

Environmental Consciousness: An Eco-Critical Study of Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea*.

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Abstract

*This research is an ecocritical analysis of Kamila Shamsie's novel *In the City by the Sea*. The study examines the novel's portrayal of the relationship between nature and man, highlighting the interconnectedness of the two. Through a close reading of the text, this research identifies ecocritical elements, such as the use of natural imagery, the depiction of the city's relationship with nature, and the importance of nature in the novel. The study also explores the connection between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the need for humans to respect and care for the environment. This research contributes to the field of ecocriticism, providing a new perspective on the novel's themes and motifs.*

Key Words:

Ecocriticism, Environmental Studies, Nature and Culture, Interconnectedness, Human-Environment Relationship, Sustainable Living, Environmental Awareness, Kamila Shamsie, Ecological Consciousness, Green Perception

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study:

Eco-criticism posits that the degradation of the environment is a result of human beings' dominance over nature, leading to consequences such as floods, famines, and the disappearance of animals. This theoretical framework serves as a lens through which to analyze literary works, revealing the intricate relationships between humans, culture, and the natural world. By examining the link between literature and the physical environment, eco-criticism provides a nuanced understanding of the human experience and the importance of environmental consciousness.

Kamila Shamsie's selected novel *In the City by the Sea* portrays a stark representation of the natural environment, highlighting its profound impact on the minds of individuals. The insanitary environment serves as a catalyst for a distinctive transformation in human thought, corrupting the mental faculties of its inhabitants. In the dirty environment, people are exposed to impure air and contaminated water, leading to a polluted ecological realization. This, in turn, affects their mental state, resulting in an impure mentality that permeates their daily lives. The novel's portrayal of environmental degradation serves as a critique of the spiritual deficiencies of urban space, as noted by Rozelle (2002:24).

According to Lawrence Buell (1986:12), the physical environment has a profound influence on human imagination and cognition. This concept is evident in Kamila Shamsie's novel, which presents a vivid portrayal of the interlink between the environment and the human mind. The novel demonstrates how the setting and background of the story influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of its characters.

The novel's depiction of the environment is not merely a backdrop for the plot, but an integral part of the narrative, shaping the characters' perceptions and experiences. The physical environment is presented as a dynamic force that impacts the human imagination and cognition, influencing the way people think, feel, and interact with one another. This study highlights the significance of the physical environment in shaping human experience, as demonstrated in Shamsie's novel *In the City by the Sea*. Kamila Shamsie is a young and accomplished Pakistani English writer, known for her literary background and remarkable novels. Born into a family of writers and journalists, Shamsie's mother, Moneeza Shamsie, is a well-known editor and literary journalist, and her aunt, Attia Hussain, is also a writer. Shamsie's literary career began with the publication of her debut novel, *In the City by the Sea*, in 1998, which received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999.

Shamsie's subsequent novels, *Salt and Saffron* (2000), *Kartography* (2002), and *Broken Verses* (2005), have solidified her position as a prominent writer of Pakistani English literature. Her writing often explores themes of Pakistani culture, identity, and the natural world, with a strong focus on ecofeminism. Her novels are known for their vivid descriptions of the natural setting, including flowers, trees, and animal imagery, which serve to critique the ecological point of view.

1.2 Thesis Statement:

Ecocriticism, a critical approach that examines the relationship between the physical environment and literature, has become a crucial tool in raising environmental awareness globally. As the world grapples with pressing environmental issues such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, air and water pollution, and the loss of natural habitats, it is essential to publicize environmental consciousness. Kamila Shamsie, a prominent Pakistani English novelist, exemplifies the significance of ecocriticism in her work. Her writing highlights the interconnectedness of nature and culture, showcasing the impact of the physical environment on human society.

1.3 Significance of the Study:

The rapid development has also brought new environmental challenges, including deforestation, habitat destruction, and the loss of biodiversity. The people of underdeveloped countries are also facing the challenges of adapting to the changing environment, including the impacts of climate change, pollution, and resource depletion.

In this context, the role of literature and art in promoting environmental awareness and cultural preservation has become increasingly important. Writers, artists, and other creative writers have a significant role to play in shaping public opinion and inspiring positive change, and their work can help to raise awareness about the importance of environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

1.4 Delimitation of the Study:

The novel *In the City by the Sea* by Kamila Shamsie has been selected for this study to examine its eco-critical and eco-feminist themes in *In the City by the Sea*. The novel also portrays the physical environment as a source of beauty and wonder, but also as a space of conflict and disorder. The city is depicted as a place of contrasts, where poverty and wealth coexist, and where the natural and built environments are in a state of tension.

The novel also portrays the impact of environmental destruction on human health and well-being. The character of Hasan, the protagonist, is affected by the environmental degradation of the city, and his experiences and perspectives provide a powerful critique of the ways in which environmental destruction affects human health and well-being.

1.5 What is Ecocriticism?

Ecocriticism, a term coined by William Ruecket in 1978, is a critical approach that examines the interconnectedness of the physical environment with literature. The term "ecocriticism" is a compound word, derived from the Greek word "oikos," meaning "house," and the suffix "-criticism." This approach has been referred to by different names, including ecological literary criticism, ecopoetics, and studies of green culture, but the underlying concepts remain the same.

Ecocriticism emerged as a distinct field of study in the late 1970s, with William Ruecket's essay, *"Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,"* considered a foundational text in the field. Ruecket's work laid the groundwork for the development of ecocriticism as a critical approach that examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment.

Ecocriticism offers a new perspective on literary analysis, focusing on the ways in which literature reflects and shapes our understanding of the natural world. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of human culture and the physical environment, highlighting the ways in which literature can be used to explore and critique the relationships between humans and the natural world.

Some notable scholars who have contributed to the development of ecocriticism include:

William Ruecket, who coined the term "ecocriticism" in 1978 and Cheryll Glotfelty, who edited the influential collection of essays, "The Ecocriticism Reader". Harold Fromm, who wrote the influential book, "Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities"

1.6 Methodology

The novel "In the City by the Sea" by Kamila Shamsie offers a rich tapestry of themes and motifs that can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens. The novel's portrayal of the natural world and its influence on human society is a key aspect of its ecocritical significance.

The novel's portrayal of the destructive environment is a pressing concern that is reflected in the textual analysis. The writer's concerns about the environment are evident in the ways in which the novel critiques the impact of human activities on the natural world. This analysis provides insights into the ways in which literature can be used to raise awareness about environmental issues and promote sustainability.

1.7 Theoretical Framework:

In the 21st century, ecocriticism has become a common approach in various fields of study, including literature. This approach examines the relationship between the environment and society, highlighting the interconnectedness of nature and culture. Ecocritics re-reads literary works from an ecocentric perspective, focusing on the representation of the natural world.

According to Peter Barry, ecocritics employ a variety of ecocentric concepts, such as enlargement and liveliness, balance and imbalance, symbiosis and sympathy, and sustainable or unsustainable uses of energy and resources. They also go beyond social constructivism and linguistic determinism, highlighting ecocentric values of particular observation, collective ethical conscientiousness, and the claims of the world outside ourselves.

Glen A. Love describes the purpose and importance of ecocriticism in his book, *Practical Ecocriticism*. He emphasizes the significance of the natural world in our writings and teachings, highlighting the connection between literature and nature. Love's work serves as a foundation for the field of ecocriticism, which has grown and spread since its introduction by William Ruecket in 1978.

Ecofeminism is a new perspective in literary criticism that emerged in the 1970s. Introduced by Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French feminist, ecofeminism unites feminism and ecology to highlight the interconnection between the way women and nature are treated in male-dominated culture. Ecofeminism covers the interconnection of all life, and scholars argue that the domination of women and the environment are comparable in many ways.

1.8 Data Analysis/ Discussion:

The novel "In the City by the Sea" by Kamila Shamsie is a rich tapestry of themes and motifs that can be analyzed through an ecocritical lens. The novel explores the relationship between nature and man, highlighting the interconnectedness of the two. The writer, Shamsie, uses natural imagery to depict the unfamiliar realms of the underdeveloped nations' ecological consciousness.

Shamsie's novel is replete with ecocritical elements, which are woven throughout the narrative. The writer's use of natural imagery creates a sense of connection between the natural world and the human world. The protagonist, Hasan, is portrayed as someone who has a deep connection with nature, which is evident in his observations and interactions with the natural world.

The novel depicts the city as a place where the natural world is often overlooked or ignored. The city's two seasons, Almost-Winter and Absolute-Summer, are coexisting to create a third season, How-Should-We-Dress? This highlights the impact of human activities on the natural world and the way it affects the environment.

The city's relationship with nature is complex and multifaceted. The city is a place of human activity, where people go about their daily lives, often without regard for the natural world. The writer highlights the impact of human activities on the natural world, such as the destruction of trees and the pollution of the air and water.

Nature plays a significant role in the novel, serving as a source of comfort, solace, and inspiration for the protagonist, Hasan. The writer uses natural imagery to depict the beauty and wonder of the natural world, highlighting the importance of preserving and protecting it.

The novel highlights the connection between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the need for humans to respect and care for the environment.

As we read the novel *Shamsie*, we find the connections between nature and man and its interconnectedness to reshaping the existing setup. *In the City by the Sea* are replete with such relations as show the link of man and his environment. The writers give the natural imagery in these novels which allows the reader to recognize the unfamiliar realms of the under developed nations' ecological consciousness. The environmental concerns show their approach towards green perception. Not only physical setting is the core of the study but it gives the detailed attitude of men towards women also. This novel shows Ecofeminism in literature and Pakistani social set up.

1.9 Ecocritical Elements in *In the City by the Sea*:

Shamsie has given this relationship of man and his environment in *In the City by the Sea*. Things are somehow interconnected. Man and his environment are strongly interconnected. Consequently, today, the study of Nature has formed an integral part of various academic domains. It is much present in the writing of Kamila Shamsi's *In the City by the Sea*. The main character Hasan who is eleven year old, an intelligent boy, had changed when he had seen the death of a kite-flyer. He visits his uncle's house where he had been arrested. During this period Shamsie had shown her inclination towards nature. Hasan goes to his uncle Mamoo's house with his mother and father. There was oddity but Hasan was thinking about the smell of pine-cones. As Shamsie writes:

“Despite the strangeness and uncertainty that pervaded his Mamoo's house that midterm holyday, when Hasan was to remember most vividly about the visit was the smell of pine-cones.”(Shamsie, 1998:1)

This is clear that he is much intoxicated with that smell. This shows the link of nature in this story. Through his visit the writer has shown the attitude of urban people towards nature. Our society is becoming too much corrupt. They are fighting with each other. Police and people are fighting each other. “Salman Haq's supporters clashed with police in riots around the city.” There is no person who is taking interest in environment. Every person seems busy in his own activity. It is only Hasan who looks at every beauty. He smells the mingled scent of sea-air, garbage, eucalyptus and dust that no one in the City by the Sea ever noticed until it disappeared. Hasan has deep connection with natural imagery. He should have been able to see the sun

entering its final stages but because of the higher buildings he could not see it. About the sun and the weather she says,

“The sun was ferocious, a taste of summer months ahead. Along the boundary wall purple, orange and pink bougainvillea flowers drooped their heads beneath their own leaves, and the hibiscus flowers in the back garden let hang their pollen-tipped tongues.”(Shamsie,1998:4)

The writer has depicted the hotness of the sun which shows the tough situation in the house of Hasan’s uncle house. The different flowers present different conditions. In the lap of flowers man goes away from the tough routine of life. The flowers make a beautiful scene. Hasan sits in the garden hose away from Uncle Latif’s prize *chikoo trees*. (Shamsie, 1998:5) The hose had two streams of sun-sparkling show the flow of water. The sun, the flower, garden and different trees show the ecocritical reading and interest of the writer. As literature presents the current situation of the people, this is clear that nature is once again interest of the people. The smell of the flowers makes a man away from the reality of life. At home man becomes unhappy and tired. As Shamsie writes about Hasan as:

“Hasan was grateful for the smell. It made him feel as though Ami, Aba and he were somewhere different, somewhere not home...”
(Shamsie, 1998:8)

When Hasan, with his parents reach at his uncle’s house he watches different naturally objects.

Not only sun but also he could not see moon at night. These are the sources of great pleasure and enjoyment. His teacher taught him about the moon. Hasan thought about the moon that it only ascended as high as was necessary to put itself in sky watchers’ lines of vision. There a gardener is for removing pines from there. He plays with Hasan, he throws pines to him. He plays in the room. At his uncle’s house he enjoys a sound sleep, in the morning when his uncle asks him about the thing which he had not done, he tells his uncle that he has stopped eating pomegranates. Hasan used to awoke in the morning when he was five years old. At that time, ‘gulping the air’ and ‘the grass glistened with dew that had sprinkled from the wings of fairies’ (Shamsie, 1998:4). Animals are also discussed in ecocriticism. There is much closeness between animals and man. This is also in this novel. Hasan’s girl friend Zehra named her puppy with the name of president. When Hasan with his parents comes back from his uncle’s house after a week there was a lot of change in the streets.

“Outside, the world was dust. Dust swirled the streets, filled Hasan’s nostrils, weighed down the air, made every intake of breath a conscious action. The city had changed in a week. It used to be a house, but now it was just a place that existed outside Salman Mamoo’s house”. (Shamsie, 1998:5)

Salman pulled his sister out of the sofa to go outside. There they ask Hasan to join them to enjoy themselves. They see a different scene there. Outside, the clouds were a dragon breathing out a red sun. They look at the sky where they watch a lot of pine-cones. The different stages and forms of the sun show the closeness of man with his surroundings. The writer has shown the total environment of Hasan’s house. He smells the pinecones from perfume. There were trees of pine-cones. Even their carpet was also made with pine cones. His mother and uncle talk about the pinecones. They were withered away as he saw at his uncle’s house. They were not in that condition as they were in the past. Now the condition was averse to the condition

prevailing in his maternal house. The pines pricked his body. The real closeness is shown by the writer. The hero of the novel plays with these pinecones. Shamsie has given a full description about the pinecones. There is fast association between environment and man.

The writer has chosen some names which show the real link of environment. The names: Hasan and Gul which are for beauty and flower respectively. She has given the natural environment that exists between man and his society and outer environment also as well. There are two seasons winter and summer. In this season people wear dresses according to the environment. This is the depiction of the fact that external environment changes your inner environment. As Shamsie remarks:

“The City’s two seasons of Almost-Winter and Absolute-Summer had been coexisting these last few days to create the third season of How-Should-We-Dress? (Shamsie, 1998:21)

The branches of these were not in proper way. There were ‘a boy and a girl’ having the same age as Hasan had. They were wandering through the garbage and collecting the papers from there to sell them for money. The writer has tried to point out the attitude of people towards environment. They are not paying attention towards it. There is heap of garbage. On the other hand the author of the novel has tried to point out the division in this society. They are also young. They have been marginalized. They are to earn their money to lead their life. Whereas, Hasan thinks of his books and studies. Shamsie has given two types of children in her society. On the one hand there is Hasan and on the other hand the children who were collecting papers. Hasan was sitting in the car. He threw his book to the girl who was dirty. She was a little taller than Hasan. It shows her age and height but she was dirty barefooted girl who scrounged through garbage.

Since ecology studies the relations between species, ecocriticism must see its complicity in what it attacks. All writers and their critics are stuck with language, and although we cast nature and culture as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream. (William Ruckert, 1978 :69) Shamsie has portrayed the society in which people are not courteous. They don’t behave well. As we see in the novel, ‘Salman Haq’s supporters clashed with police in riots around the city’ (Shamsie, 1998:3). The reason of their fight was protest. The students have been shown not in studies but they were on strike holding ‘their weapons were twigs, stones from the roadsides and pebbles used in used in hopscotch games’ (Shamsie, 1998, 3). They were saying about the unity and to suspend their studies. Their voices were about to end study and ‘close your school. And join their rally; they broke many things without any reason. This shows the attitude of students in this environment. In this society people are doing illegal actions. As we see, Zahoor’s wife ran away with a boy who was working in Tobacco Company. The people who are not taking care of environment they are not mentally sound.

Ku-kura koo. Ku-kura koo. The sound of the cock is a symbol of the closeness to the environment. Not only sounds of the birds but also the names of the people are associated to animals as bloody bird. This is discussed in Ecocriticism. He says that the roosters are unpunctual in these days. They are crowing at day time. The writer has given this description in this novel.

“Salman Mamoon shook his head and held a saucepan under the hot water tap. Even the roosters are unpunctual in this city. The one next door used to crow about forty five minutes after sunrise, and that was bad enough, but since my walls have been raised the bird doesn’t see the sun until midday and bloody hill I am rural boy. I can’t take rooster crowing four

hours after breakfast. So I try to goad it into ku-karuing with noises of my own” (Shamsie, 1998:24)

In the rural area there are birds and crops which are related to ecology. Every character of the novel is linked with his natural environment. Hasan used to get up early in the morning and feels freshness in this dewy morning. The morning, evening, night and day are signs of natural beauty. The beautiful scene and dewy grass are natural phenomena. The morning air makes healthier environment. If we look ecocritical point of view Shamsie looks representing nature with different modes. We see, Shamsie has given this description as given below.

“He awoke every morning and knew, by opening his window and gulping in the air, that it was 6.30 a.m. Outside the grass glistened with dew that had sprinkled from the wings of dusk-fairies as the sound of human eyelids opening sent them flying backwards through time-zones. Barefoot, his body trembling with the possibility of cold, Hasan ran lightly across the grass, and knelt down.” (Shamsie, 1998:31)

Ecologically thinking gives a relief to talk about morning, evening, grass, trees and gardens. So the writer has done in this novel. Hasan lays among the *karonda* tree and thought about the past moments. In nature man feels pleasure and he thinks better. He goes away from the fever and fret of life. Hasan is shown very close to nature because he is not indulged in other social activities. He thinks just beautiful scenery. He plays with birds also. He is very fond of these birds and animals. We see in the text as:

“The first moment was always satisfying; Hasan dipped his hand into the mass of feathers and scooped out a handful, recalling the feel of new born chicks stirring in the hand.” (Shamsie, 1998:54)

The field studies flora and fauna deeply. We see the glimpse in this novel too much. The whole novel revolves around animals, and greenery. When Hasan goes on *chehlam* he meets his relatives there. Everywhere he goes he takes nature with every moment. As Shamsie describes that Hasan talks his cousins about different activities in the morning and evening.

“Something shiny glinted in the bushes near the verandah. Hasan squatted on the grass and pulled things in the view.” (Shamsie, 1998:94)

In the verandah he watches his mother who was sitting among the other ladies. There women were busy in reciting prayers. Hasan started to look other side.

“His gaze landed on the bright yellow flowers of the laburnum tree. He tilted his head back to look at the roof. This was the spot. Hasan stepped forward into the shade of the laburnum. He closed his eyes and saw Azeem frozen in decent, just to the right of the laburnum.”
(Shamsie, 1998:95)

His whole world revolves around plants, trees and flowers. When they go on tour there they kill a beast. They share their ideas about the cost of beasts. Uncle Latif and he see some birds and plants. Shamsie has portrayed the animals and plants very beautifully.

“Look Lantcelittl, I told you once to avoid bad eyesight by eating carrots. You became Bugs Bunny with the eyes of hawk. I told you to avoid bad skin by rubbing lemon-juice and salt on your skin. You stole all the lemons from my tree, your skin glows like a worm.”
(Shamsie, 1998:117)

Hasan goes to the sea and shows the seashells to an old man. The old man was comparing this sea shell to others. Hasan thinks of the mango tree which was cut a week ago. On the other hand

the breeze in the garden was making Hasan happy. Hasan enjoys the beach. They talk about the frogs and toadies. Zahra and Hasan sat on grass while talking to each other. Salman Mamoo says that forget spirits and dolphins. Hasan remembers the poem Daffodils. Shamsie has given a detailed imagery of animals. As Shamsie writes:

“Hasan bent over and placed his head between his knees. The dragonflies sped up and began whirling frenetically like dusk-fairies to escape from between the enclosed palms of the Warlock.” (Shamsie, 1998:188)

Hasan always is around the natural things. Hasan and Zehra watch golden daffodils and Nargis Lotia, they were becoming green.

“The City air whispered of mangoes. The first fruits of the season had ripened to pungent sweet-sourness, and the scent was so dizzying Hasan would have fallen off the branches of Uncle Latif’s mango tree if Salman Mamoo had not been sitting behind him on the tree limb, holding him around the waist with one arm while other arm pulled fruit that laden branches towards Hasan’s nose and made him dizzier still.”(Shamsie, 1998:207)

Conclusion

The contemporary Pakistani English fiction writers have been actively highlighting the ecological degradation in the third-world countries, particularly in Pakistan. This has become a major theme in their works, with the aim of raising awareness about the devastating impact of human activities on the environment. Literature and humanities play a significant role in cultural communication, focusing on human consciousness of the environment.

Shamsie's debut novel is a remarkable example of nature writing, providing an accurate depiction of natural scenes such as trees, flowers, the sun, the moon, and the sea. The protagonist, Hasan, is portrayed as someone who has a loving attitude towards the environment, which highlights the importance of the natural world in literature.

The ideology, philosophy, and behavior of the public towards nature, including plant and animal life, significantly influence the way non-human aspects of the existing earth are presented in Pakistani English literature. Human beings often view themselves as intellectual beings, trying to organize everything according to their perception. This highlights the need for environmental awareness and a shift towards a healthy environment for future living.

In today's world, it is essential to make environmental issues a top priority. This can be achieved by promoting environmental consciousness among the public and encouraging a shift towards sustainable living. By doing so, we can work towards preserving the natural world and ensuring a healthy environment for future generations.

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