



CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE POEMS OF JAYANTA MAHAPATRA WITH REFERENCE TO THE ECO-CRITICAL PRAXIS: ECO-POETICS AND CULTURAL ECOLOGY.

English

Ranjit G*

Ph.D. Scholar, PG and Research Department of English, Sree Narayana Guru College of Arts and Science, KG Chavady, Coimbatore-641105. *Corresponding Author

Dr. Rajkumar K

Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of English, Nehru Arts and Science College (Autonomous), TM Palayam, Coimbatore-641105.

ABSTRACT

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the doyens of Indian English literature. Being an Indo- Anglican writer, he came to the literary arena in his later half of his life. He was then conferred with Sahitya Akademy award for his seminal work *Relationship* in 1981. This gave him the title of a modern Indian writer among the international literary circle. Most of his works are bound to the culture of Orissa and his works are rich in images picked from Bhubaneswar, Konarka, Puri and Chilka lake. He is a patron of Indian civilization and an ardent fighter against environmental concerns, social issues and political inequalities. Reading Mahapatra's poems under Ecocritical praxis is an interesting realm of inquest where he has penned his genuine concerns and cultural tracks through his poems. Eco-poetic aspects are abundant in his poems that Mahapatra reconnects the human activity with nature and also resist the current human intervention in this exploitive capitalistic world. Cultural ecology has a deep connection in his poems that his characters are the testimonies of the reconnection between man and nature. Irrespective of his age, he is still an ardent writer who has a vision for optimistic posterity.

KEYWORDS

Eco Criticism, Eco-poetics, Cultural Ecology, Ecology, Nativity, Sustainable resources, Tradition and Suffering, Reconnection, Resistance.

INTRODUCTION

The interconnectedness of human activities and nature has been a deciding movement in the twentieth century. Eco-poetics is one such movement which started in the late twentieth century stresses on the necessity of an ecological awareness in the environment where it addresses many issues regarding degradation of nature, environmental justice and deep ecological concerns. It is an interdisciplinary branch which encompasses poetry, science and other contemporary theories. It also has a parallel ideology with the ethno-poetics where it stresses on the connectivity of human activities with that of the environment. But it doesn't have a connection with nature poetry and the proponent of Eco-poetics was Jonathan Skinner, who started a journal named *Eco-Poetics*, edited the featured works of writers like Forest Gander, Juliana Spahr and Jack Collom. Later, it was further developed by Angela Hume and Gilian Osborne as an interdisciplinary branch of environmental studies.

History and Features of Eco-Poetry

Eco-poetics raises relevant questions regarding ethical issues which include both spiritual and political concerns. With regard, Skinner opens up with four major themes of eco-poetics which acts as a window through which these can be practiced and implemented. They are: Resistance, Witnessing, Reconnection and Visioning. Consideration of the natural world is not a new way to see the natural world. It has its implication back from the romantic period and later evolved in the twentieth century. It has its influence in the US mainly because of the then popular movement called Beat Movement. It has widely influenced the American public and their culture. But it was very slow in the UK as they had largely been exposed to the religious and political causes which stood as a barrier to accept this newly emerging through awareness. But in the modern day, many efforts have been escalated to expedite the ecological sense and has been recognized as a great movement in the late twentieth century. It has its implications in the Green movement and in the wider literary circles.

Skinner's first theme of Reconnection extended the idea of encompassing the whole community as one entity including the earth and the whole universe. Thus a holistic idea of oneness is imposed onto the self which has led to the awareness of community sharing. Thus eco-poetics is an understanding of the self beyond the linguistic barriers or boundaries. The interconnectedness of human and the natural world had been forgotten till the late twentieth century and lacked interdependence. In the modern world, the ideas were polished through secular and materialistic culture which has exploited the earth and considered it as inanimate. With this reductionism, the natural world has become an aspect of decoration that satisfies all the needs of human sustenance. People in the society are raised as beings of interconnectedness but also with the realization of the pain inflicted upon the ecosystem. But in the major case, the society doesn't bother that the earth is bleeding.

Eco-poets are bound to work for the whole life experiences in the ecosystem. Overwhelming deterioration is experienced when the self is separated from the consideration of earth being an inanimate entity. The humans thus feel helplessness and incapable to respond to the atrocities that have been inflicted upon the environment. Early writers like William Blake had celebrated the natural world in his works. The writers like Gary Snider, an American contemporary writer, feels that humans are indebted to the ancient roots of human existence as the shaping factor for the current upbringing. He considers it as a combined effort of experience and doesn't want to separate earth from human beings. He states that, if there is any separation between human beings and earth, then that is because of absence of love. It cannot be the same humanistic love that the western world propagates. Without the combined effort, survival and sustenance becomes hard on this earth.

Eco-poetry as a spiritual movement emerges as a result of the experiences gathered from the natural world. Poets like Alice Oswald give ecopoetry a religious overtone. And the concept of nature is not always associated with wilderness and entitled to solitary reading, but it has also different settings possible when a reader reads William Heyen's work *Fast Food*. In a theoretical perspective, it is evident that Gary Snider may not consider an animal if it is not observable or else it should come to the unconscious mind. Here the unconscious mind plays a pivotal role in shaping human considerations. It is thus clear that the unconscious mind can be a deciding factor for the progress of cultural transactions and the reconnection between ecology and animals. Eco-poets also have an opportunity to become the voices of the earth and other living beings. This allows the eco-poets to feel not separated from the other species of the ecology which is highlighted in Less Murray's *Translations from the Natural World*. This shows the imaginative faculty of the poets of the previous ages in all the cultures.

Eco-poetry is highly appreciated when it travels the realms of imaginative places where human experiences couldn't reach and explore. This futuristic imagination leads to a glimpse on the devastating probability of ecology and individuals. The prospective damage that can cause human devastation is being imagined and a reconnection is recommended at this juncture. This foreseeing imagination leads to another aspect of witnessing in eco-poetry. It highlights the probable mass extinction of the human race. It has been noted that human intervention in nature is already a suicidal engagement which can eradicate the human race completely. Eco-poets have been highly vocal against the exploitation and urges to slow down the activities that erases even the tribal life on the earth. It is evident that the Eco-poets advocate and become a testimony to draw issues and concerns strongly as a part of the witnessing community. The duty of the Eco-poets is to preserve the posterity that at least one individual is ignited. It then opens up a sense of responsibility and also resistance.

As a result of industrial growth, humans colonized different aspects of our lives. It includes the social, spiritual and intellectual realms. The horror of capitalism engulfed the world where there was no sound for the communities who were witnessing the danger of encroachment. In a world where people started living like oppressed people, it is difficult to express their own abilities and opportunities for the enhancement of their well being. The immense silencing of this phenomena is engulfed with fears and people with a lot of limitations. It has started to result in the breakdown of the relationship in the communities to express the desires and feelings of Loneliness among themselves. Thereafter people started to think about breaking down the shackles of this capitalistic operation by raising their voice through various means of writing. Eco-poetry Started to address these fragmented entities and expressions through the observations of the current patterns of the climate and the phenomena that governs the present times. It had thus become a radical development as a response to this situation that it never was introduced in any educational system till Allen Ginsberg. He advocated for the protection of humanity from war as he had participated in the rally of anti-Vietnam War in 1966. He was disappointed by the then corporate media which never reported the calamities that cost due to war. He took time to report all the sufferings of the people which were unreported and were ignored and writing off them made him write about them. It has thus become the form of resistance and witnessing which has been ignored for a long time. Poets like Anne Waldman used poetry as a means of resistance which later busted many news stories in the media. In one office pan flat Gary Snyder states that human beings are like the antigens which destroy the human race but the other sector of human beings takes the responsibility of humanity and acts like antibodies.

Gary Snyder is considered as the voice of nature beyond his political positions. He promotes the reading of poetry and a sense of responsibility through which the community is developed to a more sensible and eco-friendly part of the community. He also reminds that the point is work is not limited to the activities related to culture but also it has a practical application in protecting the land and needs of the people. He endows all the creative writers as a responsible individual in shaping the society to become a sustainable environment with less carbon consumption.

Cultural Ecology and its features

Environmental studies pave the way for different studies related to conservation and sustainable ecology. Cultural Ecology is one such study that relates to the study of human adaptations Which is related to physical and social environments. It emphasises the ability of the human being to survive in a society through biological and cultural processes. This can be taken in two ways. one is diachronic- studying the entities that happened in the past, second is synchronic- Studying the current entities and its variances. The main idea of cultural ecology is that the natural environment contributes a major share in the cultural and social transformation of human beings. Especially, in the distribution of power and wealth and also the effect of the behavior in the society.

Julian Steward – proponent of the term 'Cultural Ecology' proposes a methodology to comprehend the human engagements with nature which in turn shape the culture and society. In this, the cultural change is viewed as the ability of men to adapt to the circumstances. It can be either technologies, knowledge acquired, or practices. Social ecology also views that the geography of a place plays a vital role in defining the culture of that region. It works on documenting the methods in which the technologies are used to understand the environment and the ways to live with it. It has also studied the human culture and behavioral patterns that are associated when using the environment for a living. These patterns are recorded to analyze the influence of the environment on various aspects of culture which is central to the day to day life of human beings and the development of various systems of living through which the humans have been engaged.

Development of Cultural Ecology

The evolution of cultural ecology as a transdisciplinary theory is regarded as a paradigm of cultural studies rather than natural and human sciences. It is interdependent with human culture and the ecological processes Which cannot be separated from the cultural entities which are self reflective and relatively independent. In literary studies, It has spread its ideas through fairy tales, pastoral poetry and environmental writings. The interaction between culture and nature is the highlighting area in social ecology which is preceded by romanticism and it continues its effect till the present human experience. German eco-critic Hubert Zapf views that Literature is the mutual connection between nature and culture Which is a symbolic

representation of the powerful form of social ecology. Literature has highlighted varied relationship scenarios through the cultural backgrounds according to the living and nonliving perspectives. It is thus derived that literature can revive the power of novelty and cultural anticipation through social ecology.

Jayanta Mahapatra as a doyen in the Indian English Poetry

Jayanta Mahapatra is one of the most acknowledged modern writers among English poets. A sensitive poet with a wide variety of aspects like pain, suffering, faith and so on. Almost all his poems are centered in and around Orissa and also the relationship between a man and a woman. He was the first among the doyens of Indian poets to receive the Sahitya Akademy Award in 1981 for his seminal work *Relationship*. He was born to Mr. Lamuel Mahapatra and Sudhansa Mahapatra on 22nd October in the year 1928, in a middle class family. He had his schooling in Cuttack's Steward School. Later he had his masters in Physics and started his career as a professor of Physics in various Government colleges. He came to the literary scene very late that he began his writing at the age of thirty eight. Thereafter, he had his famous works which marked his name among the greatest writers like A K Ramanujam, Ezekiel and so on.

As a poet, his themes are vivid which focuses around emotions like pain, suffering, love, faith and so on. He has used poetry as a means to express his own emotions and concerns. He always has the innate thought of having a better society that he hoped for the quick reformation of it. He lashed out his concern about poverty and patriarchal domination through his poem *Hunger*. He was also critical about the religious hypocrisy of the people which can be found in his *Dawn at Puri*. He has a very complex way of writing which normal readers find it difficult to comprehend. He leaves unclear ideas and assumptions to reader's comprehension and are expected to interpret in their own ways. He is also considered as an indigenious poet of raw village fervor that his backgrounds for his poems are mostly Chilka lake, Bhubaneswar, Konark Temple and the premises in Orissa. Moreover, he had a collection of eighteen books in his name so far. A few among them are *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*, *Svayamvara and other Poems*, *A Father's Hours*, *A Rain of Rites*. He has written only a single short story *The Green Gardener* in his literary career. He also is the editor of a prestigious literary magazine *Chandrabhaga*. He also translated many works from Oriya to English.

Mahapatra's works are highly sensitive and complex in understanding but when he dealt with the sufferings and the regional effervescence, it has a different fervor. Even though his consciousness is highly prone to the native fervor, it parallels the environmental concerns too. Traditional glory is highly appreciated in his works. He is deeply disturbed by the interference of the human occupation and its impact on the earth. His poem *Vulnerable* quotes that man has disrobed the ecological balance that they are devoid of rain. The situation has inflicted the mankind a sense of pain in his own wrong doings and he reminds that even the other living creatures are also affected by the despair.

"We disrobed the earth
under everyone's eyes,
every afternoon now
pain peers from its pores
folded in
little weeds." (Mahapatra 54)

Man has inflicted this state when ecology is getting delineated and is disappearing from everyone's eyes day by day. The poet here is deeply disappointed that even the animals and plants become the victims of this situation. Mahapatra leaves a link to have a proper connectivity between human and ecology to have a sustainable environment. His ecopoetic vision alarms the reader to become a part of change in cultivating ecoconsciousness so as to preserve the equilibrium. In his poem *Earth*, Mahapatra highlights the relationship to be maintained with the earth. Human intervention has dismantled the whole balance of the ecosystem that they dig out all the minerals for their selfish motives. He likes to warn that this earth is feeding humanity and he feels so protective towards the earth. He lashes out at the politicians who support this looting of the ecological treasures which is very essential for all the living creatures' sustenance in the world.

"Do not take away
anything from this earth,
Water of richness
Or lightness of the heart.
And the country's leaders:
Dig out the iron ore,

The manganese and bauxite,
From the warm depths of its tears
Its ancient god." (Mahapatra 72)

The realm of eco-poetics has clearly stated in Mahapatra's works which reverberates the need of reconnecting with nature by resisting the act that harms the ecology. Mahapatra further enlightens the reader by quoting that nature provides surplus resources for survival and it will accept human activity and return it equally. Here Mahapatra raises his protest against the corrupt politicians who hardly have any consciousness regarding nature and its protection. It is thus alarming to realize that the near future may also suffer the aftermath of the ecological degradation.

"This earth
Which consumes us as we feed it,
Claiming the last remnant
Of the minister's conscience,
And where
Never ends tomorrow's hunger". (Mahapatra 72)

Human intervention in this world has a cultural background which enables them to explore and flourish their capabilities. As the cultural ecologists states that demographic differences hone human culture, Mahapatra's *The Shore* highlights the formation of a thought process of the people on the seashore. It is because of the vastness of the ocean, man begins to think about his importance and the reason behind his existence. Here the poet presents the character as an ignorant person like a child, confused and amazed to know about his existence. A sense of fright arises in his mind that he believes there is a much more unknown fact that pervades his intellect than he thought about.

"The shore keeps me thinking
why I have come into the world
One night I stood there as a child
terrified by the almost inaudible bear
of the lonely boat tied to the shore;
the truth was more than I could bear". (Mahapatra 156)

CONCLUSION

Being a true regional poet, Mahapatra always has his affinity towards nature and he is much more concerned about the fact that this world is irresponsible to handle the ecological balance. Industrial development and other modern discourses are acceptable but the poet finds a lack of ecoconsciousness in the current world. He always warns the posterity of the possible danger yet to come if the same attitude continues. He has been a part of various movements to protect the socio-cultural milieu of Orissa that he lashes out an emergency call to the whole of humanity to have an ecological awareness that can only keep them safe in a sustainable environment.

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