

Culture and Media:
Ecocritical Explorations

Culture and Media:
Ecocritical Explorations

Edited by

Rayson K. Alex, S. Susan Deborah
and Sachindev P.S.

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations,
Edited by Rayson K. Alex, S. Susan Deborah, Sachindev P.S.

This book first published 2014

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2014 by Rayson K. Alex, S. Susan Deborah, Sachindev P.S. and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-5971-0, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-5971-4

Dedicated to

tiNai, formerly known as OSLE-India

CONTENTS

List of Images	x
List of Tables	xi
Foreword	xii
Richard Kerridge	
Acknowledgements	xvii
Introduction	1
Rayson K. Alex	
Section I: <i>Ecocriticism and Cinema</i>	
Chapter One.....	12
Towards T-Documentary: Critiquing Ecocinema	
Rayson K. Alex	
Chapter Two	34
Directing the Weather, Producing the Climate	
Patrick D. Murphy	
Chapter Three	49
Spectators to Future Ruin: Ecological Representations and their Consumption	
Simon C. Estok	
Chapter Four.....	66
Exploring Ecocriticism in Australian Film and Television Studies	
Susan Ward and Kitty Van Vuuren	
Chapter Five	85
Comic Complexity in <i>Dr. Seuss's The Lorax</i> : Seuss's Tragic Ecoclassic Morphs into Feature-length Animated Comedy	
Deidre Pike	

Chapter Six	97
An Affective Turn: The Rhetorical Triangle in <i>The Cove</i>	
Yalan Chang	
Chapter Seven.....	114
Ecological Representations of Irish Films	
Patrick Brereton	
Chapter Eight.....	131
Tribal People on Screen: Ecological Representation in Documentaries	
Rayson K. Alex	
Chapter Nine.....	141
<i>Papilio Buddha</i> : Exploring Ecological Connectedness	
Sachindev P. S.	
Chapter Ten	157
<i>tinai</i> Reading of the Film <i>Godavari</i>	
Samuel Moses	
Section II: <i>Ecocriticism and Culture</i>	
Chapter Eleven	170
Authorship in the Light of <i>tinai</i>	
Nirmal Selvamony	
Chapter Twelve	189
Ecoethics and the Evolution of an Ecoartist: Saving Threatened Species	
Lynne Hull	
Chapter Thirteen.....	204
Politicizing Indigenous Knowledge Conservation Practices:	
The Dynamics of Using Open Source Media to Preserve	
Indigenous Cultures	
Padini Nirmal	
Chapter Fourteen	222
Eating Out of Your Hands: Food Blogging as Transecological	
Phenomenon	
S. Susan Deborah	

Chapter Fifteen	241
<i>Ubuntuism</i> in the Proverbs of the Maragoli Community in Western Kenya Nabeta Sangili	
Contributors.....	258
Index.....	263

LIST OF IMAGES

- 3-1. Accessorizing of animals, because it implies an ethical disregard, is one variety of ecophobia in play
- 3-2. It starts at an early age, as this little girl with her toy dog in a bag shows
- 8-1. The represented moving out of the community in the first and second categories
- 8-2. The represented moving circularly within the community in the third category
- 9-1. Shankaran and Manjushree in Yab-Yum position with the Taradevi-Buddha statue in the background
- 9-2. An intimate moment between Shankaran and Jack
- 9-3. Shankaran with the dead peacock
- 9-4. Tribal people at the demonstration area
- 9-5. Close-up of tribal persons
- 9-6. Procession carrying the Buddha statue
- 12-1. Desert hydroglyphs
- 12-2. Raptor roosts
- 12-3. “Lightning” raptor roosts
- 12-4. Close-up of raptor roosts
- 12-5. Ecozone projects
- 12-6. Floating islands
- 12-7. Site projects
- 12-8. Lagoon sculpture, Punta Laguna, MX
- 12-9. “Polar platform” proposal
- 15-1. A view of the ecosystem surrounding the river Izava in Mudungu village
- 15-2. Invaded land at Givudianyi Village
- 15-3. *Evembe* in Itengi Village
- 15-4. The only mature *Mtembe* tree in Givudianyi Village

LIST OF TABLES

- 1-1. Comparison of definitions of ecology
- 1-2. Comparison of definitions of ecocinema
- 15-1. Summary of the analysis

FOREWORD

RICHARD KERRIDGE

One of the strongest themes in ecocriticism at present is the need for a perspective informed by postcolonial criticism. It is also observed, rather less frequently, that postcolonial criticism needs an environmentalist and ecocritical perspective. Recent books that have explored the relationship between these two schools of political criticism include Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's *Postcolonial Environments*, Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt's *Postcolonial Green*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* and Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

These books have brought Western literary ecocriticism into contact with the foundational political and philosophical ideas of postcolonialist environmentalists and ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez Alier. Postcolonial ecocriticism has broadened the focus of the ecocritical movement and confronted it with some global political realities. What should the relationship be, these critics have asked, between the preservationist concerns of enthusiasts for wild nature and the environmental justice concerns of poor communities? How can a new preservationist love of wild nature differentiate itself sufficiently from the colonialist traditions? At the same time, postcolonial critics are asked how can they give due recognition to environmental dangers, including the threat to biodiversity, while remaining careful that Western environmentalism should not impose Western cultural preferences.

Rob Nixon has memorably formulated the challenges for both forms of criticism. Western ecocritics, in what is now seen as "first wave" ecocriticism, often seemed to assume that the preoccupations of Deep Ecology—the concern with wilderness preservation, especially—could simply be transferred "from a supremely rich, lightly populated, overconsuming, overmilitarized society like the United States to densely populated countries (India, Nigeria, Indonesia) where significant peasant communities subsisted off the land" (Nixon). Postcolonialism has had much to teach ecocriticism about the historical relationship between

preservationism and colonialism, and the continuing cultural legacy of that relationship. Postcolonial critics, however, should not assume that environmental concern is always suspect in this way. Environmental problems are real and urgent, and concern with them comes also from some of the poorest non-Western communities. “Any lingering postcolonial dismissal of environmentalism as marginal to ‘real’ politics is belied by the proliferation of indigenous environmental movements across the global South.”

Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations appears at a very interesting moment, therefore. Some of the old oppositions are receding. Postcolonial ecocriticism has posed questions that need new answers: different answers from different parts of the world. This fascinating collection of essays provides some Indian answers and situates those answers alongside developments elsewhere. It develops the relatively new field of the ecocritical study of film and filmmaking. The collection moves from discussion of some of the general questions ecocritics ask about film to critique of particular examples from India, North America, Australia and Ireland. In each case, the essay analyses the cultural and ideological history that shapes the environmental content.

Patrick D. Murphy notes, for example, that the post-apocalyptic ecothriller *Waterworld* reproduces “a standard cowboy Western plot of a drifter who gets caught up in homesteaders’ failed defence against bandits and finds himself compelled to take on ever-increasing responsibility for others.” Murphy also identifies a fundamental problem of representation faced by environmental art of all kinds. Quoting Sean Cubitt’s observation that “Ecological thinking places the emphasis on the priority of systems over nodes,” Murphy observes that movies have great difficulty in representing systems. Movies, he says, “tend to be paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic in their focus”; they “emphasize nodes as literally specific, or as metaphors and similes rather than as synecdoche.” They have difficulty in pulling back from the immediate situation and story to make visible the larger, open-ended spatial and temporal system of ecological relationships that play a determining role in the story: the set of relationships that Timothy Morton calls “the mesh.” Television miniseries, too, though they usually have more time available than feature films, “tend to depict the crises through a series of very tightly portrayed individuals or small groups, again emphasizing nodes over systems.”

For some ecocritics—Timothy Clark, for example—environmental threats necessitate a change, of emphasis at least, from “the foundational assumption of liberal thought”—the assumption that “a human being is an essentially private, atomistic and apolitical individual” (Clark). The

Western liberal version of selfhood emerged as consumer society, a society whose ethical and cultural norms rest on the assumption that endless economic growth is desirable and possible. Perceptions of environmental crisis challenge this assumption, both in terms of practical questions of economic policy and social justice, and in terms of the reconception of selfhood that these problems require. This reconception is necessary because ecological processes consist of forces too large to be fitted into the time frame of conventional realism—the time frame constituted by realistic plot and “character”—and events too small to register as conventionally dramatic: events such as the leaving on or turning off of a light. Like Morton, Clark calls for a shift of emphasis in the way we imagine the self, from the self as an atomized individual with hard boundaries to a self always already in the process of producing the world and being produced by it, a self through which the world flows, a self that is as conceptually inseparable as it is materially inseparable from the larger ecosystem that sustains its physical body. In Cubitt and Murphy’s terms, that is a shift of emphasis from node to system. Ecological perception dissolves unifying notions of selfhood and strong dualistic separations between culture and nature, subject and object, or human and nonhuman. Instead of these hard selves and boundaries, we have shared ancestry, co-evolution, system, process, energy flow, hybridity, actor-networks, post-humanism, symbiosis, biosemiotics and the continuous mutual constitution of self and world: the system of relationships that Timothy Morton calls “the mesh” and New Materialist theorists call “distributed agency.”

The difficult trade-off here is between the perceived need to find new experimental forms that foreground this open-ended systemic aspect of ecological processes—artistic “hyperobjects,” in Morton’s terms, to reflect the hyperobject that is the biosphere or climate change—and the need to use well-established cultural genres that reach mass audiences. Addressing this dilemma is an important task for ecocriticism in every cultural context. *Culture and Media* begins to set out some Indian approaches.

Susan Ward and Kitty van Vuuren note that in Australian ecohorror movies there is both a continuation of traditional colonial fears about the hostile *terra nullius* of the interior and a new set of allegories for the disastrous capacity of wild nature to exceed human control; the two elements are related in ways that give ecocritics pause. Ward and van Vuuren also track the ecological elements and ideologies to be found in Australian television soap operas and in the children’s television series *dirtgirlworld*. Pat Brereton, surveying Irish films with environmental themes, finds a similarly complex relationship between the tradition of

Romantic conservatism in the representation of Irish landscapes and rural life and the emergence in more urban cinema of a new ecological awareness. Kathryn Yalan Chang's discussion of *The Cove*, Louie Psihoyos's campaigning documentary about Japanese dolphin fishing, a film that has had considerable policy consequences, explores tensions between different ethical obligations: the obligation to protect animals from cruelty and the obligation to respect diverse cultural traditions that are easily scapegoated by a society committed on a much larger scale to less visible industrial cruelty. Yalan Chang acknowledges the difficulty posed by the cultural argument while refusing to allow it to trump the cruelty argument. Her essay is a fine example of the complex negotiation that a cross-cultural postcolonial ecocriticism involves.

These chapters, along with Simon C. Estok's warning about the propensity of commercial cinema to use environmental crisis as mere dramatic backdrop for conventional plot and Deidre Pike's optimistic account of the 2012 3D animated adaptation of Dr Seuss's *The Lorax*, provide a useful frame—a context of ecocritical questions—for the centre of the book, the ecocritical discussion of Indian film and its genres and techniques. The most distinctively Indian formulation of these questions offered by the book is what Nirmal Selvamony and Rayson K. Alex call *tinai* criticism, based on the Tamil Dravidian concept of *tinai*, the founding principle of pre-caste society in Tamil Nadu, defined by Selvamony as an “organism-like society,” constituting a “ground of existence” that unites human and non-human elements, culture and nature. This conception of relationship to land, and all forms of life in that land, is the one that makes land sacred, in the *tinai* sense of the term used by Alex. Selvamony gives an account of how authorship must be conceived in *tinai* criticism as communitarian more than individual, with the community including the non-human as well as the human. Authorship is thus attributed to place, ecosystem and history, as well as to the human community and the human individual. Selvamony and Alex demonstrate the potential of *tinai* to be an ecocritical idea, consonant with the reconception of selfhood advocated by Clark. K. Samuel Moses Srinivas takes the idea further out of its usual cultural space, when he uses it to provide the conceptual framework for a reading of a Telugu film made in 2006.

Other contributors who do not use *tinai* as a conceptual foundation are nevertheless exploring similar ground: looking for principles of selfhood and authorship that emphasize the individual's embeddedness in community and ecosystem. In an important essay discussing the creation of Digital Community Archives as a cultural resource for indigenous tribal

cultures, Padini Nirmal presents an impressive example of the use of digital technology to create a new communal meeting place and archive place that may help to preserve a traditional cultural commons threatened by other contemporary developments. The example overturns expectations that traditional indigenous culture and technological modernity will be in opposition. Indigenous knowledge is thus able to “transcend the geographical limits of the nation situated in the global south and reach those in the global north (and sometimes travel within the south, back to the south and around the world).” With this new power to travel, and to make visible the global ecological and commercial relationships implicated in what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence”—the violent effects, in other parts of the world, of Western consumerism—indigenous communal knowledge is able to pose a challenge to the Western institution of intellectual property that is so menacing to these indigenous communities. Nirmal does not refer to *tinai*, but her broad argument is similar to that of Alex, Selvamony and Moses. P. S. Sachindev implies a similar sense of potential in his discussion of the banned film *Papilio Buddha*; in this case, potential is not realized, Sachindev argues, since the film’s main symbol has not been drawn from the culture of the Dalit community whose plight is the film’s subject matter and that community is not given a voice by the film. Negotiations between indigenous culture and the global networking made possible by the internet are also explored by Susan Deborah in her discussion of food blogs. Nabeta Sangili supplies an African perspective: he too explores the significance of ecological knowledge in certain indigenous cultures, looking at the presence of trees and plants in the normative proverbs of the Kenyan Maragoli people. Lynne Hull, an ecoartist, finds new ways of sharing authorship with the natural world; she designs sculptures that will be used as habitat by wild animals and birds, and positions them where they will be of most use, so that the animal, benefiting from the artwork, completes the work with its presence.

Culture and Media is a richly various collection of essays, yet one that has shared aims and concerns running through it. This is exciting and fascinating material, and a significant contribution to Indian ecocriticism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors thank all the contributors for complying with our requests and answering our queries from time to time with diligence and patience.

We would like to express our thanks to Prof. Richard Kerridge for graciously consenting to write the Foreword to the book.

We express our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. T. Jayaraman for voluntarily offering to copy-edit the essays. His keen eye and dexterity saved us many sleepless nights. Alongside him we also gratefully acknowledge the hard work and time put forth by Ms. Lincy Ann Mathew who style-edited the essays and embellished their readability. Mr. Christopher Pipe helped us with the final edit.

We are indebted and grateful to the *tiNai* (formerly OSLE-India) family which has enabled to strengthen our foundation in Ecocriticism and also gave us the freedom to initiate Ecomedia, an offshoot of *tiNai*. A special word of thanks to Dr. Nirmal Selvamony, founder and president of *tiNai* who introduced us to Ecocriticism and supported all our crazy ideas and projects. His guidance and support throughout the process of this book has helped us immensely.

The editors wish to thank Dr. Swarnalatha Rangarajan for her consistent encouragement and enthusiasm towards our book project and related endeavours. Her contagious sunshine always brought a cheer to our tired spirits.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our friends and well-wishers in Madras Christian College, Central University of Tamil Nadu and Birla Institute of Technology and Science-Pilani, K.K. Birla Goa Campus (BITS-Goa), namely, Prof. Meenakshi Raman (Head, Department of Humanities and Management, BITS-Goa), Mr. Irshad P.S. and Ms. Christina Peter.

We like to place on record the kind help rendered by Dr. Chia-ju Chang, Assistant Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, New York, by means of encouragement, support and finding publishers and contributors for the book.

We are immensely grateful to Amanda Millar, Carol Koulikourdi and Soucin Yip-Sou, Administrative Staff, Cambridge Scholars Publishing for leading us through the formalities of this book project.

This project would not have seen the light of the day if not for the seeds sown in the form of ideas by D. Samuel Johnson and Samuel Moses K. on a rainy day in the Madras Christian College campus.

Rayson K. Alex

S. Susan Deborah

Sachindev P.S.

INTRODUCTION

RAYSON K. ALEX

Shifting the Focus from Global to Glocal

Ecocritics might apophatically agree that ecocriticism confronts anthropocentrism. They, however, might take different positions—biocentric or ecocentric. The critical approaches on ecoart, be it film, painting, architecture or sculpting, are not very different from one another. The primary concern of ecoartists and ecoart critics (including ecocinema critics)—which ever their medium may be—is to create and analyse art that places other life forms, land and earth in foci. When shifting focus, many exciting things come about in ecocriticism. Some examples of paradigm shifts in ecocriticism are human to animal, literary to cultural, print to new media, psychology to ecology and postcolonial to ecopostcolonial. The perspectives of and on “the other” gain significance in such a circumstance and come under the spotlight. *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* is one such effort in yoking together some of these perspectives in a glocal context. However, the volume should be considered an addition to the existing body of ecocritical academia in India and the populace at large.

Cultural discourse in ecocriticism has a long-drawn history. It probably could be traced back to the duality of the nature-culture debate. Though such debates have been instrumental in placing ecocriticism in specific literary, political, cultural and social contexts, use of cultural texts to apply ecocritical or ecological principles has not been canonized in ecocritical academia. The consideration of music, drama and other arts, festivals, oral traditions, third gender expressions, expressions on caste and cinema, pottery, cooking, blogging and other crafts as analytical texts is a comparatively recent trend in ecocritical study. This diversification of ecocriticism is the outcome of the aforementioned paradigm shift.

Ecocriticism to Ecocriticisms

In the plenary session held at the end of the National Conference on *Towards Indian Ecocriticism* organized at Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, in 2011, a participant commenting on the theme of the conference remarked,

The diversity of the geographical, ideological, cultural, religious, linguistic aspects of over 5000 communities in India should be a possible ground for various forms of “Indian” ecocriticism. It would be proper and timely to refer to ecocriticism as ‘ecocriticisms’ when it is applied in the context of such a diverse country as India. (Elamparithy)

The point that Elamparithy was making was that ecocriticism should diversify in terms of texts and themes, crossing the boundaries of regions, locations and people involved in critical analysis. Murphy (64-74) discusses this idea by calling it “transnational” ecocriticism, thereby determining the differences in “gender,” “cultural multiplicity” and “plurality”. However, Elamparithy’s point seems to focus not necessarily on the national or the regional boundaries that ecocriticism could cross but the canonical acceptance that the various forms of ecocriticism should possess and thus he thrusts on the shift from ecocriticism to “ecocriticisms.” There is another side to this idea, though. Transnationalism is usually seen in the context of migration, displacement, hybridity and diaspora. In one respect or the other, all organisms have migrated or displaced and are therefore hybrid and diasporic. So this “canonical acceptance” of a local concept needs first to be localized before its conscious or unconscious transportation or transformation to another land. It is easier to accept “one” than “many.” Moreover, the terminology also needs clarity and careful coinage while the reference might be merely to “translocalism” or “transregionalism” and not necessarily “transnationalism.” On a not entirely different note, how could this kind of a model work? Can local ecocritical issues strictly be local? How would we separate global issues from the local? For instance, climate change is a worldwide phenomenon which has adversely affected all local areas. One way or the other, there is tension between the corresponding global and the local issues (Nayar). Such complexities need to be tackled in this shift from ecocriticism to “ecocriticisms.”

***tinai*: Towards Glocal Ecocriticism**

Nirmal Selvamony's *tinai* criticism is a bold initiative towards such a kind of ecocriticism in India. It is a local and a global concept, in the simplest terms, an indigenous way of looking at the land and its people from natural, cultural and supernatural perspectives. Acknowledging its origin from the social order of the early Dravidian people, it retains its local and regional flavour. However, *tinai* is not merely a parochial theory of the South Indians but has been acknowledged and used by ecocritics outside the country, making it a "canonically accepted" concept. In an interview, Scott Slovic says,

there's a concept called *tinai*, and this is a kind of indigenous notion of ecology that has very practical aspects to it I think we can learn a lot from the unique perspectives in different parts of the world. We may well find a lot of common ground but we may find regional, cultural, religious particularities in different parts of the world and it's really important for us to recognize those and there's no simply one solution to every kind of cultural and environmental problem: solutions may be different ... (Romero 77-78)

The well-appreciated transnational effort in ecocriticism makes such concepts useful in offering different theoretical platforms and solutions to world ecocriticism, exalting them to a global context. *tinai* attaining a global identity while retaining its local flavour is a concept that is global and local at the same time. *tinai*, thus, is a glocal concept. This volume offers a variety of glocal perspectives from countries like Australia, America, Ireland, South Korea and Africa. Among these ecocritical engagements, the African concept of *ubuntuism* and the Indian concept of *tinai* stand apart for their glocal nature.

Literary to Cultural and Media Ecocriticism

The use of cultural texts in analyses is a result of the aforementioned paradigm shift. The corollary of this advancement, though, is the inclusion of lifestyles, social orders and cultural expressions and impression; mere thematic study becomes insufficient in this case. Deep engagement in cultural ecocriticism calls for equal importance in bringing form and content in the purview of ecocritical analyses. A conscious attempt is made in the essays in this volume to realize this responsibility. A few essays on cinema in the volume give equal importance to the technicalities

(camera, videography, editing and sound) of the analysed films as well as to their themes.

A major portion of the book is devoted to essays on cinema. Ten essays in the volume analyse feature films, animation films and documentaries dealing with environmental themes. Ecocinema criticism is still in its infancy with only a handful of critics working in the field. There are not many ecocritical anthologies on cinema available in the international marketplace. Many academicians do not see cinema as worthy of academic discourse. Some of them opine that cinema is not a serious medium for engaging with ecological or environmental issues. This attitude towards cinema has kept the medium away from serious ecocritical engagement as well. However, one cannot deny the relevance of visual media in today's world. Therefore, a keen effort was made to encourage contributors to write about cinema. Such agreements and disagreements on the potential of cinema are evident in some of the essays included in the volume. The argued ecocritical and cinematic issues in the essays are (1) depiction of reality, (2) limitation of length, (3) exaggerated facts, (4) fiction as a representation or misrepresentation, (5) representations of people and land in cinema, (6) ecological cinema production, (7) the conflict between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism and (8) defining ecocinema.

The denial of anthropocentrism in ecocriticism is probably a search for an original reality—a closer relationship with the environment. Ecocritics are often seen trying to bring this reality into the light by their critiquing and analyses. Love (1) says, “Environmental and population pressures inevitably and increasingly support the position that any literary criticism which purports to deal with social and physical reality will encompass ecological criticism.” It makes more sense if said the other way—any engagement with ecocriticism would inevitably deal with the physical reality of society and its culture. In that sense, Glotfelty's definition, “the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment” (xviii) and Garrard's call to ecocritics “to recognise that there are serious arguments about the existence of the problems, their extent, the nature of the threat and the possible solutions to them” (5) invite attention to the present reality—the reality of ecological crisis, ecological relationships, ecological representations, ecological alteration, ecological consciousness, ecological citizenship, ecological sensibility, ecological modernisation and ecological knowledge. Today ecocritics would say, “let us not harp on the past and cry about the future instead worry about the present.” The focus on the present, needless to say, has a vested interest—an ecological earth, which might be an activist agenda for future. The “change” aspect in

ecological activism would positively be “realized” with a holistic understanding of ecology.

In February 2013, I attended an interactive session consisting of “interdisciplinary academicians” aimed at creating an action plan for climate change in an academic institution. The discussion largely centred on the use and benefits of nanolubricants. The discussion failed to address the humanistic, environmental, local and global perspectives on climate change. Such atomistic discussion might be useful from a technological perspective but might not be culturally and socially relevant as it fails to initiate a holistic ecological understanding of the earth. *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations*, however, is only an attempt towards the holistic understanding of place, people and culture.

Physical Reality and Transformed Reality

It should be noted that “physical reality” and artistic (cinematic) reality are both represented through one medium the partial representation of reality or perspectives of reality is sometimes called “transformed reality.” Robins and Creighton (34) write: “this transformed reality is no longer reality, not even like reality. Now it is this transformed reality which is known. This ... however, is self-contradictory, for it declares reality both knowable and unknowable at the same time.” Presumably, reality could be knowable and unknowable and the transformed reality reveals both in a prophetic manner. A painting, a creative expression of an artist, might showcase a physical reality through its artistic expression. This expression might change the perspectives of people, or at least excite them or make them think—an opening to the physical reality. Thus, the commodity of reality is constructed from the physical reality and this transformed reality is vibrant, dynamic and contradictory as Burr claims.

The debates surrounding realism and relativism suggest that the term “reality” can imply different contrast poles, with quite different implications. I identified three contrasts to the term “reality”: (1) reality (as truth) verses falsehood; (2) reality (as materiality) verses illusion; and (3) reality (as essence) verses construction.” (Burr 101)

Therefore, the reality depicted in an artistic medium need not be physical reality but can be transformed reality. In fictional cinema, what is depicted is a fictitious reality. In art, it might be an artistic reality. In literature, it might be a literary reality. In each case, the reality is constructed and thus transformed. The transformed reality is a construction of human beings and thus most likely anthropocentric in nature, for example, the auteuristic

films. But even such films might fictitiously deal with a larger environmental issue, making it ecocentric in some sense. As Burr points out, the reality might not refer to a factual and a material reality, but to a constructed one—a transformed reality. However, all films need not be looked at from this perspective alone. Ethnographic films and environmental films are expected to construct a less transformed reality, bringing it closer to “reality.” *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* attempts to continue the discussion on reality in art.

The impact of this volume is almost immediate because Indian ecocriticism is still entangled with literary ecocriticism. *Essays in Ecocriticism*, edited by Nirmal Selvamony, Nirmaldasan and Rayson K. Alex, is the first attempt by Indian academics to publish a volume on ecocriticism. Reviewing the volume, Mark C. Long writes, “The essays also reflect the assimilation of the literary traditions of England and the US, as well as an intellectual history that includes such writers as Martin Buber, Martin Heidegger, John Rawls, and Arne Naess” (190). As the titles explain, *Nature and Human Nature: Ecology, Meaning* (2008), edited by S. Murali, and *Ecological Criticism for Our Times: Literature, Nature and Critical Inquiry* (2011), edited by S. Murali and Ujjwal Jana, contain essays critiquing literary texts. U. Sumathy’s *Ecocriticism in Practice* (2010) “brings out parallels between literary texts and reality and shows how literature serves as a platform to voice environmental concerns” (Kannadasan). The essays in the three volumes of *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*, edited by R. Swarnalatha, are also predominantly based on literary texts. There have been attempts by scholars to critique films and other art forms as presentations in conferences organized by *tiNai* (forum for promoting ecocriticism in India) formerly called OSLE-India. Responding to the increased interest in media studies in the field of ecocriticism, *tiNai* formed a group at the beginning of 2009 named the Ecomedia Team, headed by Mr. Watson Solomon, a media expert, and convened by Sachindev P. S., S. Susan Deborah and K. Samuel Moses to study and research on the ecological aspects of such media as print, video, film and the internet. As part of its activities, the Ecomedia Team organized three workshops on Ecology in Tribal Lore (2009) at Madras Christian College; Ecology and Lifestyle (2010) at the Good Earth School, Chennai; and Ecocriticism: Emerging Trends (2010) at Bharati Women’s College, Chennai, using videos and films as texts. In consultation with the Ecomedia Team, a two-semester course titled “Ecocriticism for Integrated Sciences” was introduced in Central University of Tamil Nadu at Tiruvarur, equipping students to analyse films from an ecocritical angle. In the third semester of the course, students were expected to make video-

documentaries on pressing environmental/ecological issues in the region. The Ecomedia Team has also done a project with a fund from the World Oral Literature Project, making video-documentaries on the ecological life of a tribal community called Mudugar in Attappady, Palakkad District, Kerala, in Southern India. It is this engagement that enabled the editors to venture into the book project on ecocriticism, media and culture. *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* is the first of its kind from India initiated by Ecomedia Team and it owes this to *tiNai*.

Though the volume distinguishes between ecological and environmental essays, the essays are categorized according to the texts used for analysis, broadly speaking, cinema, other arts and culture. The categories are not watertight compartments; nevertheless, the essays at times thematically overlap one another. Culture, in its broadest sense, is considered to be any intellectual production of an individual or a community espousing visual art, literature, performance, gender, architecture, films, video, internet, family, home, language, market, economy, politics, society, agriculture, environment and so on. In that sense, media are a part of cultural production. However, the editors of the volume give special focus to cinema considering its recent popularity quotient and the outgrowth progress that it has attained in Indian academia. The volume has two sections—Ecocriticism and Cinema, and Ecocriticism and Culture.

The first section—Ecocriticism and Cinema—consists of ten essays. Rayson K. Alex's essay titled, "Towards T-Documentary: Critiquing Ecocinema," Patrick D. Murphy's "Directing the Weather, Producing the Climate," Simon C. Estok's "Spectators to Future Ruin: Ecological Representations and Their Consumption," Susan Ward's and Kitty Van Vuuren's "Exploring Ecocriticism in Australian Film and Television Studies," Deidre Pike's "Comic Complexity in *Dr. Seuss's The Lorax*: Seuss's Tragic Ecoclassic Morphs into Feature-length Animated Comedy," Yalan Chang's "An Affective Turn: The Rhetorical Triangle in *The Cove*," Patrick Brereton's "Ecological Representations of Irish Films," Alex's "Tribal People on Screen: Ecological Representation in Documentaries," Sachindev P.S.'s "*Papilio Buddha*: Exploring Ecological Connectedness" and Samuel Moses's essay "*tinai* Reading of the Film *Godavari*" use feature-fiction, documentaries and animation films as texts for analysis. Interestingly, the essays—subtly or overtly—discuss the various aspects of the conflict between reality and transformed reality.

The second section—Ecocriticism and Culture—has five essays: Nirmal Selvamony's essay, "Author in the Light of *tinai*," Lynne Hull's "Ecoethics and the Evolution of an Ecoartist: Saving Threatened Species," Padini Nirmal's "Politicizing Indigenous Knowledge Conservation

Practices: The Dynamics of Using Open Source Media to Preserve Indigenous Cultures,” S. Susan Deborah’s “Eating Out of Your Hands: Food Blogging as Transecological Phenomenon” and Nabeta Sangili’s “*Ubuntuism* in the Proverbs of the Maragoli Community in Western Kenya.” The essays read literary, artistic and cultural texts from an ecocritical angle.

Probably, the circle of ecocriticism will be complete if the political and economic aspects of the issues dealt with are considered (Nayar). In that sense, the editors do not claim the volume to be a holistic one. However, the essays give neither an economic nor a political account of any of the issues dealt with. To elaborate on this with an example, an ecocritical analysis of a film ideally critiques various aspects of pre-production, production, post-production and the box-office accounts. However, the possibility of an ecoeconomic analysis would probably go beyond it to include the economic aspects of the themes and subthemes. Similar is the case with the political aspect as well.

Taking into account the steady growth of the ecocritical scenario in India, *Culture and Media: Ecocritical Explorations* strives to give a new direction to the scholars in India (and outside) to have glocal ecocritical perspectives. The volume, the editors believe, will be a small step towards an ecological change. Whether books and ideas can make physical changes is a contestable idea, we are dreamers of an ecocritical world where all literary, cultural, social and political texts and the society itself are guided by ecological principles.

References

- Burr, Vivien. *Social Constructionism*. 1995. New York and Canada: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- Elamparathy, S. “On Towards Indian Ecocriticism.” Central University of Tamil Nadu. Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu State, India. 3 December 2011. Plenary Address.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Glotfelty, Cheryll. “Introduction.” *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1996. xviii. Print.
- Kannadasan, Akila. “Cool Campaigners.” *The Hindu* 16 June 2011. Web.
- Long, Mark C. Rev. of *Essays in Ecocriticism*, eds. Nirmal Selvamony, Nirmaldasan and Rayson K. Alex. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 2009: 190-191. Print.

- Love, Glen A. *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and the Environment*. Charlottesville and London, 2003. Print.
- Murphy, Patrick D. "Toward Transnational Ecocritical Theory: The Example of Hwa Yol Jung." *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields*. UK: Lexington Books, 2009. Print.
- Nayar, Pramod K. "Re: Ecomedia." Message to Rayson K. Alex. 24 Jul. 2013. Email.
- Robins, Edwin Proctor and J.E. Creighton. *Some Problems Of Lotze's Theory Of Knowledge*. New York: Macmillan, 1900. Print.
- Romero, Diana Villanueva. "Reflections on Literature and Environment: An Interview with Scott Slovic." *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 1.2 (2010): 77-78. Web. 4 February 2013.

SECTION I:
ECOCRITICISM AND CINEMA

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS T-DOCUMENTARY: CRITIQUING ECOCINEMA

RAYSON K. ALEX

“Ecology” and “environment” are two words that are interchangeably used in various disciplines. These scientific terms are nowadays used in media, technology and humanities to mean something completely different from what scientists mean. When a person from the humanities uses such scientific terms without any scientific orientation, he/she would rationalize it as “interdisciplinarity.” Such a person would justify his/her argument by stating, “we belong to the humanities discipline; we are not scientists.” Apparently, there is an interaction between the two disciplines. But how could a humanities disciplinarian truly justify this interaction between the humanities and the sciences? The present discussion, however, does not propose a divide between the humanities and the sciences but brings us to the ethics of bridging the divide. A commonly used and overused word is “ecofriendly.” Analysing the ethics of the coinage and usage of the word, I guess, will introduce the argument of the essay.

A Google search for the word “ecofriendly” will yield a plethora of websites using the word in various ways. The buzz word, used widely in marketing today, gives a false impression to the customer that he/she is involved in saving the environment or at least not harming the environment (ecofriendly). “Ecologically friendly,” “environmentally friendly” and “green lifestyle” are functionally similar terms ostensibly pronouncing a friendly attitude towards the earth or the environment (see “What Is Eco-Friendly” in the References). What does the adverb “ecologically” mean in these usages? Any dictionary would logically connect it to the root of the word “ecology,” defining the word as “with respect to ecology.” The terms, as mentioned earlier, might refer to the earth or the environment, but they seldom refer to the scientific discipline of ecology. At this point, it is necessary to define and differentiate the terms. The endeavour is to clearly articulate that “ecology” and