
Ecocriticism in Vihang A. Naik's "The Banyan City": An Exploration of its Relevance for the Environmental Stability through the Reflection of the Concerns of Global Warming and Pollution

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Abstract:

Healthy earthly lives depend on the stability in the environment and this is the universal truth. The physical environment encompasses the natural landscape which includes mountains, grasslands, crop-fields, rivers, ponds, lakes, forests. The preservation of these natural objects is directly linked to the initiations and works which are eco-friendly to a great extent. Timely prevention of intrusion or encroachment in the jungles/forests as well as the mountainous regions will bring wholesome fruition, thus ensuring the balanced population of species and the healthy condition of plants, herbs, trees, etc. Trees ensure the smooth flow of cool air across the wild habitat as well as outside of wild ecology. Green crop- fields and grasslands through natural mode of farming provide unpolluted and healthy food to humans and fodder to cattle. The waste management doesn't reduce the sources of water to a barren/deplorable condition, instead it maintains the vitality in the aquatic ecology. The present paper is focused on Vihang A Naik's poem "The Banyan City" which explores the concerns of Global Warming and Pollution and decodes the remedies for averting this environmental chaos for a stable/balanced global environment.

Keywords:- Ecocriticism, Environment, Conservation, Landscape, Global Warming, Pollution, Stability, etc.

Introduction

The environment and ecology are correlated to each other, for they encompass all the natural happenings for a complete wisdom of flora, fauna, species, rivers, mountains, valleys, forests, lakes, ponds, etc. The repeated environmental disasters have compelled the humans to recheck their duties towards nature.

The present chapter is focused on Vihang A. Naik's eco-sensitive poem entitled "The Banyan City". It decodes the concerns of Global Warming and Pollution and eco-friendly diagnosis to counterbalance their painful consequences. As far as the fragrance of ecocriticism in Indian Writing in English is concerned, it has been remarkable or phenomenal with the literary voices drenched in the fragrance of eco-friendly visions and ideas. In other words, both old and new generation writers have been the motivators in terms of mass awakening with respect to the environmental responsibilities in different places of India. In addition to this, their literary outputs manifest the holistic approach to address the global environment. Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, Sarojini Naidu, Keki N. Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, Dilip Chitre, Mamang Dai, Vihang A. Naik, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, etc., have played pivotal role for the enrichment of ecocriticism as far as Indian Writing in English is concerned. Vihang A. Naik hails from Gujarat and he was born in Surat; he did spend his life both in Surat and Baroda. Shifting to these places naturally shaped and influenced his poetical works. That is why he had the firsthand experience of the environmental changes in these cities. Dr U. Sumathy has thrown light on shaping role of a writer's place in terms of the environmental condition: "Eco-critics study the environmental conditions of an author's life and the influence of place on the imagination, demonstrating that where an author grew up, travelled and wrote is pertinent to an understanding of his or her work". (P. 76)

The Poem "The Banyan City" is undoubtedly the notable contribution to the domain of Ecocriticism. The term "Ecocriticism" documents the environmental aspects in novels, poems, etc. Cheryll Glotfelty, a world-renowned Professor of environment and literature at the University of Nevada, Reno, in her jointly edited book entitled *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) successfully establishes an authentic definition of Ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment". Moreover, she opts for flexible words in terms of the deep understanding of this term in the following eco-sensitive sentences: "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, eco-critics take an earth centered approach to literary studies". (Glotfelty, P. xix.) The poet, Vihang A. Naik, from the very beginning of "The Banyan City" ensures the readers to ponder in their minds about the aftermath of the excessive exploitation of trees. Hence the Banyan Tree voices out the plight and harsh truth of the extinction of the other trees of different places of the world. The eco-sensitive words of 'chop' and 'hack' refer to the unsensible efforts to break or hamper the environmental peace and greenery. The Banyan tree symbolizes the firmness of determination to remain stable and rigid at its position for providing shadow to the passengers and to purify

the toxic air of the atmosphere. In other words, this tree stands for hope, possibility, charity, loving-kindness, goodness, etc. During extreme hot weather/ season, people, and cattle experience coolness in their bodies once they take shelter or break from their strenuous works or duties. The Banyan Tree of Baroda city acts like a living soul and Vihang Naik has clearly incorporated the humanitarian qualities or virtues in this eco-poetical composition.

“To unearth the roots of a banyan is never easy. chop or hack. The old banyan with the roots spread over a century”. (Web)

The following words of the second stanza of “The Banyan City” by Vihang Naik reflect his impatient heart in anticipation of the environmental hazards which would befall across the city as a consequence of the uncontrolled pollution. There was a time when living organisms and the landscape of the adjoining city were in harmony/tune with nature. The world famous, Lawrence Bull, has written and popularized the concept of “social ecocriticism” which showcases the aspects of the urban environment, and it is also as relevant as the “natural landscapes” in terms of understanding the condition of the environment. When one plunge deep into the poet’s eco-sensitive world, one will reach the state of honest and permanent realization that a single tree, as the banyan tree of the city, strongly voices out the plight or exploitation of all the plants and trees that are in danger. The plants can also be of vegetables but they, too, are the victims of exploitation due to the frequent usage of pesticides and fertilizers. Gary Snyder, a world recognized poet of Deep Ecology writes: “They buy vegetables from the supermarket but do not think about the soil these grow in” (P.3)

It is Vihang Naik’s utmost caliber as a writer/poet that he successfully establishes the banyan tree as the representative of even all the trees of the wild ecology. Now it is pertinent to decode the eco-friendly vibrations or fragrances across the old city during the days of the banyan tree. There was the complete picture of the greenery and purity of the surrounding. Moreover, the timely and full growth of this old tree symbolize the proper growth of all the nearby or distant plants and trees of the city.

“This aged city, facing the withered glory, now wrinkled, cracked, weather-beaten, with dim eyes”. (Web)

Diving deep into these poignant and eco-sensitive lines of this environmental poem, researcher/academician or reader attains the solid wisdom of the environmental conservation. In other words, the poet, Vihang Naik, points out the rising pollution being a catalyst to intensify the effect of Global Warming which is characterized and observed in the form of extreme hot climatic conditions, flood, drought, acid rainfall, etc.

“Has stood the time. the heavy breath”, (Web)

The Poet, Vihang Naik, had the first-hand experience of unhygienic condition

of the city which was also observed during the complete changing of the texture of a river. A river is a symbol of productivity as well as prosperity. It doesn't have any bias in terms of providing a healthy living place or shelter to aquatic plants and creatures. Hence 'gutter' refers to a dying place of darkness, hopelessness. It is only known to the world for pollution and nothing else. As far as Vihang Naik's potential as an eco-poet is concerned, the present poem entitled "The Banyan City" effectively exposes the factors behind any kind of pollution. In terms of the water pollution, the poet has tried his utmost to expose the horrific outcomes of the continuous negligence towards the precious resources of water. It is the natural tendency of any river to flow towards the suitable destination or direction and it has the universal purpose to make the land fertile and to ensure the cultivation of grasses and crops. It ensures the paucity of food grains for the survival of humans and cattle. The complete transformation of the river into a gutter unravels the poet's realistic realization of the pollution index of the place due to the scarcity of healthy plants and trees along with the excessive dumping of the waste materials, especially plastics across the lost river. According to National Geographic Society, "All living things-from one celled microbes to blue whales-depend on Earth's supply of air and water. When these resources are polluted, all forms of life are threatened. Pollution is a global problem". Vihang Naik has proved himself as an advocate of environmental peace and justice. He has emphatically and honestly exposed the destructive tendencies of pollution in this eco-poetry entitled "The Banyan City". He voices out the realistic plight of the city due to three types of pollution, namely water pollution, air pollution and noise pollution. 'The humming of vehicles' documents humans' fastidious way of spending humanly lives on the earth. It makes the people open their eyes and realize the highest index of noise pollution. Fitted to this context, it is quite essential to write about pollutants and pollution as observed by National Geographic Society:

"Many things that are useful to people produce pollution. Cars spew pollutants from their exhaust pipes. Burning coal to create electricity pollutes the air. Industries and homes generate garbage and sewage that can pollute the land and water. Pesticides-chemical poisons used to kill weeds and insects-seep into waterways and harm wildlife". Hence Humming of vehicles is highly symbolic as the poet, Vihang Naik, perceives them like that of bees who scream after the lost honey of the beehive. Hence the lost greenery of nature/natural environment and the disappearance of the beehive are synonymous to each other. As an eco-poet, Vihang A. Naik, has fabricated the words of "The Banyan City" with an everlasting eco-friendly vision to let the readers/reading public become convergent or familiar with all the characteristic features of pollution of the then time as well as the present time.

"Breathing. A river turns into a gutter. There is humming of vehicles. The city mumbles". (Web)

As far as noise pollution is concerned, its intensity is undoubtedly one of the

environmental concerns for all time. The more is the number of vehicles; the more is the unwholesome effect of noise pollution in the environment. At this point/context, it is quite essential to write regarding Vihang Naik's self-transformation from a poet into a teacher/ mentor and vice-versa. He adopts a holistic approach to uplift the understanding of the common masses or people towards the natural environment. The life must be in harmony and rhythm to enjoy a meaningful life. A meaningful life does not misguide any person and is subject to prosperity. The following lines of this eco-poem embody the poet's emphasis over social and ecological harmony/stability and these goals can be attained through self-refinement which instils in people's hearts with respect to the virtues of humanism which prepares a solid ground for loving kindness, reciprocation, mutual understanding, compassion, sympathy, etc., towards the objects of nature or natural environment. Wendell Berry highlights in his 'The Presence of Nature in the Natural World: A Long Conversation' with these words: "A human centered and even a self-centered point of view is inevitable- What other point of view can a human have? – but by imagination, sympathy, and charity only are we able to recognize the actuality and the necessity of other points of view". The following lines establish the poem as an eco-poem and Vihang Naik as an eco-poet:

"You grapple for meaning
in the traffic of noises.

.....
You can no longer click
that tree at the crossroad, combing
the National Highway number eight
when you enter Vadodara". (Web)

Vihang Naik has undoubtedly composed a poignant and eco-sensitive poem of the plight of the old banyan tree; he is a daring poet to tell the bitter truth of the exploitation of the environment. The above words of 'click' and 'combing' are eye-opener words that tell the eco-friendly story with respect to the strongness and eco-aesthetic appearance or beauty of the old Banyan tree of the city. The tree proved itself as the natural purifier of air and the atmosphere was smooth in terms of the less effect of the dust pollutants. "The Banyan City"/ conveys the poet's own documentation or observation of the realities of the city as far as global warming and pollution are concerned. Vihang Naik finds a strong paradox between the present and the past time. The natural 'Combing' of the highway creates the dustless transportation and an indication of the smooth governing of eco-systems. The above words of 'click' and 'combing' also prove the existence of eco-aestheticism and ecological balance of the then time wherein both the tourists and the residing/local people used to breathe in a dustless/harmless atmosphere. It is also

evident from this poem that Vihang Naik had the solid vision to have eco-friendly transformation of the city like that of ecotopia. Moreover, 'The Banyan City' holds the fragrance of holistic vision in terms of holistic education. In other words, it implies logical thinking which makes the readers/people ponder in their minds with respect to the required eco-friendly duties for the environmental conservation.

Conclusion:

'The Banyan City' is truly a research oriented environmental poem and in terms of ecological balance it acts as a bridge between human and non-human with respect to kinship, protection. Vihang S Naik is a practical poet that's why the whole poem unravels the realistic account of the aftermath of global warming and pollution. The accumulation of power and wealth for luxurious way of living at the cost of environmental decay is in no way constructive for the present generation and the posterity. Both global warming and pollution can be controlled through eco-friendly initiations/works such as plantation, waste management, conservation, afforestation, electric/chargeable vehicles, etc.

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