

# ECOCRITICISM: A LITERARY THEORY

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## Abstract

*The aim of this research paper is to focus on emergence of ecocriticism in the world. This paper helps readers to understand ecocriticism in literature. An ecocritical perspective helps evaluate works with the aim of environmental justice in mind. Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment and show how human being's relationship with physical environment are show in literature. Ecocriticism is an important step to bring awareness to the world environmental issues. Ecocriticism takes an earth centred approach to literature. The main objective of ecocriticism is to take care of earth. So in this paper I discusses history and emergence of ecocriticism theory.*

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism; Man- nature relationship; nature; human being

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## Ecocriticism: An Introduction

**E**cocriticism is a latest critical discipline which is distinctive amongst modern literary theory and cultural theories. It established as a literary theory. Ecocriticism is a special discourse. It studies the connection between nature and literature. It explores the relationship between the environment and literature. The human being is an element of nature. Literature and art influence human life. Human life too influences the art and literature. Ecocriticism redefines our relationship with the environment and literature.

It identifies roots of the problem of ecological crisis in the relationship of the society with nature and also the structure of the society inside. It's also connected with social and economic justice. The loss of ecology has irreversible, inter-generational consequences. The protection of air, water, soil health, and diverseness ought to be primary environmental imperatives. Environment impacts people's day nowadays lives. Quality of natural environment determines the standard of human life. Cultural survival of individuals depends upon integrated environmental practices. Imagination and creative thinking are powerful forces that establish the understanding of nature. There's the necessity to extend the environmental awareness among the human being of all countries.

The arrival of ecocriticism is as timely because it is important. The environment great historian Donald Worster in his work, *Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* Suggest that Today we are facing a global crisis not because of the function of ecosystems but because of the way our moral system works. To

overcome this crisis, we must understand these ethical systems and use that understanding to reform them.

Since the beginning of literary studies, literary studies and environmental studies have been in a different form, and the field of ecocriticism has recently been completed. Ecocriticism has become a coherent and organized discipline within literary studies in the last decade of the twentieth century. The publication of two landmark book in 1996, the *Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* are breakthroughs in the field of ecological criticism.

### DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ECOCRITICISM

Cheryll Glotfelty defines it in her introduction to *'The Ecocriticism Reader (1996)'*:

What... is Ecocriticism? Simply, put, Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as Feminist Criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious – perspective, and Marxist Criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty 1996 xix)

In this definition Cheryll Glotfelty focus on the relationship between culture and nature and “interrelationships”, especially the arts and culture of language and literature” (Glotfelty 1996)

Ecocritical literature examines the relationship of the environment to other forces. It examines how the land is represented in metaphors, values, and culture. According to Cheryl Glotfelty in *What is Ecocriticism?*, “Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound environmental implications” (Glotfelty).

## The origin of Ecocriticism and its definition

Ecocriticism emerged as a study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment in the mid-1990's. Ecocriticism is a term derived from Greek root 'Oikos', Latinized as 'Eco-', which can often find in Economic as well as in Ecology. Dokom (1959) lists the Indo - European root 'Weik' from which Greek 'Oikos' derives, which means "Village; House". The word 'Eco' is shared by ecology and economics, hence, etymologically, the first would be the study of the "House" and the second would be the management and account of the "House". Not simply about the house and its management but the two disciplines also share other aspects than mere etymology. As Teri Wynn highlight, "Ecologists research natural systems and economist research human systems." (2010); the balance and wellbeing of the general system, of the whole, constituted by the natural world by the human world, depends upon the relationship of ecology and economics, that is the way in which nature and human interaction with each other.

In recent years, people have become increasingly aware of the relationship between ecology and economy and have initiated new approaches, namely "green economy". In this wave, Arthur Dahl explain this statement in a book (1996), starting with a biological study that depicts the parallel connection between ecology and economy and its dynamics and has been identified as "Ecological subject ", which is the title of Dahl's book. In this work, Dahl focuses the fundamental unity of ecology and economics that should continue to link each other in theory and practice. He constructed the concept of "ecology" based on two kinds of eco-economic ideas and tried to unify these ideas and their functions. Therefore, "ecology" is a system related to natural or human reality, and its ideas can be applied to the natural environment as well as the human social system and its internal dynamics. It does not subject if Dahl's theory will find concrete applications and true viability. Economics, 'ecological' management should be inspired and guided by the concept of ecology. – The study of 'eco'; this would allow a balanced and organic functioning of the global 'eco' our planet – EARTH.

There are basically **two waves** of ecocriticism as identified by Lawrence Buell. **The first wave eco-critics**“ focused on nature writing, nature poetry, and wilderness fiction” (Buell 138). They used to uphold the philosophy of organism. Here environment effectively means natural environment (Buell 21). The aim of the wave was to preserve ‘biotic community’ (Coupe 4). The eco-critics of this wave appraised “the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action” (Howarth 69). So ecocriticism initially aimed at earth care.

**The second wave eco-critics** inclined towards environmental justice issues and a ‘social ecocriticism’ which considers ‘urban landscape as seriously as natural landscape’ (Buell 22). This wave of ecocriticism is also known as revisionist ecocriticism. It seeks to locate the vestiges of nature in cities and exposes crimes of eco-injustice against society’s marginal section. The eco-critics interpret nature writing texts. At the same time, they use them as a context for analyzing the principles and customs of our society in relationship to nature. Often, the result is a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world. Now ecocriticism is said to be in the third wave as stated by Glotfelty, Scott Slovic and others initiating feminist perspectives in the study of eco literature.

Buell in the essay, "Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends," published in 2011, after a thorough analysis of the European, British, American, Japanese, Chinese and Indian schools of ecocriticism, directs the future of ecocriticism to the ecocritical scope in the Third World countries. It is in this circumstance that Indian ecocriticism must study its movement and history. The objectives of the as hinted earlier, are to critically study the present and past areas of environmental activities in Indian education in the reference of the large body of eco-critical scholarship in the West and to express the concerns

## Ecological consciousness is not a recent Phenomenon

The goal of most ecocritical literature is to bring awareness to environmental problems and hopefully enlist help. As time goes on, Ecocritics becomes increasingly important because of its environmental political agenda. The leading nations in the world today see the environment as a low priority because preservation of the environment does not further the ideals of imperialism. Imperialism's anthropocentric mindset sees the world as something to control, and the environment is just another resource to exploit to gain more power. This is not sustainable and cannot continue if the world is to last. Ecocriticism is an important step in bringing awareness to the environmental problem that the world faces today, but it only works if more people learn about it. The only way to change this mindset is to educate the world, and hopefully bring about a change in values.

The main matter regarding environment have always been a part of human history; water and air pollution and deforestation were already problems in very ancient times. The name of development man's exploitation of timber and other natural resources have certainly favored the rise of and progress of many civilizations, which would also set up wood business (S. the Phoenicians) or would trade some other raw materials out of jungles, but deforestation has also put an end to some of those civilizations, bringing them to collapse. Deforestation is also in part a consequence of dendrolatry that is known as veneration of trees. Trees and forests are seen as manifestations or deities, and people either worship them or try to defeat their morality, hate them and destroy them. This scene is fully illustrated in the Scottish Gilgamesh epic: the heroes of this ancient work decided to destroy the cedar forest of his kingdom in order to gain the eternal and immortal reputation. Those forests are so precious to God that they have a guardian to protect them. After the king's misdeeds, they curse the Sumerian region with fire, drought, and desolation which will later occur in that geographical area and thus story moves ahead. The symbolic and metaphorical meaning warns human being not to disturb or destroy the harmony of nature otherwise the result is unbearable. These consideration aims to show that environmental issues and

ecological consciousness have always been part of human life and are expressed both in philosophy and literary works. The current sense of urgency is to realize that we can get to a point that is harmful to environmental misuse.

## Conclusion

Due to the over-exploitation of natural resources of the earth, human beings have been facing environmental and ecological problems. Survival of man itself has become in danger in this ecologically corrupted world. In order to save our planet earth, it has become essential for everyone to contribute in their own approach. Hence eco-criticism is one of the ways chosen by humanists to fight for the survival of the planet earth.

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