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Rewriting, Reimagining and Reinventing the Environment and Environmental Education as a function of the Arts

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Abstract : Environmental Education and amelioration have long underlined the very imperative nature of the necessity through disciplines including but not limited to sciences, indigenous knowledge systems, literature and arts as intervening subjects. While Performing Arts as a discipline exhibited a humongous concern for uplifting of environmental standards through portrayal of finesse on the platforms aiming to serve the purpose, the literary lens not only witnessed but also imparted crucial additions to the think-tanks, theorization, re-imagination and active representation of the environment as not the mere background of literary, performing and cinematic pursuits but also as having a direct influence on the happenings. Cinema, thus in its ability to borrow and put into effect these brainstormed ideas, became the new norm for environmental representation. All these art forms refused to be merely reduced to portrayal of environment but also worked towards reshaping, reinventing and re-establishing the need for environmental awareness thereby paving way for environmental education in a truly multidisciplinary fashion.

The present study aims at identifying and enlisting the various significant artistic representations of the environment from time to time through arts including the factions of Performing Arts, Literary Arts, Cinematic Arts and also the Creative Arts; ensuring the intertwining relationships in the nature of environmental representation and environmental education as of vital importance. Through a comprehensive deep dive among various artistic movements in history, the study aims at strengthening the vital derivations of environmental education through the arts. The study also aims at critiquing the shortcomings to environmental awareness and the risks posed at environmental education through their understanding as garnered from various forms of arts and artistic endeavours as such. The study also aims at a brief evaluation of artistic movements concerned with the environment and environmental education that are/were visible in the arts.

The approach to the study/research being considered herein is qualitative. Under the qualitative approach, the chosen mode is the case study approach so as to facilitate a broader and deeper understanding of the environment as a subject of representation in the various forms of arts through examining key representations of environment, enlisting them and further deriving educationally suitable explanations for them thereby shedding light on it's immortality, employed creative liberties, underlining movements and further unleashing a scope for studies in the discipline hence allowing a multi-faceted and artistically sound understanding of the same. The study shall also become a key to steer artistic representation of the environment navigating through artistic talents, modes and forms of expression and the need to facilitate environmental education through the arts by imparting a positively appealing image of the same.

IndexTerms - Environmental Arts, Environmental Education, Environmental Representation, Environmental Discourse, Environmental Cinema

Introduction

Aesthetic experiences in nature are believed to deepen the human connection with the environment (Carlson, 1984). Environmental aesthetics explores the intricate relationship between aesthetic appreciation of nature and ethical responsibilities. The present era underpinned by a towering rate of environmental challenges, is also equally horrifying with the urgency of taking action to remediate, if not entirely steer or command these environmental issues. The only sigh of relief in this regard being the field of environmental education underpinning both high hopes, aspirations of remediation and amelioration of environmental issues. With its aims clearly highlighting the need to equip individuals with the emotional, scientific and abilities crucial to not only understand but also drive the notion of harmonious growth, appreciation and conservation of the world within and around us. As the life forms on planet Earth face alarming challenges including but not limited to climate change and decreasing forms of diversity along with the depletion of resources, environmental education and its need in the truest sense, capable enough to facilitate progressive changes is felt.

Indigenous cultures worldwide have long employed artistic traditions to convey ecological knowledge, celebrate the land, and shape cultural identity (Kawagley, 1995). The path to foster intertwined relationships among organisms and the meaningfulness and stability in them has failed to be supplied exclusively with careful and scientifically feasible data. The pivotal role played by the elements of scientific data and theoretical backing, though cannot be denied, however the pressing need for garnering environmental wisdom supplied with humanness, emotion and the role of creativity and artistic endeavours in doing so is felt. This very intertwining of the domains of environment, arts and environmental education signifies its role as being of key importance for a harmonious benefit of all these sectors combined.

Arts in environmental education emphasize experiential learning in natural settings, fostering a sense of place, ecological understanding, and emotional connection (Barzel, 2013). Artistic representations tend to encompass a broad and diverse spectrum of human expression and it is these artistic expressions that have served as a medium for human beings facilitating exploration, interpretation and interaction with the world around.

Arts accommodate diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds, enabling learners to express their unique perspectives on environmental issues (Gruenewald, 2003). Art in its varied forms, be it visual art, literary art, musical representation and performing arts such as theatre and dance exhibit a notable capacity to transcend barriers not only of language but also cultures working by evoking emotions, enabling introspection, and enlightening imagination. Precisely, it is this transformative potential that makes art an invaluable asset in the realm of environmental education.

Community art projects provide opportunities for collective expression and ecological awareness, fostering community engagement and collaboration (Jordan & Hinds, 2016). It cannot be called a mere embellishment when the integration of arts and environmental education is achieved but can rather be pointed out as a remarkable upgradation in perspective by acknowledging that apart from imparting factual knowledge, it is crucial to foster a sense of curiosity, wonder, delight or empathy towards the environment.

Arts-based environmental education empowers individuals to advocate for environmental causes and take meaningful action (Stevenson & Dillon, 2018). Engagement with nature on a visceral and emotional level is enabled through the arts thereby overriding the boundaries of the instruction imparted in a conventional classroom. It is through the arts that individuals are encouraged to explore the ecological details, question and connect with their intricacies and to facilitate development with a harmonious purview, something that conventional pedagogical methods may find difficulty with.

Objectives of the Study

The present study underlines the following objectives:

- To discuss the movements concerning environment and its related areas in the discipline of humanities
- To disseminate the key takeaways regarding manner of perception and representation of environment as garnered through artistic movements
- To locate and identify the discourse of the environment and environmental education in literary and cinematic medium of representation
- To evaluate the intended aims of environment and environmental education through representational arts and their key movements

Delimitation of the Study

The present study is delimited to specific movements in various artistic forms, namely, Romanticism, Marxism, Naturalism and Genre Hybridism (Bollywood Masala Genre) and discusses the nuances of environment and environmental education disseminated by these movements.

Methods and Procedures

The present study utilizes the qualitative approach to research under which the case-study method has been chosen to facilitate a broader and deeper understanding of the subjects and forms of representation concerned. Representative texts and/or thinkers were chosen for the description of each age/period/movement under the lens of environmental education.

Discussions and Findings

Foundational takeaways of Arts in Environmental Education

To understand the significance of arts in environmental education, we must first delve into the theoretical foundations that underpin this approach. Several foundational takeaways inform the integration of arts into environmental education, each contributing to a multifaceted and holistic understanding of the interplay between human beings and the environment.

Aesthetic Experience and Environmental Aesthetics:

Aesthetic experiences—those moments of profound beauty, awe, and inspiration—have the power to deepen our connection with nature. Environmental aesthetics, a field within philosophy, explores the intricate relationship between the aesthetic appreciation of the environment and our ethical responsibilities toward it. By incorporating aesthetics into environmental education, we encourage learners to develop a heightened sensitivity to the beauty and intricacy of the natural world, fostering a sense of stewardship.

Ecopedagogy:

Ecopedagogy is an evolving pedagogical philosophy that emphasizes ecological consciousness and ethical responsibility. It recognizes the role of arts in cultivating ecological awareness, ecological ethics, and ecological identity. Ecopedagogical approaches often employ the arts to engage learners in immersive, place-based experiences that instill a profound sense of connection with local ecosystems and communities.

Biophilia Hypothesis:

Proposed by biologist E.O. Wilson, the biophilia hypothesis suggests that humans possess an innate affinity for nature and other living beings. Arts in environmental education align with this hypothesis by nurturing and amplifying individuals' inherent biophilic tendencies. Through artistic exploration, learners develop a deeper appreciation for the diversity and complexity of life on Earth, reinforcing their intrinsic connection to nature.

Deep Ecology:

Deep ecology, as a philosophical and ethical framework, advocates for a radical shift in human consciousness—one that recognizes the intrinsic value of all life forms and ecosystems. The arts serve as a conduit for deep ecological understanding, encouraging learners to transcend anthropocentrism and embrace an ecological worldview. Through creative expression, individuals explore their place within the web of life and cultivate a sense of kinship with non-human beings.

Further Explorations:

The integration of arts into environmental education is not a novel concept; rather, it has deep historical roots. Indigenous cultures worldwide have long employed artistic traditions to pass down ecological knowledge, celebrate the land, and forge a sense of identity rooted in the natural world. These traditions continue to inspire modern practices that recognize the significance of indigenous ecological knowledge and artistic expression.

In recent decades, the incorporation of arts into environmental education has gained momentum within educational institutions, environmental organizations, and communities worldwide. This resurgence has been driven by a growing awareness of the need to cultivate ecological literacy and a sense of environmental stewardship in an increasingly urbanized and technocentric world.

Theater productions, eco-art installations, community mural projects, nature-inspired poetry workshops, and immersive outdoor experiences are just a few examples of how the arts are being harnessed to engage learners of all ages. These approaches transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries, inviting collaboration between artists, educators, scientists, and communities in the pursuit of environmental understanding and action.

At its core, the integration of arts into environmental education represents a profound paradigm shift—one that transcends the transmission of information to evoke a sense of connection, compassion, and responsibility. Through the arts, learners embark on a journey of exploration and self-discovery, fostering an enduring bond with the natural world that extends beyond the classroom.

Embarking on this exploration of arts in environmental education, one shall delve into the multifaceted dimensions of this approach and be enabled to examine the myriad ways in which the arts enable individuals to become beneficiaries of environmental education.

Concerns of Environmental Education garnered through Key Movements in Arts: Thematic Placeholders of Environment and Environmental Education

Naturalism: Foundations in Environmental Education through realisation of intrinsic value of nature

Environmental education, as a field, seeks to promote ecological literacy, sustainable behavior, and a sense of responsibility toward the environment. Naturalism, a philosophical perspective rooted in the idea that nature has inherent value and should be respected and preserved, provides a rich foundation for environmental education. The integration of naturalism into environmental education, emphasizes its potential to foster a profound and enduring connection between individuals and the natural world.

Intrinsic Value of Nature: Naturalism posits that nature has intrinsic value, independent of its utility to humans. This perspective challenges anthropocentrism and emphasizes that nature deserves respect and protection simply because it exists. In environmental education, this principle underlines the importance of instilling a deep reverence for the natural world.

Interconnectedness: Naturalism recognizes the intricate web of life, highlighting the interdependence of all living beings. Environmental education often incorporates this concept by teaching about ecosystems, food chains, and the ecological relationships that sustain life. Understanding these connections promotes a holistic view of nature.

Direct Experience and Observation: Naturalism encourages direct engagement with the natural world through observation and experience. Environmental education often emphasizes outdoor learning, field trips, and hands-on activities to enable individuals to connect with nature firsthand. This direct interaction fosters a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Ecological Ethics: Naturalism promotes ecological ethics, emphasizing the moral responsibility to protect and conserve the environment. Environmental education integrates this ethic by instilling values of stewardship, conservation, and environmental responsibility. It encourages individuals to take action to preserve nature for future generations.

Transcendentalism: The transcendentalist movement in the 19th century, led by thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, embraced naturalism's core principles. Their writings and philosophy emphasized the spiritual connection between humans and nature. Today, their works continue to inspire environmental education, advocating for a deep communion with the natural world.

Experiential Learning: Environmental education draws from the naturalist tradition of experiential learning. Outdoor education programs, nature camps, and wilderness experiences provide opportunities for individuals to engage directly with nature, fostering a sense of place and ecological understanding.

Conservation Efforts: Naturalism's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature has played a crucial role in conservation movements. Environmental education often aligns with these efforts by educating individuals about the importance of protecting biodiversity and natural habitats.

Naturalism's philosophical principles, rooted in the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all life, provide a robust foundation for environmental education. By incorporating naturalism, environmental education can foster a deep and enduring connection between individuals and the natural world. This connection, grounded in direct experience, observation, and ecological ethics, has the potential to inspire a new generation of environmentally conscious and responsible individuals.

Environmental Education in Romanticism: Nature's Connection and it's Nurturing

Romanticism, a cultural and intellectual movement that emerged in the late 18th century, celebrated the profound connection between humanity and the natural world. This movement, characterized by a reverence for nature's beauty and a rejection of industrialization's alienation, has significantly influenced environmental education. Romanticism, with its emphasis on emotional and aesthetic experiences in nature, informs the goals, methods, and outcomes of environmental education, nurturing a deep and enduring bond between individuals and the environment.

Foundations of Romantic Environmental Education

Emotional Connection:

Romanticism places a strong emphasis on emotional responses to nature. Romantic writers and poets, such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, celebrated the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world. Environmental education often draws from this emphasis on emotional experiences in nature to foster a sense of wonder, awe, and empathy toward the environment.

Aesthetic Appreciation:

The Romantics had a keen appreciation for the aesthetic beauty of nature. They regarded nature as a source of inspiration for art, literature, and creativity. In environmental education, this aesthetic dimension is integrated to encourage individuals to engage with nature through artistic expression, photography, and creative writing, enhancing their connection with the environment.

Spiritual and Transcendental Elements:

Romanticism often explored the spiritual and transcendental aspects of nature. This perspective emphasizes the idea that nature holds a deeper, mystical significance. Environmental education can incorporate these elements to encourage individuals to explore the spiritual dimension of their relationship with the environment.

Influence of Romanticism on Environmental Consciousness

Early Environmental Conservation:

Romanticism's celebration of nature played a pivotal role in early conservation efforts. The movement inspired the protection and preservation of natural landscapes and the establishment of national parks, contributing to the development of modern environmental conservation initiatives.

Nature Writing:

Romantic writers and poets produced influential nature literature that celebrated the beauty and grandeur of the natural world. Works like Thoreau's "Walden" and John Muir's writings on Yosemite helped shape the genre of nature writing, which continues to inspire environmental education and ecological awareness.

Experiential Learning:

Environmental education often emphasizes experiential learning in natural settings. This approach draws from Romantic ideals of direct engagement with nature to foster a sense of place, ecological understanding, and emotional connection.

Environmental Ethics:

Romanticism's emphasis on the intrinsic value of nature has informed modern environmental ethics. Environmental education promotes ethical considerations and responsibilities toward the environment, aligning with the Romantic tradition of valuing nature for its own sake.

Romanticism's celebration of the emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of humanity's connection with nature has left an indelible mark on environmental education. By incorporating Romantic ideals, environmental education nurtures a profound and lasting bond between individuals and the environment, fostering a sense of environmental stewardship rooted in appreciation, empathy, and wonder.

Environmental Education and Marxism: Emphasizing the Class Struggle and paving way for Environmental Consciousness

Marxist Environmentalism represents a critical perspective within environmental thought that seeks to integrate Marxist principles with ecological awareness. It bridges the socio-economic critique of capitalism found in Marxism with a growing concern for environmental degradation. This synthesis, often referred to as "eco-Marxism," illuminates the interconnectedness of class struggle and ecological crises, offering a framework to analyze and address the complex relationship between human societies and the environment.

Foundations of Marxist Environmentalism

Historical Materialism:

At the core of Marxism is historical materialism, a perspective that examines how material conditions shape societal development. Traditional Marxism has primarily focused on class struggle and the dynamics of capitalism. However, eco-Marxism expands this perspective to include the ecological dimension. It asserts that economic systems are deeply entwined with the exploitation and degradation of nature.

Capitalism and Ecological Crisis:

One of the central tenets of Marxist Environmentalism is the critique of capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit and growth. Capitalism's inherent drive for expansion and accumulation often leads to the overexploitation of natural resources, environmental degradation, and social inequality. This perspective highlights the role of capitalism in exacerbating ecological crises, such as climate change, deforestation, and pollution.

Commodification of Nature:

Marxist Environmentalism emphasizes the capitalist commodification of nature. It argues that under capitalism, nature is transformed into a commodity, subject to market forces and exploitation. This commodification extends to the privatization of resources, where corporations profit from activities like water privatization, land enclosures, and resource extraction, often at the expense of marginalized communities and ecosystems.

Labor and Nature:

Traditional Marxism emphasizes the exploitation of human labor by capitalist systems. Eco-Marxism extends this concept to include the exploitation of nature. It suggests that both human labor and nature are sources of value and that capitalism tends to exploit both relentlessly. This perspective underscores the need to recognize the intrinsic value of nature beyond its utility for profit.

Marxist Environmentalism, or eco-Marxism, represents a critical perspective that integrates Marxist principles with ecological awareness. It highlights the role of capitalism in environmental degradation and social inequality and emphasizes the commodification of nature. While it offers valuable insights, it also faces challenges, including critiques about its focus on class struggle and the feasibility of transitioning to alternative systems.

As global environmental challenges continue to escalate, eco-Marxism reminds us of the deep connections between economic systems and ecological crises. It calls for a re-evaluation of our societal values and priorities and the pursuit of a more just and sustainable relationship with the environment.

Genre Hybridism: Mass and Modern mode of Environmental Representation

Bollywood, the vibrant and influential film industry of India, has traditionally been known for its colorful song-and-dance sequences, gripping drama, and larger-than-life storytelling. However, beneath the glitter and glamour, Bollywood has occasionally delved into pressing societal issues, including environmental concerns. The exploration of the intersection of environmental education and Bollywood "masala" films, the popular and entertaining genre that blends various elements to cater to a wide audience investigates how Bollywood masala films have been harnessed as a medium to convey environmental messages, educate the masses, and inspire change.

Bollywood Masala Films: A Cultural Phenomenon

Bollywood masala films, characterized by their mix of melodrama, romance, action, and music, hold a significant place in Indian popular culture. These films have an unparalleled reach, both domestically and internationally, making them a potent vehicle for conveying important messages. While the primary goal of masala films is entertainment, they often incorporate elements of social commentary and reflection.

Environmental Education in Masala Films

Depiction of Environmental Issues: Over the years, Bollywood masala films have portrayed a range of environmental issues, including deforestation, water scarcity, pollution, and wildlife conservation. These films use the power of visual storytelling to depict the consequences of environmental degradation.

Example: In the film "Swades" (2004), directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, the protagonist confronts rural electrification challenges, highlighting the importance of sustainable energy solutions.

Advocacy for Environmental Conservation: Some masala films actively promote environmental conservation and sustainability. They inspire viewers to take action and protect their natural surroundings.

Example: "Paani" (unreleased as of my last knowledge update in September 2021), directed by Shekhar Kapur, explores a dystopian future where water is scarce, emphasizing the urgent need for water conservation.

Educational Messaging: While delivering entertainment, masala films often incorporate educational messaging related to environmental issues. This can range from simple awareness-raising to more in-depth exploration of ecological challenges.

Example: "PK" (2014), directed by Rajkumar Hirani, uses humor and satire to address cultural and environmental issues, urging viewers to question societal norms and environmental practices.

Mass Appeal: The widespread popularity of Bollywood masala films ensures that environmental messages reach a broad audience, transcending demographic and geographic boundaries.

Behavioral Change: These films have the potential to influence viewers' attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. Positive depictions of sustainable practices can encourage individuals to adopt eco-friendly habits.

Commercial Constraints: While masala films have the reach, the commercial nature of Bollywood can sometimes dilute the depth and seriousness of environmental messaging. Filmmakers may prioritize entertainment over education.

Stereotypes and Simplification: Environmental issues can be oversimplified or stereotyped in masala films for dramatic effect, potentially leading to misunderstandings or misrepresentations.

Bollywood masala films, with their captivating narratives and extensive reach, serve as a unique platform for environmental education. They have the potential to raise awareness, inspire action, and reach a vast and diverse audience. While challenges exist, the incorporation of environmental themes into this influential genre can contribute to a greater understanding of ecological issues among the masses. As Bollywood continues to evolve, its role in environmental education through masala films remains a captivating and valuable aspect of India's cinematic landscape. Further research and exploration in this area can shed light on the effectiveness of masala films as a medium for environmental education and advocacy.

Conclusion

Environmental education has long played a vital function in the shaping of human attitudes towards the environment by not only enabling them but also guiding and facilitating them to be steered in the right direction. Arts in all its forms and versions, places and times, perspectives and aims alike has worked towards imparting a stance of environmental education which need not necessarily be positive but which in the longer run has worked more in favor of environment than against. The ability to connect and transcend into environment empowered by art is one of art's unique features that has further only strengthened the nuances of environmental education.

Movements discussed in the study, viz. Naturalism, Romanticism and Marxism have shaped their perspective from a critical lens thereby enabling others to share or understand the same. With major emphasis mostly centered around aesthetic appeal, conservation and appreciation of nature and/or environment, these movements have imparted a rather artistically appealing yet logically sound reasoning in the support of fulfilled their role in environmental education through diverse means, thoughts and forms.

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