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Nature, environment and issues in poetic works of English writers

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Abstract

Literature can be perceived as an aesthetically and culture constructed part of the environment. If we undertake a literary journey through the literature of any community of language, writers and poets have tried best to protect, preserve and nurture the environment. Nature and Literature have always shared an intimate relationship as is evident in the works of authors and poets down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Literature plays a crucial role in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact in a perpetual dance. Present research paper is an attempt to study, investigate and understand environment concerns in the poetry of British, American and Indian Literature.

Keywords: Environment, nature and literature

Introduction

The relationship between man and environment has varied from the early periods of human settlement on the earth to the present day. The environment has considerably affected human beings. As long as environment suitable for living beings, growth and reproduction continues and populations of different species expand and this process continues till the ecosystem reaches its carrying capacity. At this stage, there is need to establish equilibrium between the living organisms and non- living components of environment. These two are existent in the environment for a long period and if this equilibrium is disturbed the process of successful living also gets disturbed. So the environmental ethics need to be considered.

Environment ethic are founded on the awareness, that we all living beings ate the part of nature and man being the most Intelligent is considered as patron to the nature. Co-existence of man and nature is interdependent. Nature provides the necessary support to man and other living beings on the other hand living beings help nature to grow and develop. In any natural system the well-being of a species is dependent on the growth and harmony of the whole eco-system. It is fundamental ethical responsibility of man to respect and protect nature, its resources and life supporting systems.

Whenever man has exploited the natural resources unethically, it has responded furiously in the form of ferocious floods, earthquakes, landslide, tsunami, and other natural calamities etc. Besides scientists, environmentalists and ecologists, poets also have shown great concern and deep rooted interest for the ecological balance and nurturing care for environment. Their concerns for environment constitute a new academic discipline, Eco-criticism (term coined by (William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco-criticism)" beginning Eco-in the 1990's. Cheryl Glotfelty has defined eco-criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."

The 19 and 20 century British and American literary figures have shown varlous aspects of nature in their writings to develop a sense of responsibility among the masses and to make them understand environmental preservation. Sir John Betjeman's (1906-1984) poem "Inexpensive Progress" reveals how increasing industrialization progress is destroying nature:

Encase your legs in nylons,
Bestride your hills with pylons
O age without a soul;
Away with gentle willows
And all the elmy billows
That through your valleys roll

Besides the deep concern for nature, the poet laments the loss of gentle willows and beautiful elmy trees:

Let's say Good-bye to hedges!
And roads with grassy edges
And winding country lanes;
Let all things travel faster
Where motor car is master
Till only speed remains.

The loss of green hedges and greenery at the road side does not affect the modern man who is really insensitive to the beauties of nature, and his only concern is technological advancement.

Anne Sexton is one of the major talents of the twentieth century American poetry. She has used nature as a potential source in realizing her journey of life. Through nature objects, Sexton has raised confessional poetry to the heights of art which contained the elements of "Truth", "Goodness" and "Beauty". Sexton's perception of Nature grows deeper and deeper. She has glorified natural objects. In her poetic volumes, she uses natural objects for realizing the powerful soul-God. Without nature, Sexton would not have been successful in providing philosophical bottom to her poetry. Her poetry possessing the glorious imprint of nature is really a religious journey which can be visualized in various stages: Awakening, Purgation, Illumination, and the Dark Night of the soul and Union.

"You are many: They are few
Stand ye calm and resolve,
Like a forest close and mute,
With folded arms and looks, which are
Weapons in unvanquished war."

Peace and survival of life on earth as we know it is threatened by human activities, which lack a commitment to humanitarian values. Destruction of nature and natural resources result from ignorance, greed and lack of respect for the earth's living things. This lack of respect extends even to earth's human descendants. The future generation who will inherit a vastly degraded planet if world peace does not become a reality and destruction of the nature environment continues at the present rate. Our ancestors viewed the earth as rich and bountiful, which it is. Many people in the past also saw nature as inexhaustibly sustainable, which we now know is the case, only if we care for it.

It is not difficult to forgive destruction in the past, which result from ignorance. Today, however, we have access to more information, and it is essential that we re-examine ethically, what we have inherited, what we are responsible for, and what we will pass onto coming generations. Clearly this is a pivotal generation. Global communication is possible, yet confrontation more often than meaningful dialogues for peace take place. Our marvels of science and technology are matched, if not outweighed, by many current tragedies, including human starvation in some parts of the world, and extinction of other life forms. Exploration of outer space takes place at the same time as earth's own oceans, seas and fresh water areas grow increasingly polluted, and their life forms are still largely unknown or misunderstood. Many of the earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects, and even micro-organism that we know as

rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability and the responsibility. We must act before it is too late.

H Davies (1872-1940) ^[2], a twentieth century poet was a prolific poet of nature lyrics. His lyric "Leisure" is a limitation over modern mechanized man's passivity in responding to the 48. Swatch Bharat Campaign beautiful aspects of nature. We are hustle in hustle and bustle of modern life aiming to acquire material prosperity and fame. What we instead get is neurosis and anxiety in life. We must not permit materialism to dwarf and narrow our lives; we can obtain and nourish our sense of beauty and joy only through "leisure". A life nurtured in the lap of nature is blessed with calm, serenity and peace of mind. So the poet suggest that nature must be protected and preserved as it permanent source of pleasure. What W.H. Davies says in his poem "Leisure" shows deep concern for nature? Mark the following lines-

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?
No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows;
No time to see, when woods we pass
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass."

In above mentioned lines, the modern materialistic man's attitude to nature has been focused at. Modern man is running after a blind race of amassing more and more wealth which provides the luxuries of life but not peace of mind. So it becomes the moral duty of all writers to awaken the numb souls of human beings and to make them realize that nature is the only source of joy which has pleasant effect on mind. Only nature can give relaxation to modern man from anxieties of modern day problems.

In Britain, in the nineteenth century, the Romantic poets reacted strongly against the eighteenth century emphasis on rationalism and sought innovative methods of expressing their emotions and feelings. William Wordsworth, considered by many to be spokesman of the movement, celebrates the beauty and mystery of nature in some of the most famous lyrics, including "Michael" (1800) which portrays simple shepherd who is deeply attached to the natural world around him but is struggling to maintain himself and his values in a hostile universe. W. Wordsworth's autobiographical poem "The Prelude" (1850).

The Romantic interest in nature is specifically important to eco-critics. Wordsworth was revolutionary in his politics and the protection of nature universe was one element of his radical thinking. His sonnet "The world is Too Much With Us" is a scathing attack on the gross materialism and consequent moral and to see people busy in hoarding and squandering wealth and thus wasting their nobler and greater powers, i. e, their spiritual powers.

To make the contemporary generation aware about their insensitive attitude towards the blessing of nature which intact is a perennial source of joy, Wordsworth composed "The World is Too Much with us"-

"The world is too much us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This sea that bears her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune.

One of the major themes in Wordsworth's poetry is the healing capacity of nature to a man entangled in the soothing touch of tranquility and restores to him his holy inner poem but can bless a responsive heart with perennial glee. In his poem "Daffodils", he relates a life experience. He says that daffodils are a perennial source of joy to him whenever, he is in a 'pensive' or 'vacant' mood.

"For oft, when on my couch I lie,
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils."

Wordsworth realizes a harmony between Nature and Soul. He sees nature as inseparable part of human beings saying:

"A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things."

When this spontaneity is destroyed or misadjusted, it comes out in form of pollution, extinction, earthquake and other natural calamities.

In present time, the global warming, melting glaciers, floods, different types of pollution, decreasing forestry and misbalance in biodiversity has not only produced hazards for human health but also cultural crisis and psychological trauma among human beings.

In the present scenario, when the risk to the environment and health are increasing with the rapid industrialization, urbanization, globalization and mechanization, literature can be the best and most appropriate medium to provide environment education and mass awareness for creating interest towards ecology and environment as Wordsworth, a poet of Nature does in his poem 'Tables Turned' -

"One impulse from vernal wood,
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' echoes the poet's note of eternal sadness, his sense of tears in mortal things. Who can forget the following note?

"Begin and cease, and then again begin,
With tumultuous cadence of slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in."

The poet feels that world now is without love, joy and peace, Men live here blindly in the blackness of doubt. He closes the poem in a peak point of the elegiac mood.

"And we are as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

John Keats, the most sensuous poet of English Literature has established a close rapport with nature and death wish but also his consideration of environmental forces not only to convey his melancholy and death wish but also his consideration of environmental degradation and decay. It's the only reason that he forbids the righting ale not to her own world of permanence and peace.

"Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What Thor among the levels hast never know
The weariness, the fever, and the fret".

Percy Bysshe Shelley, the most revolutionary nature poet has made the west as his messenger to prophesies his idea-

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind."

The love natures among these romantic poets show that co-existence of man and nature is interdependent. Nature provides necessary support to man and to respect and protect nature, its resources and its life supporting systems. Even in the modern era, the poets have established a great concern for natural disharmony and its hazardous impact on health as well as psyche of human beings. T. S. Eliot has portrayed with original Colours this glooming picture of doom of modern man in "The Waste land":

"April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, string
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers,

Summer surprised us, coming over the starnbergersee with a shower of rain.

Moreover, American poets also worshiped Nature. Robert Frost is great lover of nature. "Stopping by Woods on a Showy Evening" is one of the most quietly moving of Frost's lyrics:

"The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep."

It expresses the conflict which everyone feels between the demands of practical life with its obligations to others and the ardent desire to escape into a land of peace and serenity. Undoubtedly, the twentieth century American Female poet Anne Sexton has used nature as a potential source of realizing god in her poems. Her "The Awful Rowing towards God" (1975) incorporates Sexton's sailing towards her island. She never forgets that her destination can be achieved only by having the company of nature. Sea and sea water find a lively expression in the poem.

"I am rowing, I am rowing
Through the oarlocks stick and are rusty
And the sea blinks and rolls
But I am rowing, I am rowing
Through the wind pushes me back."

When union with that Almighty is possible through these natural resources, then why human beings are acting as monsters to these beautiful natural objects? These natural objects act as herbs in healing the wounds of Human beings. Nevertheless, not only the British and American but Indian poets also writing in English have shown Environmental intimacy in their literature. Nissim Ezekiel's poem "A Morning Walk" where the city Bombay is described as living hell is noteworthy here-

"Barbaric city sick with slums
Deprived of seasons, iron- lunged
Its hawker, beggars, iron-lunged
Processions led by tax tic drums."

The city of dreams and imagination which runs day and night has no heavenly joy. The poem has a message for human beings as why such unrest, why such blind race when everyone has to die one day. So enjoy the beauty of nature, spend time in the lap of nature and try to unite with God-the creator of us all human beings.

An eco- critical reading of Kiki N. Daruwalla's poem "A boat ride along Ganga" reveals how man is responsible for polluting the holy river. The poem begins with a simple description of an evening but the poet's "conscience" for "hygiene" makes him curse it - As the panda points out Dasavamedh

"I listen avidly to his legend talk
Striving to forget what I chanced to see:
The Sewer – mouth trained like a cannon
On the rivers flank. It is as I feared;
Hygiene is a part of conscience and I curse it
And curse my upbringing which makes me
Queasy here."

This poem focuses on the hazards of polluting the holy river 'Ganga; the poet intends to make one 'queasy' and to develop hygiene as a part of one's conscience. Really it's pathetic and gruesome to observe the pungent reality that the very impact of 'westernization' has snatched away the identity of Indian culture and the pious 'Ganga Maa' is transferred into impious one.

To conclude, Environmental awareness is the need of the hour. English Literature plays a crucial and unique role to awaken the numb heart and soul of human beings. Only through English Literature, the desired destination where man will be visualized as patron to the nature can be achieved and once again this earth will be blessed with heavenly bliss and glee.

"Let the knowledge grow from more to more
But more of reverence in us dwell
To make a vast eternity."

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