

## Keynote Address

### Nature and Creative Art: A Trajectory from Mythic-Adulation to Anthropocene-Apprehension

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**Abstract:** Despite an ambivalent stance on the inherent nature of reality lying either in the idea or in the phenomena, creative artists since antiquity have revered nature/earth as the essence--the kernel, of human thought and the source of literary creativity. They have attributed the evocation of literary impulse, like P. B. Shelley, to the coalescence of thought with “universe of things”. Creative writers consider that knowledge, creativity and literary sensibility irrefutably seek a dwelling place—*oikos*—in nature. However, a massive shift has taken place from mythical period to the present Anthropocene era in the ways of envisioning nature and nature-human relationship, treating and representing it. Revered as the divine embodiment in the Vedic period and the creation of God in the Christian origin myth, nature has been allegorically, symbolically and pragmatically represented as a site of beauty, danger, aesthetic and emotive evocation, scientific observation and exploration, anthropocentric consumerist exploitation to a domain largely generating a discourse of peril and doom. This presentation surveys literatures from the Vedic times to the Anthropocene era, observes how nature has been represented in literature over the times, analyses and reflects upon the motives of such delineation. Upon deeper reflection, I conclude that human tendencies and inclinations can be discerned towards revering, knowing, fearing and saving nature since the mythic period to the Anthropocene era. Reflecting upon human activities “to conquer, domesticate and violate” which have caused detrimental impact on the ecosystem of the earth as a result of scientific optimism and anthropocentric arrogance, creative artists of the present Anthropocene era not only lament the loss caused by nature’s exploitation and show the apocalyptic fear, but also indicate the urgency of responding with immediacy to the socio-cultural, political, religious, ethical questions of human responsibility toward nature.

**Keywords:** Environment, Biocentric, Anthropocentric, Anthropocene, Scientific Optimism, Ecosystem, Apocalypse

I am humbled by your invitation to the 25<sup>th</sup> MELOW International conference and am delighted to learn that this two-day conference has brought together scholars to share their scholarship on and around the central theme of the conference “Echoes of the Earth: Interplay of Literature and Landscape.” Primarily, I appreciate your selection of this small hilly town of Dhulikhel amid these green hills, aerially just a few miles away from the Himalayas which have conjured the human minds with awe, wonder, curiosity and veneration, and awakened thinkers, philosophers and sages to a contemplative state of transcendence—a realm of divine joy and bliss. Your physical—not merely voyeuristic I trust— proximity to this landscape will give a testimony of what landscape means to literary creativity.

My presentation will sporadically reflect over literatures of the West from the mythical and classical period to the present times, anecdotal reference to Vedas and Upanishads, Sanskrit literature by Kalidasa and Nepali literature to reflect upon human nature relationship, human attitudes to nature, with the ensuing impacts, as reflected in those writings and on writerly positions in literary creations. The presentation is, however, a humble initiation to stimulate curiosity and evoke response to the burgeoning issue of environment we as humans are confronting with.

Loosely shaped around the theme of “Nature and Creative Art,” my presentation will reflect on the interplay of nature (landscape) and creative art (literature). I am using nature, earth, landscape, environment, ecology indiscriminately to refer to the physical reality surpassing the biotic and abiotic world holistically. I apologize for reversing the order of “literature and landscape” in the conference title to “landscape (nature) and literature (creative art)” with an assertion that knowledge is embodied in nature. To reflect upon nature-literature (creative art) interplay, I will contemplate over the rendition of nature in literatures from the mythical period to the current Anthropocene era.

Creation myths prevalent in various religious beliefs and cultures associate ideas and knowledge with objective reality, the world of phenomena, perceived by senses and treat ideas set aside from objective reality as dreamy and unreal. Hindu belief system holds the earth as the source of knowledge. Beginning with *Aum agnimile purohitam yagyasya deva mrityujam. Hotaram ratnadhatamam* (ॐ अग्निमीले पुरोहितं यज्ञस्य देव मृत्युजम्। होतरं रत्नधातमम्), the *Rigveda* exhibits the faith of the Aryans in the Indus valley on *agni* (fire), *vayu* (wind), *varun* (water), *surya* (sun), *soma* (moon), the world of phenomena, indicative of the reverence shown to natural elements and the the anthropocosmic (Panikkar 36) --divine, human and cosmic, power attributed to them. It is where nature, divine and human unitive vision can be seen in Hindu belief system. Creative art gains the contemplative force from this unity.

The contemplative/meditative moment marks the end of discursive stage from where the path leads to joy and ecstasy. Creative Art begins at this contemplative stage, and what ensues is the divine realization in tranquility (Salvation) and creative instinct in a repose. Contemplative journeys both for soteriological or creative goals have their roots in the earth as it is the essence of all things. Highlighting the earth as the essence of all things and beings, *Chandogya Upanisad* positions; यसां भूतानाम पृथ्वी रसः, पृथिव्या आपो रसः, आपां औषधयो रसः, ओषधीनाम् पुरुषो रसः, पुरुषस्य वाग रसः, वाच राग राशः, रचः साम रसः, सामना उद्गीता रसः (The essence of the beings/non-beings is the earth; the essence of earth is water; the essence of water is plants; the essence of plants is a person; the essence of a person is speech; the essence of speech is Rk (hymn); the essence of Rk is the *saman* (chant). The essence of the *saman* (chant) is *Udgitha*. (337-338), the contemplative (soteriological for saints) stage one reaches through chanting and singing.

The earth is the principal element to carve this trajectory. This significance ascribed to the earth/nature by the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* indicates how nature is represented in the Indian sub-continent. A deep ecological awareness and human-nature connectivity can be seen in the culture of the Indic regions. The worldviews projected by the *Bhagvadgita* can be regarded as to be venerating the ecological bond between men, animals and lower beings: The sages with true knowledge

The sages with true knowledge see with equal vision a learned Brahmana, a cow, an elephant, a dog and an outcaste (a dog-eater). Negating any hierarchical distinction between divine and mundane world (organic, inorganic and the divine world), the *Bhagavadgita* places everything on a horizontal plane in the way Barry Commoner's first law of ecology delineates "Everything Is Connected to Everything Else" (33).

The material pre-eminence of the world can be noticed in the Christian belief system as well. *The Bible* describes in "Genesis" how God hovering over the waters and the surfaces of the deep created out of the formless empty and void, the heavens and the earth, the light and the darkness, water and sky, seas and the land, trees and vegetations, day and night, the moon and stars to govern the night, the sun to govern the day, the creatures of the sea and water and animals and birds on the land before finally making man in His image, in His likeness as to rule over the land and over all the creatures. After creating man and woman, He blessed them and said "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1: 28).

In Christian faith, God is believed to have created water, made land suitable for plant growth before making man from the dust of the ground, giving him life and creating woman from his ribs. God implanted trees in the garden and put in the middle of the garden of Eden "the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of Good and evil" (Genesis 2:8). It is only after Eve ate the apple and gave it to Adam to eat that they acquired the knowledge of good and evil. This process of creation in Christianity assumes the earth and the heaven as the base of all realities and the fertile ground for all understanding of light—knowledge—and life.

Many other indigenous cultures and religions attach importance to the awareness of the land. Native Americans, for example, conceive in the mythopoeic mode "a world in which plants, animals, pictures, words, actions, as well as humans, storms and the sunlight had the potential of power and

life” (Vecsey and Venebales 16). They trust primitive animism--a belief regarding the environment as living. A world can stand for a thing and a man in animal skin can be the animal. The animistic association with nature credits the idea that the entire consciousness comes from nature. In *Black Elk Speaks*, John G. Neihardt gathers, from what Black Elk expresses, ‘Native American religion is after all about seeing things in spirit and spirit in all things.’ Black Elk narrates his experience while standing on the highest mountain and seeing round beneath him the whole hoop of the world with a spirit in all thing, a tree giving shelter to everyone and encompassing everything.

And while I stood there, I saw more than I can tell and I understand more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I say it was holy. (43)

A mighty flowering tree sheltering all the children of one mother and father indicates how nature is considered holy and divine and how it dwells in the heart of Native American religious consciousness. This association with nature marks their awareness and that the very beginning of “thinking” starts from the landscape imaginary.

### **Divine, Human and Nature Interaction in Classical Literature**

Nature’s dominant presence can be noticed in literature as a symbol, an image, a point of reference, as a power leading to deeper contemplative and emotive expression in the classical literature. Beside this mimetic, rhetorical and creative referentiality, it has been projected as a mystical and supernatural site of knowledge revered as divine, eulogized as gorgeous, charming and beautiful, shunned as foul and filthy, feared as dark, dangerous and ferocious since antiquity.

Classical literature of the Indian sub-continent deifies nature, assigns it supernatural position and internalizes the economy of nature with an emphasis on biocentric unity where divine, human and material (physical) assort as one and the same. This biocentric attitude to nature seen in the Indic

thought system means a lot to respond to the escalating ecoterrorism and environmental degradation causing a threat to the planet, earth, and the species on it.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the classical epics of mythic dimension, which have now become an inherent part of public knowledge, nature/landscape is of utmost importance. The entire narrative of the epic *Mahabharata* that is a reflection on the way of life, on human society, righteousness, individual humility, devotion, right and wrong action, individual's peculiarities are narratives shaped around place of place sacred and divine and dark and ferocious representing good and bad facets of human life and the world.

In the classical Sanskrit literature, Kalidasa's portrayal of Sage Kanva's hermitage in *Abhijnanshakuntalam*, as a site of purity, beauty, sacredness and evocative power, has rare parallels in world literature. *Meghduta (The Cloud Messenger)* is Kalidasa's another popular poetic work symbolically presenting the connections between human emotion and landscape/environment. It narrates the story of Yaksha (a demigod), who is exiled due to the curse of Kubera in Ramgiri of Central India and is separated from his beloved during the rainy season. He sends a message through the cloud to his beloved living in Alakapuri in the Himalayas. The cloud, personified and endowed with human consciousness, echoes Yaksha's longing and love. The landscape imagery: rivers, forests, mountains, villages and cities on the way that Yaksha describes in the first part is vividly intricate. *Meghaduta* is an exemplary poem that gives nature life, connects with human and the divine, through its symbolic, contemplative expressivity.

In Greek and Roman classical literature, humanity's relationship to the world is seen through the forces of nature. Deities and divine power are animated and personified in nature. The Greek poet Theocritus in his pastoral mode of literary expression presents the bucolic vision of nature. Nature stands as a source of beauty and inspiration, chaos and destruction, rage, fate and death.

Homer's *Iliad* portrays the landscape shared by gods, humans, living and non-living with God on elevated spaces like Mount Olympus and others below. Nature's association with dangers and wonders, mysterious and supernatural has been shown in *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus is heading to

Ithaca crossing the unpredictable and endless sea. The sea has been presented as calm and navigable, violent and destructive like the storm. Islands can be beautiful; wilderness dangerous. The rugged island of Cyclopes, the dreamy island of the Lotus-Eaters, the bucolic and beautiful island of Calypso have links with human fate and destiny. Homeric writing links human emotions, struggles, conditions and fate to the powerful and uncontrollable force of nature. It remains a dominant presence in his writing.

The Greek playwrights--Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, use nature in their plays not only as a background, but as the symbolic indicator of divine will and power, human fate, moral dilemma, decay and suffering. In Aeschylus' plays, nature reflects the divine order and comic justice. Natural forces appear in the form of the expression of God's will whereas Sophocles' plays focus on human experience of nature regarding their actions, difficulties, dilemma and suffering. Nature reflects divine justice in Aeschylus and human fate in Sophocles.

In Aeschylus's *Pometheus Bound*, Prometheus, the protagonist is chained to a remote cliff in the barren, wild and inhospitable mountain for his eternal punishment in desolation for his defiance of God. Nature is projected as a boundary between order/civilization and chaos working at the divine will. In *Agamemnon*, one of the trilogies of *The Oresteia*, nature reflects human emotions, moral decay and divine will through profuse references of storms and natural disasters symbolizing familial and political storms in the house of Atreus. In *The Persians*, the uncontrollable force of nature, the power of God and fate, is shown in the form of the sea that swallows the Persian fleet causing its catastrophic end in the Battle of Salamis. Divine will, nature's power, human fate and suffering are major things symbolically hinted through the reference of nature in Aeschylus' plays.

Sophocles' plays *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus at Colonus* reveal through symbolic and metaphoric use of nature: death, decay, moral pollution, human guilt, fate, conflict between human and divine law, divine intervention and nature's fury, individual dilemma and suffering.

Virgil's *Aeneid* uses nature symbolism to depict divine wrath, emotional turmoil and internal psychological struggles by referring to violent weather conditions, safety and hospitality through the

depiction of fertile, green and attractive landscapes similar to that of Carthage, (Dido), danger and divine threat through the description of the entrance of the underworld, divine interaction with nature to intervene human actions like Venus calming the sea to facilitate Aeneas' journey to Carthage.

Equally important is the role of nature in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in affecting and mirroring physical and emotional transformation. Change/transformation is the major theme and characters transform into mountains, rivers, trees and animals like the change of the nymph Daphne into a laurel tree, Narcissus's change into a flower after being self-obsessive on seeing his own image in a pool, the couple, Baucis and Philemon, into an intertwined tree. Nature remains the major force behind this change. The change of seasons following the abduction of Persephone by Hades reveals the cycle of life, death, revival and human experience in tune with nature. Nature is presented as idyllic, beautiful, emotive and dangerous at the same time. It won't be an exaggeration to say that Western classical literature envisions interaction, connection and organic unity between human, divine and natural world.

### **Nature and Literature from Medieval to the Neoclassical Period**

Medieval literature encompassing religious writings, sermons, homilies, chivalric romance, love poetry and allegorical literature alludes nature symbolically and allegorically. From a religious perspective, nature is projected as a medium of understanding divine order made in his image and bearing his grandeur, if not corrupted and polluted by sin. The landscape of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*) is structured with religious and moral intent. Dante enters the dark wood in the beginning of *Inferno* and this dark wood symbolically stands for moral confusion, crisis and sinful life and the nine circles of Hell (limbo, lust, gluttony, greed, wrath, heresy, violence, fraud, treachery) comprising natural elements like earth, air, fire, water showing the intensity of sin and punishment. The portrayal of the landscape of the underworld in Dante is similar to Virgil's *Aeneid*.

As the Renaissance observed the revival of interest in classical antiquity, the literary writers used nature to depict human emotional conditions, idealized and peaceful pastoral life, love, light



with a reflection of divine order. Despite the shifting focus on humanity, Shakespeare's gardens, and forests in *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As you Like It* are vehicles of emotional and political appeals.

Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* in its pastoral form depicts rural life, changing seasons and beauty of nature; Milton's *Paradise Lost* while describing human beings fall from grace symbolizes beauty and fragility of nature. From the restoration period till the 18<sup>th</sup> century, writers, rather than celebrating nature for its beauty, spiritual grandeur and source of inspiration, focused on its value, order, rational and empirical observation, study and utilization for human progress. Nature was taken more from a rationalist perspective and had a subdued position.

### **Return to Nature: Beauty and Sublimity, Vision and Imagination**

Creative artists have talked about the enormity of nature and its relation with knowledge, imagination, inspiration, and creativity. William Wordsworth's poem entitled "The Table Turned" reads:

One impulse of a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can. (21-24:765)

This poetic exhortation proclaims that human expanse of knowledge and creativity tends to be diminutive in front of the vast array of earth that evokes reverence to its immensity, beauty and grandeur.

Romantic literature lightens rationalist's burden of reason, logic and ethics of the enlightenment era, takes humans from the stuffy, suffocating enclaves out to the sublime landscape to breath afresh in a contemplative mood. Nature is not only a reservoir of poetic images and symbols for Romantics, but the very source of human thought, knowledge and creativity. Shelley in "Mont Blanc" highlights the coalescence of thought with the universe of things evoking multifarious permutations of appearances ranging from gloomy to dark to bright to magnificent and writes:

The everlasting universe of things

Flows through the mind and rolls its rapid waves,

Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—

Now lending splendor, where from secret springs

The source of human thought its tribute brings. (Shelley “Mont Blanc”, 1-5))

Shelley holds, when worldly things in diverse forms and colors interact with the human mind, ideas, thought and knowledge get a reality. Creativity thus results from the intersection of nature and the human mind.

Romantic poets indeed envision harmonious relationship between humans and the world outside, creativity and landscape. Through extensive use of natural imagery, Wordsworth and Coleridge paint the natural world as a home, a birth place, a dwelling place of language, feeling, thought and expression. With some difference in the language use, both these poets present a great ecological vision. Coleridge in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” a poem written in defense of “all things both great and small”, the Mariner finally bids farewell to the wedding guest indicating the economy (harmony/unity) of nature:

He prayeth well, who loveth well

Both man and bird and beast (7:612-13)

Wordsworth uses green language, reveres nature as he feels that love of nature leads him to the love of humankind and that human physical and psychological living is impossible without earth. Wordsworth is a lover of the natural world—the world of eye and ear; he respects it as the nurse, the guide, the guardian of his heart, soul and of his moral being. He considers that nature has the power to fill our mind with emotions, intellectual charm, sublimity, calm delight and subtle joys by giving us the realization that nature is a powerful force that can bring unity in things:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows

Like harmony in music; there is a dark

Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles

Discordant images, makes them cling together

In a society. (Prelude 1:340-344)

Keats uses environmental imagery to express the bountifulness and power of nature to relieve humanity from weariness, fever, fret, disease, and death. In “Ode to a Nightingale”, he describes the how natural world is free from the worries of the human world:

Fade far away, dissolve and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
the weariness, the fever, and the fret. (19-21)

For Romantic poets, nature is not only a background for imagery, source of creative knowledge, inspiration and imagination, a site evoking emotion, but a site of harmony, joy and respite from the problems of the mundane world.

Transatlantic writers (American Transcendentalists) Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman and environmental conservationist, John Muir reflect on the interconnections of the animal world with the organic and inorganic environment. For Emerson, knowledge is found not in books but in original relation to the universe. Least affected by the idea of ecocide/environmental degradation caused by human activities, he enhances the concept of immutability and vastness of nature in his book *Nature* and views: “Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf” (356).

Walt Whitman holds great faith on the vastness of nature in “A Song of the Rolling Earth”. The earth gives him the confidence to overlook the ecological apocalyptic view because he believes that even the most destructive human actions are just the chipping. So, Whitman in “A Song of the Rolling Earth” proclaims knowledge to be an emulation of the spheres of the earth:

I swear there is no greatness or power that does not emulate  
those of the earth,  
There can be no theory of any account unless it corroborates the  
theory of the earth,  
No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not is of account,

Unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth,

Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of the

Earth. (91-95)

Whitman assertively assigns that there can be no knower and knowledge of the world that does not corroborate with the earth. Such an idea signals the primacy of earth and creative art/literature as a product of human mind thus invariably resonates the song of the earth. He indirectly says that ‘mental awareness has links with biology; and biology has not only links with, but is dependent on nature/earth (qtd. in Joshi 5). Whitman is influenced by *The Vedas*, which venerate nature and emphasize the importance of *Panchamahabuta*: sky (sound), wind (touch), fire (color), water (taste) and earth (smell) with their intersecting propensity (*panchikaran* process) that compose nature. His idea of symbiotic relationship of human and the natural world goes with Coleridge’s concept of organicity. Though he supports ecologists’ co-evolutionary model that regards the mutual adaptation of organism to their environment, his idea of connectedness (a problematic issue) has a slight anthropocentric inclination. Yet, his interest is not in material, but in spiritual and symbolic like the Vedic one.

Thoreau, “THE PATRON SAINT of American environmental writing” (Buell, *The Environmental* 115), is Emerson’s earthly opposite as he takes a more empirical and scientific approach, than the spiritual, to defining nature, though he finds both the spiritual and material significance. Nature, for him, has an intrinsic value than any utilitarian one. In this sense, literary art results from deeper understanding of the earth. Thoreau’s minute study of nature, the topography, plants, animals with a scientist’s accuracy in *Walden* is a testimony of “holistic ecological vision” (Buell, *The Environmental* 131).

Unlike Emerson’s and Thoreau’s non-fictional literary writings, Whitman as a democratic American poet and naturalist foregrounds the power of earth in “A Song of the Rolling Earth.” His deep ecological vision describes the earth with its all-embracing, all-compromising power and

amplitude of the earth, not bothered by the threat of ecocide, and ecological apocalyptic vision that many 19<sup>th</sup> century writers foresaw and warned.

American transcendentalists have, with their spiritual, scientific, biotic (deep ecological) or human inclinations in the depiction of nature, have great regard for nature. They mostly take the holistic approach of dealing with the earth and find it to be more powerful than any other worldly things and beings. Literature is all about knowing the landscape as language coevolves with it.

With unflinching love for and attachment to the land, John Muir considers nature as to be more mysterious than the supernatural form of God. Wilderness is a source of energy with prospects of spiritual and sensual delight; creative delight is merely a part of it.

### **Shifting Worldview on Nature and Culture in the Victorian Writings**

Nature has been symbolically depicted variously in the Victorian literature owing to shifting social, cultural and scientific tension. The age reflects partly the Romantic influence where nature is a site of sublime beauty and divine inspiration; partly the scientific influence of industrial advancement and conceptual change about the world views. The emergence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution (*On the Origin of Species*) implanted the concept that the earth is not benign, bucolic and harmonious, but brutal and indifferent where all the species have to struggle for survival and only the fittest survive. Humans are for the first time made to rethink their origin that they are not the children of God, but of the apes from whom they have evolved from.

Lord Tennyson in his poems (*In Memoriam*) contradictorily presents nature's grandeur and indifference to the suffering of humanity; John Ruskin eulogizes nature for moral and spiritual betterment in his essays. If Charles Dicken's laments the loss of the vitality of rural life due to the degradation of nature with the emerging industrial towns (*Oliver Twist, Hard Times*) as does Matthew Arnold that of pastoral life in his poems, Thomas Hardy, in his pessimistic tone, portrays nature as cruel and indifferent, yet gives nature a prominent place in his Wessex novels. Victorian Gothic novels present nature as dark, dreary and mysterious, and realist novels present the landscape with greater accuracy. No matter whether Victorian poems and novels project nature as bucolic and

sublime, harsh and indifferent, dark and mysterious, filthy and dead, it has a dominant place in literary art.

### **Nature in Nepali Literature**

Nepal poets influenced by the Sanskrit and Western Romantic tradition have written poems using nature metaphor and references. This tradition begins with Lekhnath Poudyal's *Ritubichar* that describes the six seasons in the manner they were described by Kalidasa in his *Ritusamhar*. The poem exquisitely describes the features and traits of the season employing nature imageries, time and again allegorically. Seasons' truthful and realistic description with allegorical references, metrical and rhythmic particularity make this poem both easily accessible to the common readers and a bit remote at times. Yet, this poem sets a genre of Nepali nature writing:

हिलेमा भ्यागुतो बस्छ हिलेमा कमलस्थिति  
स्थानले मात्र के गर्नु भिन्नैछ गुणकोगति

Both the frog and the lotus flower are found in the mud, but are endowed with different traits Laxmi Prasad Devkota's poems reveal the development of natural awareness gained through the contact of the corporeal eye to the heightened understanding and knowledge gained through the visionary eye. He enters the world of mundane reality; in a state of imagination and vision, transcends it and enters the world of harmony and internalizes mercy, pity, peace and love—the characteristic emblems of world of eternity and truth. In a sublime state of mind in the proximity of nature, Devkota sees harmony between nature and humans. Devkota's poems like "The Rainbow", "Spring", "Song of the Nightingale", "The Swallow and Devkota", "The Rain", exhibit human nature coalescence. Season's description in "Spring" shows his minute observation:

What a Season has Arrived!  
Earth-rainbowing, hare-maddening,  
Bee-buzzing, bird-quickenings'  
Pulse palpitating, heart agitating! (1-4)

"The Swallow and Devkota" reveals human-nature harmony:

The swallow and Devkota

Share the same nest; share the same trait.

How the tiger and the lamb share the same riverbank!

Nature sits and weaves their hearts in a single thread. (1-5)

Poet Siddhicharan Shrestha's "Mero Pyaro Okhaldhung," and "Urbasi", Madhav Prasad Ghimire's "Kaligandaki" elegantly present the awareness of the place. So, does Ramesh Bikal's novel *Abiral Bagdachha Indravati*. In Nepali literary writings, nature's beauty, sublimity and its emotional power have been largely depicted. Over the time, climate change, deforestation, snow-melting in the Himalayas, flash floods, erosion, careless urbanization, ruthless treatment to nature, indigenous awareness have drawn contemporary literary writers, specially *pariyapoets* (poets writing on environment), toward ecopoetic expression of the discourse of doom, more in fictional and non-fictional forms than poetry. Nature is a dominant presence in Nepali literature.

### **Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Afterwards: Apprehension of Toxicity and Ecological Apocalypse**

With scientific advancement, industrialization, urbanization, use of pesticides on agricultural farms, growing population following advancement in health facilities, rise of consumer products and capitalist economy, rapid communication and transportation facilities, increasing use of fossil fuel, disposal of nuclear waste causing environmental pollution and threat, anxiety on the loss of nature is noticed in writings of the modern 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This anxiety is prompted by fragmentation of land, alienation faced by the people in their lives, anthropocentric hubris of human beings, "to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing" (Rueckert 113). With the increasing environmental problems causing severe threat to the earth, its flora and fauna and in turn to the human being themselves, literary writers have felt the urgency to focus on environmental crisis pushing the planet beyond limits.

Creative and critical voices (together with activism—like *chipko andolan* in India, tree huggers in the US) have come in profusion in favor of biocentric positioning against scientific optimism and anthropocentric arrogance to exploit the earth. Reflecting upon human activities having

detrimental impact on ecosystem, creative artists provoked by overall ecological threat, from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present Anthropocene, not only lament the loss and show the apocalyptic fear caused by nature's exploitation, but also indicate the urgency of responding with immediacy to the socio-cultural, religious, political and ethical human responsibility toward nature. Landscape and literature have become more connected now. The canvas of expression has been broad. The shift is in the subject and theme. The dominant environmental concern is all about the fate of the planet and the human beings as reflected in Robert Frost's "A Brook in the City."

The meadows grass could be cemented down  
From growing under pavements of a town;  
The apple trees be sent to heath stone flame  
Is water wood to serve the brook the same?  
How else dispose of an immortal force  
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source  
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown  
Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone. (9-16)

Robinson Jeffers's poem "Passenger Pigeons", written before mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, ironically hints at this threat as well:

In spite of wars, famines and pestilences we are quite suddenly  
Three billion people: our bones, ours too would make  
Wide prairies white, a beautiful snow of unburied bones: (20-23)

Biocentric and anthropocentric discourses, deep and shallow ecological issues, ecocide and ecoterrorism, toxicity, utopia, dystopia and apocalypse, climate change and environmental pollution, bioregionalism and universalism, scientific optimism and its limits, environmental ethics, biophilia, responsibility, environments rights, duties, mediated and natural environment, knowing and ignoring earth and more entail areas of environmental literary response.



The questions like how does a poem represent nature? what images, symbols and figurations are there? what is the setting and background of a novel? what aesthetic appeal does nature make? which prominently foregrounded environmental literary writings are obsolete questions with limited resonance now?

There is a tendency of counter questioning them. The questions which prominently mark the ecopoetic discourse now are: How do the images, symbols and figurations used for nature affect it in turn? Can nature writing be taken as a genre? Can place/nature be a subject of critical analysis like race, class, caste, color, gender, ethnicity? Are writings of men and women on nature similar or different? If different why and how do they affect the destiny of nature? How do we perceive wild and urban, sublime and ugly, dark and bright spaces, forests and gardens in our memory? What role does education play in the perception of landscape? How is nature depicted in films, documentaries and advertisements, and how do they affect nature and society? What is the relation of environment and literature? What is the relation of environmental literature with environmental science, philosophy, history, ethics, psychology, arts, politics? What are the possibilities of scientific and social-scientific inquiry in this field. How is the experience related to place expressed in texts, theory, history and culture? How can the reference, use and imitation of physical environment be retheorized? How can the rhetoric of environmental discourse be studied? (Glotfelty and Buell)

I understand the complexity of our conversation in this conference, but I am hopeful that even the scrawny and sketchy indication of the immensity of nature will give us a feel on how human literary endeavors have been 'directed towards knowing, revering (as sacred), and fearing the immensity of nature by foregrounding its essence and intrinsic worth as the source of creativity (qtd in Joshi vi) since antiquity. With the modern techno-scientific progress, however, the exploitation of the earth has escalated beyond imagination as a result of anthropocentric consumerist demands of natural resources. Such acts of exhausting natural resources have intensified earth's pollution leading to environmentally adverse impacts (climate change, ice melting, deforestation, desertification of the Himalayas, sea-level rise, and what not) and, in turn, directed literary creative expression from

respecting sacred nature for symbolic portrayal and emotive evocation to pondering over economy (organic unity) to usefulness to threat of the end of nature (ecological apocalypse) to environmental ethics to protection/preservation discourses. Let me conclude with these lines from “An essay on Criticism” to indicate that much is written on nature and literature and much needs to be done:

The increasing prospects tires our wandering eyes,

Hills peep o'er hills, Alps on Alps Arise. (231-32)

A Little learning is a dangerous thing:

Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring

Their shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,

And drinking largely sobers us again. (215-18)

Let us hope that the desire to write and learn more on landscape and nature will give us greater revelation on the immensity, essence and importance of human-nature harmony and coexistence.

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