



# Current Perspectives in English Literature



**Dr. Ashok Shinde**  
Chairman

**Dr. Kamble Umesh D.**  
Co-Editor

**Dr. S. M. Bhalsing Mulay**  
Editor

ISBN: 978-93-5158-577-0



Mula Education Society's  
**Shri Dnyaneshwar Mahavidyalaya, Newasa**  
Tal- Newasa, Dist- Ahmednagar, Maharashtra (India), 414603

## **Ecocriticism: Representation of Nature in Literature**

**Dr. G. D. Kokane**

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University  
Sub-Campus, Osmanabad

Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment. Literary scholars analyse texts that depict environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. It is known by number of other designations, Green Studies, Eco-Poetics, and environmental literary criticism. It is committed to moral and philosophical aims. Ecocritics explore the ecological values described in the texts. William Rueckert may have been the first person to use the word, ecocriticism, in his essay entitled, *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978 (Barry 240). Ecocriticism arose as a powerful and well organized movement in the 1990s in United States of America. In *The Comedy of Survival* (1974) Joseph Meeker proposed an argument that the environment crisis is caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West of separation of culture from nature,

There are different ways in which specific works of literary art have been and can be evaluated. Psychological and sociological are the method of investigation. Ecocriticism is a recently evolved critical theory.

Ecocritics consider the many relations between literature and the natural world. They expand our understanding of environment. Lawrence Buell thinks that we lack imagination when we analyse nature. Literature is not just about human life but it also describes the influence of nature on human life and literature. Nature is not man-made. Ecocriticism as a coherent theory arrived in 1994.

Ecocritics argue that how you define nature will determine how you understand it.

Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold explicated the ways men and women are disconnected from nature. The lack of intimacy leads people to abuse nature. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Carson's *Silent Spring* and Leopold's *A Sand Country Almanac* emphasize the role of literature to review the harmful practices of human society. Edward Abbey believed that true nature is found only in wilderness, travelling into the wilderness can only reveal who we really are.

Ecofeminists like Vandana Shiva, Greta Gaard, and Catriona Sandiland tell the stories about nature through a feminist perspective. Ecofeminist literary criticism examines the representations of nature by women, and reveal how they often overturn dominant male images and attitudes toward the environment.

Ecocriticism is the study of representations of nature in literary works and of the relationship between literature and the environment. Thoreau's *Walden* is a classic poetic narrative about nature. He discussed the meaning of living in harmony with nature. Emerson's *Nature* talks about mystical unity of nature. Romantic poets were revolutionary in politics, and the preservation of the natural world was one important element of their radical thinking. Victorian essayist John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle lamented the destruction of the environment due to industrialization.

Ecocriticism redefines our relationship with the environment and Nature. It identifies roots of the problem of ecological crisis in relationship of the society with nature and the structure of the society within. It is also related with social and economic justice. The loss of ecology has irreversible, inter-generational consequences. The protection of air, water, soil health, and biodiversity should be primary environmental imperatives. Environment impacts people's day today lives. Quality of natural environment determines the quality of human life. Cultural survival of people depends upon integrated environmental practices. Imagination and creativity are powerful forces which establish understanding with nature. There is the need to increase the environmental awareness among the people of all countries.

The publication of two landmark books 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.

United Kingdom version of ecocriticism is known as Green Studies. The Green Studies takes its bearings from the Romanticism of the 1790s. Jonathan Bate, the critic, is the founding figure of Green Studies. He is the author of *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition*. He has also written *The Song of the Earth*. Soper Kate's *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human* is a fundamental text which laid the foundations of contemporary ecocriticism. Many of the concerns of the ecocriticism are evident

in Raymond William's book, *The Country and the City*. Lawrence Coupe edited *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*.

Ecocriticism is concerned with the decisive matter of the relationship between culture and nature. Ecocritics reject the notion that everything is socially and / or linguistically constructed. Ecocritics firmly believe that Nature affects human life. Sri Aurobindo believed:

For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity (*The Future Evolution of Man* P.1)

Twenty first century is often called as the century of the environment. Ecocriticism is a coherent and broadly based movement. Without biosphere and planetary conditions human life could not exist. Ecocriticism challenges too much postmodern critical discourses as well as to the critical systems of the past. Our perceptions of nature are necessarily human constructed. Nature plays a vital role in shaping human attitudes and behavior. Literary work has the environmental context. Charles Darwin asserted in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* that humans are descended from earlier forms of life. Human differ in degree only from other animals. Literature is related to nature and human life. Humans have to take prompt and vigorous actions to check the pollution and spoliation affecting the planet earth. Our efforts should be strong to protect the Earth's ecosystems to safeguard our future on the planet. Political leaders should understand the depth of the environmental concerns for the sustainable development of the country. We should not assess our wellbeing just in economic terms. We should assess progress not just in terms of fiscal loss and gain but in terms of earth's biological and cultural loss. It will be more accurate assessment of human success.

Ecocriticism draws the attention of the world to the crucial issues of environmental degradation through the forum of literature. Nature and culture are inclusive terms. Ecocriticism is committed to make the world less unjust. Well conceived and sincerely implemented policies can make difference to people. High economic growth rates do not at all mean inclusive growth. The present policies in India are ill equipped to correct chronic poverty. Policies and institutions are central to a country's ability. The nation is fed up with corruption.

A human society based on inequality decays in the course of time. It aims at creating the harmonious relationship between Nature and human nature. It is against the exploitative development. The ecological analysis of the human life reflected in literature has been called ecological Criticism or Ecocriticism. The critical theory deals with the relationship between the human life and the nature. It transcends the exclusive categories of centre and periphery. It is the high time now to ponder over the evil consequences of industrialization and mechanization, globalization, privatization and liberalization. It is the study of the interrelationship between nature and human life.

The environment nurtures, uplifts our senses and sustains our existence. Wendell Berry explores the political and moral implications of degrading and neglecting place in the novels such as *The Memory of Old Jack* (1976). In the United States the environmental literature includes poetry, fiction, and drama that scrutinize the relationship between humans and the natural environment.

The consciousness of the ethical component of literature is an important principle of the new ecological literary criticism or Ecocriticism. The writers such as Berry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, Rick Bass, Robert Michael Pyle, Scott Russell Sanders, Wendell Barry, Gary Snyder and other environmental writers achieve not only aesthetic brilliance but also an understanding of human society's relationship with the planet.

Literary artists consider that values are at the heart of their work. Literary scholars give the utmost importance to the issues of human values and attitudes. Environmental writers create interest among their readers. They present a long term vision of our relationship with the planet. They stimulate ethical reformation.

We have approached the 21st century. It has become clear that the model of free economy, Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization does not work. The problems of environmental degradation, poverty and domestic inequality have begun to threaten the very existence of the society and nation. They are threatening the quality of human life and security of nation. The model has proved ultimately self defeating, as it threatens the beneficiaries of the so called progress. The world needs an alternative approach. The new approach is of Sustainable Development. The development pattern should create social cohesion rather than social inequality.

**The development pattern should aim at the improvement of the quality of life. Environmental degradations affect the quality of life. In absence of healthy environment people are victimized by various types of diseases. Future generations feel insecure. Economic development pattern is responsible for the present problems. The problems are endemic not incidental. We need to reassess what we mean by economic and social progress. We should introduce fundamental changes in the economic and social development to achieve genuine development.**

Poverty is the mother of all ills. Poverty is responsible for the rise in crimes, anti-social behaviour. The shadows of globalization and deregulation markets have made even middle class vulnerable and insecure. Unequal society cannot stand the challenges, it breaks down.

The middle class instead of solving the problem of the decay of the society want to evade the responsibility. They try to find peace and security within the four walls of their home. The people confront fear and tension and anxiety in their homes too. The sustainable development is the best model of development which improves the standard of life for all. The market economy has belittled the governments in the various countries of the world. It has caused anarchy in some African countries like Nigeria.

In the present model of market economy people have developed distrust over the political institution which governs them. Democracy needs to be strengthened in the real manner. Deregulated Market mechanisms are responsible for the breaking down of the traditional cultural values. People are feeling the loss of a sense of a community. The market economy has proved self defeating. The supporters of market economy had claimed that it will solve all the problems. But instead of solving the problems it has generated severe problems before the society which are threatening the very existence of society. The present model of development has given rise to violence and alienation among the people. Equality and inclusiveness strengthen the community. It creates the bond between individuals and the society. The society at large is united in the true sense.

Ecocriticism is applicable and relevant in twenty-first century. It addresses the prominent issue of environmental crisis. There is the close relationship between the text, author and nature. Physical setting plays an important role in literary texts as they do in human life. Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we

imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. It envisions the sustainable life. It has rediscovered and reinterpreted nature writings. Ecofeminists believe that the oppression of women and nature are fundamentally connected. Humanity ecologically more aware must also overcome oppression of women. Patriarchal dualism women and the concept nature in the same category. Ecocriticism examines ourselves and the environment around us. Environmental crisis is both a physical and cultural problem. Ecocritics examine the place of environment in hierarchy.

### **Bibliography**

- Barry, Peter. "Ecocriticism". *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Coupe, Laurence, ed. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge, 2000.

\*\*\*\*\*