

Chapter –I

‘The Earth Does Not Belong to Man, Man Belongs to the Earth’

Ecocriticism: An Introduction

Every part of the earth is sacred to my people...This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth...We are part of the earth and it is part of us...What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth...Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

(Chief Seattle’s “Letter to All”)

With reference to the historical amount of the human contribution in environmental degradation, these words, taken from the widely known speech by Chief Seattle, the leader of the Red Chief Tribal communities, hold utmost significance in the contemporary environmental discourse. He probably had uttered them in 1894 in a meeting with Mr. Stevens, the then Governor of the USA- who had approached him to buy the land of the forest in which Native Indians used to live for hundreds of years.

Although the political history of the mankind is replete with various theories to justify colonization of the earth and her natural resources, it must be admitted that human societies have largely remained detached from the extremely important issue of the environmental repercussions of the territorial

politics and the unbridled exploitation of the natural resources of the planet earth.

Besides raising other issues, literature and literary criticism, being the lamps and mirrors of life, have also long been expected to utilize their transformative and persuasive powers to enhance ecosensitivity of the human psyche to let it understand as to how human apathy for nature has incrementally aggravated environmental issues- which have been plaguing all corners of the planet earth from time to time.

It must be admitted that except for brief spans of Romantic Revival in Europe and Transcendentalist movement in America, nature has not been given adequate space on the Western literary landscapes. Even in the Romantic expressions, which were reactions to the post-industrial aggression on the aesthetic and spiritual realms of nature, it would be difficult to find poets and critics focusing explicitly on the harmful environmental impact of the materialistic treatment of nature precipitated by the colonial industrial giants.

The domain of literary criticism, which remained primarily preoccupied till 1980s either with technical aspects of literature or with the socio-economic oppressions of the subaltern voices of the human societies, scarcely bothered to turn its critical attention on to the marginalized voice of the planet earth herself- which has sheltered and nourished all the human and non-human entities since the time immemorial.

Sufferings of the planet earth and her non-human earthlings have been systematically neglected under the influence of the distorted interpretations of the anthropomorphic religious thought. Enlightenment philosophies also became remarkably instrumental in subjugating the earth and the non-human nature by generating Nature/Culture binaries in human consciousness. With the help of these

binaries, the White colonizers validated their Master/Slave narratives to animalize and enslave the human and the natural resources of the lands they had colonized.

Today, in the post-global world, even for the politically liberated countries like India, it is very important to remain extra vigilant about the impact of endorsing certain economic policies which can potentially damage her natural resources on one hand; and on the other hand, undermine her eco-wisdom which has enriched her cultural heritage since ancient times.

Overall outcomes of the Earth Summits and Conference of Parties point to the fact that the climate of the global environmental politics is clearly dominated today by crony capitalism, and the global economic forces perpetuate consumerism across the world for their own benefits at the cost of the environmental well-being of the earth.

Nevertheless, the prevalent climatic conditions and the potential existential threat they have produced have now compelled the entire mankind to sincerely scrutinize all disciplines of human knowledge and their practices from environmental point of view.

In this scenario, ecocriticism, which is a multi-disciplinary critical tool to evaluate fictional expressions in light of their ecological significance, could prove to be one of the best imaginative exercises for the mankind. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers of ecocriticism in America, says that ecocriticism explores the inextricable links between literary expressions and the natural environs (*Ecocriticism Reader* xx). Since ecocriticism examines cultural products like literature and other forms of art to understand the dynamics of man-Nature relationships from multiple dimensions, it can be very useful in understanding

human role and responsibilities either in mitigating or in aggravating the existing environmental problematic.

Emerged in America in 1990s, ecocriticism shares a close spiritual proximity with the environmental vision reflected in the Chief Seattle's speech quoted above. Although some scholars have raised grave doubts about the location, translator's authenticity and contexts of Seattle's speech, the Romantic love for Nature and the environmental wisdom it contains could surely provide a road map to the humans to modify their approaches to deal with the present ecological issues.

Importantly, Glotfelty notes that as "a critical stance", ecocriticism has "one foot in literature" and the other; "on land"; and as "a theoretical discourse it negotiates between the human and non-human" (*Ecocritical Reader* xix). According to Glotfelty, ecocriticism is thus an earth-centered critique of literature, which clearly embodies the crux of the Chief Seattle's appeal to honor the land and the habitats it offers to protect the entire existence into her green embrace.

As ecocritics also find it interesting to see how 'place' could be treated as a distinct category just the ways in which the post-colonial and post-modern thinkers and theorists have considered gender, class or race in their critical discourses, it would be pertinent to ecocritically explore the forests, valleys, river banks and sea shores which foreground the select works of Dhruv Bhatt and Gopinath Mohanty. At the same time, it will also be important to see how and why their themes and characters coincide or differ in their approaches to the man-Nature relationships they have fictionalized.

This introductory chapter explores some basic aspects of the term 'ecocriticism', its global relevance, some of its definitions and features, the philosophical and geo-cultural causes for the long absence of ecologically conscious

literary criticism, and a brief history of its growth. In continuation of the first one, the second chapter will focus on the significance of its study in Indian contexts, compatibility of its characteristics with Indian socio-cultural ethos, and the three branches of ecocriticism- in the light of which I will attempt to analyze the specific texts in the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Ecocriticism and Eco-activism: A Brief Etymological Flashback

The roots of the formal ecocritical movement lie in the American social activism called environmentalism which had begun in 1970s as a reaction against the profit-oriented use of poisonous pesticides in the agricultural sector.

It can be observed that the term ‘ecology’ is also made up of two Greek words: ‘oikos’ (home/habitat) and ‘logy’ (study of). Ecocritical analysis of the fictional depictions of man-Nature relationships stimulates opportunities to understand man’s attitudes towards his own home- i.e. towards the natural environment of the planet earth, which surrounds himself and his co-earthlings.

If we focus at first on the term ‘ecology,’ it should be noted that it was Ernest Haeckel, a German zoologist, who used the term ‘ecology’ for the first time in 1866 to refer to the scientific study of the interrelationships among humans, animals, plants and their habitats. Long before him, Aristotle (384-322 BC) and his student Theophrastus (372-287 BC) had already offered significant contribution into the systematic study of the animal and plant lives respectively.

An article “Plantesamfund” mentions an important book entitled *Oecology of Plants: An Introduction to the Study of Plant Communities*- which was published in 1909 by Warming and Martin Vahl. That book was an English translation from a Danish book by Eugen Warming published in 1895. In fact, this was the book, which not only contained the word ‘ecology’ in its title for the first time, but it also

generated a deep research interest in the great British botanist A.G. Tansley. According to Parmar P.Y. and S.B.Vasavada, it was Tansley who gave the word 'Ecosystem' in 1935 to refer to the complex system in which the biotic and the abiotic entities could survive on account their mutual interactions. Tansley was in fact the first ecologist to emphatically pronounce that ecological knowledge is a prerequisite to develop the basic understanding of the complex environmental processes (16).

Following a brief progression of the term 'ecology', George Tessy in her Ph.D. thesis mentions many early literary articles which used the word 'ecological' in their titles. Important among them were: "Enclosures: The Ecological Significance of a Poem by John Clare" (1963) by Robert Waller, "The Ecological Vision of Gary Snyder" (1970) by Thomas Lyon, "Ecology in Arcadia" (1971) by Glen. A. Love, "Home at Grasmere, Ecological Holiness" (1974) by a US ecocritic Karl Kroeber, and *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* by Joseph Meeker (1974).

In his *Comedy of Survival*, Meeker posits that "environmental crisis is caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West of separation of culture from nature, and elevation of the former to moral predominance" ("Ecocriticism").

Published in 1973, Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, could be considered an important and early critique of pastoral literature from England. However, it has generally been accepted that the English variant of ecocriticism called 'green studies' was launched in 1991 with the publication of *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* by the Shakespearean scholar Jonathan Bate. In this book, Bate rejects the dogmatic stance of some of the new

historicists who sought to devalue Wordsworth's Romantic idealism as impractical and absurd in present contexts.

It has been generally accepted that the neologism 'ecocriticism' was formally mentioned for the first time in 1978 by William Rueckert in an essay entitled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment on Ecocriticism." Rueckert proposed in this essay to apply ecological concepts in understanding literature.

Environmental Activism: America and India

It seems pertinent to look at the similarities and contrasts found in American and Indian varieties of environmental activism because American academia is a formal birth place of the ecocritical movement, and I am going to utilize its critical insights to evaluate the texts which hail from the Indian soil. This exercise can also be useful in understanding how mutual environmental benefits could be drawn out of the synthesis of the two temperamentally distinct ecological visions- one representing the East; and the other, the West; one representing the problems of the developed economies; and the other; of the developing economies.

More than a decade before Rueckert formally floated the concept of utilizing fiction for ecological protection, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1963) in America had already become notable among social circles as well as in the field of literature for its apocalyptic style of explaining the poisonous impact of using agricultural pesticides on birds, on the soil, on the food chains and on the humans who consume that food. Carson (1907-1964) was a marine biologist, an author and a conservationist. Her *Silent Spring* stimulated a remarkable ecosensitive activism called 'environmentalism' in the American society during 1970s.

Interestingly around the same time, economically developing countries like India and Africa also witnessed globally acclaimed environmental movements such

as Chipko Andolan (Tree-Hugging Agitation) in India; and Green Belt Movement in Kenya.

Professor Wangari Maathai organized rural womenfolk in 1977 to combat deforestation and soil erosion by planting more and more trees across Kenya, so that subsistence issue could be resolved and environmental interests of the poor could be protected. Similarly, in India, the same objective inspired eco-activist Sunderlal Bahuguna to launch Chipko Andolan in 1973. People living in the foothills of the Himalaya, who were traditionally dependent on the forests for their daily subsistence, reacted against the mass-logging operations conducted by private companies. As soon as the contractors were seen along with their automatic chainsaws to fell trees, village folks, and especially womenfolk having leaders like Gaura Devi among them, used to rush to hug the trees to prevent the commercial en masse tree-cutting operations.

One of the common factors between the campaigns that took place in the economically developed America and the developing India was the time frame; both took place almost around 1970s and continued vigorously for more than a decade afterwards. Secondly, activists of both these movements wanted to guard environmental interests against capitalist aggression on the collective natural resources. However, the difference between their rationales shows how economic factors affect location-specific-environmental consciousness.

In India, the said environmental struggle had emanated from the grass root level. i.e. from the poor villagers- and mostly the women folk among them- whose closely connected ecologic and economic interests were at stake; whereas, the support system of the American eco-activism was bolstered by the people belonging

to higher socio-economic strata, who wanted the government to guard the environmental health of their societies.

It must be admitted that even more than economic positions, more often it is the religious sentiments and spiritual philosophies which can continue to inspire geo-culture-specific communities fervently either in laying down their own lives for protecting the non-human environment or destroying the same on account of the spiciest hegemony propagated by the Western religions and the colonial powers which endorsed unscrupulous exploitation of nature. The bloody sacrifice of more than 350 Rajasthani Bishnois in 1730s in India (who preferred to get killed in lieu of trees) and the monstrous extraction of the natural resources of India around the same time by the British industrialists provide apt examples to look at this reality from opposite angles.

However, as mentioned before, in 1970s, environmentalism ushered by Carson's book prepared a broad platform for the emergence of ecocriticism in the Western critical domains. Ecocriticism then gradually branched out into various stands such as ecosociology, ecofeminism, deep ecology, ecospiritualism, ecopsychology etc. etc.

In later years, when environmental consciousness began to break geo-cultural, xenophobic, racial, economic and spiciest boundaries, a considerable number of ecoactivists and literary artists across the globe realised the ecological significance of procuring environmental justice for every segment of human societies as well as for their non-human counterparts.

It could be observed that ideas of the Bishnois, Rueckert, Meeker and Carson substantiate the climatologists' appeals who have been emphatically asking the humanity since 1960s to focus on intensifying the collective environmental mission.

Majority of the natural scientists and ecologists have been repeatedly warning the polities across the world that if man fails now to take immediate action about minimizing human contribution into the environmental destruction, he is certainly and rapidly minimizing his own chances survival.

Responding to this necessity, in 1989, ecocritics like Cheryll Glotfelty, Harold Fromm and their colleagues convened a conference in America, wherein they appealed to the literary scholars to focus their critical attention on Nature-writings in order to re-examine the changed/changing human attitudes towards Nature. As a result of this conference, Glotfelty and Fromm co-edited a well-known anthology of ecocritical essays entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, and published it in 1996.

Glotfelty's scholarly publication points towards our environmental complacency, and the marked negligence of ecological issues in the field of literary criticism till the end of the twentieth century. It clearly suggests that an enormous effort by the literary critics will be required to dilute the human centrism which could be found ingrained in almost all fields of human enterprises.

Taxonomical Convenience of "Eco" over "Environ": Re-Centering Nature

To 'environ' means to encompass, encircle, surround, enclose or embrace. So, on the whole, environment is "the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded." And, ecology is "a branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments." Or, it may be defined as "the totality or pattern of relations between organisms and their environment" (Merriam Webster).

Here, environment seems to be an integral part of the ecosphere. According to Glotfelty, the term 'enviro' sounds "anthropocentric" as well as "dualistic",

suggesting that humans are at the center and man chooses to remain isolated from the environment that encompasses him. She argues that the critics prefer the term ‘eco’ as it sounds all inclusive, implying “... interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts.” She adds that perhaps because of this reason the term ‘ecocriticism’ has gained more popularity at present, though the “... taxonomic name of this green branch of literary study is still being negotiated” (*Ecocritical Reader* xx, xix).

1.2 Ecocriticism: A Holistic Approach, Not a Concrete Theory

Ecocritical platform tends to envelope the boundless. Since the flexibility of ecocritical platform offers multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary opportunities to explore relations between the limitless scopes of the natural environs and the multi-layered cultural environs, what Glotfelty has said above about its nomenclature is also true about the acts of circumscribing this praxis within a specific definition.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider some of the critical attempts to define the term to give proper direction to the critical ideas in light of which the select texts are to be assessed.

In the Introduction to *Ecocriticism Reader* Glotfelty states that:

Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

To substantiate their earth-centrism, it must be noted, ecocritics borrow arguments from the feminist, Marxist, socialist and other critical theories which have

themselves been diversified into a plethora of different groups and subgroups. Ecocritics also try to understand Nature from spiritual, scientific, psychological and technological dimensions. Moreover, what adds to complexities of this multidisciplinary platform is its capacity to embrace the conceptual varieties on ecological issues which arise out of the opposite environmental positions of the colonizers and the colonized as debated in the postcolonial critical discourse; the exploiters and the exploited within the inter/national boundaries; the developed economies and the developing ones on global scale; and the rich and the poor at local levels. All these concepts and opinions and observations expand the scopes of ecocriticism, turning into a holistic approach to literature.

Perhaps that is why, when Glotfelty was trying to codify this critical practice, Wallace Stegner, a known historian-novelist-critic, gave a practical suggestion not to do so. Rather than systemizing this practice, he said he would prefer this topic to remain “large and loose and suggestive and open” (Glotfelty Introduction. xxii).

In fact, the spectrum of ecocriticism has now been broadened further from Romantic literature and the genre of the non-fictional Nature-writing to films, paintings, architecture, documentaries, animal stories, children literature or even scientific write-ups, to name a few. Marginalized voices of women or have-nots or homosexuals or racial victims are represented today respectively by feminists, Marxists, Queer theorists or postcolonial thinkers. In the same way, ecocritics attempt to highlight not only the marginalized human voices, but also the never-heard voice of the earth and her environment.

Due to its broad spectrum, ecocriticism becomes an eco-conscious approach rather than a specific school with a concrete, mono-dimensional theory like Marxism or feminism or socialism from which it liberally draws its ecosensitive arguments.

Ecocriticism has thus become an umbrella term to denote various types of ecologically conscious modes of criticism known with different rubrics such as ‘environmental literary criticism’, ‘green criticism’, ‘green poetics’, ‘green cultural studies’ ‘eco-poetics’ etc.

Some Definitions

Multi-faceted scopes of the ecocritical praxis have inspired various critics to define ecocriticism in various ways. In the introduction to her book *Ecocritical Reader*, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Glotfelty simply defines ecocriticism as “a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xx).

Derek Gladwin defines ecocriticism as “a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment” (“Ecocriticism.” Oxford Bibliographies).

Another article entitled “Ecocriticism” discusses more definitions of the term by other important ecocritics like Lawrence Buell, Simon Estok and Camilo Gomides. According to this article, Buell, like Glotfelty, also defines ecocriticism as a “study of relationship between literature and the environment,” but he adds that this study should be “conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.”

On the other hand, Estok also repeats the word “commitment” twice. While explaining the term with reference to other critical theories, he observes that:

Ecocriticism has distinguished itself... Firstly, by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an

important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and secondly, by its commitment to making connections.

Estok's mention of "commitment" to "natural world" clearly shows ecocritics' preference for the 'art for the sake of life'. His second mention of "commitment" to "making connections" reflects the conviction of the deep ecologists in the famous dictum that 'everything is connected to everything else.' In the same article, it is stated that Gomides considers 'ecocriticism' as:

The field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with Nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations.

As Gomides explains, it is desirable for an ecocritic to raise "moral questions" about "human interactions with Nature" so that the audience may learn to "live within a limit" which "will be binding over generations."

It can be easily noticed that all the critics mentioned put emphasis on the ethical stance ecocriticism takes- which is necessary from theoretical as well as from practical point of views in today's environmental situation. In different words, they all point towards their common goal of drawing attention of the mankind towards its moral and practical responsibilities in resolving the global environmental problematic.

Ecocritical Resistance to Human-centrism

Whatever human goals, achievements and definitions of progress might be, it is a scientifically proven fact that humanity has come to a point today where the nexus among climate change, global warming and the human-sponsored pollutions have exasperated environmental problematic like never before. So, ecocritics tend to

draw human attention towards the negative environmental impact of industrial development and war fare.

Black smokes being emanated from vehicles and factories and from the road construction activities, the appalling speed of de-forestation, and the war operations exponentially increase carbon foot prints. The resultant rise in the global temperatures disturb seasonal cycles and intensify the scopes and frequencies of natural disasters.

Mentioning an alarming statistical jump in the average number of natural calamities from 400 in 1980 to 960 in 2007, Ben Block claims that 97 percent or more of actively publishing climatologists of the world agree that the climate-warming trends and the attendant hydro-metrological entropies over the past century are “extremely likely due to human activities.”

In 2019, while the climate-warming trends and human contribution into the same have been remarkably increased, Ben Block’s climatic statistics about ecologically terrifying human acts makes one remind Mary Shelly’s premonition expressed in her scientific fiction *Frankenstein* (1818)- which is a story about an over ambitious scientist, who, in a Mephistophelian fashion, paradoxically invites his own ruin through the terrifying acts of his own creation- an unruly grotesque humanoid equipped with artificial intelligence.

So, while procuring a radical shift from egocentric to ecocentric way of life has become a global imperative, it has indeed become very important to appreciate such literature that would undermine anthropocentrism and suggest that if man fails to handle his knowledge of chemistry or technology in proper directions, it is none but the mankind itself which will suffer the undesirable consequences of the disharmony between man and Nature.

In fact, more than 80% of the energy required to facilitate the luxurious life styles of economically developed classes is supplied today through the consumption of fossil fuels which in turn releases Carbon Dioxide (Co₂); and this Co₂ is literally and scientifically a black sheep among the other ecologically harmful man-made Green House Gases (GHGs) (“Time for Change”).

Co₂ forms a thick layer in the upper air - which traps the solar radiation, obstructing the heat which must otherwise vanish quickly back into the space. The resultant phenomenon of global warming ignites wild fires, upsets seasonal cycles and perturbs precipitation processes; generating floods here and draughts there. Thus, the phenomena of global warming cause a serious damage to the biodiversity as well as to the human communities living near low-lying coastal water bodies like Maldives, or in forest areas like Sundarbans connecting the West Bengal of India and Bangladesh.

Since anthropogenic pressures have in this way de-stabilized ecosystems, Verderame Michael in “The Shape of Ecocriticism to Come” suggests that the field of ecocriticism must re-examine actions of the mankind from the inward as well as outward viewpoints. He believes that though literary critic is not a scientist, it is desirable that he gains some basic know-how about the scientific and material aspects of the specific issues he has to deal with. He asserts that to be capable of comprehending the eco material aspects depicted in the texts, an ecocritic, besides literary journals and books, should also consider the statistical data provided in the newspapers, reports from government agencies, medical reports or even weather bulletins.

Michael’s suggestion for the ecocritics to utilize “outward” as well “inward” viewpoints guides them to touch deeper layers of ecological issues fictionalized in a

given text. Wordsworth has attached importance to the responses of the inward eye; whereas, Michael suggests that the outward details provided by scientific reports enriches one's inward understanding of the issue; and it is the internalized thinking patterns which determine outward acts of man. In one of the following sessions, it will be interesting to see how religious, literary and philosophical concepts influence the inwardness of the human psyche; and how they have thus shaped socio-political and scientific concepts of Nature as well as determine the goals and practices of humans- who have lived across the diverse geo-cultural boundaries and temporal zones throughout their evolutionary journey.

Remus Prăvălie's doctoral research on nuclear tests exposes a scary dimension to the eco-problematic, which suggests that besides carbon emissions, plastic-electronic-chemical waste, and digital pollutions, how warfare has also added significantly to the present rates of environmental degradation.

History is replete with innumerable episodes to support Prăvălie's research. For instance, even after more than seven decades, Hiroshima-Nagasaki have not been yet able to come out of the nuclear shock they received due to the two American Atom bombs dropped on them during the Second World War respectively on 6th and 9th August, 1945.

Although great controversies were stormed around the question as to what must have instigated America to launch those consecutive attacks within a period of three days, the question has still remained debatable whether it was a military necessity for America to let Japan surrender, or it was the political ambition of America to establish military supremacy among other countries like Russia by parading its Nuclear might.

Luis Walter Alvarez, the Nobel Prize Winner of 1968, was an American physicist who had participated not only in making the Atomic bomb called 'Little Boy', but he had also joined the actual aerial-bomb-strike on Hiroshima to witness and evaluate how huge could be the impact of their Little Boy on the city where it was to be dropped. 'Having seen a movie on the previous night', the bombers started for Japan at 2.45 am on 6th August, 1945. Just after dropping the bomb and burning alive more than 90000 humans and obliterating innumerable families of the non-human aquatic and terrestrial species below, from the flying plane, Alvarez wrote a letter to his son, saying:

During the last few hours I have been thinking of you and your mother and our little sister Jean...What regrets I have about being a party to killing and maiming thousands of Japanese civilians this morning tempered with the hope that this terrible weapon we have created may bring the countries of the world together.... Our new destruction force is so many thousands of times worse that it may realize Nobel's dream.

This letter explicitly shows the apathy that has grown between man-man, and between man-Nature, and its impact on the socio-cultural and natural ecologies. It reflects how even a psyche of a scientist, in techno-scientifically and economically advanced cultures, thinks about their fellow human beings, and how it does not have time nor any intension to think about the impact of his acts on Nature.

It may be noted that even before the so-called Nature-culture dichotomy emerged, even an illiterate human being, being an intrinsic part of nature, did instinctively know the prime importance of maintaining harmony with nature. In fact, since the times immemorial, the tribal sagacity, as expressed in the Chief

Seattle's speech, has always guided the humanity that natural entities exist on the earth on account of the mutual reciprocities they develop between them and the mother earth. Thematic study of Mohanty's *Paraja* will also indicate how drastically the earth and her green covers are being affected due to the expulsions of the forest-dwelling tribal communities from their forest lands.

Throughout the trajectory of human evolution, the disassociation between man-Nature is steadily being accelerated. Modern man has indeed "no time to stand and stare" the nature around him, to use Willian Davies's famous lines. It is difficult to disagree with this Romantic regret that the type of bond which humans previously used to cherish with Nature is certainly being corroded as physical gulfs between them continue to widen.

The killing of Albatross in Shelly's *Ancient Mariner* does remind the modern mindsets that in the scientifically interlinked ecosystem, man has to take the recent upsurge in the annihilation of certain non-human species like- Amur leopard, gorillas, elephants, tigers, shark whales, vultures, owlets, and eagles- more sensitively.

If modern man, despite his remarkable knowledge of the natural laws of symbiosis, continues to damage nature like before, he could be compared with the fictional figure of Kalidasa, the most celebrated star of the classical literary universe in general and Sanskrit literature in particular, who has been shown being unaware of cutting the very branch of a tree on which he is sitting.

It is indeed difficult to deny that in the post-industrial world that with the help of quick and automatic technology and the spread of advertisements to boost consumerism, natural resources are being extracted with a dazzling speed globally.

Masses are also thus knowingly or unknowingly implicated into the processes that harm their own ecological health.

It has to be acknowledged that in order to grapple successfully with the enormities of the environmental challenge, ecosensitivity of the political will of every nation requires to be enhanced since it holds the executive powers to implement environmental laws into their own systems.

1.3 Ecopolitics and its Impact on the Physical Environment

Since the limitless spatial and temporal scopes of the physical environs subsume all the man-made geo-political borders, humans do know how extremely important it is to maintain harmonies between natural ecology and human politics. Despite continued negotiations on this issue being held on the international environmental platforms, natural environment is perpetually being affected at macro as well as micro levels due to the inter/national power games called 'ecopolitics.'

Natural resources pull more economic wealth, and economically strong nations attempt to capture more of these 'treasure troves' by expanding their territorial powers over the land which is found enriched with oil, gas, water bodies, green covers and minerals.

Links between the exploitation of natural resources and the ecologic marginalisation of humans on account of their economic, social, racial or gendered discriminations are quite distinct. News about ecopolitics are suggestive of the fact that on account of their respective economic strength, nations keep fighting to establish their claims on the depleting natural resources discovered in territories of other nations.

The same reason induces disharmony among the states within the nations, among the regions within the states, and also among the communities living in those

regions. Such eco-conflicts ultimately damage health of the natural environs of the earth in various ways.

In his research-based article of 2017, Alice Klein, quoting the *Journal of Coastal Conservation*, reports that eight low-lying Pacific islands have already been swallowed by the sea levels, which have been rising due to the corresponding hike in pollution indices and in the global temperatures. Human communities and biodiversity located near water bodies and forest areas of Maldives, Marshal islands, Pacific islands, Hawaii, and Bangladesh have been seriously exposed to high-risk-flood zones.

To take precautionary measures against the ensuing climatic disorders, international organisations like the UN have been attempting to monitor the pollution indices of each nation. Pollutions adversely affect limited natural resources, which aggravates the subsistence struggles between man-man, state-state and man-animal.

Therefore, since 1970s, in conventions like ES (Earth Summits) and COPs (Conference of Parties), the UN has been persuading all her member nations to formulate and implement environmentally resilient laws, and facilitate policies that support sustainable development, protection of biodiversity and preservation of the endangered species.

Under 1992 UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), the UN invited all its member nations to sign different environmental accords. KP (Kyoto Protocol) of 1997 and PA (Paris Agreement) of 2015 were very important among them as they put economic and legal obligations to cut specific amount of carbon-emissions on the signatory nations. However, as stated in the *Earth Observatory*, the rounds of intergovernmental environmental negotiations on

carbon-cuts, as the concluding paragraph of the following section would exhibit, have still remained shockingly inconclusive at the time when the rise in the earth's temperature has almost doubled in the last fifty years.

Inadequate Environmental Consciousness in Literature and Literary Criticism

Literature and literary criticism are supposed to highlight environmental issues which have been creating anxieties most significantly since post-industrial era. However, literature failed to adequately address such issues for a very long period of time.

The testimony to this fact is that between the coinage of the term 'ecology' in 1866 by Haeckel and Rueckert's proposal of 'ecocriticism' in 1978, there is a gap of more than a century- during which literature and literary criticism remained largely detached from environmental concerns- although during this period, humans in various parts of the world did suffer from numerous natural as well as man-sponsored disasters.

For example, the Pennsylvania Donora smog tragedy of 1948 in the US, and the severe Industrial air pollution event called the Great London Smog disaster of 1952 suffocated a significant amount of human lives. These were the most conspicuous examples of human contribution in aggravating ecological degradation before 1960s. When human sponsored eco-tragedies taking place due to industrialisation at home could not draw much attention of the English literary imagination, expecting them to write about the impact of Industrial Revolution on the natural and social ecologies of the colonized countries like India would be out of place.

One of the reasons for the lack of ecosensitivity prevailed in the field of literature written between 1920s and 1980s was that literary talents mostly remained preoccupied either with the formal aspects of literary expressions or with identity politics. So, although Nature was of course not out of their sight; it did remain out of their minds.

Ecocritical Void on the Western Critical Landscapes

In the Platonic world, the 'onto'/ideal was more important than the physical world. There was no place for consideration for the reality of the physical environment in the platonic world which was imagined to be a part of appearances. Poets who might have depicted Nature was just a copy of the twice removed reality. Aristotle, a natural scientist and a historian himself, had kept clear distinction among the disciplines of science, philosophy and art. Aristotelian conviction in the human supremacy over the natural world on account of human rationality continued to preoccupy attention of the artists and critics on human rather the non-human world.

Though the earth had occupied central space in the geocentric cosmic narrative propounded by the medieval theocracy, the importance given to the earth was only due to the human presence on the same. Dark ages were possessed by the beliefs that the highest celestial sources had authorized the Church authorities and the royal rules to govern the moral and administrative affairs of the human world. As a result, Greek tragedies were focused on kings and on the supernatural phenomena rather than on natural entities.

Later on, even when astronomical science replaced the geocentric narrative with the heliocentric cosmic view, neither science nor literature could dilute narcissism which had placed humans at the center of all their artistic and critical imaginations since the dark ages. So, instead of throwing some light also on the non-human nature, critics continued to invest their creative energies in critiquing the formal aspects of the given texts or evaluating the same in terms of their human-centered themes.

A quick survey of different movements described in *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* by Raman Shelden, et al. suggests that Aristotelian

emphasis on the structural balance of literary texts was revived in Renaissance in various European critical traditions; and its influence was extended clearly up to the neoclassical age of the English literary history. From within the frame work of classical literariness, neoclassic authors talked mostly about their contemporary political affairs.

Except for Romanticism which will be discussed in a separate section here, in the major part of the literary history, it was man- and not Nature -who occupied central space in human imagination and priorities. As mentioned before, the foci of literature went on shifting -from the gods and religion in the ancient times to the heroes of high birth in the renaissance humanism to the cultured man of the city life in the neoclassicism. In the traditional critical approaches also, it was man who captured the center of attention. For instance, in the conventional biographical approach of literary texts, the critical gaze by default remained human-centric. It could be seen that the basic concerns for the practitioners of Realism, Naturalism and Existentialism remained human-centric.

Aspects of natural history did not remain a favorite theme for those who practiced historical critical approach, who mostly dealt with the socio-political aspects of human history; and in the domain of psychoanalytical approach, the study of the relation between man and environment did not remain very popular though works from authors like Thomas Hardy might have proved relevant for the purpose.

The identity politics initiated by the traditional feminists, Marxists or Socialists aimed at liberating humans from the injustices inflicted upon them due to gender/economic/racial biases, but the thought of protecting identity of the earth from human aggressions did not occur to them till they entered second part of the twentieth century.

In the New criticism of 1940s, in which the text was to be evaluated without any external context, the question of incorporating ecological issues in the critical debate was methodologically out of place. The mythological approach studied how human characters responded to the archetypes lying in the collective human unconscious, and the readers' response theory was interested in studying how meanings are created out of the human comprehension of the given situations.

Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* rightly comments that Plato's skepticism about the arbitrariness of meanings seemed to have stretched its influence up to the Poststructuralist's deconstruction theories of 1970s. "Structuralism and post structuralism" observes Garrard, "... have emphasized the linguistic functions of signs that relate to each other rather than refer to real things" (9-10).

Not only the realm of poststructuralism as Gerrard observes, even the cultural theories which have gained prominence since 1980s also did not give adequate space to the most important but the long-suppressed voice of the earth herself, though the strength of these critical theories lie in its intellectual strategies of bringing the marginalized voices into the central debate.

Talking of the nineteen eighties in India, being the "period of surging carbon emissions", Amitav Ghosh, in *The Great Derangement*, admits that it was indeed a shocking surprise to note that a very few of the literary minds including himself "... were alive to the archaic voice whose rumblings, once familiar, had now become inaudible to humanity: that of the earth and its atmosphere" (166).

On the other hand, Glotfelty too makes a frank admission in *Ecocriticism Reader* regarding the American academic ostracism about tragedies like Chernobyl disaster of 1986, and the environmental issues such as oceanic oil spills, growth in the ozone hole, and hurricanes and droughts that took place at domestic front around

the same time. She states that although “The Engendered Earth” was given the “1989 person of the year award” of the Time Magazine, and although the US president declared 1990s “the decade of the environment”, the literary domain of America surprisingly remained unaffected by environmental concerns (Introduction xvi).

Not much seems to have changed in this situation even today. Dominique Mosbergen, a Huff Post correspondent and a green advocate, reports that the US president Donald Trump, a leader of a nation which is among the top three per-capita carbon-emitting economies, dismissed the very concept of global warming as “hoax” and “bullshit” in 2017.

In the times when economic priorities clearly subjugate ecological considerations in the world, Trumps’ statement does exhibit not only the human apathy for the exceptionally widened Nature-Culture chasm, but it also signals towards the fact as to what a colossal environmental challenge is looming over the entire ecosystem- when the definitions of human goals, progress and life itself are being reframed under the impact of globalization.

In order to grapple with this formidable challenge, besides the UN, when many formal and informal groups belonging to diverse professional spheres from different corners of the world have also been attempting to contribute towards raising environmental awareness in various ways- the domains of literature and literary criticism- with the help of their transformative powers- are also now expected to offer a substantial contribution in stimulating and percolating environmental consciousness in the socio-political psyche of the mankind.

1.4 Ecocritical Seeds and their Growth: Waves and Strands

Considering the grave necessity to include material aspects of environmental issues in literature, in introduction to *Ecocritical Reader*, Glotfelty rightly remarks

that what needs to be understood is that “literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter and ideas interact” (xvi, xix).

Between 1990-1992, by organizing, participating and encouraging special sessions, symposia and conferences focusing on the American Nature writing through important literary associations like Modern Language Association (MLA) or Western Literature Association (WLA)- Glotfelty along with Harold Fromm, Glen Love and Scott Slovic made arrangements to bring together eco-conscious authors who were writing without knowing about one another’s similar interests and goals.

In 1992, with initial number of 300 members, the professional association ASLE was established with a view to promote “intellectual work in the environmental humanities and arts.” It has an international presence now with 1450 members in more than 30 countries. It quarterly publishes peer-reviewed academic journal called *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE) through Oxford University Press in which the current ecocritical scholarship can be accessed.

In 2020, “Bifrost Online” could be considered one of the important websites which promotes exchange of environmental thoughts to enhance awareness about sustainability and climate change. Eminent ecocritics like Greta Gaard, Serpil Oppermann, Steven Hartman, and Joni Adamson have presented a stimulating discussion on this platform through a Portal they have named COVID-19.

Waves of Ecocriticism

Generally, the brief history of the ecocritical practice has been segregated into three short time spans. The period between 1980-1995 is considered the first wave; the second wave runs between 1995-2000; and the phase which began in post

2000 was labeled as third wave in 2009, and it still continues as suggested by Slovic Scott in “The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflections on the Current Phase of the Discipline.”

Slovic notes that the ‘wave’ metaphor was given by Lawrence Buell in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005). Buell pointed out that drawing a definite chart of ecocriticism is difficult since the ecocritical trends that had begun in the first wave are still running strong in some cases.

Slovic classifies the waves with regard to their characteristic features. According to him, the first wave focused primarily on: the non-fiction Nature-writing of the American and the British literature. Scientific literacy on part of an ecocritic was seen as a need to correct his subjective responses to the natural environs. Discursive ecofeminism was common in practice, which equated women with Nature as they have a unique relation. It studied the literary representations of the spiritual or biological connections between human and non-human. Wilderness experience in the rural settings was appreciated with conservationist stance. Thomas Hardy, Henry David Thoreau or Wendell Berry could be considered some of the important literary figures for critical analysis during the first wave.

Second Wave distinctively differs from the first phase as it expands itself in the choice of genre, settings and the scopes of criticism. Instead of the prime focus only on non-fiction, multiple genres were studied during this phase. Even the concept of green cultural studies exceeded the boundaries of literature. Instead of speculation on Nature, it aimed at social activism. For example, Rachel Carson’s idyllic portrayal of the heavenly beauty of Nature in the beginning is a rhetorical strategy to intensify the kind of damage could be done by pesticides. Instead of the representation of Nature, the focus was shifted to the representation of the culture

specific ecological situations across the world. The idea of environmental justice was strengthened during this wave. Instead of just romanticisation of pastoral beauty or natural wilderness, the ecological experiences of the urban and suburban also came into critical focus. Known exemplars of the second wave, according to Slovic, are: Laurence Coupe's collection *The Green Studies Reader* (2000), Karla Armbruster and Kathleen Wallace's *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, and *The Environmental Justice Reader*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein.

Slovic observes that the focus of the third wave was more intense on ethnic identity than it was before. Another striking feature of this phase was the comparative practice of cross-cultural, internationally relative human experiences.

In the field of ecofeminism, material ecofeminism emerged which included topics on eco-masculinism, green queer theory, sustainable life styles, food habits like vegetarianism or omnivorianism. In this period, the scope of the environmental justice has been extended to include the rights of the non-human species. Critics like Dana Phillips and Michael Cohen have recommended to include critical theories while reminding the ecofeminists to remember their activism. Slovic calls the third wave “Polymorphous activist” tendency in which scholars and teachers would find “new and old ways to connect their work to social transformation”.

If ecocritical contribution of Romantics and Transcendentalists is seen in light of Slovic's above-mentioned remarks, practitioners of both these movements could be called polymorphous activists. Their works, theories and democratic spirit have produced considerable influence on great many literary artists, political thinkers and ecocritics.

Major Ecocritical Strands

Began in the 1970s in America, as mentioned before, environmentalism, a broad socio-political environmental movement, became a foundational source from which various, overlapping trends of ecocriticism- such as ecosociology, deep ecology, ecofeminism, eco-culturalism, ecolinguistics, eco-spiritualism, ecotourism, ecopsychology, postcolonial ecocriticism etc. have come into being.

Out of all these trends, I am going to focus in this thesis the first three major trends- namely ecosociology, deep ecology and ecofeminism. Just as their nomenclatures suggest, practitioners of these ecocritical trends argue that the causes of ecological degradation lie respectively in economic disparity, specisism and androcentrism. All these trends can of course be understood more clearly in light of the insights offered by the other ecocritical segments mentioned above.

Environmentalism urges the humanity to preserve environment primarily for the sake of protecting human health and survival. To oppose industrial emissions of gases, de-forestation and the dumping of plastic waste into the soil and seas, they launch socio-political campaigns to protect the green covers and to stop further environmental deterioration.

Eco-socialists, like Marxists and other followers of socialism, believe that the cause of ecological decay is economic inequality; and the commodification of Nature and consumerism being aggravated by the elites and the industrial corporate houses intensify ecological and social disorders. They also study how the rich nations on the international platforms and the rich class within those nations victimize Nature as well as the poor on account of their self-perceived notions of progress and practices of obtaining material comforts.

Ecofeminism is based on a firm conviction that ecological problem cannot be resolve without considering feminist perspectives on environmental issues. Having a huge amount of contrasting voices within its orbits, it has been rightly referred to as ‘Ecofeminisms.’ The roots of these varieties could be traced in the different categories one comes across in the feminist discourse such as: liberals and radicals, Marxists and Socialists, The First world and Third world feminists, or the Black and the White feminists. To champion the cause of ecological recovery, some ecofeminists outrightly reject the traditional practice of equating images of women with Mother Nature; whereas, some of them propose to modify those stereotypes to affirm superiority of the natural ecosensitivity attributed to women in responding to environmental issues.

In chapter III, it will be seen how these intersecting, overlapping threads of ecofeminists, in spite of their discernable differences, unanimously reject the male-centric legitimization of colonizing and exploiting the Earth/Birth Mothers.

Deep ecology advocates anti-speciesist and anti-anthropocentric ideology to deal with the environmental issues. Exclusively human-centric environmental concepts are found shallow and conservative by this section of radical ecocritics called **Deep ecologists**- who believe that any approach which excludes existential rights of the non-human organisms remains superficial, and this myopic tendency can never resolve the environmental problematic. Deep ecologists therefore outrightly reject ecological marginalization of the less-resourceful non-human world. In the fourth chapter, in light of their manifesto called Deep-Ecology-Platform, I will try to explain why they disprove speciesism of environmentalists and criticize human-centrism that inform other ecocritical strands.

Eco-linguistics is a study of language and other literary tools from ecological dimension. It facilitates exploration of literary texts from the view point of semiotics to see how literary language and use of symbols reflect human attitudes about the ‘other’ human beings or the non-human counterparts of nature like birds, animals, insects, trees, places, and about the natural resources like rivers, oceans, hills, or the forest that surround us. Ecolinguists may like to study the impact of literary language on environmental approaches and practices. They try to assess the relations between the semantic structures of language and their deep structures which carry cultural connotations, and how they affect social and natural ecologies. They examine how and why language tends to protect or annihilate certain floral and faunal species by imposing human characteristics on the non-human world. For example, it may be interesting for them to see as to why and how certain animals (like foxes) and birds (like crows) have been portrayed as crafty entities in certain folklores or the collection of ancient stories like Panchatantra, and what could be the impact of such collective knowledge on such species.

Ecospiritualism seeks to curtail the psychological isolation of materialistic human world from Nature by kindling the sense of spirituality in human hearts. Ecospiritualists evaluate literature in terms of its capacity to develop the sense of honor for Nature in human consciousness by disseminating the religious tenets of non-violence and acknowledgement of spiritual equality among all human and non-human earthlings. In this regard, the great King Ashoka, who attempted to disseminate ideas of harmony and non-violence for all entities among his subjects through persuasive ways, should be considered the greatest ecospiritual figure of India.

Due to its all-inclusive qualities, ecospiritualism has often been considered to be a salient feature of the deep ecological platform. Since some practitioners of this strand express faith in reviving the ancient religious practice of seeing the earth in an image of a motherly Goddess, ecospiritualism also reflect some commonalities with the schools of Gaia hypothesis and radical ecofeminism.

Epistemological orbits of ecoculturalism is almost limitless. Ecoculturalists opine that only techno-scientific solutions cannot take us to the roots of the unexpected climate change and ecological degradation. Since it is the culture that shapes environmental imagination of humans and make them attach value to the objects of Nature, it is important to synthesize insights of cultural studies with the environmental practices and approaches adopted by different systems of human knowledge.

As culture is a comprehensive essence of the entire gamut of human experience, ecoculturalism becomes extremely open-ended domain. It encourages the ecocritics to conduct sociological study of the synchronicities between the post-global/post-modern techno-scientific growth with the social constructions of nature.

Adrian Ivakhiv points out that ecoculturalism encompasses environmental insights emerging from diverse disciplines of knowledge such as history, philosophy, media and discourse analysis, historical ecology, cultural geography, anthropology, and ‘environmental criticism’ or ‘ecocriticism.’ Explicating the multi/cross disciplinary nature and the immense scopes of ecospiritualism, Adrian Ivakhiv writes that:

The emancipatory focus within cultural studies regarding questions of class, race, gender, identity and difference, is extended, within an "ecocultural studies", to include

examination of the power exercised by humans over their extra-human environments, and to encompass questions of "ecocultural identity and difference" -- that is, relations between different modes of human interaction or "immersion" with(in) nonhuman nature (via productive labour, leisure, scientific research, religion and myth, etc.) and the politics within which these are imposed, resisted, legitimized and/or marginalized. ("Ecocultural Critical Theory")

Since ecoculturalism, as discussed above, accommodates the entire movement of ecocriticism itself, all the strands of ecocritical movement on which I am going to focus upon in the subsequent chapters can therefore be classified as small streams of the colossal river called ecocultural studies.

It may be briefly mentioned here that these different trends and the numerous dissenting voices of different ecocritics therein are bound together by their common agenda of preserving environment. Though their strategies and arguments differ, they all oppose anthropocentric tendencies in most cases. They all acknowledge moral responsibility and vital role of human beings in re-establishing ecological equilibrium.

1.5 De-Romanticizing Ecological Issues

According to Lawrence Buell, it is not desirable to ignore the scientific aspects of premonitory depictions. In *Toxic Discourse*, Buell warns us against the tendency to romanticize apocalyptic narratives. Buell underlines importance of fusing scientific objectivity, factual data and socio-economic as well as racial connotations of eco-populism. In *Ecocriticism* although Greg Gerrard also admits that the apocalyptic "... rhetorical strategies have provided the green movement with

some of its most striking success,” he does not fail to point out the “proleptic” character of this apocalypticism (93, 94).

Ecocritics who prefer to appreciate fictional realities of nature only in the light of solid ecological facts may tend to criticize premonitory narratives. It is true that over-romanticisation of ecological issues may not be preferable, but the apocalyptic narrative techniques used in the texts such as *Silent Spring* or *Frankenstein* have been appreciated since they have been able to effectively forewarn the humanity about the eminent dangers of ignoring the environmentally self-destructive actions.

Buell’s suggestion to refrain from forming impulsive opinions about environmental issues does appeal to the modern mindsets; but Gerrard’s caveat about the “proleptic” character of the environmental objections sounds debatable because the facts about environmental damage can be collected only after the damage has been done.

Apocalyptic descriptions of floods in Damodar Mauzo’s *Tsunami Simon*, Amitav Ghosh’s *Hungry Tide* or Bhatt’s *Oceanside Blues* do help us anticipate the dire scopes of the eminent environmental disasters. And, they also remind us that while preparing to face such calamities, minimizing human impact on ecology has become an inevitable exercise for the mankind.

Before concluding his discussion on Romanticism, Cuddon mentions in his dictionary two diametrically opposite views about overall effects of this ecologically important movement. He rightly says that the truth lies somewhere between Goethe’s later opinion of Romanticism as a “sickness of spirit and a disorganizing irruption of subjectivism” and the opposite opinion of others who believe that Romanticism was “a kind of renaissance, a re-discovery, a wholly beneficial upheaval, and a much-

needed rejection of the defunct standards and beliefs which resulted in a creative freedom of mind and spirit” (590).

Romantic love for nature can of course make the readers acknowledge aesthetic and emotional significance of nature. On the other hand, if majority of the modern mind sets who, like the neoclassicists, prefer to understand nature from scientific and logical dimensions, it is ‘reason’able for them to acknowledge the unquestionable logic of protecting environment from human aggressions. majority of the modern mindsets, who, like the neoclassicists, tend to look understand nature with help of their reason, scientific and It may be suitable to assume that the neoclassical preference for reason and scientific thought could also be quite useful in convincing the modern mindsets, who will also prefer to logically understand the significance of environmental preservation. However, as the human role in the present environmental degradation contradicts this assumption, it is evident that ecocritics will need to expose the paradoxes of the present times- wherein in spite of the advancement man has achieved in the knowledge of ecological sciences, he does not seem to understand the grave consequences of mistreating nature.

Ecocritics of course need to identify Romantic excesses in a given text that may tend to block scientific vision; at the same time, they have also to criticize the Neo-classical excesses which might validate the dry utilitarian logic of the neo-colonial global economic forces and the prevalent trends of consumerism.

Romantic features contained in the select texts would be quite useful in undermining those Neoclassic features which encourage commodification of nature. Therefore, it would not be out of place at this juncture to have a brief discussion on both these movements which have influenced ecocriticism in general, and which

could also offer important insights in understanding man-Nature relationships fictionalized in the select texts.

Neoclassicism (1660-1798) / Romanticism (1800-1850)

Neoclassic mechanical accuracy, scientific temper and mathematical precision. In fact, these were the features that encouraged the profit-oriented industrialization in England, and its attendant processes of technological innovations and urbanization. Romantics reacted against the excesses of rationality, logic and mechanistic thinking which dampen the spontaneous spirit of literature, take away the sense of wonder from the human heart, tend to dehumanize man, de-naturalize Nature and thus widen the Nature/Culture splits.

Although like the renaissance humanists of the 14th century, when the English Neo-classicists also turned towards the reason-based thirst of Greco-Roman knowledge resources, their vision of human liberty and aesthetics could not go beyond the periphery of monarchic political disciplines and material realities of their times- which were later on heavily criticized by the socio-political radicalism of Voltaire and Rousseau, whose thoughts had a major influence on the writings of Romantics.

With their prime focus on royal politics and elites of London, in the professional practices of Neoclassical poetry, the pristine pastoral beauty of Nature and simplicity of village life remained largely absent. Strict followers of the formative rules of the classical masters belonging to the Augustan age, Neoclassicists used to meet in the coffee shops of cities, and they did not appreciate flights into the individual, imaginative domains of emotions. For them, emotion was considered undisciplined and unruly. Pope's *Essay on Man* posits that humans, on

account of their capacity to apply logic and reason in their interactions, hold superior status than the non-humans in the cosmic hierarchical schema.

In the same essay, Pope has famously declared that ‘proper study of mankind is man,’ he is actually focusing on the city-based social man. Johnson, in *The Vanity of Human Wishes* also asks readers/poets to “Let observation with extensive view Survey mankind” “And watch the busy scenes of crowded life” (qtd.in Cuddon, J.A. 420). So, Nature, which had gone out of sight, had also gone out of the minds of the Neoclassical authors.

But such Neoclassical tendencies, which were begun to be challenged in the middle of the eighteenth century by pre-Romantics, were totally rejected by Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge whose- joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 clearly declared their determination to change the course of English literature by diverting themes, language and literary focus of literature from complexities and politics of citified milieu to the simplicity and innocence of village life and Nature.

As if responding sincerely to Russo’s slogan of ‘Going Back to Nature’ poets like Wordsworth and essayists like Thoreau actually left cities and chose to retire into the lap of Nature. It is interesting to note that Bhatt and Mohanty had also enjoyed spending considerable periods of their lives in forests, living among the forest people and animals and birds therein. Therefore, it would be interesting to notice that both these authors are essentially Romantic if one looks at their choices of themes, backdrops of their stories, their characters, as well as the simplicity of their language through which they have, like the English Romantics did, expressed their deep concerns for Nature and the people who live amid Nature.

A poem *The Table Turned* by Wordsworth demonstrated how the Romantics indeed turned the tables by boldly adopting fresh modes of poetry writing with regard to the form, theme and tone of the poems in order to re-establish the harmony between man and nature which was being lost at that time amid flood of materialism. In that poem, Wordsworth appeals the reader to “quit” his “books” and “clear” his “looks” to see the “sun above the mountain’s head” so that he may appreciate the beauty of the “sweet evening yellow” of its “mellow” “luster” that has spread through the “long green fields.” He draws attention to the sweet music of the linnet which is full of wisdom, and the blithesome songs of the throstle- who can also be a good preacher. He tells his reader that “Let Nature be your teacher” whose “ready wealth” has a “spontaneous wisdom” and “Truth breathed by cheerfulness.” He cries: “Enough of Science and of Art; Close up those barren leaves; Come forth, and bring with you a heart That watches and receives.”

Wordsworth’s appeal to close “those barren leaves” of urbanization, materialism and commercialism may sound impractical in today’s time, but it nevertheless draws our attention to the fact as to how amid the din of economic growth, scientific developments and material progress man has been divorced from the sources from which he has come and into which he will ultimately dissolve.

It was this quality of Romanticism which attracted attention of some of the leading American Transcendentalist figures like Emerson and Thoreau, who also thought that amid the fast-paced, environmentally complacent, urbanized life patterns, Romantic ideals can open possibilities of restoring harmony between man and nature, and between man and man.

American Transcendentalism (1830-1850)

Just as the English Romantic figures were not happy with the emotional and pastoral losses that came into effect due to the large-scale English industrialization, Transcendentalists also regretted the damaging cultural, spiritual and environmental implications of the rapid advancement of industrialization in America.

Transcendentalism was a combination of literary, social, religious, spiritual and philosophical thoughts. They believed that humans possess unlimited instinctive potential and inner wisdom to experience the divinity of Nature which transcends the world that surrounds us and which we perceive through our five senses.

Transcendentalism flourished in New England of America between 1830s and 1860s. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the father figure of the movement, met with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Carlyle during 1832-33. Besides Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881)'s Romantic conviction in the intuitive power of the individuals, Transcendentalists were also influenced by the cosmic idea of the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) via Coleridge's books such as *Biographia Literaria* (1817) and *Aids to Reflection* (1825).

According to the recent researches, Kant's key ideas on Natural Philosophy which propounded that "All things in the universe interactively connect" have "sources in Buddhist and Hindu thought." So, refusing to accept anthropocentric theory of cosmic design, Kant believed that:

telos of nature is its own fulfilment. Even in its simplest state, matter has the urge to develop itself. The rise of order and abundance-or biological diversity, in our terms- marks nature's quest toward fulfilment, and this process, fuelled by the

incessant pulse of attraction and repulsion, generates harmony and beauty.

("Kant's Philosophical Development" Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

On the other hand, Emerson in his *Woodland Notes II*, also sings of nature in this way:

Whoso walketh in solitude,
And inhabiteth the wood,
Choosing light, wave, rock, and bird,
Before the money-loving herd,
Into that forester shall pass
From these companions' power and grace. (*Woodnotes II*, st. 4)

Through his lectures/essays like "The American Scholar" (1837) and the "Divinity School Address" (1838), Emerson, like his British counterparts, stressed the need to focus on developing closeness to Nature. Many of Dhruv Bhatt's poems also reflect this sentiment. Instead of depending upon the dictates of the intellect that stimulate material pursuits, Emerson, like Wordsworth, favored intuition and self-reliance.

It was their conviction that communion with Nature is possible if man chooses to develop love for a life of solitude, freedom, simplicity and equality. Many of these traits and their belief in existence of soul correspond with the Hindu philosophy of life. Being champions of political and individual freedom and social equality, Transcendentalists did not approve of war, slavery, exploitation and capitalistic modes of thinking.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), W. E. Channing (1780-1842), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), Bronson Alcott (1799-1888), Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) are considered important Transcendentalists among others. John Muir (1838-1914) was an environmental conservationist whose contribution is immense in preservation of wilderness and national parks of America.

Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854) is a poetic record of his essays describing the author's peaceful experience of living amid wilderness. He proved that material pursuit is not necessary to lead an emotionally richer life based on simplicity and self-reliance. Thoreau's ideas of civil disobedience and simplicity had influenced Gandhian thoughts.

Whitman (1819-1892) celebrates in free verse his intensely personal and intuitive responses to the inward/outward worlds of human nature as well as Nature. His well-known *Leaves of Grass* (1855) is an enthusiastic acknowledgement of the significance of individual freedom in enriching his poetic consciousness.

In *Classic American Literature* (a digital lecture), Professor Bhimsinh Dahiya observes that the elder transcendentalists like Emerson and Thoreau share much in common about the Romantic idealism in that they appreciate the metaphysical and serene aspects of nature; whereas, in Walt Whitman one finds a balance between the ideal and the real; and, according to Dahiya, in the Romantic writings of Hawthorne and Herman Melville, one finds a gradual transition from pure idealism to realism about Nature and the nature of life, as they are ready to embrace and exhibit the creative as well as destructive aspects of nature. If one moves from the texts written by Bhatt to Mohanty, one would find a shift from pure idealism to realism about so far as their approaches to life being lived amid Nature are concerned.

As the organic bond between man and Nature was very much honored in the pre-Socratic paganism, Romantics as well as Transcendentalists revived that all-inclusive, secular religion instead of drawing inspiration from the anthropocentric Christian theocratic ideals. Their love for those pantheistic traditions that acknowledges dignity and equality of all entities of non-human Nature made them appreciate Rousseau's idealism about going back to the original state of nature-which is of course a debatable idea in today's world.

Whatever the critical battles on the effects of Romanticism might be, the fact remains unchallenged that the Romantics did blaze a unique track on the global literary map with their emphasis on prioritizing: emotion over reason; imagination over logic; intuition over sensory observation; democracy over despotism, spiritual idealism over gross materialism; and their preference for the all-inclusive, secular Dharma over monolithic, divisive religious dogmas.

Romantic passion for imaginative freedom, their demand for social justice and their love for Nature were the universal traits which have travelled across all geo-political and literary confines.

Though Romantic concepts of Nature may sound idealist and far-fetched in a techno-scientifically advanced milieu of the post-global urban consciousness which, like the neoclassicists generally prefer to appreciate reason-based view of Nature, what remains pertinent for the entire humanity for all the time is the Romantic acknowledgement about spiritual, emotional and aesthetic significance of preserving Nature and protecting the primordial psychological bonds of humans with Nature.

Keeping such advantage of Romanticism in view, Glotfelty and her fellow critics appealed the scholars to revive their interest in Nature-writing so that ecosensitivity of the readers could be enhanced and their attention could be drawn

towards environmental preservation. They were convinced that bringing back the glory of pastorals and its ecosensitive re-examination could be one of the most effective ways to improve human tendencies towards Nature.

Before we start exploring the selected texts in light of the specific ecocritical trends from the third chapter, it seems necessary at this juncture to take a brief survey of the changing perceptions of Nature in human imagination from the socio-political-economic-religious and scientific viewpoints and their corresponding influences on the natural environs.

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