

## LITERATURE GOES GREEN: A STUDY OF ECOCRITICISM IN WESTERN VERSUS INDIAN LITERATURE

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### **Abstract**

During the last few decades nature has started showing its rage against man's blind pursuit for scientific and technological advancements and materialism. The overuse of natural resources and an endless exploitation of nature for satisfying its own selfish ends man has created an ecological imbalance or better to say an ecological disaster which can be seen very frequently across the globe. The growing industrialization has changed the natural landscape and has marginalized the entire ecosystem. Under these challenging circumstances there developed a new perspective towards nature and its indispensable role played in human life. This new dimension of study concerned with the interdependence between man and nature was termed as 'Ecocriticism'. This study chiefly aims at the exploration of growing environmental concerns and tries to establish a parallel between Western and Indian leanings towards ecocritical writings since time immemorial.

**Keywords:** Environment, Materialism, Exploitation, Disaster

**Introduction:** It is a worldwide movement which took its shape as a reaction to man's anthropocentric attitude of dominating and ruling the nature. Eco criticism has rendered its contribution by bringing an ecological literacy among the masses, thus enlightening their minds for nurturing the Mother Earth more tenderly. Eco criticism has evolved a lot since its existence and has developed as an instrument of interpretation of the different aspects of nature writing such as Environmental criticism, Green cultural studies, Deep Ecology, Animal Studies, Eco feminism and Eco spiritualism etc.

**Western Wisdom: Where literature and Environment Cross The Paths:** The relationship between man and his environment has been documented several times through the literary works since time immemorial. Edward White in his foreword to 'Natural Discourse: Towards Eco composition' cites the journey of Adam and Eve through the garden of Eden (in the Bible) and Odysseus dangerous trek across the Mediterranean sea in Homer's Odyssey, are the few literary examples where human paths cross with nature. Though Eco criticism as a theory is looked upon as a recent emergent but if we go back and investigate the history we could easily trace out a time when environmental writing was on its rise and its importance was being gradually realized in America and other European countries. To quote Jefferson in 'The Natural Bridge' "The most

sublime of nature's works though not comprehended under the present head, must not be pretermitted.”

The word sublime used by Jefferson here refers to the way the different people i.e. the creative class and the lay man appreciate the beauty of nature and accept its immense power to inspire and motivate them. Down through the ages, again in the writings of British romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge we can find out a sharp leanings on nature. Thoreau, an American transcendentalist in his major works has thoroughly talked about nature and also the ways in which nature can shape the spiritual and intellectual progress of any society.

Pippa Marland, an eco critic opines that Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' which came in 1962 marked the beginning of modern environmental writing and ultimately catalyzed the Eco criticism movement

Peter Barry, another eco critic posits that William Rueckert's 1978 essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco Criticism', explicitly referred to the term Eco Criticism. To be more precise the credit of using the term Eco criticism instead of 'The Study Of Nature Writing' goes to Cheryll Glotfelty, a graduate student at Cornwell University at the time. She is acknowledged as the founder of U.S criticism and also credited to have greened the field of literature through her Anthology, 'The Eco criticism Reader' published in 1966.

Jonathan Bate's, 'Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition' is supposed to have signaled the dawn of Eco criticism on the British side of things

### **Ecology: The Ancient Indian Prudence**

Hinduism has often been coined as an environment friendly religion. Hindus regard everything around them as pervaded by a subtle divine presence, may it be any object of nature like rivers, mountains, lakes, animals flora and even the stars and planets. Hinduism assumes that Divine energy/power is present in every particle and in every manifestation of matter. Just as the sparks of fire have the same essence as the fire itself from where it is issued forth, so is the entire creation, the whole universe, of the same essence as the Divine.

“Oh mother earth- Let your mountains clad peaks bring us happiness. On this multicolour. Indra Gupta prithvi, let me enjoy never ending happiness and gain everlasting glory without fear from defeat.”

\_Atharveda (Bhumisuktam 11.1)

India preserves an ancient tradition of protecting and worshipping Nature. Down the ages, harmony between Nature and Man always played a pivotal role in the Indian social life. Hindu mythology gives recognition to the omnipresence and omnipotence of God. It preaches that everything on this earth whether living or non living, bears a reflection of God, thus should be treated respectfully. Any damage or harm done to any part of nature was taken as an insult or injury to God. The entire environment was held in high esteem as it was the manifestation of the Almighty, the invisible God. A few examples are:

“Do not cut trees, because they remove pollution.” (Rig Veda, 6:48:17)

“Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere. ( Yajur Veda, 5:43)

Destruction of forests are taken as the destruction of the state, and reforestation an act of rebuilding the state and advancing its welfare. Protection of animals is considered a sacred duty. (charak samhita)

During the time of Ramayana also people were well aware about the omnipresence of God in every object of nature, therefore they highly praised and worshipped nature for e.g. Ravana,one

of the most knowledgeable and powerful demons, when faced trials in his life, tried to trace out its reason in any of the sins, if ever he committed against nature.

“I have not cut down any Fig tree in the month of Vaishakh, why then this calamity befall me?”

Bhagvad Gita also echoes the manifestation of Divine in every object of nature. Lord Krishna says,

“ Aham atma gudakesh sarva bhutashya sthitah

Aham adish cha madhyam cha bhutanam anta eva cha”

O Arjun, I am seated in the heart of all living entities. I am the beginning, middle and the end of all beings.

Similarly Rig Veda contains a verse which invokes the Divine to bliss and protect the environment for the general well being.

“madhu vatah ritayate madhu ksaranti sindhavah

Madhvih nah santusadhi

Iman jibebhyah paridhin dadhami meshan nu gadaparur arthametata

Satan jibantu saradah puruchirantamrstun

Dadhatan parvatena

Tiye nastane parvatah santu svaitava na virah

Panita aptyoada no vardhannah sansan naryo ahistou.”

(Rig Veda, 5/81/9)

All the poets of Sanskrit literature, with no exception are great lovers of nature. They not only loved nature but completely identified themselves with it. There are many examples to highlight their love towards flora and fauna.

In Kumarsambhavam Kalidasa extremely advocated the conservation of environment. He strongly opines that even a poisonous tree should not be cut down even by a person who raised it. A step further, the sage Kanva has personified nature to emphasize that Divinity pervades through all the objects of nature. While he sends shakuntala back to her husband’s house, he reminds the trees about the services rendered by her to them and also seeks permission from each of them for her departure

In Hindu culture, for maintaining ecological balance, plantation of trees is associated with the philosophy of Karma, and thus a great emphasis is laid on it.

It thus strongly advocates that one should raise big trees which bear fruits. Even if it does not offer fruits, it at least gives shade.

**Conclusion:** - It can be concluded that the concept of environmental concern and awareness is not new but it exists since times immemorial. It is as old as the human civilization itself. Be it the literature of East or West, everywhere we can discern a strong bondage between man and his environment. In fact now-a-days with a quick growth of industries and other mechanical and technological advancements, maintaining an ecological equilibrium, amid the environmental crisis, is emerging out as the challenge of the hour. Now it is our moral and social responsibility to maintain the balance and see that nature is not disturbed or interfered with, lest it should lead to chaos, as aptly pointed out by Earnst Hemmingway a famous American novelist, who remarked, “mending nature is ending nature.”

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