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Eco criticism in the poems of Kalidasa

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Abstract

Edward O. Wilson has described 21st century as century of environment (Buell 3). The latest developed theory named 'Eco criticism theory' studies about nature and environment. It studies the relations among writers, texts and the society. It looks closely at the human, culture, nature interaction in texts. Kalidasa has earned name and fame through his poems and dramas in Sanskrit literature. His approach to nature and study of human psychology in his creative works with his best poetical style has placed him respectfully into world literature. This paper will study Kalidasa as an eco-critical poet with reference to his poems.

Keywords: eco criticism, environment, nature, society, culture, Kalidasa.

1. Introduction

Eco criticism seeks to redirect humanistic ideology not spurning the natural science but using the ideas to sustain viable reading. "Nature is an interacting process, a seamless web and that nature is responsive to laws that it constitutes a value system with intrinsic opportunities and constraints upon human issues" (Glottfelty and Fromm 118). Eco criticism broadens its focus from nature writing to environmental commitment, study of society and culture of people. Thus, eco criticism is a movement which moves to socio centric direction with keeping its base on nature writing. "Eco criticism implies more ecological literacy than it advocates reformation of literary studies via Rapprochement" (Buell 8). Eco literature is not a kind of literature which describes the natural world. It is different from traditional literature that describes nature. The aim of eco literature is to reveal the harmony between nature and human being. The harmonious tuning between nature and literature proves beneficial for present generation and also for future generation. "Eco criticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire eco sphere" (Glottfelty and Fromm xix).

Kalidasa is the brightest star in the galaxy of Indian poetry. His poetic works are *Ritusamhara*, *Meghaduta*, *Kumarsambhava* and *Raghuvamsha*. His plays are *Malavikagnimitram*, *Vikramorvashiyam* and *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. He has earned name and fame through his poems and dramas in Sanskrit literature. His approach to nature and study of human psychology in his creative works with his best poetical style has placed him respectfully into world literature. The researcher wants to use this latest developed theory in evaluating Kalidasa's poems. The researcher wants to study the newly invented critical theory of eco criticism and will also study the need of it in the contemporary situation.

2. Eco criticism

Nature attracts the literary writers and their works embellish with depiction of nature. Buell uses the words 'First wave eco criticism' for such type of the nature writing. The British Romantic poets named Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats used nature in their poems. William Wordsworth is the high priest of nature. He praises nature in his famous poem *Tintern Abbey*: "Nature is never failing friend...nurse, guide and guardian of mankind" (Rengasamy 45). In *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge has given the reference of bird named Albatross. We should not kill the bird is the indirect message of this poem. Eco criticism studies the protection of animals and birds. "British Romanticism has proved to be a fertile and varied ground for eco critical revisionism" (Buell 3). Eco criticism also guides us to take care of birds and animals. Garrard observes, "Animal study is important ally of eco criticism" (Garrard 144). William Shakespeare is the famous dramatist of English literature. He says in *as you like it* which is a pastoral comedy, "Finds tongue in trees, books in the running brook, Sermons in the stones and good in everything (Act-2 Scene-1) (Love 66).

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Thus, the delineation of nature is well reflected in the literary works of writers.

Eco criticism often presents the scene of an interplay that stresses the cultural aspects of various concepts of nature. Timothy observes "Eco criticism is varied and fast changing set of practices which challenges thinking and practice in reading of literature and culture" (Cover page). Thus, eco criticism functions to evaluate literature and culture.

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Eco literature also shows the domination of man on nature. The purpose of eco criticism is to promote consciousness of people. "Eco criticism is the study of environmental texts including literature, film, magic, visual art and popular media from any critical perspective or the application of various environmental lenses" (Shukla and Dwivedi 23). Eco criticism assumes that nature and human culture are mutually influential and awake ecological communications. "Eco criticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscapes in cultural texts playing particular attention to attribute towards nature" (Nayar 242).

Nature, ecology, society, culture, animal study etc. are components of eco criticism.

Eco criticism looks closely at the human, culture, nature interaction in texts. Eco criticism often presents the scene of an interplay that stresses the cultural aspects of various concepts of nature. Timothy observes "Eco criticism is varied and fast changing set of practices which challenges thinking and practice in reading of literature and culture" (Cover page). Thus, eco criticism functions to evaluate literature and culture: "Eco criticism is a theoretical movement, examining cultural constructions of Nature in their social and political contexts" (Egan Cover page). So, "Eco criticism is means of moving from monoculture view of nature to multi-cultural one from world of self-isolating societies to world of united and unifying culture" (Karala and Kathleen xxii).

It is very interesting and important to peep into the origin of the eco criticism theory. The earlier history of the term reflects the contribution of three persons. The first item in Mazel's anthology of early eco criticism dates from 1864 (Buell 152). The German zoologist named Ernest Haeckel used the term ecology in 1869. Joseph Meeker introduced the

term 'literary ecology' in 1972. (Rajkrishna and Ujjaval 3). The term 'eco criticism' was first introduced in 1978 by William Ruckert in his essay named *Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Eco criticism*. The writer gives signal to mankind. "...the idea that nature should also be protected by human laws, that trees (dolphins and whales hawks and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the marvellous and characteristic parts of the ecological vision" (Glotfelty and Fromm 108). In 1996, there is an official announcement of eco criticism theory through the publication of the two seminal works: 'The Eco Critical Reader' edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and 'The Environmental Imagination' by Lawrence Buell.

3. The eco critical elements in Kalidasa's poetical works

Kalidasa's all the poems have fragrance of eco criticism.

Ritusamhara

Ritusamhara portrays the beauty of nature with varieties of plants, trees and flowers of different seasons. To study ecology is the base of eco criticism. It draws the pictorial picture of pleasurable moments of nature like smiling trees and flowers, flowing streams and rivers in monsoon season and beautiful flowers, trees, humming of bees, nice lakes enriched with lotuses in spring season. The after effect of monsoon is shown in autumn season. The farm adorned with crops, blooming of flowers like Kasha, Malati, Shyama creepers, trees like Kovidar and Saptachchada are the speciality of autumn season. So, nature which is the element of eco criticism is well expressed here. Extreme heat and extreme cold affect the parts of nature. The scorching heat dries the vegetable and forest region. Due to cold Lotuses perish. Cold affects all the parts of nature. Of course, Lodhra trees flower in cold season. Eco criticism shows the world of animals and birds. In summer, deer, snake, lion, elephant, peacock, pig, frog, buffalo, monkey, oxen, sharabhas suffer due to scorching heat, thirst and they make search of watery place. Peacock, elephant and lion, serpent and frog etc. forget their revengeful approach to each other and have friendly relation. The curiosity of Chataka to welcome clouds and the happiness of bees and peacock due to arrival of rain are well delineated here. Thus, the study of eco criticism guides to take care of birds and animals. The wild elephants are angry as they heard the noise of thundering of cloud. The satisfaction of Chatak and the pleasure of peacock are continued in autumn season as they are satisfied with rain. The lakes look beautiful with sitting of swans.

"Robed in pale silk plumes of Kasa blooms,

Full blown lotuses her beautiful face

The music of her anklet bells

Ripening grain, lightly bending her lissome form autumn has now arrived, enchanting as a bride" (Chandra 89).

The musical voice of Kraunch and lively farms with flocks of female deer in cold season, the sweet cooking of cuckoo and of humming bee on the flowers in spring season depict the effect of season on birds and animals. So, eco criticism studies the lives of birds and animals. Here the effect of nature on them is shown.

Eco criticism observes the effect of nature on human being and interrelation between nature and humanity. The dry summer waves and terrible cold disturb their routine. But the people enjoy seasons like monsoon, spring and even winter which affect positively among them. Kalidasa is erotic poet. In *Ritusamhara*, nature kindles the inner feeling of love to couple and separated lovers from their partners. The aspects of nature motivate and kindle their love to each other. Thus seasonable trees, flowers, farms with crops, singing of birds, dancing of peacocks, nice lakes with varied Lotuses, shower of rain, rainbow, rivers, mountains, sunrays, moonrays, sky with shining stars etc. make the people happy. The lifestyle of persons of society is varied as per season to season. Women use various flowers to adore their parts of body. Social way of living and effect of nature on it, are observed which are presented in Eco criticism. To draw leafy line on faces, to use the incense of Agar, paste of sandal wood, smoke of Kalaguru reflect the contemporary society. Women decorate themselves with various ornaments. The sweet smell of flowers like Kadamba, Kesar, Ketaki and flowers of Kakubha trees are enjoyed by women. The poem also shows cultural side of society and shakes our sensibility for eco consciousness and alerts the persons to preserve nature, to have inter-tuning with nature, to use and utilize the parts of nature for decoration by women. Respect towards nature enables persons not to cut trees and disturb the environment. Thus the thoughts reflected in *Ritusamhara* are full of eco criticism.

Meghaduta

Meghaduta, the famous lyric of Kalidasa, written in Mandakranta meter, is also an eco-critical text. The text is full of notes of beauty of nature, its impact on birds and animals, harmony between nature and human being and also observation of society and culture, reflected in elements of eco criticism. Even today, on the first day of Ashadha, the connoisseur remembers Kalidasa's *Meghaduta*. The floating clouds at sky pains Yaksha who is separated from his wife. Yaksha got a curse from his master Kuber due to his carelessness in duties. He has to obey the command of Kubera to live alone for one year at Ramagiri. Yaksha sends his love message to his wife at Alaka through cloud. He chooses cloud as a messenger and sends his messages to his beloved wife through cloud because कामार्ता हि प्रकृतिकृपणाश्चेतनेषु (Unni 12) (for those who are afflicted with love could not at all distinguish between animate and inanimate). Yaksha instructs cloud for his path from Ramagiri to Alaka. The flight of cloud colours the rainbow (Seven colours design of the incidents) as we experience through eyes of cloud like beauty of nature, its effect on birds and animals, its effect on human being, reflection of society and culture in nature, mythology and historical places of India. Yaksha treats cloud as an animate person who will move and give message to Yaksha's beloved wife. The beauty of trees like Ashoka, Mandar, Kalpavruksha (desire granting tree), Bakul, Devadar etc., flowers like Nima, Kutaja, Ketaka, Kadamba, Jasmine, Lotus, Kunda, Lodhra, Kurvaka, Shirisha, Nipa etc., Manasa lake, rivers like Reva, Vetravati, Shipra, Saraswati, Ganga, Yamuna, Sindhu, Gambhira, the mountains like Kailash,

Himalaya, Amarakuta, Vindhya, Nicha enrich the poem with depiction of ecology. The minute detail of nature like blowing of breeze, rainbow, slopes of Himvan and other mountain slopes etc. are outstanding. The reference of swans, peacock, deer, elephant, bees, Indragopa insect presents the world of insects, birds and animals. The social and cultural study of cities like Vidisha, Ujjayini and Alaka are well expressed. The happy and satisfied life of Yaksha becomes example for society. Eco criticism has concerned to study the society which is affected by aspects of nature. The historical and mythological places like Kurukshetra, Kanakhala remind the Indian history and mythology. Yaksha misses his wife and sees the reflection of her beauty in elements of nature. Yaksha shares his feeling to nature and bird which is well delineated in this verse:

“श्यामास्वङ्गं चकितहरणीप्रेक्षणे दृष्टिपातं,
वक्त्रच्छायां शशिनि शिखिनां बर्हभारेषु केशान् ।

उत्पश्यामि प्रतनुषु नदीवीचिषु भ्रूविलासान् ,

हन्तैकस्मिन्कवचिदपि न ते चण्डि सादृश्यमस्ति” ॥ (Uttaramegha 44)

(I fancy to see your body in the Priyangu creepers, your glances in the eyes of bewildered female deer, the beauty of your face in the moon, your (decorated) hair in the plumages of peacocks, and the sportive movements of your eye-brows in the gentle ripples of rivers: But, Oh, misfortune! Nowhere in a single thing, O passionate one, does your (entire) likeness exist (Kale, 167). The painted figures of Shankha and Padma on both sides of door at Yaksha's house denote the cultural side of society. The ethics is suggested through *Meghaduta* as Yaksha is the mouthpiece of Kalidasa. Thus, all the components of eco criticism theory are well reflected in *Meghaduta*.

Kumarsambhava

Kumarsambhava is also full of eco critical references. The poet expresses the beauty of Himalaya in few verses of Canto 1 of *Kumarsambhava*. The opening of the poem expresses the divine atmosphere of North India with beauty of Himalaya.

“There in the north is the Monarch of mountains,
Himalaya named of divinity indwelling;

Plunging into a great oceans, east and west

He stands, a rod taking the Earth's whole measure” (Chandra 109).

Thus, ecology which is a part of eco criticism is shown here. Himalaya is surrounded with other small mountains which are the store house of the brilliant gems and precious medical herbs, materials of offerings which are useful to mankind. Kalidasa gives the poetic and lively picture of snowy mountains. The beauty of Himalaya, clouds, sunset give the pictorial quality of Kalidasa. “The mountain fills the hollow bamboo-stems, with breeze he excels through his cave mouths, as if wishing to accompany with flutes, note by note, the high clear melodies of the faunas” (Chandra 110). The luminous glow of herbs at night expressed the pen picture of mountain area with Kalidasa's imaginative abilities. The Himalaya is depicted as the great shelter for kiratas, hunters, animals and birds. The praise of mountain, moonbeams, rainclouds, cascading water of Bhagirathi narrate the lively picture of Himalaya and praises the Creator i.e. God, as a

source of sacrificial materials and supporter of Earth. So, ecology is well presented here. "The delineation of Himalaya is the finest in characterization of poem" (Chandra 20). In Canto 3, Kalidasa has given the depiction of spring season. Cupid, God of love, (Kamadev) has created this spring to awake Lord Shiva from Samadhi and love Parvati so that their marriage can become possible as forecasted by Narad. 'Suddenly Spring set in' (Jhala 42). The spring is depicted from verse no. 25 to 39. The poet narrates the beauty of likable sunrays, sober breeze with fragrance, greenery of colourful flowers and palasa buds. The colour of gorgeous Karnikara is beautiful but without fragrance and the buds of palasa is not fully bloomed. The beautiful simile is depicted as "Palasa buds not yet fully open as intense red and curved like the new moon appeared at once, like nail marks on the forest glades, tenderly uniting with their lover, spring" (Chandra 135). The full bloomed Tilaka flowers add to the beauty of atmosphere. Such spring also affects animals and birds. The feeling of deer and cuckoo is affected by nature. The liveliness of floral designs is shown as if they are painted. Thus, animal study and ecology which are the aspects of eco criticism are suggested here. Parvati nurtures trees like her child in the hermitage of Vashistha. All these prove that, *Kumarsambhava* is full of eco criticism.

Raghuvamsha

Raghuvamsha is the best epic of Kalidasa and reflects his well experienced and mature poetic style. It is the most appropriate epic according to the characteristics of the 'Mahakavya' as depicted by critics in the *Poetics*. It is a composition in verse divided into nineteen cantos with variety of meters. Each canto is potential to be a separate poem due to its poetic qualities. The theme of the poem depicts the glorious dynasty of Raghu (King Ikshvaku dynasty). The description of galaxy of clever and noble kings like Dilip, Raghu, Aja, Dasharatha, Rama etc. attract the readers. There is narration of twenty nine kings in *Raghuvamsha* (Jhala 96). The episode of Dilip and the lion, Raghu's encounter with Indra, Indumati's Svyamavara, Aja's lament, Vashistha's message, Dasharatha and his curse, Sita's abandonment, the reunion of Rama with his sons and tragic end of Sita etc. incidents colour the poem. The poem is full of eco critical references. The main component of eco criticism is the depiction of nature which is marvellously expressed here. In *Raghuvamsha*, Rama's journey from Lanka to Ayodhya depicts the ecological beauty of southern India. The beauty of nature enriches in the canto no. 2, 4, 9, 13 and 14 of poem. In this way, ecology which is the part of eco criticism is well reflected here. The beauty of forest is well depicted thus: "The wind charged with the spray of the mountain streams, and bearing the fragrance of the gently shaken flowers of trees, served (refreshed) him, who purified by his righteous conduct was oppressed by heat as he had no umbrella with him" (Kale 10). King Dilip's pious and dedicated service and care to cow (Kamadhenu) reflects his love for animals. Thus, it reminds of eco criticism which also encourages animal study. *Raghuvamsha* also reflects the effect of nature on humanity. In Canto 14, when Rama abandons Sita, Sita cries and aspects of nature like plants, trees, flowers and animals become her equal partner in her

sadness. So, to study the effect of nature on human being which is one of the aspects of eco criticism, is well studied here. *Raghuvamsha* depicts the way of living of kings. Trees like Kalpavruasha and Asipatravruksha are referred as divine trees. The divine luster of Rishes inspires forest animals to leave their violence and revengeful nature and become peaceful. So, *Raghuvamsha* contains eco critical aspects. So, Kalidas's all poetical works reflect eco criticism.

4. Conclusion

Literature is the medium to reflect the current problems of society. The development of science and technology put the world in summit of progress. But the lives of humans are in danger. Eco criticism alerts the persons of society through literary works to sensitize with all problems. So theory of eco criticism is most appropriate and useful in 21st century. "If mortals dwell in that, they save the earth and if poetry is the original admission of dwelling, the poetry is the place where we save the earth" (Bate 183). All these thoughts are well noticed in the poetic works of Kalidasa. At present, the world suffers from the problem of the global warming. We see slogans like 'Save environment and tree'. The population of birds and animals are decreased. Kalidasa gives indirect suggestion through his works to preserve nature and to take care of birds and animals. Thus, the various aspects of eco criticism are well reflected in Kalidasa's all poems.

Eco criticism motivates the persons for eco sensitivity. The poems of Kalidasa suggest that we should take care of nature and also to take care of animals and birds. Kalidasa gives indirect message to society to glorify nature, to preserve trees and animals in better way.

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