

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES TODAY:

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



V.D. SATPUTE, M.B. PATIL, S.A. TENGSE

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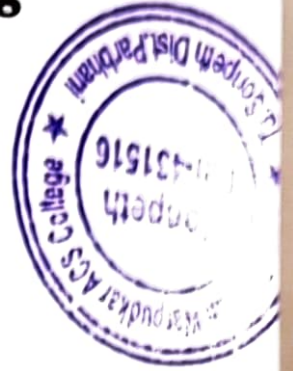
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Reflection of Environmental Concerns in Indian Writing in English

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Today the word 'environment' is being discussed at top priority not only at national level but also at international. The issue of environment today transcends the boundaries of nations and hence it is a global issue today that needs to be addressed at global level. Environment refers to everything remaining around human beings. Environment protection act 1986, defines it as, "The study of basic components of our surrounding and their interactions is called the environmental science. Educating people on environment and its problems is called the environmental education. Every man is being surrounded by air, water, soil, stones, animals and other human beings." (Arumugan and Kumaran, 2013). Environment plays a vital role in the development of human beings. Healthy environment is must for the peaceful living of human beings. Since last two centuries, humans have been excessively robbing the natural resources and creating the things for themselves. This excessive and reckless use of the natural resources resulted in having the pollution and the advent of most of the natural hazards. Our ancestors lived on the earth and left the earth by leaving the safe earth for us to live. Now it is our duty to the society, nation to handover the earth safely to the next generation. Today's plight shows that mother earth is in dire and it is being surrounded by the man made calamities. The problems like global warming, green house effect, acid rain, water pollution, marine oil

pollution, noise pollution etc are dragging the human beings at the threshold of death. Since this has been the global issue today, national and international agencies are working in the direction of the conservation of environment. The first such attempt was made at Rio De Janerio in 1992 during the United Nations conference on 'Environment and Development.' The world is witnessing the growth in the natural and manmade calamities. In such a scenario it is the need of the hour that every individual must be conscious about environment because this problem cannot be overcome by single nation or state or law etc.

Literature is a mirror of society and the literary writers are the describers of the society. They attempt to depict the society in various shades. The present research paper is a synoptic survey of some major Indian writers writing in English on the environmental concerns, its protection, sustenance and degradation. An attempt is made as to how the following prominent writers have contributed in awaking the sensibilities of people regarding the issue of environment. Addressing the environmental concerns has been the top priority of most of the disciplines of study. Ancient emperors' policies and saint literature is full with such references where the attempts have been made to protect or conserve nature and environment. English literature is not an exception to such attempts and we find numerous authors writing about the conservation of environment. Since literature is mirror to society, it always reflects the contemporary society. In fact good literature always stands for the test of time. Authors not only represent the age in which he or she lives but predict the probable danger to be confronted by the humanity in near future. Environmental degradation has been the major issue since last some of the decades. It came in literature mainly after the industrial revolution. Charles Dickens is probably the first author to voice against the disastrous effects of industry emissions on child workers. Indian writers are no

exception to this and we have numerous writers having deep respect to nature. The following prominent writers have devoted their writings on the issue of environment.

Rabindranath Tagore preached the world as to how to respect the nature and protect it. Tagore first became concerned about mans impact on the environment after seeing an oil spill at sea on his way to Japan in 1916. Even today the marine oil pollution is a matter of grave concern for environmentalists. Tagore can be considered as one of the pioneers of the eco critical movement which emerged in late 1990s. A century before, Tagore commented on the issues of exploitation of environment. He has appealed to protect nature through his poems, plays and short stories. Subhash Dutt has rightly said, "The literary works of Tagore can be used for raising awareness about environment" (Bhattacharjee, 2013). For example in his play *Muktadhara*, Tagore stresses the importance of water for sustaining the life of all living beings on this planet. In Indian scriptures, rivers are being offered the status of mother- one who gives life. Today the world is having many disputes regarding the sharing of water of the river. Tagore comments on the human pride, greed and power which causes mans separateness from the harmony of nature. There are number of books in the history of Indian English literature which can be read in the light of eco-critical perspective.

Mahatma Gandhi was a true crusader against the environmental degradation and warned the people about the depletion of natural resources. Gandhi presents views for sustainable use of resources and minimal damage to the environment. He writes, "The earth, the air, the land and the water were not an inheritance from our forefathers but a loan from our children. So we have to handover to the next generation at least as it was handed over to us." In his book *Hind Swaraj*, he warned humanity, "Earth provides the whole world and its society is working in complete harmony with

nature – this balance is a creative force enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

Raja Rao truly depicts the south Indian culture in his *Kanthapura* where rivers and mountains play an important role in people's lives. Raja Rao stresses that the Indian tradition sees the existence of God in the form of nature. The mountain is being named after the Goddess Kenchamma. It is considered to be the soul responsible for the prosperity and adversity of people. Raja Rao writes about mountain Kenchamma: "Kenchamma is our Goddess. Great and bounteous is she.....never has she failed us in grief. If rains come not, you fall at her feet and say, 'Kenchamma you are not kind to us. Our field is full of younglings.'" It reminds us the age old practice of our ancestors when nature was revered in the true sense. R.K. Narayans novel *The Man Eater of Malgudi* can be read from eco-critical perspective. The novel is about the massive killing of animals and the ruthless process of stuffing. The character named Ramaswami, A forest officer, kills 18 elephants and 60 tigers in his life and the reason is to save the human life. Actually we humans have made intrusion in the abode of animals which made them unrest and consequently they are forced to attack human habitation. The novel ends with the message to human beings that nature retaliates against the forces who abuse nature. This retaliation can be in the form of natural disasters.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is a Booker winning work that highly contains the environmental concerns in the contemporary India. Her social concern for protecting the natural resources like water is revealed when she narrates the return of Rahel to Ayemenem. The protection of water has been the concern of this work. Menanchal River demonstrates as to how rivers are polluted: "Greeted her with a ghastly skulls smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed." She also highlights the encroachment in the form of the rice cultivation at the

banks of the river which results in narrowing its width. Roy also attacks ill effects of the import of pesticides in the name of the green revolution during the 1970s. Excessive use of the pesticides polluted the water in Meenanchal River and became dangerous for aquatic creatures.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* closely associates with the protection of river called Teesta at Kalimpong. She is much concerned about the stones in the river that are being carried from the river for construction purpose at great extent. The excerpt from the text is very much evidence of it: "Everyday pour stones are carried from the river bed of the Teesta to build their houses and cities. We are labourers, working barefoot in all weather, as they (Rich People) sit fat in managers' houses with their fat wives, with their fat bank accounts and their fat children going abroad." Kiran Desai stresses the need of the mass awareness about the environmental issues. She comments on the bad habits of Indian people to defecate on the open ground. She writes: "When Sai, one of the characters, return from the Dehradun convent to Kalimpong, she noticed the railway lines in the early morning that the tracks were lined with 'rows of bare bottoms.' Close up, they could see dozens of people defecating on to the tracks, rinsing their bottoms with water from can."

Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* also deals with the issue of environmental degradation in the present day India, particularly the pollution in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bangalore. The novel deals with the degradation of land, population growth, water pollution, increasing air pollution, depletion of water resources and the background of overwhelming poverty. The dangerous emissions from the industry have curtailed the life of the people of Delhi. He says, "There was a good reason for the face masks; they say the air is so bad in Delhi that it takes ten years off a man's life." Further he describes the city of Bangalore: "The entire city is masked in smoke, smog, powder, cement, dust. It is under a

nature – this balance is a creative force enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed."

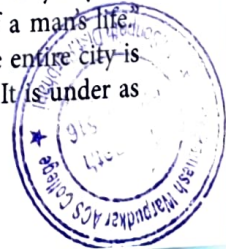
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veil. When the veil is lifted, what will Bangalore be like." He talks about the present plight of the most sacred river 'Ganga' the world. Today Ganga has become one of the most polluted rivers in the world.

To conclude, nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of saints, poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. Today the intimate relationship between the natural and social world is being analyzed and emphasized in all departments of knowledge and development and literature is also not exception to it. It might not be wrong to say that the writing is not just to please or entertain the readers. The novelists' social concern for ecology, the ill effects of pollution, and their intention to make the readers to be aware of protecting the natural resources is revealed in their writings. Recently a special ministry is set up for Ganga Cleaning and Water Resource which leaves a ray of hope in the minds of the readers who read these works. The attempts on the part of the various authors to preserve the environment may not be adequate but certainly it will ignite the young minds to work in the direction of preserving the nature.

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