Ecological Affinity: Exploration into the Romantic Construction of Ecology in Devkota's Poetry

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Abstract

This article explores the romantic construction of ecology in the poetic works of modern Nepali poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota. It uses ecocriticism as its theoretical framing to recognize and capitalize on the ecological undertones ingrained in his romantic poetry. This framing situates the poet's romantic imagining within the relevant literature and attempts to find a dialogic space to study his intellectual orientation toward the holistic understanding of the natural world as conceptualized in ecocriticism. The study also explores the entrenched ecological ideas reflected in three deliberately chosen poetic works: *Jwarsamana Prakriti, Muna Madan, and Shakuntala*. In so doing, it attempts to capture how these selected texts display a subtle congruence in shaping Devkota's ecological insights despite their explicit differences in length and scope. The findings of this study reveal how the nature-women relationship, the animal world, and the green language coalesce the construct of his romantic ecology. Additionally, the study points out its limitations and offers some implications for revisiting Devkota's poetic works through the ecocritical lens.

Keywords: romantic poetry, ecocriticism, nature-women relationship, animal world, green language.

Devkota and the Scope of His Romantic Imagining

Laxmi Prasad Devkota (1909–1959), popularly acclaimed as the *mahakavi* (great poet) of Nepali literature, is "essentially a romantic poet" (Bandhu, 2001, p. 517).

According to Luitel (2009), he is regarded as one who introduced modernism through romantic trends. Joshi (2000) found Devkota's nature-centric romantic philosophy to be central in his poetry, in which "nature, humanity, and divinity are intertwined to reveal the significance of life in full" (p. 141). Likewise, Shrestha and Sharma (2004) explored his romantic style of composition and viewpoint, reiterating his position as a romantic poet. In their words, he is "essentially a romantic-naturalist poet" (p. 57). Other Nepali critics, such as Tripathi et al. (2003), also highlighted the nature–human bond as a key aspect of Devkota's poetry. They noted that his poetry reveals "a deeper longing for a nature-nourished human civilization that stands in sharp contrast to the artificial, bourgeois, or industrial civilization" (p. 189). However, Devkota scholars appear to have adopted a static and less critical stance on his devotion to nature. While they acknowledge that Devkota's romantic poetry seeks to renew harmony between humans and nature and encourages the self to return to nature, there is limited literature on how his poetry also reveals ecological undertones—such as a retreat from modern life plagued by materialism, the portrayal of an abundant animal world**,** and the use of nature-oriented language**.**

Some research studies have explored Devkota's ecological sensibility and traits, both with and without the explicit mention of the ecological approach. Devkota (2020), for example, examined the role of animals in *Muna Madan* and revealed the poet's emotional engagement with the diversity of the animal kingdom. His exploration brought to light, for the first time, how the animals in *Muna Madan* reflect both the delightful and tragic moods of the poem, indicating both the usefulness of—and the threat to—animal life. Likewise, Devkota's *Shakuntala* has also been studied from an ecocritical perspective. A study by Rai (2019) used

ecofeminist theoretical concepts to uncover the epic's nature–women interconnection. This study explored the interdependent nexus between nature and women as an interlinked subject in terms of the inferiorization of—and domination over—women and nature. Hence, Devkota's recognition and value as a poet cannot be limited to that of a romantic poet. There are concerns that "Devkota is understood superficially in Nepali literature" (Bhandari, 2009, p. 192).

In this context, this article attempts to re/read Devkota's poetry through an ecocritical approach. As mentioned above, while some studies have taken this direction, the existing literature has yet to fully recognize and value Devkota as a poet with ecological sensibility. Therefore, this study proposes a threefold reading to substantiate ecocritical exploration: the interconnectedness between nature and women, the recognition and value of the animal world, and the green language enriched with wild elements or lush vegetation in rural settings. The primary concern of this study is to examine how Devkota's poetry conveys an acute awareness of the interrelatedness of all life forms in nature and how the language contributes to his ecological affinity. The picture that emerges from this exploration is built on the confluence of romanticism and ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism as a Theoretical Framing

The study uses the concept of ecofeminism to present a fuller picture of Devkota's poetry. "According to ecofeminists, trees, water, animals, toxics, and nature language are feminist issues because understanding them helps one understand the status and plight of women cross-culturally" (Warren, 1997, p. 4). Similarly, Lorentzen and Eaton (2002) emphasize that, in ecofeminism, "the dominations of women and nature are linked in various

ways (e.g., historically, materially, culturally, or conceptually)" (p. 2). Connecting ecocriticism with the pastoral, Gifford (2009) states that "ecocriticism is concerned not only with the attitude to nature expressed by the author of the text, but also with its patterns of interrelatedness, both between the human and the non-human, and between the different parts of the non-human world" (p. 5). In this context, this study demonstrates how Devkota's effort to intimately weave nature into life calls for the exploration of ecocritical concerns.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to capture the complex diversity of Devkota's poetry, this study deliberately selects three of his poetic works: *Jwarsamana Prakriti*, *Muna Madan*, and *Shakuntala*. These poetic texts of varying lengths, as suggested by quotations and existing literature cited below, allow for an exploration of his ecological sensibility as it flows through his poetry. This ecocritical framing is oriented toward rendering the interrelationship between ecology and women, the animal world, and the rustic, green language used to narrate them. This threefold orientation to the romantic construction of ecological thinking constitutes the core of the theoretical framework.

Exploration into the Romantic Construction of Ecology

This section explores the selected texts through an ecocritical lens, as outlined above. It analyzes how gendered perspectives shape representations of both nature and women. Using an ecofeminist framework, the analysis examines how the exploitation of nature and the marginalization and oppression of women are interconnected, rooted in patriarchal structures that prioritize dominance and control. It highlights the complex relationships among gender, power, language, and ecology,

offering insights into the ecological dimensions of Devkota's poetic expression.

Jwarsamana Prakriti

Jwarsamana Prakriti, one of Devkota's celebrated poems, demonstrates a deep relationship between nature, humans, and other creatures on Earth. It begins with a feverish speaker lamenting the rising temperature of the Earth and the oppressive heat affecting both himself and the natural world around him and ends with a healing gesture from the nature goddess. The poem opens by expressing the suffering of a speaker imprisoned in his hut and emotionally crippled by a materialistic fever—a condition that troubled the Romantics—as revealed in the following expression:

> With the worldly fever on the forehead
> I am lying a bird at the window of my own nest
> In longing for a hut to soothe my aching soul.
> (Devkota, 2005, p. 226, trans. mine)

Additionally, the following lines indicate that his fever is spread over both the physical (in the body) and the biological (in the environment) spheres. He shares the impact of this increasing heat thus,

> O, friend! Is there someone to take care of us?
> O, plant! O, bird!
> Thou Sun-laden—O, beautiful flower!
> All those that cannot speak—
> The withered grasses,
> Those living creatures who'd recall pain and pleasure.
> (Devkota, 2005, p. 228; trans. mine)

Upon closer examination, the lines quoted above evoke, through their diction and exclamatory tone, the entire Earth suffering from a surge of heat, expressing sympathy for other life forms and greenery. They convey an acute awareness of the interrelatedness of all life forms and a

sense of helplessness in response to the rising temperature of the Earth. The lines signal a real landscape—plants, birds, flowers, grasses, and all living creatures—that may be seen as organically connected to the diverse forms of life surrounding the speaker. Here, the speaker's association of his fever with all other forms in the environment is deeply ecological. Tripathi et al. (2003) view this fever as a consequence of humans' separation from nature and their insatiable materialistic desires. They argue that this indifference to nature is the root cause of the fever. While these critics note that the poem was written in response to human indifference toward nature and excessive attachment to material gain—driven by the spirit of the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution—what they leave unexamined is the idea of the early impacts of global warming. The image of "withered grasses," for example, can be interpreted as an explicit sign of this. Notably, the poet's privileging of the external over the internal is significant. It can be argued that the fever engulfing both the speaker and his surroundings symbolizes the Earth becoming hotter—more precisely, global warming—which remains a pressing issue today. From an ecological perspective, these lines may be read as evidence reminding us of the dependence and complex interconnection of all living things on this planet. Morton (2010) asserts that "ecology is profoundly about coexistence" (p. 4). This is especially true because "all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as part of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth" (Devall & Sessions, 2005, p. 202). Therefore, this ecological thread of interpretation in the poem reflects not only Devkota's compassionate view of nature as a Romantic poet but also an early concern about the environmental consequences of industrialization that troubled the Romantics.

In the extracts below, the poet further expands his ecological awareness by invoking a sense of shared benevolence and anticipating the eternal blessings of nature:

O, the Earth! Your warming is in spike and sweep
Wait, the heavens will weep
O, creatures! You are burning up
Wait, the soothing balm will caress
O sufferer! You have a fever deep
Wait, the fever will be subdued soon.
(Devkota, 2005, p. 228; trans.mine)

The poet brings both humans and nonhumans together in a collective suffering caused by the increasing heat on Earth, which serves as a warning sign of global climate change. He reminds us that nature is "actually present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it" (Barry, 2020, p. 252). These exclamations express not only a heartfelt recognition of interconnectedness but also the poet's sense of coexistence with other creatures. Devkota quickly turns to nature as a nourishing element that causes rain and subdues the fever of sufferers. The expression "the heaven will weep" indicates that the Earth will be replenished with rain, enabling both humans and nonhumans to receive life. The rain is expected to instill happiness and sustenance into the sphere of Earth and all life forms therein. By sharing the common fate of all sufferers on Earth, the speaker resonates with ecofeminist concerns to save the planet and themselves for common welfare. Cuomo (2002) asserts that "ecofeminism stresses the depth to which human realities are embedded in ecological realities…we are all composed of physical and conceptual connections and relationships" (p. 1). This ecological view of the natural world expresses a deep and abiding interest in the Earth as a dwelling place for all living things (McKusick, 2005, p. 202). It concerns the way we imagine living together with nature. Therefore, nature and

the natural world of animals, birds, and other creatures are taken into consideration by the observant poet. This romantic idea of nature—or more precisely, the feminized nature—signals Devkota's optimistic sense that nature has the power to recover, reflecting Romantics' belief in the organic unity between humans and nature (Garrard, 2007). As a Romantic poet, Devkota depicts nature as "nectar-nourishing, medicinal, and rhythmic" (Devkota, 2005, line 155; my trans.), meaning that nature provides nourishment, heals, and causes the entire world to run in rhythm.

The other side of Devkota's ecological thought embraces a feminized relationship with nature. He addresses nature as the sublime "someone" ("Sundari Kohi," line 29) and evokes this feminized connection with the following lines:

> A tender touch, younger sweetheart, solitary is her tune
> The worldly fever subdued, the forehead is cool and immune.
> (Devkota, 2005, p. 227; trans. mine)

By presenting nature as having a solitary tune, the poet appears to regard nature as "an expression of divinity" (Branch, 1996, p. 283), who performs all healing gestures. Sivaranjani and Rajarajan (2016) maintain that "nature is feminized because it possesses qualities of women" (p. 136). Furthermore, Lakshmitarukmi (2017) notes that "ecofeminists see that women and nature share values that relate to the ability of nurturing, caring, and reproducing" (p. 27). However, the poet laments that this connection has been neglected:

> Blinded is the sight and the heart fouled up
> The worldly fever on our forehead and our conduct plagued.
> (Devkota, 2005, p. 229; trans mine)

The extract above describes the physical and mental condition of modern humans in vivid poetic phrases. At a deeper level, it resonates meticulously with the inevitable consequences of rampant human activities within a global ecosystem that has abandoned humanity. In this context, sharp phrases such as "blinded sight" and "conduct plagued" can be interpreted as a critique of human conditions in modern industrial society, where people are blinded by materialistic gains. From Devkota's perspective, the source of humanity is nature, and "humanity survives only in rural civilization or natural life" (Poudel, 2009, p. 418). However, modern reality is the opposite. Modern forms of consumption and materialism cause fatal psychological and environmental damage. These lines reveal, with apocalyptic intensity, the devastation of nature caused by materialism deeply entrenched in human psyche and behavior. They emphasize ecocentric values regarding the collective fate of humanity lost in materialism and consumption.

As a Romantic poet, Devkota (2005) views "nature as a storehouse, the green treasure" (p. 229; translation mine), which humanity has failed to recognize and value. According to Poudel (2009), "For Devkota, nature is the school of knowledge, man's guru, and the source of human culture; life achieves completeness through nature" (p. 419). However, humans remain indifferent to nature, as revealed in these lines:

> Rich is the sky, rich are the earth and mountains
> Failed to garner our granary as we sank into concrete and fountains.
> (Devkota, 2005, p. 229; trans. mine)

Here, Devkota appears deeply eco-conscious, issuing a warning to humanity that nature is not infinite and that modern forms of consumption may cause irreparable damage. The implied message in these lines reflects

Devkota's philosophy that "humanity can survive in rural civilization or natural life" (Poudel, 2009, p. 418).

Finally, as Devkota favors *pothipan* (feminine quality) over *mardapan* (masculine quality) (Poudel, 2009, p. 419), his poetic language is integral to his romantic ecology. The language in this poem is nourished by his deep fondness for nature and is therefore more feminine in its flow and rhythm. His yearning for life in nature is lucidly presented in the poem. He suggests that poets "are often exceptionally lucid or provocative in their articulation of the relationship between internal and external worlds" (Bate, 2001, p. 251). The rootedness of his romantic ecology is sustained by language that demonstrates his deep appreciation for the inseparable relationship between humans and nature. The examples quoted in this discussion can be understood as instances of the language of nature, which is "highly figurative," "soft and rhythmic" (Tripathi et al., 2003, p. 226). The literariness, imagery, and musicality of the poem heighten the poet's romantic consciousness that humans can rid themselves of worldly fever only by returning to the grandeur of nature—their own ecology. This is what a romantic poet can do. In this regard, Garrard (2007) maintains that "scientific problems might need scientific expertise, and what ecocritics can do is literary and cultural analysis based on rhetorical strategies, the use of pastoral and apocalyptic imagery, and literary allusions" (p. 3). It is this belief that enables the insights of *Jwarsamana Prakriti* to remain effective beyond its publication in 1961.

Muna Madan

Set both in the northern Tibetan territory and the northwest part of the Kathmandu Valley, *Muna Madan* is not only a story of love ingrained in poverty, as commonly understood in much of the Nepali critical literature. Upon

closer examination, the epic reveals significant ecological undertones. This section proposes to examine three aspects through an ecological approach: the language of nature carved in *jhyaure* rhythm (folk verse), the portrayal of Muna's submissive character, and the representation of the animal world.

Muna Madan is often remembered for its rhythmic and lucid narration of a love story. It is celebrated for its simplicity in language and style, reminiscent of British Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth (2006), who advocated simplicity in style and focused on rural life and language. Written in popular folk verse, the poem embodies green and rustic language deeply rooted in ecocentric writings and Romanticism. This linguistic landscape enhances the poem's ecological underpinnings through its preservation of local rhythm and linguistic diversity, firmly grounded in its landscape. Thus, its linguistic landscape functions as topographical material—regional literature carrying typical Nepali linguistic diversity. The epic begins with the celebration of folk verse as a typical creation of Nepali soil.

> The Nepalese folk song in *jhyaure* meter, pleasant and beautiful
> I planted sapling digging untilled, a peasant dutiful. *(Devkota, 2010, p. 5)*
> The wave of *jhyaure* moving through the gulf, plain, and hill,
> Giving a simple and conscious thrill speaks the native soil.
> (Devkota, 2010, p. 5)

The poem derives much of its charm from its simple language, skillful alliteration, and musical meter. This charm creates a rhythmic intensity connected to the community—the "native soil." By grounding the poem in everyday

language and extensively using natural imagery, the poem treats language as a living entity, an enrooted rhythm for its readers. Devkota (2010) asserts, "Jhyaure is our tears story and a route of water" (p. 7). The following excerpt illustrates his deep appreciation for this folk verse:

> The first young leaf is plucked up by a bird by holding in its beak
> The Nature singing the sound of cascade enjoying glory peak
> Being her best friend, the Nepalese people, facing the Sun and rain
> Like a cooing dove, they are uttering the pleasant jhyaure tune.
> (Devkota, 2010, p. 7)

The blending of this folk verse with the natural, physical world evokes not only pastoral peace but also a sense of rootedness, as reflected in the extract above. The atmosphere appears to be a living environment where a bird plucks a leaf and holds it in its beak, while nature sings its song. This scene suggests a rich tropical ecotone inhabited by birds. Ecologically, the bird carries a young leaf or utters a sweet sound like a cooing dove. Nature seems to have embraced the color green in this narration. McKusick (2005) maintains that the greening of language is a poetic practice grounded in deep appreciation for specific diction and versification integrated with its local environment or geographical place. Embellished with simple language and skillful alliteration, the use of folk verse in the poem demonstrates how language and the natural world coexist in harmony. Many of the similes and metaphors are homegrown, drawn from everyday objects or natural phenomena, and the syntax is simple and lucid. The language of low and rural life in *Muna Madan*, especially its constant reference to the lives of common people, resonates with Wordsworth's (2006)

emphasis on rustic language—that is, "the language of real men in a state of vivid sensation" (p. 263).

In the following extract, Muna makes an appeal to Madan, who is set to go to Lhasa:

> Why do you visit the savage society as a so-called trader?
> What is the worth of visiting Lhasa leaving the mother here?
> A bag of gold is equal to hand-dirt; what can be done with wealth?
> Living on greens is better, maintaining peaceful mental health.
> (Devkota, 2010, p. 15)

From an ecocritical point of view, the poem's ecological themes are enhanced through its denunciation of the "savage society" and its connection to real life, as expressed in phrases such as "hand-dirt," "living on greens," and "peaceful mental health." There is an implied urge to connect to the earth for fertility, growth, and energy. By revealing such urges through the female character, the poem reflects the broad social landscape of Nepali society, which appears inseparable from the overall ecosystem. Madan's departure for material progress brings nothing but tragedy to the family. His departure stimulates a complex negotiation of nature and culture arising from our interactions with societal realities.

From an ecological perspective, another important aspect of *Muna Madan* is its portrayal of the animal world. In all its forms, nature embodies both humans and nonhumans as integrated phenomena. On his way to Lhasa, Madan offers a close look at natural phenomena, noting that "sufficiency of the Nature here cannot be told in word" (Devkota, 2010, p. 25). Wild animals abound: "in the dusk light, wandering around, animals strange wild" (p. 25);

"variantly chirping multi-colored birds more than assumption" (p. 25); "the wild animals, plump and stout, enjoying under shade" (p. 26). The mention of diverse animals—including cows, yaks, sheep, and reptiles—in the narration invites ecological discourse. Garrard (2007) maintains that "within ecofeminist theory, the place of animals must be addressed" (p. 5). A study by Devkota (2020) reveals that the "relationship between humans and animals remains somewhat pastoral and idyllic" in *Muna Madan* (p. 172). His study highlights both the usefulness of animals and the threats they face, especially regarding the use of animal products as food, clothing, bedding, blankets, curtains, and medicinal musk. For example, Chyangba places Madan on a lamb's "soft woolen mattress" (Devkota, 2010, p. 49) and feeds him lamb's soup, which indicates the slow but continuous hunting of animals. Rooted in communal obligations specific to rural localities, such examples warn us that animal ecologies are vulnerable to human impacts. Hence, "animals and animal products have recently become the site of a new range of concerns" (Garrard, 2007, p. 148) in ecocriticism. In this context, the articulation of species diversity is increasingly ecological, echoing "the troubled boundaries between the human and other creatures" discussed by ecocritics (Garrard, 2007, p. 148).

However, Devkota's romantic ecology also rejoices in the ecologically rich animal world. Such romantic depictions of animals help develop a sense of the wider boundaries of life by fostering awareness of existence beyond our own (Oerlemans, 1994). The following extract explicitly depicts an abundant animal world:

> The birds twittering, chirping in twilight,
> The doves' and cuckoos' cooing and cooing, and
> pheasants' flapping sight.

(Devkota, 2010, p. 51)

A peacock's style, scratch of doe and buck deer's moving sound,
The grown-up creepers started to bloom, and the bees' buzzing made
Lush greenery with many kids and fawns, playing by shaking head.

(Devkota, 2010, p. 51)

The diverse life forms, their joy, and the greenery depicted above heighten Devkota's romantic ecology beautifully. The setting where Madan recovers with "nutritious yak-milk for his nourishment best" (Devkota, 2010, p. 47) is both ecologically and romantically rich in its fondness for rural and natural life. Devkota (2010) explicitly expresses his deeper longing for the "love land with lush greenery" (p. 51), a place where "neither pollution of the environment nor any temper hung" (p. 49). As a romantic poet, he advocates for nature quite explicitly:

The eyes were graceful by the greenery, Natural heritage,
Disease and sickness could be healed up by the local craft and shrub;
Men give importance to urban life, but the real life is hedge.

(Devkota, 2010, p. 49)

Here, herbs connect humans to real, natural life on the physical earth, which holds ecological significance of its own.

Apart from its richness in language, nature, and the animal world, *Muna Madan* is an important site for exploring Muna's role as a traditional Nepali wife who is mentally and physically devoted to her husband. She embodies a patriarchal socio-economic structure in which males are breadwinners and females handle domestic chores.

Her submissive character is projected as incapable of walking across "hills and mountains, vertical steep" (Devkota, 2010, p. 21) but "ready to enter even the flame of pyre" (Devkota, 2010, p. 35) for the sake of her husband. The following lines articulate Muna's condition in her husband's absence, likening her to a caged bird: "An innocent bird captive in a cage, has to weep silently / How could it escape out of the cage-bars, pecking them violently" (Devkota, 2010, p. 17).

In her husband's absence, Muna "has to weep silently," like "an innocent bird captive in a cage" (Devkota, 2010, p. 17) that pecks at the bars in vain to escape. She has "so delicate" and "shapely feet" like "lotus-fabricate" (p. 35). Her heels are compared to "duck's eggs" (p. 35), implying they are round, soft, and fragile. Her teeth are described as "pomegranate seeds" (p. 13) and "like pearls" (p. 35). In contrast, Madan, as a male figure, "sets himself apart from woman and nature" (Griffin, 1978, p. 1) and labels himself as "a hero" who "struggles in the world" "to achieve victory" (p. 19). Muna's condition is likened to "the birds' eggs" (Griffin, 1978, p. 1), underscoring patriarchal values embedded within the social system. These values reveal masculinity as dominant and women as submissive and fragile. Ecofeminists such as Griffin (1978) juxtapose this subordination of women and nature to critique the patriarchal social system. Therefore, the gendered juxtaposition in *Muna Madan* evokes several "forms of dualisms such as reason and emotion, culture and nature, and man and woman" (Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002, p. 1).

From an ecofeminist perspective, *Muna Madan* highlights how animals are consumed by humans and women are subjected to control. It suggests how patriarchal values function across natural and social landscapes, constructing manhood through dominance over animals and

women. These concerns are central to ecofeminism because "what makes ecofeminism distinct is its insistence that nonhuman nature and naturism are feminist issues" (Warren, 1997, p. 4). Additionally, there are indications of physical world destruction, apparently symbolizing Muna's death. The entire city is described as sunk in "mournful plight" (Devkota, 2010, p. 71), where "an owl with round eyes sat on the stump broken by hurricane" (p. 71), and "the dog was weeping sitting on the doorway" (p. 71). Here, the bird functions as an organic element, not just a metaphor. The owl's round, large eyes symbolize destruction in the town. This devastation appears to signify the consequences of subordinating both women and nature. Thus, this exploration offers new ecocritical meanings to Devkota's romantic fervor devoted to nature's beauty, mysticism, and wilderness in various forms.

Shakuntala

The epic *Shakuntala* essentially tells the story of Shakuntala's relationship with King Dushyanta, presented through her childhood, marriage, separation, and reunion with him. Viewed from a broadly ecological perspective, Shakuntala's growth process itself forms a grand narrative of nature, as "the narration of the epic begins in the wilds and expands to the settlements" (Vaishnav, 1991, Preface). Some studies have explored this relationship through ecofeminist readings. This section builds on those explorations and centers its analysis on three points: the nature–women relationship, the masculinity and subordination of the main female character Shakuntala, and the language used to capture nature's beauty as the setting where romantic love flourishes.

Devkota begins the epic by calling for a return to nature and antiquity in his address to the readers:

Come off the weight of all thy leaden skies,
Thy wall-eyed cities and thy modern death,
Sore sufferer! O soul of lifeless man!
Into the world of quick antiquity,
(Devkota, 1991, To the Reader)

Nature is intimately woven into life:

Mountains breathe, the verdant woods inspire,
And gods and angels walk the young earth still.
(Devkota, 1991, To the Reader)

In these lines addressed directly to readers, Devkota uses his romantic imagination to orient man—a "sore sufferer"—toward the ancient past, where "nature is intimately woven into life." He appears aware of the fate of modern humans lost in material gains, as the following extract further heightens:

Our souls, guilt-stained with lies ourselves have told,
Regret our ev'ry act, our ev'rey step regret,
For lots of hearts are wounded, lots are plagued.
(Devkota, 1991, p. 7)

When baby Shakuntala is born, the poet rejoices in her birth as a confluence of heaven and earth, as expressed in the following lines:

A rich reward God sent to earth, nymph-born,
Of heaven and earth, the home of nature graced.
(Devkota, 1991, p. 34)

Shakuntala grows to become an embodiment of a dynamic ecosystem and a passionate commitment to linking the boundaries of the universe. Her growth and development in Kanva Rishi's ashram (a hermit's hut) in the forest portray her as a complete form of nature. Devkota's poetic energy devoted to projecting her as nature enhances the concept of three interconnected ecologies: the tapovan (uncontaminated, natural world for penance), the heaven (Indra's palace), and the urban (Dushyanta's palace). These

ecologies coalesce to construct the interconnections between nature and women. Therefore, she is described as "of heaven and earth, of flesh and soul compound" (Devkota, 1991, p. 62).

Shakuntala is at the center of Devkota's romantic ecology, so she is presented as being rooted in nature. To draw on a few instances, Shakuntala receives nourishment and protection in the lap of Mother Earth after her biological parents (Vishwamitra and Menuka) abandon her in the forest. She receives honey drops from bees: "But bees there came in humming, buzzing swarms," "Some sweetened drops fell on the baby's lips" (Devkota, 1991, p. 37). Shakuntala lives among the greenery and experiences pastoral peace, surrounded by the good company of birds that are capable of imitating "the Vedic hymns" and "holy chants" (p. 59). Shakuntala's companionship with birds not only evokes an uncontaminated animal world but also gives readers the impression that Shakuntala is nature herself. The following extract reveals this explicitly:

> Came every bird that nestles in the woods
> And danced, or sang, or down a feather cast,
> Or shielding warmest her with its downy wings
> From chilly movements of the woodland breeze.
> A protegee of birds, Shakuntala,
> (for thus her name) lived smiling happily.
> (Devkota, 1991, p. 38)

Shakuntala's organic relation to the birds around her, as she is "a protegee of birds," encourages us to blur discriminatory lines between the human and the animal world.

The other side of Devkota's romantic ecology is the revelation of male domination over women and nature, which reflects the power of masculinity as the creator of the Earth and women. A study by Rai (2019) examines the nature–women relationship in *Shakuntala* through

ecofeminist perspectives and reveals that "their connection is understood in terms of male domination over nature and women" (p. 34). The projection of powerful males (e.g., Vishnu, Indra, Vishwamitra, Dushyanta) from both heaven and Earth seems to be relegated as necessary to control nature and women: "For woman is a temptress, sweet but sad" (Devkota, 1991, p. 27), and "To women, mistress of the hearth and home/ Her lord is god" (p. 90).

This masculine power not only uses the woman as a tool (such as the use of Menuka to ruin Vishwamitra's penance) but also abandons or rejects her (such as Shakuntala's abandonment or rejection by Vishwamitra and Dushyanta) for their comfort. Dushyanta's proclamation, "I and I alone am the king!" (p. 98), reminds us of male rage and masculinity eternally present in our society. Along with the projection of this male domination, the epic includes several instances that hail King Dushyanta as the king of nature, as if all the creatures and plants are under his control: "May the king/ Of beasts, whose eyes the jungle dominate" (p. 45). It is obvious here that he is the master of the jungle who has full authority over the animal world and its habitat. This suggests that the king has masculine superiority over animals, so he can hunt them at his whim and pleasure.

The instances mentioned above evoke the discourse initiated by ecofeminists by exposing why "men have innate power over both women and nature" (Lorentzen & Heather, 2002, p. 1) and how nature and women are interlinked subjects. Griffin (1978) identifies women with the Earth both as sustenance for humanity and as victims of male rage. Her radical expression "We are woman and nature" (p. 1) reveals nature–women mutualism. Soper (2000) perceives a woman as nature and nature as a woman. She generalizes nature and women as a single entity by attributing their qualities to each other, particularly femininity with naturality in terms of

reproduction. Warren (1997) also draws parallels between the domination of women and the domination of nature across cultures and as part of the same ecosystem. Shakuntala's rejection scene in the court (Canto Eight) offers a related discourse on the domination of women, which invites an ecocritical understanding of women's implied power. For example, Dhungel (2001) identifies Shakuntala's silence as powerful and victorious. She states, "It acts like an omnipotent power. The reader thus becomes a silent witness to the crash of silence that echoes through earth and heaven, and Bharatvarsha (Indian subcontinent) finally finds its primal voice" (p. 17). By making King Dushyanta surrender to Shakuntala's "speaking silences" (Stout, as cited in Dhungel, 2001, p. 14) in the end, Devkota foregrounds the power of women in nature. His romantic project lets Dushyanta feel a profound affinity and intimacy with nature through his renewed love for Shakuntala, who is nature herself.

Finally, the epic has an ecocritical bearing through its striking fascination with "the language of nature that is green" (McKusick, 2005, p. 205). Written explicitly in defense of nature, the epic reads as if nature has its own language. For example, surroundings rich in birds and animals, ashrams (hermits' huts) away from greed and power, kind and nurturing nature, and the glorious past of Bharatvarsha—the narratives of Shakuntala's organic life—all are narrated through such poetic language that is essentially green in an ecological sense. Devkota's romantic longing for the peaceful coexistence of the past presents us with the hard, physical reality of the material world, which comprises natural elements including trees, birds and animals, gardens, flowers, rishis (hermits), the king, and people. According to Sharma (2008), "Devkota's Shakuntala perpetuates the legacy of rich cultural, social, and

geographical heritage, especially through the uses of imageries steeped in typically indigenous vegetations, flora and fauna, and landscape" (p. 5). This is a poetic practice that seems to have emerged from his deep appreciation of local color, regionalism, and the interrelatedness of all life forms, which is deeply ecological as perceived by ecocritics. His national and cultural consciousness conveys a Nepali ambiance. For example, after Dushyanta wins the war, he receives a welcome from people with "the red aveer, the durbadal / pearl-woven, grains of husked and colored rice" (Devkota, 1991, p. 94). From an ecological perspective, therefore, the epic is an admixture of geographical, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

Conclusion and Implications

This study reveals that the romantic conceptions of nature and all living forms in the physical world, and the language used to present that world, beautifully coalesce into the larger whole of Devkota's romantic ecology. From an ecocritical point of view, the imperative of his romantic poetry is dedicated to revealing informative parallels to our modern ecological concerns, which remind us repeatedly of the relationship between humans and all life forms in the larger tapestry of nature, as well as language as a living thing enrooted in that ecology.

The study shows that Devkota's spatial imagination in romantic poetry carries a rich ecological affinity integral to the shaping of his romantic imaginary. Within the capacity and scope of Devkota's romantic poetry, the romantic construction of ecology seems to come naturally close to the ecological thinking of today. Though this study is limited to just three poetic works and constrained by the scope of an article, it might encourage researchers, practitioners, and students to further explore the diversity and depth of Devkota's ecological insights inherent in his

engagement with nature, the animal world, and language. A key motivation for upcoming scholars might involve a stubbornly literal approach to his devotion to nature, the scenic sublime, and the countryside—one that takes his romantic narrative of nature and all life forms seriously and offers romantic speculations about the relationships between human beings and cosmic forces, and the limits of human beings' scope and power.

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