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APPROACHES TO ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE LIGHT OF VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

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Abstract

English literature, with its vast geographical, cultural, and thematic diversity, has evolved into a global body of writing that transcends national and cultural boundaries. In the contemporary academic world, the study of English literature increasingly emphasizes inclusivity, cross-cultural understanding, and global human values. This paper examines various approaches to English literature in the light of the Indian philosophical concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which upholds the idea that the entire world is one family. By aligning literary studies with this universal humanistic vision, the paper argues that English literature can be approached not merely as a colonial or national tradition but as a shared global heritage that fosters empathy, ethical awareness, and intercultural harmony.

Keywords: - English literature, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, global humanism, literary approaches, world literature, cultural unity etc.

Introduction

The discipline of English literature has undergone remarkable transformation over the past century. Originally centered on British canonical texts, it has expanded to include American literature, postcolonial writings, and world literatures in English. This expansion reflects broader socio-cultural changes brought about by globalization, migration, and technological advancement. In this evolving context, literature is no longer viewed solely as an aesthetic artifact but as a cultural and ethical medium that reflects human values and social realities. Parallel to this academic development, Indian philosophy offers a timeless vision of universal harmony through the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, meaning "the world is one family." This paper seeks to explore how this philosophy can guide contemporary approaches

to English literature, encouraging readers and scholars to adopt inclusive, ethical, and global perspectives.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: A Philosophical and Humanistic Framework

The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam originates from the Mahopanishad and represents a holistic worldview that transcends divisions of caste, race, religion, language, and nationality. It advocates the recognition of shared humanity and collective responsibility. In Indian philosophical thought, this concept symbolizes the highest ethical consciousness, where narrow self-interest is replaced by compassion and universal brotherhood. In literary studies, this philosophy encourages readers to move beyond parochial or nationalistic interpretations and instead focus on universal human concerns such as love, suffering, justice, freedom, and dignity. Applying Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to English literature allows texts from diverse cultures to be read as interconnected narratives of human experience.

English Literature as a Global Literary Tradition

English literature today represents a global corpus shaped by writers from Britain, America, Africa, India, the Caribbean, and other regions. The global spread of English has enabled writers from formerly colonized societies to use the language as a medium of resistance, self-expression, and cultural assertion. From the perspective of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, English literature becomes a shared literary space where multiple voices co-exist. The language no longer belongs to a single nation but functions as a bridge connecting cultures. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and Derek Walcott demonstrate how English can articulate local realities while addressing universal human themes.

Humanistic Approach to Literature English

A humanistic approach to English literature emphasizes empathy, ethical reflection, and emotional understanding. Literature is read as a mirror of human life that reveals moral dilemmas, social injustices, and individual aspirations. This approach aligns closely with Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, as both emphasize shared humanity. For instance, the social criticism in Charles Dickens's novels resonates with concerns about poverty and inequality found in postcolonial literature. Similarly, themes of alienation and identity in modernist literature echo experiences of displacement in contemporary global writing. Such readings highlight the continuity of human concerns across time and culture.

Comparative and Cross-Cultural Approaches

Comparative literature is inherently connected to the philosophy of Vasudharva Kutumbakam. By comparing texts from different cultures written in English, scholars can

identify shared themes, values, and human experiences. Indian English literature, African literature in English, and Caribbean writings often explore issues of identity, migration, oppression, and resistance. A comparative approach reveals how different societies respond to similar historical and social challenges. This method fosters mutual understanding and reinforces the idea of global interconnectedness.

Post-colonial Perspectives and Inclusive Reading

Post-colonial criticism has played a vital role in reshaping the study of English literature. It challenges Euro-centric narratives and highlights voices from the margins. However, when informed by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, postcolonial reading moves beyond confrontation toward dialogue and reconciliation. English literature, in this light, becomes a site of cultural negotiation where diverse identities coexist. This inclusive reading practice respects historical realities while promoting mutual respect and understanding, aligning literary studies with ethical global humanism.

Pedagogical Implications of Applying Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to the teaching of English literature has significant pedagogical implications. Literature classrooms can become spaces for intercultural dialogue, ethical discussion, and global awareness. Teachers can encourage students to identify universal human values in texts, appreciate cultural diversity, and relate literary themes to contemporary global issues such as migration, conflict, gender equality, and environmental crises. Such pedagogy nurtures empathy, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

English Literature and Global Citizenship

In an era of globalization, English literature plays a vital role in shaping global citizens. English literature, approached through Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, helps readers develop tolerance, empathy, and ethical awareness. Texts dealing with war, displacement, gender injustice, and social inequality invite readers to reflect on shared human responsibilities. Literature thus becomes a moral and cultural bridge connecting individuals across borders and fostering a sense of global solidarity.

Relevance in the Global and Digital Age

The digital revolution has further expanded the reach of English literature. Online platforms, digital libraries, and virtual classrooms have made literary texts accessible to global audiences. English functions as a primary medium for digital literary exchange. When guided by ethical principles, digital engagement with English literature can promote cross-cultural understanding and collaborative learning. This global accessibility reinforces the vision of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam in the contemporary world.

Conclusion: -

Approaching English literature in the light of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam offers a meaningful and ethical framework for literary studies. It transforms English literature from a historically colonial discipline into a global humanistic enterprise rooted in shared values and mutual respect. By emphasizing unity in diversity, empathy, and intercultural understanding, this approach enriches literary interpretation and pedagogy. Ultimately, English literature, when guided by the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, can contribute significantly to global harmony and collective human consciousness.

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