
AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF KALIDASA'S MEGHADUTA

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Abstract:

Eco criticism is that the study of literature and atmosphere from a knowledge domain purpose of read wherever all sciences close to investigate the atmosphere and brainstorm potential solutions for the correction of the up to date environmental scenario. Over the last three decades, eco criticism has emerged as a field of arts that addresses, however humans relate to bloodless nature of the atmosphere in literature. Today, with the event and growth of eco vital studies, any line between human and bloodless nature has essentially blurred. Lawrence Buell's eco vital approach originated in his outstanding work on Henry David Thoreau, that culminated in 1995 with the Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and also the Formation of yankee Culture. though the construct of Environmental Awareness has become a awfully serious issue and a matter of nice discussion within the up to date age, it did arrest the eye of the traditional Indians since the first stage of civilization. Meghadutam could be a duta-kavyam or messenger-verse form, the primary of its kind, giving rise to a spate of imitations over the centuries. To decision it a duta- kavyam is merely place it during a determinable genre. Thus, eco criticism becomes a literary and demanding tool, a

form of reading designed to show and facilitate analysis of a text's orientation each to the globe during which it takes form, at the side of the conditions and context that have an effect on that orientation, no matter it'd be.

Keywords:

Ecocriticism,reading,orientation,etc

Eco criticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. Ecocriticism was officially heralded by the publication of two seminal works, both published in the mid-1990's :The Ecocriticism Reader, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and The Environmental Imagination, by Lawrence Buell. Ecocriticism investigates the relation between humans and the natural world in literature. It deals with how environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment and the attitude towards nature are presented and analyzed. One of the main goals in ecocriticism is to study how individuals in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. This form of criticism has gained a lot of attention

during recent years (approximately since 2000) due to higher social emphasis on environmental destruction and increased technology. It is hence a fresh way of analyzing and interpreting literary texts, which brings new dimensions to the field of literary and theoretical studies. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach that is known by another designations, including “green (cultural) studies”, “ecopoetics”, and “environmental literary criticism”.

Western thought has often held a more or less utilitarian attitude to nature-nature is for serving human needs. However, after the eighteenth century, there emerged many voices that demanded a revaluation of the relationship between man and environment, and man’s view of nature. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher developed the notion of “Deep Ecology” which emphasizes the basic interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features, and presents a symbiotic and holistic world- view rather than an anthropocentric one.

Over the last three decades, ecocriticism has emerged as a field of literary study that addresses how humans relate to nonhuman nature of the environment in literature. Today , with the development and expansion of ecocritical studies, any line between human and nonhuman nature has necessarily blurred. So when subjected to ecocriticism, literature of all periods and places- not only eccentric or environmental literature or nature writing, but all literature – is viewed in terms of place, setting or environment , all of which have taken on

richer meaning . A rapidly changing theoretical approach, ecocriticism grows out of the traditional approach to physical, or the historical or natural history in the context of a work of art. Such approaches can be interdisciplinary, invoking knowledge of environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies. Though it became a subject heading in the Library of Congress list of “Authorities” in 2002, ecocriticism is not yet listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. However, many words prefixed “eco” are listed, among them “ecofeminism” and “economics”. “Eco”, from the Greek root oikos, means “house”. Ecocriticism , then is the criticism of the “house”, i.e. , the environment , as represented in literature. But the definition of “house”, or oikos, is not simple. Since 1990, ecocriticism has burgeoned; it has entered academic course lists worldwide along with the creation of interdisciplinary academic faculty positions to teach them. Peter Barry adapted a chapter titled “Ecocriticism” to the second edition of his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, but correctly claims that ecocriticism has no universal model.

Moving backward in time to the 1960s and 1970s, one finds a number of important resources on what came to be known as ecocriticism. Two titles are especially important: Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the pastoral idea in America* and Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*. Marx identifies the machine as the advancement of technology in what was considered by many to be the virgin land

of America. This classic in the study of American literature exemplifies the fertile ground that gave birth to ecocriticism in the United States. Also, ecocriticism, as it now in vogue in the USA, takes its literary bearings from the nineteenth century transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. Raymond Williams played a very inspiring role in the development of the UK version of ecocriticism or "green studies", that also drew insights from the English Romanticism of the 1790s. Williams focussed on the urbanism that competes with the bucolic English countryside. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* stands not as a precursor but as an early founding text which introduces the notion of literary ecology by emphasizing comedy in a discussion of how the natural world strives for survival. In a chapter on Hamlet, he innovatively shows that Hamlet's doubts are directed not only at the world of humans.

Some ecocritics date the birth of the word "ecocriticism" to William Rueckert, who in a 1978 essay titled "Literature and Ecology" An experiment in Ecocriticism entailed "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm quite rightly included Rueckert's essay in their edited volume *The Ecocriticism Reader : Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, which more than fifteen years after its publication, remains a benchmark text in the field because of the passion of its contributors, its scholarly breadth and depth, and the diversity of its essays. In a 1989 *Western Literature*

Association meeting, Glotfelty had argued literary critics to develop an ecological approach to literature, one that would focus on the cultural dimensions of humans relationship to the environment. Another basic source that reveals the diversity of ecocritical approach to literature is *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism*, 1993- 2003, edited by Michael Branch and Scott Slovic (the author of *Going Away to Think*, which looks at ecocritical responsibility). Its nineteen essays cover broad landscapes and are written by top ecocritics in the field. The British counterpart to *The ISLE Reader* is *The Green Studies Reader : From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, edited by Laurence Coupe, which with its many voices eloquently challenges the notion that nonhuman nature is subordinate to human nature, a belief that is rapidly becoming outdated.

The essays in Fiona Becket and Terry Gifford's collection *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism*, focuss on the politics of environmental crisis. In their study of environmental issues, the contributors look at texts from Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* to the animal stories of German writer Otto Alscher and address a necessary question: "What are the goals of ecocriticism at large?"

Lawrence Buell's ecocritical approach originated in his outstanding work on Henry David Thoreau, which culminated in 1995 with *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of*

American Culture. In this groundbreaking work, Buell offers four criteria for determining whether a text is environmental: first, "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device"; second, "the human interest is not... the only legitimate interest"; third, "human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation" and forth, "there is some sense of the environment as a process." In his monumental work, *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard measures this by the extent to which one uses, saves or ignores the environment, and to him, most ecocritics would probably identify themselves as "environmentalists" or "deep ecologists". He also categorizes the literary loci of the environment: pastoral, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and the earth. In postmodern parlance, the "environment" takes on new meaning. As Garrard points out in a chapter titled "Futures: The Earth," ecocriticism oriented toward nature writing has led to urban and ecojustice revisionism, so much so that he finds it "more productive to think inclusively of environmentality as a property of any text."

Karl Kroeber paves the way for sane, inspiring prospects for merging the interests between the arts and the sciences. Although he focuses primarily on the British Romantics, Kroeber makes a compelling case for interdisciplinary study of the impact of the natural world and poetic process. Jonathan Bate deals with the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats etc. And debates whether their Romantic notion of nature is a

metaphor for the self rather than a tribute to the biotic world.

Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring*, an exposure of the environmental hazards of DDT, first appeared in 1962 and inaugurated twentieth century environmentalism. *Silent Spring* continues to be a classic in environmental nonfiction, as do the writings of California naturalist John Muir.

In his brilliant *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Alan Bewell looks at the impact colonialism had on infecting native populations and how British Romantic literature reflects that epidemiological crisis. This ecological colonization includes not only smallpox epidemics in the America but also long-term psychological and medical effects of colonization in tropical climates worldwide. Bewell identifies these concerns in the works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, John Keats, and many others.

The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in an American Film Genre, edited by Deborah Carmichael, is an interesting collection that joins ecocriticism with film studies, frontier writing and portrayals of the landscapes of the American West. Ramachandra Guha, a prominent Indian thinker and historian, has rightly pointed out that ideas of development and progress in Third World nations like India are grounded on Western models of modernity. Likewise, ecological perspectives of the West negate the indigenous knowledge, culture and rituals.

For instance, people are evicted from lands where they have occupied for centuries under the name of conserving wildlife(the debate about tiger conservation in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*).

Ecocriticism may well be in its demise already. In their 2004 essay "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming politics in a post-Environmental", Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus argued, that the politics that dealt with acid rain and smog can't deal with global warming. Society has changed, and our politics have not kept up. Environmentalism must die, they concluded, so that something new can be born. Ecocriticism, once the literary arm of environmentalism, has evolved into a multidisciplinary approach to all environmental literature, which, if ecocriticism does its work, will be all literature.

Although the concept of Environmental Awareness has become a very serious issue and a matter of great discussion in the contemporary age, it did arrest the attention of the ancient Indians since the early stage of civilization. Our ancient Indian thinkers and sociological scientists heartily realized the importance of natural objects on human life. Hence, they worshiped the natural objects on human life. Hence, they worshipped the natural objects as deity to protect and maintain a healthy environment. In the Rigveda along, we have several suktas where 'Rishi' propitiates the natural elements as deities showing the significance of these objects in human life or in all living being.

As for instance, in the Vayu-sukta of the Rigveda states that "Vayu' or the air is the essence of all living being. Science is also regards pure air('vayu') is a boon to good health and happiness. The sages felt 'vayu' as the store-house of ambrosial for him, it has medicinal qualities. The Isopanishada states that the God is present in each and every part of this creation. Thus, it indicates that one should not dare to disturb the environment which is nothing but a manifestation of God.

The Atharvaveda says that 'the earth is our mother and we are her child'. Similarly, the Visnupurana also praises the earth as our mother as she nurses the receptacle and nourished of all existing things. Likewise, the animals are also a major part of our environment. Some animals like cow, horse etc. have been described in the Vedas emphatically. Therefore, the Atharvaveda suggests punishment to those who becomes threaten to such type of animals for their existence. In this way, a lot of instances are available in different ancient Indian scriptures, which provide evidence of the ancient Indian thinkers concern regarding environmental awareness.

Human being and Environment are closely interrelated and interdependent as the two sides of the same coin. The human being flourish in its lap and at the end take eternal rest therein. In the vast field of Sanskrit literature, beginning from the Vedic up to Classical, nature as well as environment plays a significant role towards human civilization. Kalidasa, the great poet- dramatist occupies a dominant

place in the field of Sanskrit literature. The description of nature in Kalidasa's work is unique, majestic and significant one through which he earns the world-wide recognition as 'the poet of Nature'

In the Meghaduta nature plays a very significant role. Here, we have the vivid description of various types of plants, animals, mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, flowers as well as some living and non-living elements of nature which not only charms the poetic creation of the great poet, also reflect the heartiest love or consciousness of Kalidasa towards nature or the natural environment surrounded by him. As for instance, in the Meghaduta, Kalidasa presents the piece of clouds through which Yaksha wish to send his well being message to his beloved as an animate object. Thus he placed the natural elements and human beings in the same platform. The poet while processed to describe the route of the cloud in its march from Ramagiri to Alaka has not forgotten to mention such hills and rivers like 'Amrakuta', 'Vindhya', 'Narmada', 'Narmada', 'Vetravati', 'Gandhavari', 'Gambhira' etc. Similarly, in the second part of this lyric, Kalidasa describes the city Alaka which is the destination of the cloud by the exiled Yaksha. Here also Kalidasa describes the beauty of this city with its pleasant sides of nature. All these stand nothing but as the loveliness, high gratitude as well as his concern towards nature. Thus these two lyrics set up on the lap of nature where Kalidasa establishes the natural objects in human forms and he makes an emotional relationship between man and environment. Through his two lyrics, Kalidasa depicts in a touching

manner, the natural object in human form. For example, in the Meghaduta, many rivers catch our attention as heroines, they captivate the heart of the cloud. The river Vetravati flows with trembling waves like a beautiful heroine. The cloud is kissing the passionate lady. These all bear as Kalidasa's attractive and aware mind towards his surroundings.

Ecoconsciousness and deep concerns for ecology can be seen in its full range of spectrum in the origin and growth of our culture and civilization. All the religious texts like the Bible, the Quran, and the Hindu religious scriptures, Vedic literature, the Geeta, the Bhagvad Mahapurans, the Ramayana and the Upanishads also emphasise the ecocritical point of view. Kalidasa too conveys the human relationship in this way: "Hail, friend of Indra, counsellor divine/ Illustrious offspring of a glorious line / Wearer of shapes at will, thy worth I know/ And bold entrust thee with my fated woe/ For, better far, solicitation fail/ With high desert, than with the base prevail"(Wilson 6-8).

Meghadutam is a duta-kavyam or messenger-poem, the first of its kind, giving rise to a spate of imitations over the centuries. To call it a duta-kavyam is only place it in a definable genre. The poem is much more than just a messenger poem. Further, the similarities between Meghadutam and the Ramayana which some Sanskrit commentators point out can be more fruitfully viewed from another stand point, as indicative of a fundamental factor- the poem's filiation. Kalidasa

places himself firmly in the kavya tradition which begins with the Ramayana.

Meghadutam(The Cloud Messenger) is more than a poem of longing and separation with glowing descriptions of nature. Myth and legend, dream-vision and literary reminiscences are blended with topographical and conversational dimensions to give a love-poem depth and a multilayered texture. Further, the lover- beloved (nayaka-nayika) framework of the dramatic tradition in which the poem can be seen as placed in its own times is raised to another level where it is the landscape that figures as the beloved of the cloud- lover that is itself the alter ego of the real lover- the speaker in the poem.

The natural and physical characteristics of a rain cloud as well as its mythic associations are brought into play during its long course over a vast stretch of land, and constantly related through some of the most richly textured imagery in the poet's work to legendary and semi-historical places and personages. Many of these places are holy spots of pilgrimage; places of atonement and purification associated with persons guilty of wrong doing of one kind or another. The poem is a totally new genre in the lyric mode. The cloud is introduced at the opening of the poem by the key-phrase, 'embracing the crest of the hill'. What was once sundered and placed in two separate planes, aerial and terrestrial is united. This parallels the situation of the lovers in the poem and their spatial separation.

Meghaduta is divided into two parts, Purvamegha (Previous Cloud) and Uttaramegha (Consequent Cloud). This lyric poetry shows how the Yaksha feels after having been exiled from Alaka. Suffering the agony of separation, Yaksha, the lover, becomes completely love ridden takes the help of a cloud, the 'Megha' to address his love message to his beloved. The graphical descriptions of nature and topographical details of ancient India have been poignantly shown in the lyric. Literature can play an important role to ameliorate the environmental awareness. It can convey a message to human beings that living with nature and extracting limited resources is the only source to live in harmony. Nature has been the theme of earlier writings, but serious concern of ecology seems to be lacking in the earlier works. There are lots of ecocritical concerns in Kalidasa's poetry. The study of Meghaduta from an ecocritical perspectives begins with the depiction of Indian landscape.

Kalidasa's Meghaduta has defined the path of the cloud from Ramagiri to Alaka city through the Yaksha's instruction to the cloud. This lovely journey is represented in the descriptions of the Himalayas, 'Rajhansh', 'Kailash Mountain', birds, animals, flowers, trees, lakes, forests, rivers, stars, moon, sun, clouds etc. The cloud's journey encompasses the realms of earth and sky. Primarily, ecocriticism involves the phenomena of natural environment; it includes clouds, plants, trees, forests, lakes, ponds, streams, rivers and landscapes etc. The Cloud's Journey from

Ramagiri to Alkapuri represents the relationship between man and nature.

Kalidasa symbolically interlinks the non-human world with human world:

When you will be in the vicinity, the Dasarna country will have the hedges of its gardens white- coloured with the Ketaka flowers opened at their apexes, the sacred trees of its villages will be greatly disturbed by the nest- making of the domestic birds, its skirts of ‘Jambu’ forests dark with their ripe fruit, and the swans halting there for some days”.(Kale46)

The complete existence of human beings depends on the environment. The creation of the human being has been a long term evolution process in which ecology plays a significant role. Ecology studies the relationship between human being and the environment . Kalidasa has portrayed nature and its effects on the human society. Meghaduta’s every stanza represents the man- nature relationship through the Yaksha’s instruction to the cloud.

Ecocriticism studies the relation between nature and human being. This unusual combination of the physical and the spiritual can be seen in some of the terms used in ecology and ecocriticism both of which have the same aim. As a pedagogical practice, ecocriticism explores language as a coevolutionary process of the earth. It articulates the symbiotic relationship between land and landscape, text and terrain, and recognizes that language is not separate from the world of nature . The relationship between man and nature can be seen as an interdependent one. Our irresponsible actions very often cause irreparable damage to nature. The

relationship between man and nature can be seen as an interdependent one. Our irresponsible actions very often cause irreparable damage to nature. The chain of ecosystem works in such a way that everything is related to each other and affects one another :

It has also a pond attached to it, furnished with a flight of steps formed of emerald stones, and closely filled with full- blown golden lotuses with glistening stalks of vaiduryas, the swans dwelling in the water of which, being free from anxiety, do not long for (the lake) Manasa, through close at hand, even on seeing you at the approach of the rainy season. (Kale 129)

Eco criticism is the theory of literature and environment. It deals with human and non- human society. Eco criticism also studies the social and cultural aspects of our existence. Ecology is part of the main stream of human society. Kalidasa’s Meghaduta presents social phenomena from an ecocritical point of view. In the first part of Meghaduta, the poet has portrayed the bereaved Yaksha who misses his beloved (the Yakshini), and sees her beauty in the natural phenomena :

“In order to take rest there, thou wilt stay on the mountain called Nihaih bristling, as it were, as thy touch with the Kadamba trees having full- blown flowers; (the mountain) which, by means of its stony houses redolent of the perfume used by harlots when sporting, discloses the licentious youth of the townsmen”(Pathak23).

Kalidasa's Meghaduta presents all the aspects of human and social ecology. Ecocriticism has given increased attention to the literary representation of the environmental awareness. This approach shifts critical focus from social relations to natural and views the individual as a member of ecological system . This study has been a delightful aesthetic experience which has enhanced the knowledge in newly developed field of ecocriticism. The striking presence of 'ecoconsciousness' makes Kalidasa's poem ecocritically valuable. Every stanza of Meghaduta represents to different cultural traits and natural beauty through the cloud's journey from Ramagiri to Alka city :

Where the young women have a sportive lotus in their hands, interweave their hair with the fresh – blown Kunda blossoms, have the beauty of face rendered yellowish- white with the pollen of Lodhra flowers and wear the fresh Kurabaka flowers in their braids the lovely Sirish flowers on the their ears and the Nipa flowers, that spring up into existence at your approach, on the line of the parting of their hair. (Kale 111).

All these aspects of the Alaka city- women , custom, ritual, tradition , belief etc. represent the socio- cultural dimension of the people. The natural beauty of flowers like ' Kunda', 'Shirisha', 'Kadamba', 'Nima', 'Kutaja', 'Ketka', etc, trees like ' Bakul', 'Mandar', 'Ashoka', 'Kalpavrushka', 'Devdar' etc. in the Alka city show the facets of nature. The historical places like 'Avanti', 'Vidisha', 'Dashpura', ' Devgiri', 'Ramagiri', 'Ujjayini', 'Kurukshetra', 'Kanakhala', 'Alaka' etc ., the reference to rivers like

'Reva', 'Jahavahi', 'Ganga', ' Gambhira', 'Sindhu', 'Yamuna', 'Vetravati', 'Saraswati', 'Shipra', 'Charmanvati' et., and the great mountains like the 'Himalaya', 'Kailash', 'Amarakuta', 'Vindhya', 'Nicha' etc. form another aspect of the eco critical reading of the text. Thus Meghaduta suggests that nature and culture are deeply connected with each other. An Ecocritical study of Meghaduta reveals that how the landscape and the non-human world are used to shape the form, content and structure of the poem. Thus, ecocriticism becomes a literary and critical tool, a kind of reading designed to expose and facilitate analysis analysis of a text's orientation both to the world in which it takes shape, along with the conditions and context that affect that orientation, whatever it might be.

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