

## **ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN LITERATURE**

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### ***Abstract***

*Ecology, a word originated from Greek; meaning a study of our home, is usually into discussion in the field of science, but is approached in all the cultures. This distinctive feature is found from ancient literature and is a relevant one. Forms of literature like poetry, drama, fiction, literary criticism and others have thought of it. Literature has now observed the vast differences created by man in nature. A special concern towards the same has increased in today's machine age.*

*My paper is an attempt to trace the importance of ecology and the literary concern towards the same in the present threatened world.*

*Ecocritics make us think seriously about the disasters caused due to environmental crisis.*

*William Rueckert, Glen. A. Love, Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm David Mazel, William Howarth, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch have contributed a lot for the same purpose. We are in the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life system. An awareness could be a step of the beginning level which could contribute to environmental restoration and literature takes the honour of doing so.*

### **Key Words**

***Ecology: Study of Environment, cocritics: literary people who interpret the writings about Nature, Environmental crisis: danger /disaster caused in environment, Concern: anxiety, worry Restoration: repair, refurbishment, reconditioning***

## **ECOLOGICAL CONCERN IN LITERATURE**

**SWAPNA K JADHAV**

Ecology, a word originated from Greek; meaning a study of our home, the place where we live in is usually into discussion in the field of science, but can be approached in all the cultures. It has a very distinctive feature from ancient literature and is a relevant one. It is found in all the forms of literature like poetry, drama, fiction, literary criticism and many other forms too. Ecological concerns have been our need and tradition from generations. The world of literature is totally submerged with number of works dealing with beauty and power of nature .An extreme affection and high attention makes literary people get associated with Ecology from times. Many literary people express themselves to be the honored creatures born on Earth as she is our Mother and do believe in taking total care of her. But at the other end literature has also observed the vast differences created by man in nature who claims himself to be very sensible. The value or a special concern towards the same has increased in today's machine age.

The present paper is an attempt to trace the importance of ecology and the literary concern towards the same in the present threatened world.

The relation between ecology and literature is very well evidenced in the words of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all the cultures of the world. It is the relation carried on from times and will continue the same in future. Ecological aspects have been beautifully presented by Wordsworth, Keats, Walden, Whitman, Thoreau, Shakespeare, Sarojini Naidu, Anita Desai and many such great literary people. We have seen beauty, existence, affection, appreciation, gratitude and many such emotional feelings about Nature which made man proud of having it.

William Wordsworth crowns the beauty and mystery of nature in some of his most famous lyrics, like "*Michael*" (1800), wherein a character is deeply attached to the natural world which surrounds him and loves to be a part of the same. His autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1850) records the poet's understanding of nature, and *The Excursion* (1814) shows the relationship of humanity and nature.

The poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron, Percy B Shelley, Sarojini Naidu and many such poets attracted by the beauty of nature show a Romantic interest which have struck the readers mind .The Romantic interest in nature is particularly significant to ecocritics because these poets were revolutionary in their politics and the preservation of the natural world was one element of their radical thinking.

Later in the nineteenth-century some English writers like Thomas Hardy and Matthew Arnold have presented the finest descriptions of places or of Nature in English poetry.

Victorian essayists which includes John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, speak about the destruction of the environment caused by modern man due to industrialization which was an attempt to bring awareness in this century. The realists of this era wrote about industrialization and modernization, which had changed the best part of nature which had favored man till then. They said this living style was actually changing the natural landscape; their works focused on many such aspects and more on scientific descriptions and speculations about nature.

From the mid-twentieth century - Henry Nash Smith's "*Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*" (1950) and Leo Marx's "*The Machine in the Garden*" (1964) examine the same tension.. Such pioneering works made us realize that ecologically oriented criticism, now did not remain as a new phenomenon but, like the literature it studied and analyzed, so resulted with a sudden response to the urgent issues of the day. Today the problem created by man; disturbing the nature has raised numerous questions and the works by writers such as Thoreau and Emerson have puzzled all the intellectuals of the world.

**Concern for ecology** is one of the most highlighted issues under deep discussion for today. It is this sense of concern and its reflection in literature that has given rise to a new branch of literary theory, namely **Ecocriticism**.

Ecological concern is discussed in all the sectors; it acts as an interdisciplinary concept to be thought of. Literature well known for reflecting the contemporary issues could not have remained unaffected from this theme. So also literary criticism is not untouched by it.

Literary criticism was only about literature and culture but now a special concern for nature is found in it. It is the need of every country to replenish the diminishing factors of ecology which threatens human beings the most. Discussions over man and nature relationship have become more intense and focused after the emergence of ecological crisis.

The word 'ecocriticism' first appeared in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. It was an attempt of great responsibility yet remained inactive in critical vocabulary until 1989.

Glen. A. Love too seconded the Call for 'ecocriticism' at the same WLA meeting. Since that meeting in 1989 the usage of the term 'ecocriticism' has bloomed and Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, David Mazel, William Howarth, Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Branch have contributed a lot for the same purpose.

Rueckert brings considerations of pragmatic truth and falsity to bear on metaphors by considering them as realities productive of real effects, in a manner consistent with rhetorical realism. He adds Metaphors can help to form communities and can be judged by the actions of the communities they help to create. Humankind needs to serve the planet.

Rueckert argues, by finding metaphors that teach it to see itself as the planet's awareness. Rueckert's concern with "metaphor and reality" registers ecocriticism's overriding concern with the reality of ecological crisis. It's a critical movement motivated by issues arising from

this reality rather than such things as aesthetics. Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in the field, has defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” and Laurence Buell says that this study must be “conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.”

The *Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell is the broad scope of inquiry to all ecologists. Ecocriticism not only deals with the application of ecology and ecological principles, but is the Theoretical approach to the interrelation web of natural, cultural and Supernatural phenomena.

So Ecological Criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it.

Cheryll Glotfelty through words conveys about the two prefixes “eco-and-enviro”- in its connotations, enviro- is anthropocentric and dualistic, implying that we humans are at the center, surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment. Eco- in contrast, implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts.

David Mazel’s “American literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism” argues that ecocritics ought to be asking on the order of “What has counted as the environment, and what may count? Who marks off the conceptual boundaries and under what authority or for what reasons”?

David Mazel declares it is the analysis of literature “as though nature mattered.”

According to William Howarth ecocriticism deals with “writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view towards celebrating nature, berating its despoilers and reversing the harm through political action”.

William Howarth’s “Some Principles of Ecocriticism” traces the development of the science of Ecology, analyses traditional points between the hostility of sciences and humanities and anticipates the ways that ecocriticism will help to forge a partnership between these historic enemy cultures. An important issue for ecocriticism, arising from its emergence in this theoretical context is well defined by Randall Roorda in his important essay “KB in Green: Ecology, Critical theory, and Kenneth Burke”.

Ecocritics make us realize and think seriously about the dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis and reminds us of the truth that Nature has always proved to be stronger than man. It has been always favorable to us but the adverse strength of nature- the disasters are now common to life. A great strive for survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means man's essential hunt for personal identity and his actual failure to find his root has kept him ashamed of his deeds.

Today this intelligent but disturbed human brain is threatened of the exploitation created by himself and faces a question on his survival and also the survival of the planet.

Practitioners explore human attitudes toward the environment as expressed in nature writing. It is a broad genre that is known by many names like green cultural studies, ecopoetics and environmental literary criticism. The effect of one such natural calamity on the humanity can be seen in Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'So Many Hungers'. In this novel we see the true picture of Bengal famine of 1943 in which at least 3,000,000 Indians died of starvation. The ingredients of sighs and tears, misery and squalor, hunger and poverty and heroic suffering and sacrifice are compounded in this novel. This disaster has crushed millions under its devastating truculence which forms the major part of the novel's plot.

Kamala Markandya in her novel 'Nectar in Sieve'. 'The Flood', describes the control of nature over human beings. She writes "Nature is like a beast that we have trained to work for us which has tolerated all pains and now is a threat for human lives and is also a global concern.

Anita Desai a well Known Indian-English fiction writer through her 'Cry' shares such similar opinions. Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide' speaks of nature and his writings are about the vibrant ecological systems of the world has shown us the worst face of disaster and destruction still awaited. The issues depicting the political and the social truth has a concern for nature and so his novel of Indian English Literature is under the discussion of many conferences/seminars.

I would like to conclude by putforthing my view on ecocriticism, that most of the ecological works share a common motto of bringing awareness - as we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. This awareness could be a step of the beginning level which could contribute to environmental restoration, not only as a hobby but as a representative of literature.

Things could get worse for the planet if we do not get concerned for it from today . It is the duty of every man to save himself from the anger of nature in future which had ever remained affectionate and silent but would not continue to be....

**I would now add my own lines:**

What have we given to you and why haven't you asked for?

Were you bothered for us or expected something different from us

We landed on your dreams, shattered them, then why didn't you complain?

For long you remained silent, we did not understand

Now your sound trembles us,

How scattered shall we remain with screams of ever long silence?

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