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## THE NECROTOMY OF ECOLOGY IN TORU DUTT'S 'OUR CASUARINA TREE' AND GIEVE PATEL'S 'ON KILLING A TREE'

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**Abstract:** *'In Wilderness is the preservation of the World'*. This is the innuendo given by Thoreau to save the world from the clutches of environmental degradation and a realistic portrayal is found in Gieve Patel's "On Killing A Tree" (1966). The poem taps on human conscience by exposing the extent of human despoilation of Nature. On the contrary Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" celebrates the majesty of the Casuarina Tree which is not only an entity of the wilderness but also a link between Dutt's past and present. This paper will critique the binaries i.e Man and Nature and also exhibit how both are interdependent. On one hand Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" recaptures the majesty of the big tree which has the strength to bear the hold of the creeper and also serves an abode to many other living entities, Patel's "On Killing a Tree" records in detail the ceremonial task of uprooting the tree and Man's meticulous task of killing it. However it goes without saying that both the poems talk about return to the unspoiled nature in order to restore lost simplicity and this paper will bring out mankind's refuge to the lap of nature for tranquillity as upheld by Wordsworth in his celebrated work "Lines Written A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, 1798"- 'Nature never did betray a Heart that loved Her'.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Environmental Degradation, Wilderness, Man and Nature

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### INTRODUCTION

*The groves were God's first temples. Ere man*

*Learned*

*To hew the shaft and lay the architrave*

*And spread the roof above them....*

*WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT*

Man and Nature share a very close relationship since time immemorial. Before there were shops of any kind and every meal was a sort of accidental picnic, Nature had served men and it was from this experimentation that men found which plants would provide them with food. The relationship of Man and Nature has always been an interesting area for study and in today's time the equation between man and nature is being analysed and reanalysed.

Econarrative is the art of narrating a tale keeping in view the relationship of Man and the Nature in which he lives. Econarrative is nothing but Environmental Storytelling. Econarrative is a broad arena through which the artist meticulously projects the different ways to treat ecology and its issues. With the entry of 'Econarrative' in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, Ursula K. Heise talks about the variety of ways through which Environmentalists have been talked about. Ecopoetics, Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism and Green Studies which are some of the areas of literature that have been gaining a lot of attention in today's time.

Ecocriticism is the word used in "*The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmass in Literary Ecology*". This book vividly talks about the ecological approach to literary studies. Econarrative is nothing but a call to man to connect with nature. Since a long time we have regarded Earth to be like a Goddess. If we look at Greek Mythology, there too we find Earth to be the ancestral mother of all life who like a mother protects and nurtures us. Man and Nature have always been dependent on one another but in today's time i.e. in the eve of Industrialization and Globalisation, the same hand that searched for food in nature

and sought help from it has an Axe to make room for himself. Literature has always been a mirror of the society and so literature could not remain aloof from this clash between Man and Wilderness. My paper is on this issue of ecological crisis as seen in the works of Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree' and Gieve Patel's 'On Killing A Tree'.

The concern for protecting Nature and Man's inhuman depletion is a matter of grave concern for people and writers too couldn't remain detached. Literature has its own way of bringing out the relationship of Man and Nature and so the term 'Ecocriticism' first made its way in William Reukert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". Ecocriticism enables the critic to examine the textualisations of the physical environment in literary discourse and develop an earth centred approach for studying Literature. It endeavours to read and re-read and find out how nature has been treated and also find out ways in which Ecological vision should be treated in a text. When talking about literature the contribution of Indian Literature to Econarratives cannot be overlooked. There are writers like Tagore, Ruskin Bond, R.K Narayan, Anita Desai in whose writing Nature has always played a dominant role.

In the study of Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" we find the tree as an epitome of Greatness serving an abode to many living beings that come and take refuge in its branches. Dutt expresses the might of the tree which can withstand the choking grip by the creepers and emerge more powerful. Dutt expresses her joy- "*My eyes delighted on its rest*". The tree has a charm of its own but Dutt however clears the air by explaining that it wasn't because of the majesty and might of the Giant like tree that she remembers it with fondness but the tree had been a silent witness to the poetess' childhood endeavours. The tree assumes itself to be like the invisible bond of connection drawing the poetess to her past where she had spent some of her happy days of blissful childhood. We must not forget that the Tree also appears to be a witness of the poetess' siblings memories who were no more. The very title of the poem

suggests the association of the tree not only as an entity of nature but as an entity of remembrance and belongingness. The tree was the only static element in the poetess' life whereas all other things had made a gradual transition and moved on in life. The poetess also writes- "*May love defend thee from Oblivion's Curse.*"

Everyday a good number of trees disappear from the face of Earth thus turning the Green Planet to a Dreary desert. On one hand where we see in Dutt's poem a celebration of the wilderness, Gieve Patel's '*On Killing A Tree*' is a sarcastic poem on man's indiscriminate destruction of trees. The poem conveys a very strong message to mankind and that is : Killing a tree is tantamount to the murder of a man. The poet himself was an environmentalist and he has given a realistic picture of man's attitude toward trees. Every word is carefully chosen by him like "*Bleeding Bark*", "*Leprous Hide*" and "*Anchoring Earth*" which paint a very strong visual image and portray the callousness of man killing a tree.

The poet has vividly described in intricate details of the process of felling a tree which was in his thoughts killing the tree. He tells that only cutting the branches or the stem was not enough to kill a tree. The branches and leaves will grow again. Man needs to cut out the root thus destroying the tree fully. The poem is like a reality check in today's time where the process of Industrialisation and Urbanisation has taken over the green patches of land and in place of lush meadows we find Concrete Jungles. The poem highlights a lot of morals. Firstly it displays the selfish and destructive nature of mankind. Second it also reflects on the symbol that the Tree is an emblem or symbol of mankind. It says that human life is not so easy to put an end to just like "*A Simple Jab of knife will not do it.*" If we cut our fingers or peel off the skin we will not die, to kill us the heart should be cut out. Third it also reflects a strong message that Mother Earth is not so easy to be destroyed.

On the simple reading we may feel that the poem talks about killing a tree but the poem is a conflict between Man and Nature. Trees are generous helpers and Nature is the best friend of mankind but the greed of human beings knows no bounds. Men kill trees thoughtlessly .R.M Shanmugam Chetiar has rightly quoted “Trees are felled for thousands of reasons, reasons are not sought to plant a tree.” Unlike mankind trees are forgiving in nature and they again rise and grow and protect mankind. Where in one hand we find Dutt fondly reminiscing her childhood days thinking about the Casuarina Tree where she had spent her blissful childhood playing with her siblings and friends and also watching the creepers, the birds or the Baboon taking refuge there but on the contrary Patel talks about the way a tree can be killed. Where on one hand we find in Dutt’s “Our Casuarina Tree” the tree as a link to the poetess’ roots while she was away from her homeland, on the contrary we find Patel talking about uprooting the tree completely in order to put an end to it. Thoreau too had believed in immersing himself to nature and bringing back the lost simplicity of mankind.

Patel’s poem derives its strength from the space that he creates between himself and how he perceives others. Patel belongs to the avant-garde grouping of artists based in Bombay and Baroda. He is one of those writers who subscribe themselves to Green Peace Movement. His poem thus give an expression to the anxiety and bitterness at man’s cruel deed to Nature.

This paper has tried to illuminate the tendencies of people of different walks of life towards Eco Criticism. Conscious global crisis and the dawn of modernisation has tapped on the inner consciousness of mankind to arise and awake to this problem and literary scholars around the world have shown concern regarding the conflict between man and nature. Psychologists believe that there are two types of opposite currents flowing in the human mind –Eros or the urge to live and Thanatos or the urge to kill or be killed.

People of the first type try to save everything from destruction while the second are fond of destroying. As a result a constant struggle is going on in this world.

*Thoreau* in his celebrated work *Walden or Life in the Woods* regarded nature not only as an object of beautification or an entity to write verse upon, he has rather believed that nature should remain aloof from the clutches of human hands and the true beauty of nature can only be enjoyed if it remains untouched and unprotected. Thoreau had realised the true essence of human life was not in accumulating wealth or to be bound by the modern advancements of science but true happiness according to him was living a Spartan life, uncorrupted by the greed or selfish desires of mankind. He has opined "In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World.". Thoreau has thus drawn mankind back to nature. A similar approach can be seen by Ralph Waldo Emerson who too has talked about the gradual drifting away of human beings from nature due to societal distractions and scientific advancement. In his "*Nature*" published in 1836 he has believed that in order to attain true happiness one needs to be united with Nature, enjoy its entities and celebrate its beauty.

If we carefully look at Ruskin Bond's "The Cherry Tree" we find the sheer joy and the pure innocent happiness of the narrator watching the tree grow which he had planted. The tree had fought against all odds and managed to grow into a tall tree. The joy of creation and the ecstasy of seeing it standing straight can be very well felt by the words - "*A small, tall cherry grown by me.*" Tagore too has worshipped Nature and felt it to be the driving source of energy. He has even elevated the position of nature to be synonymous with a Goddess and thus stated - "What is beautiful is beneficent; O Goddess Nature, in your beauteous world No harm can ever happen."

Ancient Indian civilization too dawned around the Sylvan surroundings of the *Tapobans* which were the dwellings of the hermits. They were solely dependent on trees for food, clothing and shelter and so they worshipped trees as the saviours and composed many hymns celebrating the grandeur of Nature. From the dawn of civilization we have seen Human beings worshipping the different elements of nature according to Indian mythology –Indra was the God of thunderbolt and Rain, Surya the sun god and Trees to have been worshipped. Tulsi, Banyan, Peepal are among some of the trees worshipped by the Hindus. Even today when the world is making room for skyscrapers and multiplexes there are certain communities who still worship nature and its forces. Many tribal communities worship nature and its beauty. To celebrate nature and its majesty Rabindranath Tagore too in 1928 stated the *Vriksharopan Utsav* as he realised the importance of man to take refuge in the lap of nature.

It seems that both Toru Dutt and Gieve Patel realized the importance of nature on mankind and thus composed consciously to awaken the inner dormant self of the human beings thus calling it for some action. On one side if we see Toru Dutt's direct invocation to extol the magnificence of the Casuarina Tree, Patel in his work "On Killing a Tree" presents the theme of violence to uphold the philosophy of non-violence. The whole process of killing a tree in such a violent manner imparts the lesson of non-violence. The poet depicts man's cruelty to arouse our love and sympathy for nature. The tree in Patel's poem teaches us a lesson to stand against all odds and withstand every impediments inflicted on us, just as the tree bears all the pain, we too should be tough like it. Kahlil Gibrain has rightly written -"Trees are poems that Earth writes upon the sky." So the poet Patel has also brought out the vitality of life which is possessed by human beings. The tree also feels pain and pulsates with life as we do.

While Toru Dutt has a pacifying approach and has fondly remembered her childhood spent under the shade of the Casuarina tree, Patel has negatively tried to establish a positive thought. So with the killing of trees he has established a strong message that we should start conserving our forests rather than cutting them down or else soon a time might come when we would have no air to breathe or no sky to look at. One of the greatest poets of English Literature William Wordsworth who has left behind a rich legacy to cherish has also realised the value of nature and thus has left no nooks and cranny untouched when describing the lofty nature. He was so well in his worship to nature that he achieved the position of being the poet of nature and secured a different place in the history of English Literature. He was the one to believe that man should love nature and the true joy of mankind is to return to the lap of mother earth as he has stated -“Nature never did betray a heart that loved her” in his most celebrated and revered work “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” 1798

Ecocriticism tends to incorporate in the term what we call us as our society the inclusion of all the objects of the ecosystem and to enhance an understanding and love for the ecology where we are living. The ecocritics have tried to therefore kindle the fire of compassion which is somewhere hidden in the human beings. Men have come forward to try and understand the delicate details of mother Earth and worship her and try to fathom the hidden mysteries of it.

### **CONCLUSION-**

Both the poems “Our Casuarina Tree” and “On Killing a Tree” pose a very strong influence on human minds and ultimately the society. The poems remind us of many such poems or writings centred around Nature and particularly around the trees. We remember the Laburnum tree in the poem “I Remember I Remember”, “My own True Family” by Ted Hughes, “The Death of the Flowers” by William Collen Bryant, “The Daffodils” by William Wordsworth, “The Cherry Tree” by Ruskin Bond and many

other similar poems .So the poems are golden gates through which we peep into our lost world of sweet and sad memories and feel the pleasure and pain.

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