

Eco-Conscious Ethics in Amitav Ghosh's Novel "River of Smoke"

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Abstract

Environmental issues have been at the forefront of global concerns for several decades, with many people now recognizing the urgent need for action to mitigate the damage caused by human activities. In recent years, literature has emerged as a powerful tool for raising awareness and shaping perspectives on environmental issues.

Amitav Ghosh's novel *River of Smoke* reflects the human life condition and the crisis which becomes a part of it. His implicit narration denotes that human survival requires some knowledge to withstand and overcome the crisis. Being a citizen of the modern era, he writes of the world where human beings are subjective in their thought to face tough conditions of life. The aim of the study is to decipher the novel *River of smoke* with the aid of the existential thoughts shared by the philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir etc. In this novel, Amitav Ghosh with his well-designed plot insists the implications of the past on the present. He registers the dilemmatic situations developed by one's own decisions. Ghosh's plot brings this matter of grave importance to life and insists and educates the value of responsibility and authenticity that builds the meaningful life of an individual.

Introduction

Ecology has performed a role in the fabrication of national identity as well, which is firmly connected to cultural identity. In case of India, an example would be the invocation of natural elements in the national anthem penned by Rabindranath Tagore. The lyrics bring to the for 'Vindhya Mountain range, the Himachal area, the rivers Ganges and Yamuna to create an overarching identity to the nation during the colonial struggle. These ecological symbols, with understanding emotions of patriotism and borderline devotion has helped to ascribe identity to the imagined community.

Ecological ethics or Environmental ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the moral relationship between humans, non-humans and the natural environment. It seeks to answer questions such as what obligations we owe to animals, how we should treat the environment, and how we can generate an environmentally sustainable society.

Ecological morality is a term which consists environmental principles and ethics. Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to and also the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents. Environmental ethics considers the ethical relationships between humanity and non-human world.

Ecological ethics concentrates concerning value of non-human, or the biotic and abiotic characteristics inside nature. Living qualities can be noticed as human being flora and fauna and non-identical species that reside in nature and non-living can contemplate qualities like the welfare of forests, water, and conservation of extensive land geographical area. Environmental ethics set down what actions are favorable and unfavorable in natural environment. Challenges that could be regarded this classification of ethics are the preservation of biodiversity, clean water and air, and the importance of non-human life. Environmental ethics argues whether human possess a right to preserve the non-human and nature on the earth.

Environmental morality is the text in philosophy that examines the ethical correlation of human beings with regard to environment, and for good measure the value and moral status concerning the environment and its non-human contents. Ecological ethics are set of rules and principles which are established for the conservation and preservation environment. There are number of citations to examine the eco-conscious principles and morality as scientific route, analytical way, and literary way. Environmental morality is a subdivision of implemented philosophy that investigates the theoretical cornerstones of environmental significance together with in addition to factual matters surrounding societal behaviors, conventions, and policies to preserve and uphold biodiversity and ecological systems

Environmental morality is established on a set of importance that comprehend the indigenous excellence of the natural environment and its importance to human well-being. These appreciations encompass admiration to nature praise for human life, and a dedication to sustainability. Environmental morality for good measure to comprehend the intrinsic valuation of the natural world, meaning that nature has importance in and of itself, aside from its appropriateness to humans.

Environmental morality is also nearly connected to human privileges, as environmental detriment can have a deep consequence on human health, prosperity and dominance of human life. Environmentalists debate that all humans have a privilege to a prosperous environment and that this right is merely connected to other human privileges, such as the right to life, health, and liberty from criticism. Environmentalists also keep their opinions that environmental impairment can distinctively impact marginalized and susceptible populations, such as impoverished residents, inherent people and people belong to different region. These societies are always ascertained in localities that are heavily impacted by means of environmental detriment, such as regions with large number of pollution or vulnerability to toxic chemicals. Environmentalists debate that these societies have a privilege to environmental equity or impartiality, meaning that they have a right to live in a fair and prosperous environment and to be free from environmental hazardous.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is the interdisciplinary study of the connections between literature and the environment. It draws on contributions by scientists, writers, literary critics, anthropologists and historians about nature and ecology in examining the differences between nature and its cultural construction.

The proper concern of ecocriticism is how nature gets textualized in literary texts to create an eco-literary discourse that would help to construct an intertextual as well as an interactive approach between literary language and language of nature.

Ecocritics generally tie their cultural analysis clearly to a 'green' moral and political agenda. In this respect ecocriticism is intimately related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Expanding the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental integrity advocate a search for a fusion of environmental and social concerns.

Eco-criticism draws on a variety of multidisciplinary perspectives, including environmental studies, ecology, geography and cultural studies for examining by means of literature reflects and influences our relationship with the natural world. Eco critics explore how literary representations of nature shape our attitudes and behaviours toward the environment, and how environmental issues are represented in literature. It also considers the literature's role in promoting environmental awareness and activism. By examining literary texts that engage with environmental issues, eco critics seek to understand how literature can inspire us to take action to protect the natural world.

Ecocriticism explores the human attitude toward nature by studying subject such as science, literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and so on. India is a country with a diverse range of biodiversity. To address the ecological issues on global level, technology alone is insufficient. Our ecosystem is now in danger as a result of the eco disasters that are already occurring. Ecocriticism is a synthesis of ecological and theoretical discourse. It investigates its scope and analyses the relationship of man and nature. The study serves as a warning to humans that abuse of nature over time would result in an outburst of nature. Many writers have utilized nature imagery to describe their characters' goals, flaws, and emotions. Each life on this planet has its own fundamental value.

Role of English Literature in Eco- consciousness

Eco-Literary is the term which describes the relation between nature and literature, it points out how literature is connected with nature and represents the nature and its components. Eco-literary is used as cultural or green studies in literature. There are number of thinkers, scholars, writers and philosophers who presented the nature through their literary works in different form.

Literature has long worked as though a significant mechanism in case of making human awareness, impacting visual fields on society, culture, and the environment. In contemporary years, the participation of literature in promoting environmental mindfulness has accumulated eminence, especially throughout the lens of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary technique that keep study to the correlation of literature along with the natural world, pursues to diagnose wherein literary texts remark, review, and provide to environmental conservation. Whereas the global ecological emergencies enhance literature comes up as a energetic device for facilitating environmental awareness, gratifying anthologies to re-evaluate their interrelationship with nature.

Modern English literature has performed an important participation making environmental ideology by depicting the complications of ecological declination, climate change, and human obligation with respect to nature. Authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, and Richard Powers have been interweaved environmental circumstances into their fictional chronologies, employing anthologies to comprehend the vast effectiveness of human behavior on the earth. Because of distinctive literary observances, encompassing fiction, poetry, and drama, contemporary authors objection anthropocentric point of views, endorsing for good measure justifiable and honorable correlation with respect to the environment.

Literature has performed an important contribution in maintaining environmental awareness, parceling out a venue for argument on ecological circumstances and human correlation with regard to nature. Across the lens of ecocriticism, contemporary English literature has not only examined the environmental demolition of our world, however has correspondingly introduced determination narratives, supporting for justifiable, preservation, and a profound comprehension of our consequence on the earth. Authors have been utilized their innovational courageousness to promote consciousness, issues, societal ethics, and encourage a collective obligation with regard to the natural world. On one's doorstep harmonizing art with activism, literature deals as both a contemplation of environmental emergencies and a mechanism for contemplating determinations. As we consistently to confront an urgent ecological issues, the involvement of literature in facilitating environmental mindfulness will persist inestimable, convincing anthologies to contemplate the honorable and environmental suggestions by their conventions and inspiring an assemblage symmetrical correlation with nature and preserve it for coming generations.

Environmental literature plays a crucial role in shaping public awareness and attitudes towards environmental issues and social change. Since prehistory, literature and the arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human-environment interactions, reflecting the evolving concerns of societies around the world. By engaging readers with compelling stories and vivid descriptions, environmental literature can inspire empathy for the natural world, encourage critical reflection on our impact on the Earth, and ultimately contribute to the development of more sustainable societies. Some key elements of environmental literature include: - Exploration of human-nature relationships and interactions - Depictions of environmental challenges and crises - Use of literary techniques to evoke emotion and empathy for the natural world - Examination of cultural, social, and historical factors that shape environmental attitudes and behaviors - Integration of scientific knowledge and perspectives to inform and enrich the narrative.

Eco- Consciousness in the Novel *River of Smoke*

Amitav Ghosh is a prolific writer who has travelled different parts of the world due to his father's profession. So he knew different landscapes and environmental issues of the world in general. Being born in India, he knew the ecosystem of the country very well in general. It is also reflected in most of his works.

In his fiction, Ghosh has actually analyzed the inability of the present generation to understand the range and the physical damage of climate change and assumes that this is reflected in our time's literary works, in the recording of background and also in the political environment of our day

River of Smoke entirely deals with the breakout of the opium war (1839- 42). After ruining the Indian landscape and looting its capital, the British promote Industrial Revolution and the expansion of the empire. They convert Indian land into the producer of raw materials whose access is confined exclusively to English factories. Mishra quotes Fairbank, —In 1830, the auditor-general of the East India Company declared that every year at least £4,000,000 had to be carried back from India to England (71). The cultivation of poppy flowers and the processing of seeds into opium in India and its sale in China by British, American and Indian traders is the most spotlighted aspect of the novel. Imperialists and colonizers are greatly responsible for death and destruction of native flora, fauna, cultures and human beings of the annexed bio-regions. The novel tracks down the instances.

River of Smoke unfolds the ecological consciousness through two individuals who undertake a journey to Canton in a botanical ship the Redruth: Paulette and Penrose. Bengal born Paulette is the daughter of Pierre Lambert. He worked as a Botanist in Calcutta. After her father's death in Calcutta she decides to travel to Mauritius in search of her earlier family connections. She reaches to Port Louis on the Ibis along with other girmitiyas. There she takes shelter in the Pimple-mouse Botanical Gardens to be discovered by Fitcher Penrose. He is on an expedition eastwards in his own two-masted brig, the Redruth. Ghosh weaves these narratives together.

A deep ecological concern marks the narration of Honam episode. Honam is an island situated on the banks of Pearl River opposite to the city of Canton. In contrast to Canton which is crowded with houses, walls and narrow streets, "Honam is like a vast park, green and wooded: several small creeks and streams cut through it and their shores are dotted with monasteries, nurseries, orchids, pagodas and picturesque little villages" (279). This geographically diverse island becomes one of the principal settings in the novel. The country retreat of Punhyqua, the Cantonese local opium trader, is located on it. Punhyqua had deep connections with the merchants of Bombay.

Postmodern fiction plays a crucial role in transmitting ecological values. Ghosh's narrative details the invaluable exotic plants of China. From the earliest plant-hunter, James Cuninghame who belonged to the eighteenth century to the most recent, they aroused curiosity and interest.

River of Smoke invites an ecologically informed reading. Similar to Historiographic metafiction that mixes "the reflexively fictional with the verifiably historical" (Hutcheon, Politics 36), the ecological fiction is also concerned with both imaginative and natural worlds. This kind of narrative often underlines the relations between human imagination and the environment. Such an approach may also seem pertinent in helping humans find their connection to the earth.

Ghosh very clearly shows how imperialists and colonizers bring death and destruction of native flora, fauna, cultures and human beings. Britain and other foreign countries are presented in a race to accelerate their efforts to obtain China's most valuable trees and plants. Ghosh writes, —The value of China's plants had not been lost on Britain's rivals and enemies across the channel: the major physick gardens and herbariums of both Holand and France had also been endeavouring to assemble collections of China's floral (101). In a way they bring about massacre of land and its varied species for their own profit and greed. The mindless pursue and human greed of Britishers towards different species of flora of China disappears some plant species completely. It is a disgusting fact that humans are mindlessly destroying the plants and trees for their own use. A similar fact is mentioned in the novel showing how a rich botanical variety of China- Camellia sinensis disappears completely from the earth. This species of camellia from which tea is extracted is taken in possession by the foreigners and then mindlessly used as it accounts for an enormous proportion of the world's trade.

Ghosh through the novel makes a call for the paradigm shift from the anthropocentric to the ecocentric set of values. Through the fictionalized characters like Paulette, Commissioner Lin, King Charles, Ah Fay and Robin Chinnery he presents myriads of deep ecological, social ecological and ethic illumination and thoughts in pursuit of the ecological balance between nature and society, and even within human beings themselves. The social ecological wisdom as adopted by Ghosh, urges readers to respect, protect and care for other humans as well as nature. It is the need of the time to reconsider the relationships within human

beings, between nature and human beings, between nature and society and between nature and human spirit. Ghosh stresses on the fact that humanity is a part of nature and the development of self-awareness and human freedom is an important step in ending the environmental crisis. He wishes that all beings whether human or nonhuman should be free from all the unnecessary kind of control and exploitations. Moreover, there is a message that it is not enough to understand nature, but to save it, as ultimate concern of ecocritics is the preservation of nature, its harmony, stability, integrity, beauty and equilibrium of natural relationships in a particular environment.

Ghosh tries to highlight ecofriendly use of colours and materials used by Deeti in her paintings. Her knowledge of Madhubani painting by using rice for whitening the wall and using fruits and soil as colours, she paints beautifully but when she is stopped by her in-laws in India from painting she uses rags for painting. Her shrine is painted with pictures shows the skill possessed by the indentured labours.

The novel deals with the incidents leading to break out of Opium War (1839-42). The low demand of European commodities in China results in outpouring of silver from Britain and it leads to opium trade. Free trade is the excuse given by the English to take advantage in the opium trade. It is shown in the open letter written by the commissioner to Queen Victoria earlier it was a luxury of the upper class later it becomes an addiction leading to death and exploitation of the land and people. It is ironical that the British banned opium in their own country due to its harmful effects but talked of free trade of opium in China.

It is as peculiar as divine providence that while China suffered from the opium crisis instigated by European traders and colonisers, its blossoms delighted the very officials and soldiers advancing towards devastation. Although China may have endured setbacks against the formidable British military strategies, it undeniably contributed significantly to the advancement of human civilisation through its gifts and blessings. River of Smoke illuminates the manipulative and exploitative colonial practices of the West towards the East, while also heightening our awareness of our inherent goodness and the enduring fragrance of mankind that we will disseminate via our care for nature. Ghosh, in numerous respects, expands the function of nature beyond merely serving as a 'moral barometer'; he instead heightens our awareness of our actions. He prompts us to consider the implications of coexisting with the earth rather than merely existing upon it.

Throughout his environmentally-critical writings, Ghosh discusses the challenges facing mankind during the latest era of geological time in which people contribute to the conservation and survival of the earth. The human beings change not only one of Earth's most fundamental physical practices, but that the catastrophism presents a problem for our common understanding and the past and for modern culture generally. He cautions the present generation of writers that many cities and places have been engulfed in a rapidly changing world with a sea level, it is time to find new forms, of art and literary works that disclose the predicament at hand. Ghosh mines his own experience when he composes, he alerts the current authors. It is time to find brand-new forms of art and literary works revealing the plight in a changing world with an increasingly sea level in taking Sundarbans and the that potential of submerged cities. Ghosh's literary undertaking is an innovative one and also serves as a stimulant for social action. Ghosh seeks to illumine how displaced areas can look after hostile forces of the native environment and out-dating governments which disregard human survival efforts to protect broader ecological concerns in the world through a fictional space whose past is partly recognized and somewhat devoured. By portraying the Sundarbans as an environmentally sensitive region, he creates the idea that the environmentally friendly issues of the

earth can hardly be addressed without a close examination of the cultural and also human problems linked with natural communities.

Ghosh has excellently depicted the consequences of colonization on the environment. He portrays overutilization of rare species may indicate its disappearance and leads to its destruction. Environmental protection is an important issue and it needs an immediate response from all human beings. It is the responsibility of every human being to protect the environment while showing love and tenderness towards all living being.

Other Indian Eco-Literary Writers

The spectre of global warming has shaken mankind like never before. Uncontrolled urbanization and industrialization coupled with emissions from vehicles, air-conditioners, etc. on the one hand and senseless deforestation and exploitation of natural resources on the other have brought us face-to-face with a daunting scenario. It is but appropriate that the literary world should take up cudgels and make reading public including the young generation aware of the urgency to take corrective measures. Leading Indian writers have produced literary works that underline their concern in this regard. My paper explores the domain of Indian English Fiction and critically studies works by eminent authors like Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and some not-so-eminent ones and concludes common concern even as these deal with life in different areas affected by different types of problems in different milieu.

Another important theme in contemporary Indian literature is the depiction of indigenous relationships with nature. Indigenous communities in India have long maintained sustainable relationships with their environment, drawing on traditional knowledge to manage natural resources. However, these communities are oftendisplaced by development projects or marginalized by conservation efforts that prioritize wildlife over human life. Contemporary Indian writers highlight the wisdom of indigenous ecological practices while critiquing the ways in which modern society disregards or erases this knowledge.

In Indian English Fiction, the ecological concerns have always been there in various degrees. In early fictional writing, as in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, the villagers venerate the river Kanchamma as the Hindus all over India worship the Ganga. In R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi-centric* fiction, we find the benevolent influence of the river Sarayu on different characters. There is mention of the retreat across the river, of jungle-tribes living in hills, etc. all of which makes it a mysterious place imbued with the spirit of the place. Later in Kamala Markandaya's novels we see the evil impact of urbanization. The love for one's inherited land is integral to any environmental discourse. In her novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, industrialization and drought – as onslaughts of man and nature – combine to pauperize Nathan. Being old, he is unable to take to any other trade and is forced to migrate to city with his wife and they turn to beggary!

Exotic details of nature -- of flora and fauna and lush vegetation -- at the foot of the Kanchenjunga present a veritable feast for the nature lovers. Even the solitude of the inhabitants of Cho Oyu has been described in terms of the giant squid spotted there on rare occasions: "No human had ever seen an adult giant squid alive, and though they had eyes as big as apples to scope the dark of the ocean, theirs was a solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe" (2). The symbolic significance of the animal world is, of course, found in countless narratives produced in all times and climes. What stands out is the co-existence of the human and the animal world in that section of the Cho Oyu that is governed by the

rustic cook and other servants. A saucer of milk and a pile of sweets is placed by the cook to pacify a pair of black cobras living in a hole. The archetypal cook, as his namelessness suggests, lives in harmony with nature believing that “The natural world exists in its own right and other beings have a will, a way of their own and their own stories”

We must not forget the belated realization by a section of the ecologists that economic transformation alone is not adequate and that instead of consumerism, we should be following a kind of ‘Green spirituality’. This has, indeed, been the mantra held aloft by ancient Indian culture. But to lead the way in our times, not only the scientists, the politicians or the literary scholars, but mankind at large also has to wake up to thwart the catastrophe knocking at our door.

Conclusion

Environmental literature Eco-Literature has addressed an important participation in emphasizing consequences affiliated to environmental equity fostering consciousness with regard to the necessity for positive modification. Texts such as "Engage, Connect, protect: Empowering Diverse Youth" and "Raven Eye" are illustrations of environmental impartial literature that highlight the significance of devoting environmental prejudices and upgrading activism. These eco-literary works not merely throw illumination on the urgent matters confronted on one's doorstep marginalized communities beside for good measure illuminate anthologies to come down with proceeding in their own lives and communities

The correlation of literature and the environment can be especially comprehended throughout the lens of ecocriticism. This interdisciplinary field of study focuses on the connections between literature and the natural environment, drawing on contributions from various disciplines such as natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Ecocriticism investigates wherein literature describes the environment, the role of nature in conforming human proficiency, and the honorable repercussion concerning our interrelation with the natural universe. By means of evaluating and critiquing the illustration of the environment in literature, ecocriticism encourages us in comprehending the sophisticated interplay between humans and the environment and promotes the development of sustainable and equitable practices for the future time. In determination, environmental literature performs an important role in making consciousness with respect to environmental challenges and enhancing environmental activism.