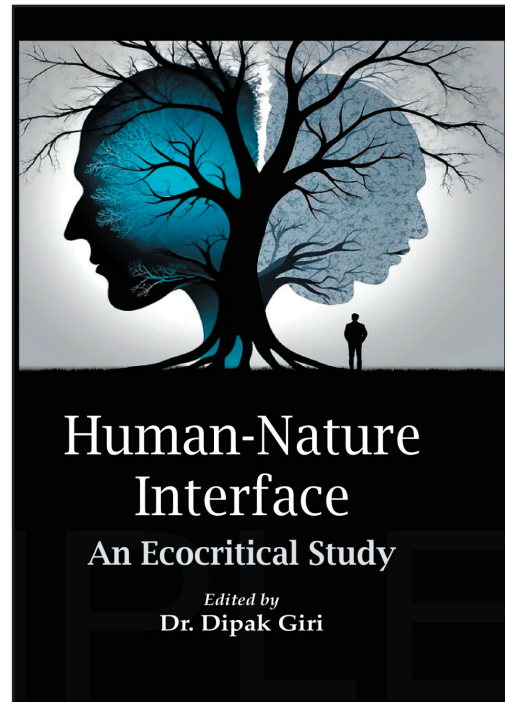


Human-Nature Interface: An Ecocritical Study,
edited by Dr. Dipak Giri, Rudra
Publishers & Distributors, New
Delhi, 2024, ISBN: 978-93-48421-37-1

Reviewed by Dr. Elham Hossain

HUMAN-NATURE INTERFACE: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY with a colorful spectrum of twenty-five essays covering from ancient Indian literary oeuvre to the contemporary renowned authors of the world literature focusing on the ecocritical area with specific emphasis attempts to make the readers well acquainted with the crucial issues to which they are critically receptive. The anthology accommodates thirty-one contributors with twenty-five highly informative and analytical essays, who work extensively to explore the areas covering ecology and environmental disasters inevitably associated to the climate change responsible for the increase of the risk of pandemics, for example, COVID-19 pandemic and many unpredictable others ahead and making the world more hospitable for desperate germs and diseases and leading humankind to the vulnerability to infection. Furthermore, these environmental disasters which are mostly man-made, consequences of the continuous emission of carbon dioxide and CFC mostly by the First World capitalist countries are leading the whole world to economic uncertainties. Countries specifically in the coastal regions are the worst victims of all the calamities emanated from environmental disasters. The rise of the sea level, increase of salinity of the agricultural land, frequent occurrences of cyclones, tsunami, and destruction of biodiversity are causing derangements and dislocations of millions of people around the world. In the name of urbanization or modernization environment is destroyed, as in most cases the issue of *deep ecology* is evaded deliberately. The economic principles of the industrialized countries trigger the imperialist mission of exploitation specifically in the Global South. In the name of globalization, recolonizing mission is still active with an intention of creating economic discrimination, responsible for the degradation of human life, human values and human health. It is the legacy of the colonial exploitation which also destroyed nature in the name of development and urbanization, but not the natives but the colonizers were the beneficiaries who enjoyed the lion share of so-called development. At present, even the local capitalists in the developing countries construct a 'discourse of development' and destroy nature for industrialization. As such, the issue of ecocriticism receives multidimensions and, thus, it deserves more and more both intensive and extensive explora-



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tion, and in this connection this volume deserves high appreciation for its commendable task of making the readers re-think and re-assess the issues related to the apocalypse of environment.

The choice of texts by the contributors deserves appreciation as they have brought to the attention of the readers some areas which are less explored or not explored yet with a focus on the environmental issues. For example, Banabhatta's *Kadambari* produced in the 7th century, and considered to be the first novel in Indian literature in Sanskrit language is explored to show the apocalypse of ecological destruction. *Kadambari* is much older than the first English novel *Pamela* (1740 AD) by Richardson, but it is not much discussed or even much written about. In this connection, Dr. Amitava Pal's essay "A Bird's Eye Viewpoint of Ecological Destruction: An Analytical Reading of "The Parrot Speaks" in Banabhatta's *Kadambari*" is a remarkable addition to the episteme in relation to its archaeological way of digging out the significance of nature in human life. The researcher feels an intense urge in bringing this text with an exclusive focus on the ecological aspects underlying the narratives of the text to the critical readership, such as, global warming, destruction of tropical rain forest and its impact on the human society.

Dr. S. Sneha Sri's essay "Adolescents' Resilience and Emotions to Nature in Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof*" critically explores Bond's first novel *The Room on the Roof* (1956) and delves deeper into the affinity between adolescents and nature. A Wordsworthian color seeps out of the researcher's examination of the interconnectedness between an adolescent and nature. Nature serves as therapeutic to the grievances of human mind which can aptly communicate and exchange dialogues with it. The theoretical framework used by the researcher and the list of references incorporated at the end of the essay evidently demonstrate a concrete intellectual base on which the study is founded. Again, Dr. Sravana Jyothi Doddapaneni reflects on how Ruskin Bond connects the natural and geographical sites with human conscious, and puts that human identity is constructed by nature directly. Dr. Rajendra B. Ambavane in his speculative essay "Colonizing Environment: Ecological Imperialism in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*" reveals how colonial and imperial enterprises destroy the natural resources of the colonized countries. The examination of the first novel of Ghosh from the *ibis trilogy* invites the readers to reckon seriously about the ecological exploitation of the colonial and imperial mission of Europe side by side with its political and economic sabotage.

Similarly, Dr. Swarnabharati Evani works on a prominent film *Joram* and brings out the voice of the margin and makes the center of the power-structure listen to it. Urbanization is a discourse with which the marginal communities are very often ousted, and this anthropocentric displacement, though superficially appears to be beneficial, ultimately brings anxieties and troubles to the whole community living in both rural and urban areas, as humans are poignantly interconnected with nature. Film is a comparatively recent narrative which deserves critical approach and Dr. Swarnabharati has done this apt job properly. Again, Dr. Naeemul Haq depicts the close affinity between man and nature in the pre-colonial Africa and how the advent of colonialism brought death and disaster to both the Africans and the nature. His essay titled "Nature vs Man: Ecological Tensions in Achebe's *Arrow of God*" offers an in-depth study of how

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the natives of Africa are defined by their close integrity with nature and how it is destroyed by the capitalist mission of the colonizers. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* depicts how man's unwise activities and selfish interest tells upon nature. Jack being swept by killing instinct intrinsically related to the craving for power sets fire to the forest at the end to smoke out Ralph whom he looks upon a staunch contestant in the power-game. Dr. Manoj Kumar in his essay titled "Destruction of Environment: Consequences and Treatment in Context of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*" sheds light on the issue how man's unwise act of burning forest and other ecological resources contributes to the rise of global temperature which tends to threaten the future of mankind.

In the same vein, Dr. Sahabuddin Ahamed and Praveen Toppo address the issue of ecocritical imperialism in context of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, an interdisciplinary text written in the nature of a docu-fiction as history and fiction melt down in Ghosh's fiction at a crucial line where these two cannot be distinctly distinguished. The authors have produced powerful insights to demonstrate how ecological catastrophe dislocates and deranges the people depending on the water bodies like rivers and the sea for survival. The dislocated people tend to go to the developed countries in Europe which mostly causes the emission of carbon in immense quantity and contributes to the global warming leading to the rise of the sea level and ousting the people living in the coastal areas and destroying bio-diversity. In the developed countries, these illegal migrants, at least those who fortunately reach, though many of them die in the sea due to hunger and many of them are cruelly shot dead by the border guards of different countries, live in the slums and bound to work in the mills and factories at low wages, and thus fall victim to economic exploitation. They also turn into an easy stuff of politics of different NGO's and local political parties and are used as pawns on the chess board. Thus, Dr. Sahabuddin Ahamed and Praveen Toppo depict the dark aspects of ecological imperialism in context of Amitav Ghosh's seminal text *The Hungry Tide*.

True, nature is man's best companion and preserver, and it can be used for the benevolence of mankind. This maxim is delineated in the essay "Were the 'Tree Poems' Really So?: An Ecocritical Reading on Marakkavithaikal" by Dr. R. Pavitra with an in-depth reflection on the diachronic as well as synchronic exploration of the history of the role and contribution of nature to humankind. Vulnerability and strength of both women and nature are explored in the works of Aemilia Lanyer, Mary Oliver and Margaret Atwood by Dr. Shruti Rawal, Khyati Kapoor and Kanishk Sharma in their essay. Actually, the authors have sufficiently thrown light on how nature is considered equivalent to women in the patriarchal framework and how both are treated in terms of dominance and hegemony, an entity of voicelessness and lacking agency or authority. Nisha A K and Dr. Monibinder Kaur depict how during the colonial era the ecological balance was destroyed in the name of using technology for agriculture. Even in the postcolonial era the legacy of colonialism is still telling upon the harmony of nature. The remarkable aspect is that this issue is delineated in respect of the seminal literary texts of some leading litterateurs, and readers will, I believe, get a new approach to examine the issue of contemporary importance. Dipra Biswas and Dr. Joydeep Banerjee have brought a crucial issue to the readers' knowledge about a world which is full of cha-

otic situations due to the break of ecological balance in their essay "Sustenance and Environmental Decay in Dystopian Worlds of Claire Vaye Watkin's *Gold Fame Citrus* and Jeff Vandermeer's *Borne*. The authors have questioned the validity of bioengineering and corporate power structure which in the name of development are destroying the ecosystem, that will bring a catastrophic consequence for the human beings. Nature nurtures human existence this maxim is dealt with by Dr. Rohitashwani and Prof. Dr. Shalini Yadav in their essay "Nature and Nurture: An Ecocritical Exploration of *The God of Small Things* by Arudhati Roy". Socio-political realities and even psychological entity are directly shaped by nature and its displacement causes the displacement of human identity. Both the authors address this issue with great care and lots of references from the primary and secondary sources.

In fact, every calamity brings a paradigm shift in art, culture and literature, and as such, tsunami of 2004, an unprecedented natural calamity caused by the shift of tectonic plate beneath the floor of the Indian ocean brings about angst, anxieties and trauma among the people of fifteen coastal countries, and inevitably a kind of trepidation penetrates into the plot of both fictions and non-fictions of these countries. Aishwarya Bhutoria throws light on how Sri Lankan fictions and non-fictions go through a distinct change from the traditional subject-matter of Sri Lankan literature. Astomi Roy's in-depth exploration of Toru Dutt's poem "Our Casuarina Tree" brings before the readers a pathetic fallacy like situation in which man imposes his own emotions upon the natural or the objects of nature. Human relation can be interpreted in relation to nature and Astomi Roy has successfully depicted this very aspect in her essay "Nature and Childhood Memories Seen through Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree'". Dr. Mayuri Pathak's essay "Phallogocentric Ecocriticism in Dr. Indira Goswami's *The Blue Necked God: A Brief Analysis*" adds a new dimension and area of thinking to the *Volume*. A canonical text from Assamese literature is explored to demonstrate how male dominated discourse and male power-dynamics tend to destroy nature. Sayan Chatterjee in his essay "Decoding the Human-Nature Dynamics in Dhruba Hazarika's *Luck: An Ecocritical Exploration*" offers a critical look into how marginalized groups, including indigenous communities, people of color, women, and economically disadvantaged populations, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and resource exploitation". True, environmental issues are deeply intertextualized with social inequality, marginalization of the working class of people and above all, power dynamics, and this has been extensively explored by Muhammad Abdur Rahman in his essay "Human-Nature Interface: An Ecocritical Study on Environmental Justice Ecocriticism". Technology and science bring about revolution in agricultural production, but at the same time these things hazard human existence, too. The pesticides that the farmers use in their field poison not only food but also destroys bio-diversity and it may eventually lead human beings to existential crisis. Besides, environmental policy-making on the part of the power-structure badly affects the people living in the margin. The complex interplay between human activities and the natural environment is also irreparably affected by the Global North as it is emitting carbon and CFC in huge quantity and contributing to the environmental disaster. Rahman has offered an in-depth study of this issue in his essay.

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Again, Nilufer Ali's essay is highly instructive, and the way she has examined the crosscurrents of the environment and democracy is really a newer way to address the environmental issue. Her reference to some of the major fictions of Amitav Ghosh aptly defends her study. Furthermore, some pictures that she has incorporated in her essay helps her assessment of the environmental issues be more concrete and factual. Krupa Devendra Kumar Pandya in his essay titled "River as the cradle of the Story in Elif Shafak's *There are Rivers in the Sky*" makes an excellent juxtaposition between Indian myths and Environmental study. Human body, according to Indian myth, is made up of 'Panch Mahabhut' and water is one of them, which is the most vulnerable of all other natural elements. It is now believed that there may be a war in future on the captivation of the source of pure drinking water. Panday's choice of Elif Shafak's text has brought about a change in the flow of the tone of the book, which is based on mostly Indian literature or literary texts. Panday has very vigorously depicted how water is intertwined with cultural and religious narrative that spans across centuries covering the civilizations gradually formed on the banks of Tigris and Euphrates and how Mesopotamian civilization collapsed due to the contamination of these rivers.

The volume is unique in several ways and one of them, at this point that I cannot but mention, is that it sheds critical light on some most recent concepts and hermeneutic areas. For instance, Laxmi Sarma questions anthropocentrism in her essay "Botanical Personhood and Plant Animism: Being Plant-attentive, Reflectivity, and Questioning the Anthropocentrism" and suggests to change the direction of our attention from the feeling of ethical superiority to the importance of plants as a significant entity. Plants have feeling, not in the sense that the humans respond to the external agents, but in the sense that they grow, live, contribute and then die. The stance of thinking that Sarma offers conspicuously contributes to the ecological harmony, essential for sustaining human existence. In the same vein, Prakash Baral addresses the issue of apocalypse, a dystopia where survival is a challenge for man. He has chosen McCarthy's *The Road* where the mother of the boy dies immediately after his birth and the father moves towards South to save his son from extreme cold. But he is fight with both the adversities of nature and the hostility of humans, and ultimately, he succumbs to death, leaving his son in a desolate and uncertain world, a typical world for the present generation and the generation ahead. But humans must survive and for his survival, the survival of nature must be given priority, and this message is echoed in Sudip Debnath's essay "Deforestation or Civilization? An Ecocritical Study of Gieve Patel's "On Killing a Tree", R. K. Narayan's "The Axe" and Ruskin Bond's "The Cherry Tree"". Sudip borrows ecocritical framework and connects it with Wordsworthian conception of pantheism and exhibits that nature is a living entity and a dwelling place of the eternal spirit. Hence it is to be saved, not destroyed. The way Sudip bridges ecocriticism with pantheism will, I think, invite the readers to think of environmental issues in an innovative gesture.

True, nature nourishes culture of a community living in its lap, and again a culture may develop some practices that may go against nature. The relationship between these two entities is complex, to a great extent, philosophic. Sharadi Borah depicts such an exquisite and complex

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relationship between nature and culture in his essay titled "An Ecocritical Analysis of Ecological Concerns in Select Fictional Works of Assam". Sharadi Borah has chosen the literary works of some local authors such as Indira Goswami, Dr. Laksmi Nandan Bora, Debendranath Acharya, Dhruvajyoti Bora, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Mitra Phukan and several other writers of Assamese literature, and this attempt has expanded the canvass of this volume in relation to the relevant issues related to ecology. The volume ends with Dipak Giri's essay "An Interlink between Women and Nature: Reading Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* from an Ecofeminist Perspective". Roy's ecofeminist idealism encompasses both nature and women with equal impetus. The relation between these two entities is mostly guided by the predominant culture which usually works as both friendly and antagonistic force. Dipak demonstrates that the subjugation of nature is a metaphor of the subjugation of women. At the end, an index is added to the book to provide the readers with an easy way to have an access to the information incorporated into the book.

Finally, a book like this with such a huge number of essays on diverse perspectives of ecocritical study deserves to be in the readers' table as it, I think, attempts desperately to break through the Eurocentric approach to the environmental issues. To me, it seems that this volume promotes to look into our own environmental issues not through a borrowed lens, but through our own lens. Here lies its uniqueness.

Elham Hossain is an academic, essayist, translator, editor and literary critic. He did his B.A. (Honours) and M.A. in English Literature. He wrote his M. Phil. dissertation on the colonial literature and doctoral dissertation on the novels of the Nigerian litterateur Chinua Achebe in the University of Dhaka. He has authored 19 books on colonial and postcolonial literature and translated a good number of African, South Asian and Latin American writings. He has published more than fifty research articles in the academic journal of home and abroad. He has twenty two years of teaching experience in tertiary level. He was designated as Professor of English at Dhaka City College under National University of Bangladesh. At present, he is working as a **faculty of the Department of English at Green University of Bangladesh**. His area of interest includes translation studies, African literatures and cultures, philosophy, literary theories, environmental imperialism, ecological racism, diaspora literature and subaltern studies. He edits a bilingual literary periodical titled *AFRICAR ALO (Light of Africa)*. He also reviews research articles for various prestigious journals of home and abroad.