



The Transience of Human Existence: An Ecocritical Interpretation of Parijat's *Blue Mimosa*

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Abstract

Blue Mimosa (*Shirishko Phool*), a landmark in the field of Nepali novels written by Bishnu Kumari Waiba, who adopted the penname Parijat, is mainly studied as a semi-biographical account of the writer's experience as an existential expression of a modern, bold lady due to her education who could not make her life that meaningful enough that has been expressed in the form of her knowledge of nothingness and absurdity. However, the main objective of this research article is to study the novel to discover the inherent and intricate interconnection of nature and human life, how significantly human life depends upon nature and natural conditions, as human life itself is a tiny part of nature as a whole. The literary theories of ecocriticism and environmental humanism, with a special focus on the Anthropocene, have been exploited to study the novel for this purpose, along with the help of other supporting knowledge of the critics of the field. This article explores the theme of the transitory existence of human life and the inherent relationship between human life and nature, which depend on one another, like an ecosystem. Through its complex characters of Sakambari, Suyogbir, and Shiva Raj, the other family members, Suyogbir's experience of WWII as a war veteran, Parijat has very artistically woven the interdependence of persons within one another in their lives, and the effect of nature on human lives.

Keywords: Environment, existence, interdependence, Bishnu Kumari Waiba, *Blue Mimosa*, death



Climate Action

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Introduction

Blue Mimosa, a novel written by Parijat (Bishnu Kumari Waiba) in 1965, emerged as a new experiment in literature for contemporary writers and readers. The book is a semi-autobiography of the novelist. The story is a first-person narration made by the male protagonist Suyog Bir Singh, a WWII veteran and survivor of the war in Burma against Japan, who has a very bitter experience regarding life. He has no family, lives alone in a rented flat in Kathmandu, wanders around the city aimlessly, and is supported by the pension he receives for fighting as a British Gurkha soldier. He has done nothing worthy of memory except he has been in the army; he says he has not killed any person, even in the war, but he has raped at least two local ladies in the Burmese jungle. In his retired life in the alleys of Kathmandu at the time, he happens to meet a young man, Shiva Raj, who is pressurized by the responsibility of supporting three good-for-nothing sisters who have an expensive lifestyle and an old mother as a bread-winner for the family, the real male member of middle-class Nepali society of the time. In the course of friendship with the brother of three young sisters, the novelist makes her male protagonist meet Sakambari, an enigmatic character, a bold and outspoken, rather Westernized young lady, to whom he gets attracted by her personality. Even though he likes her elder sister Mujura, the family's first daughter, as his perfect wife, rather than 'Bari', pet-named. The author has chosen a special name for the female protagonist, who is beautiful, educated, extroverted, fearless, and rather bold enough to smoke cigarettes in public and face the males of the time, but this young lady with the hue and charm is delicate physically and as fragile as any flower that blooms blue on the Mimosa tree. Sakambari represents the beautiful flower that blooms in warm spring, just at the end of cold winter, but she kills herself just after she is kissed by her 'Suyogji', as the mimosa flowers fall off the tree as soon as they reach their full bloom. The author kills her bold female protagonist without letting her have any more physical contact with the wreck of WWII because she wants to keep the creation of nature undefiled.

Literature Review

Blue Mimosa has been read from diverse perspectives by different readers. Indra Bahadur Rai (2058 BS), a well-known writer and critic of Nepali literature, has categorized the novel as an absurdist creation. He has claimed that the novel inaugurates the theme of absurdism and meaninglessness in Nepali literature (p. 196). Murari Aryal (2051 BS) contends that Parijat is a towering novelist of Nepali literature and *Blue Mimosa* is an uncontested Nepali novel. According to him, the themes of absurdism and nihilism expressed in the novel affect her understanding of the devastation wrought by the Second World War on human life (p. 59). Krishnachandrasingh Pradhan (2061 BS) also comments upon the notion of meaninglessness revealed in the novel. (p. 345). Krishna Hari Baral and Netra Atom (2009) have commented that *Blue Mimosa* is a pioneering novel heralding the theme of nihilism and absurdism in Nepali novels (p. 187). Another reader, Govinda

Bhatta (2023 BS), on the other hand, finds the novel entirely worthless. For him, it is like a beautiful flower of paper written in a beautiful language that has no use-value (pp. 123-28). Simone Gautam (2011) has analyzed the varied experiences of women as depicted in the novel and finds them influenced by feminist thought developed in the West during the sixties. According to him, Bari bears several persona-petals (p. 149). However, Arun Gupto (2008) asserts that over-reading the novel from absurdist and existentialist approaches has marred the novel's beauty (p. 10). They are all obvious facets of the novel; it can be read from the point of view of ecocriticism, plant humanism, or phytocriticism that connects human life with the natural world and lets the readers understand their connection better.

Methodology

It is basically library research that employs qualitative methods. This mode of research has been adopted for reading texts and books, and critical writing and the opinions of critics and academics have been used to delve into the meaning of the novel.

Ecological Humanism

According to J. Andrew Hubbell and John Charles Ryan (2022), *ecocriticism* acknowledges that multifaceted cultural, social, and intellectual shifts are unfolding indefinitely (pp.11–12). Along these lines, the study underscores three issues facing environmental literature and criticism vis-à-vis this vast transformation. The first issue, according to him, pertains to the capacity of aesthetic forms to accommodate environmental problems at a global scale. The second relates to the representation of more-than-human agencies and the turn to things themselves set in motion by material ecocriticism. The third calls attention to the implications of the relatively recent yet steady internationalization of the field (p. 6). It is the issue that begins from aesthetic forms like literature through the representation of more-than-human agencies like flora and fauna to global issues. Edward O. Wilson (2016) argues,

Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the sources of human sensibility and acquire the knowledge on which an enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction, can be built. (p. 157)

Ecocriticism is the concept of interconnectedness – both physical and conceptual – between humanity and the Earth, a notion asserted by Val Plumwood's (2002) notion that "the basic interconnectedness of all matter and psyche is such a truism that it is puzzling that it should need to be remarked at all" (p. 87). Similarly, Timothy Clark (2015) observes,

Ecocriticism has become a diverse and vast field, a mix of literary, cultural, political, scientific, and activist strands. . . Its mantra is that the environmental crisis demands a reconsideration of society's basic values, constitution, and purposes, and that art and literature can be vital in that work. (p. 15)

He emphasizes the responsibility of human society to preserve the environment because

it is an inevitable part of human art and literature as well. According to Robyn Eckersley (1992), anthropocentrism is "The conviction that there is a distinct and ethically significant idea that humanity is the only primary source of worth or purpose in the world, setting it apart from the rest of nature" (p. 92). Ecocritics value biocentrism and refuse the anthropocentric approach. As a critical viewpoint, ecocriticism examines the interaction between the human and non-human worlds. "Ecocritics are concerned about human health, food, and shelter in addition to wildlife and the outdoors. Today, almost all human endeavors include heedlessly exploiting the natural world" (Plumwood, 2002, p. 35). Additionally, it considers how humans are portrayed in relation to natural scenery and landscapes, and their attitudes and level of attention to it, which may be positive or negative. This kind of endeavor negotiates between nature and literature. It asserts that understanding natural and environmental issues frequently aids in understanding the connection between human oppression and nature's illegitimate dominance or exploitation.

Hubbell and Ryan (2022) show the relationship between humankind and the environment to be very crucial,

Looked at one way, humans are the new superhero species, boldly altering vast planetary systems; looked at another way, we are the sorcerer's apprentice, helpless before the vast powers we've unwittingly released and making matters worse with each new intervention. Incredibly powerful; utterly helpless. (p. 49)

They assert that Phytocriticism, a branch of ecocriticism, on the other hand, entails the examination of 'plant texts' depicting plant life, botanical histories and ethics, and human-plant relations. Viewing literary texts through a botanical optic, phytocriticism is steadily coalescing around botanical ethics debates and the still nascent, though promising, transdisciplinary academic-activist field of human-plant studies (p. 14). Writers may confer personality, desire, will, and sentience to plant personae. They add, "Individual liberty has been a 'philosophical wrecking ball' for modern Western culture's most cherished belief: individualism" (p. 50). They satirize the Western anthropocentric exploitation as he says, "In the Western story of progress, a few elites convinced us that pursuing self-interest is a social good and a law of nature. Yet the pursuit of self-interest was generally regarded as anti-social by previous civilizations, and they established ethics, religion, arts, and culture to contain it" (p. 50). Therefore, as they highlight, "The Anthropocene shows us that we must cooperate or die" (p. 50). Thus, it has been urgent for human society to love the environment as they love themselves and make Environmental Humanism a main genre of literary studies.

Discussion

Symbolic Representation of Blue Mimosa

The novel *Blue Mimosa* (*Shirish Ko Phool*) is symbolic in its meaning, and it has a very close connection with nature. "Parijat", the pen name of the novelist, is highly symbolic in the sense that it is a plant of the mimosa family that blooms during the late summer and

autumn seasons. It is a very delicate flower with a wonderful aroma that is offered in the service of dead ancestors in Nepali society. However, the most interesting feature of this flower is that it blooms only at night and falls to the ground before the sunshine in the morning. It symbolizes the transience of human life.

Blue Mimosa, the flower as well, symbolizes human life in that it has a slender body, delicate flower petals, and blooms from winter to spring, which means the flower's life span is comparatively short, like that of humankind. More importantly, the flower buds catch the bees and flies, as it is said, that can be compared to a beautiful female body organ that is enough to catch and captivate a male. In the novel, Suyog Bir, the male protagonist, talks of the flycatcher bud, and he wants to be caught by the delicate body part of the female protagonist, Sakambari, and wants to be captivated by her love. He is even ready to die inside the flower petal. The novel shows a very close relationship between natural flora and the human body in the sense that one depends on the other and is affected by the other. Regarding the flower buds symbolizing the female body that can trap a male easily, Sakambari says to Suyog, "Look here, on these seem something like buds are sprouting. Do you see? They are the most important organs of the flower; with them they kill insects" (p. 13). The author compares the female body, especially the breasts, to the first catcher of the male gaze and attention.

The novelist uses another symbol of the buds when she makes Sakambari say, "I don't know what there is in them, but the insects leave the flower and enter them. When a bee has entered the pouch, it closes its mouth. Inside, the insect dies of suffocation" (p. 13). It means a male entering into the female body and surrendering inside it, but the insect (male) prefers a bud (fresh bud) to a full bloom of a flower (a grown-up body). Again, Sakambari points to the "killer orchids" (p. 14) and warns Suyog, "But if someone comes to be killed, I've nothing to say about that" (p. 15); that is, Suyog has to be aware of this before he enters into her life. The other symbol the novelist has created is that of the Garden of Eden when Suyog describes the scene on the lawn ". . . I saw her lying flat on the back on the green grass . . . Like a snake who has come out to bask in the morning sun . . . seeing her that way, looking so much like a snake, I shivered . . ." (p. 34), it is somehow the same experience Adam had when he saw mother Eve lying flat on the green grass of Garden of Eden not enough to do anything in the process of the creation of the world when Suyog confesses, "What would have happened if I had seen Bari naked today" (p. 35).

The novel has created color imagery of blue mimosa, blue flowers, and blue lips, which symbolize a darker side of human life in this case because Sakambari succumbs to death when Suyog's blue lips forcefully kiss her on her blue lips, caused by her excessive smoking. Suyog confesses, "I killed Sakambari; in broad daylight, I raped Sakambari" (p. 96). It is not Suyog but a design of the novelist has killed her protagonist, a young, delicate and undefiled flower, before any insect could have sucked her nectar.

Question on Anthropocene

Anthropocene or anthropocentrism has materialized almost everything and every living being on this earth. Everything has been commodified. Anthropocene has raised a serious question about the commodification of every living being, more specifically, natural beings. Sakambari, the protagonist, questions the outer interruption of someone's life, especially flowers, "If a flower buds for itself and opens for itself and, as if accepting some compulsion, falls whether it fights the black bee or not, then why should it fall suffering the sting of the black bee? It falls only for itself. It falls by its own will" (p. 14). The novelist has attributed the natural flowers with such a strong will that plants have their own will like that of human beings, and they should be left alone to make their own decision; every flower should be free to choose when to bloom or fall; no human or non-human interruption should exist. In some instances, human beings feel jealous of the wonderful characteristics of plants; he says, "I found some contentment in touching with my hands the flowers of insect-killing orchids; that was the extent and the means of my contentment" (p. 47) because it is something challenging for a soldier who feared to kill even a single person despite being a WWII veteran and a survivor of it. It is an open challenge for people who feel like, "We live just to keep on breathing. We men are like the worms that live in beer. We have to keep going wherever we are. What would happen if we killed ourselves here" (p. 35)? That means being human only does not prove our superiority over all other living beings when we cannot contribute anything to the betterment of the living beings on earth. What the human monopoly on earth has done is cause wars, death, and destruction. It is exemplified when Suyog talks about the innocent soldiers who are killed in the war, "Someday perhaps these fossils will show what a curse suffered, how we traveled this way bearing on our shoulders the burden called life . . . I called to the vultures, "Don't peck at these corpses. They are survivor of a war" (p. 69). Human beings who could contribute enough to make the whole world better have put all their strength into killing other humans and destroying the environment. The hopelessness of human life is well explained when Suyog feels about Sakambari, who has planted different species of flora in her yard, ". . . though the flowers she had planted were fluttering, in the air, fulfilled by life . . . interesting it is to watch the insects being killed . . . But the desires of life are not so easily set right" (p. 74), that life is not as fulfilling and blissful as nature.

Interconnected Fragility

Human life and flowers are interconnected because both of them are too fragile and transient. In this novel, *Blue Mimosa*, the flower is connected with Sakambari's life because the bud of her life closes forever before it could open, as some flower buds before they bloom. The interconnectedness of the flowers and human life (Sakambari's life) is so deep that one symbolizes and represents the other. In the same way, in a very short time of introduction, Suyog Bir's life is intricately connected with Sakambari because he feels so empty when Sakambari is planning to go to Tarai, and Shiva Raj informs, "Bari won't be

here after tomorrow" (p. 41). "That was enough to make me feel as if I were flung by a forceful blow onto a vast plain of reality, where dreams, fantasies, hypocrisy did not exist, only reality. I felt like an empty vessel, like a bottle from which the liquid is escaping, unable to collect again" (p. 41). He is so troubled that "For the first time I went to bed with a troubled expression" (p. 43). This is how one's life is connected with the other and how fragile the connection proves.

Shiva Raj's life is so deeply connected with that of Sakambari, "Bari was intimate with Shiva Raj and Shiva Raj was intimate with me. Then I was happy" (p. 47). On the other hand, when the intimacy grows deeper Suyog feels, "From Bari, a single, whole Sakambari, how could a mentality be separated, how could her charms be separated. I wanted to engulf the whole Bari in my embrace, I wanted her to be submerged in me" (p. 49) like everything grown on earth gets submerged and becomes one with nature. When Suyog gets to know that Bari has fallen ill due to his kiss, he feels sorry not only for Sakambari but also for Shiva Raj when he confesses, "I realized that I had infected Shiva Raj as well as Bari" (p. 91), that proves that human relation is like that of ecosystem in which one life depends upon others, as Suyog adds, "I was surprised to think of the way Shiva Raj cared for Bari . . . Why did he have to be attached to each other like magnets" (p. 93). We know Shiva Raj does not like to lose Bari at any cost when he says, "If anything happens to Bari, I can't go on living. Really, I'll kill myself" (p. 93). It shows the intricate connection between the siblings. When Sakambari dies, Suyog feels completely empty and says, "Here is the value of your life and mine. My Sakambari, one day, full of life, you said that one must have an organ like the killer orchid's . . . you had one and you have killed me" (p. 97). For Suyog, the romance he did proves to be painful because Sakambari dies after his kiss, and the consequence is humans felling trees, and they have to regret when nature destroys human settlements due to the lack of jungle.

Nature Personified as Human Actor and Witness

One cannot hide anything from nature because nature observes every human action. Sometimes, one feels thrilled, and sometimes, one feels ashamed to act foolishly because flora and fauna observe everything. Suyog describes flowers as persons: "A flower must have some kind of purpose," as if they were human beings. He describes wilderness in which he cannot get hold of emotions for a Kachin girl and happens to rape her, "I felt like a leopard ready to pounce from the bushes. I could not keep control of myself. . . I came out of the bushes . . . I came up to her. Darkness, silence" (p. 54). He further describes his cruelty of raping a girl, ". . . I struck her on her head with my rifle butt and she fell over, unconscious into the bushes . . . who was there in this desolate place" (p. 55)? There is no human being watching him rape the girl but the trees and bushes standing around to witness. Again, he describes his offense with the Kachin girl of Makhrai in Burma, "... who herded buffaloes blossomed among the thorny roses..." (p. 57). He adds, "Like a snake hypnotized by the playing of the flute, trusting in me, she entered the bushes... I plundered her to my heart's content... she looked helpless" (p. 58). The author has personified the

flora as if they were dumb human beings to witness and feel all human atrocities. Suyog further expresses his feelings about the Kachin girl, "Entangled with a ruby, a rose appears, a golden-brown head, merging with a raped rose shudders" (p. 60). This reference to a 'raped rose' is undoubtedly more than human.

Parijat refers to 'insect killer orchid' several times as if they were human beings hunting for their prey. Other birds and animals are also talked about when Suyog and his friend come back to the Indian border of Assam through Death Valley. They spend several nights in the jungle where they behave as if the flora and fauna were their friends, providers of food and shelter. Once, Suyog talks aloud, "I called to the vultures, 'Don't peck at these corpses. They are a souvenir of war'" (p. 69). When Sakambari does not show any interest in him as a lover, Suyog feels shattered. It expresses his anger, "I recognized that Bari was really nothing more than an insect killer orchid... to watch the insect being killed here" (p. 74). He compares himself to an insect attracted to a flower, and the flower (Bari) kills him silently by ignoring him. He wants to be killed by the love of Sakambari among the blue mimosa by the owner of the insect-killing orchid. Finally, he comes to an action as the ignorance of Sakambari towards him is too much for him to tolerate, "I was not in control of myself. I was unable to realize the situation consciously. My whole body was trembling. Impassioned, I caught hold of her white neck and kissed her soft lips" (p. 77) in the witness of mimosa trees.

The novelist has attributed the trees with so much human character: "If a flower buds for itself and, as if accepting some compulsion, falls whether it fights the black bee or not, then why should it fall suffering the sting of the black bee? It falls only for itself. It falls by its own will" (p. 88). Suyog is compared with the black bee, and Sakambari with the insect-killing orchid; however, the black bee's kiss kills the insect-killing orchid in the novel. The most important attribute the novelist has given to the trees is that they have their own will, more than a human quality. Sakambari's health deteriorates when the mimosa trees begin to shed their leaves on the ground, and she dies when the trees have shed their leaves: "The empty branches of mimosa stood there accepting their emptiness" (p. 97). The author kills Sakambari with the falling of mimosa leaves to make Suyog's life empty forever.

Conclusion

The novelist has attributed the flora and fauna with human attributes so that they can be the providers to humans, which is more than human quality. The flora witnesses human activities; they observe, react, and behave as if they were human beings because they have their free will and act independently. The novel uses the blue color of the mimosa flower as a symbol of decay, unfulfillment, and the transitory character of human aspirations and life. The novelist is conscious of the fact that human life is transient and full of imperfections. Nature fights against exploitation and renews itself every year, which humans cannot do. Blue mimosa, the tree in itself, is a co-actor in the novel with the protagonist Sakambari, who symbolizes beauty, decay, and impermanence. The novel is

a critique against the Anthropocene in which Suyog, the male protagonist, is isolated from the world around succumbs to an alienated life, drinking and smoking without being understood by others because he has violated many rules of nature of peaceful cohabitation and understanding of others' co-existence.

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