

Ecocentrism in Translated Odia Fiction: A Critical Study of Gopinath Mohanty's *The Ancestor* Pratibha Ray's *After the Deluge* and Akhila Naik's *Bheda*

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ABSTRACT:

Ecocentrism is a term used by environmentalists and ecologists to refer to a nature-centric outlook as opposed to human-centric that upholds all life forms through interrelationships between natural features and biological organisms. Many writers have effortlessly tried to show this relationship in their text thus giving it a nature-centric perspective which combines all life forms together under one roof. Gopinath Mohanty is a versatile Odia writer, who has contributed to great masterpieces like *Dadibudha* 1944 (*The Ancestor*), *Paraja* 1946 (*Common People*). This tribal series not only accentuates the culture of various tribes residing in Odisha but also throw light on their inseparable bond with nature. Pratibha Ray is a prolific Odia writer whose classics include *Punyotoya* (*The Hallowed River* 1978), *Sila Padma* 1983 (*The Stone Lotus*), *Aadibhoomi* 1993 (*The Primal Land*). Her masterpiece *Magnamati* (*After The Deluge*) paints a life-threatening picture of Odisha's super cyclone 1999. Akhila Naik is another literary figure from Kalahandi district of Odisha. He has done post-graduation in Odia and has excellence in writing poetry, short stories and novels. *Bheda* is his first novel. Gopinath Mohanty's *The Ancestor* is a date palm tree that is given the stature of God and worshipped. Ray's *After the Deluge*, delineates the relationship of human beings with mother earth. In Naik's *Bheda*, we come across ecocriticism and a nature-oriented approach though it targets on the plight of poor Dalits. All the three novels shed light on the significance of nature to human beings as it touches upon eco-ethics and deals with the aftermath of ignoring it. My paper makes an attempt to analyze the three texts in the context of eco-centrism which centralises nature by bringing all the life forms together under one eternal roof called earth.

Keywords: Eco-centrism, Nature, Cyclone, Sustenance, Eco-ethics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nature has always been a presiding theme in all genres of literature. In the famous fairytale *Cinderella*, nature plays a pivotal role in empowering the title character by providing her with all that she asks for. From tales of mythology to fictional narratives, songs of the poets, through the grim stories of detectives, nature is treated separately yet playing a significant role. In Kalidasa's classic *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, the female protagonist Shakuntala seems to be in peace with nature as a workmate picking up different figures like birds, animals and plants in the deep forest. She mirrors nature in general through her capturing beauty and feminine attributes. If one closely examines the pronounced ancient epic *Ramayana* by Valmiki, which pictures dense forests like Chitrakoota, Naimishaaranya, Dandakaranya, "Panchavati" etc encompassing wild trees, fruits, animals, river facilitating the flow of life. A considerable part of the text is devoted to the deeds of Lord Ram in the thicket during his fourteen-year exile, which is entitled as *Aranya kanda*. *The Aranya kanda* or *The Forest Episode* forms the third text of the epic. The writer hints at the centrality of nature and all living organisms. Sita, one of the

protagonists emanates from earth and finally commingles in it showing the paramount power of nature being the maker and demolisher. Not only in actual texts, but also in the retellings, woodland serves as a consequential setting as well as character. For instance, in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's masterpiece *The Forest of Enchantments*, the writer picks up concerns of the female characters of *Ramayana* like Sita, Kaikeyi, Surpanakha, Mandodari and Urmila in the evergreen setting of Rishi Valmiki's Ashram in the midst of wilderness. Here nature is not projected as a background, it is much more than that which further enhances the feminist voices of hardship.

II. EMERGENCE OF ECOCRITICISM

Ecocriticism is a comprehensive approach that literary and cultural researchers use to examine how literature, culture, and the physical environment intersect with the global ecological catastrophe. At first, ecocriticism was known as "literary ecology" (Meeker 1972), and it was eventually shortened to "-ism" (Rueckert 1996). By the early 1990s, ecocriticism had become a popular literary and cultural theory. This was demonstrated by the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) at the Western Literary Association in 1992, including the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Glotfelty and Fromm 1996), and the launch of the flagship journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* in 1993.

Key publications like *The Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm have helped the field of ecocriticism; which examines the relationship between literature and the environment gain recognition. This field examines how our perceptions of nature and environmental challenges are reflected in and shaped by literature. Important ecocriticism figures include Greg Garrard, Jonathan Bate, and Lawrence Buell. Their writings present a variety of viewpoints on environmental criticism and the ecological imagination.

A classic work of ecocriticism, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was released in 1962. Credited with increasing public awareness of the perils of unrestrained chemical usage, it investigates the detrimental impacts of pesticides on the environment, especially birds. It further warns people of the use of pesticides which can cause long term illness in humans and animals.

In his memoir *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey discusses his experiences working as a park ranger in Utah and offers a critical analysis of how humans affect the natural environment. It examines issues such as the importance of wild areas, the preservation of wildness, and the perils of unbridled development. A seminal work in the area, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm) compiles important works that define and examine ecocriticism. With a literary and historical perspective on the environment, Lawrence Buell's book *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* explores how nature writing shaped American culture and identity. It also focuses on American writer Thoreau's contribution and interest in nature writing. Ecocriticism by Greg Garrard offers a thorough introduction to the discipline, highlighting its main ideas, approaches, and arguments. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* by Ursula K. Heise examines how local and global literary viewpoints on the environment relate to one another. Tim Morton's *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking the Beauty of the Environment* highlights the idea of hyper objects and questions conventional ideas of nature in writing.

The writers of the romantic era, have treated nature as an ever-present entity: a guide, philosopher, friend, teacher, etc which guides them through the harsh ways of life, providing them with ample solace, comfort, motivation, spirit, and inspiration. All these themes are best reflected in the rhythmic songs of poetry penned down by Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron and Coleridge, stating the very significance of nature in the existence of human beings. These writers have already given what is called as the true way of living life in harmony with nature.

III. HUMAN-NATURE RELATIONSHIP AND ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

The relationship between man and nature is age-old and has been a recent topic of debate in ecocritical forums. According to Ms. T. Jemima Asenath and Dr. A. Santhanalakshmi, ecocriticism "advocates a peaceful interaction between man and nature and opposes excessive human exploitation of the natural world. It is man's conflicts with nature that cause ecological crises" (1285). Human beings and other organisms are reliant on nature for their persistence. Both of it being ambiguous, whose nature is arduous to be examined. Nature

acts both as a creator and destroyer and so man in some cases. Being quick-witted and technologically sound, man makes so many innovations in all the spheres but callously marring nature and biodiversity. The rapid metropolization has resulted in indiscriminate felling of the trees, thus muddling the flora and fauna and greatly stirring the ecosystem. The ecological problem persists because "people have not completely understood their connection to the natural surroundings" (Asenath and Santhanalakshmi 1286). In a society that prioritizes consumerism, it increases people's ability to acquire resources and money, which encourages them to take advantage of nature. It results in an environmentally damaging societal structure.

Human beings are considered as descendants of Mother Nature. Nature possessing all maternal attributes stands as a supreme authority and even goes to the extent of punishing its child when he crosses all the bars. Nature has always nurtured man ever since its evolution. It has not only sheltered him but also has taken ample concern to nourish him with adequate food just like caring mother who comforts her child in her warm bosom. All plants, animals, human beings and other living beings form smaller parts of a larger whole called Nature and live together in harmony. Eco-centrism brings all living organisms under one roof thus imparting them a globalised identity. It is a nature-centric approach not human-centric, which manifests in nature that encapsulates all the life forms together without any bias, thus, falling under the broad category of Eco-criticism. According to Prof. Harish D.L., "eco-criticism is combination of 'criticism' with 'eco', a shortened form of 'ecology' the science that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habitats" (616). It is the task of the eco-critics that they must provide readers with a more comprehensive, in-depth, and unambiguous explanation of how and what environmental literature conveys than the authors themselves, who are engrossed in their own stories, if they are to accomplish anything truly significant. An essential part of the eco-critical process of removing such concepts, writings, and writers collectively, and placing them in context is our understanding of ourselves and where we are. Literally, our understanding of our place in the world and the reason behind our writing. Other names for eco-criticism include environmental criticism and green studies, which refer to critical works that examine the connections between literature and the biological and physical world while accurately recognizing the destruction that human activity is causing to the environment. Numerous critics also highlight "the interdisciplinary nature of the enquiry, which is informed by ecological science, politics, ethics, and women's studies" (D.L.617).

Particularly, in this study nature stands supreme as many noted "American and British Romantic writers took a particular interest in nature as a subject" (D.L.615). Natural objects are used as recurrent themes in multiple narratives to focus the centrality of nature and its impression on the lives of human beings. May it be fiction, poetry, gothic romance, detective story, surrounding plays a pivotal role in the progression of the plot. Nature as reflected in most of the narratives brings forth a consciousness that human beings cannot sustain without nature. Nature not only creates different forms of life but also nourishes them thus playing a pivotal role in the life of human beings.

Nature basically used as a setting in a story or fiction enhances it further adding a background to it without which plot development is not possible. As Prof. Harish puts forth in his paper "natural historians began to write about newly encountered places and wildlife; and pioneers and other travelers wrote of their experiences with an emphasis on setting" (617). Setting is as important as character because it makes the readers aware of the place where the action is taking place. Here, the action refers to the events of the story or plot. Setting or the surrounding not only adds a background to the story but also provides basic information to the readers about the socio-cultural aspects of the place. It speaks volumes about the people residing in it, their lifestyle, culture, tradition, belief system, etc. which adds to the better understanding of the text. The description of the surrounding aids to the proper exposition of the story to the readers. For instance, the novel *The Ancestor* by Gopinath Mohanty is set in the Lulla village, a remote village in Odisha where the people of Paraja tribe live. Mohanty's detailed description of the village roads, trees, hills, temples, ponds exposes the story to the readers thus providing a preface to it. Here "life is predominated by the eco-cultural practices, rituals festivities, song and dance, family affairs etc." (Senapati 71). Upon closed reading of the text; one can assume that there is a strong connection between the setting and the story of the text. Thus, setting or surrounding plays a crucial role in the narrative which most writers adopt as a strategy for the plot development. Another exemplary text can be Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, a classic of American Literature that gives a clarion call of back to nature, "describing the ordinary but remarkable creatures and happenings he encounters in the natural world and discussing the meaning of living in harmony with nature and one's

soul" (D.L.617). There is a detailed description of the author's two months stay in a small cabin in Walden Pond in Massachusetts, observing nature, believing in self-reliance and gaining spiritual awakening. Through the remarkable text, he not only details his experience with nature but gives a universal message to mankind how to live in harmony with nature.

IV. DISCUSSION

Gopinath Mohanty is a well-liked name in Odia literature, who has mastery in painting the true picture of tribal culture and credos. With his notable contribution to the tribal series namely, *Dadi Budha*, *Paraja* and *Amrutara Santana*, Mohanty has grabbed himself an irreplaceable rank in the domain of literature. All these seminal works have been rendered into English by various remarkable personalities to touch upon larger canvas.

Mohanty's *Amrutara Santana* and *Paraja* deal with tribal life and their struggle for survival amidst various challenges like modernisation and hybridisation of culture. Mohanty as a part of his job as a public servant spent most of his time in the remote area of Koraput surrounded by forests and hills. There he keenly observed the lifestyle of various tribes and recorded it which was successfully culminated as novels rendering him as a master of tribal series. His *Amrutara Santana* deals with naive Kondh tribe and their mannerisms whereas *Paraja* and *Dadi Budha* are solely dedicated to Paraja tribe of Odisha. Kurella in his research echoes, the same impression when he writes, that "The shock, the turmoil, the anger, and the emptiness that were felt by these besieged people find expression in these novels" (367). Each tribe has their own distinct way of living guided by certain rules and regulations. Mostly Mohanty touches upon the themes of modernisation and disintegration of tribal culture due to outside interference and internal conflicts through which he paints a vivid picture of existential crisis faced by the tribes. It also deals with loss of identity and the struggle of indigenous tribes to preserve their tribal culture. He is deemed as "the first novelist in India to explore the tribal life of hilly interiors" and emerge as a powerful "voice for the voiceless" (Senapati 70).

V. TRIBAL IDENTITY, CULTURE, AND ECOLOGY

Tribe denotes to a group of people adhering to certain cultural traits. According to the researcher, Sayar Singh Chopra, these are "a separate group of persons having their own identity, and cultural traits" (74). These people are completely different from the people of the mainstream due to their way of dressing, living, language, strict practices and rigid belief system. Their world is guarded by superstitions and blind belief they share a special kinship with nature. They live "in isolated areas and their social life is different from the people of the main stream" (Chopra 74). Odisha has been home to various tribes from time immemorial. These tribes specifically live in secluded areas amidst nature and natural resources and are known for following bizarre practices. Each of the tribe is different from other as far as rules and regulations are concerned. Each tribe is marked by its own distinct identity. For instance, Bonda tribe who dwell in Malkangiri district has unique identifying features which make them different from other tribes. They serve as major subject in Pratibha Ray's novel *The Primal Land*. They speak remo language and are a part of Munda ethnic group. They have unique dressing style of women wearing heavy necklace made of beads, and stones while men cover themselves with loin cloth. Women have a strange ritual of remaining bald and naked. Their marriage customs and rituals are quite unique as women marry men who are much younger to them.

VI. NATURE WORSHIP AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY IN *THE ANCESTOR*

Dadi Budha or *The Ancestor* is a heart-throbbing tale of the Paraja tribe which is the first novel of Mohanty published in 1944. It was first published in Odia as *Dadi Budha* and later translated into English by Arun Kumar Mohanty. According to the practices of the tribe, nature stands supreme. It is both the life-giver and taker. The plot of the narrative begins in an inaccessible village of Lulla, "a mountainous territory surrounded by thick forest" (Senapati 71), where life is led blissfully by the grace of the local deity, Dadi Budha until the Christian missionaries set their foot in and the whole tribal culture falls apart.

In the words of the researcher Soumyakanta Senapati, Odisha has been a place of residence of "62 tribes, who constitute 22.1% of the state population", which is equivalent to one-fourth of the total population. Their way of living and credos impart them a distinctive identity which "lie in their vibrant and varied cultural heritage,

tradition, indigenous customs, occult practices, typical lifestyle, language, rituals and festivals" (Senapati 71). Their world, way of living, beliefs, customs, and superstitions seem mysterious to the common people. They strongly believe in the worship of nature. The writer realistically paints the picture of Parajas living a secluded life far from the madding crowd in the mountainous village of Lulla exclusively governed by tribal norms.

The salient thing to mark here is the title of the text: "'Dadi' in Paraja language means grandfather" and '*Budha*' means elderly and when used conjointly it refers to the "spirit of their ancestors that they worship as their supreme God". Here, 'Dadi Budha' is a disfigured date palm tree attired with white loin cloth and worshipped. "Everything happens at the will of Dadi Budha" (Senapati 71-72). He is considered as the supreme creator and destroyer as evident in the lines of the text:

Dadi Budha was a benign deity. He expressed his anger until he was provoked. He was the eternal ancestor. Everything was his creation, his play. Anyone could speak on his behalf, for he was mute (Mohanty 8).

Modern man has come across 'Chipko Movement' as an initiative to protect felling of trees. But it seems peculiar that though they are illiterate, they well understand from where their food comes and who is the ultimate creator of the beautiful earth. It is none other than Mother Nature, who nurtures everyone without even slightest of partiality. For her, all the forms of creation both living and non-living whether flora or fauna or insects or birds or plants or shrub bear the same eminence. Their size, shape, color and contribution hardly matters. Here the date palm tree acts like a typical grandfather, who unifies everyone in an eternal bond of love and cooperation. Mohanty through the depiction of tribal culture has foregrounded the concept of Ecocentrism, which is a nature-based approach. According to the researcher Narayan Jena and Pramod Kumar Das, "Mohanty has given a splendid description of the tribal world in the hills and forests of the Eastern Ghats of Odisha" (2). The central attention is on nature as represented in the narrative through various description of the scenery:

Hills stand one piled on other creating an illusion of innumerable vimans. The peaks of the hills, small and large, incline towards a valley at their centre. The valley is covered by the green forest. The river Muran flows through this beautiful valley, from one end of the highland to the other (Mohanty 1).

From the above description, it is clear that the tribal world is both sublime and beautiful amidst mountains, hills, valleys and river that has a therapeutic effect on individuals. Nature soothes the mind and restores energy among the tribes who toil all day in the field. Thenga Jani, the son of the village headman, wandering in the mountains witnesses the autumn sun which appears to him sweet and warm, "it intoxicated him and made his mind swing" (Mohanty 15). There is mention of the fresh "breeze blowing through the corn fields, shadow of the hill-forest, water of the river Muran, starry night, etc. give strength and replenishment to the tired body of the farmers of the Lulla village" (Jena and Das 3).

The next centre of focus of the writer is "'Dadi Budha', embodied by the Date palm tree is believed to be the representative of both the ancestor's spirit and the natural spirit" (Jena and Das 5). It is not a common tree in the eyes of the tribe rather it is their ancestor's spirit dwelling in the tree which is venerated for better harvest, fertility, production, well-being, etc. There are rituals of sacrifice made solely dedicated to it. During marriage, there is a provision of bestowing offerings to their local deity from both sides.

Their world is exclusively for themselves nobody can dare to intervene. No doubt, the writer here has projected Dadi Budha as a unifying force, who maintains his firm position in the community. People of the tribe seem always busy trying to please their master through following activities like offerings, rituals, and celebrations which ensures not only their well-being but also their steadiness, decree, etc. They have a staunch believe on Dadi Budha and most of their cultural practices are entwined with it. Dadi Budha is a conventional spirit and "stands for the cultural heritage of the tribal people manifest in their rituals and customs" (Mohanty ii).

In the words of the researcher, Pushpavalli Kurella, the story "is set in" the Lulla Village, in "the densely-wooded hills and valleys of the Eastern Ghats in the undivided Koraput district of Southern Odisha" (367), which is much more than an appropriate setting amidst backwoods and hills located in the lap of nature. The people of the tribe are naive to the technological amelioration. The writer has given ample reverence to Nature not only as a setting, but also as an escorting spirit. In the text, "Ram Muduli's cosmological vision reveres and celebrates human's participatory kinship with nature. For him, nature is animate with the spirits of ancestors and everything is interconnected" (Kurella 372).

The novel substantially deals with the themes of eco-ethics, thus centralizing nature and ranking it the highest. Like Romantic Poet, Pantheist William Wordsworth who not only worshipped Nature but considered it as his guide, philosopher, friend who inspires him and teaches him life's lesson. For him Nature acted as teacher as evident in his *The Prelude* in the boat stealing episode. The poem is based on Wordsworth's memory of childhood where he steals a boat and experiences awe and fear associated to it. The action is based on the stealing of boat and rowing it across the river. While he was doing that he witnessed something fearful and shocking. Here there is a shift in the tone the carefree happy poet now feels scared seeing the vast mountain behind him. It seemed to him as if Nature is warning him against unethical deed of stealing. Nature here which was pleasant initially now takes the form of a vast mountain heading towards poet and teaching him life lessons. The haunted poet suddenly becomes conscious of the power of Nature and his limitations to it. This incident brings a change in his earlier perception of nature which is associated with profound beauty and innocence. He never thought nature could invoke such a fearful and jaw dropping sight. This incident not only changes poet's perception but also leads to deeper understanding of the world. He now sees nature not only as a friend, philosopher but also as a guide and strict teacher who leads to the better understanding the difference between ethical and unethical and eventually guides to the right path.

VII. ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE IN PRATIBHA RAY'S *AFTER THE DELUGE*

Another distinguished writer of Odisha is Pratibha Ray. Her seminal work *Magnamati*, first published in Odia in 2004 and translated into English in 2021 by Prafulla Kumar Mohanty as *After the Deluge*, is a jaw-dropping tale of the super cyclone of 1999 and it is detrimental to the people. It mostly affected the coastal areas especially Jagatsinghpur district. This novel is based on real life episodes witnessed by the writer herself when she visited the affected place. She has seen people enduring too closely and has also interacted with few of the survivors.

Pratibha Ray's *After the Deluge* (*Magnamati*) is a deeply evocative novel that explores themes of survival, resilience, and humanity amid a natural calamity. Rooted in the cultural and geographic context of rural Odisha, the novel vividly depicts the aftermath of a devastating flood and the lives of the people who bear its brunt. Through the lens of this catastrophic event, Ray depicts the horrors of the Anthropocene, including environmental degradation, human displacement, and the erosion of traditional ways of life. Moreover, Ray masterfully blends her narrative with themes of environmental consciousness, social critique, and personal transformation, making *Magnamati* a poignant exploration of human endurance and fragility in the face of nature's wrath keeping nature at the center.

The deluge serves as more than just a catastrophic event in the novel. It is a metaphorical and literal force that reshapes lives and landscapes. The floodwaters disrupt the social and moral fabric of the affected villages, washing away not just homes and livelihoods but also the pretensions and illusions of normalcy. Ray uses the flood as a backdrop to probe deeper existential questions about the human relationship with nature, the fragility of civilization, and the limits of human control. The text not only hints at "various human actions with negative impacts on nature while at the same time building human awareness" (Nahdhiyah et al.2).

Through her descriptions of the flood and its aftermath, Ray brings to life the harrowing impact of such disasters. Her prose captures the rising panic as the waters encroach, the anguish of loss, and the numbing despair that follows destruction. However, the flood is not merely destructive—it is also transformative, forcing the characters to confront their vulnerabilities and adapt to an altered reality.

At its heart, *After the Deluge* is a tribute to the indomitable spirit of humanity. Ray portrays arena of characters, each coping with the calamity in their unique ways. From those who succumb to despair to those who rise with renewed strength, the novel underscores the diversity of human responses to crisis. Central to this is the community's collective effort to rebuild their lives despite overwhelming odds.

The novel's depiction of survival is both raw and inspiring. Ray shows how individuals and communities come together in the aftermath of disaster, finding strength in solidarity. This collective resilience is counterpointed by moments of individual heroism and self-sacrifice, emphasizing the complex interplay of personal and communal dynamics in times of crisis. One of the underlying themes of *After the Deluge* is the delicate and often fraught relationship between humans and nature. The flood serves as a reminder of nature's power and unpredictability, challenging the characters' assumptions of control and security. Ray critiques the

hubris of human endeavors that ignore the rhythms and limitations of the natural world, suggesting that disasters often arise from a disregard for environmental balance.

The novel's portrayal of the flood also reflects a deep respect for nature's duality—as both nurturer and destroyer like most of the novels that “portray the interaction between humans and nature, and nature is often presented as entity that is threatened by human action” (Nahdhiyah et al. 3). Several examples of natural phenomena and characteristics that were harmed or destroyed by human activity can be found in the scriptures dating back to the distant past. The issue of nature's devastation is now present in a wide variety of literary works. While the flood wreaks havoc, it is also a force of renewal, cleansing and reshaping the land. Ray's narrative invites readers to reflect on the need for harmony with nature, advocating a balance that respects its power and sustains its bounty. Amid the chaos of the flood, *After the Deluge* unearths the underlying social inequities that define the community. The novel lays bare the disparities in wealth, privilege, and access to resources, which become even more pronounced during the disaster. The poor and marginalised suffer the most, their vulnerabilities exacerbated by the systemic inequities that favor the affluent and powerful.

Ray also uses the flood as a lens to examine human morality. In the face of adversity, the characters are forced to confront their values and priorities. The disaster acts as a crucible, revealing both the best and worst aspects of human nature. Acts of kindness and compassion stand alongside instances of selfishness and betrayal, painting a complex portrait of humanity under pressure. As the title suggests, *After the Deluge* is ultimately about what comes after: the process of recovery, rebuilding, and redemption. The flood serves as a turning point for many characters, forcing them to reevaluate their lives and relationships. Through their struggles, Ray explores themes of forgiveness, renewal, and hope. For some characters, the flood offers an opportunity for redemption. Faced with the transience of material possessions and the fragility of human existence, they discover deeper truths about themselves and their place in the world. The novel suggests that even in the face of overwhelming loss, there is potential for growth and transformation.

One of the primary horrors of the Anthropocene explored in *After the Deluge* is the devastating impact of climate change on vulnerable communities. The novel highlights the trauma and displacement caused by the super cyclone, which destroyed homes, livelihoods, and entire ecosystems. As evident in the text, “About ninety percent of the villages in Jagatsinghpur district were treeless, birdless, lifeless, and flowerless wastes” (341). Ray's vivid descriptions of the cyclone's aftermath, including the scenes of destruction, death, and despair, serve as a powerful indictment of the failure of governments and societies to address the root causes of climate change.

Another horror of the Anthropocene depicted in the novel is the erosion of traditional ways of life. The cyclone has destroyed not only physical infrastructure but also the social and cultural fabric of the affected communities. Ray portrays the struggles of the characters to come to terms with their loss and to find ways to rebuild their lives. It felt as if the disaster which separated them again reunited them to face the oddities. After the devastation, the government actively participated with “self-sacrificing dedication to rescue the victims from inaccessible places” Relief packets were distributed by the voluntary organization, but “even if thousands of crores poured in as aid, that would not compensate the loss” (346). Through their stories of the victim, Ray highlights the importance of preserving traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and community bonds in the face of environmental disaster.

The novel also explores the horror of environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity. The cyclone has destroyed vast areas of mangrove forests, which were not only a source of livelihood for the local communities but also a vital component of the ecosystem. Ray's descriptions of the devastated landscape, including the dead and dying trees, serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving natural ecosystems and the consequences of environmental degradation.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the horror of human displacement and migration. The cyclone has forced thousands of people to leave their homes and migrate to other areas in search of shelter, food, and livelihoods. Ray portrays the struggles of the displaced people, including their experiences of trauma, loss, and exploitation as she writes, “there was no one to assess victory and defeat after the battle was over. But as they were all fighters, they were all the victors in the war of life, although dead” (344). The flood has washed away the entire coastal plains but still there is hope among the victors who fought tirelessly to save their lives.

After the Deluge is a powerful exploration of the horrors of the Anthropocene era. Pratibha Ray's novel serves as a warning about the devastating consequences of climate change, environmental degradation, and human displacement which is a major concern nowadays as put forth by the researcher Nahdhiyah et al. as they say that "the degradation of nature and the damage done to the natural environment as phenomena have elicited responses not only from writers and the public, but also from academics who play a role in building an intellectual climate and environmental awareness"(3). Through its vivid portrayals of the aftermath of the Odisha super cyclone, the novel highlights the need for governments, societies, and individuals to take action to address the root causes of these horrors and to work towards a more sustainable and equitable future. In this context contemporary researchers observe, "The destruction of nature is now a theme reflected in an abundant flow of literary works" (Nahdhiyah et al.2).

VIII. ANTHROPOCENE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Similarly, in the novel, we witness Nature punishing humans for crossing all the limits of tolerance. Cyclone and flood are represented as vengeance of Nature on human beings and civilization. It emerges so powerfully that it devours the entire area consisting of human beings, birds, animals, trees, forests, houses, and whatever comes on its way. The sea here is personified as a demon that knows only demolition and loss.

Etymologically, Deluge denotes excessive flood and the title too highlights the aftermath of it and its impression on the lives of people. Soon after the super cyclone, it rained so heavily for the couple of days that it led the sea to be swelled up just like a pregnant woman who can no more withstand the pressure of her ever expanding womb. The sea couldn't hold for long and the huge furious waves washed away the entire civilisation teaching mankind a forever lesson.

There is blend of lore and mythology in the novel through the depiction of the fisherman community, dwelling near the sea, and advancing towards modernisation with full swing. Cyclone and flood are the recent lessons learned by humans. As reflected in the words of the Jnanpith laureate Sitakant Mohapatra,

A brilliant narrative of the super-cyclone that had ravaged coastal Odisha in 1999. The author's psychological analysis of the anguish of man and his Single-minded focus on overcoming the crisis....

The fury of nature in the form of cyclone symbolises the human follies in transgressing all the limits of humanity, thus victimizing earth. But soon human beings learn the value of Mother Nature. Like a mother, she nurtures her child but when the child becomes a truant and hurts her, she even goes to the extent of punishing. Human beings should learn to live in harmony with Nature otherwise the consequences would be disastrous for the entire mankind:

A little frown of earth blows away –like mustard seeds- all the achievements of humankind in this vast world... (Ray 26).

The author in her novel beautifully pictorializes earth as a living entity who chronicles her own history using her own language on trees, bushes, river, sea, sky and air. The language of earth is totally incomprehensible to man. Earth unites all the living creatures: plants, trees, and water bodies into one as in the novel, the individual name of the village transforms into *Basumati* (earth) which comprises of all the divine energy that plays a pivotal role in synthesising and orchestrating the entire universe.

The narrative deals solely with the plight of Mother Earth. It is both the tale of creation and destruction just like after the destruction of dreadful dinosaurs, the beautiful civilization of mankind begun. Ray focuses on nature as a creator who continually recreates but rarely destroys. But when man transgresses all the limits, the nature also finds itself in a restless state. The role of the mother is not only to take care of her children but also to punish whenever needed. Nature plays the role of a typical mother who is multi-tasking. According to the writer, the Sea god couldn't see the mother earth crying and suffering and vowed to devour the earth with three weapons:

The sea god of Kaliyug, keeping his promise, had been carrying only three weapons in his ninety-nine hands; cyclone, typhoon and tidal waves. Launching those weapons, the lord of the sea observed the ritual of massacre for thirty-six hours on the tolerant earth (Ray 340).

And there goes the description of the most violent cyclone in the history of Odisha and everlasting fear in the memories of those survived. The rage of god is so vengeful in nature that it devastates all the forms of life making everyone stand on the same plane; birds, animals, human beings, vegetation, plants, trees, forests,

rivers, air, soil. There was complete silence after the dreadful cyclone hit the coast. Now it was the turn of the tides as the vindictive winds had all ready done their part. Huge tides emerged with a roaring sound and swept away all the remaining livestock. The furies of nature brought all forms of life to deathbed, some perished and some survived:

All were separated from each other and again were united in the feast of death. Naked, open bodies, open eyes, open mouths, limbs twisted and almost cut off from the body, the death blues on their lips, limbs and bodies painted with their dear village soil (Ray 344).

In the narrative, the author focuses on the struggle of people who all were different from each other as they fought their own battle but one thing was common amongst them during the deluge, all the villagers emerged as fighters armored with weapons like co-ordination, endurance and courage.

IX. ECO-SOCIAL CONCERNS IN AKHILA NAIK'S *BHEDA*

Another writer who is known for engaging similar themes is Akhila Naik. He hails from Kalahandi and taught in Government College Bhawanipatna. He has contributed many narratives and poems from an early age some of which includes his poetry collections *Gadhuabela* (1993), *Dhin* (2008), *Gulikhatti* (1996), *Dhobapharaphara* (2001). Apart from writing poetry, he too has mastery in drafting novels like *Abija* (2020), *Satadina* (2008) and *Bheda* (2010).

Naik's masterpiece *Bheda* is based on the pitiful plight of Dalits living in the remotest village of Kalahandi district of Odisha. Though the novel targets a particular section of the society, it also sheds light on various issues prevailing in the area like cultural politics, corruption, poverty, migration, caste violence, education, eco-criticism, etc. As noted by the researcher Dr. Jyadeb Sahoo, "*Bheda* in Odia means the sense of difference" that prevails in the society between the upper and lower castes (113). It has layers of meaning and is acclaimed as the first Odia Dalit novel ever written by a Dalit. Earlier people have written novels but not about this particular issue. It is such a powerful novel that it brings the truth to the limelight which was otherwise hidden for years. As put forth by Kuber Nag, "Although there are multiple events of caste violence and atrocities against Dalits in Odisha, they hardly get any attention from the state, media, and civil society" (1).

X. CASTE, ECOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Akhila Naik in his novel *Bheda* paints a clear picture of Dalits and their existential struggle. Though *Bheda* strongly targets marginalised communities, it also sheds light on other issues prevailing in the society. One of such is relationship of human beings with nature. The novel has its setting in a village of Kalahandi district and predominantly dwells on subaltern issues. The researchers Vijay Kumar and Binod Mishra in their paper have discussed about socio-ecological realism in Naik's *Bheda* through the lens of ecocriticism. They highlight on the issue of 'environmental casteism' and explore different angles of subjugation meted out to the Dalits at different levels. The novel explores various concepts of "purity and pollution as they exist in Hindu society and especially in Kalahandi: 'one of the most backward and feudalistic districts of Odisha'" (2). The setting itself provides ample of background information to the readers. According to the two researchers, "Naik, realistically and graphically, portrays Kalahandi as notorious for feudalism, slave trade, manufactured disasters, famine, droughts, and caste oppression" (2).

The novelist discusses about its forest cover and natural resources which is available abundantly. Naik draws attention of the readers to the exploitation of natural resources through the incident of the plot. The main protagonist of the novel Laltu, forms Sahajkhola Jungle Suraksha Committee for punishing the people who are involved in illegal smuggling of woods. Laltu, exposes Semi Seth and Banabihari who are involved in the matter and seized their trucks. Thus, emerging as a hero of the novel. But soon he faces a whole lot of problems as he comes to the limelight:

The committee members jumped out from their hiding places on to the road and stopped all the five carts. The halias who were manning the carts panicked. They could not speak. After a lot of interrogation they finally revealed that they were working as halias in Bhaja Sahu's house, the cloth merchant of Dharamgarh (Naik 23).

Laltu, the son of Dinabandhu Duria witnessing the smuggling of woods decides to form a committee with his friend Kartik Pota. The members of the committee become active during the night as most of the illegal works

initiate in the darkness of the night when no one watches. As Laltu and his members seized the trucks loaded with woods, they realized that they belonged to Baya. The trucks were seized and stored in Kartik's backyard.

Semi Seth and Baya as antagonists hatch a conspiracy against Laltu and as a result he soon ends up in prison on a false accusation. But that didn't stop him from revolting. He carried on his protest with the hope that soon the condition of poor Dalits will change. But of no use. Naik's *Bheda* talks boldly about casteism and its negative impact on the society. It is such a harrowing tale which can never serve the purpose of pleasure reading. The marginalisation was so intense that the Dalits were prohibited to enter temples where only Brahmins and Marwadis were allowed:

Will a Dom woman become a Brahmin or a Marwadi by going to the temple of the Brahmins and Mrwadis? Look how she wears a saree by pleating it. She also wears a petticoat and a blouse. She marks her head with sindoor, puts kohl in her eyes (Naik 75).

In this way, people of Marichapadar criticise Mastrani, Dinamastre's wife who started to follow women of upper caste. The influence of Brahminism is clearly evident in Mastrani. "Naik gives the example of Mastrani and her inclination towards Hindu gods and goddesses" (Nag 7). She wakes up early in the morning and takes bath unlike other women who work in the field till late evening. She lives in the hope that someday her social status will rise and she will enjoy all the liberty. Here "Naik is critical of society's caste system and Brahminical hegemony. He has observed and experienced caste very closely" (Nag 2).

Though the novel's central concern is caste violence and atrocities, it also sheds light on various themes like cultural politics, migration, corruption, subjugation, protest, education and much more. There are eco-critical and eco-social concerns foregrounded by the writer. The discussion on deforestation, illegal smuggling of trees, formation of Sahajkhoh Jungle Suraksha Committee centralises nature as a whole.

XI. FINDINGS

From the above discussion, it is quite clear that the translated texts; *The Ancestor* and *After the Deluge* and *Bheda* have eco-centrism as recurring theme, bringing nature at the centre. Nature being a living entity and a guiding spirit not only helps human beings to thrive, but also provides them with all the basic needs. A good relationship with Nature can help man acquire physical and mental well-being.

In Mohanty's *The Ancestor*, we come across Paraja tribe, who have special affinity towards nature. They believe in eco-ethics and worship nature as their deity. *The Ancestor*, who possessed the spirit of the elder's, is none other than a disfigured date palm tree covered in white loin cloth. Here, Mohanty wants to shift the attention of readers to nature through the depiction of date palm tree and how the people of the tribe consider it both as their creator and destroyer. Whereas Ray's seminal work focuses on Mother Nature and her relationship with her children. She not only protects them at the time of crisis but also destroys as destruction is followed by creation. It is a saddening anecdote of Mother Nature and her suffering which was unbearable for God and he armed her with three weapons; cyclone, typhoon, and tidal waves, and it brought all the forms of life together admitting their own limits and struggling for survival.

Akhila Naik in his seminal text *Bheda* throws light on the theme of ecocriticism and eco-socialism. The protagonist Laltu forms a committee to protect the illegal smuggling of trees which is a main cause behind decrease in forest cover and natural resources which was once abundantly available. Thus, centralising nature as an ultimate force, which seems unconquerable. Two texts focus on eco-ethics, while the other one deals with the dreadful consequences of ignoring it. All three texts teach the lesson of living in harmony with nature which serves as an ultimate way of living deeming nature to be supreme and referring to the great chain of being.

Tables and Figures

Table 1.

HOW TO CITE: Juhee Panda, Mukesh Tiwari, Suhasini Dash (2026). Ecocentrism in Translated Odia Fiction: A Critical Study of Gopinath Mohanty's <i>The Ancestor</i> Pratibha Ray's <i>After the Deluge</i> and Akhila Naik's <i>Bheda</i>. <i>International Journal of Special Education</i>, 41(1s), 01-09. COPYRIGHT STATEMENT: Copyright: © 2026 Authors. Open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).	ABSTRACT: Ecocentrism is a term used by environmentalists and ecologists to refer to a nature-centric outlook as opposed to human-centric that upholds all life forms through interrelationships between natural features and biological organisms. Many writers have effortlessly tried to show this relationship in their text thus giving it a nature-centric perspective which combines all life forms together under one roof. Gopinath Mohanty is a versatile Odia writer, who has contributed to great masterpieces like <i>Dadibudha</i> 1944 (<i>The Ancestor</i>), <i>Paraja</i> 1946 (<i>Common People</i>). This tribal series not only accentuates the culture of various tribes residing in Odisha but also throw light on their inseparable bond with nature. Pratibha Ray is a prolific Odia writer whose classics include <i>Punyotoya</i> (<i>The Hallowed River</i> 1978), <i>Sila Padma</i> 1983 (<i>The Stone Lotus</i>), <i>Aadibhoomi</i> 1993 (<i>The Primal Land</i>). Her masterpiece <i>Magnamati</i> (<i>After The Deluge</i>) paints a life-threatening picture of Odisha's super cyclone 1999. Akhila Naik is another literary figure from Kalahandi district of Odisha. He has done post-graduation in Odia and has excellence in writing poetry, short stories and novels. <i>Bheda</i> is his first novel. Gopinath Mohanty's <i>The Ancestor</i> is a date palm tree that is given the stature of God and worshipped. Ray's <i>After the Deluge</i>, delineates the relationship of human beings with mother earth. In Naik's <i>Bheda</i>, we come across ecocriticism and a nature-oriented approach though it targets on the plight of poor Dalits. All the three novels shed light on the significance of nature to human beings as it touches upon eco-ethics and deals with the aftermath of ignoring it. My paper makes an attempt to analyze the three texts in the context of eco-centrism which centralises nature by bringing all the life forms together under one eternal roof called earth. Keywords: Eco-centrism, Nature, Cyclone, Sustenance, Eco-ethics
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