

“ECO-CRITICISM: A STUDY OF THE NOVEL MAYABRITTA”

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Abstract

Eco-criticism can be defined as the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment. The paper attempts to analyse the novel Mayabritta by Rita Choudhary from the perspective of Eco-criticism. While analysing from this context the focus will be given on some characters that will help to study the novel. The novelist is trying to focus on how we need to preserve nature as without nature human cannot survive in this world. All throughout the novel, Dr. Choudhary is trying to reflect that we need not take anyone's permission to work for nature. She says that there are a lot to do for the shake of nature as well as mankind and we need to make people aware of it.

Keywords: *Eco-criticism, Literature, Environment, Nature, Romanticism*

Introduction

Eco-Criticism runs a whole gamut of definition of which the most well known is by Cheryll Glotfelty's as "the study of relation between literature and the physical environment" proposed in *The Eco-Criticism Reader*. According to Richard Kerridge, the ecocritic should track environmental ideas and address debates wherever they appear in the partially concealed cultural spaces and 'evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to the environmental crisis'. Michael P. Branch refers to Eco-Criticism as a 'Call for Cultural' change which is not merely an exercise in analysing nature in literature but a "Move towards a more bio centric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of human's conception of global community to include nonhuman life forms and the physical environment. In his seminal work, *The Comedy of Survival :Studies in Literary Ecology*, Joseph Meeker affirms that as the world's only literary creature, human beings have the responsibility to discover the role of literature in the welfare and survival of humanity and the natural environment as well as to examine the 'insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us'

When we discuss the concept of Eco-Criticism, romanticism also comes into the context. Romanticism's idea of 'Return to Nature' was an influence that inspired ecocritics to study the connection between Romanticism and ecology. Many concepts of contemporary environmental thinking can also be traced to key texts belonging to the Romantic period. Axel Goodbody states that "Mother Nature" was a poetic product of the age of the steam engine. Romantic writers conceptualised environmental pollution as both an external phenomenon resulting from industrialisation and an inner state resulting from the fragmentation and alienation of human personality. Some ecocritics have also opposed the simplistic application of Romantic concept such as unity of mind and nature, intuition and concept of intrinsic value to the environmental problems that we face today. However, Romantic literature speaks to our trouble environmental times because its central theme is humanity's alienation from nature and the concomitant "Search for holistic or integrated perception an emphasis on interdependence and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth".

The term Eco-criticism is a much debated one in the present time. The term coined by Cheryl Glotfelty has gained popularity especially in English literature towards the end of 1990. It could not attain popularity in Assamese literature like that of English which becomes the basic reason for the absence of proper Assamese word for the term Eco-criticism. The Dictionary meaning of the term 'Criticism' is to give comment. In a nutshell, eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. It implies that Eco-Criticism Studies the environment from its theoretical perspective. This research article attempts a critical study of the novel *Mayabritta* by the eminent novelist Dr. Rita Choudhury.

The social responsibility of literature in the context of the ever-changing socio-economic scenario has been covered by the area of Eco-criticism. The creative literature has provided newer and newer reading experiences in connection with the diversified subject matter; in the same way the world of criticism also has experienced the influence of the different issues in the prospective of social, political and cultural changes. Environmental theories and environmental preservation criticism has turned out to be the most debated aspects in the recent days. *Mayabritta* will be discussed within the specific scope of the study of this research article. Nature and the elements of nature are discussed from a romantic standpoint in the popular literary criticism. The natural elements like trees, rivers, hills and mountains, flora and fauna turns out to be the foundation study to all such criticism. When towards the end of 19th century the natural imbalances and its effects have created threats, then such literature came up with a mission to preserve nature as a whole making the readers responsible towards the great cause of humanity. It also paves the way in the field of literary criticism in the name of Eco-criticism. The predominating areas covered by Eco-criticism are manmade natural disaster, the scope of men's right to nature, social responsibility of literature, literary presentation of the awareness towards environment preservation etc. The importance of Eco-criticism gains importance in the present context.

The relationship of men and animals with the environment has been continuing from time immemorial. The earliest texts like Vedas and Upanishads too are evidences of the inclusion of the relationship of environmental aspect of the universe. The natural environment plays an important role in the physical, spiritual and psychological good health of people whereas the global warming has carried negative aspects to the world. Assamese literature has witnessed the awareness towards environmental issues since 19th century. Especially Assamese novels has developed newer vistas introducing ever new thoughts and has created changing circumstances. Assamese fiction is abound with the description of nature along with the changes of time that nature has provided ever-changing aspects to Assamese fictions. The new trend raises awareness towards emotional responsibility for the Universe. A good many Assamese fiction have taken up Eco-criticism as their central theme. *Mereng* by Anuradha Sarmah Pujari, *Mayabritta* by Rita Choudhury, *Felani* by Arupa Patangia Kalita, *Jerew Hagramai Gabo (Jetia Aranyoi Kande)* by Ratna Bharali Ozah, *Sukula Hatir Khuj* by Prabhat Goswami, *Sorai Suburi* by Pankaj Gobind Medhi are worth mentioning.

Mayabritta by Rita Choudhury is one of the seminal fictions of the contemporary times. There are a lot of sub-plot in the novel and every page remind the readers about the environmental awareness through the characters of Nira, Sanjoy, and Subarna. This is reflected through their conversation where the author writes:

“The rivers have their own lives, sensitivity is found in trees, creepers and birds. The rivers to suffer as human beings. The case is same with birds and animals. The world /earth does not belong to man only. The earth belongs to nature. We are only a part of the whole body. Should we kill our mother? Is it? (*Mayabritta*)

Presenting the relationship between literature and environment, the readers are made aware about environmental concerns in the novel through the character of Reni. Dr.Choudhary writes:

“How did she tried to save the trees by hugging them from the orders of the wood merchants, road engineers and the planners?” (*Mayabritta*)

The nature lovers must try to save nature. As we depend upon nature, we learn to depend on nature. Reni’s character is one of the best example in this connection which is clearly evident in the novel. Reni says:

“We are in favour of forest. In favour of nature. We are in favour of the flora and fauna of nature and for the ones who take resort to the forest for all types of support. One particular person has himself raised a forest at a time when man becomes a threat to environment”. (*Mayabritta*)

The nature and the earth is alienated in the hands of heartless people just as infants are uninhabited in the hands of inhuman mothers. Selfish people have destroyed forest and polluted the rivers, the soil, the sky and the wind. As a result the peace and clarity of nature have been decayed and destroyed. The balance of the earth is lost. The novelist has depicted:

“Who would save the destination of nature if not we? Who would save nature if not we? Who would save the technique of intellectuals and insecured living world due to the brutal mentality of people? We will have to do it. We can at least plant a tree in front of our house. We can save a pair of birds that have their nest on that tree. And we can also help in making our children realise, our neighbours and our friends, why should we love nature, why should we save nature, and if nature is destroyed can we survive? There will be a day when we will struggle for oxygen, the soil from the naked forest will cover up the bed river, land will become desert, the ocean will be poisoned. The fishes will dry up. The birds will dry up. How can we live alone in a poisoned world without oxygen, without forest, without wild animals? And if we want then also can we live? (*Mayabritta*).

Conclusion

According to the theory of Eco-criticism it is our duty to preserve environment. The human civilisation has been pushed into crucial bloody future through selfishness and self centeredness that is the prayer of mercilessness. This theory is given importance in order to make a link between environment and literature. In fact the forest has fed us to live, it gives us food and medicine. The forest is given back dead trees. The forest gives us more then we give it back and still we destroy forest. Nature is our wealth and we should not destroy Nature. The easiest way to understand this trend in literary theories would be to learn what these people do. Many novelists in the contemporary time are focusing on the concept of eco-criticism through their literary texts. These writers are very much conscious about the environmental issues and they are trying to make the readers aware through their writings. In the novel *Mayabritta*, Rita Choudhary through her pages with the help of the plot is trying to focus on the environmental issues which in a way will make the readers aware of these concerns.

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