

# Man's Creation Surplants God's Technology: An Ecocritical Reading of Selected Poems

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## Abstract

Literature often echoes manifold clashes related to man and environment. Such apprehensions on landscape and its exploitation, as a consequence of the multifaceted activities of man, gain colour through the multifarious genres of literatures, mainly poetry, which further facilitates ecological as well as cultural consciousness among the readers. Ecopoetry concentrates on the inevitability of equitable balance between man and nature. An anthropocentric perspective of the same assumes much significance in this contemporary epoch of rapid modernisation where the technologically advanced man destructs the natural environmental conditions. In the broader perspective of ecofeminism, over the years, Mother Earth has been subjected to multidimensional utilisation and exploitation at the hands of the scientifically driven man. This paper is organized from an eco-conscious perspective with the effective aid of concepts such as ecopoetics, ecocriticism and ecofeminism to make an eloquent appraisal of select poems across diverse cultures, with special reference to Ted Walter's *Spurned Goddess* and O.N.V Kurup's *Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham* translated as *A Requiem to Mother Earth*, among others.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism; Ecocriticism; Ecofeminism; Ecology; Ecopoetics.

## Introduction

In the contemporary scenario of continual natural disasters and climatic changes, it is imperative to delve deep into the literary discourses for an enhanced comprehension of 'nature'. What we apprehend of 'nature' from the legendary manuscripts coupled with unembellished historic substantiation of recurrent exploitation and disregard for nature and natural

resources may oblige an introspective reading of how man has conceived of agencies that are not human. The non-human agencies and man's constant interaction with them are steadily becoming the matter of deliberations that interest environmental enthusiasts, theorists and literary scholars across the world. In the light of large scale environmental catastrophes, species extinctions and identity altering advancements in science and technology, an anthropocentric world view is neither sustainable nor defensible. Escalating the intellectual inquest on 'nature' opens up a plethora of possibilities. The paper seeks to explore some of these possibilities vis-à-vis the non-human agencies in literary texts and human interaction with them.

Language plays a critical role in our understanding of nature and eloquently resonates the reverence and prominence that man attribute to nature and its ample resources. Hence it is imperative to evaluate, recreate and synchronise the balance of nature, man and culture; to help pave a pathway for an organic, sustainable and tranquil future on Earth. This paper attempts to respond to the figurative capacity of language in mediating our relationship with nature and the world around us by using the expedient perceptions of ecopoetics, ecocriticism as well as ecofeminism to study and escalate the ecological consciousness in select poems across diverse cultures, with special reference to 'the policeman poet' Ted Walter's acclaimed poem *Spurned Goddess* and the prominent Malayalam writer and poet O.N.V Kurup's scoloossally celebrated poem *Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham* translated into English language as *A Requiem to Mother Earth*.

The origin of the term, 'ecocriticism' can be traced back to the Greek words 'oikos' and 'kritis'. Cheryll Glotfelthy, the pioneering ecocritic in USA, defines ecocriticism in his seminal collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, co-edited with Harold Fromm as, "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" and involves "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*" (2000), the collection of essays by Laurence Coupe is often considered as having equal status in UK to that of Glotfelthy and Fromm in USA. "The publication of Ecocritical works began in the late 70s and during the mid-80s, collaborative projects came up. The MLA (Modern Language Association) conference on Ecocriticism lead to the Greening of Literary Studies hence eco criticism became prominent in the literary scenario" (Georgy 2).

Ecopoems are poems, with robust environmental prominence, emerged

as a consequence of direct knowledge and acquaintance of nature and the natural world. They frequently embellished the jeopardies of modern world by concentrating on the revolution from egologic to eco logic. The environmental studies theorist, William Rueckart put forward two ways to read poetry- First, the necessity to asks questions and second the inevitability to appreciate literature within an ecological imaginary. Nature-oriented poetry or poetry with ecological concerns had its primary exponents in Jonathan Skinner and Christopher Arigo. The word 'ecopoetics' was propagated by Jonathan Skinner through a journal by J. Scott Bryson titled, *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002). The emphasis was bestowed on therequisite to find equitability between the human and nature, to restore the human and nonhuman nature relationship". The most extensively read ecopoems include, Peter Abbs's *Earth Songs* (2002), Alice Oswald's *The Thunder Mutters* (2005), Neil Astley's *Earth Shattering: Eco poems* (2007), Jay Ramsay's *Soul of the Earth* (2011), and many others.

The title of the paper is a very significant line, "Man's Creation Surplants God's Technology" (lines 7-9), taken from the eco poem *Sunset on Portage* by the Canadian aboriginal poet George Kenny, which employs the technique of subversion in the usual association of God with creation and man with technology. The perception, that creation of man surplants the technology of god, becomes central to the theme of the poem. As a result of the creative subversion employed, the roles are reversed and as a consequence, man becomes the creator. The irony involved here is that man becomes both the creator and destroyer of his own future. The advancement accomplished by man is inferior to the one accomplished by environment. Consequently, it is high time that man cultivate the capability to recognize with the myriad forms of life to gaze beyond the utility angle. The word "surplant" is crucial to the reading of the poem. The natural landscape, wildlife and forestry are disrupted with the artificial advancement, resulting in a very materialistic society.

*Penitence*, published in the 1997 collection titled *A Normal Skin*, by well acclaimed environmentalist John Burnside explores the fundamental spiritual & ecological issues about the nature of living on earth. "The poem evokes a mood of guilt & penitence as it depicts the conflict between man & nature, epitomized by an accident that takes place as the poet drives through the woods in the dark and hits a deer. The poet effectively addresses the issue of road kill in the poem. Road ecology is a highly significant area of study, especially in the contemporary industrialized scenario where the ecological effects of roads results in noise pollution, air pollution, degradation of ecosystem and water pollution. It can also lead to habitat frag-

mentation & destruction”(Georgy 4). The insignificance and callousness of man and modernity towards the landscape and environment becomes a key concern in the poem.

The reading detects the ways in which the environment is depicted in select poems; the connection between the feminine and the landscape, their commodification and objectification, and the effect it has on the viewers, among other facets. Primarily referred to as the third wave of feminism, ‘ecofeminism’ as a movement, emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless the word ‘ecofeminism’ was first used in *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), by the French feminist Francoise D’Eaubonne and it became widespread only in the backdrop of numerous disputes and activities counter to ecological devastation, sparked-off primarily by frequent ecological catastrophes. To consider how gender and nature operate as social constructs in subverting the ‘androcentric’ approach of environmentalism, ecofeminism rests on the belief that environment is a feminist issue. Ecofeminists employ parallels concerning the subjugation of nature and the harassment of women as a method to accentuate the notion that both must be understood in order to suitably identify how they are connected. These parallels embrace but are not restricted to seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the custodians of culture and women as the custodians of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate landscape.

Ted Walter’s *The Spurned Goddess* can be considered as a quintessential specimen of poetry that echoes ecofeminist undertones. The title ‘The Spurned Goddess’ itself is of great importance. This title is employed as a figurative representation of nature with a negative connotation as the term ‘spurned’ is customarily deliberated as a word of contempt. Earth is personified by attributing the feminine traits and her glory and grandeur are celebrated, over the years, by many versatile poets like Wordsworth by the title ‘Mother Earth’. On the contrary, Ted Walter addresses nature not as ‘Mother Goddess’ but as the ‘Spurned Goddess’ thereby projecting man’s impertinence towards Mother Earth. “Let us consider Earth, explore the ache”, becomes a refrain throughout the poem as he tries to recognize with the “ache” that originates from the conflict of man and nature.

Ted Walter eloquently advocates that it took fifteen billion years to make “the Earth from star-stuff but rarely do man offer much reverence to the legacy and grandeur of Earth. Despite conserving environment in its purity and splendour, man exploits nature through manifold means thereby rescinding the natural resources, the forestry, landscape, causes destruc-



tion in the food chains and food webs which even lead to extinction of species. Such a transformation is irretrievable as we cannot fake a species. In a sense Ted Walter ridicules the hostile endeavours of the technologically driven modern civilization. He also raises the question “will our children learn to speak her name in hope, honour her return?” which is quite significant in the present-day ecological state. This poem serves as the poet’s dirge at the deplorable predicament of nature. It serves as a lament on the destruction of the environment. Ted Walter also exemplifies the insignificance of man when compared to the majesty and grandeur of Mother Earth. Ted Walter’s *Spurned Goddess* reminds the readers the well acclaimed poem *A Requiem to Mother Earth* by O.N.V.Kurup.

“This song I inscribe in my heart today is a requiem to you and to me!” (lines 8-9) articulates the Jnanpith Award winning poet and lyricist O.N.V. Kurup, in his widelycelebrated poem *Bhoomikooru Charamageetham* translated into English with the title *Requiem to Mother Earth*. This is yet another significant eco poem that can be easily subjected to an ecofeminist analysis. The title of the poem is very significant to two paramount explanations. Firstly, the association of the term ‘Mother’ with Earth whereby Earth gets personified as a departed mother, abused and abandoned by her sons. Secondly, due to the use of the word requiem which means a funeral song for Mother Earth. The verse “in the imminence of your death, may your soul rest in peace!” (lines 6-7) becomes a powerful refrain in the poem.

The poet persistently addresses Earth as “Mother!” throughout the poem. The story of Mother Earth is not different from the present day stories we hear about the mothers who give

birth to children who exploit their resources to their maximum to attain stability and later displays insolence and gradually abandon them without much care or concern for the poor souls. In his most renowned poem, *A Requiem to Mother Earth*, O.N.V. Kurup eloquently portrays the helplessness of a mother who “bore countless children who cannot live in amity!” (lines 25-26) who had to shed unseen silent tear witnessing her children eating one another. The poet addresses “Mother” Earth as the “favourite bride of the sun” (line 41) who has lost her nuptial apparel. This denotes her devastated state as a consequence of the brutal irreverent deeds of her children who clawed at her bare body and “feasted on the gushing blood! The rhythm of death resounds everywhere, as they swirl in their frenzied dance!” (lines 45-49).

Remarkably, the poet brings in traces of intertextuality with the “story of the

Young Greek who unwittingly married his mother" (lines 50-51) and presents "the children of the Mother who strip her naked" (lines 52-53) as a subversion of the old story. Furthermore the mention of the wheels of the chariot of life reminds the readers of the chariot of death that Emily Dickinson has portrayed in her poem, *Because I Could Not Stop for Death*. There appears repeated personifications of nature throughout the poem. The phrases such as "theeyes of the blazing sun" (line 60), "June clouds hunt for drinking water" (line 62), "Decembernights hunt for cold", (line 63) "April dawns hunt for a tiny flower" (line 64), "sylvan rivers hunt for swirling currents(line 65)" and others exemplify the fact that "the rhythm of creation is shattered" (line 66) due to the continual reckless and ruthless interference of man and modernity.

In the course of the poem, O.N.V. articulates that he has always marvelled at her "magic of catching an infant sun in a dew-drop" (lines 81-83). He continues to acknowledge the virtues of his devoted Mother quite eloquently. "Mother! I see you in myriad forms" (line 93) he exclaims and explains how she deck the trees with verdant hues, how she scare him with the screeching of the owl, how she comfort him with the cuckoo's song, how she dips the dusks in gold, how she carries the eventide and disappear into the woods, how she returns with the dawn on her shoulders, how she wakes him up and feeds him the nectar of poetry. "I know all this, you fill in me, O Mother! What remains immortal in me are your memories!" (lines 117-119) exclaims the poet. Gradually he describe the present condition of the poor lady brutally abused by her sons. Mother Earth is portrayed as a "trudge along the solar highway an outcast with tonsured head shouldering the bundle of shame" (lines 127-129).

The poet concludes by affirming that "Mother Earth, not yet dead! This is your requiem! This song I inscribe in my heart today is a requiem to you and to me" (lines 135-138). The arresting verse "I won't be here to moisten your dead lips with my tears, to mourn your death" (lines 139-141) is very significant as it exemplifies the symbiotic relationship between man and nature. It is high time for man to have an epiphany regarding the ultimate truth of human existence- without nature there is no possible existence for man. By causing destruction the natural resources and the various flora and fauna, man is digging his own grave. The universal message ingrained in those evocative lines of poetry epitomizes the poet's vision of equitability. The concluding part "O Mother Earth, not yet dead, in the imminence of your death, May your soul rest in peace! in eternal peace!" (lines 144-147) caution the readers of the impending catastrophe that is soon to cause the extermination of man..

These evocative eco-poem are poignant illustrations of merciless commodification and vicious objectification of Mother Earth in the postmodern era. Such ruthless exploitation of the landscape, obliteration of wildlife and attenuation of forest cover may result in radical penalties that comprises climate change, scarcity of water, depletion of natural resources and many more ecological perils that pose risk to both man and Earth to the extent of the complete eradication of life on Earth. Man must learn not just to protect and conserve but also to respect the Mother Earth.

## Conclusion

To foster an ecological consciousness, a perception of our spiritual, cultural and ecological dimensions of traditions and practices, is critical. The analysis of the proficiency with which the literary theorists respond to the ecological dilapidation and its material effects endowed in literature can aid us realize how aspects like race, gender and caste facilitate in the interfaces between humans and the natural world. On a close reading, the selected poems for analysis render a reiteration of the existing anthropocentric beliefs and as a consequence there develops a questioning stand which pronounces that the progress attained by man is always secondary to the one attained by nature. Therefore, it is high time that man develop the ability to identify with all forms of life to look beyond the utility angle. It is highly important to preserve nature and its resources for maintaining peace and harmony for the successful existence of man on Earth.

As it is the obligation and responsibility of each and every child to protect and respect Mother Earth who has bestowed her myriad boons upon her selfish children, quite selflessly, it is reasonably imperative to cultivate as well as spread ecological consciousness even among the grassroot levels of the society irrespective of class, creed or gender. Spasmodic collaborative efforts must be made to perceive and perform some effective solution to the detrimental environmental calamities and the challenging ecological problems. The 'go green' movement must be promoted with a vision of equitability and safe future. A precise rootedness in the concepts and purpose of human existence can benefit us in piloting a future of ecological sustainability and harmony. Henceforth, there ought to be a communal pursuit for paradigms, pathways, frameworks and visions built of an existing heritage of ideas, world views and cultures anchored on practices-old and new.

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