



An Ecocritical Interpretation of Indian English Novels: *The Hungry Tide* and *Nectar in a Sieve*

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Abstract: Literature takes birth in the womb of nature. Literature deals with power and beauty of nature. However, the factor of ecology and the natural hazards in our environment that are imposed on humanity has been the centre of attraction of many writers. This ecological component is at the heart of the new field of literary theory known as Ecocriticism. Through the assessment of two Indian English novels, Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, this paper aims to analyse the role of ecocriticism in literature. Man and environment are at odds in *The Hungry Tide*. On the other hand, the novel *Nectar in a Sieve* is about the heroine Rukmani's effort to conserve and rebuild aspects of her family's rural lifestyle, as well as a strong sense of love for their land.

Keywords: nature, ecocriticism, literary theory, rural life, and conflict.

Introduction:

Ecocriticism is inter-related with nature. It is concerned with the interplay between humans and nature. Nature and human beings are intertwined since they are both dependent on one another. The relationship between literature and environment is the subject of ecocriticism. Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, Harold Fromm, Michael P. Branch, William Howarth, Simon C. Estok, Glen A. Love, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, and are some of the most well-known Ecocritics. Greenery appears in literature after the prolonged boredom of social, economical, cultural, and personal issues. Nature and environment play the role of crown in both



novels. An ecological perspective strikes our mother earth. Ecocriticism is one of the ecological movements which fights several environmental issues.

In 1978, William Rueckert coined the word "Ecocriticism" in his book *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. Ecocriticism became its own discipline in 1990. By defining the interaction between man and nature, the universe comes into being. Ecocriticism is a type of literary criticism that is known for depicting the relationship between literature and the environment. It deals not only with literature but also with science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc. It studies the attitude of mankind towards nature. Ecocriticism has expanded to include eco-culture, ecopoetics, and criticism of environmental literature. Ecocriticism is a literary analysis as well as a methodological foundation to the interaction of essence, civilization, and magical realism. It investigates the environment through both theoretical and literary sources. Literature is expressed through the language of nature.

Women and Nature Interface:

The conceptual claim that "hierarchical dualism" is the foundation of society. (Eaton and Lorentzen 2). The second empirical claim reveals that women are the first victims of environmental deterioration in the name of scientific and technical advancement because of their strong interaction with and reliance on nature. (Eaton and Lorentzen 2). The third claim is epistemological which points to the knowledge of nature.

Relationship between Literature and Nature:

In the writings of various writers and poets from various civilizations around the world, the tie between literature and nature is prominent. Nature is the subject of novels, poems, essays, and dramas. Environmental challenges have become a source of worry for knowledge and development in recent years. Literary expressions are linked to ecology and ecocriticism. The ecological imbalance, rising population, and environmental hazards are responsible for writings in literature.

Ecocriticism in Literature:

Nature is the lap of many literary writings. Colonialism is responsible for the devastation of environment. Literature portrays the image of men's attitude towards nature and thus, brings in



the change in social, cultural, and economic environments. Ecocriticism studies the relationship between man and nature and emerges itself as the branch of literary theory. Nature, images, gender, man-woman relationships, tourism, culture, feminism, and other aspects of environmental studies in literary writings have deeper implications than their literal manifestations. Man's harshness has impacted India's ecology, which stretches from the Himalayan range to the flat plains in the southward, as well as from the dynamic Sundarbans in the eastward to the arid desert in the westward. Literature cannot get rid of such harassment of human nature.

Ecocritical Point of View in *The Hungry Tide*:

This novel of Amitav Ghosh reflects India's ecological challenges. Ghosh's story depicts the interactions between the rich and the poor, the serene environment, and the plants and animals, highlighting the tragedy as well as the hypocrisy that characterized the conservation initiatives in Sundarbans. Ghosh explores the conflicts that prevail in human societies, as well as their diverse relationships in the universe and the additional aspect of environment which is modified by people. He recalls how this storm got so well-known that over thirty thousand people were murdered in 1970. One of the reasons *The Hungry Tide* is split into two parts is because of this. 'The ebb: bhata' is the first part, and 'the flood: jwar' is the second. An enormous cluster of islands exists between the land and the sea on India's easternmost coast. Some are enormous, while others are the size of sandbars. There are no boundaries between fresh and salt water, rivers and seas, or even land and water. A visionary Scotsman created a Utopian town here around the turn of the century, where people of all colours, classes, and religions might live together. The novel explores the relationships between the province, the impoverished, nature, and the natural setting. It shows all the anguish and dishonesty of the Sundarbans' discourse. It analyses the tensions that exist between human societies, their natural relationships, and the reality of nature that is always changing humans. The plot of the story revolves around two visitors to Sundarbans. Their visit must be intended to allow them access to wildlife conservation programmes. The tension between plant and animal life creates a conflict between land and sea in the Sundarbans.



Natural elements are neglected by man's violation of ecosystem in the Sundarbans. The setting of the novel is the Sundarbans, a beautiful, mesmerising, and fascinating island in the Bay of Bengal. The lives of the settlers are insecure and unpredictable. Natural perils, life-threatening situations, unrest, and tiger attacks all lurk in that region. Tidal floods pose a threat to people's lives on the island. Human beings are the puppets in nature's hands. They are subject to reciprocity laws since they cannot rule the entire cosmos. People are fighting nature, the flood, the hurricane, wild creatures, as well as the terrifying environment. The story's principal character is Piyali Roy of India, an American scientist. For the residents of the Sundarbans, the mangrove forest is the cosmos. Every year, people become separated from their companions in the dense jungle and are killed by wild animals like snakes, tigers, crocodiles, etc. Human beings try to hide themselves from voracious waves. *The Hungry Tide* explores man's ongoing fight with terrific mother-earth:

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 terrains 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 tigers, snakes and crocodiles. (Ghosh7)

The Hungry Tide gives an asymmetrical flow of time and space. Ghosh alternates between Nirmal's perspective of the Morichjhanpi incident and Kanai, Piya Roy, and Fokir's current travels. So, the adventure must be necessary for the plot and adds a complex layer to the sub-topics and plots. Thus, *The Hungry Tide* revolves around war and freedom, settlers and refugees, communication barriers, development, women trafficking, and quick changes in events and emotions. Ghosh contains people's forecasts about the nature of the Sundarbans' tides and weather. Myths are frequently portrayed in the form of songs and rhymes. The novel's moods are created by the mythic, natural, and human styles. This Ghosh piece connects human lives to ecological systems of life. Nature serves as a stark reminder of society's socioeconomic divide. This paper reflects the power of ecosystem and lives of people living in such settings.



Ghosh has a unique method of presenting the evolutionary structure of creation. His thoughts are focused with the region's natural equilibrium. *The Hungry Tide* shows us a bizarre tale of love about Fokir and Piya, two lovers. Both spend their quality time together on the river's huge lengths and in the trees. When Fokir assists the villagers to slaughter the tiger that has already threatened the villagers, Piya becomes upset and bewildered. The beloved had hoped that he would understand her beliefs and ideals. She refuses to hear Fokir's description of the tiger's condition and covers her ears. This novel examines refugee resettlement in the Morichjhanpi and Sundarbans forest reserves, as well as the delicate Man-Nature interaction. The inextricable relationship between personal experiences and the larger story of the region's ecological and environmental forces. The killing of a tiger in the story raises the subject of conservation. *The Hungry Tide* depicts nature's untamed, ferocious, and untameable character, which remains unchanged in response to human will.

To conclude *The Hungry Tide*, we may assess that nature is sympathetic to man. It is a friend, philosopher, and guide to a man. Except nature man becomes an animal. *The Hungry Tide* portrays the ecosystem of mangrove forested islands and mudflats which constantly undergo changes due to the tidal flows. Human life would be impossible to imagine without the vastness of nature. Like the mother earth, the novel also comprises of both land and water. The novel is analysed on the ecocritical study and inspires the readers. Though *The Hungry Tide* explores the hazards of the Sundarbans, which include dangerous tigers on land and terrifying crocodiles in the water, the novel's hard core is the killing of East Pakistan refugees who fled the Dandakaranya refugee camps for a better life in Morichjhanpi. The novel's reality is as follows: "The Sundarbans were an excellent choice for Ghosh's setting" (Kaur127).

Ecocriticism in *Nectar in a Sieve*:

The subtitle of the novel *A Novel of Rural India* portrays that the theme of the novel is about rural India in general and not any village in particular. *Nectar in a Sieve* narrates the conditions of poor peasants who are unable to collect the nectar (joy and comfort) of their own lives because of its failure to pass through the sieve of their poverty. The female heroine Rukmani's quest to recover and reinstate rustic aspects of her family's existence, as well as a



strong sense of love for their land, is the focus of Kamala Markandaya's novel *Nectar in a Sieve*. She and her spouse have formed a close link with the countryside. Not only love but also poverty is the lead cause of their dependency on this land for survival. Rukmani's link with land reflects her sense of belongingness to her rural surroundings. Rukmani reflects about her early marriage:

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)

Rukmani mixes her spouse's description of his wife's charm with the serenity he saw within the meadows. She says:

The air was full of the sound of the bells, and of birds, sparrows and bulbuls mainly, and sometimes the cry of an eagle, but when we passed a grove, green and leafy, I could hear mynahs and parrots. It was warm, unused to so long a jolting, I fell asleep. (Markandaya 5)

But the mingling of feminine beauty with nature is short lived and the harmony dies its premature death. The modern technology is the destroyer and devastator of such pure harmony of nature and mankind. Rukmani's life is no exception here. The tannery is a modern icon. As a result, the environment and economic position of the community have altered. The tannery is viewed from two perspectives: Kunthi welcomes it, while Rukmani observes it a danger to the villagers. Tannery becomes a sole cause of her three nice sons' deaths. Arjun, Raja, and Thambi, who are poor, receive assistance from the tannery. It gives an opportunity of employment for them and thus distracts them from family life. The romanticism of Rukmani with nature is degraded by this tannery. The novel depicts how a peasant woman's happiness and joy are found in the essentials of shelter, food, clothing, and above all, the exquisite purity of the countryside. Rukmani's heart aches with joy by the brightness, nature, and the vitality of the green fields. The image of women's sexuality is represented through the symbolism of grains /seeds. The overarching emblem for life in *Nectar in a Sieve* is grains and seeds.



Nectar in a Sieve examines domineering values via the vision of tannery. Tannery is the sole basis of environmental and women's exploitation. Markandaya introduces tannery to two social classes – workers, and landowners. Men are the epitomes of technology and development. After the introduction of tannery, there is an initiation of bullock-cart laden with stones, cement, bricks, tin-sheets, iron-rods, rope and hemp coils. The residents are compelled to labour on the tannery operation while such "evil" of progress spreads throughout the village, disrupting its agrarian lifestyle. Arjun, a young boy who is excited about the new development, makes an excellent suggestion: "They are pulling down houses around the maiden and there is a long line of bullock-carts carrying bricks" (Markandaya 27).

The tannery not only takes people's lives, but also it has a negative impact on the village's ecology and ecosystem. It changes the young generation's mindset, and they no longer desire to farm. The bucolic charm of the tranquil land gives way to the bustling city: "Not in the town, where all that was natural had long been sacrificed, but on its outskirts, one could still see the passing of the seasons" (Markandaya 117). Nature is present in the dialogues of the characters. Rukmani praises her daughter by saying that she is "a maiden (who is) like a flower" (Markandaya 51).

Rukmani is the lead character of the story; she is married to Nathan, an inferior peasant who is superior in love and compassion. The tannery, according to Rukmani, is a disaster for the village. Rukmani possesses traditional pastoral knowledge of land cultivation: "Dung is too useful in our homes to be given to the land, for it is fuel to us and protection against damp and heat and even ants and mice. Did you know?" (Markandaya 34). Nature bestows her blessings on villagers. The exploitation of nature causes the exploitation of women. So, Vandana Shiva says:

Development has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant that the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities (Shiva 99).

The tale depicts ladies who are at ease with nature and familiar with Indian culture. They consider cobras to be sacred and believe that they should be worshipped rather than murdered. Furthermore, Rukmani names her daughter Irawaddy, after one of Asia's rivers, because water is



pure and sacred. Through her repeated use of seed imagery, Markandaya subtly connects woman and landscape. Woman participates in the life cycle as a seed, then a seedling, and finally as part of the soil that nourishes future generations as a giver, nurturer, and endurer of life.

Rukmani is associated with land, seeds, and the procreation process in this context. In Rukmani's community, a woman's role in procreation is crucial. A lady who is unable to conceive after marriage is renounced by her husband in rural society. The renunciation of woman is shown through the character of Ira. Women, like nature, give birth to new lives and experience the delights and hardships of pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing. So, via childbearing and domestic caretaking, women and nature walk hand in hand. Ecofeminists honour women's relationships with nature by resurrecting age-old rituals of goddess worship, the sun, the moon, and the female reproduction process. As Leopold puts it:

To comprehend the functions of a hand, one must first comprehend the entire body and place the former in an organic relationship with the latter. A human is both a member and a member of the home in which (s)he lives. (204).

Land cultivation necessitates male and female participation in tilling the soil, planting, and reaping the grain. Rukmani favours:

I was out all the day with Nathan planting the paddy in the drained fields. Corn had to be sown too, the land was ready. My husband ploughed it, steadying the plough behind the two bullocks while I came behind, strewing the seed to either side sprinkling the earth over from the basket at my hip. (Markandaya18)

The fragrance of flowers stops, the air is polluted, and green fields become colourless.

Conclusion:

Finally, ecocriticism investigates and analyses man's relationship with nature. Agriculture is a source of cultural veneration as well as a means of existence. Environmental problems push us to learn about Green Literature. Ecocriticism shares the human relationship with other creatures. The land has a spiritual significance for rural people:

To argue that the land is living and sacred is a very revolutionary statement. Pure things are not to be taken advantage of. If the floor on which we walk, has a sacred quality, we



must not permit the soil to degrade. We can't cut old growth forests because of our business, because what is sacred and pure cannot be assessed on benefit and loss scales. (Fosset *al* 177)

The balance in the ecosystem creates social, cognitive, and emotive abilities of human nature. Green stands for freshness and humility and man can achieve those qualities during nature. Human qualities flourish in the lap of vivid nature. Nature is the teacher, guardian, guide, and instructor of man. The colour green symbolizes freshness, humility, and compassion towards mankind and nature. Man can only be human if he lives amid nature. With nature deteriorating, man will soon resemble an animal. The Hungry Tide represents the daily tide fluctuations that cause the Sunderbans ecology of marsh covered islands and wetlands to shift, with portions of the island inundated and surrounded by salt water. Ghosh's sense of place may be his greatest strength as a writer.

On the other hand, *Nectar in a Sieve* shows how man's negligence of nature has a significant impact on their lives. Environmental degradation is a result of industrialization. It makes natural resource depletion easier. It emits pollutants into the atmosphere, water, and soil. Global warming and climate change are the most serious risks to industrialization. Humans can think and be aware of environmental issues. Ecocriticism suggests a predetermined selection of works that can only be read in reference to a single philosophy.

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