



RESEARCH PAPER

Desecration of Mother Nature: An Ecocritical Reading of Graeme King's *Tears of Nature*

Dr. Sardar Ahmad Farooq*¹ Dr. Nazakat Awan²
Dr. Muhammad Imran³

1. Lecturer, Department of English, Govt. Postgraduate College Mansehra, KP, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of English, Hazara University Mansehra, KP, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Hazara University Mansehra, KP, Pakistan

DOI

[http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022\(6-II\) 40](http://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2022(6-II) 40)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

February 15, 2022

Accepted:

May 10, 2022

Online:

May 12, 2022

Keywords:

Ecocriticism,
Ecological
Awareness,
Global warming,
Nature,
Pollution

***Corresponding
Author**

Sardarahmad.farooq
@gmail.com

Nature for its nourishing roles has assumed the role of 'mother' for each and every living organism. However, humans have tarnished it and marred its beauties to an irrecoverable extent. This havoc has been played with the Earth in the name of material growth and industrial progress without implementing any compensatory alternatives. The present paper aims at interpreting the poem "Tears of Nature" so as to describe how the poet is emphasizing the gravity of the ecological situation. Drawing on the ecological strands of Ecocritical theory and employing the basic assumptions of Ecocriticism as theoretical framework, this study attempts to bring to the limelight the ecological concerns and how they are covertly and overtly voiced by the poet through this literary piece. The finding of the study suggests that environmental problem particularly global warming is one of the gravest concerns for whole humanity which is too alarming to be ignored.

Introduction

Ecocriticism is an emerging area of literary studies encompassing diverse approaches and theories concerning human relationship with the environment reflected through literature. In the contemporary times, this field of inquiry has gained a wider scope and currency in world literatures. The purpose of the current research is to analyse poet's approach towards "nature" with the intent of highlighting the need for ecological awareness. It also aims at relating degradation of nature with the polluted human psyche reflected through the roles people play in the society. Such polluted psyche is manifested in most of human activities and thoughts like their collective indifference towards natural degradation, greed, money-grabbing spirit, destructive behaviour and ignorance etc. The text selected for the current study is the poem "Tears of Nature" by Graeme King. The pursuing lines contain his brief introduction.

Graeme King (1915 - 2008) was born in Melbourne, Australia. He started composing poetry early in his teens. He was a bright student in school. He has written extensively, the notable works include *Across the Long Bridge* (2005), *The Blind Man's Rainbow* (2006), *Rhyme and Reason* (2006) and various other publications. The

poem "Tears of Nature" reminds its readers of the exploitation of nature at the hands of humans. In the current scenario, nature or environment is an emergent field of study. Owing to the burgeoning exposure made by print, electronic and social media over a period of time, the issues related to the environment or nature have gained a great deal of currency. Horrendous effects of the exploitation of natural phenomena may very well be observed in the form of land, water and air pollution which in turn have led to umpteen health problems, lower life-expectancy, lesser yields and non-availability of pure and clean water in many parts of the globe. The whole world has become a mess up of the ecological oddities, the most precarious, of course, is issue of global warming. This is reflected through increasing temperatures, changing seasons, melting glaciers, altered snow and rain patterns and water shortage.

Nature has suffered a great deal at the hands of humans and therefore, the relationship between humans and nature is of paramount importance. According to Oroskhan&Faghfori (2015), despite the fact that nature has been the cradle of human civilisation, "... nonetheless, during the last century the rapid progress of technology has led to the destruction of it" (p. 66). The process of evolution has been marked with increasing human efforts to understand natural laws and to modify them to suit his needs, thereby putting nature and its beauty at stake. Exploitation of nature has been done incessantly in the name of modernization and modification of his ways of living. The problems associated with environment, today, have become so aggravated that they pose a great threat to human life on the planet in the years to come. Environment has, in fact, become the gravest concern for humanity. In fact, the human mis(use) of nature has led to the destruction of natural systems and it is still threatening the very base of life. Humans interfere with the processes through which nature regulates and sustains itself by trying to change it to suit them rather than adapting to it. Oroskhan and Faghfori (2015) further state that "with the increase of these destructions, literary critics have felt compelled to ponder over and avoid the greater danger it may cause in the near future by referring to the nature presented in literary texts" (p.66). According to Roy (2014), "literature might prove to be a useful and potent tool not only to have a historical understanding of the man/nature relationship but it might also influence the way man treat nature in the future" (p. 93). Man is the part of nature and the mutual relationship manifests itself consciously or unconsciously through different forms of expression. It is also binding upon humans to make sure that the environment or nature remained preserved for the coming generations. Artists ought to take up the cause of nature through their works. "Time and again questions have been raised from some sections of academia about the relevance of Literature and how it aids in sustainability and the preservation of the environment" (Roy, 2014, p. 93). It is thereof from this niche that this study focuses on the examination of environmental concerns particularly with respect to the relationship between man and nature and how the polluted and exploited nature has, in turn, obscured and polluted human psyche. In the academic circles, the issue of the environment has gained much attention. In the modern times, Ecocriticism has emerged as a highly relevant field of study which aims at foregrounding environmental issues particularly in relation to man. It also attempts to create ecological awareness through literature. It informs in what relation to physical environment a piece of literature stands.

Literature Review

Oxford English Dictionary defines 'Ecology' as "the branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment" (557). It is a cross-disciplinary field that encompasses botany, zoology, geography, and Earth science. Among other things, it studies the interdependence of organisms within an ecosystem. In contemporary era, literature has assumed dual role. It either neglects altogether the growing ecological concerns or highlights this crisis to create awareness and to critique those power structures whose policies and decisions trigger this crisis. In the latter case, it has served as an important tool of foregrounding the significance of physical environment and its safety. According to Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt (2010), the world is "locked in a dance of cultural, economic, and ecological interdependence. This interdependence calls for a multiplicity of voices to address the problems that our world faces today" (p.3).

Ecocriticism is an emerging concept in academia. Broadly speaking, it is related with the study of relationship between humans and the natural environment. It also deals with how this relationship is affected owing to industrial and technological developments. Joseph W. Meeker (1972) introduced the term literary ecology as "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works" (p.17). Some ecocritics ascribe the creation of the word "ecocriticism" to William Rueckert, who in a 1978 essay titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" wrote that ecocriticism entails "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (p.107).

But it was the publication of Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), and Cheryll Glotfelty's and Harold Fromm's collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) that "solidified ecocriticism and gave scholars a foundation. A community was created around one major focus: literature and the environment" (Campbell, 2010, p.13). These representative works in ecocritical studies have ushered in a new dimension in literature for making it a vehicle of creating awareness about the environment. The treatment of nature is different from those of the Romantics. Today the central position of man is challenged because nature herself is important and so are the non-human forms. She ought not to be left at the disposal of man to be exploited.

Glotfelty argues that ecological studies sticks to the idea that human culture and the physical environment exist in a way that the former affects and is affected by the latter. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature (Glotfelty, 1996).

Material and Methods

The premise of this research paper is to explore the dynamics of ecological crisis in the contemporary times and how this issue is voiced or otherwise in academic discourse. The study is qualitative and inductive in nature, and the interpretive research design is adopted for this purpose. Graeme King's poem "Tears of Nature" is the object of study. Theoretical assumptions provided by various theorists in Ecocriticism are employed as framework to carry out the study.

Theoretical Framework

Ecocriticism is also referred to as “green studies” and its roots go back to the late 1970s, although it started developing in 1990s. The term “Ecocriticism” was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. Rueckert’s purpose was to focus on the application of ecology to the study of literature. In 1990, Cheryl Glotfelty was the first who hold an academic position as a professor of literature and Environment. With the publication of two seminal works, *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell, the term “ecocriticism” first officially came into the reader’s view. “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis” (Buell, 2007, p.430). Lawrence Buell’s definition emphasizes that ecocriticism is about the relationship between literature and the environment or the ecology. In fact, for the study of ecocriticism, an understanding of the environmental destruction of modern times is necessary. In “The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology”, Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) defines ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii). It highlights the significance of the natural world in various literary works. It also attempts to explore the causes of environmental degradation while simultaneously looking for the alternative ways of thinking underlying values attached with ecological processes. A few years later, Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) proposed another definition of this new term in literary studies: “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-centred approach to literary studies” (p. 18). In “The Ecocritical Heritage” essay by Ian Marshall as one of the position papers from the 1994 Western Literature Association Meeting for defining ecocriticism, writes that “definitions of ecocriticism can be broad as well as deep. Put as simply and loosely as possible: it is literary criticism informed by ecological awareness”. Another related concept within Ecocriticism is “deep ecology”, a term coined by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess in 1973. He made significant contribution to the ecological movement of late twentieth century. Naess made an important distinction between deep and shallow ecology. According to him the shallow ecology is about the earth’s utility to man, whereas the deep ecology is based on the belief that nature does not exist merely for serving human needs. It also stresses that environmental degradation is largely brought on by the anthropocentric view of man. Judi Bari states that: “Nature does not exist to serve humans. Rather, humans are a part of nature, one species among many. All species have the right to exist for their own sake, regardless of their usefulness to humans” (Bari, 1995, p.22). Deep ecologists want the modern man to ask deep questions about his personal lifestyle since in this way can man discover his rightful place in nature. In fact, Ecocriticism allows readers/critics to employ a nature-based approach to the study of a text, particularly to see how nature is depicted therein.

Ecocriticism is, in fact, viewed as a literary theory that focuses on raising consciousness about the dilapidated condition of nature in order to address ecological problems. It also accounts for the exploitation of nature and its hazardous impacts as a consequence of man’s callousness. Rapid spread of the most common and detrimental diseases along with the extinction of various species disturbing natural balance are only a few of the effects of environmental degradation caused by the

exploitative human activities. "Ecocriticism", as Richard Kerridge (2006) puts in, "is a literary and cultural from an environmentalist viewpoint... Ecocritics analyses the history of concepts such as nature in an attempt to understand the cultural development that has led to the present global ecological crisis"(p.530). Kerridge directly states that ecocritics are not merely restricted to just a representation of environment, but they make the world conscious for their contribution in the environmental degradation and ecological imbalance. They also try to show how human societies are creating hurdles for the survival of the non-human world. Furthermore, the problems related with nature do not just fall within the domain of natural sciences but they entail certain cultural, artistic and moral decisions. There is no denying the fact that texts play a crucial role in triggering ecological activism as well as in the formation of policies. As a matter of fact, Matthewman (2011) explores questions such as "Is poetry the place where we save the Earth? How do you define an 'ecopoem'? What makes an Ecocritical reading? She argues that English as a subject has a pivotal role to play in mediating the environmental rhetoric, texts and readings that surround us. She further states that "English could have an Ecocritical role, however, which would involve critical reflection on the way that nature, the environment and animals are represented as well consideration of the aesthetic and ethical effects of these representations" (p. 22). She further maintains that nature or environment becomes a chief focus in the ecocritical reading of texts. Ecocritical study brings ecological issues to the fore and attempts to raise collective human consciousness to address them effectively. It also invests much interest in wildlife or non-human creatures and highlights the causes that disturb natural balance. Ecocriticism deconstructs the notion that environment is just an abstract idea; rather it presents it as an actual problem that needs serious action. And finally, it celebrates the beauty of natural phenomena in the literary texts and indicates the intensity and degree of ecological crisis.

Results and Discussion

The very title of the poem speaks volumes of the exploitation of 'Mother Nature' at the hands of none other than human species. Grim personification used in the title inkles towards a pitiable condition of nature that has been the target of the most callous and merciless human activity. Man has played havoc to natural beauty in the name of advancement, modernization and material progress. At the surface level, nature embodies various phenomena like trees, flowers, rivers, oceans, mountains, pastures, clouds, and rainbow and alike; at the under-the-surface level, however, it connotes life and the cause of life on the planet. It precedes and pervades everything; like mother, it gives birth (creates), nurtures and protects its creations against the odds. It procures an essential meaning to the whole material phenomena. So damaging nature not only mars its surface beauty but is tantamount to abolishing life itself. Metaphorically, it sheds tears owing to the unspeakable degradation meted out to it. Ruthless felling of the trees, a significant source of life, and least or no plantation in its place has paved the way for numerous ecological problems, the most critical of course is the phenomenon of global warming. Rapid and unchecked rise in the process of industrialization has caused various types of environmental pollution. The poet starts with the shocking revelation: "Or was it one more broken, falling tree?" Deforestation has brought on pollution related to land, air and water, which, in turn, have exerted a negative and debilitating impact on human psyche. Thinking is polluted as can be reflected through human anti-nature actions, indifference, destructiveness and ignorance. King refers to the lack of collective awareness about

ecological issues and repeats the same concern time and again throughout the poem. "You'd think we'd learn as time goes speeding by".

Albeit constant debates on media about/on environmental problems, inclusion of ecological courses in schools' curricula, and currency this subject is gaining nowadays, a vast majority of people seems reluctant to take a pragmatic and proactive approach to at least make up for this natural loss. Situation is worse especially in the developing countries where people pay least or no heed to ecological issues. For instance, the extremely hazardous effects of the perforated ozone layers are passed on, conveyed or taught, but are simply taken for granted.

"They tell us there's a big hole in the sky,

We won't believe in something we can't see" (King, 2006, p.59).

The poet tacitly believes that people are highly impassive about the environmental problems and they usually dismiss something they can't see themselves as irrational and fallacious. Likewise, sheer ignorance and non-seriousness on the part of humans have led the world to an alarming ecological situation where ever rising pollution poses a great threat to life. The natural resources of the world are subject to vandalism owing to various factors stemming mostly from anthropogenic activities. The ecology of the land and the water has been severely disturbed and damaged. Industrialization, deforestation, hunting of birds and animals, pollution and reduction of water bodies, and construction of roads through forests has stripped the land of its natural cover resulting in susceptible soil erosion and extinction of biodiversity. It is also ironical that in spite of an enormous progress in science and technology, man has not been able to eliminate or curtail pollution. As King remarks:

We develop rocket ships that fly,

But still can't stop pollution of the sea. (King, 2006, p.59)

And this, too, is what makes nature weep. The wastes and chemicals coming out of factories make water contaminated and sea-life decayed. Pollution in diverse forms coupled with the phenomenon of global warming is likely to make the world an uninhabitable place. Many of the species, both fauna and flora, are unable to adapt to the hazardous conditions and consequently, they are obliterated from the surface of the earth for good. The industries in most of the areas are set up at the cost of verdant thickets of trees and arable lands which clearly points towards the vested interests of a particular class of people. This class is simply bent on multiplying its assets without even making up for the huge loss meted out to nature or environment. It is to their benefit that they keep quiet and make the opposing voices suppressed. Such high-ups often influence the policy-makers and diplomatic tactics are employed to keep this status-quo intact. On the other hand, vast majority of people, ignorant and indifferent, thinks that with the passage of time they will either learn or the problems will be solved automatically.

Headlines: one more species set to die,

Keep it quiet...use diplomacy. (King, 2006, p.59)

The growing ecological issues and man's ruthless attitude towards Mother Nature have exerted a reciprocal impact on human psyche. These issues in general and pollution in particular have to a great extent, obscured human thinking and polluted his psyche. Man is literally unable to plunge the depths of his cruelty, indifference and lack of ecological awareness. They are reluctant either to hold them responsible for the natural degradation or to take adequate measures to stop pollution in their individual capacity. Rather they are more prone towards passing the buck.

Worry on the future? Pass it by!

How can preservation start with me? (King,2006,p.59)

People must realize that the individual actions are mighty crucial both to the amelioration as well as the degradation of Nature. Man and Nature exist in close mutual relationship. Man must be careful in preserving the natural resources and caring for the natural phenomena. It does not mean that material progress is unnecessary but the natural loss it entails must at least be compensated for through alternate ecological methods. And lastly, there is a great need for raising collective awareness among people about the environmental problems. Ecology courses, nature-based syllabi and other action programs can enhance ecological activism.

Conclusion

Ecocritical perspective rests on the premise that the attention of the readers be drawn towards the environmental crisis, one of the gravest concerns of the 21st century. It lays chief emphasis on the need for raising collective ecological awareness and then to prepare a strategy to preserve the natural phenomena. The poem *Tears of Nature* has been studied in the light of the basic tenets provided by Ecocritical theory. The study has unveiled that man and Nature exist in complementary relationship to each other. Human actions can either save Nature from degradation or can take it to the brink of destruction. Significant symbolic images of environmental exploitation evoke sympathetic and affectionate emotions in readers towards the environment, thus encouraging them respond to and to treat the environment conservatively. Certain literary devices used by the poet carry environment-based themes and also convey the poet's profound feeling of sadness for natural decay. The study also reveals that ecological issues have polluted human psyche as reflected through their indifference, callousness, ignorance and in some cases hypocritical attitudes. Certain power structures deliberately suppress human voice against the exploitation of nature because the raising of awareness is directly proportional to their material loss. This study shows how power structures are complicit in upsetting the ecological balance in different parts of the world. The discourse of power is inscribed on 'Mother Nature'.

References

- Bari, J. (1995). *Revolutionary Ecology: Biocentrism & Deep Ecology. A Journal of Evolutionary Ecology*. Trees Foundation
- Buell, L. (2007). *The Ethics and Politics of Environmental Criticism: The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Campbell, Andrea K. (2010). *Narrating Other Nature: A Third Wave Ecocritical Approach to Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki, and Octavia Butler*. Diss. Washington State University.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. (1996). "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H. (1996). *Introduction: The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press
- Ian, M. (1994). *The Ecocritical Heritage: Defining Ecocritical Theory and Practice*. Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Salt Lake City.
- King, G. (2006). *Tears of Nature*. Peshawar: Textbook board peahswar Pakistan
- Kerridge, R. (2006). *Environmentalism and Criticism: Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Patricia Waugh. London: Oxford University Press
- Matthewman, S. (2011). *Teaching Secondary English as if the Planet Matters*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis.
- Naess, A. (1973). *The Shallow and the Deep. Long-Range Ecology: A Summary*. An *Interdisciplinary journal of Philosophy and the Social Sciences*, 16, 95-100.
- Oroskhan, M. H., & Faghfori, S. (2015). An Ecological exploration of Marvell's selected poems. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4(3), 66-71.
- Roy, A. (2014). Green Poems: An ecocritical reading of select Indian poems in English. *MIT International Journal of English Language & Literature*, 1(2), 92-99.