

Research Paper

Capitalism and True Environmentalism: A Contrast of Approaches as Seen in Literature in the Indian and Global Scenario

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The paper sought to study the Indian and the global approaches towards environmental conservation as have reflected in respective literature and to find out which approach converges towards true environmentalism. In the course of the study, it put on discussion the undercurrents of capitalism in the works of western literature by analysing a sample of different poems. Further it inspected how environmentalism finds its place in Indian literature where nature and environment becomes a thing of worship, the very heart of Indian poetry. The paper found that India sets an ideal and ultimately the only effective approach towards environmental conservation. Unlike the ongoing efforts led by capitalist organisations, which seek only to bring back the comforts man has lost as a result of his destruction of nature, India has set an example of how to live sustainably in harmony with the nature.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmentalism has, of late, found its voice round the globe amidst the onslaught of man's capitalist tendencies. There are evident differences in approaches towards environmentalism in different parts of the world. India in particular has ever stood out, for its efforts to conserve nature not recently but from the ancient times. A stark difference could be observed between today's globally accepted conservation strategies (that put forward by UN and such organizations) and that India has so far followed and made a part of its social life.

In the course of history, man has constantly kept moving away from the nature, scaling horrible and apparently irretrievable lengths. His aimless trajectory in pursuit of comfort and pleasure served him converge nowhere, only to be lost in the void. Technological advancement has took a turn apparently to such heights that it could nevermore come back and touch the raw

earth. But people around the world have more or less become aware that this fantastic world of modern developments is not to last for ever. They have started to miss the comforts they have been thanklessly enjoying at the hands of nature. They began to realize what they have lost owing to their own destructive aggression on environment. Despite this, one should bear in mind that such concern for nature does not seem to have arisen out of a sincere empathetic realisation. Rather is a desperate cry over the lost and owes merely to his selfish intentions. For all the ongoing discussions about nature, climate change, biodiversity and extinction strictly mourn the wellness, the pleasure we have consequently lost. Is this a true and sincere approach towards conservation of nature? We speak of conservation strategies, action plans, and sustainable development. What do we develop? We develop a thousand new chemicals every

year to poison earth, to poison water, to poison food and breathing air. We develop innumerable new diseases. We develop cutting edge technology to kill life on earth.

Do we need more action plans? For every action in the course of man's history has started turning against and hitting back right on him. What remains of all action is the prevalent unrest.

We are always on the run, we run for money, we run for fame and what else that we do not run for. Capitalist way of thought could be seen operating in every new development in the world. Even the apparently sincere efforts going on to conserve nature are sometimes no different. Such capitalist tendencies have been reflected on all walks of life, undoubtedly on literature too. The question that why we have millions of works written so far in western literature (and world literature for the latter has learnt to categorically follow patterns of the former and creates exact replicas!) invariably centred on man, and roams wearisomely around the futile and the superficial, and that too from the stereotypic monotonous mundane life, explains that. Every time a new work is produced, some kind novelty is expected of it. But most of the time it is all the same, the same old patterns, recurrent themes on a new attire. Think how many works have been written so far, for instance, in English literature. From the age of Chaucer, through the Golden era, Shakespeare, Milton, and the great Victorian masters of novel or so they are called. How many of their works, how many have something to tell other than human triviality, dispersing discussions on the convolutions of human mind? Chaucer is praised best for his *Canterbury Tales*, perhaps the first in the train among the best works in English literary canon. What do those tales tell? What do Shakespeare's greatest tragedies tell? They all tell of man, his manners, his folly, his futilities, his chronicles, his bravery, his downfall, and a little more. Nature hardly comes into the scene, or if at all it does, it stays aloof being a different entity that has nothing significant to do. It is man and man alone always on the focus. One may ask well, what else literature could tell; for literature is essentially connected to human life. This is because we are so programmed by the kind of literature we are accustomed to. We cannot imagine Shakespeare writing pages in praise of Birnam forest. But look how this Indian poet, the greatest perhaps in many respects, chose to begin one of his most praised works of poetry.

*Astyuttarasyamdisidevadatma
himalayonamanagadhirajah
purvaparautoyanidhimvagahya
sthithaprithiviyamanadandah.*

[There, in the north, is the soul of Gods
Himalaya in name, the king of mounts
Reaching to the waters on east and west
Stands who as if to measure the earth]

The poet is none other than Kalidasa. This line from Kumarasambhavam seems more like an invocation. Himalaya is raised to being no less than a Godhead. It is a selfless praise of the mountain that gives life giving waters to India. Being the heart of life in the subcontinent, Himalaya is therefore, undoubtedly worth of worshipping. The invocation continues until the tenth verse of the work. It is not often that such sincerity of expression in tribute to nature happens in world literature. Does it become of the literature of our day in general? Even if occurs such honest devotion towards a natural entity, it remains only as a glimpse considering the huge mass of works written every year. Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is one;

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small.

We do not have time for trifles like reflecting on, conserving, empathising with, if not worshipping, what surrounds us and more ironically what has shaped us and given life to us and is very well a part of us. We are after many other things. As

Robert Frost puts it in one of his most quoted lines,
Woods are lovely dark and deep
But I have promises keep
And miles to go before I sleep

Nature gives us pleasure on seeing, yet we will keep on killing systematically every component of nature to keep our promises, to make the miles long journey of life easy and comfortable. But people have started realizing that things are not that easy. Every killing adds to the growing unrest and leads man towards a fast approaching extinction. Man cannot stand aloof separating himself from nature, however hard he tries and by killing each living being he is killing himself. It is high time that we were more kind; to be kind towards everything means kind towards ourselves. This short poem, "The Mower" of Philip Larkin is worth noting as it conveys the same sense.

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.
I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:
Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful
Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

The 'mower' is the ruthless brute force of capitalist

current. We need no mowers anymore. Their blades have started turning back to us to make a fatal wound. It is no more a question of being kind, It is, in fact, a question of survival. It is struggle for existence.

It is fundamental to human behaviour not to be content with what is. This misconception that there is something to be done, some change to be made on the natural by man's action, by his masculine bravery is the answer to why the world has been manipulated as seen today. But now that he has changed his mind, by today's ecological activism, he is again back in action to make further changes but this time in a different direction. Conservation strategies formulated by modern ecology and the action plans by international organizations like UN, WWF, and IUCN are part of that. All of them create the impression that a reverse transformation is in the making, that too again by man's brave hands. But such make-beliefs can only create an illusion. It is man's principles and formulations that brought nature to this plight. How ridiculous it would be to expect the same to save the earth!

Then how can environment be conserved in the true sense? The answer is simple and is very well consisted in India's body of knowledge and literature as old as Vedic Literature.

Om purnamatapurnamidam
purnatpurnamudachyate
purnasyapurnamadaya
purnamevavasishyate.

[Everything is complete in itself, perfect in every respect. From that which is complete does

emerge only 'the complete'. Even if you make something out of it, only 'the complete' do you get. And add something to it, only the complete will be left.]

Hence nature is complete in itself. It does not need human intellect to save itself. It becomes complete by its own force if we allow it to. The best effort to conserve nature is to remain as non-violent as possible towards living things, doing the few that human life could do in help of nature.

Life on this earth (and anywhere else) is simple, transparent, natural, and so profuse, full and self-sufficient as no need, there is, of an external intervention. Science, reason, and systemic conceptions become a need when human consciousness feels otherwise. Theories, and scientific misconceptions are not what life is. Nature is perfect in its own way and if not it knows how to be. All one should do is to remain passive without any intrusion.

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