largely concerned with environmental justice than their predecessors. His critique of the social order evaluated urban planned cities and regions, like the natural environment, to be on the same pedestal in terms of seriousness (Buell 22). Buell ultimately acknowledges that in the western academic context, ecocriticism is often only treated as environmental criticism (Buell 28).

Eco-critics exhort people to acknowledge the need to alter their own behaviours and perspectives and take the required steps to stop ecological deterioration and advance environmental conservation at present. Further, the author also expresses his view that the study of literature must be combined with other academic fields.

There are key elements that an ecocritic will invariably encounter while conducting research. These concepts would always be present when Eco critically analyses a piece of literature, looking for answers to questions arising from the theoretical framework of ecocriticism in those texts. They are "environmental" and "ecological citizenship," "care ethics" or "the ethics of care" (which may or may not be associated with ecological citizenship), and "ecoliteracy" as a whole.

Ecocriticism is heavily influenced by Western ideology, but is deeply rooted in ancient Indian theories and texts. The terminology might have been recent of about three-four decades ago, but the theme has been ancient. Ancient Indian literature is full of ideas about praising nature. In India, there has been a history of nature worship since the Vedic era. A people's collective poetic response to the wonder and awe of existence is captured in the Rig Vedic hymns. They are poetry that extols the earth's beauty and the forces that can be seen through nature's brilliant veil.

God was worshipped in nature. The sun was revered as a divinity. Indra, the rain god, was elevated to the position of king. All the natural elements were revered as deities, including the sea god Varun, the wind god Vayu, the soil god Prithvi, the fire god Agni, and the sky god Akash. In religion, even the planets were given prominence. The Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh—became increasingly revered over time as the Creator, the Preserver, and the Destroyer. Shiva is linked to scorpions, snakes, and other insects. In addition to Narsimha (the lion), Vishnu is also revered as a crocodile, fish, and turtle. The gods of wealth Laxmi and Durga are represented by the owl and Singh (the lion), respectively.

Indian classical texts, epics and Upanishads include eco-friendly practices, care for nature, reverence for nature, nourishment, and nature conservation. Valmiki's *The Ramayan* has a subtitle: *Book of Wilderness*. Ram, who is supposed to be Vishnu in human form, had a dynamic relationship with nature throughout his exile there. His association with Hanuman (representing monkeys), Jamvant (symbolising a bear), Marich (associated with a deer), Laxman (linked to Sheshnag, the serpent), Kakhushund (correlating with a crow), Garud (depicting a hawk), and Nandi illustrate the deep bond between humans and their empathetic understanding of animals' emotions. The concept of wildlife preservation is an inherent part of Indian culture. We are forbidden from destroying them because we worship peepal, tulsi, bargad, awnla, and use flowers, grass, leaves, belpatra, akauadhatura, chandan, and many other things. The *Panchtantra* teaches youngsters values and ethics via the use of animal fables.

The writers of Indian English literature likewise expressed a tremendous passion for nature and natural objects. They accurately captured nature while maintaining a keen awareness of it. When conveying their ideas about the social environment, authors like R. K. Narayan, Amitav Ghosh, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Ruskin Bond, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, and Indira Goswami have referenced nature and its aspects.

Indian fiction, especially regional fiction, often confronts political discourse in the context of environmental degradation, suggesting that India alone cannot influence the outcome of the crisis. The novel chosen in my research article provides perspective and engagement on the subject by showing how closely related social and ecological realities are.

The biggest problems in the environment, from water pollution to global warming, from land and soil

degradation to human security and migration, arise from the same human activities. Now looking at the big problems of the environment, more and more people are taking action to protect the environment and telling others about environmental problems; A large body of evidence shows the negative impact of human activities on ecosystems.

Most recent literature deals with environmental problems. Over the past decade, namely 2020, cultural and environmental critics may ask why writers have not engaged with themes of nature and the environment. This shift in attention has had a huge impact on the climate change discourse in literary works, with the hopes of having a personal reaction initiated thus helping create better environmental awareness among the public, ultimately encouraging better environmental policies and policies.

A masterpiece in Konkani, a novel written by Pundalik N. Naik, *Acchev* was published in 1977, and translated in English by Vidya Pai titled *The Upheaval*. In this novel industrialization results in the robbing the land of its precious flora and fauna. Naik's work effectively deals with the anxieties and problems in the lives of poor peasants in India in general and Goa in particular. In his article "Mining Activity as a Self-invited Disaster of Man in The Upheaval", Akshay A. Yardi stated that, "The Upheaval is a tragic story of a village by name Kolamba. It has three veins running through. First, the novel narrates the degradation of a society; second, it shows the fall of a man due to his greed for wealth; and the third, it speaks of the cultural degradation too" (102). When the protagonist Pandari, decides to work in the mine, the farmer's helplessness becomes apparent as well as the culture of their indigenous community is severely impacted as the mode of occupation changes. But ultimately, we witness how one wrong choice by Pandhari rooted in his appetite for money, brings down annihilation on the family. Pandhari was not the only one to work in the mill, several other cultivators chose to work at the mines for further diurnal stipend. These changes sluggishly set in a vicious circle of events that take place in the village. As the story proceeds, we see the villagers no longer celebrate their traditional observances and carnivals. Abu is an old man and worked for the well-being of the people of the village. Savlo Master is an academy school teacher in Kolamba. Both Abu and Savlo Master are the companion-lights of culture and good traditions for the villagers. But, the death of Abu and the exit of Savlo master from the village of Kolamba herald a series of further demeaning incidents. The academy children are dragged on to work at the mines and the womenfolk of the village

fall prey to the lust of the directors at the mines. The youngsters and adolescents take to alcohol dependence and indulge in harlotry. Nanu and Manuel are the two youthful enthusiasts who became victims of the bad habits. Not only that we also see how the women in the village lose their chastity. Pundalik Naik has not only focused upon the impacts of mining on human nature and culture but also upon the environment.

N.A. D'Souza in her short story *Dweepa*, talks about the transformation of farmers due to the construction of irrigation systems. The novella, first published as a weekly in 1970 and later translated from Kannada to Hindi by Susheela Punitha, focuses on the construction of the Linganamakki dam on the Sharavathi river in Malnad district. The main issues are the dissatisfaction of the government, its greed and most importantly the result. *Island / Dweepa* has seven episodes: Krithika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Aridhraa, Punarvasu, Pushya and Aslesha. The hero Ganapayya and his wife Nagaveni live a bad life and feel discriminated against. This causes them to feel bad towards others, become angry, and even protective of themselves. The government bears full responsibility for the untimely death and loss of Ganapaya and his family. The government did not immediately pay for his death and failed to take the necessary measures in time to save their lives.

Kolleti Jaadalu was released in Telugu by Akkineni Kutumbarao in 2020. Veteran feminist rights activist and writer Vasanth Kannabiran has skillfully translated the novel from Telugu. The story describes the trials and tribulations of people who continue their lives in Koleru, which is one of the largest lakes in India, located in Andhra Pradesh. Construction of Dams is one of the preeminent reasons for the migration and dislocation of population in India. The most targeted groups for this cause are the tribal and Dalit communities, who live in deep forests and alongside the rivers for civilization of crops. In recent past, the rapid developmental activities benefit the privileged few, while the others bear the cost.

Byadhkhanda, published in the early 90s in Bengali, is a novel that borrows its name from a section of the epic poem Abhayamanga by Mukundaram. Writer and activist Mahasweta Devi's writings always gave voice to the voiceless. The English translation of Kabikankan Mukundaram Chakrabarti's renowned medieval poem, is translated to English as *Book of the Hunter*, by Mandira Sengupta and Sagaree Sengupta. It is set in sixteenth-century medieval Bengal and draws inspiration from Chakrabarti's life. The impact of settlements and the

clearance of woods on the indigenous peoples is also depicted, in addition to the socio-political history of the time especially the Shabars, one of the indigenous hunter tribes. The awareness of the environment is increased by narratives build by these books. The novel covers topics of conservation and degradation, of wildlife, marine life, pollution and global warming. It follows the contrasting lives of two couples – a Brahman and a Shabar. The novel is a stark look at the effect of unethical and unchecked urbanisation on indigenous communities.

Aathi by Sarah Joseph who is a famous Malayalam writer is a novel from an ecological perspective. Translated in English as *Gift in Green* by Valson Thampu. In the novel, Aathi is portrayed as a timeless village, in a setting that takes on an aura of myth and mysticism. Within this village, people coexist in idyllic harmony with the natural world. However, this serenity is disrupted by the intrusion of urban and commercial influences, even leading to contamination of their aquatic environment. Yet, the novel concludes on an optimistic note, illustrating the triumph of enduring natural forces over the encroachment of modern commercial interests. Highlighting the issues faced by the people of Aathi, Sarah Joseph attempts to present certain relevant issues people face both locally and globally. It challenges the anthropological perspective and promotes ecological justice, asserting that other species should be afforded equal rights and dignity. The novel also addresses concerns related to global water politics.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Environmental preservation has become a necessity for the existence and sustenance of all living creatures. Recent scientific discoveries are posing a threat to the sustenance of the environment as well as to all living creatures. Such concerns, very naturally, have attracted the attention of critics. How to confront and address such a situation is one of the primary responsibilities of one and all. Litterateurs are no exception to it. The regional novels *The Upheaval* by Pundalik Naik, *Dweep* by N.A. D'Souza, *The Book of a Hunter* by Mahasweta Devi and *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph not only describe the hazards which pose a threat to environment but also provide probable solutions to these concerns. It also creates awareness among the younger generation that they may play their part in sustenance of the environment by promoting critical thinking skills.

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