



Introduction

The inception of my epistemological premises about how the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘environment’ are mutually imbricated in the context of the postcolonial countries (or the global South) goes back to the incidents of struggle by farmers against the acquisition of multi-cropped agricultural lands for industrial development at Singur and Nandigram, in the state of West Bengal, India, in 2006-2007. Although such conflict of farmers initially appeared to be political, economic, and even historical incidents, yet they could in no way be explained without paying attention to the material strata composed of the biotic and abiotic factors. My curiosity to learn more about such incidents led me to explore similar conflicts arising out of social inequality and resource crisis from other postcolonial countries— be it the Penan struggle in Malaysia, the struggle against eucalyptus plantation in Indonesia, or the struggle of the Ogoni community against transnational oil conglomerates in Nigeria. I was wondering whether there was literature from postcolonial countries which instead of celebrating nature as pristine or sublime, could represent such realities of the environment. Ecocriticism as a field of literary and cultural inquiry gained prominence in the 1990s, and despite Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s repeated pleas to accommodate the “other voices” by making it “multi-ethnic” (Glotfelty xxv) and “comprehensive” (Buell 8), it mostly remained confined to environmental issues of either that of North America or Western Europe. Postcolonial ecocriticism is writing back against such parochial and egalitarian representations of the environment of the global North in order to reclaim the marginalized voices of people of the postcolonial countries which got occluded in North’s precarious subjectivity. Postcolonial ecocriticism calls for the need to move beyond the biocentric representations of Nature as normative, and instead look for more provincial realities of the environment which Joan Martinez-Alier argued as ‘environmentalism of the poor’ⁱ. It urges to look into the social conflicts and environmental entitlements of the people of postcolonial countries, and the need for such environmental issues to be adequately historicized – to delve deeper into the colonial and neocolonial realities of the environment by uncovering the environmental ramifications of colonialism and neocolonialism, the vicious nexus between land and empire, and thereby give voice to the disenfranchised. However, issues of geographical parochialism in ecocriticism relates not only to the North/South power

relations, but also to pockets of irregular and unequal development both within North and South, i.e., South in North, and North in South.

This issue of *RILE* is an attempt to look into the realities of postcolonial environments by trying to decolonize the normative representations in ecocriticism emerging out of North America and Western Europe as well as the metropolitan centers of the global South. Although this journal issue contains environmental realities of postcolonial countries from across the planet, they are united by the fact that they share a common history of colonialism and are presently the sites of intensified environmental exploitation by a globalized ruling class. The first essay by John Charles Ryan “‘Solitary in Your Rainy Kingdom’: Postcolonial Poetic Narratives of the Southern Beech” examines postcolonial poetic narratives of the Southern beech, particularly in the works of James K. Baxter, Ruth Dallas, Pablo Neruda, Gabriel Mistral, Mark O’Connor, and Les Murray to explore how “deep time” could offer an understanding of climate change as represented in literary narratives.

Pankaj Sekhsaria’s essay “The ecology and history of the Andaman Islands: Bottom up and through the lens of fiction” is a representation of the research and activism in the Andaman Islands in India through the lens of fiction. Sekhsaria seeks to argue the relevance of fiction as a medium of creative expression in offering possibilities of communicating the multi-disciplinary nature of any bio-geography.

The third essay by Swarnalatha Rangarajan, “‘Multiple Anamorphisms’: Imagining the Indigene in Pankaj Sekhsaria’s *The Last Wave*” explores the state-indigene-place relationship in the Indian archipelagos of the Andaman Islands as depicted in Pankaj Sekhsaria’s novel *The Last Wave*. Placing Sekhsaria’s forest narrative in the tradition of ‘new forest texts’, Rangarajan tries to explore the state domination of the Island forests as well as the ambiguous relationship of the tribals (indigenous communities) with nature.

Amitav Ghosh’s novel *Gun Island* has been interpreted by Asis De through the epistemic lens of affective theory in his essay “Human/Non-human Interface and the Affective Uncanny” to understand how the human/non-human interface is perceived through the inventories of belonging and migration to represent an interplay of the corporeal and the uncanny to elicit emotional affect sandwiched between anxiety and hope – emotions which are central conditions of postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

Debarati Bandyopadhyay's "Postcolonial Ecocriticism through the Canadian Lens: Select Writings of Margaret Atwood" delves on how the writings of Margaret Atwood has focused on the different dimensions of postcolonialism and ecocriticism right from the beginning of her writings. Bandyopadhyay explores how Atwood represents the maladies of the ecology of the geographical spaces of Canada, and how it is imbricated with the nature of colonial and postcolonial history.

Munira Salim in her paper "Climate Change and the Politics with the Indigenous: A Comparative Study of *The Swan Book* and *The Last Wave*" debates between the sustainable environmental condition vis a vis the issue of 'plight' and 'identity' of the aboriginal tribes.

The issue also contains two book reviews – Sachinddev P. S's review of Nick Hayes *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us* and Kritish Rajbhandari's review of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*.

Taken together, it has been the attempt of this journal issue to give expression to voices that would be the foundation for further definition, controversy, and revaluation of postcolonial ecocriticism, which, in turn, would make ecocriticism much more capacious.

ⁱ For more details see, Joan Martinez-Alier's *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuations* (2002).

Works Cited

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