

Voice of Ecocriticism in Shanmathi Sriramulu's
The Speaking Breeze

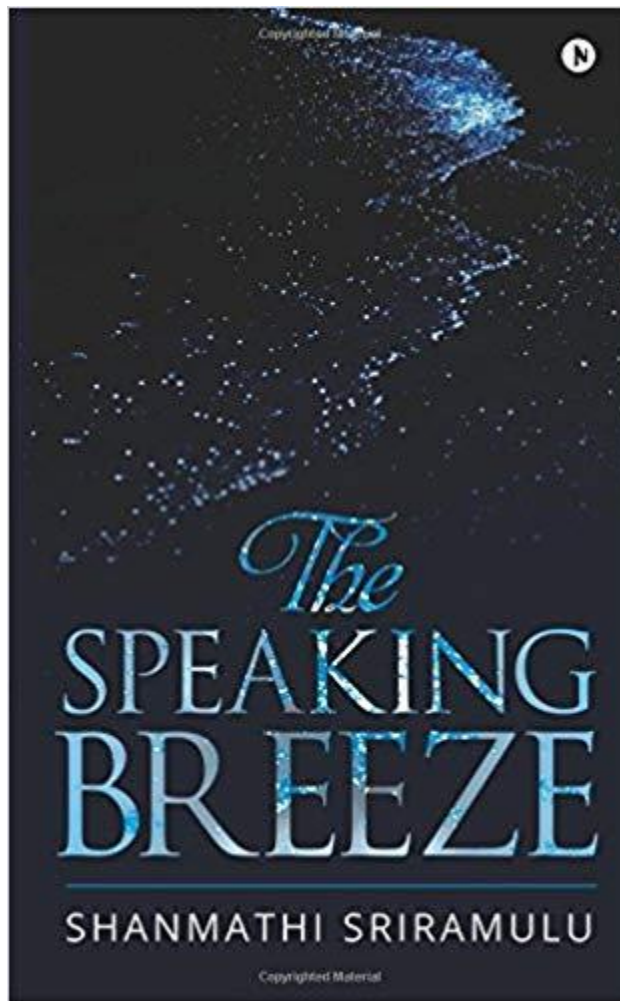
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Abstract

Ecocriticism has created an incredible place in various genres of literature all over the world. This term was first defined by Cheryll Glotfelty. Ecocriticism is the study of

interrelationship between literature and global environment. It mainly focuses on the literature of the environment. It is otherwise known as Green Writing. It reflects how nature is portrayed in literature. The paper seeks to explore ecocritical perspective in selected poems of Shanmathi Sriramulu. The existence of literature and physical environment creates and moulds a development in humans. In this mechanical and technological society, men are fascinated by machines rather than by the beauty of nature. Ecocriticism not only speaks about the wilderness and its beauty but also about the environmental crises. The main aim of this paper is to make man care about his beautiful environment, which is in menace, due to some innovations in industrialization.

Keywords: Shanmathi Sriramulu, *The Speaking Breeze*, Ecocriticism, Environmental Crises, Colonizing the forest, Inventions.

Introduction

Shanmathi Sriramulu is an Indian English poetess and research scholar from Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. She published her debut literary piece at a young age. It is titled as *The Speaking Breeze* and was published in the year 2018. *The Speaking Breeze* is a collection of poems which speaks about contemporary issues that exist in the society. Shanmathi Sriramulu's poems present the themes of nature, love, feminism, class difference and struggle, casteism and gender discrimination. Through her writings the author aims to equalize the imbalance in the society. This paper explores how nature is depicted and what is the current scenario regarding man and his natural environment.

In the poem "The Woeful Wizard" Shanmathi speaks of the tragic condition of the landscape and the river, through a wizard's voice. The river without water and the riverbank without sand were completely prosperous a few decades ago. At present where did the prosperity go?

Double or triple decades prior, the masters commanded
Their Kuttichathans to count the drop of water
Or the number of sands in the river,
Until they were assigned for a task. (8-11)

This poem is narrated by a poor wizard who is surviving in this mechanical world without sufficient clients. In those days wizards and witches earned from sorcery using "Kuttichathan" which means a small spirit or imp. Whenever the wizard was not in need of the imp's service, the wizard orders it to count the drops of water in the river and sands in the bank. If not, it will attack the master itself, they believed. The Kuttichathan also obeyed the orders from his master. The present generation is not ready to spend their time by believing in supernatural power and mocked everything as superstitious and fraudulent beliefs. Most of them turned atheist and moved towards the side of science where they have reason and proof for every action and reaction.

If I order my Kuttichathan to count the water drops in river,
He merges me inside a barrel full of water
And questions me, 'what do you mean by river?
Everything is parched up everywhere'.
If I order him to count the sands in the riverbank,
He kicks my butt and interrogates,
'Do you think the sand mafias are fools?
To leave as it is.' (13-20)

Here the writer vividly describes the current status of the landscape. In the present world, no one came to the wizard. From this situation it is understood that even the imp remained unemployed. In order to escape from the attack of his Kuttichathan, the wizard assigned the same old task given by his ancestors. The river is parched up and the sand mafias have stolen the sand illegally, so the imp returned without anything. It shows that the nature is in a bad condition.

"The Mourning Flora and Fauna" is a poem in which the nature laments about its extinction due to industrialization and development. This poem creates awareness among the people that they are destroying the forest and its inhabitants. "We begged these two legged beings / To reside within their periphery" (9-10). Forests were rich in sources until men stepped in. Men did not hear the cries of the plants, trees, animals and birds and started his tyrannical rule over the forest. "These civilized creatures colonize our woods / With concrete constructions and automobiles" (13-14). Here the forest addresses the people who settle down in the wild as civilized creatures. These lines are somewhat similar to the ideas of William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*:

The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community. This is what the ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude towards nature. (107)

Men chop trees without mercy,
And tear apart the love between rain and forest.
The River remains like a road without water,
Plants and trees stand as zombies in scarcity,
And animals conquer human boundary
In search of food and water. (18-23)

Through this poem, the poetess exposes the reasons for wilderness in forests and animals entering agricultural fields and villages. Cutting down a number of trees in the forest

naturally affects the usual rain which fills up the running river and fetches the thirst of plants to sprout. When the vegetation tumbles down without rain and water, wild animals like elephants, jaguars and leopards trespass the villages in search of food and water. In the recent years, the case of “Chinnathambi” elephant in Tamilnadu is a case in point. The poet observes.

Flash news pop ups,
‘Due to Untamed animal atrocities
The endangered species are shot dead
Or imprisoned in zoos as accused.
Finally the innocents have become victims
And the civilized behave like cannibals.’

Just because of the humans’ colonization of the forests, animals try to move out of their homeland. Man with the sixth sense gives up his homeland for betterment and progress, the wild animals never do the same. These wild species are not ready to give up their land rights. When men started demolishing forests and its trees, the animals began to exploit the agricultural fields of people as a sign of warning. As soon as an animal enters a rural or urban area, everyone blamed it, without even thinking about their faults. These animals are being shot dead and imprisoned in zoos like freedom fighters who fought for the liberation of their motherland. The intelligent and skillful humans are unable to judge the future scarcity and disaster because of destruction of forests. In this case, the writer beautifully and practically makes the society understand that innocent animals are fighting to save their forest from the human beings like us.

The poem “The Iron Trees” speaks about how the progress in technology is dominating the power of nature.

These trees never danced
When the wind blows,
They turned the technology enhanced
And standing as flora and fauna’s foes.

They eat screws, drinks oil, not fertilizer and water
Thank God, they’re cursed to remain impotent.
These tall trees invisibly lead the survivors to slaughter (5-11)

In this modern era, an invisible war is going on between nature and artificial technology. Real trees always make a move when a wind blows, if it stands erect without any action, it is understood that it is not a real tree which is born out of nature. It helped technology to spread everywhere. Despite water and fertilizer these trees had screws and oil. “They bewitched many birds by artificial power / These manmade trees are known as Cell

Tower” (13-14). These lines prove that it is a tower made by man which did not warn men about its dangerous radiations affecting natural species. People could witness only the present development, but they are blind to observe the future destruction.

Conclusion

Contemporary literary theory was its peak in the 1980’s. ‘Ecocriticism’ or ‘Green Studies’, the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment burgeoned as a literary movement during that period. Writers who celebrate nature and issues related to nature such as the Americans like Margaret Fuller, R.W. Emerson, H.D. Thoreau and British writers like Thomas Gray, William Wordsworth, and John Milton, have immensely contributed towards ‘nature’ writing. Ecocritical study of literary texts focuses on the ‘anthropocentric’ problems and rectifying the injustices caused to nature.

The present researcher has taken up a few poems of the budding literary poet, Shanmathi and analysed its concerns for the presentation of green surroundings. The paper attempts to show how the poetess has been perceptive, incisive and objective in her treatment of the subject of main relation to nature.

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