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Ecocriticism in Rudyard Kipling's *the Jungle Book*

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Abstract: Ecocriticism is the study of nature writing. It concerns about the depiction of natural environment in a literary product. Through nature writing, authors try to incorporate prevailing environmental conditions and crisis in their work of art. The stories in *The Jungle Book* hold vast knowledge of natural world. This book encompasses the crystal clear knowledge of both biotic and abiotic natural factors. The readers can experience the natural world close to their heart by reading the stories. Kipling, in his books, gives more importance to the animal characters. Except a few human characters, others are animals and birds. He has given a clear description of the feature of all animals including humans in his stories. By reading his description of animals, one can easily visualize the mental picture of those animals. Not only the features but also living place, predation, offspring, mate, prey, diseases and interaction are also described. The depicting interrelated life of organisms in the text, obliquely tries to counsel humans to have a co-existing natural life in a healthy way.

Keywords: *Abiotic, Biotic, Co-exist, Ecocriticism, Environment.*

The following abbreviation is used after the quotation: JB - *The Jungle Book*

A prevalent connotation in the literary world is 'Literature is mirror of life'. The word 'life' in the above connotation not only acknowledges the life of human beings, but also the life of all organisms in the whole natural world. The natural world incorporates both biotic and abiotic factors. Water, air, humidity, atmosphere, wind, pollution, pressure, minerals, temperature, light and soil are some of the biotic factors in the nature. Abiotic factors comprise reptiles, birds, animals, plants, bacteria and humans. These two factors are interconnected and becomes a cause for the sustainable life in the natural world.

A human being can experience the above factors in two ways. The first way is real life experience and the second way is reading literary works. The former experience is earned from the bodily sensual perceptions like touching, smelling, seeing, tasting and hearing. The latter is experienced through the inner sensual perception like emotion, feeling and imagination. Among these two ways, the most effective natural world experience is acquired from reading. Reading books supplies a vast knowledge about the natural world. If an ideal reader investigates a book based on the above ecological (natural) world, then it is called Ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is a new born theory began in USA and it is otherwise known as green studies. It is the study of nature writing. This study concerns about the depiction of natural environmental in a literary product. Through nature writing, authors try to incorporate prevailing environmental conditions and crisis in their work of art. Writers like Arne Neass, Cheryll Glotfelty and Rachel Carson give importance to Ecocriticism in their works. Some of the ecocritical writings which built a strong pillar for the field are Arne Neass's *The Shallow and the Deep*, *Long-Range Ecology Movement*, Cheryll Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Readers*, William Rueckert's *Romantic Ecology*, Rachel Carson *Silent Spring*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Margret Fuller's

Summer on the Lakes, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand Country Almanac: And Sketcher Here and There*, and John Muir's *A Thousand-Mile walk to Gulf*.

Rudyard Kipling also holds an important place in Ecocriticism indirectly, by exhibiting natural phenomena in his works. Kipling's famous literary work, *The Jungle Book* is taken into consideration for the paper. The short stories of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* are examined in terms of ecological perspective. Kipling's literary book holds the crystal clear knowledge of both biotic and abiotic factors. The readers can experience the natural world close to their heart by reading Kipling's stories.

The Jungle Book is a collection of short stories. It becomes very famous among both children and adults because of its realistic exposition of natural life. Most of the stories in the book revolve round a man-cub, a jungle boy named Mowgli. He is abandoned in a place where no humans lived. Bagheera, the black panther saves him and takes him to the jungle. In the jungle, he is raised by the Wolf-Pack. There he lives a natural life with his animal companions. He is taught the Law of Jungle by Baloo, the bear. Baloo and Bagheera become good friends and teacher for Mowgli. The only danger in the jungle is Shere Khan, the lame tiger. This is a nutshell of Mowgli's story. The other stories in the book are not related with Mowgli, but still, they are based on ecology and environment. Those other stories have their own stories like life of seals, mangoose, tamed animals etc...

Kipling, in his stories, gives more importance to the animal characters. Except a few human characters, others are animals and birds. Kipling has given the fair description of the features of all animals, including humans in his stories. By reading his description of animals, the readers can easily visualize the mental picture of those animals. Not only the features but also living place, predation, offspring, mate, prey, diseases and interaction are also described. The below passages describe the inhabitation of abiotic creatures in the natural world by analyzing the characters in the stories of *The Jungle Book*.

In this world, human beings consider themselves as superior one to other organisms. It is not a fact. They are also a kind of animal. Like other organisms, they are also living in the same environment and having same food to eat. Kipling proves that man is also an animal by using the word man-cub. Cub is the word attributed for the offspring of animals. The word 'cub' is used for a human (Mowgli), to refer human as an animal. In the first story, Kipling manifests the behavior of human child. "How Little! How naked, and – how bold!" said Mother Wolf softly." (JB 8) This quotation shows that human cubs are little and naked. Here, naked doesn't mean nudeness. It visualizes a human baby without hair. All new born animals would have hair in their whole body. But man's child will not have hair in their body while they are newly born. When they grow up the hair grows. This shows Mowgli as a human cub. In *The Second Jungle Book*, Kipling talks about the adulthood features of human.

Kipling also mentions the evolution of human from monkeys. "I was their blood brother except that I had no tail, and should be their leader some day." (JB 35) The phrase blood brother proves that humans are the descendants of monkeys. As the time evolved, humans lost their hair and tail. Later, they called themselves as civilized people. Mowgli can easily climb and fling through the branches of trees. The only animals which can fling in trees are monkeys. This shows the resemblance of Mowgli, the human and monkeys. To refer this Kipling says, "... at first Mowgli would cling like the sloth, but afterward he would fling himself through the

branches almost as boldly as the grey ape.” (JB 15) This is how Kipling explains the evolution of man from monkeys with the help of the character Mowgli.

Akela and his pack members are wolves in the story. They belong to the grey wolf family. The physical features and behaviors of the grey wolves are mentioned, by describing Akela’s pack members. “Mother Wolf lay with her big grey nose dropped across her four tumbling, squealing cubs and the moon shone into the mouth of the cave where they all lived. Augrh! Said Father Wolf, ‘It is time to hunt again’” (JB 3) From this the readers can understand that the nose of the grey wolf family are grey in color and they are big. They live in the caves in rocky mountain place. The wolf pack will go for hunt at night time. They are all carnivores. In hunting song, Kipling remarks Wolves predating does. Mostly, father wolfs go for hunt and the mother wolfs stay in the cave and take care of the cubs. Akela’s wolf pack describes the behaviors and features of wolfs living in the jungle.

Baloo is a sloth bear in the stories of *The Jungle Book*. He is a sleepy brown bear He is very lazy in his activities. These kinds of bears are seen in Indian rocky places. They can adapt any places for their life. Bears find their food by smelling. Baloo had nuts, roots and honey as its food. When Baloo teaches Mowgli, he says that it was pleasant to eat nuts and honey then raw meat. In the stories, the brown bear is showed as herbivores. But during some seasons, they prey on mountain goat, sheep and salmon. Thus Kipling described food and behavior of bears through Baloo.

Bagheera is a black colored panther. Black panthers are same as leopards. Leopards have spots in their body but panthers don’t have it. In the story, Bagheera has an inky black coat and having patterns of watered silk. His skin is very soft. He is cunning and strong. He can climb trees for some height. Kipling mentions minute actions of panthers through Bagheera’s actions like shaking wet body, climbing trees, hunting buffaloes etc. “Bagheera shaking his wet sides as he came up from the tank” (JB 55)

Shere Khan is a lame tiger in *The Jungle Books* stories. He is a Bengal tiger, found in Indian jungle. Like all Bengal tigers, Shere Khan has bold orange colored skin with black strips. He had light fur. He is over three meter long. In the stories, he is shown as the renowned man eater. This shows Bengal tigers as carnivores. In Kipling’s life time, tiger would enter into the village and had people as their hunting prey. Even now this is happening. The features of the Bengal tigers are exposed in the stories.

Raan is a kite in *The Jungle Books*. He helps Bagheera and Baloo to find Mowgli when he is kidnapped by Bandar-logs. Kites are eagle species. Here, in *The Jungle Books* the above behaviors of kite are described through Rann, the kite. “Raan, the kite balancing and wheeling as he kept watch over the jungle waiting for things to die.” (JB 40) The kites can balance in the sky for many hours. Unlike other birds, kites can do wheeling in the sky. They can watch their prey from that much height. Their usual food is dead carcasses.

Kaa is a python in *The Jungle Books* stories. The readers can find him in the story from the beginning till the end. The characteristics of pythons are revealed through his character. Kaa is a rock snake. He can climb wherever they can. In the stories, Kaa steals and eats the young monkeys. This shows Kaa as carnivorous. Intake of food is unique, when it comes to pythons. “He is very old and very cunning. Above all, he is always hungry. He sleeps for a full month after he has once eaten... Kaa was not a poison-snake...his strength lay in his hug, and when he

had once lapped his huge coils round anybody there will no more to be said.” (JB 43) This shows pythons are very cunning. They can live for long time. In their life time, they spend most of the time in eating and taking rest. They are hungry all the time. They have the prey and take rest for digestion. Pythons do not chew food. They have it as gulp. This is the reason for pythons taking long time for digestion. Eating and digesting are the only process that pythons do in their life time. This shows pythons as hungry creatures. Other than this mating is considered.

Mang is a bat in Mowgli’s stories. Bats are omnivores. They eat fruits. There are some carnivore kinds of bats. “Now Chil the kite brings home the night That Mang the Bat sets free...” (JB 3) “He is not Mang the Bat, to hang in the branches... Baloo taught him what to say to Mang, the Bat when he disturbed him in the branches at midday.” (JB 91) This shows that bats are set free at night time. After all animals come to their home at evening, the bats will start their predation at night. They live in branches of the trees. Sometimes they live in caves of mountains. They sleep at day time and wake up at night. These are the features of bats described in the stories of *The Jungle Book*. This is how Kipling describes the behavior of animals. By describing the behaviours, he indirectly gives information about living place, predation, offspring, mate, prey, diseases and interaction.

From Kipling’s stories readers can get not only the information about animal behaviors but also the vast knowledge about natural environment. He describes the biotic factors like landscape and weather conditions. The collected stories in the book clearly depict various kinds of landscapes. In Mowgli’s Stories, the features of mountain and forest landscape are exposed. Other stories exhibit the vivid description of some other landscapes like sea, deserts, marshy and pastoral lands. Along with landscapes and weather conditions, the stories shows light on the biotic factors like human, animals, birds and reptiles – Mowgli, Bagheera and Baloo.

Thus, Kipling effectively describes the inhabitation of animals in the natural world and the environmental conditions. Through the behavioral depiction of animals in the jungle, Kipling insists on the interrelated life. By depicting interrelated life of organisms in the text, he obliquely tries to counsel humans to have a co-existing natural life in a healthy way. Like this an ideal reader can analyze Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* in terms of environmental perspective. In addition, one can analyze the text in all other ecocritical approaches like Deep Ecology, Shallow Ecology, *tinai* theory etc... On the whole, the paper tries to expose the environmental depiction in the short stories of Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*.

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