



## Ecocriticism: An analysis of environmental concerns in various works of literature

Ishwar Kumar Paswan

Assistant Professor, Department of English, D. S. M. College, Jhajha, Bihar, India

### Abstract

Environment has threatened human civilization and the world for decades. Misusing natural resources has put us in peril. The rainforests are being cut down, fossil fuels are dwindling, and the seasons are erratic. Our environment is threatened by recurrent global ecological disasters. In the latter decade of the 20th century, Ecocriticism emerged as a new way to read nature writing. It's a worldwide movement that arose in response to man's anthropocentric view of nature. This study explores eco-critical approaches in world literature and Indian English writing. This environmentally focused literature study creates eco-literate readers who care for Mother Nature. Ecocriticism has developed rapidly since its debut due to environmental concerns. It's a tool for interpreting nature literature linked with Environmental critique, Animal studies, Green Cultural Studies, Eco-sophy, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Ecospiritualism.

**Keywords:** Environment, literature, nature, ecocriticism

### Introduction

Ecocriticism is one of the most recent revisionist movements to sweep the humanities over the past few decades. Eco-disasters are happening now, and our environment is in danger. Science and technology alone are not enough to solve the world's environmental problems. We should change how we feel about nature. Literature is not separate from life, so it has to do something. Literary critics didn't pay enough attention to nature for a long time, so eco-friendly literature asks for a better understanding of what nature means in a bigger picture. In the last 30 years, ecocriticism has grown into "a worldwide emerging movement." The scholars are still working on figuring out what it is and how big it is. William Rueckert used the word "ecocriticism" for the first time in 1978 in his critical essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." The word "eco" comes from the Greek root word "oikos," which means "household" or "earth." The word "logy," which comes from the Greek root word "logos," means "logical discourse." Together, they mean criticism of the house as it is shown in literature. Rueckert says that ecocriticism is the study of literature that uses ecological or ecological principles. And Lawrence Buell says that ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, done with a commitment to environmentalist praxis" (The Environmental Imagination, 430). Also, ecocriticism doesn't just mean studying nature. It's different from traditional nature writing in two ways: first, it takes a moral stand and cares about the natural world, and second, it shows the connection between the human world and the non-human world. Joseph Wood Krutch says that Thoreau's work is not about plants, animals, or birds. Instead, it is about how he felt about them, or "himself in relation to nature." (1948, Henri David Thoreau) Patrick D. Murphy is right when he says that ecocriticism is "literary criticism that comes from and is focused on how people and non-people interact and relate to each other."

There are two kinds of ecology: shallow ecology and deep ecology. Shallow ecology is mostly anthropocentric, which means that it thinks the purpose of nature is to serve humans and that humans are in charge of nature. This is because humans are the only living thing that thinks they are better than other living things. It also says that natural resources like coal, gas, forests, oil, etc. should be used in a planned way for a sustainable future. But deep ecology doesn't agree with this way of conserving nature. Instead, it says that nature should be kept in its natural state without any help from people, because nature has its own right to live. Every living thing on Earth has its own value, and no one is in charge of anyone else. This will make sure that every living thing has the same rights and that the eco-system stays in balance. Ecocriticism puts the focus on this eco-awareness and takes away man's ego-awareness. The current environmental crisis is caused by the way people live. It has nothing to do with how the ecosystem works. Instead, it has to do with how our moral system works, how we treat Mother Nature, etc. Ecocriticism makes people aware of these things.

Lawrence Buell says that ecocriticism has come in two waves. The first wave of ecocritics focused on writing about nature, poetry about nature, and fiction set in the wilderness" (Buell 138). They used to believe in the philosophy of organism. Here environment effectively means natural environment. (Buell 21) The wave was meant to protect the "biotic community" (Coupe 4) The ecocritics of this wave wrote about "the effects of culture on nature, with the goal of praising nature, criticising those who destroy it, and taking political action to undo their damage" (Howarth, 69). So the first goal of ecocriticism was to care for the earth.

The second wave of ecocritics focused on environmental justice issues and "social ecocriticism," which takes urban landscape as seriously as "natural landscape" (Buell 22). Revisionist ecocriticism is another name for this wave of ecocriticism. It tries to find traces of nature in cities and

brings to light crimes of eco-injustice against the most vulnerable people in society. The Ecocritic explains how texts about nature should be read. At the same time, they use them as a way to look at how our society's rules and habits relate to nature. The result is often a critique of how our culture devalues and degrades the natural world.

### **Nature**

The term "nature" is used in a broader way by the Ecocritics. Ecocriticism is not just the study of how literature shows nature. Nature in this case doesn't just mean a love of its pretty parts, like plants and animals. In this case, "nature" refers to the physical environment as a whole, which includes both people and non-people. Ecocriticism is based on the idea that the two things are connected in some way. As long as living things and nonliving things get along, there will be a healthy eco-system that is good for both people and the earth. "The modern ecological consciousness feels that the balance between humans and the natural world must be kept. A perfect ecology is one where plants, animals, birds, and people all live in such balance that none of them dominate or hurt the others.

### **Anthropocence vs Bio sense**

Human nature is mostly anthropocentric, which puts people on top. Man thinks he is better than every other living thing because he is the only one who can write. But ecocriticism makes humans seem less important than other things in the environment. In ecology, man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric rather than bio centric view of the world and his need to conquer, harmonise, domesticate, abuse, and use every natural thing. Anthropocentrism says that people are most important, and that they either romanticize or control the environment. On the other hand, Bio centric Decenters Humanities Importance looks at the complicated ways that humans and nonhumans interact with each other.

### **Nature vs Cultur**

One of the unspoken goals of ecocritics is to rethink how culture and nature relate to each other (Barry 252). The current ecological crisis is caused by the way people live. Since the beginning of time, people have lived close to nature in the natural environment. The geography of a landscape is linked to its culture. For instance, Synge's Aran Island, Hardy's Wessex, R.K. Narayan's Malgudi, and so on, all have an effect on the characters in their stories. Culture is something that people who have lived in the same place for a long time have built up over time. As long as people live close to nature, there will not be a threat to the environment. But as science and technology have gotten better, people have become less connected to nature, which threatens their own survival. The built up environment has taken the place of the natural environment. Our world is in trouble not because of how ecosystems work. Because that's how our moral systems work. To get through the crisis, we need to know how we affect nature. It's important to understand these moral systems and use what you know to change them.

### **Sustainable Development**

Ecocriticism supports sustainable development as a way to improve the future for all people. Every living thing has the right to live in its own way. Plants, animals, women, the poor, and tribal people all play a part in keeping the earth's

basic life support system running. The future of future generations will be safe and secure if we don't use up all of our resources. "Sustainable development is the most common way to deal with the environmental crisis" (Frederick 128). This means that natural resources must be used in a way that doesn't harm the whole environment or the health of all people (Essays in Ecocriticism 36).

### **Environmental Justice**

Ecocriticism puts an emphasis on environmental justice because man's desire to conquer nature isn't always right. We used to think that we were better than the other living things in the biosphere. But now we know that nature is not a lower-ranking part of this earth ecosystem. Instead, it is a part of it. We should stop doing things that hurt ourselves. If people try to hurt nature, they will pay for it with their own money. Our world is in trouble not because of how ecosystems work. Because that's how our moral systems work. To get through the crisis, we need to know how we affect nature. It's important to understand these moral systems and use what you know to change them.

### **Ecocriticism as an Approach from Different Fields**

Ecocriticism is an approach that tries to look at things from many different points of view. It is based on the literary theories that are already out there. All of the sciences come together to help the field. So, new ideas are coming to light, like Post-colonial Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Ecomarxism, and Eco-spiritualism. But it is different from the other theories in that it sees the earth as an ecosphere, while the other theories see it as a social sphere. All of the other theories are based on the individual ego, but ecocriticism is based on caring about the environment. In short, it is a way to study literature that focuses on the earth and helps people understand who they are, where they stand, how they should treat Mother Nature, etc.

### **What Ecocritics Do**

To deal with the current environmental crisis, ecocritics play a big role in making readers more aware of the environment. For this, they read the most important books, and they look at nature differently than most people. They move our critical focus from our inner consciousness to the outside world. They don't believe that everything is socially or linguistically constructed. They believe that nature exists outside of us but is still with us and affects us (possibly fatally if we treat it badly). They look at nature in literature through the lenses of growth and energy, sustainability and non-sustainability, and balance and imbalance. (The Reader of Ecocriticism)

### **Eco-Literature in the World**

Ecocriticism is based on the works of three important American writers who wrote about nature as a source of life and the American wilderness. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) are the three (1817-1862). The transcendentalists were a group of writers, poets, essayists, novelists, and philosophers from New England. They were the first major literary movement in the United States to break away from European models. In Nature, R. W. Emerson's first piece of reflective prose, nature was a big influence on him. The writer here praises a nontraditional way of looking at nature called "transcendentalism," which

says that "the divine" or "god" is everywhere in nature. He says that studying nature is the best way to understand reality.

Summer on the Lake by Fuller During 1843 is a Transcendental travelogue that looks at the whole of America. It is based on the area around the Great Lakes. Fuller makes a distinction between the practical goals of the settlers and the spiritual and aesthetic goals of the tourists.

But Henry David Thoreau is thought to be the person who started Ecocriticism. Thoreau's book Walden is an autobiographical account of his two-year stay in a hut on the edge of Walden Pond, two miles from his home town of Concord. It is a classic story about leaving modern life behind and trying to renew oneself through a "return to nature." This book has a strong effect on the way people think, which changes from being self-centered to caring about the environment.

Robert Frost, an important American poet, has written about woods, lakes, horses, stars, and other things. On the surface, his poems are easy to understand. But if we dig deep below the surface, we find that nature shows us the truth about life in general. In his poem "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening," he talks about the beauty of nature and the responsibilities of a short life.

Ecocriticism is not as well known in the UK as it is in the United States. American writing tends to praise nature, but British eco critics try to warn us about the dangers to the environment that come from government, industry, commerce, and neocolonialism.

In The Song of the Earth, Jonathan Bate says that colonialism and cutting down trees have often gone hand in hand. His Romantic Ecology gives a new look at the poetry of William Wordsworth from the point of view of the English pastoral tradition. In this piece, Bate talks about the politics of poetry and says that Wordsworth was the first eco critic.

Country and the City by Raymond Williams shows how different life is in the country and in the city. In this poem, William shows how country life is the centre of modernity and the perfect place to be alone.

The Green Studies Readers by Lawrence Coupe is a large collection of critical texts that look at how ecology, culture, and literature are connected. In short, the book is a good place to start learning about Green Literature because it has a lot of sources that can be used for research.

### **Ecocriticism in India**

Since the Vedas, which gave all living things the same amount of importance, Indian philosophy has a lot of environmental ideas. India also has a wide variety of plants and animals. From the Himalayas in the north to Kanyakumari in the south, from the Bay of Bengal in the east to the Arabian Sea in the west, India has a lot of different landscapes that have a big effect on people. Literature isn't a separate thing. Eco-critical texts are written by a lot of people.

Eco-critical ideas may be best seen in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize and started Viswa Varati at Shantiniketan, away from the crowds. His Rakta Karabi and Muktheadhara are the best examples of texts that criticise how people hurt nature. His ecocritical poems include "The Tame Bird Was in a Cage" (the bird in the cage has even forgotten how to sing) and "I Plucked You Flower" (people think it's their right to pick flowers). Nature

doesn't just sit there and watch. It will act up one day. It wouldn't just be a prick, but could turn into a huge wave. The person should watch out for this).

Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountains is a good example of an ecocritical text. It deals with the problem of killing animals, a growing population, and the moral decline of humans, all of which pose a threat to the environment, which is shown by frequent forest fires.

Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya shows how Nature can both kill and save life. In this story, the author shows how the bad things that come with industrialization destroy the peaceful life of a peasant.

The main theme of The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is how people exploit nature in the name of progress and modernization. This is shown in the novel The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy. In this piece, the authoress has shown that she is very aware of the important environmental issues of today. In this book, the author speaks up for the environment, which is in danger because of pollution. In this book, she not only shows how much nature has changed for the worse, but she also tries to figure out why.

Ruskin Bond's No Room for a Leopard shows how bad the animals' lives are after the trees are cut down. The Tree Lover, The Cherry Tree, All Creatures Great and Small, and many others are all about how man and nature are connected by a chain, like the chain of an ecosystem, showing how they depend on each other.

In her book "Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard," Kiran Desai criticises the busy life of the city. The main character, who is unhappy with city life, runs away to the Guava Orchard. In her book The Inheritance of Loss, the author shows how Kanchenjunga has to pay for how cruel people are. In the novel, ecocriticism takes on a political tone when the Nepali insurgency causes a lot of damage to people, animals, and the peaceful beauty of nature that can't be measured.

The Hungry Tide by Amitav Ghosh is a powerful piece of ecocriticism because it shows how humans have created systems that are bad for the environment and for people. People have said that the delta of the Sundarbans both kills and saves life. The novel accurately shows how the government used terrorism to get rid of the Bengali refugees who had moved to Marichjhapi after losing their homes.

Ecocriticism as a field of study didn't start in India until quite late. Here are some Indian eco critics who have made important contributions to ecocriticism:

Bandana Shiva is an Indian environmental activist who became an ecocritic. In her book Stolen Harvest, which is a good example of an eco-critical text, she criticises the way the west steals patents from poor countries in the name of bio piracy. So, she shows that colonization isn't something from the past; it's still going on today. She says that industrial agriculture has not made more food; instead, it has destroyed different food sources. Thus, she gave a neocolonial dimension to ecocriticism. Some of her most important works in the field of ecocriticism are Tomorrow's Biodiversity, Soil Not Oil, Staying Alive, Ecofeminism, Violence of the Green Revolution, Water Wars, Biopiracy, Making Peace with the Earth, and others.

In his article "Suicidal Motive," Suresh Frederick, an associate professor at Bishop Heber College in Tamil Nadu, looks at poems like squirrels and sparrows, which like to live near people and help keep the environment in balance.

But the unhealthy things people do threaten their very existence.

Nirmaldasan, an Assistant Professor at the SRM School of Journalism in Tamil Nadu, and Nirmal Selvamony, a Reader in English at the Madras Christian College in Chennai, have made important contributions to "Oikopoetics," which means the poetics of the "Oikos" or habitat, which includes the spirits, people, nature, and culture that are unique to it. His first book of poetry, *An Eaglet in the Skies* (published in 1996), is about the joy of creation, which is a lot like the joy of a young eagle that has just learned to fly.

Ecocriticism in India is now in its second phase, which supports Lawrence Buell's idea that the first and second waves should come together. In the first phase of Ecocriticism, people learned about ecology in their local areas. In the second phase, Ecocriticism became a movement with a global focus.

### Conclusion

Therefore, eco-criticism, which used to be associated with American nature writing and British Romantic literature, has now gotten a boost from eco-literature from all over the world. In light of the current ecological crisis around the world, its colour has changed from local to global. Humans only have one planet to live on, and if we don't take care of the blue planet, we are going to destroy ourselves soon. If we want to hear the song of the earth, we need to stop being so focused on ourselves and make a change right away. There are many ecological points of view in the world's literature. Environment is a huge part of human culture, and this is a theme that runs through all of the major works. They might see things in a new way after learning something about the environment. This is also true of Indian philosophy and writing. From the time of the Vedas to the Internet, there is a lot of environmental concern in Indian literature. In addition to traditional Indian writing in English, classic works of regional literature that have been translated into English also show how nature is seen. They teach us how to live a happy life that works well with nature. These works of environmental literature do a beautiful job of showing how people and nature are connected, which is the main point of eco-literature. The main message is to keep nature as beautiful as it is and not to mess up what we can't make. The more ecocritical writings are read, the more people will learn how to treat nature in a way that fits with the current environmental crisis.

### References

1. Adamson Joni, Scott Slovic. *The Shoulders We Stand On: An Introduction to Ethnicity and Ecocriticism*. MELUS. 2009;4(2):5-24.
2. Bernaerts Lars, Marco Caracciolo, Luc Herman, Bart Vervaeck. *The Storied Lives of Non-human Narrators*. Narrative. 2014 Jan;22(1):68-93. DOI: 10.1353/nar.2014.0002
3. Bracke Astrid, Marguérite Corporaal. *Ecocriticism and English Studies: An Introduction*. English Studies. 2010;91(7):709-12. DOI: 10.1080/0013838X.2010.518038
4. Buell Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, London, England: Harvard University Press; c1995.
5. Buell Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; c1995.
6. Buell Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. London: Blackwell; c2005.
7. Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the US and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; c2001.
8. Coupe Laurence, ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (Routledge). Print; c2000.
9. DeLoughrey Elizabeth, George B. Handley. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; c2011.
10. Easterlin Nancy. *A Bio cultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; c2012.
11. Frederick Suresh, *Contemporary Contemplation on Ecoliterature*, Authorpress, New Delhi; c2012.
12. Garrard Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, USA, Glotfelty, Cheryl and Fromm, Harold, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (University of Georgia Press, 1996). Print; c2004.
13. Gifford Terry. *Pastoral*. London: Routledge; c2001.
14. Gifford Terry. *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice*. Athens: University of Georgia Press; c2006.
15. Shivani Jha. *Ecocritical Readings Rethinking Nature and Environment*, Partridge India; c2015.
16. Mishra SK. *Ecocriticism in Children's Literature: An Analysis of Amit Garg's Two Tales*. Galaxy. 2016;5(5):91-97.
17. Selvamony Z Nirmal, Nirmaldasan Rayson K Alex. *Essays in Ecocriticism*, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi, 2007, Reprint; c2012.