



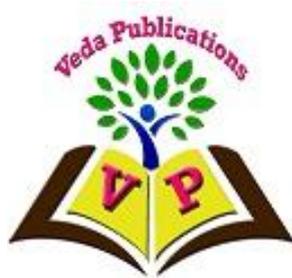
## ECOCRITICAL TROPES IN JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S GLIMPSES OF WORLD HISTORY

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### ABSTRACT



The main objective of this study is to attempt an ecocritical analysis of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History*. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) is one of the greatest statesmen and writers of the twentieth century. He has written a number of books of which *Glimpses of World History* is an outstanding contribution to Indian Literature in English. His letters to his daughter clearly reveal Nehru's interest in ecocritical tropes and his ecological sensibility. As a lover of nature, he imparts this characteristic to his daughter, Indira Gandhi too. Ecocriticism has gained the attention of many scholars over the last three decades throughout the world. It depicts the relationship between human and nature – depiction of nature in literature. This theory has been gaining popularity day by day because of the ecological disaster which the humans witness in everyday life. This study analyses the letters of Nehru from an ecocritical point of view by using various ecocritical tropes like wilderness, pastoral, animals, and pollution and apocalypse (ecocide) for understanding the ecological sensibility of Nehru. This study's approach is to concentrate on the major areas of Nehru's ecological sensibility. Therefore, this study on *Glimpses of World History* is based on ecocritical approach and it is also restricted to the same.

**Keywords:** *Wilderness, Pastoral, Animals, Pollution and Ecocide.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jawaharlal Nehru (14 Nov, 1889 to 27 May, 1964) is the first Prime Minister of India. He was born in Allahabad and had his education at Harrow and Cambridge in London. He returned to India in 1912 playing a key role in the Indian politics showing his complete interest in India and its independence. In 1947, he became the first Prime Minister of Independent India. He remained as a central figure in Indian politics for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

During his Premiership for seventeen years, he shaped India's future in science and technology. He was an ardent lover of nature, and because of this special interest in nature and natural surroundings, many natural societies and sanctuaries were named after him to honour his great desire for nature and environment. Such are Nehru Park at New Delhi, Jawaharlal Memorial Botanical Garden at Srinagar, Nehru's Institute of Mountaineering at Uttarakhand, Jawaharlal Nehru Bustard Sanctuary at Solapur, Nehru Zoological Park at Hyderabad, Nehru Rose Garden at Ludhiana, and Nehru Garden at Udaipur. Among his other books, *Glimpses of World History* is Nehru's outstanding contribution to Indian English Literature. The primary object of Nehru in writing this book was to make his daughter know about the history of the world and aware of her circumstances and of her environment. Nehru loved nature consistently and liked to be in its surroundings. He derived pleasure from Nature and his ecological consciousness is prominently revealed in his letters.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The book, *Glimpses of World History* by Jawaharlal Nehru, is selected for this study. The theory of ecocriticism is applied to Nehru's writing to analyse the concept of ecocritical approach and Nehru's ecological consciousness. This study's approach is to concentrate on the major areas of Nehru's ecological sensibility. Therefore, this study on Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* is based on ecocritical approach and it is also restricted to the same.

The book, *Glimpses of World History*, is a collection of 196 letters written by Jawaharlal Nehru to his daughter, Indira Priyadarshini from 01<sup>st</sup> January 1930 to 09<sup>th</sup> August 1933 during his sixth sentence of imprisonment. These letters were

collected and later published as a book in 1934. Through these letters, he taught his daughter (then thirteen years old) about natural history, social history and the story of civilizations. Through the years, these letters remain very fresh and vivacious, and, also, display Nehru's love for Nature. These letters belong to the 'epistolary history' genre and the epistolary harvest of Nehru's prison years is gathered in these letters. Nehru wrote a rambling account of history for young people. These letters encrust the rise and fall of civilizations and empires from Rome, Greece, China, Asia and India; great figures like Ashoka, Alexander, Chengiz Khan, Lenin, Gandhi, Roosevelt and so on; wars like Carthaginian war, Battle of Gaugamela, Kalinga War, Battle of Panipat, World War I and so on; revolutions like French Revolution, Industrial Revolution and so on; and rebellions, revolts, democracies and dictatorships. These were not only letters to Indira but more than that. *The New York Times* remarked that 'It is one of the most remarkable books ever written... Nehru makes even H.G. Wells seem singularly insular... One is awed by the breadth of Nehru's culture' (Nehru, 2004).

## 3. THEORY

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and brainstorm possible solutions for the correction of the contemporary environmental situation. Ecocriticism began to gain momentum only in the 1990s and is the youngest of revisionist movement. According to English Oxford Dictionary, Revisionism is used to refer to various ideas, principles and theories that are based on a significant revision of fundamental premises. Ecocriticism holds a variety of meaningful perspectives and has an intrinsic value of nature. Ecology is the study of how living things and their environment interact with one another (Conrad, 2011). 'Ecological Consciousness' refers to one's individual awareness on ecology and the ability to experience the feeling of natural things and understanding the concept "Nature". (Keerthy, 2013).

Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* is considered as the cult text for ecocritics all over the world. In his



book, Garrard discusses various ecocritical tropes like wilderness, pastoral, animals, pollution and apocalypse (ecocide). These can be taken into account to analyze Nehru's letters to trace his ecological consciousness.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. WILDERNESS

'Wilderness' represents the state of nature unadulterated by civilization. For Greg Garrard, wilderness makes one feel safer and healthier comparing to the polluted city life (Garrard, 2007). Nehru derived pleasure and joy in the company of raw nature. For him, wilderness is the paradise.

For Nehru, one can lead a healthy and harmonious life in the wilderness. In 'Empires in Western Asia', Nehru says that people living in forests lead a healthy life. When comparing to the contemporary geographical situation, Nehru wrote to Indira that great forests were present in the earth, especially in Asia and Europe, when early life started. In 'Asia and Europe', Nehru points out that these two continents were filled with wilderness before 5000 years. But, down the ages, due to deforestation, depletion of forests occurs affecting the ecology and environmental balance.

Nehru had a special passion towards the Himalayas, and he relished to be in the consortium of lonely mountains and peaks. He loved mountain trekking, especially the Himalayas of Kashmir. In 'The Last Letter', Nehru writes that mountain climbing is a joyful experience. In 'Empires in Western Asia', Nehru talks about the wilderness in Kashmir where there are many fine glaciers. Nehru notes that he loved the Pindari glacier, which was the nearest glacier for him and Indira from where they stayed, and he went to it when he was a small boy. He always loved to quench in the wilderness of Kashmir. For Nehru, a peaceful life is possibly greatly in the wilderness. In 'A Holiday and a Dream Journey', Nehru remarks that the peace dwells in the snow-crowned Himalayas. Hence, for him, wilderness gives peace of mind.

##### 4.2. PASTORAL

'Pastoral' depicts the country life relating to the farming and grazing of cattle. Pastoral is any literature that describes 'the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban' (Gifford, 2001).

Pastoral has decisively shaped our constructions of nature (Garrard, 2007).

For Nehru, agriculture paved way for sustainable natural resources and to maintain ecological balance. An agroecosystem is necessary for environmental sustainability. Agriculture gives food to humans and animals. Herbivores animals require pasture land for grazing or else they will destroy most of the plants in the forest.

In 'Harsha-Vardhana and Hiuen Tsang', Nehru praises the Indians who carry out subsistence farming down the ages. Subsistence farming associates in the practice of cultivating crops and rearing livestock sufficient only for an individual's requirement. This is unlike commercial/cash crop farming which associates cultivating surplus yield for trade. He quotes the words of Hiuen Tsang (c.602-664), a Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar who praised the practice of subsistence farming in India, 'Each one keeps his own worldly goods in peace, and all till their ground for their subsistence' (Nehru, 2004). In 'The Greek City-States', Nehru mentions the fields from which the food reached the ancient Greek city-states. The fields surrounded the city which was in the center having a balanced agroecosystem in their city-states.

In 'A Chronology of World History', Nehru refers to the archaeological findings revealing the practice of agriculture across Asia and Egypt in 3500 BC. Unlike the contemporary humans, these ancient men practiced only subsistence farming. In 'Where Do Riches Go To?', Nehru discusses the considerable changes that have been brought out by the new ways of agricultural production. The practice of subsistence farming was outdated and modern methods and techniques enable man to produce in a large-scale destroying the soil nutrients. All the extra yield of the produce was stored not only for future consumption but to make excess money. All the profit went directly to the businessmen and not to the farmers. Nehru quotes the comment of Voltaire, a famous Frenchman, "they have discovered in their fine politics the art of causing those to die of hunger who, cultivating the earth, give the means of life to others" (Nehru, 2004).

Man began to understand nature better only after the discovery of agriculture. But some people



say that man slowly encroached upon wild Nature and conquered it. Nehru denies this fact and says that this is not correct. In 'Where Do Riches Go To?', he writes that instead of conquering nature, 'man has begun to understand Nature, and the more he has understood, more he has been able to co-operate with Nature and to utilize it for his own purpose' (Nehru, 2004). Therefore, the ideal and flawless agriculture is to cooperate with nature and to sustain resources.

Nehru considered that the pastoral setting bestows a healthy lifestyle. In 'Empires in Western Asia', he refers to the Aryans who lived in the forests and villages and led a healthy life. They had a healthy lifestyle in the fresh pastoral setting. In 'How Britain Rule India', Nehru says that the humans living in the pastoral setting led a better, healthy and organic way of life. India is basically an agricultural country. During the British rule, Indian citizens moved towards new industrial towns from their villages to work as factory-labourers. As a result, a new middle class, *bourgeoisie*, established settlements in the industrial areas. They lived in a bad, dark, damp, filthy, unsanitary and polluted environment. Alternatively, despite the people generally starved in the villages (due to the new agricultural laws laid by the British government in India), they had their 'fill of the sun and of fresh air' (Nehru, 2004). Thus, according to Nehru, people living in the pastoral setting spend a harmonious and pollution-free life with nature.

#### 4.3. ANIMALS

Nehru liked to observe animals. He gave them much importance in his lifetime. Many animals find a healthy habitat in the Indian subcontinent down the ages. In 'Babar', Nehru points out that King Babar loved and admired the animals of Hindustan, a remarkably fine country with its different animals and plants. In 'The Decline and Fall of the Moghal Empire in India', Nehru writes that Akbar, the grandson of Babar, also admired animals of Hindustan who know the names of all his thousands of elephants, horses, deer and even pigeons! But as the time flies, India under various rulers became a place of cruelty towards animals. In 'The Huns Come to India', Nehru refers to the killing of hundreds of elephants by the Huns, in 'The Arabs Conquer from Spain to Mongolia', he refers to the hunting as an

amusement for the Arabs, in 'The Slave Kings of Delhi', he refers to the abduction of pearls (where mollusks were killed), and in 'The Borderland Empire of the Kushans', he refers to the export of silk (where silk-worms were killed).

In 'The Sixth Century Before Christ, and Religion', Nehru indicates that Lord Buddha had condemned the sacrifices of the animals. As a substitute, he advised the humans to sacrifice their anger, envy and wrong-thinking. In 'Ashoka, the Beloved of the Gods', Nehru points out that the animals were protected excitedly in Ashoka's dynasty (c.268-232 BC). He forbade animal sacrifice and erected many veterinary hospitals. Nehru also remarks in the chapter that he feels sorry for the animal-sacrifice, which prevailed in the contemporary world as a part of religion, and also feels sorry for the trivial provision of treatment given to the animals these days. In 'The Renaissance', Nehru points out the good habit of Leonardo Da Vinci towards suffering animals. He had the habit of buying caged birds in the market and setting them free instantly.

During his solitary prison stay, animals were only his companions in his cell. In 'The Quest of Man', Nehru discusses his delight to see the animals after months of seclusion in Bareilly Gaol when during his transfer to Dehra Dun Gaol. He was always delighted to see the animals.

In 'Science Goes Ahead', Nehru pities for the animals that are used in various scientific experiments. Flies, grasshoppers, frogs and dogs are used in different scientific studies to know about the characteristics and inheritance of generations, the functioning of the body, the evolution of life forms and so on. Though these animals help in new scientific developments, Nehru feels sorrow for their woebegone condition in the laboratories and calls them 'poor' (Nehru, 2004).

In 'The Lesson of History', Nehru reviews the life of insects and says that small insects are better than humans with their art of cooperation and sacrificing heart. Bees have better social organization and white ants sacrifice themselves for their comrades. Nehru points out that the ants are superior to man in terms of mutual cooperation and sacrifice. He always gave equal respect to animals.



#### 4.4. ECOCIDE

During the Vietnam War, a group of scientists coined and propagated the term "ecocide" to denounce the environment destruction (Zierler, 2011). The term 'ecocide' is a combination of two words - 'ecology' and 'suicide'. 'Ecocide' explains the environmental damage inflicted on the earth. Pollution leads the way to environmental ecocide and the later, consecutively, ensues apocalypse. Man is the sole cause for the environmental and ecological destruction. For Nehru, war is of no good. It only disturbs all life forms in the environment. In 'The Old Civilizations and Our Inheritance', Nehru discusses the destructions caused by various invasions in countries like India, China, Greece, Iraq, Egypt, Knossos and so on. Due to these invasions, the riches and resources of these countries were plundered and destroyed. In 'Asia and Europe', Nehru points out the destructive power of Europe. In the name of civilization, Europe destroyed the great portion of nature and resources down the ages. In 'India Begins to Tackle a Difficult Problem', Nehru remarks the warring humans as 'cruel and relentless savages...with one master-passion - to kill and destroy each other'. For Nehru, war is completely against humaneness.

Global Warming is one of the major problems faced by earth today. 'Global Warming is the increase of Earth's average surface temperature due to the effect of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels or from deforestation, which trap the heat that would otherwise escape from Earth' (New Mexico Solar Energy Association, 2000). In 'Marco Polo, the Great Traveller', Nehru writes about Central Asia. In the ancient days, Central Asia was fertile and teemed with various life forms. As the years passed, its climate became drier and made the region almost deserted leading to the dwindling of the living forms. Hence, this is one of the examples of the terrible affection of global warming on ecology and environment. In 'The Break-Up of the Mongol Empires', Nehru laments that man destroys Nature for his own benefit down the ages, and he only 'made the climate drier and less habitable' (Nehru, 2004).

In the name of commercial crop farming, the soil nutrients are destroyed throughout the world. in

'The Indian Artisan Goes to the Wall', Nehru says that India faced an aggressive change because of industrialization. During the British rule, cottage industries and subsistence farming were killed by the modern technology. The farmers were forced to cultivate commercial crops like sugar, indigo, cotton, rubber and so on. To get a better yield, they were forced to use artificial fertilizers and weedicides. Thus, the soil lost its nutrient and pollution occurred. In 'The Village, the Peasant and the Landlord in India', Nehru writes that the East India Company collected their raw material like cotton and others from the Indian cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras and exported to the big industries in the foreign countries. In 'How Britain Ruled India?', Nehru notes that the British forced the Indian farmers to cultivate cash crops for raw materials. Even in Java, the Dutch East India Company forced the people of Java to cultivate the plants that were required in Europe like coffee, tea, sugar, indigo and so on. The British also forced commercial crop farming in South America. Thus, the 19<sup>th</sup> century English policy neglected subsistence farming and concentrated only on commercial crop farming and on its industries in its colonies leading to pollution, exploitation of natural resources and destruction of the environment.

In 'Imperialism and Nationalism in Persia', Nehru writes about the exploitation of Persian oil-fields in the name of business. Petroleum was discovered in Persia only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, for Anglo-Persian Oil Company, Persia became the 'object of greed' resulting in the 'exploitation of oil-fields' (Nehru, 2004). The petroleum resource started to get depleted in the greedy hands of men. The usage of petroleum in vehicles and machines results in pollution too.

In 'The Village, the Peasant, and the Landlord in India', Nehru discusses the four mighty famines in India in the years 1861, 1876, 1896 and 1900. The plundering of the natural resources of India, especially in Bengal, by the British resulted in these famines. Nehru quotes the words of Florence Nightingale here. In 1878, she wrote about the dreadful effects of famine in East India which occurred as a result of British laws making the fertile region into a desert - 'the most fertile country in the



world, a grinding, chronic semi-starvation in many places where what is called famine does not exist' (Nehru, 2004). In 'Farther India and the East Indies', Nehru writes about the famine in the Eastern Islands. The farmers of Java were forced to cultivate only commercial crops by the Dutch East India Company which resulted in terrible famine in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is to be noted that, the above famines were only man-made. The greed of men resulted in these famines.

In 'India's Control of Foreign Markets', Nehru points out that man misuses the tolls and modern machinery. With better tools and machines, Europe captured the world market with her new inventions and discoveries in science and technology. Though tools and machines are of good use to humans, man often misuses it. Nehru says that the 'fault lies not in machinery, but in the misuse of it' (Nehru, 2004).

Today, man considered him as the master of all life forms. But, this can be achieved only with technological intelligence and if we take away this intelligence, man is nothing more than other creatures, just like in old days. In 'Another New Year's Day', Nehru says that it is only the humans that disturb the earth and the earth does not disturb any life forms in its surface. In 'Darwin and the Triumph of Science', Nehru analysis his contemporary industrious, polluted and warring world and says that *Kali Yuga* has come – 'the present age of evil' (Nehru, 2004). Grabbing of resources, avarice of anthropocentrism and misuse of modern technology through these years made this age evil.

#### 4.6. HARMONY WITH NATURE

All beings in the environment are equal for Nehru. Every life form possesses its equality in this ecology. Nehru always wished to live harmoniously with Nature. For Nehru, one can learn more from Nature. In 'A Birthday Letter', Nehru advises Indira to make friends with the sun which gives life to the earth and only do well to others.

Nehru always wished to live an organic way of life. He considered himself as a part of Nature and treated all objects in this environment with equal respect. He made friendship with stars, animals, insects, mountains, moon and so on. He lived very close to Nature, especially in the prisons. He

considered these as his companions in his solitary life in various prisons. In 'Another New Year's Day', Nehru notes that prison's environment was entirely different comparing to the outside world since it was rich in Nature. He reveals that his life amidst Nature is without problems and worries.

In 'Where Do Riches Go To?', Nehru writes about man's cooperation with Nature. He notes that many people apprise that man has conquered Nature to some extent; but, the reality is Nature cannot be conquered. Instead of conquering it, man has only understood Nature in a better way. In 'The Quest of Man', Nehru points out that 'man is part of Nature' (Nehru, 2004).

In 'Empires in Western Asia', Nehru discusses the autobiography of Nature – Nature has her own book made of stones and rocks in which she writes her own way of history. From this, the mankind can read her history. Thus, whatever happens to Nature will be written by her to the succeeding generations. The good and bad deeds done by men to today's Nature will be only reflected to the future generations in the same way. Hence, it is everyman's duty not to do anything bad towards Nature, and it is a must for everyone to preserve the natural resources for the upcoming generations.

#### 4.7. INFLUENCE ON INDIRA GANDHI

Nehru's letters, in *Glimpses of World History*, showcase his love for Nature and also showcase his profuse passion to cultivate the same in his daughter. He displayed his sensation for duty. This influenced Indira to give importance to nature and to safeguard the environment. During Indira Gandhi's first Premiership in India, the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974) was organized by the Planning Commission of India (Centre for Science and Environment, 1982). The importance to give attention to ecology and environment and to preserve nature and natural resources were included in this Plan for the first time in the country's history. In 1972, 'The Wildlife (Protection) Act' was passed in the assembly for the first time and this year is contemplated a milestone in the history of India's environmental management. Subsequently, the 'National Board for Wildlife' and 'State Board for Wildlife' were established for the recognition and improvement of future protected regions in India.



Also, there was the launching of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, conservation and community reserves in India. During Indira's second Premiership, 'The Forest (Conservation) Act' was passed in 1980 under the sixth Five-Year Plan. These letters could be one of the influences for Indira Gandhi to give emphasis to the conservation and preservation of natural environment.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Jawaharlal Nehru is a writer of ecological sensibility. He has fostered his ecological sensibility encompassing ecological tropes and harmony with nature in his *Glimpses of World History*, which is analyzed in this study. The chief principles of ecocriticism are discussed in this study according to the ecocritical tropes comprising wilderness, pastoral, animals and ecocide. He loved every form of nature as prepossessing. When William Wordsworth saw the daffodils dancing in the breeze, his heart lifted with joy. Similarly, Nehru's heart lifted up to cheer and joy simply by watching nature and natural things. Through these letters, Nehru's love of mountains, forests, fields, animals are reflected. *Glimpses of World History* concedes his love to live amidst wilderness, to encourage pastoral setting, and to give equal space for animals and other living creatures in the environment. His aesthetic appreciation of nature and ecological sensibility are revealed in these letters. Also, his love of environment and non-human beings are also displayed.

Jawaharlal Nehru stayed an avid lover of nature. His *Glimpses of World History* reveals his ecological sensibility in which he manifests his concern to live in harmony with nature and to co-exist with the entire flora and fauna. Nature has been loved and appreciated by almost all the poets in the world. But to cherish every form of nature, to discern the beauty in it and to relish its loveliness – it absolutely needs a very ecological sensibility – which Nehru had.

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