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**COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND SANSKRIT LITERATURE  
UNDER THE PURVIEW OF ECOCRITICISM**

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**Abstract**

Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment which necessitates looking at literary studies through a green lens. While literature in almost all language has always engaged with nature and the environment from a creative and aesthetic approach, ecocriticism demands a close critical look at nature and environment. The attitude of writers towards nature has been of pastoral impulse, an aesthetic appreciation of nature, mystical and philosophical musings. This paper seeks to establish parallels in Sanskrit and English literature in the treatment of nature.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Nature, Environment, Literature, Parallels, Man.

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an inter-disciplinary point of view, where literary scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. The term 'ecocriticism' was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined ecocriticism as the study of relation between literature and physical environment. In their introduction to The Ecocriticism Reader, Glotfelty and Fromm described the critical approach: "... All ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of languages and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land. As a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human".<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as a "study of relationship between literature and the environment conducted in the spirit of commitment to environment praxis."<sup>2</sup> Contemplating the functional aspect of this approach, Simon Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than simply the study of nature or natural things in literature, rather it is a theory "that is committed to effecting change by analysing the function-thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise- of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contributes to material practices in material world"<sup>3</sup>

Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach and is often informed by other fields such as ecologies, biopolitics, environmentalism, social ecology, environmental history among others. In terms of methodology, ecocriticism is similar to other critical approaches such as feminism, post colonialism etc. Just as feminism analyses the relationship between man and woman, how society has constructed the definitions of man and woman and how these definitions have changed over the years. Similarly, ecocriticism analyses the relationship between man and nature and how this relationship has evolved over the years and the treatment of the same in literature. Michael P. Cohen elaborates, "Ecocriticism focuses on literary expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence and fears of loss and disaster. Ecocriticism has an agenda."<sup>4</sup> Critics are of the view that teaching of literature without including the concern for environment is incomplete and even incongruous.

As far as treatment of the relationship between man and nature is concerned in Sanskrit literature, it goes back to Vedic literature, particularly the Atharveda deals with the subject of nature in great details. Here the objects of nature are glorified for their contribution towards a healthy and balanced human life. Human body is said to be constituted with five elements- earth, water, fire, air, sky which are called "Panchtattva" in Sanskrit. All ancient scriptures written in Sanskrit such as the Upnishadas, the Manusamriti, and The Gita emphasizes the role and importance of nature in human life. The Upnishadas deifies the objects of nature such as the Sun, the Moon and expresses gratitude to them for sustaining life on the earth. It also emphasizes the moral values associated with the objects of nature such as trees, rivers and clouds etc. The value of philanthropy is emphasized by the example of trees and rivers. As these do not use their product for themselves, human life is also meant for the upliftment and betterment of others' lives.

The tradition of interacting with natural objects is beautifully depicted by Kalidasa, fondly called as "the prince of Sanskrit literature." In Meghadootam, he portrays clouds as message bearer or "doot". He personifies nature and presents a deep bonding between the objects of nature and human beings. In Abhigyanashakuntalam, the protagonist Shakuntla befriends the trees, the creepers and the fawns and Kalidasa gives a poignant description of the moment when the whole "tapovan" sheds tears at farewell of Shakuntla to her husband's house. Kalidasa also portrays the impact of seasons on human psyche and shows how human emotions find resonance in the objects of nature. This glorious tradition of aesthetic appreciation of nature is continued in the works of later writers as well.

In English literature, the treatment of nature can be traced back to Elizabethan era with Sir Phillip Sydney's 'The Faerie Queen'. Even the plays of Shakespeare such as 'The Taming of the Shrew', 'Midsummer Night's Dream', 'Much Ado about Nothing' and 'As You Like It' present a rich and vivid description of nature. Nature has been a favourite theme of the romantics.

William Wordsworth has been called as “the greatest poet of nature.” He clearly states in The Preface to Lyrical Ballads that poetry is the image of man and nature. But what really interests Wordsworth is not nature for its own sake, but nature as it affects the human mind and personality. He chooses rustic life as subject matter of his poems because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. He thinks that man and nature are essentially adapted to each other and the mind of man is naturally the mirror of the fairest and the most interesting properties of nature. These ideas of the reciprocity herald the philosophy of symbiosis, environmental ethics and the ecological conscience that ecocritics are now advocating. Wordsworth, in ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’, expresses a deep sense of kinship with the entire natural world: “To her fair works did nature link/ The human soul that through me ran.”<sup>5</sup> He portrays various aspects of nature in ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘Prelude’, ‘The Daffodils’, ‘To the Cuckoo’, ‘Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower’. He reveals the educative powers of nature and shows how nature exercises a chastening, humanizing and ennobling influence on our character. In ‘The world is too Much With Us’, he presents a critique of modern man who, lost in his materialistic pursuits, turns a blind eye to the beauty of nature and his sensibilities have been blunted by greed and insatiable, an ever-growing desires. Wordsworth says:

The world is too much with 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! <sup>6</sup>

John Keats’ treatment of nature is marked by vivid imagery and great sensuous appeal. His odes such as ‘Ode On Grecian Urn’, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, ‘To Autumn’, and ‘Hyperion’ are remarkable for their rich and sensuous description of nature and meditative depth. His apprehension of natural phenomena as therapeutic to human health is best displayed in poems like ‘The Poet’, ‘Sleep and Poetry’, ‘I Stood Tip-Toe upon a Little Hill’, ‘Bright Star! would I were Steadfast as thou art’, ‘Endymion’. Describing the healing power of nature, Keats shows that nature is not merely concerned with the aesthetic art of writing poetry, but it could also serve a curing purpose to whoever is open and receptive to it. As he says in, I Stood Tip-Toe upon a Little Hill:

The breezes were ethereal, and pure,  
And crept through half closed lattices to cure.  
The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,  
And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.<sup>7</sup>

Wordsworthian mysticism gives way to nature being a forceful symbol of rebellion against tyranny in the poetry of P.B. Shelley and Byron. These poets admire nature’s vastness, grandeur and its capacity to strike terror. For these romantic poets, nature is more than just a passive beneficiary of human efforts to bring about social and political change.

The natural world is suffused with revolutionary energies that contribute to the cause of human freedom. Percy Bysshe Shelley in 'Mont Blanc' portrays how nature is permeated with awesome life-giving potential as well as a terrible power of destruction. Byron visualised nature not as logical, but an organic process, in a constant state of development and change. In the organic process, all of the natural entities belong to each another. Quite aptly in 'Child Harold', Byron, viewing the wonderful scenery of the Rhine And the Alps states, "I live not in myself, but I become / Portion of that around me."<sup>8</sup>

The concern for nature in the wake of growing industrialization and deforestation finds echo in the poetry of modern poets. John Betjeman's 'Inexpensive Progress' is a satirical attack on the obsession of modern man with so called progress at the expense of nature. He reveals how increasing industrialization and urbanization is destroying nature and defacing its fair face. It is also taking a heavy toll on the simple ways and values associated with old country life. Philip Larkin echoes the same sentiment in his 'Going, Going' and mourns that England has won the dubious distinction of becoming of becoming the 'first slum of Europe'.

In American literature too, the ennobling influence of nature on man is described by Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Walt Whitman's portrayal of nature in 'The Leaves of Grass' is replete with symbols of freedom and democracy. Robert Frost, also known as nature poet, uses objects of nature and activities related to nature to reiterate human dilemmas, doubts and fears. His 'Birches', 'Two Tramps in Mud Time', 'Mending Wall', 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', 'West Running Brook' etc. underline the symbolic significance of natural objects as he himself has said that a poem brings in delight and ends in wisdom.

This comparative analysis of Sanskrit and English literature clearly establishes the fact that literature in both languages has dealt with the various facts of nature. Nature has been deified and glorified for its contribution to the sustenance and continuation of human life. Vivid images and sensuous details of natural objects mark the poetry in both the languages. Nature has been termed and described as a friend, philosopher and guide. The Romantic literature is a germinal site for the rise of ecological consciousness. Donald Worcester aptly remarks, "At the core of the Romantic view of nature was what later generations would come to call an ecological perspective: that is a search for holistic or integrated perception and emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth."<sup>9</sup> Man's utilization of natural resources for his progress, its fatal impact on environment, the need to redress the damage done to our ecosystem has been emphasized in modern English literature whereas in ancient Sanskrit literature emphasis has been laid on the tactful use of natural resources. It evidently and amply proves that language becomes secondary when it comes to the treatment of nature and its relation with man.

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