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The Affective /Emotive Exploration of Climate Change : A View of the Selected Works and Trends in Contemporary Indian Poetry

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Abstract

Climate change has had a considerable impact on poetry, because poets often engage with the natural world and the human condition within this world. Themes of environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and human impact on the world have crystallized into increasingly mainstream engagements for poets, as they explore the emotional and existential implications of climate change, using their craft to raise awareness, provoke thoughts and spur actions. Eco-poetry is also gaining ground, as a movement primarily intended to address concerns about the environment, sustainability and conservation. Overall, climate change has injected a sense of urgency into poetry, with many poets now processing urgent ecological issues while also imagining a more sustainable future. This article discusses the ways climate change is affecting poetry, ranging from its potential to force poets to make new associations and metaphors, to inspire a sense of activism and urgency, as well as a short discussion of the emergence of eco-poetry as a particular genre of poetry that reflects a commitment to advocating for the environment while constructing visions of future ecologies. The focus of this article is to illustrate the interplay between literature, in particular poetry, ecology and the pressing issues of climate change using selected works of poetry and examination of contemporary poetry trends.

Key Words: Climate Change, Eco Poetry, Anthropocene, Chayawaad

Introduction

In the context of the climate crisis, songs like "Maa Reva Tera Paani Nirmal" and "Ganga Behti Ho Kyu" are ghostly dirges and potent environmental critique which articulate the rising anguish of India's rivers, particularly the revered ones like Narmada and Ganga. These are not only musical declarations but also ecological affidavits, echoing the lament of ecosystems perturbed by runaway industrialization, deforestation, damming, pollution, and the overall impact of climate change. Maa Reva Tera Paani Nirmal, popularized by Indian music band Indian Ocean, appeals to the Narmada as a mother whose previously pure waters are in danger. The repeated, devotional couplet of the song—"Maa Reva tera paani nirmal, khal khal behta jaaye"—not only celebrates the river's origin as pure but, when sung today, is a dirge expressing sorrow at its lost virginity. The song today sounds in the midst of mounting concern over river pollution, dwindling water levels, and the natural flows being disturbed by large dams such as the Sardar Sarovar Project. The Narmada Bachao Andolan, led by activists like Medha Patkar, has brought to

the forefront the socio-environmental consequences of such development initiatives, which have displaced people and disrupted ecologically sensitive ecosystems.

Also, Bhupen Hazarika wrote and sung the song Ganga Behti Ho Kyu, critiquing the silence of river Ganga amid destruction. The lines bitterly contrasts the picture of the eternally purifying, life-restoring Ganga from the good old days with her present-day state of being—choked, laden, and as if muted by her tragedies. This reflects an internal cultural and ecological dissonance where revered rivers are both revered and desecrated. The song forces us to confront this paradox and the fact that mythologizing rivers without preserving them is a hollow exercise. Climate change aggravates the condition of these rivers with erratic rainfall patterns, glacial melting in the Himalayas where the Ganga originates, and rising temperatures altering aquatic life and water quality. The 2018 IPCC report had already warned of the threat to South Asia's water resources, and a 2022 NITI Aayog report once again stated that India is faced with a serious water crisis, with most rivers, including the Ganga, facing high ecological pressure.

Both the songs, thus, surpass their immediate musical worth to serve as environmental songs and cultural critiques. They evoke collective memory and responsibility, reminding everyone that rivers are not only water bodies but sacred life-forces intricately interconnected with India's spiritual, social, and ecological fibres. Folk and poetic culture, as in this case, are turned into a form of resistance—what ecologist Vandana Shiva refers to as 'Earth Democracy'—that counter the commodification of nature and bring to centre stage indigenous, sustainable relations with nature. They represent what Amitav Ghosh refers to as "the great derangement"—the failure of modern narratives to capture the enormity and intensity of climate disaster. By going back to river-based songs, we draw upon a culturally evocative idiom of ecological awareness, in which the river's voice is used as a metaphor for protest and prayer. As India struggles with the climate crisis, hearing the silences and songs of Reva and Ganga may provide warning and wisdom.

This paper investigates how climate change informs poetry today, focusing on the rise of eco-poetry as a genre. It tracks how poets react to ecological destruction, express loss, and build metaphors of resistance and regeneration. Employing an interdisciplinary perspective, it explores the interstices of literature, environment, activism, and ethics.

The ecocritical movement now explores the cultural impact of global warming. According to Lawrence Buell (2005) in The Future of Environmental Criticism, literature becomes significant in contributing to ecological awareness. Likewise, Rob Nixon (2011) provides the description of "slow violence," slow and insensible damage to nature, yet drastically hurtful in effect—an angle which poets have taken to, answering with sonic profundity. Eco-poetry, though based on conventional nature poetry, is different in its activist and urgent voice. J. Scott Bryson (2002) states that eco-poetry not only praises nature but also laments its loss and provokes readers to take action. Fisher-Wirth and Street (2013) contend that eco-poetry is "a poetry of witness and resistance" that places emphasis on sustainability and interdependence. In the Indian context, postcolonial eco-criticism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010) identifies the confluence of environmental injustice and colonial pasts. Poets like Mamang Dai register ecological loss defined by Indigenous knowledge and cultural memory, whereas Ranjit Hoskote investigates issues of water scarcity and ecological vulnerability with philosophical acuity.

Climate Change and Emerging Poetic Themes

One of the main threads of climate poetry is one of lamentation—of glaciers melting, species vanishing, and habitats disappearing. Craig Santos Perez's from unincorporated territory series expresses the trauma of sea level rise in his home island of Guam. He says:
"these islands / have not always / been drowning"—
a brief but haunting reminder of climate-related displacement.

This type of poetry puts the emotional register of environmental sorrow, known as solastalgia (Albrecht, 2005)—homesickness in one's own home resulting from environmental change—into the foreground. Climate-aware poetry tends to invoke metaphors of collapse—tumbling shorelines, fire-ravaged forests, crumbling identity—to articulate the existential danger posed by environmental deterioration. Meanwhile, it coins metaphors of interdependence and resilience.

Metaphor is defined in Indian eco-poetry by spiritual and philosophical traditions. The Ganga river is not simply a physical presence but a living presence, frequently imagined as nurturer and victim of industrial exploitation. Juliana Spahr's This Connection of Everyone with Lungs (2005) positions breath, body, and environment together in a physical, visceral consciousness of global interconnectedness. Ranjit Hoskote, in poems like “The Atlas of Lost Beliefs”, navigates ecological memory and cultural erosion, mapping landscapes of loss with philosophical intricacy. Mamang Dai’s poetry, such as The Balm of Time, is rooted in Arunachal Pradesh’s forests and rivers, articulating an Indigenous worldview where human and nonhuman exist in sacred relationship.

The work of climate poets is subtle but effective. It does not mobilize mass protests like journalism or documentary but shifts consciousness. In India, green poets are involved in literary festivals and community readings that create awareness of their particular concern: deforestation, water shortages, or mining accidents. These verses are lyrical, but they are part of a pedagogical task—learning about the vulnerability of nature. Since art allows us, as environmental philosopher Timothy Morton (2010) contends, to engage with the "hyperobjects" of global warming—objects so large and abstract that they are impossible to fully comprehend, poetry makes abstractions emotionally palatable.

Eco Poetry and *Chhayawaad*

Eco-poetry, though a contemporary term, has deep historical roots in Indian literary traditions, particularly within the Chhayawaad movement of early 20th-century Hindi literature. Often compared to the Romantic movement in the West, Chhayawaad was marked by a lyrical introspection and a profound engagement with nature, which can be read as an early form of ecological consciousness. These poets like Jaishankar Prasad, Sumitranandan Pant, Mahadevi Verma, and Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' placed their poetry with awe at nature, representing forests, rivers, mountains, and seasons not only as scenic vistas but as alive, breathing worlds which are forever intertwined with the human psyche. Sumitranandan Pant, in particular, is well-known as prakriti ka kavi (the poet of nature), whose poetry visualized nature as

sacred, ageless, and spiritually nourishing. In his poem "Panchvati," Pant idealizes the forest as a utopian site of peace and sagacity, appealing to a tradition which identifies ecological well-being in spiritual well-being. Mahadevi Verma's poems, suffused as her work is with sadness, carry an identification of human and more-than-human anguish, a blur of distinction between individual loss and loss of terrain. These writers, even prior to modern speech about climate, wrote work which initiated a line of poetry sensing nature as less resource than relationship—an ethic now at the core of eco-poetry. As scholar Nandini Sahu remarks, Chhayawaadi poets "sought to create an inner ecology," formulating a vision in which self and nature were intimately connected, anticipating the 21st-century eco-critical agendas. Indian eco-poetry can thus historically be traced back not only to recent activism but to a deeper aesthetic and philosophical heritage going back to the Chhayawaad era.

Contemporary Scene of Eco-Poetry in India

The modern Indian landscape of eco-poetry echoes an increasing sense of urgency to respond to the climate crisis in literary terms, going beyond nature poetry romanticized to an activist, reflective, and frequently mourning address of ecological devastation. Modern-day eco-poets address the facts of deforestation, global warming, river pollution, species extinction, and displacement of people, frequently interweaving ecological issues with social justice, gender, and indigenous rights. Indian English poets such as Ranjit Hoskote, Arundhathi Subramaniam, and Tishani Doshi, to name a few, write with a layered sensitivity where environmental ruination is connected with memory loss, cultural erasure, and identity loss. Hoskote's poems, for example, tend to pit the urban ruin against the recollection of landscapes, underlining a breach in our ecological awareness. Regional language poetry too plays a crucial part; Malayalam poets such as K. Satchidanandan and Tamil poets such as Sukirtharani weave in ecological concerns while using native idioms, myths, and folk environmental movements. Eco-poetry is no longer the preserve of elitist literary enclaves—it expresses itself in protest songs, Dalit poetry, and indigenous oral cultures that fight environmental injustice and colonial exploitation of land and water. The growth of anthologies like "The Great Indian Poetry Collective" and "Voices on the Verge: Indian Poetry and Climate Change" indicates a collective literary trend towards environmental accountability. Furthermore, Indian eco-poetry today is increasingly intersectional—poets Meena Kandasamy and Mamang Dai convey the ways in which land degradation impacts marginalised bodies and communities, synthesising ecological and political critique. These poets refuse anthropocentric conceptions of the world and instead resonate with what philosopher Val Plumwood refers to as "an ethics of ecological humility." Sudeep Sen is one major voice to voice the dilemmas, devastations, and contemplative possibilities of this era. Through a dense interaction of lyricism, visual organization, and world ecological consciousness, Sen's poetry lives in the Anthropocene not just as setting but as central preoccupation that informs poetic form, mood, and ethical impulse.

One of the distinguishing features of Sen's eco-poetry is the keen sensory description he uses to recreate the natural world. His poems are filled with haptic textures—sand, salt, mist, rain, rust—and this sensory present becomes a way of re-establishing closeness between the reader and the world at risk. In Rain, for example, Sen turns a presumably mundane meteorological event into an elemental meditation, suffused

with yearning and ecological meaning. Rain is turned into a symbol of cleansing, renewal, and vulnerability:

"Rain—raw, naked, liquid—/rinses the air clean/scents the soil,/etches stories in watercolour."

Here, the rain is more than a backdrop but a player, recalling the vulnerability of natural cycles that continue to be manipulated by climate change. The application of assonance and alliteration imitates the rhythm of falling rain, creating an embedded ecological sensibility.

Water, as it figures repeatedly in Sen's poetry—monsoons, rivers, floods, tides—is also used to comment on the man-made implications of the changing climate. In Monsoon and Postcards from Bangladesh, he links climactic occurrences with socio-political and human-made crises. The monsoon, as muse as well as metaphor, is a prelude to dislocation, most especially among the poor. His poetry recalls us to the fact that in the Anthropocene, weather is not neutral anymore—it is politicized, weaponized by inequality, and mediated by human intervention.

Sen also talks about the water bodies' deterioration with lyrical sadness and alarm. The Yamuna, for example, is a river as well as a corpse—gushing through history and city detritus. His description of rivers as Earth's veins and arteries not only places them in the center as ecological entities but also attributes to nature a physical, vulnerable presence. This figure makes environmental decline intensely personal, resonating with current eco-critical practices focused on planetary embodiment.

The Anthropocene is hostile to linear account, and Sen's shape likewise tends to refuse it. A number of his poems consist in visual and verbal fragments—chunks of thought, image, speech. Fragmented ecological consciousness seems to characterise our epoch. In Fractals: New & Selected Poems, e.g., page layout and margins convey the fractured nature of pressure-tensed ecosystems. This fragmentation is not simply aesthetic but epistemological: how does one compose coherently in an age of collapse, extinction, and rupture?

Sen's employment of mixed media—photographs, typography, translation—only strengthens this polyphonic address. The Anthropocene, for Sen, is less a topic than a practice: one must inscribe it in stacked, collaged modes if one is to adequately represent its complexity.

While Sen’s poetry carries the textures of Delhi’s dust and monsoon, it also moves across borders—London, Dhaka, New York, Dharmshala. This global scope reflects the transnational nature of climate change. Yet, he is careful to ground his ecological concerns in local landscapes and histories. His focus on the Yamuna, Sundarbans, or Andaman Islands locates climate change within particular Indian geographies, pushing back against the abstract universalism sometimes prevalent in Anthropocene thought. He also frequently uses natural beauty as the backdrop for the trash of modernity—plastic, sewage, noise, concrete—to make visible the expansion of the anthropogenic over the organic. His poetry forces the reader to acknowledge that the Anthropocene is not an abstract scientific period but a lived, everyday moment, particularly in urban India where ecological degradation is spectacular and also invisible.

Poet's work is not just the work of observer; he puts himself in the role of a witness and record-keeper of environmental decay. But whereas such apocalyptic visions usually produce despair, his poems hold a low-key note of resilience. Mourning, indeed, but a refusal to ignore, to pay attention, to notice and identify what is lost. This ethical witnessing resonates with eco-critical theorist Rob Nixon's concept of

"slow violence"—the insidious, unseen devastation of ecosystems and communities. Sen's poetry, in its unobtrusive attentiveness, is a resistance to this slow violence. His occasional deployment of the second person ("you") also elicits complicity and connection. The reader is not just a passive recipient of poetic beauty but is engaged in the ecological web, made to feel responsible and complicit.

In an era when scientific accounts too frequently fail to act, Sen's poetry presents a different grammar—of emotion, vulnerability, and tenderness. His poems of the Anthropocene are not answers, but balm. They remind us what is at risk—not only icecaps and carbon but song, silence, and the sacred textures of the Earth. By combining aesthetics with urgency, Sudeep Sen expands the terrain of ecological imagination in Indian English poetry, providing a lyric lifeline in an era of planetary precarity.

Indian contemporary eco-poetry is not simply descriptive—it is spiritually resonant, emotionally raw, and highly political, addressing what Amitav Ghosh has called "the great derangement" of climate denial with a ferocious, lyric urgency. It becomes at once a grieving and a mobilizing force, a poetry form that hears the earth while calling out for its cure.

The Anthropocene, characterized by a massive human influence on the geology and biosphere of the Earth, has made climate change a central theme in international debate. Poetry and literature have not been immune to this transformation. Poets, who have long been seen as historians of human feeling and experience, have now focused attention on the ecological crises that threaten the Earth as well as the very fabric of existence.

Conclusion

Climate change is not merely an environmental problem—it is existential, cultural, spiritual. As the crisis deepens, poetry will continue to adapt in its response. Eco-poetry in the future can become more multimedia, combining voice, video, and visual arts to enhance impact. Education systems can also include eco-poetry in curricula, promoting ecological literacy through the arts. By doing so, poetry can assist in reframing our relationship with the planet—from dominion to kinship. The effect of climate change on poetry is deep and multifaceted. It has reshaped not just poetic meaning but also the role and intent of poets. As witnesses to ecological breakdown and guardians of words, poets have reacted with urgency, lament, resistance, and hope. The development of eco-poetry as a genre serves to highlight this shift. By investing themselves in the ecological crisis, poets themselves become crucial players in the cultural imagination of climate change. Their language is capable of evoking awareness, cultivating sympathy, and envisioning other, sustainable possibilities.

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- Indian Ocean "Maa Reva Tera Paani Nirmal."
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