

BADAL SIRCAR'S *BHOMA*: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY

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Abstract

In the Post Modern era, we are facing many problems because of the ecological imbalance. The nature as a phenomenon is very precious but due to material progress and dissatisfaction of surroundings, man has posed very serious threats to our social, cultural, moral and environmental balance. The environmental issues are not only related to nature and its degradation but also related to the issues raised socially, culturally, politically and mentally. As literature is mirror to society and it includes society with its 'wholeness', environmental issues are not only limited to science but literature has also proven to be a good source to put questions in the minds of people through different literary compositions. Ecocriticism as a branch of literature studies the problems raised in environment and its relation to the living organism.

Badal Sircar, an influential Indian street playwright has exposed the environmental problems and its effect on society in one of his most genius plays *Bhoma*. He has universally depicted the problems of environment and its impact on human psyche. This study is not only related to the environmental effects on man's physical world but also on his inner mind. The proposed paper will throw light on the environmental issues and also provide an Ecocritical study of the play.

Keywords: Environmental, Ecocriticism, Organism

*For I'd rather by thy child
And pupil, in the forest wild
Than be the king of men elsewhere
And most sovereign slave of care
To have one moment of thy dawn
Than share the city's year forlorn*

“Nature’ by Henry David Thoreau”

A Brief Introduction to Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a single word which is made of two words 'Ecology' and 'criticism'. These words have their roots in Greek. The word 'Eco' is the shorten form of Ecology and in Greek it is derived from the word 'oikios' which means 'home'. The word 'Criticism' is also derived from the Greek word 'kritikos' which means 'to judge'. And according to Edward Hoagland the

‘oikos’ is ‘nature’. He calls it ‘our widest home’. As an academic discipline, it began in the 1990s. It is the study of representation of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and environment. Ecocriticism, as a term was coined by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment” in 1978.

Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined Ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”.(xviii,1996) In *A Handbook of Literary Terms*, M.H Abrams defined Ecocriticism as:

Ecocriticism is the cultural writing which explore the relations between literature and biological and physical environment conducted with an acute awareness of the devastation being wrought on that environment by human activities.(81,2009)

The purpose of Ecocriticism is to show how the work of writers are concerned about the environment and can play some part in solving the ecological degradation. It is an approach to examine the exemplification of nature in literary texts. It has become a prominent theory in literary criticism.

Sudhindra Sircar later known as Badal Sircar (1925-2011) is a renowned theatrical personality of Indian street theatre. He has established Third Theatre which is also known as ‘Street Theatre’ or ‘People’s Theatre’. Street theatre is very much different from the Proscenium theatre. They have no artificial aids like they lack stage setting, lightning, and elaborate costumes of the characters. They are not expensive and flexible and mobile. Street theatre contributes to the social, political, economic and cultural reformation. It helps in arousing the social, political and other problems related to environment consciousness of the people.

Bhoma is a play written with different style and it comprises several threads being tied together to make it a single rope. For *Bhoma* he says “it was quite unique and not applicable to any of his other plays”.(6,2009) Through *Bhoma*, he is showing the deplorable condition of the exploited peasants of rural India who have been a victim of the powerful oppressive landlords. *Bhoma* is the central character of the play although he is not present physically.

Bhoma: An Ecocritical Study

Literature serves human life by all means as it is the outcome of its environment, culture and tradition. Human life provides base to literature and literature is the reflection of human life. Human beings think that they are superior to nature. People are manipulating natural resources and animal species for their own selfish gains. Man and nature are not binaries but they are intersected and mutually constitutive. The ecological crisis has become a universal phenomenon. The play *Bhoma* is inspired by the Sundarbans. Sircar has announced the story of *Bhoma* which was once heard by him from the master of the Rangabelia village school. The play starts with the different positions of actors. Some have become seed. Some of them have become wood-cutters. Some characters are ploughing and some are acting as if they are harvesting.

Each crouches and becomes a seed. Sprouting, standing up, stretching and spreading. Tress. Birds singing. Wind through the leaves. Two of the actors turn into woodcutters felling trees with. The customary ‘heave ho...’ etc. clearing the jungle. Paddy fields. Ploughing, sowing. Harvesting.(59)

Badal Sircar is showing the significance of villages as there live the 75 percent of India’s population. Villages are of no importance as India is rapidly developing. “The village! The lovely village! The charming village! The beautiful village”.(63)*Bhoma*, the main character is not present in the play. It is abstract and symbol of everything whether it is living or non- living

things which are present in the play. “Bhoma is the forest, Bhoma is the paddy field, Bhoma is the village”.(64)

With the discrepancy between rich and poor and the stranded condition of poor, Sircar is pointing out how these rich people are using the natural resources for their own sake and they are not only exploiting the nature but also the man. As we can see through the conversation of the characters:

ONE. The *Ravi* season paddy. When there is no rain. When the soil is dry.

TWO. We want water give us water we want water give us water we want water give us water...

FOUR. Plenty of water deep down in the earth-a lot of water a lot...

FIVE. Who's going to draw it? Who'll draw it? Who'll draw it? Draw it?...(65)

Badal Sircar is indicating the extinction of the forests. He is saying that tigers, snakes, crocodiles all are disappearing from the forests. As Ecocriticism is not only concerned about the ecology only but the animals also. Sircar by using humour, a literary device, giving a serious message to people that is to save the species of animals.

THREE, SIX (start dancing). Picnic? Ho, ho, Picnic...

TWO. Save the tigers...

THREE, FOUR, SIX. The beautiful snake.

TWO. The beautiful crocodile.(101)

The process of urbanization, modernization has become the serious threat to the ecology. The people of Sundarbans are using the forests and the other natural resources for their own development.

TWO, THREE, FOUR, SIX. None? Then it's not the jungles of the Sundarbans?
 ONE. No. Not any longer. It's not a forest now. The forest's now cleared. Jungle *hasil*.

TWO, THREE, FOUR, SIX. *Hasil*? What do you mean?

ONE. The Oraons. The Mundas. The Santhals. The aboriginals. The jungle *hasil*. The forest's cleared. The forest's cleared to make way for *abaad*, for cultivation.(98)

The prime purpose of a work of literature is to provide aesthetic pleasure to the spectators but it has a deeper meaning also which is to instruct the society about the prevailing problems. Due to the deterioration of forests and the trees, many people have lost their lands, crops, homes etc.

TWO. Salt Water.

THREE. The land is gone.

FOUR. The crops are gone.

TWO. Homes are gone.

THREE. An acre of my land was eaten away by the Bidya river three years ago.(103)

There is also reference to how village Rangabelia is becoming narrower because of the rivers' augmentation.

ONE. A strip in between-the village Rangabelia. The embankments give way on both sides. The Bidya eats away. The Gomor eats away. Rangabelia gets narrower. And narrower. And narrower.(103)

Thus to conclude, we can say that ecological problems are not related to the physical environment only but it is also related to the inner consciousness of the man. Through *Bhoma*

Sircar's intention is to show that how these people are using nature for their own benefits and this is the law of nature that when you disturb the natural process then it will take its revenge in any form. He is accomplishing the purpose of street theatre as visual representation is more actual than verbal representation. Ella Dutta rightly says:

What he wishes to communicate through his theatre are clear cut facts, concrete truths about what is happening in the villages, the nature of exploitation both industrial and agricultural, the urban stranglehold on the rural economy. He feels that his first mission is to make people aware. (4)

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