



## CHALLENGES TO THE ECOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT: DEFLECTION IN KINCAID'S AND WHITEHEAD'S NARRATIVES



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### Abstract

*This paper critiques the human stupidity and challenges seen in the ecological environment as the people are doing unnatural activities in destroying the natural resources. The issues raised in this paper are taken from Jamaica Kincaid's Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas and Neil L. Whitehead's "South America/Amazonia: The Forest of Marvels," and they are studied from eco-ethical perspectives. This study is made with an objective of finding out the reasons for ecological degradation. This paper follows a qualitative research method and the texts are analyzed on the basis of primary and secondary resources for which texts and relevant references are studied comparatively. Methodological implication of the theories helps to explore an environmental risk factor inscribed in Kincaid's and Whitehead's narratives in a comparative framework. This paper questions to the loopholes left in the early research and addresses them. Environmental and ecological theorists' ideas support for completion of the paper. Finding of this paper is that the natural disasters which we are facing in the present time bring a critical condition soon. Previous studies do not support biospheric protection well and so this study helps to create an eco-friendly atmosphere.*

**Keywords:** Ecology, stupidities, deflection, natural disbalance, ecological crisis

### Introduction

Environment means to the surroundings around us. It is made up of all the living beings and the non-living things. Humans conduct different activities in their surroundings and these activities are responsible for environmental disbalances. They do the activities from anthropocentric notions. The environmental study helps to observe things from biosphere eyes because it advocates for eco-ethics. Biosphere study takes all the things of this world as the gift of nature and leaves a lesson to respect worldly creatures from a bio-centric perspective. Biosphere study rejects the anthropocentric notion of human stupidity and so it tries to create a harmonious connection between nature and the human as Arnold David states as, "eco-friendly atmosphere" (1996, p. 22). David means to say that the people should stop cutting trees for wood and they should not put on fire in the jungle which causes deforestation. Globalized practices of the industrialized world inspire people towards massive production for which excessive use of chemicals and pesticides decreases the fertility rate of the land that questions "land ethics" (p. 26). Unnecessary chopping down of the trees causes soil erosion, dryness in the water resources and that creates a problem in the fresh air.

Kincaid's travelogue, *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya*, explores ideas about things she experienced while traveling to the high Himalayas of Nepal. She writes about the recollection of her memories, "We walked along open, exposed ledges and then suddenly it was dark and cold and we were in a forest, and so Sunam said we would spend the night there. We camped in a forest of *Rhododendron hodgsonii*, surrounded by them, towering above us, right next to a waterfall. . ." (2005, p. 38). Kincaid explains the activities they did in the forest and what a difficult journey they made. She writes about both the joyful experiences and painful moments within that of the leech bites and the Maoist's threat. She critiques the political disturbances and unethical activities of the people that questions the beautiful history of Nepal's aesthetic atmospheres. Like Kincaid's travelogue, Whitehead's essay discusses about his travel experiences. His essay, "South America/Amazonia: The Forest of Marvels" historicizes the aesthetics of Amazon, on the one hand, and tries to make the people aware about possible challenges that we have to face in the near future, to the next. He writes, "scientific investigation into the environment limits socio-cultural capacity" (2002, p. 134). Whitehead argues closely supporting the arguments of Kincaid and so he raises the issues on scientific investigation of environmental things.

Kincaid and Whitehead make such remarks in their travelogues. Both the writers, in their texts, expose references to human stupidity whose activities are the causes and consequences of destroying the natural resources. Destruction of natural resources endangers a fresh environment that is highly risky to human beings as it disbalances the eco-system. People, in the present time, are consuming things thinking only from an anthropocentric perspective. This paper, thus, focuses on the challenges seen in ecological systems and discusses alternative suggestions to save the biosphere. It shows an endangered condition between the ecological-environment and human beings based on Kincaid's and Whitehead's narratives. People have to keep a close relationship with the ecological environment and so they have to save nature, wisely in time for the secured future. Human and nature are interdependent in

each-other but the human beings show their stupidity in excessive use of the natural resources to which Laura says, "people are destroying the environmental things" (2011, p. 32). Laura claims that the people's daily activities distract the eco-friendly things.

In the eco-environment-based cultural arts and literature people have to do the supporting activities to save the biosphere. Discussing the various kinds of difficulties Kincaid and Whitehead try to show the essence of human-nature relationship. Whitehead writes, ". . . forest ecology challenged even the most brutal efforts of extractive industries to make the jungle profitable" (2002, p. 123). Whitehead advocates for establishment of the biosphere nature and challenges to the industrial world. He writes,

. . . colonial culture on the ecology of the Amazon itself and on the native people who once lived there. Native peoples are relegated to the status of an evanescent curiosity, among whom a few final determinations as to the riddles of local culture might be made, but whose destiny is now extinction. As such they may require ethical commentary but have become irrelevant to the potential of Amazonia for scientific enlightenment. (2002, p. 131)

Whitehead is highly conscious about environmental ethics and touches on the future of that Amazonian beauty that might be endangered because of human activities. People's selfish activities, human control over the natural resources like the colonial practices of controlling over the neighboring countries might end the beauty of that Amazonian region.

Critics and theorists, concerned with environmental issues, question the activities of human stupidity. Laura Barbas-Rhoden, Arnold David, Bill Ashcroft, Griffiths Gareth, Tiffin Helen, Brain G. Wolff, Michel Foucault etc. are critiquing the ecological environment and the challenges that might come in its future. Modern men are not taking the natural things for granted, and they are destroying the natural beauties foolishly against the environmental ethics for which they have to pay a great cost as a compensation. Human awareness for eco-ethical preservation is a must for the secured future. Therefore, this paper focuses on the challenges seen in the present and seeks for the possible safety tools and techniques.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the reasons behind ecological degradation by examining the human activities that lead to the destruction of natural resources. It critiques human "stupidity" and the challenges observed in the ecological environment. This research specifically analyzes these issues through an eco-ethical lens, drawing insights from Jamaica Kincaid's *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalayas* and Neil L. Whitehead's "South America/Amazonia: The Forest of Marvels." Furthermore, the study aims to identify environmental risk factors present in Kincaid's and Whitehead's narratives within a comparative framework, address shortcomings in previous research regarding biospheric protection, and ultimately contribute to fostering an eco-friendly atmosphere

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

Human stupidity is a problem of environmental disasters as Brain G. Wolff in "Environmental Studies and Utilitarian Ethics" asserts. He writes, ". . . challenges the inferior moral standing of other species" (2008, p. 6). Wolff critiques anthropocentrism, globalization and stupidity of the modern-men. Easily understanding, nature is a backbone of human life, and so Wolff asserts, "an adequate environmental ethics must be holistic, as opposed to individualistic, and make ecosystem and species the subject of direct moral concern" (p. 7). Ecological environment and its connection with human beings is great as written by Wolff. In the same line of Wolff, Kincaid and Whitehead also focus on environmental ethics and write about their collected memories. Another critic, Ahmad Aijaz finds weaknesses in Foucauldian discourses on power and Said's politics in the concept of orientalism. He questions the national issues of class consciousness whereas people try to classify their positions. They fight in each-other for their arts, culture and literature. Ahmad takes the power and practices, both, as an interdependent element of human-nature relationships. Thus, Kincaid's and Whitehead's beautiful memories of traveling to the nature-gifted Himalayas, forests and the river banks create emotional triggers that can be studied from multiple perspectives.

Kincaid's travelogue accounts the journey in a narrative form whereas she travelled in the high Himalayas and the dense forest of Nepal. Along with her friends and the trekking team members including Dan, Sue, Bleddyn and the tour guides she enjoyed the villager's love and Sherpa hospitality a lot. She writes, "We emerged from the forest back into the open sun, and I have to say that I began to flag then. At one o'clock we stopped for lunch in the village Muri" (2005, p. 16). Kincaid has joyful experiences of travelling and enjoying the new geography. In the meantime, she has some painful moments and so she notes them in her travel account. She seems happy enough while climbing the Himalayas and collecting the seeds. She has some terrifying memories while travelling through the narrow roads in Maoist zones. It was the time of political disharmony as the king had dismissed the parliament in Nepal. She doubts about the contrasts between the king and the Maoists. She writes,

The king had dismissed parliament, and I wondered how that would affect our trip, for the king's dismissing parliament had something to do with the Maoist guerrillas, and I was going into the countryside, where the Maoist guerrillas might be, and

since they couldn't kill the king, would they kill me instead? What was I doing in a world in which king and Maoists were in mortal conflict? (2005, p. 7)

The conflict between political parties like Maoists and the king was the pick point that could bring a violent situation at any time. Travelers have to pay some money to the Maoists as they bargain for cash before they spend the night in their controlled area.

Regarding their difficult walking on the damaged road, Maoist threat and other events, Kincaid writes, "the road then, sometimes as wide as a dirt driveway in Vermont, sometimes no bigger than a quarter of that, was red clay unfolding upward; the top of each climb was the bottom of another. By midmorning, my senses were added. It took me many days to realize, to accept . . . many days to understand" (p. 12). Narratives are about the difficult journeys of the traveler's team in the hard to travel geographical locations. As Kincaid's journey, Whitehead also has mixed experiences and memories on his travel account and so he writes, "The 'Amazon' might be restrictively identified with the main river channel or the river basin, but the Amazon river basin actually has a watershed" (2002, p. 122). He discusses physical space and raises the questions about dislocated locations. He rejects the European concept of colonization and writes, "European exploration of South America, the Caribbean Islands, coastal Guiana, and the Brazilian littoral south of the Amazon were the easterly starting points for journeys into the hinterland" (p. 124). He discusses the people, places and things in a horrifying way, "Tupinamba warriors stripped naked . . . cannibal demise of other captives, including Portuguese" (p. 126). Whitehead's narratives expose both the joyful and painful memories while travelling to Amazonia.

Regarding the complex journey, Achebe writes, "journey is blending reality with personal imagination" (1994, p. 375). Achebe writes about individual accounts prepared while travelling. As Achebe's claim, Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimension of Globalization* highlights the power and takes it as "a cultural practice in travel" (1996, p. 12). Appadurai's references and recordings are close to the colonial writer's remarks. Kincaid suffers both in the days and nights while travelling in the difficult geography in the badly politicized period, however Amartya Sen in *Reason before Identity* takes it as a "quest of gardening" (2005, p. 13). Travelling and writing in this sense is a work of art that mixes the multiple colors of the memories and experiences.

Like Kincaid's travelogue, Neil L. Whitehead's essay, a piece of travel writing, re-historicizes the accounts of Amazonian Literature that is based on environmental things, natural resources and their aesthetics. The forest is large, and the river is too long. In this regard Whitehead agrees with the ideas of John Hemming as expressed in *Trees of Rivers: The Story of the Amazon*, "The river is world's greatest river" (2008, p. 328). Amazon is geographically located in the different zones and the countries as said by Hemming. Discourses are everywhere in regards to the shapes and sizes of Amazon geography, especially in the cases of forest and the river. People believe that it is the longest river of the world and that the Amazon is the largest and dense forest with a number of beautiful sceneries. It is extended into "Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, French Guiana, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela" as written by Browder and Godfrey in *Rainforest Cities: Urbanization, Development, and Globalization of the Brazilian Amazon* (1992, p. 1). Amazon covers the major cities of South America. Rodriguez and Pizarro claim that it is extended in "Manaus and Belém in Brazil, Iquitos in Peru, and Leticia in Colombia" (Rodriguez 1997, p. 36 & Pizarro 2005, p. 71). The environmental aesthetics of the Amazon river and jungle create a beautiful space in the Amazon. The beautiful temples, resorts and the hotels are named the same as Amazon that represents the Amazon beauty.

Likewise, the travel narratives of Kincaid in Nepal, Amazonian literature of Whitehead in the Amazon in the present makes a strong attention to the readers about environmental ethics. Indeed, Whitehead's concern like Kincaid on environmental ethics prepares a biosphere-based framework. It suggests us to study about the arts, culture and literature of the past and forces us to re-write anthropocentric manuscripts from the bio-centric perspectives to re-historicize the things. Whitehead's study makes coverage of the Amazon geography. However, the authors like Roberto González Echevarría made critical judgments on the environmental ethics of biosphere writings as she writes, "there is writing everywhere in the jungle" (1990, p. 2). Environmental ethics in the colonial mindsets seems rather biased and so that the colonized mindset in thinking about the environmental ethics should be re-freshed through literary engagements of the native Amazonians.

The concept of this Amazon literature has generated multiple views for the conceptual changes as Slater in *Dance of the Dolphin: Transformation and Disenchantment in the Amazonian Imagination* writes, "geographic entity and province of the imagination" (1994, p. 115). Slater highlights the imaginative geography. He makes a statement about Amazon and writes, "it is vast, incomprehensible, filled with wonder, and rich in life and culture" (p. 125). The Amazonian literature creates a discourse of the marvelous forest and the river as Stephen argues it as, "the unfamiliar, the alien, the terrible, the desirable, and the hateful" (1991, p. 23). Amazonian arts, culture and the literature-based travel account of Neil L. Whitehead are spell-bounding elements of the romantic history as the travelers and the romantic writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron write.

Romantic echoes of the mountains and forests re-echo with the bubbling, sounding and thundering of rushing water that one can enjoy in the heart of the mountains, valleys and ditches. Alexander Von. Humboldt in the *Views of Nature: The Sublime Phenomena of Creation* writes, “people can delve and roar in the rain-foreboding howl of the bearded ape” (1850, pp. 19–20). Humboldt supports the concept of resourcing and restructuring the world from environmental ethics. It focuses on the safe side of the biosphere to “reinvent” the concept for the safe eco-friendly environment. Henry Bates is much concerned about eco-ethics and in *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* writes, “marvelous diversity and richness of trees foliage in flowers” (1969, p. 180). Bates’s concept is close to Mary Campbell, who in *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing 400–1600* writes, “. . . seeing is believing, [and] the impossibility of full enumeration” (1988, p. 179). Campbell focuses on travelling and writing as an eye witness.

Environmentalists and geographers make some critical remarks on its border by bringing the issues of the river and the forest that seems in Brazil and Peru. For Da Cunha, as *Obra Completa in Rio de Janeiro: Companhia José* writes, “it is oxymoronically the mais perlustrada . . . é a menos conhecida” (1966, p. 224). The problem seen in the eco-environment of Amazon forest and the river exposes the lack of the environment-based knowledge that is linking together with the wrongly developed phenomena. Whitehead wants to travel and explore about Amazon beauty from eco-ethics perspectives what he observed but Kincaid politicizes them. Travelling in the beauty of nature and seeds collecting for gardening is a beautiful memory in Kincaid’s travelogue. Ania Loomba in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* writes, “travelling and writing is mixing with physical tiredness and mental suffering for water and food as they have to travel only eating some quality less noodles” (1998, p. 46). Kincaid has double objectives in traveling and collecting the seeds but Whitehead has the nature quest.

Kincaid and Whitehead’s styles on writing about the ecological-environment are concerned with human unawareness and political disharmony. Moreover, Kincaid’s concern is on nature, seeds and politics but Whitehead is much engaged only with an Amazon beauty. Viewing the beauties with flora and fauna, they are applying the concepts of environmental ethics in their texts in mixed method approaches. The methodological application helps to analyze both the texts, discussed in this study, from western and the eastern perspectives.

#### **Methodos and Materials**

This paper is prepared by applying the qualitative research method. The study is based on the texts and the library resources. It analyzes Jamaica Kincaid’s *Among Flowers: A Walk in the Himalaya* and Neil L. Whitehead’s “South America/Amazonia: The Forest of Marvels,” in the comparative way. The texts are analyzed with the help secondary materials available in the library and an online resources. Brain G. Wolff, Ahmad Aijaz, Edward Said and Michel Foucault’s ideas are applied to critique the textual issues. Oriental and occidental debates also are exposed as referential tools to discuss the colonial practices within environmental value judgements of the east and the west by borrowing the ideas from Edward Said. Authoritative anthropocentrism is an obstacle to environmentalism as claimed by Said who observes the human stupidities and takes them as an output of an occidental value-based activities. Said evaluates the things and claims that the people are controlling the things in an “authoritative way”. Said’s description in the oriental subject is vague and it does not represent the present practices of cultural liberalism. Ahmad Aijaz finds weaknesses in Foucauldian discourses on power and Said’s politics in the concept of orientalism and, *In theory: Classes, nations, literature* claims that the national literature can sprout in the ecological environment. He questions the national issues of class consciousness whereas people try to classify their positions. They fight in each-other for their arts, culture and literature. Ahmad takes the power and practices, both, as an interdependent element of human-nature relationships.

Critiquing the ideas of European people and their control over the natural resources, this researcher interconnects the views on environmental ethics of the theorists who speak against such authoritative voices. On the other hand, Michel Foucault’s concept of power as a literary tool helps to know about environmental ethics that is applied in this study. It helps to discuss the nature, culture and activities of the non-west countries like Nepal to balance between the power and the oriental values of cultural connectivity.

#### **Results and Discussions**

Kincaid’s concern is on nature, seeds and politics whereas Whitehead is much engaged only with an Amazon beauty. Viewing the beauties with flora and fauna, they are applying the concepts of environmental ethics in the mixed method approaches. This study, thus, is prepared in comparative method about environmental issues on the basis of travelers’ remarks, critical reviews and the textual analysis of Kincaid’s and Whitehead’s travelogues. Both the travelogues are observing the forests and Himalayas from the Westerner’s eyes as said by Wolff but this researcher is applying the different tools and techniques in a comparative way to analyze the challenges seen in the environment. The study method applied in this article is thus a critique on environmental ethics that is applied in a comparative way.

This study plods observing the entire journey of Kincaid and Whitehead in the Himalayas of Nepal and Amazon forest. Study makes a coverage on the environmental issues in a comparative way and therefore the study method is in comparative form of the environment-based texts. Kincaid and Whitehead delve in environmental ethics-based information collection. This paper is, thus, prepared with the help of field-based narratologies, travel accounts, library resources and environment related materials. Kincaid and Whitehead's travel accounts have highlighted ecological environment-based concepts. Kincaid writes about the forest of Nepal but Whitehead makes his central part to the Amazon forest and its literature. It is often regarded as reality what one sees in the forests and the banks of the river. Overwhelming natural resources and their beauties in Nepal and Amazon region mentioned in the travelogues exemplify eco-environmental ethics, however Kincaid is dissatisfied with the terrorist activities of the Maoists in then Nepal and Whitehead is frustrated of colonization and European hegemonies. Both of them speak against human stupidity, deforestation and the drought.

### Conclusion

Kincaid and Whitehead in their travel accounts write about environmental ethics. They write about their collected experiences and the memories. Fresh experiences and memories that they collected from their trekking, tours and travels, in the high Himalayas and the dense forest of Nepal and Amazon of South America are supporting tools for an environmental documentation. Their travel accounts are prepared to note down the beauties of the Himalayas, Amazon forest and the rivers. Both of them discuss nature quests in search of aesthetics. They are worried about stupid activities of the people that bring possible dangers in the near future. Kincaid's and Whitehead's beautiful memories of traveling to the nature-gifted Himalayas, forests and the river banks create emotional triggers that can be studied from multiple perspectives. Their narratives about the ecological-environment are covering the natural beauties on the one hand and political disharmony with human stupidity on the other hand.

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