

## Ecocriticism: Global Perspective

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### Abstract

Ecocriticism is the branch of literary criticism which studies literature in relation to the Environment, Man's attitude towards nature and the interdependent kinship that sustains the life on this planet. It is a global phenomenon which has drawn attention since very recent times only when nature started to show its adverse effects on us which were caused by our heedlessness. But now Ecocriticism stands in the centre of anthropological arena and is becoming the most debatable and worrisome concept. More and more Literary texts are now written to create awareness about the need and maintenance of nature. The present study is a kind of descriptive, analytical and historical study of Ecocriticism. It includes the concept of Ecocriticism in various texts and practices which has been in light since ancient times. It deals with how deep-rooted lies the cause of balancing the man and nature bond that will pave the way for a sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Ecological Balance, Sustainable Development, Earth Summit, Green technology, Nature,

### Introduction

Literary criticism is a vast and dynamic branch of literature. Through many literary and cultural theories, it encompasses the field of excellence in literature. Among all the literary theories Ecocriticism is unique and interesting because it moves outside human sphere and deals with elements that were neglected till now. The main focus of Ecocriticism is justification of human life in relation to the *nature*. It poetically and beautifully celebrates the indispensable interaction between literature and the environment. Literature influences human life, so does the environment so there is a direct relationship between literature and the environment. Ecocriticism mainly redefines this kinship between these two and the importance of a stable bond between them. Ecocriticism not only beautifies the nature but it also sheds light on the threats faced by the same. On earth Human race has always craved for progress eyeing on the future

but the same course of progress neglects the environment and our duty towards it which has become the deciding factor in ruining the man-nature relationship. Ecocriticism describes the need of *Ecological balance* for the stability of this planet.

Ecocriticism is a very young concept that was borne in the fag end of twentieth century. It was in 1950's and 60's that the seeds of Ecocriticism were sown. Some prominent works were written about the same. Today Ecocriticism is a well known and organised concept in literary studies. The two books that proved to be the founding stones of Eco-critics were 'The Ecocriticism Reader' by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and Lawrence Buell's 'The Environmental Imagination'. Ecocriticism began in USA in late 1980's and during 1990's in UK. In USA its pioneers were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau who launched the movement 'Transcendentalism'. One of the greatest and impressive related works by Henry David Thoreau is 'Walden' that explains man's attachment to the nature and the deep kinship between the two. Unlike in USA Ecocriticism in UK is known as 'Green Studies' which saw its peak in Romantic age. Jonathan Bate is regarded as the founding figure of Green studies through his book 'Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environment Tradition'. In addition to name, Ecocriticism also differs in origin and prominence in USA and UK.

Ecocriticism in UK is mainly concerned with conservatory aspects of nature. The critics warn us about the threats to the environment and the consequences if the same continues to happen. The ill effects of the failure to maintain the harmony between man and the nature will have a disastrous impact on it. The threats to environment come from people, industries, vehicles etc. Nature has always supported and nurtured man and provided all the needs for millions of years. Both renewable and non-renewable sources present in nature are supporting the life on this planet. Air, soil, water, oceans, coal are priceless resources without which life would have been impossible on earth. But it is the greed and ignorance of man that has marred this kinships and has left the environment in a pathetic condition. It is this injustice from our side that the concerned critics warn us of. This concept was revolutionized by the book *Silent Spring (1962)* by Rachel Carson. The book moulds our attention towards the damage done to the nature and the welcome of an Apocalypse if such a thing continues to happen. Rachel Carson describes the nature as a mute victim of our selfish and inhuman activities.

In comparison to UK Ecocriticism in USA differs with respect to its meaning and nature. The critics celebrate nature and its belongings and consider it as a messenger and a soother. The role of nature is actively as a supporting companion because it replenishes the life on the planet. The concept of Transcendentalism is like that of Romanticism but Transcendentalism also believes in Responsibility that we owe towards Nature.

William Ruckert was the first to use the term Ecocriticism in his essay '*Literature And Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*' in which he suggested to apply ecology to study of literature. There are many ways authors have tried to Define Ecocriticism. Some of the definitions of Ecocriticism are given as:

"What is Ecocriticism? Simply put Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as the feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of the modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts Ecocriticism takes an Earth centered approach to literary studies". (Glotfelty 1996)

"The Ecocritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed, in a great many cultural spaces. Most of all Ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis"

(Richard Kerridge 1998)

"Ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to the natural environmentalist Praxis' (Lawrance Buell)

### **Path Of Ecocriticism**

When we deeply study the concept of Ecocriticism, we find it discussed in many literary texts. The need for an environment conscious attitude has been always stressed in texts from time to time. Organisations, scientists, thinkers, activists, Religions, movements etc. have highlighted the craving need for a mutualistic bond between man and the environment. For example when we look at classical traditions and different religions, we find Ecocriticism discussed in a lucid way.

### **Ecocriticism in Classical Traditions**

Ancient critics and thinkers have discussed the role of environment in our lives. They defined the ways man was connected to nature emphasizing on the cardinal relationship between them. According to Plato 'Nature is our ancestral home which cared for us like a mother'. Aristotle describes the kinship saying, 'The whole is necessary than parts'. So the whole (Man and Nature) should turn out to be a positive interaction not a negative one where man acts as a predator on the environment. According to Aristotle We should create ethical values among peoples for developing an Eco-conscious spirit in them that will run down the generations.

### **Ecocriticism In World Religions**

#### **Philosophy Of Ecocriticism In Islam**

Islam lucidly describes the availability of resources in environment, their usefulness and our duty for the safeguard of them. Holy Quran at one place says 'And we have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on *Land* and *Sea*'. Maintaining the healthy state of environment is the religious duty of every Muslim. In one of the narrations of Prophet Mohammad<sup>Saw</sup> is mentioned,

"if the hour (Day of Resurrection) is about to be established and one of you was holding a palm shoot, let him take advantage of even one second to plant it"

Likewise at other occasion Prophet Mohammad<sup>Saw</sup> said

"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds and then a bird, man or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charity"

#### **Ecocriticism In Hinduism**

Almost all texts in Hinduism stress on the Humane treatment of environment. Vedic period distinguishes the five elements of universe viz. Earth, Air, Water, space and Light. Then goes on to explain the importance of each one in detail. Vedas also teach the same philosophy of preserving the Environment that offers a deep bondage with the man. Yajurvedic treatment of equality between man and wild and the right of existence for every element of environment describes the fair treatment we should do with the environment.

The concept of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam encourages cooperation among all creatures on earth and considers the entire universe as a single family. In Mahabarta we are asked about the consequences of disturbing the balance of the environment. It says "Two types of diseases occur due to pollution. First one is related to the Body and other one is related to Mind and both are interconnected. Eco-spirituality is very much emphasized in Hinduism which is practiced through ethical values and behaviour.

### **Ecocriticism In Buddhism And Jainism**

Jainism stresses on an ecological lifestyle believing protection of environment is the human protection and polluting it means endangering the human life. 'All life is bound together by mutual support and interdependence' Buddhism believes that trees and animals also possess the same degree of relevance as do the humans and they are the distinguishing elements of earth. Ashoka was also of the same belief and insisted on planting the trees and forbid to kill the animals.

### **Dimensions of Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism means friendship of man with nature. Nature has benefitted man in every respect and every time. Due to this man-nature interaction various dimensions arise which may be discussed as:

#### **Social Dimension**

The social construct defines the state of environment. Socially conscious and responsible class will ensure a sound ecological balance. If the people of a particular society are taught the knowledge of vitality of environment they will ensure its healthy state which in turn will support the particular community. Balancing the environmental health with the rapid population explosion lies within the social domain. Economic usage of all the resources should be the maxim of all the communities.

#### **Political Dimension**

Governments play a vital role in developing a nature friendly attitude among people. At the larger the government is the guardian of the environment. It can provide the guidelines for the efficient use of the resources so that our future generations will not have to suffer. It can organise campaigns, workshops, conferences, programmes etc. to create awareness among masses.

### **Industrial Dimension**

The strongest and successful breakthrough man ever witnessed was the industrial Revolution that gave new shoot to human progress. It arose man to the throne of comfort but it's other side was dark that left the darkest and gravest impact on the environment. It was the major blow to the environmental health. Today everywhere large and small scale industries run for our ease but due to it the damage done to the environment is beyond the measure. Nations are now struggling to cope up with such a reckless catastrophe. All components of environment Air, water, land are in a sick state. Many countries are now taking measures to tackle with this problem.

### **Ethical Dimension**

Man can be called the real caretaker of the nature Because it is his real home. Man learnt everything in the lap of nature. Because of the deep-rooted kinship many civilizations considered nature as holy and worshiped it because their ancestors were the patrons of the same activities. Even today many tribes consider nature as the real sustainer and they show the due obeisance to it.

### **Global Concern For Ecocriticism**

World is progressing at a rapid rate. Globalisation has made the world a small village. Nations compete with one another in technology, arms, life index etc. but when looking at the infectious condition of the environment decay, we see the future of this planet dark and catastrophic. Industrial pollutants killing the quality of air, Run-out garbage marring water quality, land encroachment affecting the soil, Deforestation wiping off the forests and so on, this all presents a horrible scenario before our eyes. This damage has evoked nations to take measures for the safeguard of the environment. At the international level nations are coming forward to save the planet earth. Ventures like Earth summit, Kyoto Protocol, IPCC (Intergovernmental panel on climate change), Paris Agreement etc. are the big steps nations are taking to save the earth. Even some nations have opted for the complete detachment from Hurting the environment By using the 'Green technology'

### **Conclusion**

Ecocriticism is a revolutionary concept in the field of literature. It can be considered as literature for The Nature, By the Nature lovers and Literature of the nature. It believes that Nature is the real maintainer and preserver of human life but if not cared properly can prove to be the destroyer. Man-nature interaction is beyond the scope of words because nature has always n

urtured man like a child who is taken care of by his/her mother. Nature has always fulfilled the needs of man and in turn it demands its maintainability from us. That is why all Thinkers, scientists, concerned texts, critics and nature conscious minds focus on the issue preservation of this great heritage which is the real gift from divinity. The movement 'Environmentalism' should bear the real fruits of Ecological Balance that will ensure the safety of all forms of life on Earth, especially Humans who are striving for a sustainable development.

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