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**Reconstructing the World through Ecocriticism: An Overview of Ecocritical Slants in E. M. Forster's A Passage to India**

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**Abstract:** Ecocriticism in the modern era comes out as a major emerging theory as the nature is continuously contaminated by the anthropogenic activities of man. The nexus between the mother Nature and mankind becomes gradually wider. Man in pursuit of money and other material aspects is incessantly committing ecocide. To save nature from the greedy clutches of modern civilization ecocriticism comes into being. E. M. Forster’s polemical novel *A Passage to India* celebrates the triumph of this theory because the horrid aspect of the Marabar Caves baffles the comprehension of both the natives and foreigners. Rains come for the sake of the weary and distracted souls to attain sublimity and ultimate unification with God. Not only this but also other features of Indian landscape and religion interact with diverse spheres of human life.

**Key words**: Ecocriticism, Nature, Ecocritical Slants,Culture, Marabar Caves.

In the twenty first century phenomena environment is on the verge of deterioration as it is gradually going to lose its beauty, entity, greenness and freshness by the unscientific activity of human beings and industrial waste materials. Off late, human beings of both First world and Third world countries are ceaselessly committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for any kind of life. At this critical juncture, the conscious and rational people take an effort to make other concerned about the boon of benevolent nature. As a result of this consciousness ecocriticism emerges as a prime literary theory making an attempt to make a greener, cleaner, pollution-free nature through the sustainable development by disclosing the close nexus between human world and environment through literature.

Ecocriticism as a literary theory gains its momentum during the late 1960s and early 1970s. U.S critic William Rueckert first used the term ‘ecocriticism’ in the essay “*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”* in 1978. In Britain ecocriticism is known as ‘Green Study’ and its infrastructure is less developed there than in USA. To define it may be described as a literary and cultural criticism from an environmentalist viewpoint. Glotfelty in the ‘Introduction’ to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996)defines ecocriticism as “the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective... ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty xix). Lawrence Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* terms it as “a study of relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment of environmentalist praxis” (Buell 7-8). Richard Kerridge in “Environmentalism and Ecocriticism” introduces the concept of nature and its connection to the culture:

Ecocritics analyze the history of concepts such as ‘nature’, in an attempt to understand the cultural developments that has led to the present global crisis. Direct representations of environmental damage or political struggle are of obvious interest to ecocritics, but so is the whole array of cultural and daily life, for what it revels about implicit attitudes that have environmental consequences. (Kerridge 532)

Dana Phillips argues in the essay “Ecocriticism, Literary Theory and Truth of Ecology*”* in favour of the professors of the Department of English about the necessity of reading ecocriticism in literature emphasizing the catena between nature and culture: “Nature is thoroughly implicated in culture and culture is thoroughly implicated in nature” (Phillips 578).

To sum up, it can be asserted that ecocritics bring the questions of class, race, colonialism and gender while they assess a text from ecocritical viewpoint. Following Glotfelty, Greg Garrard stresses upon the co-relation of nature and culture and asserts “...ecocriticism is closely related to environmentally oriented developments in philosophy and political theory. Developing the insights of earlier critical movements, ecofeminists, social ecologists and environmental justice advocates seek a synthesis of environmental and social concerns” (Garrard 3).

E. M Forster's epoch- making novel *A Passage to India* (1924) is crammed with ecological elements firmly establishing that the present novel can be read in terms of eco-critical reading. The novel's triadic structure (Mosque- Caves and Temple) manifests co- mingling of the natural, cultural and religious aspects of India. The ‘Mosque’ section deals with the possibilities of personal relationship, Islamic brotherhood and oneness of God; the ‘Caves’ section exhibits the primitive universe of evil, chaos and annihilation; the ‘Temple’ section comes as a restorative of harmony and happiness to the exhausted souls in the novel. Critic like Benita Parry assimilates triadic structure of the novel with three different seasonal cycles like cold weather, hot weather and monsoon. Forster’s intention of writing the novel is to examine the close relationship between man and India, essentially as a geographical aspect transforming into a philosophic one:

His intention seems to have been to examine man's place ‘among the incompatible multitudes of mankind’... India, perceived as shapeless arbitrary and discordant, suited the purpose admirably, fitting neatly as a microcosm of ‘the echoing contradictory world’ which opens out to reveal an intrinsic unity. (as quoted in Kundu 52)

At the very outset of *A Passage to India* the description of Chandrapore city and river Ganges reflect nature- culture dualism. The city Chandrapore, situated on the bank of Ganges and bedecked with the trees, is divided by the railway track into Indian locality with hospital and European locality with a civil station. Chandrapore, a city of garden, is just like a forest sparsely scattered with huts and glitters with the holy river Ganges on the bank of which “ toddy palms and neem trees and mangoes...rise from the gardens where ancient tanks nourish them....Seeking light and air, and endowed with more strength than man or his work, they soar above the lower deposit to greet one another with branches and beckoning leaves, and to build a city for birds”(Forster 9-10).The holy river Ganges has become polluted in Chandrapore as the effect of anthropocentricism; the river continues to put up with the rubbish of the city and washes away the dead bodies from Banaras. The sky plays a pivotal role in Chandrapore city because here “the sky settles everything... not only climates and seasons but when the earth shall be beautiful. By herself she can do little--- only feeble outburst of flowers. But when the sky chooses, glory can rain into the Chandrapore bazaars or a benediction pass from horizon of horizon” (Forster 10). This natural phenomenon reveals the intricate relationship between sky and Chandrapore, conflict between the colonizers and colonized as well as the potential unity of man and the redemption of mankind through the breaking out of social institutes and classifications that segregate them into their closed groupings. Malcolm Bradbury speaks for the ambiguous quality of the sky: “...the sky itself is an infinitive mystery, and reaching away into its ‘farther distance... beyond colour, lost freed itself from blue’ (p. 11). Certainly, beyond the world of social organization is the world of the “secret understanding of the heart’’ (p.22) to which Aziz appeals...” (Bradbury 39).

In *A Passage to India* colonialism undermines anthropocentricism; the colonizers exploit indigenous people, a part and parcel of nature. Mrs. Callendar's scornful remark about the treatment of native patients in the hospital elucidates the attitude of the colonizer to the natives as “... the kindest thing one can do to a native is to let him die” (Forster 28). It exposes the arrogant, insensitive attitude towards the Indians; even “the intelligent natives estimate that a year in India makes the pleasantest Englishman rude” (Trilling 19). Chandrapore club where Indians are not permitted to enter is reverberated with the sound of National Anthem reminding every member of their British national identity especially the ideology that they are in exile. Ronny, the city magistrate of Chandrapore, holds a callous posture to the Indians because “the educated Indians will be no good to us if there's a bow , it is simply not worth while conciliating them , that's why they don't matter’’ (Forster 39). Geographical distance has made two races apart; the club mentality testifies Boehmer's observation: “Perhaps the most binding imperative of colonial life was to stick to one's own” (Boehmer 67). None but Mrs. Moore makes herself isolated from other club members whose biased conduct and racial hatred towards the Indians baffle her conviction about India which epitomizes the existence of omnipresent God to her. Her strong conviction is: “...India is part of the earth. And God has put us on the earth in order to be pleasant to each other...He is omnipresent, even in India, to see how we are succeeding” (Forster 51).

The Indian landscape imparts Mrs. Moore a sense of unification. The moon in Indian sky provides her a sense of unity and kinship; it is the same moon in England which looked there “dead and alien; here she was caught in the shawl of night together with earth and all other starts” (Forster 30). Mrs. Moore's sense of alliance continues to persist through her observation of the wasp which signifies her own openness to the Hindu idea of collectivity, to mysticism and the indefinable quality of India in general. However, the wasp is the lowest creature as represented in Hindu myth and it represents a limit of the Hindu vision. Mrs. Moore's vision of the “pretty dear” (Forster 35) is not a panacea, but merely a possibility for unity and understanding of India. But her empathy to the Indians, Adela's intense desire to see the ‘real India’ and all sorts of politics and intrigues of the English people seem to be inconsequential because of the scorching heat of the unfriendly Sun in the Indian sky. Malcolm Bradbury aptly describes the Sun in the novel “merely a creature, like the rest, and so debarred from glory’’ (Bradbury 37). The hot alien Indian weather which is a part of insurmountable mystery of India baffles the understanding and judgment of the English people. On the other hand, Indian weather becomes a tool of introspection for Adela divulging to her that part of Ronny's character which she never admired : “ His self- complacency, his censoriousness , his lack of subtlety, all grew vivid beneath a tropic sky” ( Forster 79). But Ronny's perception of Indian weather is a quintessence form of every Englishman's perception of the colony: “There's nothing in India but the weather... it's the alpha and omega of the whole affair” (Forster 49). So the bridge party to meet East and West proves to be a foil. There Mrs. Turton wonders about the Indians “Why they come at all I don't know. They hate it as much as we do” (Forster 60).

Religion, a chief aspect of man- made culture, again stands as a barrier to meet East and West as well as Hindu and Muslim. Aziz reacts with disgust to Mrs. Moore for entering into the mosque. Ronny hearing his mother's visit to the mosque warns “you can not do that sort of things...it's not done” (Forster30), insisting that the class difference should be maintained in colony like India where the Englishman “like posing as gods” (Forster 49). Again, western civilization recognizes a new sort of confrontation coming in contact with the East. Adela, a western maid, realizes her own self and the wide difference between herself and Ronny, her fiancé. The ultimate outcome is the breaking off their engagement. When she comes to realize with this resolution, Adela observes a green bird exposing the mysteries and muddles of “hundred Indias”, a land of mysterious beauty and an exposure of inner self in close contact with nature. Adela's emotions associating with the green bird manifests the inscrutable and non-identifiable nature of India. Like Aziz she prefers to remain silent; the interaction between the subconscious self with its conscious counterpart seems to be inutile. To follow Orange: “Moreover, this willingness to trust to silence rather than more direct expression marks a primary strategy in Forster’s attempt to penetrate Indian culture” (Orange 57).

Thus the ‘Mosque’ section recapitulates the harmony and a quest to know the mysteries of India by Mrs. Moore and Adela Quested; the ‘Caves’ section explores the crudity and horrible nature of the Marabar Caves overwhelming the cultural upbringing of these two English women. The hot, stony Indian landscape is viewed as the ‘alien weather’ by the Europeans with horror, terror and disgust. None can interpret the void and meaninglessness of Indian landscape because India is unique with its “fields, then hills, jungle, hills and more fields...how the mind can take hold of such a country? Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile” (Forster 135). The Marabar hills with its dark caves that are older than anything else upon the earth stand as a supreme force of unattainable nature.

The Marabar Caves embodying the spirit of emptiness and nothingness are devoid of carving and any distinction. The dark caves are only illuminated with the light of matches of a visitor through its polished walls reverberating with the sound of fatal echo ‘Boum’ or ‘bou-oum’. The caves are the representative of ancient, pre-historic age of India which even Lord Buddha “shunned a renunciation more complete than his own, and has left no legend of struggle or victory in the Marabar” (Forster124). In Rama Kundu opinion Forster portrays the caves darker than the original one to use them as structural and symbolic device drawing the attention into an area where “concentration can take place. A cavity... They were something to focus everything up” (as quoted in Kundu 114).The Marabar Caves expose the nullity of romanticism because it robbed the infinity and eternity of their vastness- the sole qualities connecting them to mankind; the world in the cave “within us and without echo together the sound of boum; this is the extreme beyond Coleridgean dejection, for the visionary hope is lost in the face of an unspeaking and utterly alien nature, a nature only self reflecting”(Bradbury 32). The hollow, empty caves become a replica of ancient atheist Indian culture.

The aspect of Indian culture associated with the Marabar Caves is the ancient atheist and ascetic tradition of Jain which rejected the phenomenal world as the source of pain and suffering. The Marabar Caves have a corrosive, nihilating effect on those who are susceptible to their power, and they become the central mystery of “mysterious India” in Forster’s *Passage* thereto. (Monk, 101)

Besides the physical existence of the Marabar Caves, it emerges as a human being fascinating and frightening other people simultaneously. The caves, to quote Shahane, “give a negative answer, though it is only one of the many possible answers” (Shahane 117) to Aziz, Mrs. Moore and Adela. Aziz, who like a Mogul emperor imparts a lavish scope of visiting the Marabar Caves to his foreign guests, fails to decipher the significance of dull, dark, empty caves without the spiritual assistance of Professor Godbole. He is accused of sexual assault by Adela who in the evil caves is hallucinated of being confronted with the evil of Aziz's mind. Thus Aziz suffers a lot because “he has challenged the spirit of the Indian earth, which tries to keep man in compartments” (Forster 127). Aziz wishes this particular grim aspect of India to be transformed into mosque that imparts elixir to the lost and dried souls. Even Mrs. Moore whose intention of coming to India was to love and observe Indians and its nature with its seemingly beautiful Ganges, the flowing water and the mysterious moon caught in the shawl of night, confronts with the Marabar Caves whose corrosive effect wither away “the wonderful India of her opening weeks, with its cool nights and acceptable hints of infinity” (Forster 156). Her claustrophobic experience within the caves makes her fatigued; she gradually loses entire mundane interest in god, in her children and in the universe as all these fail to offer repose to her soul. All Christian values within her like pathos, piety and courage seem to exist having no value of their own. Though she could ever forget the crush and smell of the rocks but the echo without any distinction has a profound imprint upon her unconscious. To her the caves become “the universe as microcosm”(Shusterman 167) that compel her to go back to England .On her way back she is taunted by the coconut trees , and all those ‘untouched places’ of India as she thinks “an echo was India [...] the Marabar caves [ were] final” (Forster 205). She is defeated before the caves which are “a primeval universe of evil, chaos and annihilation” (Shahane 117). She finally achieves her passage to India through her death in Indian sea. The swelling of the river water bears a recurring symbol of rebirth after her life. Her encounter with the caves can best be summarized in the words of Chaman L. Sahni: “From Indian standpoint, she has a vision of vast Immensity, the Hindu view of Timeless Absolute, but from western standpoint her vision embodies a confrontation with Nothingness” (Sahni 69).

India still remains an enigma both with Forster and Miss Adela Quested. Adela who comes to see the ‘real India’, accepts every saying of Aziz who is an emblem of India to her but India as a space remains a spiritual muddle both to herself and Aziz. Aziz demurs “Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing... (Forster 143)”. The horrible caves of Marabar hill become a labyrinth reflecting the same stony walls and getting her hallucinated - “that makes some women think they've had an offer of marriage when none was made” (Forster 233). The Caves stand for that aspect of India where religion becomes inadequate and sterile; Mosque and Temple prove to be ineffective. Her experience in the Caves symbolizes “the inadequacy of our intellect to measure spiritual reality” (Sivaramakrishna 15). She fails to make out India and her own Anglo- Indian status. Again, the entire episode in the Marabar Caves is marked by destruction of the structure of marriage and heterosexual relationship. Adela comes to realize the vacuity of loveless marriage; in this context Wilfrid R. Kopohen argues “... upon entering the cave, a symbol of the unconscious, the instinctual, and of motherhood and fertility, Adela becomes unhinged, suggesting a rejection of sexual union” (Kopohen 94- 95). Aziz is convicted of making sexual assault upon Adela but everything is settled aright with the benign effect of echo ‘Esmiss Esmmor’, the Indianized name of Mrs. Moore; it leads to Adela's clarity and the release of Aziz. Adela gets rid of the echo only after her confession of the mistake in the trial. This brings within her a resignation to the limits of knowledge and worlds. Adela along with Fielding broods over ceaseless conundrum of India: “Were there worlds beyond which they could never touch...? They could not tell...Perhaps life is a mystery, not a muddle; they could not tell. Perhaps the hundred Indias...are one and the universe they mirror is one. They had not the apparatus for judging” (Forster 256).

The Caves’ concomitance with the evil tinged with ceaseless mystery continues to exist with its reference to the snakes. In the Caves Adela sees a thin, dark object that looks like a snake. Adela disappearance in the caves thwarts Aziz’s desperate attempt to find her because “the place was so confusing...and full of grooves that led this way and that like snake-tracks” (Forster 152).On his way back from the picnic sites Aziz seems to see “the snake that looked like a tree” (Forster 157) but nothing is explained. On the other hand, critic like Benita Parry associates the Caves with the spiritual vacuity pervading the minds of the British. The inexpressible Caves “can also be read as echoes of the “spiritual reverberation” induced by an India whose religious pursuits and eloquent landscapes provoke intellectual doubt and promote noumenal anxities in the novel’s western protagonists...”(Parry 156). Fielding, an atheist, even muses over the fact that the Hindus have perhaps found the quintessence form of the religion which the west lacks.

'Temple' section begins after two years of Marabar incident with the coming back of Fielding to India along with Stella and Ralph at Mau during the celebration of Gokul Ashtami festival in Monsoon-“ the best weather”(Forster 307) of India. Love, peace and harmony restore in Monsoon with the “friendly Sun” shinning forth and flooding the world with colour. It is the time when reconciliation between East and West takes place after the birth of Lord Krishna representing the Hindu vision of complete being refuting the vision of nothingness, emptiness and isolation symbolized through the Marabar Caves. The evil, corrosive effect of the echo within the Marabar Caves are washed away by the symphony of music within the temple producing an echo of its own- “and union between earth and the sky, the finite and the infinite” (Kundu 220). During Krishna Janmastami festival , the wasp reminds Professor Godbole of Mrs. Moore and the unity between a Brahmin and a Christian ,between Krishna and Christ ,between East and West. He invokes the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God through the song ‘come, come, come’ - an appeal for the salvation of entire country through the song of love and transcendence. When Lord Krishna takes his birth in the rain, love permeates the entire world: “They loved all men, the whole universe, and scraps of their past, tiny splinters of detail, emerged for a moment to melt into the universal warmth” (Forster 281).

Religion dominates the aspects of Nature and culture. Here the image of Shri Krishna becomes a symbol of religious toleration and solace “not only for Indians, but for foreigners” (Forster 283). Through Nature Forster seems to realize the oneness of God as Mrs. Moore’s vision of “God is love” (51) is transformed into Godbole’s “God si love” (Forster 281). Thus the third section Temple “ seems to suggest the possibility of reconciliation between conflicting pulls, personalities and memories; it carries the promise of an ideal vision of harmony, which is attained though transitory, by the finite individual, at some rare moment when the release of love has taken place” (Kundu 118). Aziz forgetting the enmity with the English invites Ralph to water by boat in the rain where their boat collides with that of Fielding resulting in unity of two long estranged friends. They plunge in the warm; shallow water as “The rain settled in steadily to its job of wetting everybody and everything through...” (Forster 310). But both of them are aware of their imminent separation because in a country like India friendship is not possible between colonizers and colonized. Even the landscape of India opposes to the friendship between Fielding and Aziz with their hundred voices "No, not yet" (Forster 317). India is not merely represented by Forster as a geographical space standing in contrast with England only; “...India is schismatic within itself. India's challenge is the challenge of the multiverse... what the city is as metaphor in *Howards End*, India is in *Passage, it* is a metaphor of contingency”... (Bradbury 36).

To conclude now, it can be asserted that A Passage to India is intersected with the diverse elements of Nature corresponding with human emotion. While in the first section Sky predominates, the second section is preoccupied with earth and the third section with rain. The rain unites earth and sky which Forster so ardently wants. Rama Kundu's comment is apt to justify the ending:

The rain, marking union of the earth and the sky, the finite and the infinite, is over; still the earth is trying to retain the memory of rain, the union, by sucking water in, and the sound produced in the process evokes a gesture of love. (Kundu 201)

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