

## Amit Garg's Two Tales an Ecocritical Study

**submitted by:** *Debasis Panda, Asst. Professor in Raajdhani Engineering  
College, Bhubaneswar*

*Ria Pujhari, Asst. Professor in Aryan Institute of Engineering and Technology, Bhubaneswar  
Lopamudra Praharaj, Asst. Professor in NM Institute of Engineering and Technology, Bhubaneswar  
Priyadarsini Das, Asst. Professor in Capital Engineering College, Bhubaneswar*

### **Abstract:**

*Ecocritical study is a theory which analyses any literary writing that illustrates ecological concerns and scrutinizes the different ways literature nurtures the subject of nature. This paper is a work on children's literature where the author makes the readers aware about the worth of natural resources and ways to preserve it. Childhood is the most influencing period of human life so literature for children has a crucial role in formation of the psychological and intellectual expansion of the youngsters, the future inhabitant. Now a day, authors have focused on green revolution and their work have left a mark, creating awareness among children towards preservation and protection of environment. The present paper makes an effort to analyze Garg's stories for children that are abounding with environmental wisdom. Through children a genuine awareness can be promoted for the upcoming generation regarding the present depletion of our bionetwork and environment and ways to prevent the dangerous consequences.*

**Keywords:** *Bionetwork, Ecosystem, Environment, Ecocritical, Two Tales*

The present era is Digitalization; people have little thought to spare with nature. Children's no more enjoys their childhood roaming through the green field, playing games with physical labor, sowing seeds, reaping corns, collecting beans, roaming in the woods and swimming in rivers, nourishing plants and trees, tending animals, breathing fresh air and learning the value of nature. Today's children are presented with fake bliss with plastic toys, video games, cartoon channels, animations etc. We neglect nature which is our home and which is very much necessary for our very existence on earth. Materialistic attitude of man leads him to exploit nature for the best use of mankind. As a result, environment is getting polluted; polar ice is getting melted; animals are being endangered; water level of seas are on the rise; natural disasters are frequent now claiming thousands of lives; new names of diseases are coming to light etc. Hence the importance of ecocriticism is so much today.

Ecocriticism is a conceptual tool of analyzing literature from an environmentalist's view point. According to Cheryll Glotfelty ecocriticism is the "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (*The Ecocriticism Reader* xviii). It "takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature." (Glotfelty xix) Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism as a study of "the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis." [*The Environmental Imagination*, 430] Ecocriticism is worldwide emergent movement coined by William Rueckert in 1978 and popularized by Cheryll Glotfelty in 1990s. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. 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. Our global crisis is not because how ecosystems function. It is because how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature and to reform our atrocities with nature. In ecology, man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric as opposed to bio-centric vision, and his compulsion to conquer, harmonize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing. Anthropocentric - assumes the primacy of humans, who sentimentalise or dominate the environment. Bio-centric on the other hand, decenters humanities importance exploring the complex interrelationships between the human and the nonhuman. Ecocritics not only interpret the meaning of nature writing texts. They also use those texts as a context for analyzing the ideology and practices of our society in relationship to nature. Often, the result is a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world. "Ecocritics, to do something genuinely meaningful, must offer readers a broader, deeper, and more explicit explanation of how and what environmental literature communicates than the writers themselves, immersed in their particularized narratives, can offer crucial to the Ecocritical process of pulling things (ideas, texts, authors) together and putting them in perspective is our awareness of who and where we are. Our awareness, literally, of where we stand in the world and why we're writing."-says Scott Slovic. (*Going Away to Think: Engagement Retreat and Ecocritical Responsibility* 27) But ecocriticism does not simply deal with environmental disorder as represented in literature. An ecocritic is not, after all, an ecologist; ecocriticism seeks to explore the interconnection between man and nature. The harmonious relationship between human and the nonhuman will build an eco-wisdom among the readers. In a sense, ecocriticism is a process of

self-realization of who we are, where we stand, how we should treat our habitat, how we should behave with the other organisms etc. In short, Ecocriticism is literary criticism that arises from and is oriented towards a concern with human and nonhuman interaction and interrelationship.

Ecology has two shades, the shallow, and the deep ecology. Shallow ecology is essentially anthropocentric, which believes that the whole purpose of nature is to serve mankind and humans are the masters of nature; man being the only literary creature thinks himself superior over the others. It also advocates systematic usages of natural resources like coal, gas, forests, oil, etc. for a sustainable future. But deep ecology challenges this conservation mode and advocates preservation of nature to keep it in its original form without any interference of man as nature has its own right to survive. All organisms on this earth have their own intrinsic values and no one is the master of anybody. This realization will give equal rights to every organism maintaining a balance in the eco-system. Ecocriticism gives emphasis on this eco-consciousness removing the ego-consciousness of man. The present environmental crisis is a bi-product of human culture. It is not caused by how the ecosystem functions; but how our ethical system functions; how we behave with Mother Nature etc. Ecocriticism builds this awareness among man.

So ecocriticism reminds us that our environment is at margins. Life on earth is at stake. If we want to make changes to our anthropocentric vision we have to learn how to value nature since our childhood. Otherwise, she (nature) will take her retribution. Time has come to revalue nature for our very survival. This attitude should be spread among the children also for a sustainable future. Children's literature is amusing, interesting, imaginative and illuminative. Picture books serve as an effective tool to promote environmental literacy. They breathe life into concepts that are perceived to be dead in the textbooks. Through the use of related pictures in books, children of all ages are able to learn about the many facets of their environment and better understand the inter-relatedness of their lives with their surroundings. Further, they give words and pictures to help the children think about issues and situations along with providing stories. Through story, children's literature becomes powerful mode of shaping the mindset of children as they can relate their practical experience of life to literature. Herein lays the importance of ecocriticism and children's literature plays an important role in this respect. In India Ecocritical perspectives are found in children's literature like R.N. Tagore's *Postmaster*, Ruskin Bond's *The Cherry Tree*, *No Room for Leopard* and many other stories the writers show their concern for nature due to human atrocities. Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Pather Panchali*-*Song of the Road*, *Aparajito*-*the Unvanquished*, *Chander*

*Pahar-Mountain of the Moon, Sundarbone Sat Bachar-Seven Years in Sundarban* etc., where the novelist deals with the never falling bond between man and nature. Amit Garg's tales are best examples of building an eco-consciousness among children.

Garg's *The Greatest Treasures* is a beautiful example of ecocriticism in literature. The writer symbolically represents natural elements as the greatest treasure for mankind. The story starts with Peter finding a treasure map which encourages him to set out for a trip for treasure hunt. He walked alone a long way till he reached a forest. He was afraid of the dense and dark forest- a symbol of a mysterious place full of dangers and threat. But fortunately enough, he finds a lion as his friend. The lion agreed to join Peter and together they made it through despite the threat of death. The lion here symbolizes the human attributes of courage that is essential for overcoming the huddles of life.

They then reached the mountain where they found as their friend an eagle that is known for its excellent vision with which it can alert us of impending danger. The mountain being tall and craggy, the lion slipped but saved by Peter from falling. The eagle also had a sharp vision on every step they took. So the treasure hunt went on smoothly in a collaborative effort of all the three creatures.

Next they reached the valley where they met 'Sheep' whose wool we use to make shawl to keep us warm in winter. The valley was extremely uncomfortable as the cold wind swept the endless meadow. The landscape study which is the true spirit of ecocriticism can be perceived here by the readers. However, the sheep agreed to join their treasure hunt; kept them warm and cozy as they huddled against it. Here the fur producing sheep is a symbol of man's dependence on it during winter season.

After that the four creatures reached a desert, the warmest part of the earth. There they met 'Camel' the ship of the desert who agreed to help them cross the sandy track and join the treasure search. Although the desert was vast, they could overcome the huddle as the camel carried Peter, Lion and Sheep safely across with the eagle enjoying the spectacle from the sky.

*Camel began galloping and everybody cheered with excitement. Crossing the desert on Camel's back was thrilling. (The Greatest Treasure)* The writer here artfully hints how we cannot go without camel in the desert region because of this animal's special ability to go without water for a long time and its ability to carry loads in extremely hot condition.

The five then came across the ocean. There they met Turtle who promised them to help cross the ocean and readily joined the treasure hunt. Peter, Lion,

Eagle, Sheep and Camel had to wade through the rough waves that almost drowned the party, but it was the turtle that skillfully transported them across the huge water body. The tortoise here functions like a ship which carried them safe to their destination. The amphibian is a link between the land and the water.

Finally, they met Owl on the other side of the ocean. The nocturnal bird that is known for his ancient wisdom congratulated them, as they have found the real treasure. When they others exclaimed in surprise, the owl made prompt reply- *Together you have passed the forest, climbed the mountains, dared the valley, braved the desert, and crossed the ocean. You would never have done it without one another (The Greatest Treasure)*. Being surprised, they all looked at each other and realized that Owl was right – they had found friendship which indeed, is the greatest treasure ever they had found. The story teller here advocates the need for a bond between the human and the non human world. Every animal including a child has to play their role for the treasure hunt. The friendship between man and animal is highly symbolic as it tells of the hard reality of human beings who can never ignore the necessity of every organism for a sustainable development.

Another story by Garg taken for study here is *Rosa Goes to the City*. The story is a vehement protest against anthropocentric attitude of man who likes to tame wild animal for their mere pleasure. The city people used to visit a zoo; took pleasure of the baby elephant, Rosa who galloped a dozen bananas in one go. The zoo keeper, no doubt, loved and cared for little Rosa in every possible way, but Rosa missed the company of other elephants. In fact, it is her instinct for which she feels an irresistible pull towards the forest for a free life.

So one day, after feeding Rosa, when the keeper forgot to lock the door of her cage, she was out of the zoo. First, she happens to meet an ice cream vendor who was standing by the roadside. He runs away as the elephant approaches his trade box. The curious little Rosa struck her trunk into the icebox to have a taste of something cold, sweet and delicious that she simply gulped down.

Rosa then kept moving about searching for her friends. Finally, inside a shop, she saw a herd of elephants though on a television screen. She thought and marched into the TV shop. Everybody inside the shop ran out, leaving her alone. Rosa tried talking to the elephants on the TV screen, but they didn't reply. Confused and disappointed, she walked out. Back on the street, she saw a coconut-seller, selling coconuts. "Wow, I've found a ball! It's play time now!" she cried and kicked a coconut high into the air. It flew across the road and landed right beside a boy playing in the park. Rosa ran across the road, determined to get her coconut-ball. Cars screeched, buses honked, and drivers

began to yell at each other. Rosa had created a traffic jam! The traffic police moved in to take control. The zoo was informed.

Rosa now did not pay any attention hue and cry around her; she simply ran into the park where she stopped in front of the little boy smiling at her. She giggled and patted the elephant. Rosa felt flattered and trumpeted back with excitement at her newfound friend. By now, the zookeeper having reached the park, saw Rosa in the open space and understood that she would never be happy in the confinement of a zoo. Garg here provides us a solution to this problem through his writing. When we see that the zoo had transferred Rosa to a protected forest, away from the din and bustle of city, where many other elephants roamed freely, she grew up very happily as she got her desired friends. Now, instead of watching Rosa behind bars in a cramped cage, visitors could see her among lot of trees, still gulping down dozens of bananas making others merry with her fun. The message here is that if we do not disturb natural elements they would never harm us. Rather they might prove to be a source of perennial joy.

The story writer here is very critical of human culture of confining animals for mere sport or domestication. The poor animals are deprived of their rights to roam through the forest, to grow freely and to lead a normal life. They break the barrier when they get a chance and thereby make themselves free from human intervention to cage them in the zoo. Someone's pleasure should not be other's woe. The message is everybody has the right to survive in their own way; so live and let live.

So the two children's stories remind us of Barry Commoner's first law of ecology that everything is connected to everything. Nothing in this earth is superior or inferior to others. Nature is a complete whole with man and animals having their role alike. There is a relation between the human and the non-human world having interconnection. Nature is a systematic network where every organism has to play their part for their very survival. Nature is not a mere setting of human existence on earth. It is the real treasure for our survival if we take good care of her. The focus here is not on class, sex, economy, gender as we find in other critical text. It is on the outdoor environment like mountain, valley, desert, ocean and the like which form the very basis of ecocriticism. The world is now under a great threat of environmental degradation. If children learn to value nature, they would better know how to protect the pristine beauty of nature. During their elementary education they learn such stories in school. Mothers also take help of lullaby to make them sleep. They like to hear from parents or grandparents or their teachers such interesting stories where physical environment plays an important role. Thus literature may serve the purpose of environmental education also. Children must be made aware of the new

challenges our mother earth is facing today. Child is the father of man; so if the children learn something from literature about revaluing nature, they will be the eco-citizens. Then it would certainly be beneficial for a healthy future for mankind. But if we cannot build an earth centered approach from the very beginning, it would cast havoc for mankind. Too much dependence on technology is odd. The children need vast blue sky to enlarge their creative vision and imaginative spirit. Nature is the real treasure which we should take best care of.

**References:**

- Buell Lawrence, *The Environmental Imagination*, Harvard University Press, 1995, Print.
- Garg, Amit. *Rosa Goes to the City*, © 2011 Book Box. [www.bookbox.com.web.25.07.2016](http://www.bookbox.com.web.25.07.2016)
- -. *The Greatest Treasure*, © 2011 Book Box. [www.bookbox.com.web.25.07.2016](http://www.bookbox.com.web.25.07.2016)
- Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. 1996th ed. Chicago: University of Georgia Press, 1996. Print.
- Greenaway, Betty. "Ecology and the Child." *Children's literature Quarterly* 19.41 Apr. (1995)
- Platt, Kamala. "Environmental Justice Children's Literature: Depicting, Defending and Celebrating Trees and Birds, colors and People" in *Wild Thing: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism*.