

AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND MARUTI CHITAMPALLI'S SELECTED ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT

*Comparative Literature involves the study of texts across cultures. It opens new vistas of knowledge with patterns of connection in literatures across time and space. It explores the development, reciprocal differences and similarities in literatures. It bridges the gap in various literary works and confines it in united form from regional literature to National literature to International literature. Present research paper briefly reviews the term ecocriticism concern to modern cultural studies & criticism. This study focuses on the rapport between environment and human survival. This theory also provokes the ecological awareness. Ecocritics reread major literary works from an ecocentric perspective with particular attention to the representation of the natural world. This paper leads to comparison between H.D.Thoreau, an American essayist and Maruti Chitampalli, a Marathi essayist with reference to their essays. Both H.D.Thoreau and Maruti Chitampalli are keen observers of nature. Their detachment from human society and through excursions they recorded observations about nature, which brings them to the realization of constructive power of nature. Present ecocritical perspective suggests intention of poets to escape from materialistic world into the soothing company of nature. The generation gap between them does not affect their appreciation of nature as friend to humans. This paper applies the concepts of ecological awareness, wilderness, industrialization, modernization and environment into the essays of Thoreau and Chitampalli. Thoreau's **Walden** & Chitampalli's **Nisarg Vachan** exposes an extrovert personality of both essayists having patience & willingness to observe the world around them. Research paper mentions their observation of creatures like fish, snake, birds, animals & people around that area. Their sensitive experiences and keen observation widen the understanding about reciprocal relation of man & nature. Present work compares microscopic details of the beautiful objects of nature. It helps to compare ecocritical implications of both essayists in Eastern & Western approach towards ecological awareness.*

Key Words: Ecocritical, Ecocentric, Ecocriticism, Essayists Etc.

Introduction:

Comparative Literature involves the study of texts across cultures. It opens new vistas of knowledge with patterns of connection in literatures across time and space. It explores the development and reciprocal differences as well as similarities in literatures. It bridges the gap in various literary works and confines it in united form from regional literature to National literature to International literature.

In general sense ecology is a branch of Science which studies relation between environment & humans. Etymologically the word 'ecology' is derived from '*Oikology*' and it originates from Greek words '*Oikos*' means home and '*Logos*' means study of. It stands for the study of surrounding with human existence. This point of view transforms from 'nature writing' to 'ecocentric writing'.

In history literature represented revolutions, wars, and making & unmaking of empires. Literature also slowly reacted on issues of environmental degradation, like destruction of ozone layer, deforestation, reduction of water level, climate change and water scarcity, etc. The question that naturally arises in one's mind, what do these environmental disasters has to do with English literary studies? The very fact that literature cannot exist in a vacuum and that all creative activity takes place on this earth where life exists, is reason enough for all literary & environmental connections. Ecocriticism is most exciting recent development in literary and cultural studies

*Simply define; ecocriticism is the study of the relationship
between literature and the physical environment*
(Glotfelty)

Ecocriticism is a developing literary theory in modern criticism. It explores the ways in which one imagines and portrays the relationship between human beings and environment. Ecocriticism or green study has laid foundation for new perspective in literary & cultural studies. It doesn't present traditional point of view of romanticists. They proposed nature writing or writing on natural objects. Ecocriticism studies biotic as well as abiotic form of environment (vegetation-Mountains, River etc.) In course of time traditional concept of 'nature writing' transforms into 'ecocentric writing'.

It's Development:

Modern environmentalism begins with Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Her non-fictional literary analysis indicates environmental apocalypse in modern period. William Ruckert coined the term ecocriticism in 1978 into an essay entitled, *Literature & Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism*. Ecocriticism began as a critical theory in USA in late 1980s and in the UK in early 1990s and since then it is still an emerging movement. It reflects reciprocal relation of man & nature in literature. In 1992 a group of scholars established the association for the study of literature and environment which publishes the journal ISLE interdisciplinary studies in literature and environment.

Chief Exponents

In USA ecocriticism takes literary bearing from three major 19th century American writers whose work celebrates nature, life force and the wilderness as manifested in America. These three major writers are I) Ralph Waldo Emerson, II) Henry David Thoreau, III) Margaret Fuller. All three were members of the group of New England Writers. Following ecocritics are modern ecocritics, American ecocritics- Cheryll Glotfelty, Harold Fromm, Michael P. Branch, Karl Kroeber and British ecocritics- Jonathan Bate, Raymond William, Lawrence Coupe, Richard Kerridge, Greg Garrard, Terry Gifford and others.

Thoreau & Chitampalli's Concern to Ecoriticism:

Both essayists indicate towards ecological awareness. Their solitude in nature and simple life style is a message for today's materialistic approach. Thoreau's *Walden* is very noteworthy work in American literature. Ecocritical perspective on *Walden* helps to explore that Thoreau was supporter and care taker of nature. He presents in *Walden* how excess material progress spoils life and emphasizes simple lifestyle to get solace from nature. He built his cabin at Walden Pond and lived there; it means he was deeply rooted in natural surroundings. It suggests his honest attempt to establish cordial relationship between man & nature. His profound idea to establish harmony with nature expresses his intellectual heritage and simplicity. Gil Stephen, in his work *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth* defines that:

*Wordsworth, Muir and Thoreau expressed the wish that
The natural scenes so dear to them would be preserved
(Stephen P.242)*

The Romanticism in England impressed him and he appreciated Wordsworth's way of expressing natural world. The period of 18th century was the beginning period of Industrial revolution, scientific progress, which was capitalized by Wordsworth, Muir and Thoreau. Greg Garrard, in his text on literary theory *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* argues that:

*British ecocriticism focused on Wordsworth in its early
exploration, American ecoriticism identified Henry
David Thoreau as a key figure
(Garrard P. 48)*

In theory of Ecocriticism, British ecocriticism focused Wordsworth and tried to explain how Wordsworth expresses his views about environment and human existence. American ecocriticism considers Thoreau as a key figure because, he didn't present only natural description or observation of nature but he presented the close and minute relations of environment with human existence.

Maruti Chitampalli brought up in *Solapur* and then went to enroll himself in State Forest Service College at Coimbatore. After completing his training, he joined the services with Maharashtra State government. During his professional life, he moved at various forests and national parks, having live experiences with various entities. This laid the foundation of his interest in writing of his literary works. He retired from Maharashtra state government services as the Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests. He was instrumental in the development of *Karnala Bird Sanctuary*, *Navegaon National Park*, *Nagzira Sanctuary* and *Melghat Tiger Project*; also constructing orphanages for displaced wildlife at the last two institutions. His *chakawachandan*, *Pakharmaya*, *Kesharancha Paoos*, *Navegav Bandh* & *Raanwata* these literary essays are popular in Marathi literature.

Pastoral Point of View:

Thoreau & Chitampalli deal with elements related to pastoral life as well as ecological aspect. They have presented pastoral elements within writing e.g. farming, countryside life etc. Thoreau sensitively presents pastoral view in *Walden*. He expresses how the birds merrily

live life in the company of nature and he also mentions that for happy life of birds freedom is require. He focuses pastoral view through scenic narration of nature.

He says that, man should live peacefully with nature. He also defines for peaceful life fresh environment and detachment from material progress is essential. Thoreau explains about humans, birds & animals needed free atmosphere for peaceful mind & life.

From leaves of bark and boughs, of line woven and stretched of grass and straw of boards and shingles, of stones to live in more senses than we think ... Birds do not sing in caves nor do doves, cherish their innocence in dovecots.

(Thoreau P. 25)

Chitampalli also explains pastoral view in his *Jangalancha Dena*. He deals with pastoral approach of humans how greed may cause harm to ecosystem. He focuses on exploitative behavior of man towards nature. Chitampalli expresses pastoral approach in his work as:

*Jangalatil mohache vruksha foolanni baharu
lagale ki vaishaakh wanavyachi chahul lagate.
Jangalat rahnare aadiwasi mohachi foola gola
karnya karita zadakhilil jamin swachha kartat.
Tya khalil sukalela gavat va zudapa petawun
detat. Khadhi-khadhi hich aag sarya wanat pasarate
ani raatra n diwas wana petu lagtat.*

(Chitampalli P. no.32)

Views on Wilderness:

Thoreau & Chitampalli present wild form of nature, it appeals to reader who wants to live in company. Wild part of environment is uncontaminated form of nature. Thoreau & Chitampalli deal with wilderness of nature. Both have felt sympathy and love towards the wild beauty of nature. In *Walden* Thoreau expresses his wish to transform himself in natural objects. He describes wild form of ecosystem and pleased with wild form of nature. He also says that wild form of nature is undoubtedly beneficial for human survival. He wishes to enjoy wild forms of nature and establishes interconnectedness with it.

Thoreau & Chitampalli present wilderness of nature with life. Thoreau & Chitampalli are deeply rooted in wilderness. They define ecological relation of man with ecosystem. He expresses about rain; sun, summer, winter and other elements of ecosystem. Thoreau & Chitampalli convey concern about ecosystem. Both have presented wild forms of nature but Thoreau seems subjective & Chitampalli objective. Thoreau expresses wilderness in his *Walden* as:

*The indescribable Innocence and beneficence of nature, -
of sun, wind, and rain of summer and winter, - such heath,
such cheer, they afford forever ! and such sympathy have
they ever with our race, that all nature would be
affected ... Shall I not have intelligence with the Earth?
Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself? ”*

(Thoreau, P.123)

Chitampalli also points out impression of nature. He minutely observes changes in nature and feels joyful into wild changes of ecosystem. In his *Raanwata* he expresses about wild beauty of nature. He discusses how wild life exists in various forms within ecosystem. He focuses on birds, trees and vegetation etc.

*Hirawi – tamboos disanari chaitrapalawi fululagali ki
tya nawatina ti zaad natun jayachi. Satej nawin
palwina ya vrukshanna aparthiv saundarya prapta
hoi. Nantar fuloora yaycha. Foola pandhurki , nili
ewalishi. Waryachya pratyek zulaki barobar manda madhur gandha yeyi.
Halu - halu limbonyancha aagaman hoi. Tya peeku lagat. Kawale
vrukshaanchya shendyawar gharati bandhu lagat. Kokila gaau lagat.
(Chitampalli, P.63)*

Ecocritical View on Modernization & Industrialization:

Thoreau focuses on modernization & industrialization in his literary work. In *Walden* he criticizes excessive progress and greed of human beings. Thoreau & Chitampalli describe that, man wishes for getting more and its temptation creating problems for nature. Longing for more food, larger & spacious houses, finer and abundant clothes compel man to make excessive use of nature. Both emphasize that excessive demand is causing degradation of natural resources continuously. Chitampalli criticizes this tendency as well as attempt to spread awareness in *Walden* as:

*When a man is warned by the several modes which I
have described, what does he want next? Surely not more
warmth of the same kind as more and richer food...there
is another alternatives than to adventure, on life now, his
vacation from humbler toil having commenced.*

(Thoreau, P.14)

Chitampalli also criticizes exploitative tendency of mankind. In his work *Jangalancha Dena* he depicts importance of flora and fauna in ecosystem. He narrates that man is deeply interconnected with ecosystem. Further he explains that man must understand the deterioration of nature and should work for preservation of ecosystem. It is a precious heritage for mankind and essential for survival. He mentions preservation of forest is a need of time and he urges for it. He defines it as:

*Jungle nisargachi anupam dengi ahe. Paoos, pani, krishi, pashupalan aani
itar udyogdhandhyancha wanashi – nikatacha sambandh aahe. Pratyaksha va
apratyaksha labh tar asankhya aahet. Bharatiya adhyatmik –
jiwanchintanacha te pavitra aani udatta kendra aahe. Tya drushtine anadi
kalapasun te aaple vasatisthan aahe. Nisargane dilela anamol thewa
alikaladya kahi varshat aapan surakshit thewu shakalo nahi. Ekhadya
diwalkhorapramane aapli krutagnatechi bhawana wadhis lagali aahe.
Mazyalekhhatun wananchi aavashyakta kasha aahe he sanganyacha prayatna
mi kela aahe.*

(Chitampalli, P.24)

Cordial View about Ecosystem:

Thoreau & Chitampalli express cordial view about ecosystem in their essays. Thoreau is a keen observer of nature; he minutely analyzes changes and importance of ecosystem. Thoreau defines his views about ecosystem. He presents the chain of survival which is essential to man. Thoreau in *Walden* expresses the entire universe is dependent on sun as a major energy source. Thoreau defines important functions of sun; it gives energy for man & giving energy to plants for food. He describes about ecosystem and food chain like sun-vegetation-man. This food chain indicates close relation between man and environment. In *Walden* he defines about ecosystem as:

The summer, in some climates, makes possible to man a Sort of Elysian life. Fuel, except to cook his food, is then Unnecessary; the sun in his fire, and many of the fruits are sufficiently cooked by its rays; while food generally is more various and more easily obtain and clothing and shelter are wholly or half unnecessary.
(Thoreau, P.12)

Chitampalli indicates a different aspect of ecosystem, he mention that what is the systematic order of ecosystem. In his work *Pakharmaya* he defines about importance of ecosystem for human existence. He quoted his own experience to get benefitted by ecosystem. He scientifically proves that for human physiology or good health accompaniment of nature is very important. He expresses that nature is having healing ability of human pain and sufferings.

Suryodayapurwi mi jangalat phirayala nighe. Jikade tikade vilakshan shaant ase. Shwasochwasadware hawetun mubalak ozon wayu mile. Mi dirgha shwas ghewun mazi phuphoosa pranwayuna bharun taki. Shudhha rakta hrudayakade wahat rahi. Ya kshanacha anubhaw apoorwa ase. Samor suryacha tambada bimba dongara-aadun war war yetanna mi tyakade dole bharun pahat rahi. Nantar dole mitun chintan kari.

(Chitampalli, P.133)

Conclusion:

Thoreau & Chitampalli have projected a rapport between man & nature along with transcendental approach. Both essayists present ecocritical views on the basis of self-experience. Keen observation of essayists on nature and human behavior deals with environmental preservation. Essays are completely dealing with ecocritical view. Thoreau & Chitampalli are not only interested with scenic sublimation of nature but also transcendent appearance of it. Thoreau and Chitampalli look at nature as transcendentalists. Their detachment from human society and in excursions they recorded observations about nature which brings them to the realization of constructive power of nature. Both of them belong to different times but their approach of looking at nature is same. Both of them use travelogue as form to put their observations on record. In travelogue these native essayists have mentioned their experience of human existence belonging to same nature. Thoreau is subjective in his appreciation whereas Chitampalli seems objective as an observer. Their sensitive experiences and keen observations widen the understanding about reciprocal relation of man & nature.

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