

**THE ARTISTS' TRYST WITH NATURE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FIRST
GENERATION WRITERS IN INDIAN ENGLISH**

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Research Article

**The Artists' Tryst With Nature: With Special Reference To The First Generation Writers
In Indian English**

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at assessing and exploring the portrayal of Nature in the works of first generation Indian Writers writing in English. It takes into account the vision and perspective of the writers, viz. R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekeil and others. Indian English writers are unique amalgamation of both the Indian and the British attributes. The portrayal of Nature in Indian English writers too is greatly inspired by Nature portrayed in British Literature, especially in English Romantic poetry, especially by the ideas of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley.

KEYWORDS: Nature, Romantic poetry, portrayed, amalgamation

Full Paper

Portrayal of nature in Literature is as old as literature itself. Nature has been variously presented in literature down the ages. It remains the primary influence both in Classical and Romantic schools of literature, however, both the perspective and portrayal may differ. For the classicist, the Nature is the fundamental entity and other aspects of the world are its emanations. For the Romanticists, it is nothing less than the Divine that guides and conditions our life. The present paper aims at assessing and exploring the portrayal of Nature in the works of first generation Indian Writers writing of in English. It takes into account the vision and perspective of the writers, viz. R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekeil and others. It is an established fact that the Indian English writing contains a dual identity- one that comes from the indigenous cultural ethos and another from the Western/ British influence.

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The writings of all the Indian English writers are unique amalgamation of both the Indian and the British attributes. The portrayal of Nature in Indian English writers too is greatly inspired by Nature portrayed in British Literature, especially in English Romantic poetry, especially by the ideas of Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. Nature plays an important role is determining the artistic visions of English Romantic writers. They celebrate Nature in one and other aspects. In

their poetry they enliven Nature and its different elements by applying visual, auditory and other imagery. The lush-green countryside with hills, brooks and meadows beckon us and we are lost in the unaffected beauty and serenity of stand-still trees, blossoming flowers, beams of the sun and the moons, twinkling stars and so on. The slowly blowing breezes the light and torrential rains, the sparkling dew drops, all have been used by different Romantic poets in keeping with their life-vision and philosophy. Nature, in these poets, serves as the symbol for reflecting various ideas, emotions and attributes related to our existence.

The poetic world of William Wordsworth, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats is permeated with Nature. Nature, to the English Romantic poets is not just a physical phenomenon or an abstract idea. To them, it is very much a real living being, an integral part of our existence. It serves as a companion, a guardian, a guide, the lover, even the manifestation of supreme reality, God. Much has been written about William Wordsworth and his preoccupation with Nature. However, the crux of all the discussion focuses on the poet's identifying Nature with one that is original. Since Nature emanates directly from God and is untouched by all modifications made by humans in God's design, it is likened with innocence, that untouched by corruption. Going beyond Nature is getting entangled into the mud and froth of worldly affairs. In this way Wordsworth brings Nature very near to the basic tenets of Christianity and makes it equivalent to God himself. In Wordsworth, where the Nature is used in more abstract and philosophical ways, in John Keats it becomes more palpable and exquisite. In his poems we are made to almost smell the sweet fragrance of red roses, taste the magnificent 'honey wild' and 'manna dew', listen to the wonderful nightingale song and feel and see the gently blowing hair with 'winnowing wind'. Percy Bysshe Shelley's, on the other hand makes nature a medium to present his rebellious and optimistic outlook.

Romanticism has been one of the major influences in the writings of the first generation of Indian Writers in English. Almost all these writers were English educated erudite, attracted by Western progressive ideas and refined life-style. However, the pathetic conditions of their own country, due to colonial subjugation as well as inherent evils of the indigenous socio-cultural practices, make them take recourse to idealization and fancy. Even within the plain and highly matter-to-fact writings of R.K. Narayan, an idealized undercurrent of depiction of men and milieu is present. His microcosm Malgudi, itself is a product of this idealization and fancy. This sleepy imaginary town of South India is real and ethereal at the same time. It is where the day-to-day lives of normal people run its normal course. But at the same time, it represents the artists' highest poetic vision of progression of life- from disorder to order, from abnormal to normal.

Nature plays an important role in these writers' presentation of their vision. The three founding fathers of Indian English writing, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao as well as other writers of the first generation, such as Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayant Mahapatra, A.K. Ramanujan, Bhavani Bhattacharya have used Nature in various ways. Nature is represented as both the source and beauty of life. It is used as landscape- with beauties of rivers, mountains, hills, plains as well as the climate and atmospheric conditions, like, summer, winter, monsoon, rain, sun, wind and most importantly the flora and fauna. Apart from this, portrayal of Nature has symbolic and emblematic overtones as well.

Indian writing in English is not a homogeneous entity. The writers like Narayan, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgonkar, Kamla Markandaya and Anita Desai- all have their own artistic, aesthetic and philosophical visions and in these different world-visions, nature is fitted accordingly. At

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many places Nature is used as aesthetic machinery- sometimes to evoke the regional flavor and the indigenous roots of the writers, other times to present their idea of the East-West interaction and relationship, and at another times, to convey the cultural and spiritual distinctiveness of their roots. Nature plays an important role in thematic, aesthetic and philosophical design of their writings.

R.K. Narayan is undoubtedly among the greatest Indian artists writing in English. His writings have introduced India to the west in big ways. His novels and short stories not only present a characteristic Indian way of life, but a universal philosophy based on the realistic and objective portrayal of our existence on this world. The imaginary city Malgudi, where the actions of his stories are unfolded, serves as the microcosm of Narayan's Universe. All of his great works including *Swami and the Friends*, *Man Eater of Malgudi*, *The English Teacher*, and *The Guide* are set in this sleepy south Indian town. It presents the typical terrain, topography, climate and flora and fauna of the region of the South of the Vindhya mountains. At the same time it represents the socio-economic and cultural milieu of that part of India. The change, flow and movement in Nature and natural aspects present the haphazard, yet complex progression of life. The flowing Saryu River and the ruined temples have pivotal role in Raju's journey from a fraud to 'Swamiji', in Narayan's famous novel, *The Guide*. Amidst the uneven course of the sunken river Saryu, amidst the prevailing draught-like situation, Raju is spiritually reborn. He did cheat almost everyone around him- his mother, Marco, Rosie, even himself. But the faith of the credulous villages has brought a new Raju in him. He himself could not know how and when the forced sainthood shifted to real sense of service, how a cheat became a real *Mahatma* by dying for the beliefs of others. This transformation of Raju is a complex phenomenon. Undoubtedly, it involves lots of expected and unexpected processes, which includes Nature as well. As Narayan comments:

“He went down to the steps of the river, halting for breath on each step, and finally reached his basin of water. He stepped into it, shut his eyes and turned towards the mountain, his lips muttering the prayer.... It was difficult to hold Raju to his feet, as he had a tendency to flop down. They held him as if he were a baby. Raju opened his eyes, looked about, and said, “Velan. It's raining in the hills, I can feel it coming under my feet, up my legs—” and with that he sagged down.” (The Guide 221)S

It shows Wordsworth's great idea of human's communion with Nature. Nature, the purest entity reproaches the human, if anyone violates the sanctity. In, Raju's transformation his conscious or unconscious communication- with himself, with the people around and with the Nature play their parts.

If Narayan can evoke south Indian topography, Mulk Raj Anand evokes the north India surroundings of the “yellow field of mustard flower stirred by the light afternoon breeze while the sun burned over head out of a clear blue sky...” (Seven Summers 260) in equal ease. True, his obvious Marxist leanings and materialistic approach of life makes him present Nature in more realistic and concrete ways. Still, it does not prevent him making its multi-faceted uses. The attitude, emotions and preferences of his people get reflected in his vivid portrayal of Nature:

“The hand of nature was stretching itself out towards him, for the tall grass on the slopes of the Bulashah Hills was in sight, and he had opened his heart to it, lifted by the cool breeze that wafted him away from the crowds, the ugliness and the noise of the outcastes' street.... He listened to the incoherent whistling of the shrubs....His inside seemed to know that it wouldn't be soothed if there were the slightest obstruction between him and the outer world.... He was just swamped by the merest fringe of the magnificent fields that spread before him. He had been startled into an awareness of the mystery of vegetable moods.” (Untouchable 329)

Here, like Wordsworth, Nature is depicted as the soothing and consoling agent. In the lap of Nature people forget the ugliness and corruption of so-called civilized world. It is in the company with the Nature and also in communication with her, the human beings come to realize their true self that has dehumanized and demeaned by so many power-blocks of the world.

Raja Rao, another great writer of Indian English writing has presented Nature not only as the physical setting of his novels, but also as the aesthetic machinery conveying his great transcendental philosophy of oneness of self and God. Nature plays an important role in the expression of Rao's intricate metaphysics and his *Vedantic* philosophy of *Adwait*, that presents the whole universe an extension of one absolute *Brahma*. His *Kanthapura* is the prototype that manifests Rao's major preoccupation of quest for betterment. In his novel *Kanthapura* the Gandhian movement, fought with noble motive of freedom from all oppression is presented as the same prospect for betterment. In his highly metaphysical novel *The Serpent and the Rope* this prospect of betterment is explored from intensely philosophical and spiritual means. And in this quest Nature plays the predominant role. The momentum of quest gets mingled with the momentum of Nature creating philosophical and existential truth about life and nature of human beings.

“Then the wind comes so swift and dashing that it takes the autumn leaves with it, and they rise into the juggling air, while the trees bleat and blubber. Then drops fall, big as the thumb ... the earth itself seems to heave up and cheep in the monsoon rains. It churns and splashes, beats against the treetops, reckless and wilful, and suddenly floating forwards, it bucks back and spits forward and pours down upon the green, weak coffee leaves, thumping them down to the earth.” (Kanthapura 3)

These lines from *Kanthapura* clearly relate it with the socio-cultural milieu of the people therein. More than that, in course of evoking ‘churning, splashing, beating and pouring’ of coffee, the writer clearly alludes to the Hindu *Upnishadic/ Vedantic* philosophy of attainment of knowledge by several intricate processes. The essential Hindu belief of continuity of human existence marked by birth, death and rebirth is presented in these lines from *The Serpent and the Rope*:

“So, my ancestors went one by one and were burnt, and their ashes have gone down the rives. Whenever I stand in a river I remember how when young, on the day the monster ate the moon and the day fell into an eclipse, I used til and kusha grass to offer the manes my filial devotion.” (The Serpent and the Rope 1)

Kamala Markandaya is also a great novelist among Indian English novelists. Markandaya's poetry also has Nature and natural elements which gives effective and flawless expressions to her views. She presents nature as a wild animal. She presents nature as a destroyer and preserver. In her famous novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, Markandaya has depicted nature imagery. She shows the

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corelation of environment on mankind. Nature can be described in aggressive and destructive way. Poets and novelist can portray nature according to the need, mood or situation. Bhabani Bhattacharya has depicted the nature as destroyer and aggressive in a realistic way in his famous novel, *So Many Hungers*. In this novel Bhattacharya has depicted the tragic effects of famine in Bengal. This novel *So Many Hungers* is the factual presentation of the real Bengal famine of 1943. This novel deals with the painful, shocking conditions of the people due to the famine. It portrayed the miserable, terrible, gruesome and helpless situations of the people affected by famine. The novelist has used various nature symbols, images, objects and imageries for different types of comparisons. Some characters like Laxminathan and Samerandra Bose are representing the greedy and villainy nature so both are compared with Jackals and vultures. One of the prominent and popular women among Indian novelists in English is Anita Desai also. She has also included Nature and natural elements like animals, plants and birds, in almost all her works. Desai has used external landscapes of Nature to portray interior states of human mind. In the novel *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai has portrayed the complexities of Maya's inner life effectively through the landscape. It shows her resentment against her husband for his inability to communicate with her. Maya is compared with the peacock in the jungle. It is said that the peacocks fight before they mate, living. Though they are aware of death and dying still they are in love with life. This has been reflected in the end of the novel when one day during a dust storm Mays and her husband go up to the roof of their house, she pushes her husband off the parapet and he dies. In another novel *Voice in the City*, Monalisa is also compared to the encaged bird in her house. Her condition shows the plight of the imprisoned bird, and no one is concern for her rather its life gives the pleasure for the others. *The God of Small Things*, the best novel of Arundhati Roy is full of nature. In this novel Novelist describes the real beauty of nature, greenery and the look of Ayemenem and the river Meenachal. She has used many natural images and objects to describe the beauty of the region and landscape. Kiran Desai has also taken the nature treatment in her works. Her novel begins with the depiction of the natural beauty of mount Kanchenjunga. She used the beautiful mountain, and the changing seasons charmingly in her works. The mountain is taken to reveal the gloomy mood of the orphan girl, Sai in the novel. Desai describes the house of the retired Judge in the novel which is situated at blissful and beautiful atmosphere. In this beautiful house the Judge lives with his pet dog Mutt, grand-daughter Sai and the Cook. The novelists start her description in the following manner: "A crumbling isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga lives an Embittered judge. He wants to live in peaceful atmosphere by isolating Himself from the messy world." (*The Inheritance of Loss*, I)

The writer has stressed on the role of nature in human life. She has explained that the co-relation between Nature and Mankind cannot be ignored because Nature plays a very pivotal role in the life of mankind like molding the mind and life of human beings. The nature-man co-ordination is very much required to sustain the ecosystem.

Ezekiel has sustained quality of verse to Indian English Poetry. He is recognized as a major poet in the history of Indian English Poetry. Ezekiel's love for nature cannot be ignored while coming in terms of Indian ethos and culture. Indeed, nature has immense importance in Indian cultural. Nature is necessary for fruitful living and the elements of nature are symbolic of ethical values in Ezekiel's poetry: "There is a landscape certainly, the sea Among its broad realities, attracts Because it is a symbol of the free Demonic life within, Hardly suggested by the surface facts,

And rivers what a man can hope to win By simple flowing, learning how to flow, Besides that all organic growth is slow.” (CP 39)

In his poem “Song,” Ezekiel presents blossoms of summer as symbol of prosperity, charity and lucidity which are the aspects of Indian culture:

“Charity, lucidity— / Remarkable in the mood of seems / The doom of all my traffic dreams” (CP 42).

Rainwater is a traditional symbol of Indian culture and consequently rain brings prosperity in the life of an Indian farmer. Ezekiel, in “After Rain,” describes the rain as a symbol of purification of life:

“And so I went, as the weather cleared,

Walking on the wet road, to know”

His poetry shows romantic mood and presents realistic picture of Indian milieu. His major themes of poetry are like superstitions, man-woman relationship, husband-wife relationship, marriages, plight of Indian woman, issues of urban life, love and sex etc. Also, Ezekiel’s love for nature can be seen in his poetry when he tries to touch Indian cultural ethos. Being an Indian poet he has a modern and original approach to nature. Nature is very important for a healthy and fruitful living and so the elements of nature are symbolic of ethical values in his poetry. The bad part and other aspect of nature like storm, thundering, lightning, ghost, some scary birds like owl, bats are treated as symbols of blind beliefs in his poetry.

In his poem “Occupation” Ezekiel depicts these symbols of blind beliefs: “It was a stormy scene: Thunder, lightning, A multitude of ghost among the trees, Darkness, cold and restlessness, A screeching owl, bats, Many strange voices,... “ (CP 24)

Birds like owl and bats are looked upon signs of bad omen in Indian society. The black bird ‘crow’ is also looked down upon and considered as a messenger of Yama (God of death) in Hinduism. In “The Crows”, the poet expresses contempt and displeasure at the cry of this bird:

“I hear them from my narrow bed, I do not love, I only fear their cries of hidden duty’s word, Unwelcome, loud, funereal bird.” (CP 41)

Ezekiel presents nature as a symbol of purity and tranquility. Nature for Ezekiel is a guiding aspect to seek truth in life. In his use of imagery from the object of nature, he searches the past ethos and culture of India. In A Time to Change, the poet recalls “new orchids or unimagined seas”, and “discovery of cities fresh as brides”. In “A Word for the Wind,” the poet considers the wind as a source of inspiration. In “Stone,” the poet finds consolation in the objects of nature and makes himself a worshiper of nature exactly like that of William Wordsworth. Ezekiel’s poetry also focuses on his interest in ornithology and natural history. It may confess that animals also have emotions like human beings. They, too, can take interest in the act of making love among themselves. In fact, the poet is aware of the elements of nature and its happenings and the eternal reality. He does not only try to bring out the cultural ethos of the human beings, but also that of the other animals on this planet. The piece “Urban” in The Unfinished Man is a remarkable

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poem on the urban theme where the trees appear to him like ghosts losing their personal identity. He employs various images from the objects of nature in his poem "Urban":

"The hills are always far away. He knows the broken roads, and moves in circles tracked within his head. Before he wakes and has his say, The River which he claims he loves Is dry, and all the winds lie dead. At dawn he never sees the skies which, silently, are born again. Nor feels the shadow of the night Recline their fingers on his eyes, He welcomes neither sun nor rain. His landscape has no depth or height." (CP 117)

These images of hills, rivers, wind, skies, sun and rain represent the polarity to the image of the city. Perhaps, these objects of nature denote ethical values and smooth flow of culture. They have become the archetypal life symbols. Moreover, his description of nature helps to bring forth the themes of love and sex, man-woman relationship, religious-philosophical strain, human failure and so on. All these factors render him a position of a critic of Indian society. In fact, the overall discussion in this paper confirms its aptness in terms of reflection of Indian cultural ethos through the aspects of nature in his poetry.

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