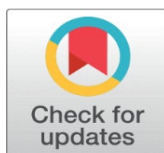
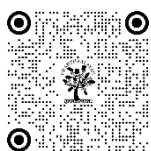


ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE AND HINDI LITERATURE

Pankaj Kumar¹✉

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign language, Manipur University, Indo-Myanmar Road, Canchipur, Imphal, Manipur, India



Corresponding Author

Pankaj Kumar,
Pankaj.kumar@manipuruniv.ac.in

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i3.2024.4836](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i3.2024.4836)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

The concept of ecological imagination has undergone a significant transformation in contemporary Japanese and Hindi literature, reflecting a paradigmatic shift in the portrayal of nature from a passive, aestheticized entity to an interconnected, dynamic force. This paper explores the evolution of literary perspectives in Japanese and Hindi literature on nature, moving beyond anthropocentric representations toward an “Ecological Turn” that emphasizes the sublime, autonomous, and interdependent aspects of the natural world. Drawing from cultural and philosophical frameworks such as Shinto animism in Japan and Indian cosmological traditions, this study examines how these literary traditions engage with deep ecological themes to critique environmental degradation and advocate for ecological preservation. Through a comparative analysis of contemporary Japanese literature such as Ishimure Michiko’s *Lake of Heaven* and Hindi Literature such as S. R. Harnot’s *Ek Nadi Tadapti Hai* (A River’s Agony), this paper highlights the ways in which both works employ narrative strategies to foreground environmental concerns. Michiko’s novel reflects on the cultural and ecological devastation wrought by large dam projects, portraying the loss of traditional ways of life and advocating for a renewed sensitivity to nature. Similarly, Harnot’s work underscores the destructive consequences of industrialization on rivers, revealing the existential distress inflicted upon both human communities and natural ecosystems. By shifting from an anthropocentric to an eco-centric worldview, both authors emphasize the intrinsic relationship between nature and culture, calling for a deeper engagement with ecological consciousness.

Keywords: Eco-Centric, Anthropocentric, Ecological Consciousness, Satoyama, Eco-Criticism



1. INTRODUCTION

There is a tremendous transformation in the nature of literature lately, evidently there is a significant rise of environmental themes in literary writings of Japanese and Hindi literature. Unsurprisingly, “nature” has been the theme of Japanese and Hindi or Indian literary works earlier too. From Japanese ancient and classical literary pieces such as *kojiki* (712), *Manyoushu* (759) *Fudoki* till modern times, and in Indian literature, since the age of ancient literature such as Vedas, Buddhist Literature, Jain literature and others till now, there are numerous works which have been advocating and propagating the harmonious way of living with Nature. However, in contemporary era, realizing the environmental crisis and broken relationship of human with nature, there started the conscious effort to treat nature in literary works with nature-centric approach and not human centric or anthropocentric.

This shift is in depiction of “Nature” more precisely “Ecological Turn” from the earlier way of stereotypically portraying Nature as symbol of patience, motherly figure as always “giving”, beauty (aesthetically in Japanese the concept of “Bi” represented by Nigimitama (Shinto god/spirit of benevolence and kindness), picturesque, a refuge for solace or romantic

all seen through human's perspectives to the Nature which can be sublime or in Japanese the concept of "Suukousa" represented by Shinto Spirit Aramitama along with "Bi", which is overwhelming, majestic, incomprehensible and gigantic.

The transition from shallow ecology, which is an anthropocentric approach focused on conserving nature and using resources judiciously, to deep ecology, which promotes an Earth-centric perspective that views the entire planet as a single organism, has prompted humanity to reconsider its relationship with nature. Deep ecology posits that humans, animals, plants, and all forms of life are interconnected parts of the same system. Therefore, it calls for a profound transformation in how humans relate to nature. Literature has deep relation with the physical environment, hence the onus on literature is formidable.

This very trend makes literature "ecologically conscious". To delve deeper, the sense of place in literature gives the emotional and cultural significance that a specific location (nature) holds for individuals and communities. It encompasses how people relate to their environment, the meanings they attach to it, and how these connections influence their identity and values.

The approach to write literary works eco-consciously started with "Post Humanist" in which human is no more in a central position and approach to literature in Japan especially after modernization and industrialization. In Japan several authors belonging to Seimeishugi (Vitalism) consciously depicted themes or motifs of deep-ecology (famously termed Daishizen / ookii na seimei) in their works. (Suzuki 2003).

Ecologically conscious literature started to take shape in Hindi literature during Chhayawaad (romanticism) period around 1920s, in which Suryakant Tripathi Nirala, Jaishankar Prasad, Sumitra Nandan Pant and Mahadevi varma are such stalwarts for whom nature was not something outside them as "environment" literally means, but they were in it or unified themselves with nature and personified nature and showed the mystic aspect of nature apart from using it as figure of speech. The poets of the era were emotionally drawn and fascinated by a wondrous supreme or divine power in nature which existed only in Vedic era. (Singh. 1962)

2. NATURE AND CULTURE IN JAPANESE AND HINDI LITERARY TRADITIONS

Nature worship and reverence for the earth deeply rooted in Indian culture. From the ancient civilization to modern times, nature is seen as a manifestation of the divine. This connection is prominently reflected in Indian literature, which explores the significance of the nature and the consequences of its degradation also.

In Japanese traditional belief driven by Shintoism, all non-human entities are believed to be deities (belief of animism) and they are worshipped on different occasions and forms (as Polytheistic beliefs). "Shizenkan" or Japanese View on nature, in Japanese culture, has been a distinct perspective because of the geographical condition of Japan where Nature is dominated and dominant both equally shaping a unique perspective on Japanese nature and that is where "Wa" or "harmony" comes into play where Japanese society have been living in harmony with nature culturally. (Terada, 1935) However, since the time of industrialization and urbanization, *Satoyama*, the symbol of Japanese tradition to live in harmony with nature got impacted due to the *Kasoka* (Depopulation) of Japanese remote villages. As the phenomena known as "*Sanchan Nogyo*" or Grandparents and mothers doing Farming after most of the adults left as migrant worker to Tokyo leaving *Jiichan*, *Baachan*, and *Kaachan* (The Sanchan) behind for farming in *Satoyama*, ultimately leading to the phenomena called *Kasoka* or depopulation of country's hinterlands or remote villages. The Lost harmony between nature and human has been themes of several literary pieces in Japan.

3. THE EMERGENCE OF ECOLOGICALLY CONSCIOUS LITERATURE IN JAPAN

The View of "Seimeikan" and "Seimeishugi" have seen their inception since pre-war period, but it has kept gaining its momentum through phases like Industrialization, Atomic bombing, rapid economic growth and urbanization, Minamata outbreak and so on and reviewing on Seimeikan has compelled Japan to re-consider how it perceives nature. Many authors have actively depicted "Seimei" Life in Ecology in their works.

In his critique, Suzuki Sadami refers to Ishikawa Jun's *Aratama* (The bad boys of the Gods, 1991) which depicts the story of a protagonist Sato which is a wild spirit a mythical symbolism of life energy of earth and it connects to Sublime aspect of nature along with *Nigimitama* which is kind and beautiful aspect of nature, but sublime and fierce. Although, depending the situation *aratama* changes itself into *Nigimatama* too. Basically, it is black humor and symbolizes the ugliness of industrialized society. Portrays the both beautiful and sublime. Similarly, the work of Kojiro Serizawa, "*Ningen no seimeikan*" (Human's vitality, 1991) that gives a distinct portrayal of Non-human beings having soul and they live

same as humans do. It emphasizes on the “Power of Nature” supports the belief of worship of “Nature” and outlines the fact that every “thing” has a life and soul. The communion is possible with them.”. “Life is ... in this home, this chair, each furniture.. all of them are living.” (*Ningen no Semeikan*) all these works according to Suzuki Sadami, fall under the category of Seimeishugi / Seimeichuushinshugi (Vitalism literally).

Vitalism defines itself as departing from the view which considers nature in materialistic and utilitarian gain and not its life value, it emphasizes on treating nature as human and gives it voice. This movement can be seen since Taisho period literary works. There are some of the examples.

This seimeikan in Japan has taken new turn, the ecological turn when the Minamata Incident took place due to industrial toxins waste dumped in sea by a chemical manufacturing unit and the disease caused devastating effect on the local public who consumed contaminated food. Ishimure Michiko, born in Minamata took up this theme in her works and wrote it in reportage form in local dialects “Paradise in the sea of Sorrow: Our Minamata Disease”. She became the voice for reconsidering the unchecked development and champion of environmental movement. Her works made huge effect on people and policies too. Her famous work “Lake of Heaven” lays emphasis on how to reconnect with nature and to grow extra sensitivity to listen to nature.

In *Lake of Heaven*, a work blending mythology, dreams, Noh drama, poetry, and direct narrative, author Ishimure explores themes related to language, dam construction and submerging of village, and the divide between urban and rural perspectives. Her narrative, described as mythopoetical, emphasizes the need for a renewed sensitivity to the “signs of life” (or *kehai* in Japanese), which are often overlooked. Through the protagonist Masahiko, who becomes attuned to these signs during his time at Amazoko (village in Kyushu) Ishimure illustrates a deeper, holistic and spiritual connection with nature. Masahiko develops a holistic perspective on his relationship with nature, recognizing an intrinsic interconnectedness with the objects and sounds around him. The novel critiques modern detachment from the natural world, using the metaphor of the “ear” to symbolize the restoration of lost sensory experiences due to urbanization and technology. Ishimure advocates for the preservation and renewal of cultural myths and stories as they embody the collective wisdom and connection to both the past and future. The text portrays a universe where all entities, living and non-living are regarded as interconnected and valued.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE (PRAKRITI VIMARSH) IN CONTEMPORARY HINDI LITERATURE

In Hindi Literature, Prakriti Vimarsh (eco-criticism/Ecological discourse) has become very essential discourse to understand ecologically conscious literature. In this discourse, few prominent contemporary authors are active and their works have made tremendous effect on environmental awareness. Their works try to rekindle the sensitivity towards nature seeing through nature-centric prism and inspires to establish a harmonious relationship with it.

Kashinath Singh's *Jangal Jatkam* exemplifies a renewed consciousness regarding nature, portraying it as an independent living entity. The narrative employs the storytelling style of Jataka tales, effectively utilizing symbolism, analogy, and moral lessons to engage readers. Central to the story is the confrontation between the jungle and humanity, where the trees, personified as sentient beings, live in fear of being destroyed for industrialization and the so-called development. Singh's evocative description encapsulates the essence of nature: “When I say, Jungle... it means sublime and awesome, scary and beautiful like oceans, mountains... earth beneath roots, endless sky above heads and winds...” This portrayal not only underscores the beauty and majesty of the natural world but also highlights the profound connection and tension between human progress and ecological preservation.

S. R. Harnot's story *Ek Nadi Taḍaptī Hai (A River's Agony)*, critiques the unregulated construction of dams that has obstructed the flow of the Sutlej River, resulting in the submergence of numerous villages and the displacement of local communities. The protagonist is attuned to the river's anguished sounds, illustrating a profound connection between humans and nature, emphasizing their interrelationship. Beyond questioning prevailing models of development, the narrative highlights the intricate interconnectedness between humans and the natural environment.

In Pradeep Jiwane's *Bhram ke Bāhar (Disillusioned)*, the narrative serves as a powerful symbolic depiction of the devastation inflicted upon aquatic life by industrial waste and pollution. The work also employs mythological references to draw attention to the disconnect between traditional beliefs about nature and the harsh realities of contemporary practices. In many cultures, water is revered as a sacred entity, often associated with life, purity, and sustenance. Jiwane juxtaposes these age-old beliefs with the current exploitation of natural resources, highlighting how modern society often fails to honor these values. This contrast serves to critique the moral and ethical responsibilities that come with our interactions with the environment.

5. CONCLUSION

The growing ecological consciousness in both Japanese and Hindi literature highlights nature as an independent entity, showcasing its picturesque and sublime qualities. This literature often reflects the deification of nature through mythological references, emphasizing its sacredness. Additionally, a personification of natural elements is prevalent in nature-centric narratives, which fosters a deeper connection with the environment. The preservation of cultural beliefs and mythology is crucial for establishing harmony between humanity and nature, reinforcing the idea that our relationship with the natural world is both profound and respectful.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Mishra, N. (2021). Ecocriticism in Indian fictions and environmental concerns. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, 9(1).
- Apni Maati. (2021, July). Ecocritical perspectives in literature. Retrieved from https://www.apnimaati.com/2021/07/blog-post_46.html
- Book/Ebook References
- Harnot, S. R. (2019). *Bhagadevi ka chai ghar*. Vani Prakashan.
- Ishimure, M. (2008). *Lake of heaven* (A. Bruce, Trans.). Lexington Books.
- Jilwane, P. (2020, June-July). *Bhram ke bahar*. *Pahal*, 122. Retrieved from https://www.apnimaati.com/2022/09/blog-post_25.html
- Singh, N. (2016). *Ādhunik sāhitya kī pravṛttiyan*. Lokbharti Prakashan. (Original work published in 1962)
- Parentetical citation: (Singh, 2016)
- Singh, K. (2013). *Jaṅgala Jātakam* in H. Arora (Ed.), *Hindi Kahānī Sañcayan*. Satish Book Depot.
- Suzuki, S. (2013). *Nyuumon nihon kingendaibungeishi*. Heibonsha Shinsho.
- Parentetical citation: (Suzuki, 2013)
- Terada, T. (1935). *Toyoshichou*. Aozora Bunko. (n.d.). Aozora Bunko Digital Library. Retrieved from https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000042/files/2510_13846.html
- Parentetical citation: (Terada, 1935)
- Webpage on a Website References
- Encyclopedia of Shinto. Kokugakuin university digital museum <https://d-museum.kokugakuin.ac.jp/eos/detail/?id=8736>