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Ecocriticism In Modern Literature: Exploring Ecological Crisis In Rumaan Alam's *Leave The World Behind*

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ABSTRACT

The environment in which a human being lives plays a great role in shaping his/her nature. There are a lot of man-made factors that have destroyed the peace and calm of the environment. These environmental factors have greatly contributed in the environmental degradation. Literature has a unique way of highlighting the relationship of humans with the environment in which they are living. The term, ecocriticism deals with the relationship between environment and literature. With the passage of time, the researchers have tried to explore ecocriticism to raise awareness through literature. The present research explores the ecological crisis in Rumaan Alam's *Leave the world behind*. The theory of ecocriticism will be used for the analysis of the ecological crisis in the novel. The textual analysis will be used as a methodology to conduct the research. The results will indicate that how the selected literary modern novel highlights the ecological crisis under the notion of ecocriticism.

1. Introduction

Literature helps in developing an emotional connection with a shared community and characters. An unparalleled terror and kindness are witnessed through literature. Above all this, a learning experience is developed. Literature has also helped the readers in understanding the problems of modern society. Multiple branches of literature have talked about the ecological importance of nature. Through this aspect, one can understand the relationship between man and the environment. This research deals with one such aspect of literature called Eco-criticism. This branch deals with reflection on the natural world and focuses on the human relationship with nature in the natural environment (Shamim, Sahu & Dwivedi, 2025). The ecological images

often embodied in the literary novels are used for describing the landscapes as pure and beautiful. Ecocriticism is the study of the connection between the environment and literature. The intricate relationships between natural environment and literature are explored through the notion of Eco-criticism (Tajane, Shree, Pathak, Saluja & Srikanth, 2024). The purpose of this research is to explore the ecological crisis in the novel, *Leave the world behind* by famous American writer, Rumaan Alam.

1.2. Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism is a novel branch of literature that explores the relationship between ecology and literature. Every object can be visualized in the ecological framework according to ecocriticism (Wuntu, Tatipang, Rorintulus, Maukar & Ali, 2024). It deals with the presentation and analysis of environmental concerns, environmental-related cultural issues, and attitudes toward nature (Fawarch, Dakamsih & Alkouri, 2023, p. 783). The Pastoral Ecocriticism is a dichotomy between rural and urban life. The rural and natural life is idealized and urban life is demonized in this field. Peace is associated with nature. Nature is beautiful as long as it is kept naturalized. Ever since, technology gained momentum and pace, the environment is adversely affected. Scholars have raised their concerns in this aspect. One such aspect of Ecocriticism is Pastoral literature that gives an insight into the beauty of the countryside and natural life. Technology is a major cause of the disruption of an idealized landscape. The ecocritics endorse the pastoral edition in the European paradigm. The short stories written by Flannery O'Connor, *The Displaced Person* and *A view of the woods*, feature the elements of ecocriticism through depicting simple villagers in rural settings (Simon, 2022). The complexities and nuances were unknown by the Eco-critics. Therefore, they based their knowledge on the pastoral dramas of Shakespeare. Classical literature and its reading had led the Renaissance enthusiasm to a Pastoral tradition. Environmental humanities has challenged the effect of modern life on the natural setting (Sahoo, 2025). Moreover, with the growing environmental challenges, it is the need of time to induce interdisciplinary collaboration which involves linking ecocriticism, education and environmental psychology (Sahoo, 2025). Hence, in the eighteenth century, the sophisticated tradition had become a way through which playful critiques could turn into a reading society. The fresh emancipation of values was rediscovered through ecocritical perspectives which the Victorians found it difficult to maintain because of the competing pressures and values of the Industrial Revolution. In the nineteenth century, the pastoral factor in England was responsible for regarding the action against the modern elements in Edward Thomas's poetry and Thomas Hardy's novels. The pastoral tradition in Europe provided an American distinctiveness. This provided a continuity that was claimed through Ecocriticism. Various strands of Irish, British, and American intersections of Eco-criticism and Pastoral have shown that regional studies, Ecocritical postcolonial, and Pastoral Literature are being written. The notions of Pastoral have been revised in the period studied by the Eco-critics. Therefore, Pastoral Ecocriticism, being a sub-category of ecocriticism is a very relevant field that explains the relationship between man and environmental factors.

1.3. Ecological Crisis

An ecological crisis is a change in the ecological and environmental conditions of humans and organisms that affect their survival. It is related to the crisis of

consciousness. The natural environment is facing degradation and multiple challenges. The current unpredictable weather changes and calamities have compelled the global world to pay a great deal of attention to nature and as a result, humans have become quite apprehensive (Wuntu et al., 2024). Very few people are aware of the true extent of deprivation and changes faced by the environment. The explosions are caused due to man-made reasons and the air becomes adverse for breathing. This ecological crisis has emerged as a result of uncontrolled human factors and poor strategies taken by humans. The other factor is deforestation due to which the phenomenon of climate change has occurred. Global warming has also played a great part in intensifying extreme weather and increased droughts. Currently, modern writers have shifted to portray the awareness of nature through novels and films.

1.4. Problem Statement

There are different experiences observed by the people. The environmental conditions change and the person adapts to them for his/her survival. Literature tells how a certain human being adapts to the ever-changing environmental conditions around him. Ecocriticism is a unique way of exploring it in novels. The research will cover how ecological crisis is evident in the novel, *Leave the world behind*.

1.5. Research Question

The research questions are as under,

- What ecological crisis factors are evident in Rumaan Alam's *Leave the World Behind*?
- How ecological crisis has been highlighted in Rumaan Alam's *Leave the World Behind*?

1.6. Aims and Objectives

This research aims to find out the ecological crisis in the novel as mentioned before.

The objectives of this research are;

- To find out how ecological crisis is presented in the form of literature
- To explore how Ecocriticism plays a major role in defining the ecological crisis

2. Literature Review

Eco-criticism is a growing field. In light of the Eco-criticism, various types of researches have been conducted by scholars of English literature. As a result of population growth, there was a surge in inflation in the sixteenth century (McIntosh, 2021). Due to this sudden inflation, national disruptions such as harvest dearth and failure, coastal flooding and soil degradation occurred (McIntosh, 2021). The romances, plays and pastoral poems mediated in shaping the role played by the natural disruption in the transformation of the modern agrarian lives (McIntosh, 2021). Khan (2023) states that Shakespeare's famous work, *As You Like it*, being a brilliant pastoral comedy provides multiple references with respect to nature threats, its preservation and protection. During the time of Shakespeare, Climate change was not given much attention because nature was considered as a very common escapade for ordinary humans. Moreover, industrial pollution was not very common as it is in the current era. It was indeed very thoughtful of Shakespeare to think about ecology and

nature as a residing place for animals (Khan, 2023). Khan (2023) shed light on how ecological concerns were established in *As You Like It*, by taking in account the killing of animals in their homes (forests). Through the Eco-critical lens, Khan (2023) provides an overview of how the play is set in the time where forest was considered as a quite productive entity for harmonious reconciliation. The welcoming, potent and active quality of forests is often foregrounded in the sixteenth century texts but overshadowed in the modern era, particularly due to industrialization. Khan (2023) further elaborates that as Eco-feminist corpus has emerged as an advance field, critical attention to Eco-criticism has also been given. Moreover, nature is not something that should be taken for granted, rather the people who love nature should conform to its boundaries and parameters (Khan, 2023). Modern readers can critically analyze the thoughts of people residing in Shakespeare's time period as the phenomena of wildfires, polar ice melting and storm surges as a result of deforestation, burning of fossil fuels were non-existent till then or not known by many (Khan, 2023). The field of Eco-criticism has appraised the texts from multiple perspectives, one being the natural world. The natural world includes animals, bio-systems, and ecological interconnections. Khan (2023) further reiterated through the close analysis of *As You like it* that nature is in great jeopardy. It is a known fact that Shakespeare wrote literary works related to nature and the environment but re-reading it from the modern, Eco-critical lens is something many scholars are striving to accomplish.

Along with mirroring the ecological realities, Literature has the tendency to inspire and influence ecological action and consciousness (Tajane et al., 2024). With the increased threat of biodiversity loss, pollution, deforestation and climate change, it has become pertinent to address these pressing concerns through the lens of literature (Tajane et al., 2024). Therefore, the authors deem it necessary to evoke environmental awareness through literature. The late 1990's witnessed the emergence of Eco-criticism as a part of greater environmental movement, originating from cultural studies, environmental ethics and ecological science (Tajane et al., 2024). Literature bears the tendency to inspire action and foster empathy towards ecological paradigm (Tajane et al., 2024). Moreover, the intersection of Eco-criticism with different theoretical frameworks that include critical race theory, feminism and postcolonialism in contemporary studies addresses the intricacies of environmental justice (Tajane et al., 2024). Pichot (2021) believed that before 2020, Pastoral genre was thought to be only a music genre in French artistic productions. Therefore, Pichot (2021) demonstrated through his study of examining the works of famous french poets; Olivier Domerg, Pierre Vinclair and Jean-Claude Pinson. In his analysis, it was evident that Pinson's poetic works highlighted an ecological mission. Moreover, in contrast to Pinson's work, Vinclair's poetry demonstrated a complex relationship between Pastoral and nature (Pichot, 2021). Vinclair's poetry explored the comfort of wilderness as contentment for an average human. Where Vinclair's poetry focused more on philosophical reasoning, Domerg's work depicted his own poetics (Pichot, 2021). Pichot (2021) considered pastoral as a touchstone of the poetic voice in Pinson's work. Conversely, Pinchot considered Vinclair's work as distrustful of belief and philosophical realms. Vinclair's philosophy regarding "Pastoral" revolved around the tradition that a poet fulfills it through his own experiences whether these experiences involve travel or childhood ventures (Pinchot, 2021). A similar study conducted by Wellman (2024) focused on the inclusion of rural aspects in the French literary works. The challenges of environmental change and rural labour are usually obscured by the pastoral literature but they are visible in the literary criticism (Wellman, 2024). According to Wellman (2024), French literary writers like Rapin

include pastoral element in their studies without expecting that the readers will read it from the ecocritic and pastoral perspective, rather they read the texts with the notion of a completely different mindset. Fawareh et al. (2023) is of the view that as the modern world is beset with ecological disasters and ecosystem is in great jeopardy, science and technology are not sufficient alone to fight. It is a great blessing that literature is being given attention from the ecological perspective that it deserved for a great period of time. Ecocriticism delineates nature and human behavior toward it at a certain time in the history of literature (Fawareh et al., 2023, p. 784). Analyzing the texts of modern English literature from the ecocritical perspective, Fawareh et al. (2023) found that in children's literature, ecocriticism equally prevails, raising awareness for the young readers.

3. Methodology

The method used for the analysis of the novel will be Textual Analysis. The novel will be analyzed through the lens of Ecocriticism. The Ecocriticism theory will be used for the evaluation of the text. The Ecocriticism theory helps in finding the ecological crisis and the tension between humans and the environment (Shamim et al., 2025).

4. Results and Discussion

References of nature in literature bring peace to mind and calm to soul. As a reader delves into the natural realms of the pastoral in Pastoral writings, he feels as if everything around is refreshing. The color "Green" itself is a picturesque representation of nature. In the domain of Environmental humanities, green color refers to political and ethical awareness (Pederson, 2021). As the theory of Ecocriticism has been applied in the novel, further exploration will reveal that the novel has the element of ecological crisis in them. The novel is based on the environmental crisis and the factors surrounding it. Thus, the relationship between human nature and environmental factors is evident in the novel.

4.1. Ecological Crisis in the novel, *Leave the world Behind*:

Leave the world behind is a famous novel written by Rumaan Alam, an American writer (Preston, 2020). The novel was published in the year, 2020 (Atakora, 2020). The story revolves around a couple, Clay and Amanda and their children, Rose and Archie. Tired of the mainstream life, they desperately long for a vacation. They rent an expensive house in a remote area, Long Island. Seemingly, having fun in the beginning, they start to experience something really odd. It isn't because of the remoteness of area or sudden change from their everyday life, but a series of ecological and absurd changes which start to happen after their arrival. Already facing the sudden loss of signals and internet, they are visited by a couple, Ruth and George, in the late hours of night. The mood of the novel and tone of the dialogues depict the eeriness of the moment as though something awkward and sinister might occur. Already upset because of the blackout, loss of signals and internet scarcity, the mood of the characters is seemingly very hard to depict. However, Alam has portrayed the moods through the writing in such a beautiful rhythm that the reader can feel the ominous element in between the lines. As the couple claims that they are the owners of this huge mansion, Amanda feels as if her holiday is ruined. Amanda was unsure

that whether to see these people as a threat or to accept that they indeed were the owners of this house. It is obvious that she wanted to have peace for some days in a remote area where no one from her corporate life would disturb her. Even after being offered a partial refund for letting the owners stay was something unexpected for her. The writer associates nature to be a healing element for a character like Amanda, who doesn't want to be disturbed, particularly during her re-connection phase. It is pertinent to note that the weather changes had also begun with each passing day. Amanda doesn't trust the couple but after learning news of the blackout, she is shocked. As Alam (2020) shared in the novel that enjoying any moment is a kind of victory, therefore, Clay was optimistic. The unusual appearance of deer throughout the novel is something absurd particularly when only Rose noted it. The other family members were not so interested in the sudden appearance of dozen of deer in the backyard of the house. Later there are thousands of deer and only Rose seemed to notice the increase in deer. This was a very strange ecological aspect given by Alam in the storyline in which the reader may have different assumptions about the situation. Maybe, the reader could imagine that if a wild animal like deer could arrive in that area, many other wild animals could arrive later as well. Being a careful and suspenseful reader, any critical aspect could be a turning point of the situation. The weather becomes hotter and Clay decides to check on the situation. He forgets the way and later meets a distressed woman on the way. She only speaks Spanish and Clay could not understand Spanish. The fact is that as much as Amanda and Clay wanted to be in the nature at the moment, they wanted to be aware of the life they had momentarily left behind. Quite not understanding the situation, Clay abandons the women after understanding the words, "deer", "telephone" and "electricity", and tries to find the way back to the house. On the other side, the forest near the house adds to the suspense and Rose along with Archie decides to explore it. The symbolism of forest is again an awareness for the readers that there might be other unusual incidents and ecological imbalances in the nearby future. When Archie gets bitten by a Tick, they rush back home. Clay finally finds the house and is reunited with Amanda, when loud noises suddenly start cracking the glass doors. The portrayal of these loud noises suggest a warning of something sinister that may happen or is happening. After the noise is over, Clay is highly disturbed and starts to get worried about his children. Thinking that he met no one except for the distressed lady, he gets really upset. Assuming that this blackout may last for several days, the adults gather the basic necessities such as preserving bathtub, going to the food stores to collect food and making up the mind to survive in this situation. Amanda and Clay further notice the illness of Archie. He was in a very odd situation as his teeth were falling out. Readers can imagine that it maybe due to the change in weather or even radiations. Human mind is absurd especially when strange things are happening around. Though things were indeed very suspenseful but readers couldn't help noticing that it is not normal for a young teenage boy to lose his teeth and that too because of a fever. Again, all this was indicating a much more sinister phenomena that couldn't be explained so easily. As for the wild animals and their appearance, the night witnessed a much more queer incident. The swimming pool of the house is filled with flamingos over the night. Again the spell of loud noises break out and this time, bats fell on the ground. As the sequence of bizarre events and ecological tension fluctuates, Rose goes missing and Archie vomits out blood. George helps Clay in taking Archie to the hospital. During their journey, Clay admits to George that he had met a distressed woman during his short trip to find out the situation. Readers come to know that the woman is George's maid, Rosa. Instead of reaching the hospital, George takes Archie

to his contractor who might have some medical supplies. Danny, the contractor is aware of the declining situation but refuses to help them. Danny, upon hearing about the massive migration of deer, falling of bats and arrival of enormous number of flamingos, consider all the incidents a bad omen and advises them to return to where they came from (George's house). All of them come to know that a lot of people have died due to floods and there a lot of other disasters happening in the country. Readers can assume it could be an invasion or a civil war. The ecological crisis in the novel is quite indirect, subtle and unsettling. The incidents such as major migration of flamingos and deer hint towards an apocalyptic atmosphere. The unexplained diseases that affect Archie, the sudden stillness, disruptions in wildlife and massive flooding hint towards the major ecological collapse throughout the novel. Moreover, this ecological crisis is highlighted as an element of an unnamed and a broader disaster that caused societal breakdown and a great disconnection from the technological world. The novel defines the element of ecocriticism in a way that the humans have become highly dependent upon the modern conveniences that they don't seem to notice the natural phenomena happening around them. The human society and its fragility are highly underscored in the backdrop of the ecological crisis. The pertinent factor among all is that the humans have become too dependent on technology that they consider themselves bored and dysfunctional without it. The film adaptation to the novel was released in 2023. The visuals are the embodiment of the book but there are some changes in the film. In the film, when the family arrives at their getaway, they see a man stocking up canned food. They also witness an oil tanker ship that crashes on the shore. As compared to the book where there is no aspect of beach, there are people around on the beach. The emergency notification is received on the television and phones of the characters. Rose, the daughter of Amanda and Clay, is a big fan of the TV show, *Friends*. There is no couple in the movie that arrives but George and his daughter, Ruth arrives late at night. At the end of the film, Rose goes to watch her favorite TV show, *Friends* in a deserted house where there are stocks of canned food while in the book, Rose goes to a deserted house to get canned food for the family.

5. Conclusion

In the face of ecological disruptions, the limitations of affluence and privilege is highlighted. A world where understandings and traditional structures don't hold their true meaning, the survival depends on accepting the new realities. Each character in the novel had an existential crisis which unfortunately, every other human being has. It is important to take break from the everyday life and explore nature in light of the relationship between a human and nature itself. Moreover, as climate change is resulting in ecological disruptions, it is mandatory to balance both nature and urban responsibilities. It is necessary to create a balance between sitting under a tree and using a gadget in a well-furnished office. The element of ecocriticism has played a great role in making the humans aware about the ecological disruptions occurring in the world.

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