

A Post-colonial Ecocritical Approach to the Select Poems of A.D. Hope

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ABSTRACT

Nature has been vividly portrayed and depicted in different colours and forms in Postcolonial literatures. Nature has often been portrayed as vicious, a destroyer, an evil force that feeds on human hopes and aspirations, and sometimes as creator and nurturer, creating and sustaining life on Earth. However, time and again, the literature of the post-colonial era has portrayed an essential decay in the World of nature in the aftermath of colonialism. Colonialism has significantly affected the culture and environment of the indigenous people of the colony countries. Australia was colonised by the British imperialists in 1788 and the country got freedom in 1901. This colonization had a devastating impact on the social, cultural, religious, political and economic life of the indigenous people of Australia. It goes without saying that the native people of Australia suffered tremendously at the hands of the British colonisers. The British colonizers exploited, subjugated and tortured the indigenous people of the country. However, they were not contented with that. They were obviously interested in Australia's vast natural resources. They ruthlessly exploited the vast natural resources of the country, they extracted the precious metals and rocks, like gold, and shipped them to Britain. This exploitation of the natural resources and the tyranny and cruelty of the British colonizers who took away the culture, history and identity of the indigenous people of Australia, left an indelible mark on the lives of the Australian aboriginals. The postcolonial literature of Australia gives us an insight into this hapless condition of people as well as the environment in the aftermath of Independence. Colonialism has significantly affected the lives of the indigenous people of Australia and their connection with nature. The social stagnation and moral degradation brought about by the British colonizers has got vividly portrayed in the poetry of A. D. Hope. The Australian poet, Alec Derwent Hope has tried to depict the British Colonizers' social and environmental exploitation and the miserable condition of people in the aftermath of colonialism in his poetry. This paper is an endeavour to study Hope's poems from a postcolonial and ecological perspective. The poems under consideration here are – Australia, Standardization, The Death of the Bird and Toast for a Golden Age.

1. Introduction

There exists a close and sacred relationship between humans and nature. We are very much dependent on nature for our very sustenance. This deep connection between humans and nature exert a strong influence on human culture. Our surrounding environment shapes our culture, our behaviour. And for that reason, the close relationship between humans and nature has often treated as a literary subject. Time and again, the theme of human-nature relationship and the grave environmental issues have recurred in literature, especially in postcolonial literatures. Ecocriticism is basically the study of how literature and environment are very much co-related and how the decadence in the human society gets reflected in their surrounding environment. Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as "(a) study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis". Thus, ecocriticism is basically concerned with the relationship between literature and environment and how it gets textualized in literature. Ecocriticism is the study of the literary treatment of nature as a theme and its textual representation. In his book, "Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, Pramod Nayar defined Ecocriticism as:

a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards nature and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with

the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches.

Therefore, ecocriticism is the analysis of the literary texts that uphold the issue of environment and how it significantly influences and affects our lives. It explores the deep-rooted connection existing between the World of Humans and the world of nature. Humans beings are very much a part of the Nature, and the exploration of this sacred relationship that exists between the two is the primary goal of ecocriticism. There exists an intertwined relationship between humans and the physical world surrounding them. This very theme has been studied and explored further by Postcolonial ecocriticism. As Glotfelty rightly states in this context:

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, an ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture. Understanding how nature and culture constantly influence and construct each other is essential to an informed ecocriticism. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land. As a

theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (The Ecocriticism Reader)

Postcolonialism is a completely different concept that focuses on the affects of colonialism, the significant social and cultural transformations the colonised countries went through after the end of imperialism and also the evolution of neo-colonialism. Postcolonialism, as a theory, has nothing to do with environment. The environmental concerns don't figure in postcolonial studies. Therefore, ecocriticism and postcolonialism are two completely different theories with two different sets of principles and ideals. And therefore, the question arises how these two different concepts coexist and work together to give a new perspective to the deep connection between literature and environment. There exists a deep-rooted connection between Postcolonialism and ecocriticism, that needs to be studied and explored further. The colonizers shamelessly exploited both the natural resources as well as the human resources of their colonies. The colonizers surely took away the religion, culture, tradition, language and even the very identity of the indigenous people of the country. And imposed upon them, their own tradition, religion and culture. However, they were not contented with that. They took interest in the natural resources available in the countries they dominated. Once that area got explored, they started exploiting and extracting precious rocks and materials and ship the same to their own countries. This exploitation of the natural resources of the colonies exerted a disastrous effect on the life and livelihood of the indigenous people of that country. The colonizers were least bothered about the environmental degradation they caused and its serious repercussions on the lives of the natives. They were only focused on the profit they made by recklessly exploiting the vast natural resources of the colonies they ruled. The colonizers completely devastated and transformed the social and cultural life of the indigenous people of the country, along with their environment. They shamelessly exploited and looted the vast riches of their colonies and converted them into barren, deserted lands. As Edward Said rightly states in his book *Culture and Imperialism*:

Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored...

Thus, Postcolonialism and ecocriticism are very much connected with each other, since colonialism significantly affected the lives and culture of the native people of their colonies through their tyranny, cruelty and ruthless exploitation of the natural resources of that country. In the aftermath of colonialism, these native people of the colonies found themselves in a precarious situation, where they felt a sense of rootlessness. They were forced to renounce their culture, tradition and even their native tongue, and embrace an alien culture, religion and language. The hapless, wretched condition of the human society, left after the end of imperialism got reflected in the surrounding environment as well.

Time and again Nature has figured prominently in Australian literature. As Charlotte Wood rightly puts it in his article, "A Place on Earth: Nature writing in Australia", "Australian fictionalists [a new word for me!] have always unselfconsciously written of the natural world". There is an abundance of natural beauty and mysticism in Australian fictional canon. From Henry Kendall to Judith Wright, Australian poets have glorified and upheld the natural diversity of the country in their beautiful verse. Alec Derwent Hope is one of those few Australian poets who has tried to portray the wretched condition of his country in the aftermath of colonialism through a very grim and harrowing image of the physical world of Australia. The poem, *Australia* portrays the country as "A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey". At the very outset of the poem, Hope makes it pretty clear that his native country, Australia is a nation of trees, but at the same time, it is dull, lustreless and a barren land. Australia offers great diversity in its flora and fauna. The country has a great abundance of natural resources. And not only that, the country is also very well known for its great diversity of physical features. Huge mountains, forests, highlands, deserts – all account for the distinct geographical features of the country. However, the poet here takes a sarcastic stance and vividly portrays the country as a land of hopelessness:

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

For Hope, Australia is just like an aged woman who has lost the ability to reproduce. Although her breasts are tender, but her womb is completely dry. Hope considers Australia to be an empty piece of land, that has nothing to offer to anyone. The whole country is just like a barren inhospitable desert that has lost its power of creation. The natural decadence of Australia is actually symbolic of the pathetic condition of the Australian aboriginals, who have lost their long history and tradition. The land is barren just like its people:

The river of her immense stupidity
Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive',
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

The rivers that flow in this country are immensely stupid, i.e., the people who inhabit this place are avowedly stupid and monotonous, because they have lost their connection to their past, they have lost their culture, their root and the power of creation. The native people of Australia have lost their long-held tradition and cultural richness because of colonization. They have lost their very identity because of the European invasion. Colonization has robbed them of their culture and tradition and left them as hopeless, monotonous beings who are merely surviving on this dying world. These people boast of not living a happy, contented and productive life, but rather of merely surviving. Colonialism has degraded the indigenous people of Australia to this harrowing state, where they have lost the very essence of life. And the diverse physical features of the country, instead of adding vibrancy and lustre to young nation, drains her vitality:

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,

Each drains her, A vast parasite robber-state
Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Colonialism has degraded the country to the state of a parasite robber state, where the British came to colonize and rob its people of their lands and riches. They intended to completely destroy the cultural heritage of these native people. After destroying their connection to their very roots, the colonizers have left the country after implanting a parasite that will slowly destroy the country and its people.

Hope addresses the people of Australia as 'second hand Europeans', because these people have been robbed of their identity, their culture, history and tradition and are forced to embrace the language and culture of the colonizers. The country's long past, history, music, culture – are unknown to these people. These people are not familiar with the past of their own native land. Here the poet expresses his grave concern for these hopeless people. However, Hope does end the poem in a patriotic note, stating that, in spite of all these, there are some people like him who turn to their native land in quest of peace, motivation, inspiration and serenity.

Another important satiric poem of Hope, Standardization delineates the unmatched glory of the Natural World in contrast to the dying world of the modern, civilized people. The poem explores the futility of Modern-day technology. The poem is a scathing attack on the industrialization that has thrived in the modern world of humans. This industrialization, this progress of humans has taken these people away from the lap of their mother nature and have converted them into a bunch of apathetic, materialistic people. Hope here strongly criticizes the urbanization of society, the transformation of society at the advent of modernization, or more specifically, industrialization. He severely condemns the materialism and petty mindedness of the people of Australia, who claim to be modern, civilized people, but in reality, are uncultivated rustics, who prioritize sinful materialism over values, ethics and morals. This resentment of the poet towards the materialistic modern people of Australia, is very much evident in the poem, when he states:

With horror at the house not made with hands
And when from vacuum cleaners and tinned soup
.....
Where huge towns thrust up in synthetic stone
And films and sleek miraculous motor cars
And celluloid and rubber are unknown;

What Industrialization has achieved in his native country, is merely – the 'Standardization of the race:'. Modernization or urbanization of the society has undoubtedly destroyed the vast diversity and variety of Australia's flora and fauna. Like the colonizers, Urbanization has taken away the distinctiveness, the originality of the native Australians, and has significantly contributed towards severe environmental degradation. The poet mourns this social and moral degradation in the people of Australia who are so much engrossed in the world of modern technological innovations that they have forgotten their close relationship with nature. Modern technology has driven these people away from the safeguard of nature. These materialistic people have forgotten that nature once created them, they are

an inseparable part of nature. Amidst these techno savvy people, the poet imagines seeing nature brooding in the shade of her trees:

I see, stooping among her orchard trees,
The old, sound Earth, gathering her windfalls in,
Broad in the hams and stiffening at the knees,
Pause and I see her grave malicious grin.

The poet imagines nature as an aged woman who bitterly smiles at the progress of the modern people, who have forgotten her glory and now value most the inglorious and impermanent innovations of the modern world. Nature's glory is unmatched:

For there is no manufacture competes
With her in the mass production of shapes and things.
Over and over she gathers and repeats
The cast of a face, a million butterfly wings.

Here, the poet emphasizes the fact that Nature's ingenuity is matchless. Nothing, no modern huge machines can compete with the artistry and the craftsmanship of nature. Nature is supreme. The modern and civilized people of Australia have somehow forgotten this unparallel richness of nature and have, rather embraced the transitoriness of artificial machines. Industrialization was, of course introduced by the colonizers, the Britishers. Urbanization of the cities and the common people's blind dependence on the machines – are the legacies of European colonizers. They completely changed the face of Australia, by taking away its history, culture and tradition and by imposing their customs, manners and culture on the Australian aboriginals. As Hope states, these people are "Lost tribes" with "a lost language". The long history, the past of Australia has somehow consigned into oblivion because of modernization. The people of Australia have forgotten their roots, they have forgotten how once their mother nature took the pain of creating them.

She cannot recall how long ago she chose
The Streamlined hulls of fish, the snail's long eyes,
.....
The lashing seed that grows to a man again,
From whom by the same processes unfold
Unending generations of living men.

Hope sees nature as a supreme power who once created life on Earth. And just like man's Original sin, these people of Australia have repeated the same mistake by abandoning their mother nature, who created them, to embrace futile materialism:

Lost tribes in a lost language mutter in
His dreams: his science is tethered to their brains,
His guilt merely repeats Original sin.
Nothing can equal the majesty and grandeur of
nature.

However, this unparallel glory of the physical world, the nature remains unacknowledged by the native people of Australia, who live submerged in the ocean of modernization. These people have moved away from the care and nurturing of their creator, the mother nature, for the sake of modern technology. This deviation and degeneration in the people of Australia, owing to colonialism, have been portrayed

artistically and vividly in the poem, "Standardization". Through this poem, the poet has raised his concern for the environment as well as the people of his native country who have lost their connection with their long past, all because of colonialism. He has portrayed in this poem, how the native people of Australia have drifted away from their all-familiar natural world, and thereby has lost their cultural heritage, their social and cultural diversity and have been reduced to the status of ordinary, regular, lifeless people.

In a few of his other poems, Alec Derwent Hope has portrayed vividly the different facts of nature, its exploitation in the era of colonialism and its afterward degradation and also a harrowing image of decadence in the world of humans. In his poems, nature appears as a supreme being, the creator. Hope has imagined nature as the mother of the human-race, who once created humans and now smirks at the petty mindedness of the people.

In the poem, *The Death of a Bird*, Hope portrays a very contrasting image of nature. Unlike his other poems, where nature appears as a loving and caring mother, in this poem, nature is a ruthless annihilator of lives. In an elegiac tone, the poet here aesthetically portrays a bird's journey towards death. She flies with her companions, bearing in heart the strong desire to reach her destiny. But she soon realises death is imminent. Darkness descends, and as an annihilator, the nature devours her. The death of this tiny bird doesn't affect the Earth:

And darkness rises from the eastern valleys,
And the winds buffet her with their hungry breath,
And the great earth, with neither grief nor malice,
Receives the tiny burden of her death.

Here, in this poem, we get a contrasting image of nature as an annihilator, a destroyer of lives. The cruelty of nature has been highlighted in this poem.

In the poem, *Toast for a Golden Age*, the poet again satirises the ignoble materialism of the modern and civilized people of Australia. He addresses these people as 'objects of fun and resentment, hail-fellow gentlemen' and criticises them for wasting their lives in ignoble activities:

And here you are living happily ever after
And buying a round of drinks to prove that you are

....

All of your life, it was you who were asked to the party;

....

You slept like a top, you were fit and cheerful and hearty

And most of your troubles were solved by writing a cheque.

The poet here has highlighted the materialistic attitude of the modern, civilized people who think that life should be celebrated by drinking gin, and that money can solve each and every problem. These people lead a happy, contented life, without getting bothered by anything at all. Having fun is their prime motif in life. Values, morals – words like these hold no significance in their lives. They value only material possessions

and money. Everything else is just worthless for them. The poet celebrates this materialism of the people:

For tonight is an anniversary celebration
By all the beasts of modest intelligence
For the pensive ape who invented civilization
And lived on his wits at the rest of the world's expense.

The ape who once invented civilization is now sad at seeing this degradation in people. Because of his invention, the whole world is suffering today. According to the poet, civilization has brought nothing but pain and suffering to this world. The poet sarcastically calls for celebration. He states that today we should celebrate the petty mindedness of people, their materialism, because they have invented reason which has endowed upon them limitless power. Then the poet goes on describing how these people, who were blessed with rationality, goes on exploiting nature for their own benefit:

For the Earth, our mother, at last has found a master:

She was slow and kindly, she laughed and lay in the sun – Time strapped to his wrist, he made the old girl work faster, Stripping her naked and shouting to make her run. He chopped the mantle of pines from her beautiful shoulders He ripped her breasts for his vines, her belly for corn; And she smiled and grew green again and did as he told her, And trebled the bounty of her plenteous horn.

Human beings, with their power to reason, thought of themselves as the master of Earth. They thought they could do anything and everything. With their limitless power, they made the Earth run fast. They ripped her breasts for cultivation, and chopped off her hands for fruits. In spite of suffering so much, Nature never retorted. She did whatever the mighty men asked her to do. Men kept hurting her, but she continued smiling and continued to sacrifice herself for them. However, these mighty men have forgotten that nature is more powerful than them. Therefore, one day will come, when the children of these people will have to suffer endlessly because of their forefathers' activities:

So we wait and watch you, and feel the planet grow colder
The deserts get larger – it's no use making a fuss –
We wait for the day when Time, speaking over your shoulder
Remarks that the dog-in-the-manger has missed the bus.

After a few years, when the children of these people will suffer and think about what have they done wrong, they will then realize that they were fool, they never got the upper hand on nature. Nature was, is and always will be the most powerful, mightier being on Earth. This realization will come in near future, till then nature will calmly observe and perform whatever these men asks her to. The poem, here emphasizes the poet's grave concern for social and moral degradation of the people. He is concerned for the future of his country, which is at stake because of the unthoughtful activities of the materialistic people. The future generation will have to the dreadful repercussions of the unmindful and exploitative activities of these people.

Conclusion: As was stated earlier, the paper was attempt to study the poems of Alec Derwent Hope from a postcolonial and ecocritical perspective. In the aftermath of colonialism, the indigenous people of Australia found themselves in a precarious situation. The colonizers robbed them of their lands and resources, and reduced them to a state of hopeless, mundane, spineless, timid people, who live contented in merely surviving. On the one hand, the poet severely condemns this wretched condition and way of life of these modern and civilized people of Australia and on the other hand, he holds colonization as solely responsible for this social and moral degradation amidst these people. The British colonizers, who dominated Australia for more than 100 years, ruthlessly exploited the natural resources of the country and severely blighted the close and sacred relationship between

nature and these people. It was the colonizers, who disastrously exploited the natural resources of Australia and left them barren and deserted, not only of natural resources, but also of their history, culture, tradition and heritage. In the poetry of A D Hope, it becomes apparent that Colonialism significantly affects and exploits the physical world as well as the world of the humans. The poet's concern over the same got reflected in the four poems, I analysed in this paper. The poet has also expressed his concern over the modern people's assumed haughtiness, which leads them to believe that they can control and dominate nature as masters. However, there exists a sacred and deep relationship between humans and nature and the same should be reflected in literature to resolve the grave environmental issues and restore the pristine glory of nature in world of humans.

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