

The Material and Mythological Significance of Dirt in Pundalik Naik's the Upheaval

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Abstract

This essay takes a look at Dirt in Indian fiction and state it is significant not as a emblem or sign — which is how traditional literary criticism has addressed it — but also as a material that can transform. In order to conceptualise dirt as a literary topic, I offer a material ecocritical framework, and then I analyse selected passages from four famous Indian novels with an emphasis on dirty materialisation and change. My argument is based on the fact that Pundalik Naik's *The upheaval* places a strong emphasis on a number of different dirt scenes, all of which feature various processes. It turns out that dirt is not passive but rather active. Depictions of nature as anthropomorphic can be reconceptualised as not inevitably being expressive or as instances of the pathetic fallacy by looking at material ecocritical analysis, which rejects as a precondition of agency. Instead, such portrayals can be seen as bearing witness to the way in which authority is shared by living creatures and the environment in which it operates.

Keywords: Material Ecocriticism, Dirt Theory, Indian Literature, Material Agency.

Introduction

Due to the abundance of myths, pictures, and symbolism related to dirt in many cultures, it has long been thought of as a potent literary symbol. With myth and religion, literature is preoccupied with dirt. Though most people do not enjoy seeing dirt in their house on table, kitchen etc., only in extreme situations they find it threatening, morally objectionable and dangerous like dust bowl of America and Canada in the year 1930. The word "dirt" is typically understood to have pejorative overtones due to the way it is typically defined. Dirt is defined as "a substance, such as mud or dust, that soils someone or something" in the Oxford Dictionary. Evidently, the word derives from the old Scandinavian word "dirt" which refers to excrement. However, our current understanding of word differences and their usage has broadened to include the more

vernacular "dirt or earth." This is because new English has adopted a broader global vocabulary. It was referred to during the conference call as something "serious" and "substantial," and it was emphasised how the concept "reaches out" in a variety of various ways.

The word has varied associations with the concepts of "disorder," "abjection," and "disgust," according to 20th-century theorists. Theorists who contend that "dirt is not truly dirt but something else" have recently come under fire from philosopher Olli Lagerspetz for their "easy reductionism" (Smith 2018). For instance, dirt is described as "stuff out of place" in Mary Douglas' case. A concept is sent to "the foggy regions of symbolic" in Julia Kristeva's instance. And in the case of Martha Nussbaum, Lagerspetz recognises - and criticises - a dominant trend of "craving for

generality," of evincing a "contemptuous attitude toward the particular case," and of reflecting "a need of powerful metaphors in general debates on culture and society" in theoretical debate about dirt over the past few decades. These are all quotations from Wittgenstein that Lagerspetz uses. This pattern is accompanied with a tendency for ominous statements that are meant to represent the entirety of filth and ugliness (Lagerspetz, 2018).

Helen Sullivan, a material eco-critic who published a few years before Lagerspetz, goes much further in identifying the nature of dirt. She challenges the notion of a divide between humans and environment by using dirt. She describes it as a "pernicious" concept that enables humans to "possess, exploit, and even destroy" nature. In lieu of this dichotomy, her "dirt theory" is built on "material environmental immersion" (Sullivan, 2012) and emphasises the pervasive connection between humans and their settings, which she views as continuing. This theory asserts that we are enmeshed into soil in its many forms and that the border that separates us, if any, is a porous membrane through which matter and energy are continuously exchanged in the form of air, water, food, heat, sweat, tears, and trash. Therefore, human bodies and brains are immersed in material environs, which shape us as vividly as we shape them.

Anthony Lioi observed that "despite its desire to affirm earth, much of ecocritical culture had been dirt rejecting. Therefore, we must construct a symbolic place in ecocriticism for dirt... and give dirt its due." Within Social science and humanities, dirt, has attached little attention compared to exponential literature of water, air, and land because Dirt is an element that least likely contributes to sense of place or environment; people don't enjoy seeing dirt in their lawn or kitchen and only find dirt threatening and dangerous in extreme situations. There is a substantial gap in knowledge of dirt in ecocriticism. One such gap is the relative lack of insight into the dirt as an agentic matter who can produce its own meaning. In this research, I will analyse how in Indian Fiction dirt was "vital player" that interacted with human and non-human. My hypothesis is that the dirt in our immediate surrounds has an affect on the environment by

changing it and making it unpredictable, which is something that humans cannot control. However, with the symbolic place, I also want to embrace dirt consciously and concretely. Thus, I will employ dirt theory, material ecocriticism to explore Dirt agency in the Indian literature.

A few words of terminology seem necessary. In Dirt theory and Material Ecocriticism, article Heather I. Sullivan focused on Dirt aesthetics and material ecocriticism and said, "Green thinking neglects the less glamorous and less colourful dirt components." . Dirt is used as a ground without which life will not sustain on earth. Dirt encloses as nurturing soil and the darker side of dirt dust, the toxic substance of industrialization and depleting soil they are destructive agentic in the soil. Soil stands on a line between dirty and clean, one contaminating our homes and the other purifying our land. While the blurry brown along the road or in the distance hardly registers in many Anthropocene scenes, that out-of-focus brown is actually the force behind the action. The modern brown is becoming darker—darker as in hazardous, loaded with pesticides and herbicides, and polluted by industry.

Despite the fact that the scientific tradition that supports the "mechanical order" (Merchant, 1920) implied in this shift of perspective is in every literature, the Indian literature is an essential form of literature for the investigation of the historic value of dirt as matter. This is due to the fact that dirt appears to be so strongly linked to the rapid and widespread industrialization and colonisation that shaped this India Literature. As a consequence of this, dirt seems to fit in seamlessly with the shift from a naturalistic and philosophical understanding of nature to a more technological and scientific one. What I wish to argue against, though, is that My investigation into how dirt is portrayed in Indian literature, which is presented in the following, leads me to believe that imagery of dirt continues to be quite fruitful all throughout Indian literature (and, in fact, into the twentieth and the twenty-first). In particular, the strong agentiality of dirt in literary works opposes narratives that link technical command of nature with a passive environment. These narratives are commonly found in environmental studies. Instead, the way in which dirt is described gives the

impression that Indian writers were fully aware of its power to affect and influence both persons and their bodies. This implies that Indian writers did not view Dirt as being a passive force.

Material ecocriticism is the theoretical foundation I am using to conceptualise the significance of dirt in Indian fiction. The work of the New Materialists, upon which material ecocriticism is based, reconceives of agency as encompassing both nonhuman and material action. This is connected to a perspective that regards matter as constantly developing and (re-) materialising rather than being solid and inert. As a result, the variations between different types of matter are not thought of as being unchangeable. Generally eschew the distinction between organic and inorganic, or animate and inanimate, at the ontological level” and stress the enmeshed rather than distinct condition of these categories . As Jane Bennet emphasises, one aim is to “highlight the extent to which human being and thinghood overlap, the extent to which the us and the it slip-slide into each other. One moral of the story is that we are also nonhuman and that things, too, are vital players in the world. Dirt regularly emerges as a "essential player" in Indian literature, interacting with human/ non-human and environment and leaving its marks.

Since it places such a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of people and things, material ecocriticism addresses a wider range of issues than only the function of matter in relation to people. As Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman make clear, “what the material turn is all about is not simply a joint consideration of matter and life” ; rather, matter is itself viewed as “a field of distributed agency, This lack of willpower as a prerequisite for agency not only expands the playing field but also helps to create a view of matter as "self-creative, productive, and unpredictable It is because of this that it prepares the way for the rediscovery of a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. In her agential-realist explanation of matter, Karen Barad emphasises that "matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, matter is

substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency” .

Both new materialism and the study of dirt as it relates to literature can be beneficial to one another. In order to understand dirt as a material that is neither fixed, substantial, nor precise, it is helpful to have a different perspective on the material nature of matter. At the same time, the depiction of Dirt in earlier centuries reveals that while new materialism may be a relatively modern theoretical intervention, literature has a long heritage of depicting matter as agential. In the nineteenth century in Britain, for instance, the agential nature of Dirt became a topic of great concern in the context of sanitary reform. This was due to the fact that disease aetiology beliefs of the time maintained that moisture was producer of miasma and generated sickness. The unease that this picture caused was given voice in a variety of specialised discourses, one of which was literature, in which it was imaginatively portrayed through depictions of aquatic agency and situations in which human characters interacted with water. Literature is able to give narrative form to the numerous material entanglements that exist between humans and Dirt . These entanglements, depending on their degree of intensity, can sometimes call into question the very concept of "the environment" or of "nature" as a category distinct from humanity.

It investigates the literary depiction of a certain kind of matter, namely Dirt in its many materializations, such as mud, dust and soil .Specifically, it focuses on the representation of Dirt in the work Pundalik Naik. This is because it was during this time that large-scale industrialization and colonization was taking place in India and other countries. The idea investigation into how literature portrays Dirt and challenges the notion that matter was consequently re-conceptualized as inert. My argument is that Dirt remained to be thought of as living stuff even after the mechanical order was established, and the fact that its agentiality was represented in literature suggests that this tradition survived even after the order was made mechanical.

Material Ecocriticism in the Upheaval

Pundalik Naik's 2002 *The Upheaval* is the first Konkani novel to be translated into English by Vidya pai. Keeping his own village in mind Naik's personal ethos and rustic and agrarian life of village. In Naik's words, "Kolamba village nestled in the curve of the river Mandovi as snugly as a water pot fits against a woman's hip" The main goal of Naik is to explain how the area around the village is rich of natural beauty and that the Kolamba people are focused on agriculture, but the mining mafia has a negative impact on the land and to a greater extent their agricultural civilization, which was founded on fertile soil. The novel contributes to emerging discourse of environmental justice that has drawn attention to environmental justice and draws attention to the unequal and disproportionate affecting poor communities. For Indians, nature is just not a matter below the feet rather it is an essence of culture they have divine faith and deep reverence for it. The villagers celebrated a few festivals: Barras it is an agricultural festival of the fertility of soil celebrated once in twelve months. To give respect to soil. In the novel soil is a vibrant agent, in the setting that shapes the character experience of their surrounding and ultimately challenges the preconceived dichotomy between nature and human.

Perception and dust

The most evident evidence of the altering effects of dirt is conveyed to the reader through the novel's landscape imagery, which is replete with references to Indian pastoralism and its customs. . Contrary to initial expectations, the story is replete with landscape descriptions written in an almost pastoral way. In the introductory chapter, Naik describes the natural beauty of willage to illustrate the rural agricultural attractiveness of the village.

" Kolamba town snuggled in the bend of the river Mandovi as snugly as a woman's water pot fits against her hip. The cashew trees were dripping with fruit, which hung from each branch. Every day, mango blossoms fell to the ground and baby jackfruit grew larger and plumper on the branches. Clusters of coconuts atop the palms resembled enormous pots strung together, indicating an abundant harvest in the coming weeks." (Naik,2002)

Later, by utilizing, the pastoral contrast emphasises the global impact of dirt on the ecosystem. More than the background, the dirt irreversibly shapes the ecosphere. The vegetation in the setting is far from static and harmonious due to the presence of dirt. More than a backdrop, the dirt irreversibly shapes the ecosphere, displaying the complexities of the prior ecosphere. Equally dissimilar to the pastoral story are the first-hand accounts of plant life, as the earlier profusion of flora is only apparent in its absence. Not only does the dust make it difficult to distinguish between distinct objects, but it also brings our understanding of the human body into doubt. According to Linda Lorraine Nash, our so-called modern conception of the body is influenced by "Western allopathy and American consumerism." This is a body that is enclosed by skin and sealed off from the outer world (Nash,2006). Nonetheless, dust, which is always there, permeates the body and challenges this worldview. According to material ecocriticism, the ongoing movement of substances into and out of the body is a way for demonstrating that the human body is not a solid block that exists in isolation from its surroundings. The human body is never a strictly enclosed, protected entity; rather, it is "susceptible to substances and flows" (Alaimo, 2010). The few humans who have managed to survive in an abandoned industrial city must fight with ash and their own physical limitations...

It is made clear to the reader that the characters are engulfed in dust throughout the entirety of the narrative, as a result of the dominating subjective influence that dust maintains throughout the novel. As was mentioned previously, it is the most prominent feature that can be seen when travelling across the countryside; their surroundings are grey, and everything is covered in dust. It gives off the sense of being completely submerged in the charred ecosystem. All the Characters in the novel work hard to keep the dust out of their bodies by filtering it out of the water they drink, the food they eat, and the air they breathe. Additionally, they try to keep the dust out of their bodies by keeping their bodies distinct from the dust. The widespread nature of the dust, on the other hand, demonstrates how susceptible the human body is to external influences.

In the dirtscape, it is extremely difficult to preserve a boundary between one's body and their surroundings. The mask is a recurrent element in storyworld and serves multiple functions: it conceals the wearer's identity, reducing the intrusiveness of the technology on the human body; it creates a sense of anonymity in a world that is falling apart; and it protects the wearer from the hazardous effects of the environment. Because "the illusion of control over dirt" by means of the elimination or concealing of bodily filthiness is something that Sullivan views to be fundamental to modernity (Sullivan, 2012), the mask represents their final attempt at sustaining the values of modernity. Their best efforts to stay clean and preserve their bodily integrity appear to be in vain, however, as soon as they washed and replaced their masks with clean, fresh ones, "[t]heir masks were already grey at the mouth and their eyes were darkly cupped". The ash takes away their ability to take pleasure in the most routine of actions, such as bathing themselves and enjoying a good meal. In spite of the fact that they make an attempt to remove it from the water that they consume and the air that they breathe, the "grainy air" continues to infiltrate their bodies, as is evidenced by the fact that its flavour "never left your tongue". The materiality of the substance itself deconstructs strict boundaries between bodies and entities as "[t]he ashen scabland infects everything including pilgrim lungs, and walkers wear makeshift mouth scarves of torn sheets" (Lincoln, 2009). In spite of the cleansing rituals that humans engage in, the level to which they are immersed in their environments is revealed by dirt in a more covert form, often through sickness. The steady influx of unclean stuff into the human body causes a variety of symptoms and alterations in the human body. The impact of the dust on the story's main character, Padhari, is perhaps the clearest example of the dangers posed by the dust. The man's persistent racking cough appears again throughout the narrative, serving as a motif that foreshadows his passing: "There was a cough in his throat that never left". Even in low concentrations, particulate air pollution can negatively impact health a medical implication that keeps coming up as the story goes on and the father's health gets worse.

Even though the man is the main character of almost the whole story, we never find out what made him sick. Their clothes are always black from soot, and images of a man "bent with his hands on his knees, coughing" with "a fine mist of blood" on "the grey snow" suggest that the dusty environment is linked to his poor health in a more subtle way. Ibarrola-Armendariz has also said that he thinks his health is getting worse because he is constantly breathing in dirt and smoke.

Dirt defying human/more-than-human boundaries

In the previous section, I discussed how the dirt's agency manifests itself through its influence on biological processes that are essential to the continued existence of animal and plant life. Another characteristic of dirt that is alluded to in the novel is the unpredictability of the surrounding environment, as described by the following phrase: "the days were grayer each one than what had gone before" (Naik, 2006). The dirt is the agent of change, and as a consequence, it renders one's environment more indecipherable. Because of its erratic and unpredictable behaviour, the soil makes it impossible to forecast the rate and nature of the changes that are taking place in their environment. As a consequence of this, the dirt is a symbol of disorder and impairs one's capacity to make sense of their immediate surroundings.

The repeated descriptions of drifting dust with little else movable in the terrain add to the eerie atmosphere of the storyworld. The juxtaposition of the immobile "mummified dead everywhere" and the "blown dust" being "[t]he only thing that moved in the streets" creates unease in the reader. The dust, on the other hand, interferes with the characters' capacity to perceive hazards and possibilities in their surroundings. Due to his disease and impending death, the man gets increasingly insane near the end of the tale. The man forgets the laws of their industrial environment, maybe alluding to "the call of languor and of death," which is accompanied by a loss of hold on reality. Trying to persuade his toddler to sleep under a mountain of dirt. The man utilises his knowledge of the past world, in which the environment operated in a predictable,

decipherable manner and could be read by its human inhabitants. The dichotomy between foregone global expectation and dirt's agency is expressly mentioned here. The characters' capacity to understand their surroundings through multiple periodic categories or subunits, namely the season or the month, but also their location, is obscured by the dust, which further adds to the environment's unpredictable nature. Such strategies for interpreting one's surroundings in the dust-altered setting are no longer as useful as they once were. In her essay outlining dirt theory, Heather I. Sullivan claims that because "dust, dirt, and sand are extremely mobile components of our material surroundings," dirt theory cannot be focused on a particular place or time (Sullivan, 2012). The focus of dirt theory is on processes that are happening simultaneously in time and space concentrating on mud in *The novel* emphasises how obscure time or the place can be.

He had previously made an effort to keep a calendar and keep this ritual of order, but he has since given up on both of these endeavours. He assumed the month was October but he wasn't sure. He had stopped keeping a calendar for a number of years. They were headed in the south direction. There's no way I could make it through another winter in this place. The fact that he no longer maintains a calendar is suggestive of the complete routine that he is subjected to. The calendar, which was once significant because it marked the passage of time, is now meaningless. The man has come to the conclusion that any attempt to monitor the passage of time in this lifeless environment is fruitless, and as a result, he depends only on his past experiences for guidance.

In Indian literature, dirt is used to negotiate more than just metaphors and symbols between humans and nonhumans in an increasingly complex and rationalised public realm.; rather, it was a primary (and highly contested) channel by which interpersonal relationships were basically negotiated. This suggests that the symbolic meaning of dirt in Indian literature must be looked beyond. Recognizing dirt as a material and contemplating the ways in which its materiality is depicted in works of literature draws attention not only to the tangible physical connections among characters and dirt, but also to the mutual recognition of

influence that exists within these interactions; it is not only humans who have an effect on dirt, but dirt also has an effect on humans. The only reason I have emphasised the latter feature here is because it has a pattern of being disregarded in the explanations of the mechanical order that are challenged by my readings.

Conclusion

Thus, Material ecocriticism fosters an intra-active conception of agency while simultaneously pointing to the scope of human authority above the ecosystem by emphasising material agency and supplying an analytical lexicon and toolset for analysing its depiction. In this regard, considering dirt and its significance in Indian Literature is instructive since it can broaden the focus on human social ties that the Indian literature appears to invite. Environmental variables also have an impact on the characteristics in the contexts of dirtscapes that are explored here, in addition to human and societal factors. The portrayal of dirt through material ecocriticism, in the Indian fiction in this article goes beyond the sad fallacy's passive display of character mood. Dirt is not only utilised to highlight events in the lives of characters. There are many ways in which various manifestations of dirt can influence a human/ non-human and , environment , by taking forms of meteorological atmosphere , temperature, or structural bodies of dirt. Character is commonly affected either directly or symbolically by dirt. In the vast majority of cases, these two roles are intricately related to one another.

How to make the environment communicate to readers beyond the logic of anthropomorphism has historically been one of the huge issues that ecocriticism has attempted to address. One possible solution, in my opinion, is offered by material ecocriticism, which emphasises the fact that agency is free from human will. Without necessarily transferring human characteristics onto nature, it is possible to depict nature as agential or even animate. Ecocriticism is reopening understanding of literature which has long highlighted agency of non-human, rather than revolutionising concepts of materiality, because there is a rich, if mostly unexplored, heritage of recognising matter as agential. As was already said, Bennet

suggests that in order to accept the existence of material activity, we may need to harness anthropomorphism. Additionally, I think that material ecocriticism has the ability to cast doubt on anthropomorphism as a concept. Dirt fictions demonstrate how material action escapes the cognitive limits imposed by anthropomorphism and the sad fallacy by emphasising the function of Dirt as a transformative and materialising component that interchange with humanity through many methods.

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