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Ecological Consciousness in the Shiv Puran: A Study of Ancient Indian Environmental Thought

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Abstract

Aims: *This paper aims to explore environmental ethics embedded in ancient Indian scriptures, particularly the Shiv Puran through an eco-critical perspective. It seeks to highlight how this texts promote a harmonious relationship between humans and nature and offer sustainable ecological insights relevant to contemporary environmental crises.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The study adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology, employing the theoretical framework of eco-criticism. Selected narratives, verses, and mythological representations from the Shiv Purana is critically analyzed to examine their ecological consciousness.*

Outcome: *The analysis reveals that the Puranas present nature as sacred and interconnected with human existence. Elements such as rivers, forests, animals, and mountains are not merely physical entities but are imbued with spiritual significance.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *This study examines ecological consciousness in the Shiv Puran, highlighting its integration of environmental ethics within a spiritual framework. Through key narratives, it reveals principles of harmony, conservation, and coexistence. The study concludes that ancient Indian knowledge traditions offer valuable ecological insights and advocates their integration into contemporary environmental discourse, education, and policy for sustainable development.*

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Eco-criticism is a literary theory that studies the relationship between human beings and the environment through literature. The term “Eco-criticism”, for the first time appeared in the essay of William Rueckert “Literature and ecology: An experiment in eco- criticism” in 1978 (Rueckert 107). In 1989, a western literature association meeting was organised, where Cheryll Glotfelty proposed the usage of the term in the critical area of nature writing studies. According to Cheryll Glotfelty, “Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It studies the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature (Glotfelty 18-19). This research paper study about eco-criticism and the relationship of human and nature presented in the mythological text.

A great deal of work has been done so far on various English writers. It considered the previous studies done by the researchers which are related to the present study. The knowledge and information show the clear past pictures of the study up to where the line of the research has come. It will also give the proper direction and guidance to the researchers, so that the study can be handled with full confidence of accuracy. This study reviews key scholarly works related to the eco-criticism, environmental ethics and the study of Indian scriptures especially the Puranas. It aims to situate the present research within the existing academic field, identify gaps in current knowledge, and establish the relevance of applying an eco- critical lens to ancient Indian text such as the Shiv Puran.

Scholars have studied the ecological wisdom found in the Puranas from different perspectives Bhattacharya (2021), for instance, looks at the Shiv Purana and explains that it's stories are not just mythological accounts but also symbolic lessons about environmental balance. In another study, Renuga Devi (2011) points out that it encourages a lifestyle of co- existence with nature, recognising sacredness in animals and all natural elements. Similarly, Dobriyal and Kumar (2023) suggest that the Puranas represent more than a collection of myths- they reflect how ancient communities understood their connection with the natural world. They argue that these text combine study telling with ethical guidance using rituals and narratives to strengthen the human- nature bind.

In today’s world, religion and ecology are developing as new areas of

interest for research scholars. These research scholars are attempting to find out the traces of environmental awareness in the various philosophical traditions and mythological and spiritually embedded works like Ramayan, Mahabharata, The Puranas, The Bhagavad Gita, The Vedas etc. Of India are examples too which contain grand truth and wise lessons along with an eco-sensitive philosophy. Among all the above mythical representations, Shiv Puran have been specifically chosen for a detailed analysis from an eco- critical perspective. This research paper aims to Analyze environmentalism for this study.

Mythology is one of the various forms of literature which analyse divine stories, folk tales, and a collection of sacred stories of a culture, commonly known as myths. They discuss the concepts of truth, justice, goodness, and badness, origin of creation, and also provide a deeper perception regarding the meaning of life and death, misery, moral, cultural, and much more. Mythology or myths, in general, tend to represent the human condition and the modern concept and ideologies through supernatural and common characters.

In today's world, environmental degradation has become a crucial issue and a Big task to handle. Environmental should no longer be a subject matter to study but has become stupendous and significant to develop environmental awareness among the masses. It is a well-known fact that literature not only gives pleasure but also teaches. In this context, text can go hand in hand towards a solution. Thus, mythical literature and spiritual scriptures of various religions can act as a beneficial medium to develop ecological awareness and teach eco-ethics. Among all the Puranas, the Shiv Puran is one of the most significant. It not only teaches religious lessons but also gives a message about environmental balance and conservation. Shiv Puran tells us that religion is not separate from nature in fact it is deeply connected with it. The text encourages awareness about environmental protection.

Religious teachings are directly related to mental, ethical, and ecological harmony. The stories and verses of the Shiv Puran promote awareness and moral responsibility toward environmental conservation. Thus, it can be said that the Shiv Puran is not just a religious scripture but also a valuable text for ecological ethics. It creates awareness about maintaining harmony between humans and

nature. Lord Shiva and Shiv Purana also promote the co-existence of all forms of life together. When we study the Shiv Puran, we find that lord Shiva represents harmony among all living beings. He lives peacefully with animals and creatures that are otherwise considered enemies of each other. For example, the bull, snake, lion and mouse- all of them are companions of lord Shiva. The snake sits around his neck the bull (Nandi) stands beside him, and the lion and the mouse are also found in his presence. This symbolizes that all creatures, even those that are natural enemies, can live in harmony. This promotes the idea of the co- existence of all forms of life together.

Lord Shiva is portrayed as meditating on Mount Kailash, surrounded by serene natural beauty. This scene motivates humans to stay close to nature and lead a simple, pure life. Lord Shiva inspires us to love nature and preserve its purity. He resides on Mount Kailash, which symbolises peace and divine harmony. “Mount Kailash is a divine mountain, revered and admired by all.” (Shiv Puran, Rudra Samhita, 2.11.10). This shows that the beauty of nature itself is divine and gives joy to the beings. We should respect and preserve this natural beauty.

Another story from the Shiv Puran describes the devotion of Goddess Parvati and the creation of lord Ganesha. Once, when goddess Parvati was bathing, she created a boy from the dust of her body and placed him as a guard at the door instructing him not to allow anyone to enter. When lord Shiva came there, Ganesha stopped him. Enraged, lord Shiva cut the boy's head. Later, when goddess Parvati came to know of this, she was deeply distressed and demanded her son back. Then, at the instruction of lord Shiva, his followers brought the head of an elephant and fixed it on the boy's body. Thus, Ganesha was revived with an elephant's head.

Another eco- critical episode in the Shiv Puran is the story of Ganga Avataram (the descent of the Ganga). When Ganga was about to descend to the earth, her powerful current could have caused destruction. To prevent this, lord Shiva received her flow into his matted hair, letting her descend gently to the earth. This episode highlights the Idea of water conservation. We should also not waste water unnecessarily and should learn from this story to conserve water

properly. If we ignore this, the problem of water shortage will increase in the future.

Lord Shiva is also known as the protector and preserver of the earth. During the samundra manthan (churning of the ocean), when deadly poison (halahala) emerged, it threatened to destroy the world. To save all beings, lord Shiva consumed the poison and held it in his throat which turned blue. Thus, he is called neelkanth. This act represents his role in maintaining the balance of nature and protecting all forms of life. His action symbolizes the human responsibility to protect and preserve the earth and to act for the welfare of all living beings. “Lord Shiva consumed the poison that emerged during the churning of the ocean and retained it in his throat, thereby earning the name Neelkanth.” (Shiv Puran, Rudra Samhita. Lord Shiva is also known as the Pashupatinath the lord of animals and protector of all beings. He promotes ethical treatment and co- existence with animals. Lord Shiva wears a snake around his neck and has the bull Nandi beside him. He wears animal skin and lives among the animals. “Lord Shiva is depicted as wearing a garland of serpents and tiger skin. He is revered as Pashupatinath, the protector of all living beings.” (Shiv Puran, Rudra Samhita). This clearly shows that lord Shiva stands for compassion, care, and ethical treatment towards every form of life. We must learn from this and practice kindness and respect towards animals and nature.

The Shiv Purana emphasizes the importance of forests and afforestation. Trees should be planted, preserved, and protected. Lord Shiva loves to meditate in natural surroundings- forests, mountains, and rivers- which indicates that nature is a sacred space. We should worship nature, plants, trees, and stop deforestation. If deforestation continues, we will face severe environmental problems. Therefore, it is our moral and spiritual duty to protect and promote greenery and natural habitats. Shiv Puran is a very important Puran. It does not only teach religious preaching and rituals but also makes people aware that nature is a vital part of our lives. It teaches us that we must conserve and protect the environment and remain aware of our relationship with nature. This paper tried to analyse Shiv Puran through an eco-critical perspective. By exploring and analyzing various stories and verses from the text it may conclude that our Hindu religion does not only

teach religious ceremonies but also teaches environmental ethics and conservation. The Shiv Puran promotes ethics like - water conservation, to prevent deforestation and afforestation, promotes ethical treatment to animals and many more. To conclude, mythological text can be the best medium to spread awareness among the people toward environmental ethics and conservation.

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Dr. Ruby

Dr. Ruby is a highly qualified academic currently serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at SMPGGPG College, Meerut. She has a distinguished educational background from Chaudhary Charan Singh University, where she earned first-division honors in her B.A. (2013), M.A. (2015), and M.Phil. (2016). Her scholarly expertise is further evidenced by qualifying for the UGC-NET four times between June 2014 and July 2018. Dr. Ruby's professional experience includes over three years of teaching. She has previously served as an Assistant Professor at J.S. Hindu P.G. College, Amroha, and as a temporary Assistant Professor at Shri Kund Kund Jain P.G. College, Khatauli. A dedicated researcher with four years of experience, her M.Phil. work focused on existentialism in the poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra. She has published five research papers in peer-reviewed and UGC-approved international journals on topics such as ecopoetics, feminism, and gender inequality, and has presented extensively at national and international seminars.