SYNOPSIS

An Ecocritical Analysis: Selected Fictions of Dhruv Bhatt and Margaret Atwood

Synopsis of a Thesis to be submitted to Gujarat Technological University

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Introduction

The title of the research work is **An Ecocritical Analysis: Selected Fictions of Dhruv Bhatt** and Margaret Atwood. The work is an attempt to find out effects of environmental aspects on human life and how environment assists to achieve self realization and sustainable happiness in life.

Today, more than ever before, human being has come to the disturbing realization that he is living in 'the age of environmental limits' as mentioned by one of the renowned ecocritic Glotfelty. The human race has reached to the point where the mechanistic worldview and irresponsible behavior towards the nonhuman world is damaging the planet's basic life support system. If a man goes on destructing and damaging the planet's beauty, he will head towards the roads of self – destruction. The theory – ecocriticism focuses on environmental restoration that scholars in the humanities are exploring ways of adding environmental dimension to their works. Literary scholars have shown the urgency of the need to find solutions to the environmental crisis. It is within this broad field of theory that my study in this research is located.

Brief Description on the State of the Art of the Research Topic

Our ecosystem has always encouraged us to live our life in a better way. Nature, being an inspirational source has always led human beings on a right path. The bondage of our environment is established when we take birth on earth. According to the Indian Philosophy human body is made of 'Panchmahabhuta'. So many years ago Guru Dattatrey has considered ecological aspects like the physical aspects such as earth, air, sky, water, fire, sun, ocean as well as animals and birds like, sparrow, pigeon, python, caterpillar, bee, elephant, etc as his Guru(teacher).

Ecocriticism focuses on environmental restoration that scholars in the humanities are exploring by ways of adding environmental dimensions to their works. Literary scholars have shown the urgency of the need to find solutions to the environmental crisis. The definition of ecocriticism is credited to the book '*The Ecocritical Readers*' written by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Ecocriticism as defined by Glotfelty is –

"Ecocriticism is the relationship between literature and the physical environment"

Greg Garrard in his book 'Ecocriticism' defines the theory as -

"Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of human and non human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself."

Ecocriticism has very deep roots and with itself includes everything related to the natural resources for example mountain, sky, earth, sea, water, forest, etc. all the non-human elements i.e. buildings, houses, rocks, soil, agriculture, caves, hills plants, trees, oceans, seasons, birds, animals, wind, ancient architecture, flora and fauna, etc are considered to be a beautiful gallery or portraits in ecocriticism. Ecocriticism expands its critical approach which differs from other literary theories. Most literary theories evaluate the relationship between writers, texts, and the world. All the other theories have considered the world as only society or social sphere; hence ecocriticism takes it in the entire context of ecosphere which includes all human and non human worlds. Everything surrounded around the human life has a role to play in the development of his life. All the ecological aspects, like living and non living i.e. animals and birds as living aspects and river, mountain, plants, wilderness as non living aspects, have been considered by several writers and poets in their literary works.

Ecocritical study not only emphasizes the harmony with nature but also deals with the destruction caused to nature by the changes that take place in the modern world for most of which human is responsible. Running behind the race of so called progress, man has arrived to a quest of his sustainability. Therefore, ecocriticism is a necessary part of literary scholarship because literature cannot be separated from nature. Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crises and how language and literature transmit values.

Definition of Problem

Ecocriticism takes its subject as the interconnection between nature and culture and especially the language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other is on land. Most ecocritical works share a common motivation: to connect to the environment. The human race has reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. This awareness sparks of the desire to contribute to environment awareness.

The human race is facing a global crisis today not because of how ecosystem works but how our ethical system towards the nature functions. Facing the crises requires understanding our impact on nature with the understanding of man's ethical stand he has chosen by his cultural connotations. While studying ecocriticism, the comprehensiveness of the study is recommended. Ecocritical approach, thus can be theoretical, historical, pedagogical, analytical, rhetorical or the combination of all. All these above mentioned approaches are directly related to human life. By studying this theory, one looks at all, direct or indirect, facets, of human life.

Objective of work

The objectives of the research are

- To find out how different authors have looked at the relationship between nature and human being.
- To understand and evaluate how several writers have included environmental aspects in their literary texts.
- To analyze how writers have presented the regional influence, their language and presentation of ecological writings in different ways, presenting their different culture.
- To examine the relations between writers, text and the external world.

Hypotheses of Work

Hypotheses of the research are

- Culture plays significant role in determining the perception of ecology.
- Gender has played major role in perceiving ecological aspects.
- Literary texts explore different flavor to exhibit human nature relationships that are supposed to embody an ecological consciousness.

Scope of work

The Scope of the research is

Environmental concern is existed either at surface level or as the main theme in approximately all literary works. This research discusses the environmental concerns of writers of different gender and geographical background presenting ecological aspects and environmental issues in

various themes and sub themes in their novels. They have presented environment conscious themes and their characters are highly influenced by the environment in which they prosper.

The theory advocates environmental issues primarily as a literary tool. All the four selected novels as primary source depict environmental issues and the effects of it on human life. Existence of characters comes in question when they live uprooted from their pillars. Man can never think about his progress neglecting the habitat and the environment. All the ecological aspects like birds, mountains, rivers, oceans, birds, animals are given apt importance in the works.

With changing time and broadening of the scope, literary texts too have broadened the perspectives and concern about ecology. Environmental awareness and presentation of its importance has been the recent trends in literature. Not only literature, but media, scientists, philosophers, artists and thinkers across the globe put environment at the centre for the sustainable development.

Introduction to Primary Sources

The research is a detailed analysis of the fictions of Dhruv Bhatt, an Indian writer and Margaret Atwood, a Canadian writer. This research includes two fictions of Dhruv Bhatt - 'Akoopar' and 'Tattvamasi'. Both the fictions are translated into English; the first one is titled as 'Akoopar – The Infinite' and the second one is as 'That Thou Art'. Further, this research includes fictions of Margaret Atwood – 'Surfacing' and 'The Year of the Flood'. Both the writers are of dissimilar and distinct cultural, geographical backgrounds as well as both writers have presented nature and environment from different perspective. Even though both of them are of different gender, they have depicted environmental connection with human being in a very subtle manner. Characters of these fictions have achieved self realization and self recognition through nature and environment. Environment becomes the source of inspiration for all.

Dhruv Bhatt is a renowned Gujarati writer of contemporary literature. He has been engaged in fictionalizing the environmental issues from last few years. He discusses about ecological concerns and traditional wisdom of people living in the abode of nature. He has shared his experiences of cultural aspects keeping in view the endangered species and human life in different places of Gujarat. His works are real life examples he has experienced through sharing

life journey with people living there. He intertwined the environmental issues that are discussed at the global platforms. He talks about the issues to save lions and whales situated at different places of 'Gir'. He has projected lions and mountains as characters of the fiction in 'Akoopar-The Infinite' (2010) and he has revered river 'Narabda' to understand the very essence of the existence of the protagonist in 'That Thou Art' (1998). As many environmental theorists make a call for a transformation in the human perception of nature, literary theorists cannot ignore the interconnections between nature and culture, particularly the fact that cultural dimensions of literature influence and get influenced by the environmental issues. These novels put a question mark on the fact of the cultural deterioration in the recent times of technology and industrialization. Bhatt is more concerned about the preservation of our culture, our civilization, our values, preservation of environment than restoring machines and industries.

'Surfacing' (1972) is Margaret Atwood's most famous novel that has achieved several milestones in literary world. It reveals the conflict between technology and nature in political terms. The novel represents Atwood as a strong nationalist and firm feminist. It presents the politics of gender and describes man's superiority on women in terms of intellect, emotions and morals. In this novel also an unknown female protagonist struggles to free herself from the bondages of patriarchal politics. The suppression of patriarchy in matters of profession, marriage, appearance, motherhood bruises her intellectually, emotionally and morally. It represents a woman's struggle for freedom. When the protagonist becomes conscious about her exploitation, she revolts for her oppression and identity. At last she proves herself a brave new woman capable enough to stand for her identity without anyone's support. Atwood has presented multiple layers in this novel. From the journey of an unknown woman to the imagery of hanged heron, form the Anna's obsession for makeup to the protagonist's submission to nature for the search of her identity. The journey of the protagonist leads her to a psychological journey though the proximity of nature. At last, the protagonist refuses to act like a human being and chooses to behave like an animal that are very close to nature. This kind of her behaviour generates refusal to be the victim of the patriarch society and acceptance of the proximity to nature.

'The Year of the Flood' (2009) is a continuation of 'Oryx and Crake' that represents dystopian future. The characters reappear from the earlier novel. The global pandemic kills almost every living human being except two Toby and Ren. In the novel, unbounded and selfish human greed

in the name of progress has brought harm to the earth in a rapid way. The weather turns adverse. There is too much of rain in some of the areas and very little in some other. The heat blisters the skin, no snow for the relief. Human beings have done so much of damage to the earth that many species started dying.

Parameters to Analyze the Primary Source

Lawrence Buell's 'The Environmental Imagination' is one of the preeminent studies in the field of ecocriticism. Though Buell's focuses on the works of Henry David Thoreau and discusses about several problems of American pastorals, his work offers a thoughtful dimension to study nature in literature. Buell's observation as well as discussion of literary representation of environment and place is path breaking. Ecocritical readings suggest multiple meanings indicating dual importance of nature. On one side chirping of birds is delightful, whereas, on the other side silence of the nature equally bears the same importance. Buell's 'dual accountability' exposes so many other facets of the environment and all bear equal importance. The study of this research is based on the principles given by Lawrence Buell in 'The Environmental Imagination'. Nature with all its properties, like birds, animals, mountains, river, ocean, marine creatures are considered as ecological aspect to be taken care of. The existence of the human beings resides in the harmony of the existence of the environment with which he lives. These are the parameters to analyze the selected texts:

Natures Plays a Major role in the development of the Plot

Nature has played a vital role in the development of the plot from the time of Renaissance in England and from the time of Kalidasa in India. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelly, Keats, Dickens and Hardy have projected nature in their writings. Ecological aspect and nature have been prime factors for the development of the plot in their fictional or non-fictional works. Even ancient scriptures have established the same. Indian writers from Kalidasa to Raja Rao, Kamala Markadeya, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh have presented their works presenting importance of place in one or the other way. Location becomes important where the actions are taking place. The presentation of the environment may vary by geographical locations. Apart from this, cultural influences such as education, social standing, economic class

and religious beliefs influence the perception of the place and environment. Hence, the ultimate objective of nature is to rejuvenate human life.

Only Human Interest is Not Legitimate

Human being's engagement with nature presents opportunity to go beyond itself to be inspired and refreshed from nature. It is very fundamental for a human being to give importance to the orientation towards intimation to the place where he belongs. The issues related to it must be at the center of the system which governs the society. Human being can never exist without the support of its surroundings. In the name of so-called progress and advancement, human being has climbed the heights of insensitivity towards the environment. It is a need of the time to put forward the environment in all kinds of progress, only then the human race will relish the sustainable development. It is moral responsibility of every citizen to take care of the environment in which he flourishes his life. One should always ponder into the sustainability of human growth which is not possible ignoring the environmental growth.

Human accountability to the Environment should be the ethical orientation.

Human beings adore the advances and beauty of all ecological aspects. He has ascertained that his existence on earth is possible only through living in harmony with nature. The accountability to the environment is the prime ethical concern for a human being. Human being is indebted to nature for all the progress and expansion of material growth and industrialization. Lawrence Buell too advocates the environmental approach instead the anthropocentric one on an ethical ground. Man has always availed all the advances from the environment. In return, man has to return back what he has received. It is a human tendency that the moment he receives something, he is overjoyed and he forgets the after effects and reciprocal effects of the same. It is advisable to adapt a shift from that man lives with an obligation that he is a part of the environment and that environment is not just a resource to satisfy his desires.

Environmental awareness is a constant Process for Sustainability

The economic growth has taken a big toll from the environment. All developing countries demand more energy consumption that leads to environmental degradation. Some of the countries have started using environment friendly technology, but still environment degradation

has been the current concern for all academicians as well as responsible citizens across the globe. The increasing need for this kind of consciousness has led to search for alternate sources to solve environmental problems. Man utilizes all environmental resources, so he bears the responsibility to adopt sustainable life style to cater to the issues in protecting environment.

Effect of Disassociation with Nature

Man lives within the nature, enhances his experience in it, nurtures himself through it and develops in the lap of nature. Nature is holistic and it involves the acknowledged unity of man and all the creatures and the environment around him. Ecocriticism is a response to the need for humanistic understanding of the relationships with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. Man, who is disassociated with nature finds difficulty to identify his self also. On the contrary, a person who lives in the harmony of nature understands himself and other creatures with empathy.

Text: An Orator/Spokesperson of Environment

Postmodern writers like Margaret Atwood and Dhruv Bhatt thematize geographical, biological and ecological issues in their works to underline the changes in the reality around us. These writers link the metafictional, geographical and biological elements to generate an eco-literary fiction. This eco-literary approach is able to reintroduce a form of textual coherence in opposition of the chaos of discontinuous experiences of human life. The literary representation of human relationship with environment consciousness projects ecological thinking. Hence, the postmodern fictions describe a condition where nature as the other character acts in the development of the plot.

Rejuvenate Nature in Human Life

Human being has come from a source that is unknown and again goes back to the same source. Man, only fills the gap between these two ends. Nature reflects the invisible connection between the human soul and the Unknown entity that generally is known as God. Nature/environment provides the courage and power to man to meet these two ends happily. Nature has always been a prime source of the happiness and rejuvenation for human being and leads a man to the phase called nirvana. The Nature rejuvenates human life. It keeps people happier. Life in all the forms

of natural sources is a gift of Almighty. It is a celebration with coexistence. Nature always helps man to live life happily and successfully.

Original Contribution by the Research

Ecocriticism expands the notion of the theory - the world to include the entire ecosphere. This theory leads a man to follow anthropology and respect the cultural aspects and environment is inclusive in it.

An ecocritical reading of a literary text is simply, one which in some way incorporates the kind of issues that have been discussed above. Therefore, a study that gradually shifts from —Inside to —Outside is termed Ecocriticism. The inclusion of environmental awareness leads a man to the realization of his/her real being and their submission to the nature provides them inner happiness and satisfaction. All the characters of the fictions taken in this research acquire self realization through ecological acceptance.

Ecologically conscious texts help a man to realize his self and he reverts back toward his roots from external world. Man has roamed about everywhere in search of inner satisfaction and happiness, but the same is actualized in the lap of nature. Bhatt as well Atwood have presented their characters who have achieved the state of tranquility only after surrendering themselves to the Supreme power – Nature, their environment.

This research emphasizes on the fact that each work consists of environment awareness; without it no art is possible. Each person should perceive every art from the environmental point of view. Through this, preservation of nature can be practiced for sustainable development. Environment has always been the source of inspiration for the human race. The effects of industrialization and globalization have threatened the human race with calamities. Man cannot control the devastating effects of disasters caused by him only. Literature has always been the source of spreading awareness and sensitivity about such issues. Dhruv Bhatt and Margaret Atwood have also attempted the same. Their characters preach to surrender to the power of environment, to become selfless and submissive to the ecosphere; so that man can find sources of sustainable development.

Methodology of Research

This research work presents thorough thematic analysis of the topic keeping in view of environmental theory. Human race is affected, inspired and impressed by the surrounding that shapes his personality. Man has learnt to worship nature and has put environment in center. The societal norms have influenced man's creativity. Human behaviour is highly influenced by creative and positive energy or it is a result of negative and destructive force. Literature enables human beings to think and analyze the societal norms and adapt the optimum rituals for the larger benefit of the human race. The human being is inspired and influenced by the cultural and environmental rituals. The existence of a human cannot be claimed without influence of external environment. Literature reflects the social norms like mirror of life. Literature derives incidents from situations and incidents raised from the interactions of man and his external world. This research shows this kind of relationship between man and his surroundings and how the environment affects his personality and behaviour. The analysis of the study is based on the parameters stated by Lawrence Buell. The analysis is based on the geographical differences, gender and ability for acceptance of environment of two different writers. It also suggests that the acceptance of the environment leads man to achieve deeper understanding of life and their self realization. This research is based on the analysis of the primary and secondary sources, reference books, journals, articles and news from several media.

Achievements with respect to objectives

Different geographical and cultural background influence authors in the personal perspectives of environment. Dhruv Bhatt and Margaret Atwood are of different region, having different set of cultural norms and perceive environment from their cultural influences. Dhruv Bhatt perceives nature as one with the human being. His characters worship nature and all the creatures on the earth. His characters believe in the co-existence with the environment and they become advocates of environment to achieve that state of reverence. On the other hand, Margaret Atwood perceives environment as an inspirational factor. Her characters also are inspired by the nature and they demonstrate their existence based on the ecology they possess.

Environmental texts influence people to think about ways for sustainable development. Literature is a great tool for human being to understand the surroundings sympathetically. From the ancient times, writers of various languages have contributed in generating empathy in human beings. Man is directed by the philosophy of literature he reads about. Or literature is the mirror

of the society. Literature is influenced by social, economic, cultural diversity, so does a man influenced by the literature he reads.

Environment helps man to realize his identity. Man has emerged from the ashes of the earth. According to Hindu philosophy, man is made of ecological aspects like water, air, fire, etc. Both the writers of primary texts have shown this relationship in their fictions. Dhruv Bhatt's unnamed visitor and painter seek their identity from the river, mountain and jungle; whereas Margaret Atwood's unnamed protagonist seeks her identity from the sea on an island. She surrenders her identity to the nature and prefers to live like animals – naked. The characters of 'The Year of the Flood' seek possibility of their survival in the protection of nature and environment.

The writers of the primary texts, Dhruv Bhatt and Margaret Atwood are of different gender as well as of different cultural background. The philosophy of their lives is based on their cultural heritage. One worships nature/environment as God, the essence for the survival of human life and the other believes in the preservation of nature/environment for the protection of human life on earth. This study shows how works of varied background influence their texts. Though both have perceives nature/environment in their distinct manner, both have attempted to survive environment for the sustainable and happy life on earth.

Conclusion

After thorough analysis it is observed that literature makes positive change to the ecological awareness and can increase the sensitivity in human life. Man maintains ecological balance through literature and establishes relationship with nature. Gradually man learns to live with harmony in the presence of other ecological aspects as well as other creatures on the earth. Hence, literature can make positive contributions towards increasing the awareness about the environment.

The orientation of sensitivity towards environment is not gender specific. Ant human being irrelevant of man or woman can develop sensitivity towards environment. Dhruv Bhatt is male and Margaret Atwood is female, but both the writers have depicted the importance of environment in human life with same sensitivity. Their characters have achieved the level of

their self realization through environment. This sensitivity is not gender oriented, rather it is

human oriented.

Mother Earth is the main source to provide a man sustainable environment. The Atharva Veda

consists of the concepts related to respect the Earth. One may consider this the first one to

express relationship between humanity and earth. The earth protects and nourishes all the life

forms with equality. Each unit of this organism is a part of one family like the concept of

Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam. One should care for other creatures with sympathy and respect.

Finally this research work is accomplished on the basis of primary and secondary sources that

include reviews of reference books, newspaper, journals, and other relevant resources available

for environmental studies.

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