

# Ecocritical Pedagogy: Rediscovering Shakespeare's Natural World

**Dr. A. Suriyanarayanan**

Professor, Department of English, Adhiparasakthi College of Nursing, (Affiliated to The  
Tamilnadu Dr. MGR. Medical University, Chennai) Melmaruvathur -603319

---

## **Abstract**

This research aims to examine the connection between nature and humanity in the drama by William Shakespeare. The primary theoretical ideas have been derived from the framework of Ecocriticism in his influential publication "Metaphor and Reality: A Meditation on Man, Nature, and Words." An ecocritical study of the drama Antony and Cleopatra demonstrates a close connection between ecology and human civilization. Both humans and nature continually maintain an involved relationship. The ecocritical analysis of Shakespeare's drama indicates that every human figure assumes a comprehensive range of functions, either promoting ecological destruction or demonstrating environmental friendliness, according to the extent of their ecological consciousness. Nature has luminosity and happiness, which are crucial for flourishing and rejuvenation, enabling progress and joyful renewal.

**Keywords** – Shakespeare, Natural World, Ecocritical Pedagogy, Antony and Cleopatra.

## **1. Introduction**

Ecocriticism is a relatively new development in theoretical literature [1]. It has revitalized the research of literature and ecology as a multidisciplinary field. The significance of the environment in human activities has been a recurring subject throughout history. Ecocritical concepts reexamine the influence of nature and external variables on the conduct and decisions of personalities. Nature and natural aspects often catalyze the tragic flaws of protagonists in many novels. Ecocriticism is a kind of environmental criticism that examines and analyzes ecological concerns through the lens of literature. Environmental criticism is concerned not only with race but also with the investigation of nature and its inhabitants. Ecocriticism is the analysis of the connection between the natural world and writings.

Ecocriticism encompasses a wide range of literary and has expanded to include cinema, television, online environments, songs, and an exploration of urban images. At its core, this belief acknowledges that people are currently facing an urgent ecological emergency that demands a prompt reevaluation of the existing ways around the globe. Furthermore, it recognizes that the traditional understanding of "the natural world" and the 'human' and how they relate have primarily contributed to these harmful ways of existence. The purpose of ecocriticism is to question and analyze various viewpoints, including those within the environmentalist movement. Some ecological critics are also dedicated to discovering other

ways of understanding the connection with the surroundings. A heightened awareness of the environment characterizes the current era, as contemporary people have come to recognize the significance of the natural and physical environment due to the worsening state of nature in recent times. The declining condition of the natural environment due to pollutants has impacted the livelihood of contemporary individuals. Environmental activists are endeavoring to promote a redefined comprehension of the environment. This demonstrates the importance of the natural world upon which humanity heavily relies.

The dramas of William Shakespeare are notably abundant in their exploration of the environment and its influence on humans as representations of society [2]. Shakespeare's passion is most effectively shown through practicality and naturalistic thought. He skillfully explores human habits and ethical dilemmas by drawing connections to nature, showcasing elegance and accomplishment. He has recognized that nature functions as a representative or surrogate of God, connecting it with every one of the spiritual and physical components of the ecological systems of all living creatures. Shakespeare's primary contemplation of people and fascination with the natural world and environment represent a significant advancement in ecocritical investigation. Shakespeare's drama *Antony and Cleopatra* is replete with themes of authority, conflict, intricate diplomacy, genuine love, and the dire circumstances of two needy and passionate people [3]. The research aims to elucidate the ecocritical elements utilized by William Shakespeare in his drama. This research aims to investigate William Shakespeare's portrayal of the environment in connection to human activities. The focal component of this research is Shakespeare's affiliation and correlation with Nature in the drama. The primary aim of this research is to examine Shakespeare's comprehension of the relationship between nature and human and non-human entities in his drama. Nature greatly influences Shakespeare as a powerful entity that limits human behavior. Therefore, nature transforms into a dynamic and active entity rather than neutral and inactive.

The current study addresses the following research problems.

- How do the recurring pictures of the environment relate to and differ from *Cleopatra*?
- How does the portrayal of closeness in the play contribute to the understanding of Shakespeare's relationship with nature?
- What is the reason for *Cleopatra*'s dominance over Antony's manhood?

## **2. Background and Literature Survey**

Both poets and critics have been endeavoring to build a connection between Shakespeare and the environment. The characters in all of William Shakespeare's plays are operating in harmony with nature. However, the ecocritical concept has led to significant growth in the eco-interpretation of Shakespeare's plays and the reevaluation of his works via an ecocritical viewpoint. This has garnered considerable attention from experts. Shakespeare researchers are endeavoring to enhance public understanding of the natural world, and they have established a connection between this subject and Shakespeare's writings due to the very realistic nature of his dramas. Dustagheer et al. offer chronological and conceptual examples from the environment that may be useful for Shakespearean criticism and viewers [4]. Such examples aim to assist in making a connection to the drama by exploring the reciprocity and ongoing relationship among research on animals. In environmental critique and Shakespeare's

publication, the concept of "ecophobia" is introduced to help readers of Shakespeare's works see connections between environmental criticism, feminist critiques, sexual research, and research on anti-Semitism and racism [5]. He asserts that Shakespearean figures are consumed and impacted by ecology.

McBride et al. assert that environmental criticism encompasses more than just interpreting environmental elements in literary works [6]. It includes the social and ecological dimensions of the environment and the impacts of the natural environment on the physical realm. This research provides a concise overview of the background of environmental criticism, examining its origins in the United States and Britain. It outlines the two fundamental approaches of the social ecosystem and deep ecology that constitute the foundation of its continued growth.

Brayton et al. argue that Shakespeare depicted contemporary cosmography and historical geopolitical in his works, emphasizing the cultural differences across cultures [7]. Shakespearean dramas effectively concurrently include both the timeless and modern elements of nature. The conflict between ecological and societal concerns has consistently resulted in humanity's significant domination of the surroundings. When analyzing Shakespeare's work, the research aims to assess the conceptual foundation of democracy and freedom by studying the ecological ethics and worldview prevalent in Western and European societies.

An objective of ecocritical assessment is to examine the principles of freedom and democracy. This study involves a mutually supportive relationship between ecological characteristics and civil liberties. Nevertheless, it does involve giving up certain concepts of individual liberties. Moreover, it surpasses the boundaries and extends beyond the realm of the non-human cosmos. The significance of early modern literature for socially aggressive environmentalism is evident, as shown by Buhaug et al. [8].

The concept of the natural world has yet to be explicitly recognized as contemporary, including several aspects of old societies, such as geography, economy, and politics. Environmental concerns have been present throughout humanity's existence. Ancient civilizations had issues with air quality, water availability, and contamination. Using assets such as wood facilitated the progress and growth of many cultures and communities, in addition to expanding the timber industry and trade in raw materials. However, the deities were so fond of this lush vegetation that they had designated a guardian to safeguard it. They have been plagued by drought and devastation.

Forest cutting in Grecian times led to the degradation of soil and drainage [9]. Roman had several challenges, including atmospheric pollution, acoustic contaminants, and water quality issues. This research aims to demonstrate the enduring presence of societal challenges, their role in human existence, and their prominent representation in literary and philosophical writings. The bond between nature and writing is interwoven.

### **3. Theoretical model**

This study uses Ecocritical Discourse Evaluation to examine the drama Antony and Cleopatra. Ecocritical Multimodal assessment is a multidisciplinary approach that explores poetry and the environment to get insights into ecological issues and discuss potential remedies for the ongoing environmental crisis. Ecocritical concept exhibits a profound and intricate connection with different scientific disciplines. Ecocriticism is a valuable methodology for comprehending

the inherent interrelationships between literature and the environment. This study examines artists' comprehension, portrayal, and interaction with the environment and their surroundings. The conceptual technique is to study the portrayal of creation and the natural world in literature, explicitly capturing these concepts' true essence and importance.

This study examines nature, the organic environment, and its connection to human behavior in theatrical performances. This research focuses on exploring the impact and characteristics of individuals on nature and the influence of surroundings on the protagonists in the performances.

### **3.1 Data Analysis**

The function of the environment and its influence on human beings has been seen as a significant factor and theme in the English language both before and beyond the time of Shakespeare. Some see nature as being passive in response to human activity. At the same time, others see the environment as a force that opposes and limits human choice and activities. In contrast, William Wordsworth saw nature as fully involved in human concerns. However, Shakespeare's understanding of nature is both comprehensive and perplexing simultaneously. He has shown the environment as a dynamic and powerful entity that transcends the simplistic categorizations as either "indifferent" or "alluring," as Thomas Hardy and William Wordsworth proposed.

Portraying the environment as a character in Antony and Cleopatra's activities is enigmatic and perplexing for the spectators. In the drama, the individuals of Cleopatra and nature are portrayed as "great natural forces" that exert influence over the people by their awe-inspiring abilities. Cleopatra's emotional fortitude seemed to transcend the bounds of natural regulation. Nature maintains hormonal equilibrium, leading to the generation of feelings in a person. However, when it comes to Cleopatra, his feelings are more abundant than the typical pattern seen in other individuals. However, Cleopatra is limited by the boundaries set by creation. This is a natural phenomenon that surpasses Cleopatra. Cleopatra is subject to the whims of nature and its elemental forces. The drama demonstrates that the natural world remains a prominent force and functions as a formidable protagonist.

Lieutenant Enobarbus converses with another lieutenant, indicating that Cleopatra's affection is a powerful and innate energy, often seen as the most vital attachment. A lady who is in love may disregard societal norms. Cleopatra, composed of the four fundamental components of nature - water, wind, soil, and fire - is a physical manifestation of these natural powers. Neither Antony nor Cleopatra possess superior knowledge, power, and control. Both personalities possess more of the natural qualities bestowed upon everyone by destiny. Cleopatra, despite her gender, does not serve as a representation of other women in the drama.

The parallels and images Shakespeare uses serve as vehicles to deliver his ideas about the environment and humanity, making them of utmost importance. Antony's observation of nature reveals its immense presence, including the vastness of the sea, the celestial realm, and the whole universe. Antony's declaration that his love necessitates a "new celestial realm and new globe" expands and broadens the play's scope regarding the environmental setting. The Natural Worldwide, drawing inspiration from a portion of the Bible, is portrayed in a dramatic and

catastrophic atmosphere. This is especially true when dramas express affection and the environment seems apocalyptic.

Shakespeare not only emphasizes his use of natural items to depict the influence of nature on the people but also highlights the actors' feelings of fear and adoration, making them relatable and authentic. The conflict between rationality and emotions is a fundamental motif in William Shakespeare's writings. Antony is a leader who displays both mercilessness and bravery simultaneously. Cleopatra has control over his route of command. He imprudently fails in his military campaigns. The fusion of rationality and feelings in the personalities of Antony and Cleopatra renders them inherently authentic. Despite their status as warlords, Both have anxieties and worries over hope.

After the sport, Antony becomes aware that he has forfeited his sense of self and status as beneficial to society under the guise of preserving his existence. He inexplicably acquired a feeling of guilt and embarrassment. Shakespeare highlights the vulnerabilities inherent in the human body. Isn't it intriguing for readers that despite being the leader, he is incapable of acting based on his intelligence and judgment?

### **3.2 Discussions**

The analysis of the drama allows it to conclude that William Shakespeare's portrayal of natural phenomena is complex and incorporates the notion of life force. The characters' elevation in the play is determined by nature. Antony had all the attributes and qualities that are often given to heroes. Nature acts as a connecting barrier that restricts the actions of individuals and their ability to exert their will. The feelings and deeds of individuals are constrained by nature. The analysis places society as a subordinate force dominating the personalities' inherent essence. "Primary natural world" refers to the intrinsic biological instincts of the personalities. "Secondary natural world" refers to the cultural and societal context in which the drama's protagonists exist and interact, which also functions as a kind of environment. Antony embodies a prominent aspect of the environment since he is heavily influenced by Western civilization and cultural traditions. As a representation of her civilization, Cleopatra represents the virtues of the Eastern civilization. All of the individuals in the play, excluding Antony and Cleopatra, are significantly impacted by the surrounding culture. The material and biological character encompasses biological inclinations and societal and cultural norms. Their biological and physical characteristics determine the protagonists' destiny in the drama. The natural world influences the activities of the characters in the drama.

### **4. Conclusion**

Upon analyzing the material of the drama Antony and Cleopatra, it becomes evident that Shakespeare portrays the environment as a powerful and influential presence in the lives of humans. Shakespeare has shown nature as an influential and unifying power that connects individuals, communities, and civilization. Shakespeare's portrayal of nature demonstrates his recognition of its role as a unifying influence on human existence. Moreover, the protagonists in the drama find nature to be the origin of their allure. Nature is shown as a powerful entity that strives for the perpetuation and survival of human life on the Planet. The environment is a therapeutic agent in recuperating individuals from disorder and unpredictability. Based on

the analysis, it is inferred that Shakespeare demonstrates an operational and intellectual awareness of the environment in his drama. The portrayal of nature in the drama profoundly influences the individuals' behavioral patterns. Occasionally, natural forces seem to impart moral lessons to individuals in the play, but this is not always the case. Shakespeare's portrayal of nature is neither impartial nor detrimental to humanity, which is intriguing. In this drama, nature assumes the role of a character that aids the characters in comprehending their surroundings while constraining them via societal conventions. All individuals in the play depend on nature as a socio-ecological commodity.

## References

1. Johns-Putra, A. (2016). Climate change in literature and literary studies: From cli-fi, climate change theater and ecopoetry to ecocriticism and climate change criticism. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 7(2), 266-282.
2. Quilligan, M. (2017). Staging Gender: William Shakespeare and Elizabeth Cary. In *Ashgate Critical Essays on Women Writers in England, 1550-1700* (pp. 527-551). Routledge.
3. Sacerdoti, G. (2016). Antony and Cleopatra and the Overflowing of the Roman Measure. In *Identity, Otherness and Empire in Shakespeare's Rome* (pp. 121-132). Routledge.
4. Dustagheer, S. (2013). Shakespeare and the 'Spatial Turn'. *Literature Compass*, 10(7), 570-581.
5. Strife, S. J. (2012). Children's environmental concerns: Expressing ecophobia. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 43(1), 37-54.
6. McBride, B. B., Brewer, C. A., Berkowitz, A. R., & Borrie, W. T. (2013). Environmental literacy, ecological literacy, ecoliteracy: What do we mean and how did we get here?. *Ecosphere*, 4(5), 1-20.
7. Brayton, D. (2016). Shakespeare and the global ocean. In *Ecocritical Shakespeare* (pp. 173-190). Routledge.
8. Buhaug, H., & Urdal, H. (2013). An urbanization bomb? Population growth and social disorder in cities. *Global environmental change*, 23(1), 1-10.
9. Yassoglou, N., Tsadilas, C., Kosmas, C., Yassoglou, N., Tsadilas, C., & Kosmas, C. (2017). Land degradation and desertification. *The Soils of Greece*, 87-96.