

## The Continuity of Culture in the Entropy of Civilization

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### Abstract

The article primarily focuses on the perspectives of culture, entropy, and environment. Each of these perspectives draws on tumultuous events in the course of analysis. The thought structure, in general, can be that of the radical shift from an agrarian culture to industrialism but predominantly the question comes down to if Markandaya's characters were ready to take the new road? Adopting the ecocritical approach the article interrogates Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, showing, among other things, the workings of entropy in various layers.

**Keywords:** Culture, Entropy, Civilization, Ecocritical approach, Nature, Industrialism.

### Introduction

In *The Green Studies Reader*, Laurence Coupe argues that nature is one of the most complex words in the language. He goes on to say that green studies are about the recognition of how we relate to nature (cited in Soper, 2000). This article reviews the various difficulties that have been encountered in the development of ecocritical theory. It identifies the tension between the nature-endorsing and the nature-skeptical approaches. These two approaches take different approaches to describe the natural world and its practices. The former is focused on the recording of natural processes and landscapes at face value, while the latter is on the questions that surround the use of "nature" in social paradigms.

In many cases, nature is not given much importance by critics when it comes to describing the plot of a novel. However, it can be utilized in the creation of atmosphere by describing the inner world of characters. One of the questions that author Cheryll Glotfelty asked the reader in her

book was what role the setting of the novel plays in the plot (cited in Glotfelty & Harold, 1996). An ecocritic acknowledges the significant role that setting plays in the creation of various elements of a story. Without denying the importance of nature in a work of literature, he or she also places a special emphasis on its effects on human life. This article aims to introduce the various readings and interpretations of Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (2009) and then provide an ecocritical angle to the novel by showing the workings of entropy in various layers. It also aims to engage other theoretical perspectives, such as Marxism and feminism.

### **Nature-Culture Continuum**

During the nineteen nineties, ecocriticism responded to the popular perception of an environmental crisis by re-asserting the importance of nature. This movement was also formed in response to the 'anti-nature' discourses of Enlightenment rationality that sought to destroy the natural world. In response to the place of ecocriticism in academic literature, the movement responded by reasserting the importance of nature. This response took various forms, including the re-evaluation of natural spaces, as well as the re-evaluation of nature writing as a neglected form of writing. The movement also took on the importance of American transcendentalism and Romanticism (Arnheim, 1971; Becket & Terry, 2007). That being the case, ecocriticism has arrived at what was an inevitable encounter with the question "what is nature?" The main criticism that has emerged during the second phase of ecocriticism is that those who promote the idealization of nature have been guilty of maintaining the dualistic distinction between culture and nature. The more recent ecocritics have argued that the link between nature and culture is complex. They believe that the relationship between nature and culture is inextricably linked to political and social discourse. The central idea of their argument is that culture and nature exist in a dialectical relationship.

Despite the seemingly promising promise of ecological science, there have been arguments on the ultimate impossibility of answering the question "what is nature?" is still a matter for humans to take responsibility for. This is because the social practices that shape our relationship with nature and the discourses that we use about it are still bound by the principles of collective responsibility. In *What is Nature*, Soper (1995) presents a different theoretical position on nature. She argues that we can only understand it through the prism of human paradigms

and constructions, while she also states that there is an extra-discursive reality of nature. She additionally claims that we should additionally be aware of nature which is not a cultural formation. The other main concern for Soper is the concept of nature, which she claims has been drawn through the multiple cultural and social boundaries that have been established in the relationship between humans and nature. Soper brings the notion of new humanities, which aims to maintain the integrity of our culture while still being sensitive to the constraints of the natural world (1995).

The term "ecology" was derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *logos*, which mean "place to live," and study. It is a study of the relationship between the environment and living organisms. Ecology is a field of study that focuses on the relationship between the environment and living organisms. According to Ernest Haeckel, a German biologist, it means the relationship between an animal's environment and its organic and inorganic environment. According to Eugene Odum, an environmental scientist, ecology is a study of the relationship between the environment and organisms (cited in Goldman & Rachel, 2000). R. Mishra, an Indian ecologist, defines ecology as a study of the interactions between various factors and forms. The relationship between humans and the environment has been disrupted by the rise of industrialization and the scientific revolution. This has led to the formation of various theories and studies aimed at addressing environmental problems. Arne Nass came up with the concepts of deep ecology and ecosophy in 1972. He argued that humans are incapable of separating themselves from nature due to their intrinsic value (D'Eaubonne, 1999; Warren, 2000).

While ecosophy draws light on the prominence of equilibrium between nature and humans, Shallow Ecology is rather anthropocentric and Ecological Marxism calls for restructuring the consumption and production patterns of humans. In *New Positional Ecology*, Michael Goldman and Michael Schurman argue that the concept of locality-based studies is important for understanding people's interactions with the environment. Theodore Roszak (1993) used neologism to study the relationship between humans and the natural world in his book *The Voice of the Earth*. William Rueckert is believed to have coined the term Ecocriticism in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Rueckert's (1978) definition of ecocriticism is used to describe a critical practice that aims to raise awareness about the environment. Harold Fromm and Cheryll Glotfelty's 1996 book *The Eco-*

*Criticism Reader* helped in establishing the concept of ecocriticism as a literary theory. In his introduction, he defined ecocriticism as a study of the relationship between the physical environment and literature. Buell's *Writing for Endangered World* (2001) helped establish the ecocriticism discipline as a literary discipline. Buell's other book on *Environmental Imagination* (1995) highlighted Thoreau's concern for nature. Thoreau was in search of an alternative natural lifestyle and his writings reflect the same.

Masanobu Fukuoka's 1975 book, *One Straw Revolution*, explores the link between philosophy, agriculture, and literature. Rachel Carson's 1963 book, *Silent Spring*, which many critics consider to be a critical introduction to ecocriticism, discusses the harmful effects of pesticides on birds and nature. Bate's *The Song of the Earth* has drawn light on factors such as colonialism and deforestation that have paved the way for the ruination of nature. Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* defined the theory as a field of critical analysis that aims to study the relationship between the non-human and the human. Garrard goes on to say that ecocriticism as a theory essentially critiques the inherent values of humans (1994). Added to this, Garrard (1994) states that this branch seeks to develop the insights of social and environmental activists and other critical thinkers, seeking the synthesis of environmental and social concerns.

In his monumental work, *Writing the Environment*, Richard Kerridge (1998) defines ecocriticism as a process of analyzing and critically examining texts and ideas related to the environment. It aims to see how these ideas and concepts can be used as responses to the environmental crisis. The ecological crises have led to the birth of a new theory called ecofeminism. Ecofeminism as a discipline combines and renders thoughts to feminism and environmentalism. While ecology studies the relationship between organisms and their environment. Ecofeminism is more focused on the need to conserve the environment and prevent its exploitation by humans (Plumwood, 1986). Feminism has emerged as a broad field of study that focuses on gender inequality and sexual and political relations. It also studies the exploitation of nature. This is the main reason why environmentalists and feminists study the issue. Through their studies, both feminists and ecocritics seek to find out what exactly is the root cause of the degradation of nature and women (Mies & Vandana, 1993). They believe that the dominant gender is responsible for this. The goal of both movements is to break the link between men and women. Through a variety of academic and activist programmes,

ecofeminism has emerged as a movement that aims to address the environmental crisis (Parsapoor, 2015). It is a response to the industrialization and market culture that has affected the environment. The concerns of women about the environment have been acknowledged in various cultures around the world. D'Eaubonne's goal was to call attention to the importance of women's involvement in preserving the environment. She also established ecofeminism as a movement that involves women participating in various activities aimed at protecting the environment (Patil, 2020).

The term ecofeminism has raised a lot of questions regarding the relationship between feminism and ecology. For instance, how are the two disciplines brought together under one term? According to the theory of ecofeminism, the relationship between women and nature is complex. The first empirical claim to address the effects of environmental degradation on women is that they are the victims of it. According to Ecofeminists, these women are most affected by the economic and political structures that prevent them from attaining full economic power (Plumwood, 1986; Mies & Vandana, 1993; Parsapoor, 2015; Patil, 2020). The degradation of the environment has affected women in various parts of the world. Most of the time, women from Eastern and third world countries are involved in domestic work due to their closeness to nature and their dependence on it for food, water, and fuel. These women are also caretakers and nurturers. Deforestation has a direct impact on women, as it makes them travel long distances to collect wood and fuel. Women laborers are less paid than men when it comes to working. Also, due to the advent of commercial agriculture, many women have lost their livelihood. According to Shiva (2010), the use of technology has robbed farmers and peasants of their means of livelihood. This is an example of how technology can contribute to underdevelopment. Rachel Carson stated that the use of synthetic chemicals and pesticides has detrimental effects on both humans and nature. She also stated that the toxic chemicals are being passed from mother to child. The FDA has also confirmed that traces of these chemicals are found in milk.

The connection between nature and women is an epistemological claim. According to Vandana Shiva, women are mainly engaged in farming and are committed to sustainable agriculture. In addition to being able to produce more diverse crops, women also tend to have more plant diversity than scientists are aware of (Shiva, 2012). For centuries, women have been contributing to the conservation of soil fertility and resources.

However, due to the introduction of biotechnology, industrial agriculture, and hybridization, their knowledge of agriculture has been replaced by that of corporate market participants. According to Shiva, studies by the Navadanya suggest that women are more capable of producing more nutritious food and reducing the use of chemical fertilizers than industrial farms. Through their participation in farming, women can support the sustainable development of food and soil fertility. They also contribute to the production of fuel and food by using biomass. Unfortunately, despite their contributions, they are rarely acknowledged in terms of wages.

The setting is a critical component of ecocriticism, which is unlike other methodologies. It involves analyzing the various factors that influence the actions that are taken. Setting can be influenced by time, place, and other factors. In addition, Christian (2005) states that everything is connected to the other through the various elements of the setting. This concept is important since there are bound to be strong ties between the natural and the cultural artifacts in a story. Kate Soper, an eco-philosopher, claims that the concept of nature is presented in various ways in environmental discourse. She defines nature as a metaphysical concept that humans use to think about their differences and specificity (1995). Nature is also a realist concept that refers to the various structures and processes that are constantly operating within the physical world. The concept of nature is commonly used in theoretical and literary discourse to refer to the various features of the world that are not visible to the naked eye. For instance, animals, the physical body, and space are all-natural features of the world. Although setting and the environment are interrelated, it is not possible to separate them due to their varying effects. The various characteristics of people and environments can be influenced by the natural environment. This is a debate that dates back to Aristotle and Plato. *The Treatise of Ikhwan-al-Safa*, which is an encyclopedia that was written during the tenth century, talks about the various effects of various geographical regions on human temperament. It also talks about the changes in customs and morals that occur due to these factors.

The separation of culture and nature was mistakenly propagated by the Enlightenment. Following the first wave of ecocriticism, this division was further widened by schools of thought such as Deep Ecology. The emergence of new ecocritics has led to the establishment of a more balanced relationship between nature and culture (Williams, 1980; Warren & Dunane, 1994; Gaard & Murphy, 1998). They have emphasized the link between culture and nature. The interrelation between nature and culture

is not as exclusionary as it sounds. For instance, it does not imply that the hole in the ozone layer is not in nature. It is a paradigm shift that we need to make if we are serious about preserving culture. The concept of entropy provides a new dimension to the analysis of literary works. According to ecocritics, natural processes are prone to disorder, and the increase in their total amount of entropy is a sign that the world is moving toward destruction. Entropy is also commonly observed in various forms of social and cultural studies. The increase of entropy in society and nature has a significant influence on the events of the story. In the village, the imported elements of the city, which are part of the development, gradually infiltrate the village and change the cultural order of the people. This is also a negative for the local economy. The flow of progress through modern media is often accompanied by the energies of entropy without sufficient grounding in culture. Entropy can manifest in various forms of disorders that can affect different societies. Without sufficient cultural vigor, these disorders can become anti-progress phenomena (Warren & Dunane, 1994; Gaard & Murphy, 1998).

### **Entropy**

Entropy is a new concept that can be used by ecocritics to analyze and interpret literary works. In his paper, Hubert Zapf presents a succinct and lucid definition of this term. The concept of entropy is related to the Second Law of thermodynamics, which states that all energy is constantly transformed in a way that increases the disorder within the material universe (1989). The natural processes that are moving toward maximum entropy will eventually become less useful. This phenomenon is referred to as the heat death of the universe. The movement toward disorder is also caused by the movement toward annihilation. The concept of entropy has gained wide acceptance in various fields, including social studies and cultural studies. It can be observed in nature and society, and it can affect the characters and the events of a story (Starhawk, 1989; de Zwaan, 1993). Entropy can also be used to describe the creeping urbanization in a village. New farming methods can severely affect the cultural order of a community. They can also negatively affect the economic state of the family. Unfortunately, despite the progress that has been made, the modern narrative of progress does not provide adequate grounding in culture. Although progress can be made in different societies, the effects of certain phenomena such as entropy can severely affect the development

of a society. This is why the cultural vigor of a community must be maintained to prevent these disorders from taking hold (de Zwaan, 1993).

The universe is winding down due to the laws of thermodynamics, which are governing the creation of free energy. Even as the universe begins to decay, the order is still prevailing. The expansion of the universe has also created new pockets of complex systems that can export negative energy and remain in stable states. This is a countervailing trend to the secular trend toward complexity. Human beings, for instance, are contributing to the ecological crisis caused by the changes in the environment. Complex systems which persist beyond the reach of thermodynamic equilibrium are not sustainable. From a cosmic timescale, low entropy harmony is a very ephemeral concept. A species that lived for millennia would have different ideas about sustainability. Human differences over time are likely to have a profound impact on the future of our species. The question is not whether the current form of society or economy is sustainable, but how long it can last. This is because the effects of climate change are likely to be rapid and unpredictable. The speed and duration of ecological transformations will be the critical factor in determining the future of humanity. According to David Christian, the significance of these changes can only be understood in terms of their cosmic origins (2005). He argues that these events and problems can only be understood through the lens of the big bang, which started with the explosion of the universe. The story of human development is akin to a desert caravan traveling back 13 billion years. It shows us how far we have come and how we are still nowhere near a sustainable future (Christian, 2005).

### **Enviro-Cultural Entropic Views in Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve***

Markandaya's works often depict realistic and critical views of various socio-political and economic issues. Stephen Hemenway, a noted English literature scholar, calls her one of the most productive and skilled writers from India. Markandaya's 2009 novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, is a traditional South Indian story. It focuses on the lives of Rukmani and her family, who live in a small village. The novel features various facets of their lives. Before the establishment of the tannery, the village was very tranquil and had a variety of fauna and flora. During the two months that the construction of the tannery has been going on, the entire village has changed. There are now bullock carts full of cement, bricks, and other materials, which are disrupting the surrounding environment. The local



kilns are also not able to meet the demand for materials. According to Arjun, the construction of the tannery has caused the houses around the maiden to collapse. It also creates an environment of danger, which is caused by global warming. The evil of development has also affected the village's traditional agrarian culture (cited in Quilley, 2011).

The second feature of the novel is the ownership of Zamindari, who is represented by the character of Sivaji, the proprietor of the land who leases it to the peasants. Rukmani and Nathan are shocked by this inhumane act. The owner of the land, who is represented by the character of Zamindari, claims that the tannery owners are getting a good price for the land. The introduction of the tannery has various effects on the lives of the villagers. First, it makes the prices of daily commodities higher, which leads to the exploitation of the common people by the moneylenders, such as Biswas and Hanumanta.

The natural setting of the novel is depicted through the various graphical representations of fauna and flora. Through this, the readers are transported to a place where they can feel like they are moving amid nature. The reader's journey begins with the green paddy fields and continues with the twittering of birds and the notes of mynah. The novel begins with the natural beauty of nature. Through this, the reader can get a glimpse of the various facets of Indian culture and its biodiversity. The novel then moves to the main setting of the country, which is the pastoral land. The goal of this narration is to sketch the various facets of Indian culture and its relationship with nature. In the novel, various natural phenomena are introduced that provide a glimpse into the harmful effects of human's lack of reverence for nature. Markandaya echoes the thought of how humans treat nature as a wild animal in its sense of functioning to humankind.

The majority of ecofeminists believe that women are the vanguards who protect and nurture nature (Warren 1990; 1994; 1997; Mies & Vandana, 1993; Parsapoor, 2015; Patil, 2020). However, in a reading of *Nectar in a Sieve*, it is revealed that men also play a role in the protection and care of nature. This suggests that men are both caretakers and rescuers of the environment and are subjugated by the development attitude. Nathan has a passion for the agrarian culture and believes that his sons should follow it. However, despite his efforts, his sons fail to find a way to earn on the field. They then say that there is nothing for them on the land and that they will never be able to rent it. Despite the hardships that he and his family have faced, Nathan still manages to maintain his faith in

the land. He and his family often go without food due to floods and droughts. Despite this, he still works in the tannery to nourish his family. Nathan is not able to cope with the news that Sivaji has sold the land to the tannery for a good price. He feels like he may lose his connection with the land and his ability to provide for his family. However, he believes that the tannery has the necessary resources to nourish its workers. Through Nathan's oneness with nature, we can ponder the concept of spiritual ecofeminism, which states that men and nature are interrelated. The characters Rukmani and Nathan often in the novel are voices that state that man and nature are interdependent. While Nathan is a country peasant his closeness to nature is evident in the intricate of the things such as in the ripening of the pumpkin fruit or his tenderness towards the farm animals such as the goats and the bullocks. Nathan's sense of belonging with the land, and soil symbolizes his concern for the environment. He is also always focused on either the crops or the land.

Through their joint venture, Rukmani and Nathan aim to make agriculture gender-neutral in India. They believe that women and men play a vital role in the cultivation of crops. As the season started, Rukmani and Nathan were out all day, tilling the fields and planting the crops. Rukmani noted that both the crops had been prepared, and her husband was plowing the fields while she was strewing the seeds. They live their lives as though their land is their own, and they do not consider it a means of survival. Instead, they believe that it has a spiritual significance and they are not afraid to leave it even in times of crisis. The presence of Nathan in the land allows him to reflect on his connection to nature. This is also a significant aspect of Markandaya's novel, as it allows him to critique the ecofeminist conceptual argument. According to Ruether, the concept of consciousness ends when the earth is destroyed. The concept of ecofeminism is not universal.

In the novel, we see the minor characters Kenny and Sivaji. While Sivaji is a land owner who sells his property to a tannery, in the end, he is still with Nathan's family. The novel also shows that he is always there for Nathan and his family. Kenny, on the other hand, is a doctor who doesn't care about nature but supports the villagers. He also doesn't try to be a savior of the environment. Many ecofeminists believe that capitalist patriarchy oppresses women and degrades nature. However, in Indian novels, we see that man also loses his means of livelihood due to developmental attitude. As depicted in the novel, Nathan for means of survival hopes to find a livelihood in the city. Thereafter the course of the

plot revolves around Nathan and Rukmani moving to the city to find a new life. The past life that they are forced to desert holds more memories such as the hut, as the scene vanishes into thin air, as the cart moves. The green fields that Rukmani and Nathan have dedicated their lives to cultivating are also suddenly blurred as the wheels of the cart throw red dust around them. Despite having worked hard for their land, Rukmani and Nathan have nothing left after being forced to sell their property to a stone quarry. Nathan is the first victim of the village's introduction to the tannery. The setting of the village where the novel takes place changes the face of the community. Although many of the villagers can survive, many others succumb to the lure of tannery and die. This modern phenomenon only adds to the resentment and resignation of the people living in the village.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this discussion is to challenge the prevailing view of nature that is too focused on the aesthetic of nature. It also aims to highlight the problematic factors that make claims about humanity's responses incredibly problematic. It is difficult to deny the widespread appreciation of natural phenomena such as forests, lakes, flora, and fauna. There has been a consistent and very extensive appreciation of these natural features by humans and other animals. It is hard to deny the widespread recognition of the natural phenomena that humans have been observing and appreciating for a very long time. Some of these include the colors of the sky, the sounds of birds, and the composition of the oceans. Various forms of art, such as epic poetry and religious imagery, have also contributed to the idea that nature has been a source of inspiration and delight for humans. It does not seem plausible to think that this is not due to some sort of unmediated response to the environment. The cultural forces that influence landscapes can also affect our tastes in flowers and sunsets, but these would not be possible without the existence of phenomenological responses that humans go through. The extent to which art has been influenced by nature is also an indication of the importance of the environment as a primary site of aesthetic judgment. It is also important to note that art can be regarded as inferior or superior to nature depending on the criteria used to evaluate its function concerning the environment.

The changes in the landscape that have occurred over the years are an indication of the commonality that has emerged in response to the

encroachment upon nature that humans have caused. This concern is also reflected in the shifts in the aesthetic that have occurred. In his book, Hardy argues that the new Vale of Tempe is a gaunt waste in Thule and that it is now regarded as one of the most beautiful regions in the world. It is also important to note that the history of the aesthetics of nature has to be considered in light of the history of human domination. The effects of human activities on the landscape are also reflected in the changes in the region's appearance. It is also possible that the changes in the aesthetic taste of nature have been linked to the patterns of our responses to it. For instance, the increasing value of what we have now compared to what used to be may be due to the progressive erosion of the natural world.

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