

Environmental Degradation in Manian's *The Coloured Curtain*: An Ecocritical Study

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Abstract

Environment, which is a basic necessity of life, is in state of decline in the fast changing society. Environmental crisis has become a hot topic of discussion and debate in the literary field since the birth of Ecocriticism (Literary Theory) in the English speaking world. It has become a ubiquitous issue globally. The writers from non-English speaking world, too, touch upon environmental issues. Hence, the present study aims to examine and assess the treatment of environmental crisis in Manian's English translated novel, *Chayathirai (The Coloured Curtain)*, employing Ecocriticism as a theoretical framework. The study employs qualitative research methodology: relevant data is taken from the selected text, and is examined and interpreted in the light of Ecocritical theory. Ecocriticism is a theoretical tool to analyze a literary text with a view to exploring man-environment interaction, environmental degradation, and propagating eco-awareness. The findings of the study reveal that environmental crisis is one of the most alarming issues around the globe, and man is one and only factor behind environment crisis. Dominated by anthropocentric ideology and appetite for economic progress, man blindly overuses natural resources resulting in environmental crisis. Projects in the name of development, by overusing the natural resources, jeopardize environmental sustainability. Urbanization, commercialization, and industrialization are the forces behind environmental collapse, as depicted in the novel, *The Coloured Curtain*. Future researchers will surely benefit from the present research, when conducting research on environmental crisis. On the basis of the findings of the present study, it can be recommended that similar research could be conducted on other genres of literature of any language.

Keywords: Manian, *The Coloured Curtain*, Environmental crisis, Ecocriticism, Industrialization, Urbanization, Anthropocentric ideology

Introduction

Environmental crisis refers to “the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil; the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of wildlife” (Madan & Madan, 2009, p. 388). Since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, “human activities from transportation, agriculture, fossil fuels, waste disposal and treatment, deforestation, power stations, land use, biomass burning, and industrial processes, among other things” (Casper, 2009, p. ix) have been on the increase. Though industrialization is necessary for the economic prosperity and growth of a nation, yet its hazardous effects on the environment and human existence cannot be neglected. Environmental issues mostly came into focus after the beginning of industrialization. It is the “process of industrialization” that has “contributed to environmental degradation by accelerating resource consumption, urban development and pollution” (Carter, 2001, p. 3). “People want more goods, they maintain a love affair with their cars and they are wedded to a ‘throwaway’ culture that results in landfill sites piled high with plastic bottles and obsolete computers” (Carter, 2001, p. 2).

Ecocriticism initially originated in European countries, focusing on the environmental aspects in English literature. As the environmental crisis has become a global issue, non-English speaking writers have also increasingly incorporated environmental themes into their works. Hence, the present study aims to explore environmental crisis as projected in Subrabharathi Manian's English translated novel, *The Coloured Curtain*. Subrabharathi Manian is an Indian author who writes in Tamil, the Indian indigenous language. He occupies a highly distinguished position in Tamil literature, having authored 11 novels, 15 short story collections, and a travelogue. His works have been translated into multiple languages, including English and Hungarian. His English translated novels include *1098*, *Oh! Hyderabad*, *Palm Lines*, *Faces of the Dead*, *The Last Symphony*, and *The Coloured Curtain*. Translated by P. Raja from Tamil, Chayathirai into English as *The Coloured Curtain*, the novel deals with the theme of water pollution and its impact on aquatic bodies, fauna and flora, and even on humans. Industrial waste is a big source of water contamination, as depicted in the novel. The novelist focuses on how polluted water becomes a source of anxiety for both humans and non-humans. Along with water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, water scarcity, soil erosion, and destruction of the natural environment are also dealt with in the narrative of the novel, *The Coloured Curtain*. The novel's value as an environmental fiction is great.

[*The Coloured Curtain* is] an unputdownable book that brings to mind the great French classics like *Less Miserable* by Victor Hugo and *Germinal* by Emile Zola. This novel's devastating attack on

human carelessness, greed and irresponsibility will linger with the reader long after he has completed reading it. (Raja, 2017, pp. 17)

The study examines how *The Coloured Curtain* by Manian projects environmental issues like water pollution, air pollution, noise pollution, water scarcity, soil erosion, and destruction of the natural environment. The story of the novel takes place in the town of Tirupur, renowned for its history and the cultivation of crops such as betel leaves and vegetables along the banks of the perennial river, Noi. However, the arrival of the textile industry jeopardizes the environment by contaminating the river. The textile industry has been identified as one of the most significant polluters of the environment, particularly with regard to water pollution, in the novel *The Coloured Curtain*. The contaminated sewage has turned the once-beautiful river Noi into a deadly hazard. There is a foul smell that is creating the atmosphere of suffocation. Birds find it difficult, while flying over the river in search of water. The inhabitants of the town face the scarcity of clean, drinkable water. "Give us drinkable water... Do not give us dye water to drink" (p. 263) is the heart-deep imploring of the town people. Even the fruit are not immune from the detrimental effects of polluted water, which irrigates the plants and trees. The stagnant water in the streets has become a breeding ground for illnesses like jaundice, malaria and fever, posing a constant threat to the town's residents. Children playfully immerse themselves in the polluted water, unaware of its harmful consequences. Animals like dogs, who consume this water, suffer a painful death. The emission of smoke from vehicles results in pollution in the environment. In the period of environmental crisis, Ecocriticism plays a pivotal role in highlighting the interplay between human world and the natural world, and the impact of human activities on environment. Hence, the study focuses on the implications of environmental concerns embedded in the selected text, *The Coloured Curtain*.

Review of Literature

Environmental crisis has gripped our planet in the rapidly growing industrial and technological society (Poornananda, 2022). "Our activities are steadily destroying the global ecosystem in which we evolved" (Hern, 1993, p.1). In order to combat the growing environmental around the globe, "scholars and critics of literature have a provocative role to play, raising eco-consciousness among their readers" (Shoaib, 2021, p. 34). To raise eco-consciousness, a new literary theory, Ecocriticism has emerged, gaining massive popularity among the literary scholars. Buell (2005) argues that Ecocriticism is intimately intertwined with the surge in environmental consciousness that emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. This period bore witness to a remarkable upsurge in societal awareness regarding environmental matters.

“The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and the passage of the Wilderness Act...marked the full-fledged emergence of environmentalism as a topic of public concern in America” (Buell, 1995, p. 22). “Without Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, there might be no ecology movement and thus no Ecocriticism” (Gillian, 2014, p. 27). The origin of the term Ecocriticism, in contemporary critical debate, can be traced back to William Rueckert’s essay, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* published in 1978. “Rueckert’s essay, in fact, was the part of the environmental awakening, especially in the USA that swept among writers and scholars” (Nuri, 2020, p. 1). “During the last third of the twentieth century “the environment” became front-page news” and “public concern about the state and fate of “the environment” took increasing hold, initially in the West, but now worldwide” (Buell, 2005, p. 4). Ultimately, “Environmental problems, which cause harm to both nature and humans themselves, have become global” (Erkan, 2024, p. 9).

‘Eco-criticism’ is the American term and ‘Green Studies’ is mostly used in UK. The American writing enjoys the beauty of nature with the help of language but British literature tries delivering a message which helps to make aware us about the environmental threads which come from commercial, industrial and man-made forces. Ecocriticism and Green studies, both terms denote a critical approach which began in the USA in the late 1980s and in the UK in the early 1990s. Barry (2002) points out that Ecocriticism refers to the environmental study in literature, in order to foster ecological sensibility with the aim to investigate and remedy the current environmental problems. “Ecocriticism actually launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today’s environmental crisis” (Oppermann, 1999, p.1). Ecocriticism assumes an immense significance as it “offers the most effective and relevant means of literary analysis in an era of increasing human impact upon the terrestrial environment.” (McKusick, 2000, p. 18). Ecocriticism, as one of the contemporary movements in literary criticism is concerned with the need to rethink and reconfigure the relationship between human beings and the environment.

[Ecocriticism] provides tools for a systematic study of how the intimate relationship of man with environment has undergone a negative change with the onslaught of industry and technology. This transformation from nature-centered life to the technological and industrial way of and the resulting environmental scarcity has forced literary scholars to reconsider human relationship with their environment (Shoaib, 2021, p. 9).

Mukhtar (2015) points out that ecological crisis is a result of devastating impact of human activities like colonization and wars on the environment in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Glass Palace*. The novel’s beginning in 1885 with the British invasion of Mandalay over the dispute regarding teak logs reveals the

hidden motivations behind colonization. This materialistic ambition leads to widespread deforestation. "Forests the home land for a large species of flora and fauna are erased to make for commercially lucrative plantations, timber factories and industries. Burma's teak forests are ruthlessly converted into timber yards" (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 120). The protagonist, Rajkumar, is haunted by scenes of human exploitation in the context of oil production, a prime example of how progress and ambition can lead to devastating consequences. The root cause of this ecocidal behavior lies in an anthropocentric worldview. "In the blind march of progress, humans not only neglect and kill their environment but ruthlessly pose threats to their own existence." (Mukhtar, 2015, p. 122).

Krishna and Ramesh (2019) argue that Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* serves as a poignant literary critique of the contemporary environmental and ecological concerns in India. Adiga, the novelist, through the eyes of the protagonist Balram, portrays the consequences of human actions on nature. He focuses on the Ganga river's transformation into a receptacle for human feces, industrial acids, and human remains, shifting from a place of religious significance to one marred by pollution and scavenging dogs. The novel also sheds light on the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, increasing population, and migration. "In the form of development and industrialization man removes all the natural vegetation which releases oxygen. Rapid growth of industries and transport sector release poisonous gases like sulphur dioxide Carbon monoxide, Nitrogenous oxides" (Krishna & Ramesh, 2019, p. 3).

Patidar and Sambre (2019) maintain that Roy's novel *The God of Small Things*, set in the fictitious town of Ayemenem, Kerala, centers on ecological exploitation, while championing sustainable development, through Velutha, the main character of the novel. It portrays the transformation of the once pristine river Meenanchal into a polluted, lifeless water body. Urbanization in the novel is portrayed as a significant driver of environmental deterioration, exemplified by the appearance of small fish in highway potholes and the conversion of Karri Saipu's estate into a hotel, where the once pristine view is tainted by toxic water, slums, and a deteriorating natural environment. The researcher points out that Roy vividly portrays the exploitation of nature in the pursuit of modernization and human desires while highlighting the contrasting, sustainable approach embodied by Velutha, who crafts items from natural resources with great skill and reverence for the environment.

Patidar (2019) argues that *Nectar in a Sieve* focuses on negative impact on industrialization on rural natural landscape. Rukmani, the central character in the novel is deeply connected to the land, seeking to restore her family's rural life and maintain their rootedness to the earth. The advent of the tannery, symbolic of industrial progress, disrupts the age-old interaction between humanity and the natural world, ushering in far-reaching ecological

transformations. Rukmani's connection to the land and nature is contrasted with the challenges posed by modernization, and it becomes evident that for a peasant woman like her, contentment is derived from life's basic necessities and the serenity of the countryside. On the one hand, industrialization is necessary for material prosperity and on the other hand, industrialization "promotes the exhaustion of natural resources. It causes pollution chiefly air, water and soil pollution. And today's most burning issue Global warming and climatic changes are the major penalties of industrialization" (Patidar, 2019, p. 225).

Chandran (2012) remarks that the rendering of the novel, *Chayathirai* into English as *The Coloured Curtain* bestows upon it a vast readership. The novel serves as a testament to the impact of global industrialization on the underprivileged segments of our society. The very fabric of our simple world undergoes disintegration, a recurring theme throughout the book. In its narrative, there is no linear progression of events, leaving the reader continuously in anticipation without fulfillment. The reviewer points out that the novel transports the reader back to a time when the magnificent river Noile resonated with the laughter of children, frolicking in its pure waters. Yet, it abruptly returns to the present, where a new "chemical" existence leads to the river's destruction. The novel explores the detachment between humanity and nature caused by commercialism and superstitions. It inspires readers to envision a new society that cherishes inner peace, human-nature harmony, and rejects all forms of destruction. The reviewer points out that the novelist's critique of modern society masterfully unveils the destructive consequences of foreign invasion and materialistic pursuits. Through the protagonists' tragic fates, the novel movingly depicts the disfigurement of ethnic life by unchecked greed, leaving behind squalor, loneliness, and hatred.

Manian's novel *The Coloured Curtain* has been largely overlooked in scholarly research, indicating a notable gap in the literature. This offers an opportunity to the researcher to explore the novel from environmental viewpoint, addressing environmental issues and promoting eco-awareness.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, which focuses on a descriptive approach aimed at the interpretation of data. According to Polit and Hungler (1999), a qualitative study is structured around non-statistical data and is "useful for exploring the full nature of a little-understood phenomenon" (p. 108). Qualitative research is "a frame of mind; it is an orientation and commitment to study the social world in certain kinds of ways" (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p. 27). A qualitative research paradigm is used to analyze environmental degradation in Manian's English translated novel, *The Coloured Curtain*, using ecocriticism as a theoretical underpinning. The study will conduct a close reading of the text to identify

instances where environmental themes are prominent. The theoretical framework of the study is largely drawn from the critical conceptualizations of eco-theorists: Buell and Garrard.

Theoretical Framework

The term 'Ecocriticism' originates from two Greek words including 'oikos' and 'kritis'. 'Oikos' means 'household' whereas 'kritis' means 'judge'. Hence, 'Ecocriticism' denotes "an arbiter of taste" who wants to keep the house in decent order (Howarth 1996, p. 69). Ecocriticism, in modern discussions among scholars, originates from an article by William Rueckert titled "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*," published in 1978. As Mazel (2001) in *A Century of Early Ecocriticism* expounds:

Ecocriticism—the study of literature as if the environment mattered—has only recently come to recognize itself as a distinct critical enterprise. The term itself apparently dates no further back than 1978, when it was coined by William Rueckert. (p. 1)

The decade of nineties seventies spread increasing concerns over environmental issues. "Public awareness and concern about the state of the global and local environment has grown dramatically" (Perk, 2014, p.1). Ecocriticism emerged in the late twentieth century as a response to the emergence of the environmental activist movements of the 1960s. It deals with ecological problems like pollution, global warming, climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and other ecological exploitations (Heise, 2006).

[Ecocriticism] is a modern phenomenon which came as a dynamic response to the ecological consequences of the industrial revolution. It is an ideology and a movement aimed at protecting the environment by reducing the human activities on the earth. (Poornananda, 2022, p. 1)

Ecocriticism', "has attracted the best and brightest minds in the discipline" by "addressing the most pressing issue of our time—the degraded environment" (Garrard, 2014, p. xii). It responds "to alarm about the fragility of biological environments increasingly devastated by human technologies" (Westling, 2014, p. 5). It has contributed to a heightened awareness of pollution and its consequences by criticizing "threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification" (Buell, 2001, p. 31). It can play a pivotal role in alleviating the environment related issues "by rising awareness about human-nature relations" (Bracke, 2014, p. 423).

"Ecocriticism" (or by alternative names, environmental criticism and green studies) designates the critical writings that explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage

being wrought on that environment by human activities. (Abrams & Harpham, 2015, p. 98).

Environmental crisis is a product of human culture. "It is not caused by how the ecosystem functions, but how our ethical system functions, how we behave with mother, nature etc. Ecocriticism builds this awareness among man" (Shrivastwa, 2020, p. 3). "We live in the age of the Anthropocene, in which humans are a major force influencing the land, water, and weather of the Earth" (Glotfelty, 2014, p. xi). The loss of interaction between human world and natural world accounts for environmental concerns and "the nature culture distinction itself is an anthropogenic product" (Buell, 2001, p. 3). Due to anthropocentric activities, natural world is in state of jeopardy; "the world's physical environment is being increasingly refashioned by capital, technology, and geopolitics, with so-called nature consumed or reproduced as lawns, gardens, theme parks, habitat zoos, conservancies, and so on" (Buell, 2001, p. 3). People are turning what we call 'nature' into other things (Buell, 2001). We have an innate connection to nature but tend to prioritize comfort and materialism, often disregarding the consequences until they become threatening. "We like being surrounded by greenery but ignore our reliance on toxic substances that increase the comfort of our surroundings until waste disposal becomes a local issue" (Buell, 1995, p. 4). Overuse of natural resources "are damaging the life support systems of the planet" as a result of anthropocentric culture which serves as a "reflector and shaper of people's attitudes and actions" (Garrard, 2014, p. xi).

Environmental problems are "accompanied by rapid economic growth" (Garrard, 2012, p. 24) and "development of advanced technologies, particularly the growth of heavy industry". (McKusick, 2000, p. 110). The advent of scientific and industrial revolution has brought a lot of progress which poses an alarming threat to the survival of the natural environment and the mutual coexistence between humans and non-humans. "The scientific revolution was one cause of the death of nature; the rise of industrial capitalism was another" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2015, p. 226). Development is a necessity as it facilitates existence; however, unsustainable development is jeopardizing the environment. Unsustainable advancement "has been a growing malaise about modern industrial society's inability to manage its unintended environmental consequences" (Buell, 2005, p. 5). Resultantly, pollution has emerged as one of the most alarming issues of the rapidly growing industrial era (Garrard, 2014).

In brief, keeping in view the theoretical framework Ecocriticism, the present study aims to examine and critique the treatment of environmental degradation in Manian's English translated novel *The Coloured Curtain*.

Textual Analysis

Modern societies have been at war with the environment for a long time and have treated nature as little more than a resource to be tapped and as a sink into which to dump their wastes (Foster, 1999, p. 13)

The Coloured Curtain is an eco-fiction. The story of the novel is set in the town of Tirupur where the textile industry's effluents result in the contamination of water of river, Noile surrounding the town. The "river was slowly deteriorating into a gutter" (p. 26) as a result of industrial effluents let out into it. Since his childhood, the protagonist, Baktavatchalam has been observing "the factory waste water flooding the gutters" (p. 26). At the start of the story, a foreign visitor, named Maria Rosa arrives and expresses her concern over the degradation of River Noiel. "Maria Rosa's eyes stood glued to the seeping dye waste for a long time" (p. 26). She is astonished to see the river "a storehouse of waste, and its water quite dark" (p. 24) and prefers to call it 'Dead River'. When Maria shows her concern over the contaminated and poor state of the river, Baktavatchalam, reminiscing the previous state of the river response:

Our rivers were quite alive. They flowed throughout the year. Their surroundings too were well planned and beautifully maintained. During winter they were covered with ice. The very sight of our rivers would send a feeling of joy into our hearts. (p. 25)

That was the time when the river was uncontaminated, and in a good state, before the advent of industry in the town. The water was so clean and refreshing "reminding him [Baktavatchalam] of sugarcane juice" (p. 26). Baktavatchalam reflects on how the once-thriving River Noiel was abundant with earthworms that were used as bait for fishing, and how, as a child, he used to ride his bike on the river's banks. "The once gurgling waters of River Noiel were green in his memory" (p. 26). However, now, he feels dejected as he watches factory waste flood the gutters, and pollute the river. The protagonist comments:

Both the banks of the river glowed with a silken sheen. Blobs of oil seemed to float on the sides of the banks. The waves showed a plethora of colours and air bubbles of different colours all of a sudden reached the surface and burst. He thought if he drowned himself there hundreds of bubbles would go up. And every bubble would be a mixture of colours. (p. 284)

Baktavatchalam recounts his visit to Soosaiyapuram village where he observed a distressing situation, where sewage water had contaminated the drinking water. The water tanks in every household were found to contain

fecal matter and dye waste, causing many residents to fall ill and be bedridden for days. In a satirical tone, he comments on the prevalent approach to accessing clean water:

We have to adopt ourselves to a different eating habit. To prepare hamburger from beef one has to spend the same amount of money as one would spend on water per month. Water ... the very same water that fades into insignificance when compared with nutritious cereals (p. 184).

Maria Rose, a foreigner is curious about the happenings in Tirupur. Upon entering it, she takes leisurely strolls down a pathway and is wonderstruck to see that "The path was strewn with dried-up waste and prickles. From the thickets of thorn, the footpath dwindled down to a track and disappeared in river Noiel, a storehouse of waste, and its water quite dark" (p. 24). The town of Tirupur, where the novel is set, is renowned for its history and the cultivation of crops such as betel leaves and vegetables along the banks of the perennial river Noiel. However, the textile industry's impact on the environment threatens this way of life. Like the dead flowers on dry grass, a sense of agony runs sparsely throughout the novel. The contaminated water caused by industrial effluents penetrates into everything including fauna and flora. Even the fruit are not immune from the detrimental effects of polluted water, which irrigates the plants and trees. When Maria Rosa expresses her interest to taste tender coconut, Bakthavatchalam forbids her by saying that eating coconut nourished by polluted water is undoubtedly "a risky desire" and informs Maria: "You'll find only the dye industry waste water inside the tender coconut. When we dig bore wells. You know, it is only waste water that gushed out. Sometimes we may find multi-coloured water inside the coconut shell" (p. 28).

Even the well, Vaikuntham, which is used for disposing of items used in funeral rites, is not free from the dye waste from the nearby industries. Nagan is stunned to see the dilapidated condition of the well, filled with torn gunny bags, excrement, piles of dried-up feces and discarded clothing. He empties the contents of his bag into the well and looks inside it, finding darkness with no indication of water. When Nagan satirically asks an elderly man if the well is used for disposing of items used in funeral rites, the elderly man responds sardonically:

Whoever uses the well for such a purpose these days? Perhaps the custom prevailed several decades ago. I have seen the oldies use the well for such a purpose.... the dye waste from the nearby industries that soak the earth find their way into this well. And how can you expect holy water from it? (p. 196)

During the flood, the river, Noiel was a tragic sight, as corpses from nearby mounds began to surface and float in the water. These bloated bodies "were

red in colour; some green, some blue and some a mixture of different colours" (p. 60). And there was foul smell that was creating the atmosphere of suffocation. "The denseness of colours suffocated" (p. 60) the protagonist, Bakthavatchalam. The cause of this disaster was dye waste. The outlets of the sewage system were filled with water of different hues, which sometimes pooled and spilled into the streets. The protagonist remarks that "Dye waste had changed the colour of sewage. Almost all outlets held waters of different colours. Certain outlets without proper canals spread the water to form a pool that glittered in the streets" (p. 141). People ran in a panic as the floodwaters rushed through the area, bringing a chaotic mixture of colors. "Wherever one looked one saw only a mixture of Colours" (p. 285) and "water, a mixture of colours, jetted out" (p. 287). The protagonist is wonderstruck to observe the waste of dye industries in the river Noiel: "Pitch dark in colour the gutter glimmered as far as one's eyes could reach. The gutter easily passed for a stagnant pool housing the waste from dye industries. An ugly mixture of colours it made an irritating sight" (pp. 22-23). Bakthavatchalam references the occurrence in Soosaiyapuram.

Gutter water got mixed with drinking water. The water tanks in every home had bits of faeces and dye waste. Everyone had to throw up. They did it with a great force as if they were forcing out their intestines. And then they were bedridden for several days. (p. 183)

"The gutters in the city showed up the different colours of the dye Waste water but in the dam they get mixed up and show only one colour...and that is black" (p. 283). During flood, the ecological crisis near Dam is captured by the novelist as:

Quite close to the sluice gates stood a row of karuvelam trees. The pointed end of their thorns reflected in water. Mostly devoid of their leaves, the trees showed up green and light red shoots on their branches. The protruding ends of the submerged trees showed no sign of life. Only the dye seemed to have penetrated into their barks. The barren trees that stood in rows looked like sentinels to the sluice. As it slowly began to dawn, light began to dangle in water. The floating dye waste all of a sudden got stuck up to the sluice gate. It glowed as if it were permanently stuck up there. (pp. 285-286)

Bakthavatchalam, the protagonist takes Rosa to a park that is situated away from the gutters. The park boasts an artificial fountain that requires water to be brought, in from of a water tanker. She criticizes the artificial ways of living in the industrially dominated society. She laments the loss of originality and naturality of nature, by commenting about the park that "Everything here is artificial. All plants here are cursed to suffer a short growth (p. 27). The above quoted lines indicate that nature is no longer in its pure form, after falling a prey to human activities, which have rendered it

artificial, by molding it in accordance with their requirements or desires. Brindavan Park, previously called Municipal Park, was a place where visitors were unfortunately subjected to the unpleasant odor of dye waste, frequently accumulating in River Noiel. The novelist comments:

The compound wall went up. A natural thorny fence gave rise to barbed wire fence. Lamp posts were planted at various places in the park. Each post held a cluster of milk white globular bulbs. Water jetted out from a giant size cement fish and tickled the children. A long pipe that sprayed water was a special attraction. Merry-go-round and Tora-tora were installed to please the kids. Pictures of animals and birds were painted on the compound wall. But they looked as though they were fending off their nose from the nasty smell that emanated from Noiel. Grass grown on the sides of the wall looked charred, though here and there it showed life. There was no other park anywhere in the city. The public were quite happy and expressed their joy by making frequent visits to the park. There was an entrance fee and the people didn't consider that as an expenditure. The colour TV set made its presence known by raising its voice (p. 146).

Above quoted paragraph focuses on the river Noiel, which collects dye waste from the industry, emits a foul smell that makes the park an unpleasant place to visit. This situation points to the larger problem of industrial pollution and improper waste disposal practices, contributing to the degradation of the environment and the quality of life for both humans and other organisms. The passage portrays an embodiment of human characteristics even in lifeless components, exemplified by the representation of the grass as charred and the animals depicted on the wall seemingly warding off the unpleasant odors. This figurative delineation effectively highlights the incompatibility between the superficial developments introduced to the park, and the underlying ecological predicaments that endure.

Activities related to unbridled expansion of agricultural and industrial production have deeply "affected soil and water quality, impacting on people's health and quality of life and on the environment" (Perk, 2014, p. v). Water pollution and other forms of environmental degradation leave a disastrous impact on human health and well-being. Workers involved in the manufacture and dyeing of garments face significant health hazards, including increased risks of cancer, tumors, cerebrovascular disease, and lung disease. In the industry, Jothinnani, a worker rushed towards Bakthavatchalam. "Her face was covered with banian dust. She was wheezing" (p. 227). Bakthavatchalam asked Jothinnani, "Have you become an asthmatic?" (p. 227). Nagappan is also suffering from asthma. He "lifted up an empty plastic pot. He had some difficulty in lifting up pots filled with water. That would make him breathe heavily through his mouth like a

wounded bird” (p. 51). Dye industry has caused Veluchami a laborer, to develop painful sores. As the novelist elaborates:

These painful sores made him howl at times. And at such times, Saundari, his colleague, would get him arrack. Once the liquid goes down his gullet, it would ease his pain and lull him into sleep. Veluchami did the job of mixing chemicals. Sometimes he had no way but to use his hands. The industry had no chemist. (pp. 137)

The author depicts the painful situation of the worker, Veluchami in the dye industry in the following passage:

The acrid smoke the chemicals emanated when they were mixed up or transferred from one container to another heavily disturbed his lungs. His eyes continuously jerked tears. And he left his job only when the sores spread all over his body (p. 138).

Not only the human beings but animals are not immune from contaminated water also. Indigestion problem is common due to unclean and polluted water. A dog that ingests the water dies a miserable death. Feeling thirsty, “the dog looked as though lured. It moved towards it and began to taste it” (p. 145). It starts drinking dyed water despite somebody’s attempt to drive the poor dog away. As the novelist elaborates:

“Heil! Hei! Get lost, you dog!” Somebody hissed in an attempt to drive the poor animal away. But the dog didn’t take its mouth away from the yellow water. It went on slurping it. “Don’t know what the dog had eaten. It goes on drinking this dye waste. God knows if it has any indigestion problem.” (pp. 145)

The dog drinks the dyed water and dies as a result of it. The scene of the painful death of the dog is tragic. “The dog slid and fell down. It began kicking the air as though having some kind of fit. It whimpered. Its voice was quite feeble. It breathed its last looking at infinity” (p. 146). Another unfortunate dog falls prey to the unsanitary state of the town, brought about by industrial waste. It has contracted skin disease by tasting “the particles of food that came from the outlets” (p. 267). Its body is afflicted with blisters and sores. As the novelist remarks:

The mangy dog had sores all over. Pus oozed from its sores and made the black dog look brown. There was a blister on its nose and the animal licked it with the tip of its tongue now and again. Its whiskers have gone grey and were shining. (p. 266)

Aqua bodies are also in danger due to contaminated water caused by the industrial waste. Those who consume fish suffer from health issues. The protagonist comments that the fish sellers may give fish “at a cheaper rate, but who knows if the fish was a fresh one or a dead one found floating amidst

the dye waste" (p. 110). Chettiyar, an elderly man who is now bedridden, fondly reminisces a time when he and his friends would catch fish from the river twice a week. Chettiyar recollects the bygone days when there was pure and uncontaminated water in the river, Noiel:

There was a time when I used to eat fish twice a week. That was before I fell sick. When I was healthy and when there was no work in the loom, my friends and I would take a fishing net and rush to river Noiel. (p. 117)

However, after the onslaught of industrial revolution in the region, Chettiyar remarks that "The river is dead. And all that we have for the river is the waste water from dye industries" (p. 118)."

Though industrial revolution is the symbol of progress; however its waste material can play havoc with the water if thrown into it. Environment is in state of utter decline merely as a result of man's unbridled use of natural resources, for economic progress. As a result of industrial onset in the village, the village is getting urbanized. New buildings have appeared. "Multistoreyed buildings of different shapes and colours stood like giants" (p. 192). A massive transformation has occurred in the natural landscape of the town. "Wherever one could turn one's eyes one could see only a long stretch of buildings" (p. 192). Natural area has converted into an industrial and urban area. The novel demonstrates how the urban is invading the rural in the guise of industrialization" (Chambers 2017, p. 86). It portrays a government that acquired nearly two hundred acres of land under the guise of a development scheme. As the novelist states

The government had taken away nearly two hundred acres of land in the name of 'City Development Scheme'. The plan of the government was to acquire lands at a very low rate and pass it on to the Garment Exporters Society and invest fifty percent of its shares in the City Development Scheme. (p. 290)

The novel highlights the consequences of government schemes that prioritize profit over environmental sustainability. As the novel concludes, a woman reflects on the events and the harm caused by the human impact on nature. She comments: "I want my girl to be brought up in such an atmosphere especially inside the forest. But I have to cheat her by showing her the forest only in such wall papers" (p. 291).

Water scarcity is a big concern in the modern industrially dominated era. As a consequence of the infiltration of contaminated water into the town, water scarcity is emerging as a big issue for the town people, as depicted in the novel through Maria Rosa observation:

'A pipe that supplies drinking water is leaking. These women can't afford to waste it. And so they are trying to hold in their vessels.'

'Such scarcity for drinking water here...! especially in the town that rolls in dollars and Sterling Pounds!' (p. 29).

On account of water scarcity in the town, the people have to purchase it for a high price of "sixty or seventy-five paise per pot" (p. 42). Baktavatchalam mentions that, "in several places the drinking water became coloured" (p. 281). Even the water that is sold to the residence of the region, is not immune from contaminated material. Baktavatchalam comments that "The water stored in the rusted container was making money. Invisible rust" (p. 43). Unfortunately, the dye waste stained the water and caused Bakthavatchalam to suffocate when he accidentally ingested it. The scarcity of water in the town was a significant problem, forcing people to spend money on a basic necessity, and leading to long queues of people waiting to collect water. As the novelist pinpoints:

Plastic water pots queued up from the water pipe to the place where sat Chettiyar. Every pot bore its identity mark either in the form of numbers or initials of owners. Bakthavatchalam placed his pots in the queue and straightened up. (p. 151)

Bakthavatchalam shares a story about a monarch called Parakirama Bahu who had instructed his subjects to "make necessary arrangements to store every drop of rain water" (p. 181). The king stresses: "Making drinking water available to the public is a problem indeed. The time may come when every drop of water in the river would be contaminated" (p. 181). Moreover, the king remarks that due contaminated water, "Fishes of high breed are slowly becoming extinct. Salmon is rare to see nowadays" (p. 182).

Deforestation is identified as a major cause of soil erosion in the novel, *The Coloured Curtain*. The protagonist remarks that "The arable lands were rendered infertile and a paper factory was closed down" (p. 281). The protagonist, Bakthavatchalam, reminisces about the neem trees that used to grow in the backyards of every home in his village:

And no tree was planted again in the backyard of the house. When the tree was there, we had a swing. We used to swing so fast that at times we felt as if we were about to touch the sky. At times we slipped and fell down and broke our teeth. Our faces had suffered bruises and cuts. But we never abstained from swinging. The tree was gone, and we could swing no more. (p. 154)

The novelist asserts that due to flood, "plants as though uprooted from the depth of the earth floated and the water current rocked them" (p. 286). The novelist describing the surroundings and the interior of Chettiyar's house points out that, on the table nearby the bed, "There were also puffed rice, toffees and other goodies in polythene packets" (p. 53). The excessive use

of polythene bags is prevalent, which takes a considerable amount of time to decompose, leading to a loss of soil fertility.

In *The Coloured Curtain*, water is depicted as a crucial element for sustaining life. Additionally, the story also highlights the significance of rare plants. During one scene, Kumar and his father take a break on the roadside after a long walk. While resting, they are happy to come across a group of Indian aloe plants with thick leaves. They nostalgically recall harvesting aloe, processing its gel, and blending it with jaggery, noting the plant's robustness that demands a team of four to extract and peel. "Even this has become rare," [Kumar] said pointing at the aloe. His father said, "During famine, we used to dig out the aloe, squeeze the gel Out of it and eat mixing it with jaggery. And that was when I was a boy." (p. 53). The above conversation going on between Kumar and his father is indicative of the loss of flora in the region. They also mention their memories of 'cacti' and 'water lilies', which have become rare sightings lately, and note the presence of local thorny plants such as Velikaathan and Delhi thorns during their journey.

Apart from water contamination, air contamination and noise pollution are also depicted in the novel. The novelist states that "The population has gone up" (p. 200), and with it, the proliferation of vehicles has led to a subsequent surge in pollution. The emission of smoke from vehicles has led to a huge amount of pollution in the surrounding environment. On the bridge, "Several vehicles queued up and looked like giant banian cartons. The scene made one doubt whether the bridge would be able to withstand their weight" (p. 233). Kumar's father comments that a huge amount of smoke is coming out of the chimneys and polluting the air. "He saw a factory chimney sending up smoke" (p. 71). The lorries carrying different materials are emitting a huge amount of smoke, causing disturbance for Bakthavatchalam, Jothimani and school going children. Some lorries transport bricks and sand steadily, and some water tankers run recklessly. "These water tankers disturbed Bakthavatchalam very much. They remained a constant headache to him. Their racing engines reddened his eyes and made them water. He plugged his ears, of course, but that was of no use to him. The speeding lorries made a deafening noise" (p. 43). Bakthavatchalam's companion, Jothimani, is comforted by his presence but remains fearful in crowded places. "The street was full of honking vehicles and the smoke they emitted made the place foggy. All of a sudden the sound of horns was on the increase" (p. 44). A couple of birds that were swooping over the surface of water suddenly moved upwards as if they found it hard to breathe there. As the novelist expounds:

They screamed as though somebody was strangling them. They circled in the sky and swooped down to touch the surface only to scream again. Their screaming broke the silence of the dam. As they

flew past the other side of the dam they took a dip once and coloured their heads. (p. 286)

Nagan, who is seriously suffering from fever, is irritated by “the shuttling noise of the loom” (p. 84). Chethiya is fed up with the noise of machine. In his room, he often utters out: “Hei! Stop that bloody machine... It’s enough... It’s always making noise” (p. 260). In the factory dominated area, “vehicles coughing out smoke polluted the area and the faces of the security men at the entrance of the Estate looked daubed in black dust” (p. 255). Nagan faces challenges while crossing an overflowing gutter nearby Chettiyar’s house: “The stink from the garbage dump made Nagan sneeze a lot. He had running nose. The rattle-tattle of the machines was like racing lorries” (p. 52).

Conclusion

Manian's *The Coloured Curtain* is a powerful story of environmental concerns like water contamination, air pollution, noise pollution, water scarcity, devastation of natural environment, and soil erosion, afflicting both the human beings and natural world. It realistically and vividly touches upon the central theme of environmental degradation due to industrial pollution and its far-reaching impacts on both the natural world and human existence. Manian (2017) depicts the devastating impact of dyeing factories' effluents on animals, birds, humans, and the environment at large. He portrays the reality of the dying rivers and pollution; the village people face due to the lack of proper measures to control it. He offers a strong critique of anthropocentric approach, and loss of care for environment of our planet. Through telling the story of the river Noiel in the novel, the novelist brings to surface the theme of water contamination as a result of industrial effluents in the river water. He stresses that it is crucial to take adequate steps towards preservation of water from being contaminated, and pass it on to the future generations.

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