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ECOLOGICAL DISCOURSE IN 21ST CENTURY'S HINDI LITERATURE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE FOR RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Abstract:

The 21st century, marked by the palpable realities of the Anthropocene, has witnessed a significant and urgent shift in the ecological discourse within Hindi literature. Moving beyond romanticized depictions of nature or symbolic protests, contemporary literature has begun to engage directly with the complex, interconnected crises of climate change, resource extraction, species extinction, and environmental injustice. This paper argues that 21st-century Hindi literature serves as a critical cultural forum, fostering an essential interdisciplinary dialogue that bridges the gap between scientific data and human experience to model pathways for resilience and sustainability.

Through an analysis of a diverse corpus—including novels of environmental realism, dystopian narratives, and non-fictional eco-writing—this study examines how authors and poets like Nasira Sharma, Mahua Maji, Sanjiv, Anant Kumar Singh, Akhilesh, Jayanandan, Naresh Saxena, Kumar Ambuj, Rajni Tilak etc. respectively have reframed the ecological debate. Their works do not merely depict environmental degradation but critically interrogate its root causes: neoliberal development, urban-rural divides, gendered impacts of ecological loss, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. Through a close reading of select novels, short stories, and poetry, this research demonstrates how literature articulates the lived experiences of ecological degradation, giving a human face to abstract environmental data.

Ultimately, this paper proposes that Hindi literature serves as a vital, often overlooked, repository of knowledge for building socio-ecological resilience. It facilitates a necessary dialogue between the humanities, social sciences, and environmental sciences by translating scientific urgency into cultural and emotional intelligibility.

Key words: Dialogue, Discourse, Ecocriticism, Ecological justice, Hindi literature, Interdisciplinary, Resilience, Sustainability.

Introduction:

Ecological discourse is an interdisciplinary movement that aims to observe and rethink the relationships between humans, the environment, and non-human living beings. The exploitation and destruction of nature arise from an attitude of establishing human dominance over it. Environmental destruction is the dangerous culmination of a consumerist culture. It is the alienation of humans from nature. Therefore, ecological discourse refers to the consciousness that demands the rectification of mistakes committed by humans against nature, control over unchecked desires for profit and greed, and, simultaneously, demands the establishment of harmonious and integrative relationships with nature.

The second decade of the 21st century has passed. These twenty years have witnessed many changes on a global scale. Apart from economic, social, political, and cultural changes, the change that has most profoundly affected the entire living world is 'ecological change.' By ecological change, it means the changes occurring in the habitats of living beings. It also encompasses all those activities carried out in the name of development and civilization, which include: the rampant deforestation, the arbitrary alteration of rivers' flow and direction, the increasing infertility of soil and the indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers in a hurry to make it more productive, industrialization and urbanization, the excessive exploitation of nature in the name of mineral extraction, environmental pollution, climate change, ocean acidification, ozone depletion, and the gradual decline of biodiversity, among others.

Human activities have excessively exploited various components of nature, bringing it to the center of discourse. The harmonious relationship between nature and humans has become conflict-ridden in recent decades. The capitalist mentality has created a conflict between nature and humans, which is subtle yet filled with dreadful possibilities. The delusion in which humans are advancing, feeling secure under a blanket of hyper-

modernity, is nothing but the barbaric history of humans becoming 'civilized.'

Literature always deeply absorbs its time and society. A writer's imagination, knowledge, ideological commitment, and sensitivity build an insight that connects them to the problems of the era. The deepening ecological crisis between nature and humans has emerged as the most significant problem of the present time, a matter of concern for the entire world. This is why the perspective and issues of contemporary literary writing have also changed. For a long time, Hindi literature enjoyed the vastness of nature, its beauty, mystery, and form, making it a subject of its literature. However, in the last two to three decades, writers have changed their way of looking at nature.

Ecological Discourse:

Ecology: The term 'Ecology' (Oekologie) was coined by the German scientist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) in 1866. The concept of ecology is formed from the combination of the Greek words 'oikos' and 'logos'. 'Oikos' means enclosure or the surrounding area or environment, and 'logos' means study. Thus, 'Ecology' is the branch of biology that studies the relationships of organisms, plants, animals, etc., and their interdependence on other living or non-living beings and the environment. 'Ecology' discusses all aspects of life, from small microorganisms to the processes spanning the entire planet.

The eminent scholar Irfan Habib writes, "Ecology is essentially the science of studying our relationship with the environment."²

Ecology is that branch of science within which we study the interrelationships of the biological and physical units of the environment. Ecology is directly related to the dependence of organisms on other natural resources, their habitat, and their living conditions within it. In other words, when we discuss ecology, we are essentially talking about the mutual relationships among living beings, their dependence on the physical environment, and their life and existence in their habitats such as water, forests, land, air, mountains, hills, plateaus, and poles.

Today, due to human activities and their uncontrolled aspirations, the habitats of organisms have become polluted. Man has forgotten that air, water, soil, mountains, hills, forests, etc., are also habitats for other living beings, and nature has provided these habitats to all without discrimination. The symbiosis, equanimity, and mutual interdependence spoken of under the concept of ecology are now in danger. A specific class of humans has become the master of other elements of nature and is manipulating those elements according to its own will. This is why ecology has entered the realm of discourse.

The Chipko Movement, India's most celebrated environmental movement, had a world-famous slogan: "Ecology is a sustainable economy."³ This wasn't just a slogan; it was a visionary's warning. The consequences of this lack of awareness have become a significant challenge for the world as evidenced by the decisions being taken through environmental initiatives and negotiations in the present world. Even fifty-five years after the Chipko Movement, the problem of environment and ecology remains a global problem, awaiting a reasonable solution.

Ecological Discourse: Ecological discourse is the name for that consciousness which demands the rectification of mistakes committed by humans against nature and control over unchecked desires for profit and greed. Simultaneously, it demands the establishment of harmonious and integrative relationships with nature. One of the world-famous slogans of India's most renowned environmental movement, the 'Chipko Movement,' was: "Ecology is permanent economy." This was not merely a slogan; it was a warning from a visionary. The magnitude of the challenge that has emerged globally due to not heeding this warning is evident from the decisions being taken through environmental initiatives and discussions in the world today. Fifty-five years after the Chipko Movement, the problem of environment and ecology, as a global problem, still awaits a proper solution.

Major Literary Genres of Hindi on Ecological Discourse

Novels:

'Kuiyanjan' (Nasira Sharma), 'Marang Gora Neelkanth Hua' (Mahua Maji), 'Rah Gayi

Dishayen Isi Paar' (Sanjeev), 'Hidimb' (S.R. Harnot), 'Taaki Bachi Rahe Hariyali' (Anant Kumar Singh). These novels have prominently raised modern questions related to environmental concerns.

Nasira Sharma's novel 'Kuiyanjan' gives a new dimension to our efforts for water conservation and our awareness towards the environment. Emerging as a major global problem, the 'water crisis' is creating a threat to the very existence of humanity. The author hints at this in the preface of the novel itself. The rising temperature of the Earth, the uncontrolled, imbalanced environment is warning of a severe water shortage in the future. Although 75 percent of the Earth is covered with water but "only 0.5 percent of the earth's water is available fresh water."⁴

'The basis of the novel 'Kuiyanjan' is the imminent water problem. The author connects the water crisis with the daily life activities of common people—birth, death, marriage, etc. and presents it in such a way that it feels like the reader's own experience. This global problem is also our country's problem. The novel particularly takes Rajasthan in India as the basis of its story.'⁵ Citizens of districts like Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer, Nagaur, and Churu constantly face these scarcities in their daily lives. Kuiyanjan is a powerful novel by Nasira Ji. Human existence is intertwined with nature. Nature gives generously, without discrimination, to all its children. But greedy humans want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

In the novel 'Marang Gora Neelkanth Hua', 'Mahua Maji' depicts the heart-wrenching pain of the breaking relationship between tribals and nature. The biggest question in the novel is about humanity's right to live a naturally healthy life. 'The novel presents the true image of the exploitation and oppression of tribals (humans) struggling with radiation, pollution, and displacement, and other components of the environment and ecology. The novel shows how governments that make grand claims about environmental protection on the global stage are the same ones that guarantee the loot of our natural resources and human labor by capitalists.'⁶ Extracting minerals from a specific place, deforestation, displacement of people by foreign companies or the country's own big capitalist houses such events cannot

occur without governmental intervention.

'In 'Rah Gayi Dishayen Isi Paar', Sanjeev terms the unprecedented achievements in the fields of cloning and genetics by biologists as distortions developing in the complex world of human relationships. Sanjeev highlights the importance of living beings and opposes artificiality. In the novel, the author has raised other issues like 'commercialization of spirituality', 'economic exploitation of fishermen', 'trade of human and animal meat', 'the condition of abandoned or orphaned women' and questions related to their labor.'⁷ The author has peeled back layer by layer the intervention of cultural pollution—a byproduct of scientific development—in social institutions and values. The question of life and death had been accepted almost as a philosophical object by philosophers and writers alike; for the first time, Sanjeev has looked at birth, death, life, mortality, gender, God, and infinity through the lens of scientificity. Not only has he looked, but he has also presented a logical perspective to see and understand their essence at a bio-scientific level, whose basis is science and whose center is society.

'In 'Hidimb' S. R. Harnot raises some major questions of its time, centering on an inaccessible region of Himachal. In this postmodern era, Harnot observes, understands, and unravels with great patience how family, surroundings, nature, environment, forests, and land are being destroyed in the storm of globalization, and how man is becoming increasingly helpless and alone.'⁸

'Taaki Bachi Rahe Hariyali' is the life saga of struggling farmers amidst the looming crisis over Indian agricultural culture and their struggle. 'The novel reveals layer by layer how corrupt government systems, the collusion of politicians and greedy businessmen conspire against farmers and honest agricultural scientists to demoralize them. Senior fiction writer Anant Kumar Singh in this novel 'Taaki Bachi Rahe Hariyali' exposes the violent activities taking place within agricultural ecology.'⁹ The novel begins with the government posting of a young agricultural scientist, Naveen, who is honest, enthusiastic, and believes in traditional farming methods, seeking alternatives to chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Naveen was aware of the truth behind the multi-billion rupee business under the guise of

chemical fertilizers and pesticides, so his aim was to save both crops and people. Naveen would prepare pesticides and vermicompost in the traditional way as alternatives to these chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Stories:

'Kalyan Ka Ant' by Jayanandan, 'Nadi Gayab Hai' and 'Aabhi' by S. R. Harnot, 'Bhram Ke Bahar' by Pradeep Jilvani and 'Vajood' by Akhilesh, are some of the stories discussing upon ecological discourse.

In writer Jayanandan's story 'Kalyan Ka Ant' the anguish of a pond disappearing due to the greed of family and private companies. The modern consumeristic approach of the family members and profit making private companies jointly cheated the owner of the pond. They sent him somewhere in deep ocean to find a ship because he was the master of swimming and lover of water. In his absence the family member and company made a deal and dried up the pond which was dearest of his owner. This resulted in disappearing of a living water body. This story show a serious concern for how companies begun a ruthless assault on nature using modern machinery. 10

The story 'Nadi Gayab Hai' is about a living river being suddenly dried up. 'At the center of the story are the river, forest, mountains, glaciers, dynamite, deities, the government, and the common people. This story, in ecological contexts, is about the connection and disconnect between humans and the biotic-abiotic components of nature.'¹¹ Centering on ecological questions, it also sheds light on human relationships. The author also attempts to lift the veil on religious faith, the place of deities in the lives of mountain people who live in harmony with nature, the influence of related beliefs, and myths.

'Through the story titled 'Aabhi', the author draws the reader's attention to the issues of polluted water sources in mountainous regions, the degradation of natural habitats of animals and birds due to deforestation, the decline in their numbers from hunting and deteriorating ecological balance, black marketing of flora, the encroachment of mafias and profiteers into reserved forest areas, environmental pollution caused by the arrival of

outside visitors and their irresponsible presence, as well as the cultural pollution resulting from their uncontrolled behavior.'¹² The author also appears to be trying to make readers more aware through the absence and helplessness of God during times of human destruction in this region, which has immense faith in deities.

'In Pradeep Jilvani's story 'Bhram Ke Bahar', the author has also expressed the pain of ecological crisis and the destruction of rivers through the metaphor of a water nymph.'¹³In the story 'Vajood' (Akhilesh), a glimpse of the plunder of resources has been presented by centering on the inequality prevalent in society.'¹⁴

Poetry

Contemporary Hindi poetry is that distinctive poetic stream of the modern era which is connected to contemporary contexts. In it, contemporary consciousness and poetic sensibility can be clearly seen. This poetry, struggling to protect human values, has encompassed within itself numerous new human concerns, among which ecological discourse is a central and notable aspect of this poetry's concern and sensitivity.

In truth, forests are our life-saving assets. However, in the industrial towns and metropolises that are swallowing up greenery, the atmosphere is getting polluted by poisonous gases, consequently, the healthy lungs of the Earth are becoming

Contemporary Hindi poetry is that distinctive poetic stream of the modern era which is connected to contemporary contexts. In it, contemporary consciousness and poetic sensibility can be clearly seen. This poetry, struggling to protect human values, has encompassed within itself numerous new human concerns, among which ecological discourse is a central and notable aspect of this poetry's concern and sensitivity.

Naresh Saxena's poem 'Naksha' (Map) presents a scene of such a toxic environment:

"There is a forest in the map, not trees

There are rivers in the map, not water

There are mountains in the map,not stones
There is a country in the map,not people
You must have understood
That we all live in a map...
This is no place for leisure
Come out of the maps at once
I feel that one day
Some jester will fold up all the maps and put them in his pocket
And walk away."15

Rajni Tilak expresses the horror of nature's destruction caused by nuclear war in her poem 'Buddha Chahiye Yuddha Nahi' (We Want Buddha, Not War) in this manner:

"Why did you sow these seeds of death
Nuclear war?
This banyan tree of hatred-death
Will swallow millions in an instant,
In the land of Buddha,
The vow of Panchsheel will be broken.
We do not want war,
We want to live
We want creation,not destruction
We want Buddha,not war."16

Trees have been our friends for centuries, but to build industrial towns and erect concrete jungles, we mercilessly cut down the reservoirs of oxygen the lush green forests. The inhuman relationship of humans with nature is the cause of this disintegration, fracture, and collapse. Consequently, seeing the environment becoming toxic night and day, Kumar

Ambuj writes in the poem 'Kahin Koi Zameen Nahi' (There is No Land Anywhere):

"From all sides, the sounds of new construction
And only builders are doing the construction
The rest are only selling their lands
Now all the land is with the builders
All the tricks, spirituality, and philosophy are with the builders
Earth! An half-eaten fruit
Placed on a builder's dining table."¹⁷

Other prose genres include Lakshmi Prasad Pant's travelogue 'Himalaya Ka Kabristan' (The Graveyard of the Himalayas) and Amrit Lal Vegad's 'Saundarya Ki Nadi Narmada' (The River Narmada of Beauty), which express ecological concerns. We find the same concern in the essays of Vidya Niwas Mishra and Shekhar Pathak. In the ideological literature related to the environment, we consider the writings of Sundarlal Bahuguna, Anupam Mishra, Amritlal Vegad, Shekhar Pathak, K. Vanaja, Prabhakaran Hebbar Illath, and others. The theoretical books by these writers are significant contributions on the relevant subject.

Conclusion:

The Geography's textbook of class 11th NCERT states, "The world is a system of interdependencies."¹⁸ This means the world is a system that operates on mutual interdependence. The aforementioned literature exemplify how this understanding of interdependence is gradually becoming blurred. The reality is that the world is being driven by the power of capital, apart from divine and human authorities. That power, whose first and last desire is capital accumulation at any cost. Before it, state power bows down, and even religious authority changes its course. As long as virtual efforts to save the environment and ecology continue through paper claims while rejecting nature's supreme

authority, the world will survive only as much as the tea left in a teacup. We must understand the anomaly of the wastage of resources; we must accept that increased purchasing power cannot extend our lifespan. The bread that rightfully belongs to others creates cysts in a full stomach, not blood.

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