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Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel: A Calender* – An Ecocritical Analysis

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Abstract:

Ecocriticism refers to the interdisciplinary study of literature and environment. The study has developed in last few decades, observing the effects of climatic changes and increased rate of global warming. The present paper explores the literary theory of Ecocriticism which emphasizes on fictional (and artistic) manifestation of human experiences inherent in sorrows of scarcity, hopes for harmonious existence, fears of loss and disaster. It is an ecocentric valuation of the place near Indian Himalayas trying to depict the industrialization and its ill effects on the snow-capped hills, through Indian novel "The Everest Hotel: A Calender", by I. Allan Sealy.

KEYWORDS:

Ecocriticism, Ecocentrism, Indian environment.

INTRODUCTION:

Ecocriticism is most fittingly applied to a text where landscape in itself becomes a dominant character, for example- interaction between the writer and place or when character of some poem, novel or story or any other literary genre interacts with nature in some or the other way, then at that time study of place also becomes equally important than various other issues. Thus ecocritical study is the need of the hour, firstly because, ecocriticism explains the need for humanistic understanding of our relationship with the natural world in an age of environmental destruction. If majorly seen, environmental crisis is the result of humanity's separation from the natural world, brought about not only by growing technology but also by particularization; that is, a mentality of specialization that fails to recognize the interconnectedness of things. As viewed by deep ecologists "an attack on an individual species is an attack on the whole, humanity must humbly recognize its lack of the right to dominate, and realize that the fate of other species is bound up with the fate of humanity" (http://library.thinkquest.org/26026/Philosophy/deep_ecology.html)

Secondly, in terms of the academics, ecocriticism is a response to scholarly specialization that is sometimes in the wake of science we forget that something in their natural form are best and if thought to be altered can lead to destruction. Hence this scholarly specialization seeks to associate scholars with each other and directs them towards the real concerns of the world. Thirdly, ecocriticism is also a response to felt necessities and actual crisis, and as an intrinsically holistic practice, eco-criticism also has an intrinsic ideological if not moral component. A holistic view of the universe is a value-centred one that honours the interconnectedness of things. As a result of interconnectedness of things it explains that everything is to be valued, and hence everything possesses integrity of its own, be they creatures of the earth, critical practices, spiritual beliefs, or ethnic backgrounds.

ECOCENTRIC VIEW 'THE EVEREST HOTEL: A CALENDER'

"Every morning at sunrise the women come out of the forest and set out on the path to the city.

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They file down the track balancing headloads of firewood....Always they stop under this people tree hung with the fibrous flasks of weaver birds' nests, and they rest. They talk of ferment in the hills, so many women held in the valley, so many men gone to the plains" (Sealy 127)

Allan Sealy begins the novel with the above mentioned lines clearly passing on the hint to his readers that they are going to experience the lifestyle and environment of a hilly region. Sealy has given a very picturesque narration of Drummondganj town, as the reader himself starts feeling one with natural surroundings and moving around in the forests of Drummondganj with the other characters of novel. These mentioned lines clearly signify the continuous cutting down of forest trees in the name of civilization. The author begins the novel by giving an impression of just another morning in Drummondganj, where women like just another day carry down logs of woods from forest to markets from where these woods will be sent to city. The narrative suggests that life of such people living in the small town is very simple and is very limited, confined only around talks related to local natural environment.

Sealy displays dexterity in controlling both the natural and fictional world simultaneously. He inter-mingles nature's world with the wide world of human emotions, feelings and their ever rising aspirations. These women talk about the upheaval caused in the hills due to riots and strikes taking place in support of Varunachal. At other times they talk about yeti, the snow man while at various other moments they talk about local built up myths and superstitions. But they too seem to be concerned about large scale deforestation. These women inspite of being illiterate are mature enough to anticipate the loss through which they will have to undergo when the whole forest has been cut down:

"Bare patches appear on the hillsides, like mange; in time, a whole bare hill. The springs and waterholes are drying up, the animals have to travel further to drink. Fires light up the night sky; the mountains are burning. The villagers blame the loggers, the loggers blame the villagers. The green of the water courses vanishes with the passing of the rains and the trees grow further apart" (148)

Government justifies this large scale deforestation as an excuse for the development of Drummondganj. The highway is to be built and hence in place is being cleared, which, according to authorities, will help the residents to communicate easily from one place to other. But the irony lies in the fact that these simple townfolk need a proper living conditions to survive in the hilly region more than highways and dams. The primary necessity for them is safe drinking water, moderate climate temperature and proper shelter to live in. If they would be derived of these necessities then what is the need of civilization and building highways in such region. It was obvious that cutting down of trees will lead to intense increase of temperature. Miss Sampson informs Ritu "Dust is the enemy, and its winning; every mote a spy. 'Drummondganj wasn't always like this,' she complains. 'We hardly needed fans, you know. No dust. Loo was unheard off.'" (34)

Sealy has skilfully named the main protagonist as Ritu, (meaning 'seasons' in hindi) keeping in view the shifting and ever changing patterns in her life like those of seasons which promise of change and a new beginning. Ritu's life keeps running in coherence with the cyclical design of seasons Jeth or Asadh, Push or Phalagun (Hindi names of seasons). One thing should be made clear that ecocriticism is not only about valuing trees or environment as a whole around us but it also helps in giving people sense of ownership, or it provides people with professional identity. The ecologists, biologists, geographers, scientists get their identity only due to the environment. In the same way nature plays quiet similar role in the novel too. It provides basis to the characters to associate themselves with something which gives meaning to their lives. It is with the help of nature one can understand the daily interests and routine of characters. Nature, in the text, helps in giving meaning to life of certain characters. Brij is involved in the protest of supplying dam water only to plains and hence propagates the urgency of new state where government can understand the problem of hilly people. There are unions formed in support and in against of Brij's claim. Thapa, a gardener, derives his identity by working around and taking proper care of plants. Ritu's knowledge of botany is creatively utilised when she strains her mind seeing the dining table wood "Teak from the forests of her hills; old hills, far older than these fold mountains... That forest now under her fingertips, silent, dark, mutating" (27) Later in some other episode of the novel she urges the local woman to adopt the strategy of chipko movement as the only way possible to save trees from cutting down for further industrial use of land in that area. She told them chipko movement had started from hills only and now again time has arrived to adopt it. She explains it to them that generations ago, in the same forest, village women showed the world that one could resist far greater force simply by putting your body in the way. They cried chipko or cling to the trees and hence defied the loggers.

CONCLUSION

Sunderlal Bahuguna, politician and environmentalist, taking the hint from Ramchandra Guha's work 'The Unquiet Woods', says that "the ecological crisis in Himalayas is not an isolated event [but] has its

roots in the [modern] materialistic civilization [that] makes man the butcher of Earth” (Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment 1) Ramchandra Guha too while giving an account of Chipko movement says that such movements will doom in the postmodern era like ours. He outlines the dubious strategy of the government to show the process of how it plans industrialization in post-colonial India, as it boasts about practising several ways of sustainable development, but in reality it has only pauperized millions of people in agrarian sector, diminishing the stock of plant, water and soil resources at a terrifying rate. This exploitation of nature can also be viewed in terms of the colonizer and colonized. Nature and environment around Himalayas can be taken as colonizer and the human civilization who exploits their surrounding can be termed as colonized.

By far the most important concern of the hilly regions of today is the increase of tourism and large scale industrialization in view of earning profits overlooking the fact of exploiting environment. The key is thus to find alternative forms of tourism that benefit local people and have a relatively low environmental impact rather than relying on such agencies who either wilfully ignore the damaging ecological consequences of touristic development or continue to treat the environment as if it were an endlessly replenishable resource.

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