

**“Replication of Environmental Ethics, Religious Values, and Family Bonding
in Dilip Chitre’s *The Felling of the Banyan Tree.*”**

By,

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Abstract:

The replication of environmental ethics, religious values, and family bonding represents a practical approach to sustainability. It suggests that pro-environmental behaviour is not just a result of policy or science, but is deeply rooted in the ‘soft’ infrastructure of human society: what we believe, how we pray, and how we raised. Modern industrialization and urban expansion have severely disrupted the world's ecological equilibrium, fostering seemingly irreconcilable conflicts between human ambition and environmental integrity. While these advancements have secured unprecedented material comfort, they have simultaneously catalysed deforestation, systemic pollution, and the erosion of cultural landscapes. Literature specifically poetry serves as a poignant mirror to this crisis, effectively translating abstract ecological degradation into the visceral language of human emotion. The poem narrates the destruction of a centuries-old banyan tree which stands not merely as an ecological tragedy but also as a profound symbol for uprooted identity, cultural forgetfulness and experiential movement. This paper examines the poem through the joint lenses of replication environmental ethics, Religious Values and family bonding by exploring how Dilip Chitre links ecological demolition to spiritual breakdown and cultural separation.

Keywords: *Environmental Ethics, Ecocriticism, Religious Values and Family bonding*

Introduction: Dilip Chitre: A Literary Representation

Dilip Chitre (1938–2009) was one of the most prominent Indian poets and critics to emerge in the post-Independence era. A versatile bilingual writer, he produced significant work in both Marathi and English, while also distinguishing himself as a talented painter and filmmaker. Throughout his life, Chitre maintained a passionate engagement with both native literary traditions and Western influences. His unique contribution to Indian literature is highlighted by a rare achievement: he is perhaps the only writer to have received two Sahitya Akademi Awards one for his original creative writing and the other for his work in translation. Environmental ethics emerged as a specialized branch of philosophy to interrogate the fundamental imbalance in human-nature relations. It questions whether human beings possess exclusive rights over natural resources, or if the non-human world including trees, rivers, animals, and landscapes deserves moral consideration for its own intrinsic worth.

In the Indian English literary tradition, chiefly in the post-Independence era, poets have frequently engaged with the complexities of human-nature interaction. Historically, poetry has functioned as a sensitive barometer of cultural anxieties and

social consciousness. It serves as a medium to reflect the shifting values of a society regarding its environment. The hallmarks of Chitre's literary body are his deeply autobiographical and religious themes. These elements are mainly apparent in his celebrated poem, *The Felling of the Banyan Tree*. Autobiographical Depth from the opening line to the very last, the poem is intensely personal, reflecting Chitre's own memories and experiences. Religious Reflection shows profound knowledge of Hindu traditions is woven into the narrative, providing a spiritual backdrop to the physical events described in the poem.

Literature Review:

The literature surrounding Dilip Chitre and ecocritical theory can be categorized into existential interpretations, foundational ecocritical frameworks, and the socio-ecological context of post-Independence India.

Existential and Thematic Interpretations of Chitre

Traditional criticism of Dilip Chitre has largely focused on his preoccupation with the fragmented self. Inamdar (1998) observes that Chitre's sense of alienation functions as a 'post-mortem' of the self, illustrating a persistent inability to find harmony in any geographical or cultural terrain. This is supported by Chindhade (2001), who identifies a recurring saturation of imagery related to disintegration, loss, and existential despair throughout Chitre's poetic corpus. These scholars suggest that Chitre's disconnection from his landscape is a primary source of his existential discomfort.

Foundational Ecocritical Outlines

The theoretical basis for analysing literature through an environmental lens is established by pioneers such as Glotfelty (1996), who defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, and Buell (1995), who emphasizes literature's power to shape the 'environmental imagination.' Furthermore, Garrard's (2004) thematic categories specifically pollution, pastoralism, and apocalypse provide a relevant lens through which to view Chitre's specific imagery of decay and estrangement.

The Indian Ecological Context

In the Indian domestic sphere, the erosion of traditional values provides a backdrop for Chitre's work. Guha (1989) and Shiva (1991) have documented how industrial development and globalization have displaced sacred, community-based ecological worldviews. This historical shift is mirrored in *The Felling of the Banyan Tree*, specifically in the tension between the grandmother's reverence for nature and the father's utilitarian, industrial-age mindset.

Urban Landscapes and Identity

Sargar (2012), in the article '*Author or the Character? Dilip Chitre and Mumbai*,' examines Chitre's portrayal of the metropolis. Sargar argues

that Mumbai is not merely a setting but functions as a living character within the poetry. The researcher highlights how the hectic lifestyle of the city deeply influenced Chitre's personal and creative evolution, shaping his unique poetic voice.

Alienation and the Human Condition

The theme of domestic and existential isolation is explored by Celin (n.d.) in the study *"Portrayal of Estrangement and Loneliness in Dilip Chitre's Poetry: Father Returning Home."* Celin analyzes how Chitre utilizes his father as a central figure to delineate the mechanical, routine-bound nature of modern life. Through meticulous observation, the poet captures a sense of profound loneliness, portraying the elderly father as a man estranged from both his family and the rapidly changing world around him.

Objectives:

- To analyze the autobiographical significance of the banyan tree's removal, exploring how Dilip Chitre uses personal memory to reflect on the transition from a traditional to a modern lifestyle.
- To examine the manifestation of Hindu religious values and rituals within the poem, specifically focusing on the 'sacredness' of the tree and the spiritual implications of its destruction.
- To evaluate the intersection of environmental ethics and ancestral legacy, discussing how the felling of the tree symbolizes a disconnect between human progress and ecological preservation.
- To investigate the dynamics of family bonding and patriarchy, particularly the role of the father figure in orchestrating the demolition and the emotional impact this has on the family's roots.
- To interpret the banyan tree as an extended metaphor for cultural heritage, analysing how its 'slaughter' represents the uprooting of indigenous traditions in the face of urbanization.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and hermeneutic research design, focusing on the thematic and structural analysis of Dilip Chitre's poetry. The methodology is structured as follows:

1. Nature of the Study

This research is primarily analytical and interpretive. It seeks to decode the layers of environmental ethics, religious symbolism, and familial relationships embedded in the text through a close reading of the poem.

2. Data Collection (Sources of Information)

The study relies on a dual-source approach to ensure both authenticity and academic depth:

- **Primary Source:** The core of the research is based on a comprehensive analysis of the poem "The Felling of the Banyan Tree" by Dilip Chitre.
- **Secondary Sources:** To support the arguments, the study incorporates a review of existing literature, including peer-reviewed research papers, critical essays, doctoral theses, and authoritative books on Indian English Poetry, Ecocriticism, and Chitre's literary style.

3. Analytical Framework and Tools

The research employs the following methodological tools to process the collected data:

- **Close Reading:** A meticulous examination of the poem's linguistic and metaphorical nuances to identify the intersection of tradition and modernity.
- **Comparative Method:** This is used to draw parallels between the physical act of felling the tree and the metaphorical uprooting of family bonds and religious values.
- **Thematic Analysis:** The study categorizes findings under specific thematic heads, such as Environmental Ethics (Ecocriticism) and Cultural Sociology, to evaluate the poet's perspective on human-nature relationships.

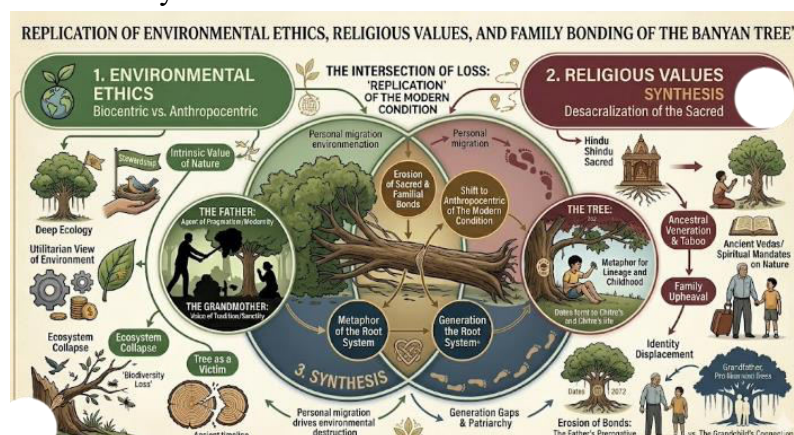
Scope and Delimitations of the Study

While this research provides a thematic deep-dive into Dilip Chitre's work, certain boundaries have been established to maintain the study's analytical depth. The limitations of the present paper are as follows:

1. **Thematic Concentration:** The scope of this study is strictly confined to the exploration of **autobiographical elements, environmental ethics, and the reflection of religious values**. Other socio-political or historical contexts are outside the immediate purview of this analysis.
2. **Exclusion of Linguistic Analysis:** This paper prioritizes thematic and philosophical interpretation over stylistic evaluation. Consequently, it does not provide a technical examination of **linguistic aspects**, such as syntax, sentence structure, or specific grammatical tenses used in the poem.

3. **Primary Source Limitation:** The research is localized to a single primary text: *The Felling of the Banyan Tree*. No other poems from Chitre's extensive corpus have been included, allowing for a concentrated "close reading" of this specific work.
4. **Absence of Comparative Framework:** The study is designed as a standalone critical inquiry. It does not seek to provide a **comparative analysis** between Dilip Chitre and other contemporary Indian English poets or international literary figures.
5. **Focus on Content over Form:** The research does not delve into the formalistic study of literary devices, such as figures of speech or prosody, focusing instead on the conceptual "replication" of ethics and bonding within the narrative.
6. **Replication of Environmental Ethics, Religious Values and Family Bonding**

Dilip Chitre's *The Felling of the Banyan Tree* is composed in free verse, spanning twenty-five lines across three distinct stanzas. Eschewing a traditional rhyme scheme or fixed meter, the poem utilizes a shifting rhythmic structure to mirror its emotional fluctuations. Intensely autobiographical, the narrative centers on a familial dichotomy: the father serves as the primary, driving force of the action, while the grandmother remains a secondary, though culturally significant, figure. The poem maintains a consistent subjective interiority, serving as a vehicle for the poet to articulate his personal grief regarding the ecological destruction and his complex reflections on his ancestry.



The images are conceptual

On Environmental Ethics

- Chitre's poem serves as a poignant critique of the anthropocentric mindset, where nature is sacrificed at the altar of urban expansion and human 'progress'.
- The felling of the banyan tree serves as a metaphor for the erosion of environmental ethics, illustrating a shift from ecological reverence to cold, utilitarian pragmatism.
- Through the vivid imagery of the tree's 'slaughter,' the poet invites an ecocritical reading that challenges the human right to destroy ancient, self-sustaining ecosystems.

On Religious Values

- The poem captures a moment of deep cultural dissonance, as the father's secular decisiveness clashes with the traditional Hindu view of the banyan tree as a sacred, life-sustaining entity.
- Chitre juxtaposes the 'mythology' of the tree—its ancient, spiritual roots—against the stark, modern reality of its destruction, highlighting a decline in traditional religious sanctity.
- The grandmother's presence, though secondary, acts as a silent repository of religious values that view the natural world as intrinsically divine rather than merely decorative.

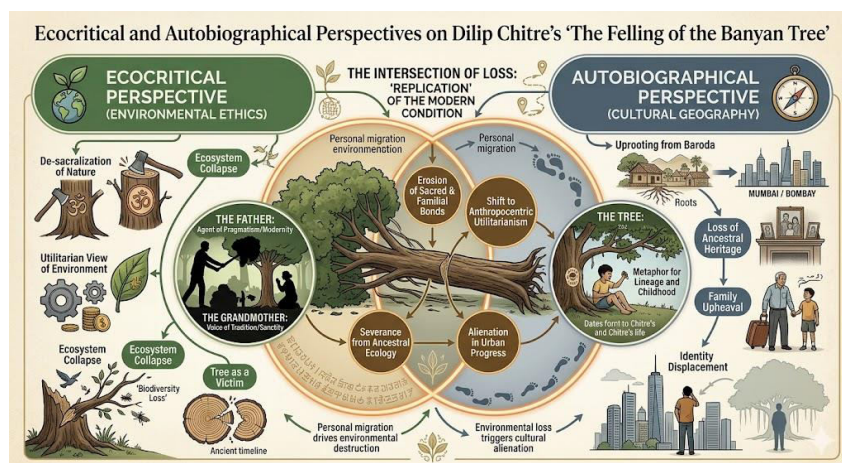
On Family Bonding

- The physical uprooting of the tree mirrors the emotional uprooting of the family, as they prepare to move from the ancestral 'roots' of Baroda to the concrete alienation of Mumbai.
- Chitre explores a fractured family dynamic, where the father's authoritative role in clearing the land symbolizes a break from the ancestral legacy and a move toward individualistic modernity.
- The banyan tree stands as a silent witness to generations of family history; its removal signifies the final severance of the bond between the household and its hereditary landscape.

On the Synthesis (Combining All Themes)

- In *The Felling of the Banyan Tree*, Chitre masterfully synthesizes environmental loss with the disintegration of religious tradition and familial cohesion.
- The poem suggests that the destruction of the natural environment is inextricably linked to the loss of religious identity and the thinning of family bonds.
- By documenting the 'murder' of the tree, Chitre illustrates how the replication of modern values inevitably leads to the displacement of ancient ethical and spiritual foundations.

Ecocritical and Autobiographical Perspectives



The images are conceptual

Focusing on 'The Felling of the Banyan Tree,' The researcher resists that while the poem addresses environmental destruction, it remains cantered on the 'pen picture' of the poet's father, suggesting that autobiographical elements remain the core of Chitre's work. In Indian culture, trees particularly the banyan tree occupy sacred and symbolic positions. The banyan is associated with longevity, shelter, fertility and spiritual endurance. It serves as a communal space in villages often regarded as a witness to generations of human history. The grandmother's reverence for trees in Chitre's poem reflects this indigenous ecological ethic which reveals trees not as commodities but as companions in the human journey. The conflict arises when the father who represents modern rationalism and utilitarian development orders the tree's felling in pursuit of urban expansion. The ethical dilemma here lies at the core of Chitre's ecological symbol. Chitre's ecological vision shares affinities with contemporaries yet stands apart in its existential depth. Gieve Patel's 'On Killing a Tree' dramatizes the violence of uprooting but remains confined to the physicality of the act. Ramanujan's 'The River' critiques human indifference to natural calamities but does not connect it to existential alienation. Nissim Ezekiel's 'Island' reflects on Bombay's corruption and ecological suffocation but primarily in socio-political terms. The felling of the banyan, described in terms of violence and slaughter, underscores that environmental destruction is inseparable from cultural amnesia and psychological despair.

Conclusion

In summation, Dilip Chitre's *The Felling of the Banyan Tree* serves as a profound meditation on the friction between tradition and the relentless march of modernity. The poet navigates a complex emotional landscape characterized by a duality of terror and fascination. While the former stems from a deep-seated apprehension regarding an ecologically depleted future, the latter arises from the sheer, awe-inspiring spectacle of the massive tree's descent—a moment that simultaneously reveals its concentric rings of history and the finality of its destruction. As an autobiographical odyssey, the poem transcends personal memoir to become a universal allegory for displacement. By documenting the family's transition from the rooted, ancestral environment of Baroda to the sterile, urban sprawl of Mumbai, Chitre

utilizes the banyan tree as a potent metaphor for life and upheaval. The ‘slaughter’ of the tree is not merely an environmental loss; it is the symbolic severance of the family’s connection to their heritage and spiritual foundations. Eventually, the paper concludes that the replication of these themes within the text underscores a grim reality: when the ‘roots’ of environmental ethics and religious sanctity are compromised for the sake of progress, the structural integrity of family bonding inevitably suffers. The fallen banyan tree remains a haunting symbol of what is sacrificed in the transition to the modern age reminding the reader that when we uproot nature, we inevitably uproot ourselves.

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