

## SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

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### **Abstract**

Now-a-days the literary critics pay attention on study and analysis of the strong bond between nature and society. Ecology and eco-criticism are the significant aspects for the literary study and research. Ecological or environmental study is the center of attraction for literary personalities as well as the need of time. People are becoming conscious about the environment. Environmental balance is very important in this globalized world. Therefore, so many plans/schemes are being launched for saving the environment and making the people environment-conscious.

Many poets and novelists have become eco-conscious or environment conscious. They have used Nature as landscape, as beautiful atmosphere/lively atmosphere such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jayant Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Bhavani Bhattacharya. The literature has become a mode of expression about environment and its importance in human life and universe. Environmental balance/protection has become the hot issue of the present time in the whole world. It is the issue of international importance. Due to the eco- imbalance and the environmental pollution, the whole world is under the curse of global warming. The world is becoming the prey of the environmental imbalances and destructions. The healthy well balanced environment/atmosphere is the need of time. It is like the life blood for the Universe. The world needs eco-friendly atmosphere for the proper growth, development, sustainability and prosperity. The various kinds of environmental issues such as biological, political, social, racial, regional, seasonal, and psychological etc. have been projected by those intellectual writers. But, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghose, Bhavani Bhattacharya and Kiran Desai have dealt the subject matter with the environmental concern. They have focused their attention on the value of eco-balance and environmental balance. They advocate the balanced co-relation between nature and mankind.

**Keywords:** Nature, Ecological, Environment, Images, Expressions, Multitudinous Forms, Landscape, Pollution, Underrated Existence, Indian Diaspora, Racial, Caste-Prejudiced, Socio-Psychological, Eco-Criticism, Eco-Balance.

Now-a-days the literary critics pay attention on study and analysis of the strong bond between nature and society. Ecology and eco-criticism are the significant aspects for the literary study and research. Ecological or environmental study is the center of attraction for literary personalities as well as the need of time. People are becoming conscious about the environment. Environmental balance is very important in this globalized world. Therefore, so many plans/schemes are being launched for saving the environment and making the people environment-conscious. Many steps have been taken for stopping environmental pollutions. People have been made to realize the importance and value of unpolluted environment. Through, the help of slogans, advertisements, documentaries and direct and indirect knowledge of the relations between man and nature. Industrialization and materialism are the main causes of environmental imbalance. They are responsible for disturbing ecological balance. Eco-criticism is a type of criticism. This kind of critical study is in vogue. It is the study of the relationships between literature and environment. It is also known as green cultural studies, eco-poetics and environmental literary criticism. In American Literature nature and environment are focused as the part and parcel of life. They are portrayed not only as the landscape and background settings but also as the most precious elements for the balance among human beings, nature and environment. They are given significance as the components for eco-balance. The inter-relationship between the society and environment is dealt.

The environmental balance or eco-balance has entered as the core topic in literature also. Literature is always the best medium for propagating any thought or value in the society. It always works as the best conveyor of ideas and messages. The issue of environment or nature or ecology and society can be found in the literature of the world. The Indian literature in English cannot be ignored in this connection. Though, the literary output in this aspect is not much, the intellectuals and the famous modern literary figures try to draw the attention of the society on these issues. The popular writers such as Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Amitav Ghose can be regarded as great environmentalists. Their works are the proof of this.

Earlier, the writers such as R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgaonkar, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, and Anita Desai have invoked Nature and nature-elements for expressing their views, their contemporary regional and social atmospheres. R.K. Narayan is a very famous regional novelist. He is well known for his imaginary creation Malgudi. It is an imaginary world invented by R. K. Narayan. Narayan's novels and short stories have this Malgudi as specific region as a backdrop. The novelist has exploited the entire social, psychological and regional atmosphere in his writing. He has used nature as the setting and background in his novels and short stories. It can be noted in his stories and novels such as *Malgudi Days*, *Man Eater of Malgudi*, *The English Teacher*, and *The Guide* etc. Malgudi can be considered as the central setting of his writings. Nature plays both the positive and negative roles. The flowing Saryu River and the ruined temples affected Raju, the guide and transformed him into a saint in the novel, *The Guide*.

Raja Rao has also applied/invoked Nature and nature elements in his novels. He has used the elements for expressing his mythological, regional and social views. His famous *novel*, *Kanthapura*, is the glaring example of this. Raja Rao has depicted the South Indian village, its customs, culture and environment realistically and precisely. He has portrayed the co-relation between mankind and Nature. His *Kanthapura* projects the role and importance of Nature beautifully in the human life. Through the depiction of rivers, mountains and other natural elements he has proved value of this co-relationship. The mythological elements introduced to

reflect the significance of this clearly. Kenchamma is regarded as the great and bounteous goddess. The novelist has proved the respect of the people for nature through their religious belief.

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, *Nector 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. This novel reveals the man made famine. It projects many kinds of hungers. So, the role of nature and the bad effect of environmental imbalance can be seen in the novel, *So Many Hungers*. The description of a famine affected boy who is battling with a dog for getting jam tin from the dustbin is the touching example of the atmosphere. The other hurting description is about a woman lay stretched by the tree trunk, groaning, while a jackal crouched and ate her body. It is clear that the novelist has applied many nature images for showing the plight of the famine affected people. By this way he has also conveyed the miserable effects of the environmental imbalance on mankind.

But, the very notable woman novelists Anita Desai and Kamala Markandaya have done a better and greater job in applying Nature and natural elements for their writings.

Anita Desai is a very prominent and popular woman Indian novelist in English. She has received the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1963. She unveils the hidden psyche/mind of her characters intelligently and skillfully. She is an expert psyche revealer. She can be considered as a psychologist. Her novels are psychological. She has paved the way for other writers. It is she who has established the norms and pattern of psychoanalysis of the characters especially of the female characters. She has the eyes and heart for studying and unfolding the hidden mind of the women of her novels. Her novels are the testimony of her this profundity as well as her skill. Her novels are replete with nature and nature imaginary. Nature plays a supporting role for her expressions. Through the help of nature elements/imagines she has conveyed the mind and psyche of her female characters very profoundly.

She has become the voice of the woman's psyche, passion, emotion, physical needs, and social claims. She has produced many psychological novels such as *Cry, the Peacock*, *Bye Bye, Black Bird*, *Voices in the City* etc. *Cry, the Peacock* is the first famous novel of Desai. This novel is full of nature imaginaries. The novelist has compared the moods, emotions, conditions and longing of the heroine Maya with various nature images.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Maya is portrayed as motherless, introvert child of a rich lawyer Rai Sahib. She is a pampered child of her father. She lives in her imaginary world with her pet dog Toto. Her father arranges her marriage with his friend Gautam. But, her married life suffers from

marital discord because Maya and Gautam are totally different in nature. Maya is very young, sensitive, and full of longings for romantic relation and feelings. While Gautam is middle aged, unromantic, very practical and lacks any concern for Maya's feelings and desires. Maya loves Gautam but she cannot get his attention and care according to her need or demand. Therefore, gradually, Maya feels herself isolated; alienated and loveless. She suffers from hallucination too and feels that rats, snakes, lizards, creeping over her body. The death of Toto is a great shock for her. She becomes more dejected, morose and disturbed after the death of her companion Toto. The whole environment appears to her very unbearable and torturous. She is also haunted by the prophecy of the albino astrologer. Due to the unbearable, gloomy, dejected atmosphere and severe longing for passionate love she kills her husband and eventually she commits suicide.

The novelist has used nature elements such as peacock/birds, animals, creatures, dust storm, fool moon, rising moon, cat, dog etc for describing different kinds of situations, emotions, frenzy, obsessions, expectations, longings etc. The cry of a peacock, in the novel, plays very touching role in Maya's life. She thinks herself like peacocks who cry for lovemaking and dies for that desire/need. The cry of the Peacock gets special attention in this connection. In the novel, the Peacock's cry represents the cry of Maya. The longing for sexual relation of Maya is compared with the effort and longing of the peacock for mating. In the novel Maya is mentally and emotionally disturbed. She feels herself lonely, isolated. She longs for all types of cares and attentions. She is fragile. She is from an affluent family. She is the pampered daughter of Rai Sahib. She cannot tolerate difficulties or loneliness. She always lives in her imaginary world. She is not practical. She wants to enjoy all sensuous things. She feels herself totally deprived of love and companionship. Therefore, she longs and cries for all things like a peacock and dies for her desires and also kills her husband for the desire of utopian satisfaction.

Desai has projected the lack of companionship in the man-woman relationship. Women painfully long for understanding, companionship and appreciation from men. They cry for these. They are always sensitive, passionate and need male support due to their social environment. Socio-psychological environment play a very pivotal role in moulding their mind and psyche. Their condition is wretched. They look bold, blunt, stylish, learned but when it is the matter of their emotional need, physical need, social support they are actually emotionally fragile, weak and timid.

*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.* (God of Small Things, 123). 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 same 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, ...*  
(Arundhati Roy, 124)



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 writer has provided a glimpse of the fresh environment. Later, she has projected the degenerated gloomy environment of the region.

The other renowned environment conscious novelist is Kiran Desai. She received the Man Booker Prize for her famous novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. She has focused on the issue of environment. Her approach is eco-centric and eco-critic. She has also focused the environment of east-west encounter, racial prejudice, political turbulence and its harmful effect on the balance of eco-system. Her novel starts with the delineation of the natural beauty of mount Kanchenjunga. She delineates the beautiful mountain, and the changing seasons charmingly. The mountain is also used to reveal the gloomy mood of the orphan girl, Sai. Desai describes the house of the retired Judge which is situated at blissful and beautiful atmosphere. The Judge lives with his pet dog Mutt, grand-daughter Sai and the Cook. The novelists start her description in the following manner:

“A crumbling isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga lives an embittered judge. He wants to live in peaceful atmosphere by isolating himself from the messy world”. (*The Inheritance of Loss, 1*)

The relation of grand-daughter, grand-father as well as the relation of the Judge and Mutt are described. Here, the embittered, prejudiced judge has no love or feeling for human beings but he is very fond of his dog Mutt. The isolated, prejudiced, and ruthless man gets solace and feeling of intimacy from the animal (a product of nature). The writer has tried to focus the role of nature in human life. She shows the co-relation between mankind and nature. She has also dealt the effects of the political, racial and social environment on human-beings. The description of Gurkha movement reflects the political atmosphere. The movement has become the cause of eco-disturbance. Through this, the novelist has focused the harmful effects on environment due to the irrational behavior and the reaction of the mankind. Kiran Desai has projected various types of atmosphere and environment such as religious, racial, political, natural etc. Through this, she shows her concern about environment balance. She points out that the co-relation between Nature and Mankind cannot be ignored because, Nature plays very pivotal role in molding the mind and life of human beings. Nature and its vital elements are essential for building as well as sustaining lives of all living-beings especially of human-beings. The nature-man co-ordination is must.

The other renowned novelist, Amitave Ghose, has also tried to show the value of eco-balance. *The Hungry Tide* is the master piece of Amitav Ghose. 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 lives. It seems as if the Bengal Tigers are more precious than human race. He reveals the attitude of the national and international environmentalists. The *White Tiger* has brought prestige and

recognition to Arvind Adiga. He has received the Booker Prize for this novel. The novel deals with the socio-psychological and caste prejudiced environment of India.

Thus, Nature is always a supporting element in Literature. It can be seen in multitudinous forms. It reflects various atmospheres, moods, feelings and status. It is an expressive form for literature. It is very significant mode of expression for describing fertile, colorful atmosphere, happiness, gloominess, bitterness, disturbing, lively, tragic atmosphere etc. All types of environment can be presented through the help of nature and various elements of nature. Now-a-day's ecology, eco-balance, environment concerns are the points of attraction and concern. The prevalent environment imbalance has compelled the intellectuals and rational people to consider this seriously. Therefore, the literary figures have used their strength for strengthening the attitude of people towards environment protection and eco-balance. Many poets and novelists have become eco-conscious or environment conscious. They have used Nature as landscape, as beautiful atmosphere/lively atmosphere such as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jayant Mahapatra, Ramanujan, Bhavani Bhattacharya. The literature has become a mode of expression about environment and its importance in human life and universe. Environmental balance/protection has become the hot issue of the present time in the whole world. It is the issue of international importance. Due to the eco- imbalance and the environmental pollution, the whole world is under the curse of global warming. The world is becoming the prey of the environmental imbalances and destructions. The healthy well balanced environment/atmosphere is the need of time. It is like the life blood for the Universe. The world needs eco-friendly atmosphere for the proper growth, development, sustainability and prosperity. The various kinds of environmental issues such as biological, political, social, racial, regional, seasonal, and psychological etc. have been projected by those intellectual writers. But, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghose, Bhavani Bhattacharya and Kiran Desai have dealt the subject matter with the environmental concern. They have focused their attention on the value of eco-balance and environmental balance. They advocate the balanced co-relation between nature and mankind.

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