

Urge for Preserving Ecology in Head's "Looking for a Rain God" and Paudyal's "The Parrot in the Cage"

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This paper examines the dynamic interaction between plants' unique sensory qualities and creative expression in culture art and literature. It explores how artists, researchers, and designers engage with human and natural (botanical) elements, as exemplified in Bessie Head's "Looking for a Rain God" and Lekhnath Paudyal's "The Parrot in the Cage," which focus on ecology. These works, consistent with the poets' practices, use plants to objectify local knowledge and maintain the balance between nature and humanity. Through a qualitative approach, this study highlights how plants serve as a source of inspiration, emphasizing both their visible and invisible roles in artistic and literary creation. This study embraces the theoretical lens of the Post Colonialism. The paper further explores how these creative practices not only enhance artistic value but also critically deal with ecological, ethical, and sustainability concerns. By employing nonhuman perspectives, the selected literary practices of Head and Paudyal reveal how artistic expression fosters ecological awareness. Thus, the study underscores the role of literature and art in shaping sustainable goals through the interplay of human and botanical life.

Keywords: plant symbolism, ecological literature, creative expression, postcolonial theory, sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A landscape wit, poet, translator, amateur gardener, and satirist, Alexander Pope – a central figure of the Eighteenth Century English Literature – highlighted the principle: "Follow Nature – at once the source, and end, and test of art" (*An Essay on Criticism*, 2009, p. 147). Pope argues that wit must be restrained by judgment, and that this is where the ancient rules can help. He, too, lost the beauty of ecology once inherited through "his father's property at Binfield in Windsor Forest, where he read avidly and gained an appreciation for the natural world" (*An Essay on Criticism*, 2009). His art and literature reflect an absence of the forest, which remains a harbinger of the source, end, and test of one's life. Pope states that authors think their reputation safe, which lives as long as fools are pleased to laugh (Poetry Foundation, 2009).

An interaction with the writers' practices in art and literature—Bessie Head in her story *Looking for a Rain God*

and Lekhanath Paudyal in his poem *The Parrot in the Cage*—reveals three central problems. Both writers critique social tyranny through their works. Paudyal's poem introduces several symbols with layered meanings; most notably, the symbol of the caged parrot reflects the social plight and the pitiable condition of the nation and its people during the Rana regime. This symbolic depiction aligns with the ecological metaphor of confinement and dislocation from nature. The interaction between the forest and the caged parrot suggests a loss of ecological harmony.

Hugh Holmes (2019) opines that the word *pigeon* "may not just reveal the bird pigeon but also peace, or freedom, or love" (p. 59). Paudyal, unlike Holmes, uses the symbol of a caged parrot to depict the unrest during the oligarchy of the Rana regime. Harry Blamires (2019) asserts that "only poets are fit to be critics," a statement that resonates with the creative expressions of Head in *Looking for a Rain God* and Paudyal in *The Parrot in the Cage*. Their works illuminate a poetic

sensitivity to both human suffering and ecological decline. This is evident in the opening lines of Head's story: "It is lonely at the lands where the people go to plough. These lands are vast clearings in the bush, and the wild bush is lonely too" (Head, 2024, p. 7). This paper investigates how wildness—particularly in human nature—poses a threat to ecology, as Head's story suggests that human action is a powerful force in degrading environmental beauty.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS OF THE STUDY

The study analyzes literary and artistic approach based on the qualitative research methodology. The research themes envelop ecological and ethical sustainability for the better health on the earth. This manuscript has analyzed subjective and symbolic plants because they are cultural metaphors and symbols for the preservation of human and nonhuman life. But due to the legacy of colonialism they suffer much. They are seeking the way to pass through the theoretical lens of the post colonialism. According to Hans Georg Gadamer (1979):

The real meaning of a text, the way in which it speaks to the interpreter does not depend on contingencies that the author and his original public represent. At least, it is not exhausted by them. It is also always codetermined by the historical situation of the interpreter. The meaning of a text goes beyond its author not only occasionally but always (82).

This study plays a role to interconnect ecological concerns with the cultural, political and historical measurements. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach. Its ecosystem or ecocriticism focuses on the ecology, plants, and sustainability. It works to develop relationships between humans and the natural world. R. Elisabetta (2010) talks about human-forest friendships and relationships which usually interact with kinship, ties and engage in rituals.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

A lonely and peaceful land preserves the ecosystem. However, human beings—considered among the wisest creatures on Earth—have dismantled the perennial canvas of natural balance in ecology. This is a matter worthy of serious reflection. Nidhi Verma, an assistant professor at Naveen Government Music College in Durg, India, notes that "the Mizo community started a new society and culture by cutting down these dense forests of the mountains" (Verma, 2025., p. 98). These words contribute meaningfully to the central theme of this essay, titled *A Study of Ecology*. How can the study of ecology not inform the core causes of humanity's destructive tendencies toward nature?

The significance of ecological awareness is evident in the following lines: "I grew up on a small farm with cows and chickens, and with a second-growth forest right at the back fence, so I had the good fortune of seeing the human and

animal as in the same realm" (Snyder, 1990, p. 138). This theme aligns with the objectives of the writers' creative practices as they address ecological issues in their narratives. This study argues for the necessity of integrating ecological interpretations into literary criticism, particularly in relation to Bessie Head's *Looking for a Rain God* and Lekhanath Paudyal's *The Parrot in the Cage*. These works portray personal or societal plights, but they do not directly engage with an ecological interpretation of the conditions described. Instead, they offer narratives shaped by human experience, leaving ecological perspectives implied rather than explicitly explored. Nonetheless, their literary landscapes are filled with symbols of nature—trees, forests, bushes—and reflect the interconnectedness of all living beings, both human and non-human. This connection underscores the importance of recognizing ecological significance in literature.

The study reveals that conservation, management, and preservation efforts are undertaken by forest corporations. However, the writers discussed in this study have overlooked the role of forest corporations as a central element in the statement of the problem. This omission contrasts with Gary Snyder's perspective in his essay *The Etiquette of Freedom*, where he asserts, "The lesson we learn from the wild becomes the etiquette of freedom" (Snyder, n.d., p. 138).

3. I, Concerns Relating to Forests and Trees

While both Bessie Head and Lekhanath Paudyal clearly express their respective societal struggles, their works remain focused on personal or narrative suffering within the framework of social conventions. This study, however, shifts the focus toward the plight of forests and trees, which are increasingly endangered by human selfishness and environmental disregard. The problems faced by the writers themselves are also noteworthy. Their displacement from their home countries may reflect an inability to reconcile with oppressive environments or societal discrimination. For instance, Bessie Head notes, "She, a South African novelist, left South Africa to escape apartheid and settled in Botswana, where she lived until her death" (*Introduction*, 2024., p. 7). Similarly, Lekhanath Paudyal's biography notes, "Born in Kaski in Central Nepal, he moved to Kathmandu, where he stayed until his death at the age of eighty-one" (*Introduction*, 2024, p. 61). Their social makeup suggests that they may have replaced their habitats due to their tendency toward social orientalism. Regarding personal, social, or local identity, Rigby (1997) remarks, "Are we not taught that Socrates is the first man to say, 'Man, know thyself?'" (pp. (889 – 928). Socrates, too, recognized that human nature is among the most selfish of all creatures in the world.

Head's and Paudyal's biographical elements help contextualize their literary narratives, though they do not directly engage with ecological issues. This research, therefore, emphasizes the overlooked voice of the natural world within their literary works. The practices of these two writers differ in the sense that each focuses on a specific plight—one personal and the other impersonal—through the

narration of their respective works. Their thematic concerns highlight how both writers engage with a modern reinterpretation of Renaissance thought. As the Renaissance shifted the focus from a theocentric to an anthropocentric worldview, “Classical writers had placed man in the center of the universe, where the mediaeval scholastics had placed God” (Blamires, 1991, p. 45) Both writers portray the inhuman nature of Mokgobja, whose memory compelled him to order his youngest son, Ramadi, to sacrifice his granddaughters. In this, they reflect on a regression to a Dark Age mentality reminiscent of the Medieval Period. As Harry Blamires (1991.) notes, medieval people “solved the intellectual problems posed by the power of evil in the world by postulating a divided supernatural authority” (p. 29). These characters, lacking benevolent conscience toward both children and nature, fail to recognize them as future sources of life and sustainability.

3. II, Conventional Beliefs

Bessie Head’s narrative primarily centers on a society where life depends on agriculture, and the community possesses little knowledge outside of theology and dualism. As a result, characters are heavily influenced by orthodox beliefs that resort to the tragic act of child sacrifice in a desperate attempt to appease the rain god. However, this appears to be a significant oversight, as neither writer directly addresses the importance of forests, despite the fact that forests play a crucial role in fostering a healthy environment for both human and nonhuman life. Nonetheless, their literary practices present two thought-provoking perspectives. First, they focus on the disintegration of inner realities—the psychological or societal collapse experienced by their characters. Second, their works lack a meaningful connection to the natural world, particularly the forest, which symbolically represents the aesthetic and ecological harmony that could have enriched their narratives.

This raises a critical question for the researcher: Why is the beauty of the forest absent—or shadowed—in their storytelling? This observation resonates with James Herriot’s short story *Just Like Bernard Shaw*, in which the narrator reflects:

I was shocked when I read about the calamity, and there was no doubt the national press shared my feelings. Banner headlines pushed grave affairs of state off the front pages, and for weeks bulletins were published for the benefit of an anxious public. It was right that this should be, and I agreed with all the phrases that rolled off the journalists’ typewriters. “Literary genius. . . .” “Inspired musical critic who sailed fearlessly against the tide of public opinion. . . .” “Most revered playwright of our age. . . .”

With fearless insight, James Herriot portrays public opinion as a powerful force, capable of bringing calamity to the forefront of public discourse, often featured prominently in news

articles. His literary genius is demonstrated through his unexpected encounter with a parrot, whose surprising behavior and talent reveal the author’s deep observational skills. Similarly, Bessie Head uses her literary voice to draw public attention to the silence of the bush, which subtly supports the village peasants during a period of extreme drought. The villagers sought shelter and refuge in the bush land in their search for water, while their innocent children would often play near the area for hours.

The setting reflects a society still rooted in medieval values—an age shaped by feudalism and theological beliefs. The villagers placed their hope in theology, expecting divine intervention in the form of rain, but it never came. Mokgobja, the main character, was especially distraught over the fate of his two granddaughters, who were often engaged in “a weird, high-pitched wailing that began on a low, mournful note and whipped up to a frenzy in nature” (Head, 2024, p. 10). The same description is repeated to emphasize their desperate cries: “a strange, high-pitched wailing that began on a low, mournful note and whipped up to frenzy” (p. 10). In the face of environmental hardship, the male members of the family were expected to retain authority and seek survival through ritualistic belief in the rain god. However, the sacrificial killing of the children failed to bring rain. They returned to their village empty-handed, only to be met with suspicion and accusations of murder. Although the women of Mokgobja’s household bore the emotional weight of the tragedy, the male members were ultimately sentenced for the murder of the innocent children.

Bessie Head’s story draws upon a theological tradition that aligns with Henry Blamires’s depiction of the “Dark Ages,” a period often misunderstood, as the Middle Ages were not uniformly bleak or intellectually stagnant (Blamires, 1991., p. 25). Bessie indirectly emphasizes the bush as a place of refuge during times of scarcity and drought. Through this depiction, the author presents a subtle balance between humanity and the natural world. Her narrative underscores a profound interconnectedness between humans and ecological equilibrium. However, the characters in Bessie’s story fail to establish a meaningful relationship with nature, which becomes a central issue critiqued in the text. This lack of connection illustrates a missed opportunity to embrace the ecological support offered by the bush as a vital natural resource. Similarly, Prem Taha (2025) notes that informed guidance enables a better understanding of forest or bush “management practices and contemporary ecological challenges” (p. 20). From historical to modern traditions, forests have been continuously subjected to both natural calamities and human interference, resulting in their ongoing marginalization. In Bessie Head’s story, both ecology and its creatures have suffered, and continue to suffer due to natural calamities such as drought and human interference. For example, Mokgobja’s family, driven by the desperate hope for rain, abandons their village and clears a portion of the bush to construct a temporary shelter. They untie their goats, brought for milk, along with two oxen, and unwarily release them into the forest. This behavior clearly reflects a dependency on

nature that, paradoxically, contributes to its degradation. Their actions, though unintentional, demonstrate how human needs and livestock become burdens that exhaust the ecological resources that the forests and trees provide.

The story subtly conveys that the village lacks a sustainable ecological foundation. In their search for rain, the villagers exploit the forest and its bush lands, fulfilling human desires at the expense of nature. The forest, however, holds its own culture to maintain ecological climates and environment; it represents a well-functioning system capable of preserving ecological balance. Business Communication Theory and Practice, a text written by Dharma Adhikari, Hugh Holmes, Tika Lamsal, and Mike Sobiech (2021), highlights 'Creating Culture,' which contributes to a better business environment. Here, Beasie's and Lekhnath's practices are a search for ecological environment rather than a search for the business environment. The ecological environment, however, relies on the presence of educated and ecologically aware individuals who understand the importance of conservation and respect the inherent beauty of the natural world.

3. III, Innocence of Ecology and Children

Bessie Head's story further emphasizes that both ecology and children represent innocent and vulnerable facets of society. A peaceful and sustainable life is unattainable unless communities become conscious of the need to preserve forests as a means of maintaining ecological balance. The preservation of forests can be viewed as a form of social-ecological system—a concept that reflects how literature can guide human behavior in relation to natural resources. All sorts of human and nonhuman escalations are occurring in ecologically rich areas, affecting forests, trees, and even children. For instance, Mokgobja and his youngest son, Ramadi, killed their children, believing in "a certain rain god who accepted only the sacrifice of the bodies of children" (10). Their ritual memory was filled with unshakable authority. However, the rain never came; instead, night turned into deadly silence, and day into the devouring heat of the sun. Brian Walker, C. S. Holling, Stephen R. Carpenter, and Ann P. Kinzig (2004), in their research titled *Resilience, Adaptability, and Transformability in Social-Ecological Systems*, assert that ecological stability is deeply rooted in forest management. Forests, they argue, play a central role in empowering not only ecosystems but also all forms of life on Earth. Their findings acknowledge that forests are constantly threatened by "both natural disturbances and human interventions" (Walker et al., 2004, p. 6). This manuscript highlights the importance of conserving forest environments, stressing that all living beings deserve the right to coexist on the planet.

Paudyal's poem, *The Parrot in the Cage*, also critiques the decline of ecological values, though his focus lies in the impact of autocratic rule on human rights. In "The Parrot in the Cage," the parrot becomes a metaphor for individuals oppressed by tyrannical rule and limited by materialistic and terrestrial ambitions. The bird, like its owner, is constrained

within a system that undermines both freedom and survival. Likewise, the narratives of Head and Paudyal converge to offer a shared moral lesson: the need to protect the innocent—whether human or nonhuman—from societal and ecological abuse. Paudyal's parrot and Head's portrayal of Mokgobja's two granddaughters, Neo and Boseyong, both symbolize endangered innocence. These figures are haunted by the destructive tendencies of human beings—ironically, the species considered the wisest on Earth.

4. CONCLUSION

Paudyal's practice of discerning the world is exploited by the ambitious nature of humanity. Through insightful and sensible repetition in his poem, the speaker portrays a caged parrot whose powerful vision interprets the world as being dominated by human selfishness. No other creatures on Earth, nor the ecological practices derived from forest preservation, are misused in such a distressing condition—one where no power can rescue them from the grip of human knowledge. The perennial question is: How do these ecological practices actually function? The challenge of preserving ecological balance is especially gained from the conservation or maintenance of plants life, remains a significant problem. Literature and art play a crucial role in promoting sustainability by highlighting the interconnection between human and natural (botanical life). Through nonhuman perspectives and ecological themes, works like "Looking for a Rain God" and "The Parrot in the Cage" demonstrate how artistic expression fosters ecological awareness and addresses ethical and sustainability concerns.

5. SCOPE FOR THE FUTURE STUDY

While these two home and abroad writers address social evils and warn readers about the tyranny imposed on vulnerable creatures and their habitats by adult generations, they have lost the ability to engage with the very ecology that culturally provides shelter, nourishment and clothing during times of crisis. Future research aims to educate readers on the importance of preserving the beauty of the unheard—both human and nonhuman beings. Human survival depends on conserving these unheard voices, which are the essential fruits nurtured by our ecosystem. Moreover, ecological beauty will remain unpreserved until responsible authorities recognize the inherent value of forests and the unconditional benefits that trees provide. Plus, future studies can help people see how to protect the natural world—especially the parts that often get overlooked or misunderstood by so-called "civilized" humans. Nature's ecological essence is calling for a safe and peaceful space where life across the universe can survive and flourish. This paper critiques how current generations, especially adults in power, have become disconnected from ecological values. The consequence is a world where both people and nature suffer due to cultural and emotional disengagement with the environment.

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