

Eco- Criticism: A Literary Approach to Nature

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Abstract: *The present paper will discuss Eco-Criticism as a separate discipline which emerged in the 21st century. It has very significant and productive directions towards literature and cultural studies. It is a study of nature, a scrutiny of ecological implications and human- nature relationships in a literary text. The paper will also investigate into the novels of Indian English literature and traces remarkable relevance of nature in the lives of human beings and made a plea to return back to nature. For example: Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura', Kamala Markandaya's 'Nectar in Sieve' and many others. Even poetry is not away from this urge. Poets like Meena Alaxender, Arun Kolatkar and few others made phenomenal contribution in praising the beauty of nature.*

Keywords: *Eco-Criticism, Ecological, Nature, Literature, Poets.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the past few decades, environment posed a big threat to the whole mankind and society. The extensive misuse of natural resources left human beings empty handed. Cutting down of forests, the fossil fuels are decreasing day by day, disorder of cycle of seasons, increasing global warming and as a result of this, the environment is at margin. Under these circumstances, a new theory came into existence which is known as 'Eco Criticism'. This environmentally oriented study of literature brings about an ecological literacy among the readers and the writers become conscious about their nature. Environmental concern becomes one of the major concerns of the world. Thus, Eco Criticism has undergone rapid development during its short tenure since its introduction

The term Eco-criticism is a separate movement or a school of Literary criticism which started developing in 1990s. In the initial phase of its development, it deals with American critics and literature. According to Buell, "The word Eco Criticism is a semi-neologism". (1091) The word 'Eco' originated from Greek terminology 'Oikos' which means 'Earth' and 'logy' from 'logos' which means 'logical discourse'. Lawrence Buell defines Eco Criticism "as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis" (430). 'Eco' in Eco-Criticism is concerned with the relationship between human beings and natural environment and how this relationship is reflected in literature. For the first time, the term appeared in William Rueckert's essay 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Eco Criticism' in 1978. Human beings always have a natural desire and curiosity to understand the environment but at the same time, they over exploit the natural resources.

Eco Criticism laid emphasis upon eco conscious man rather than ego conscious man. It is not about how ecological system functions but rather it deals with how human beings handle the system, how ethical they are in their dealings with natural resources and in which way they manage Mother Nature. In short, Eco Criticism builds this awareness among man. There are basically two waves of Eco Criticism: First wave eco critics focused upon "nature writing, nature poetry and wilderness fiction". (Buell 138) The second wave inclined towards 'Social Criticism' more upon the environment justice issues.

Eco Criticism is a wider approach and its very nature is interdisciplinary. Therefore, new theories came into existence like Post-Colonial Eco Criticism, Ecofeminism, Eco Marxism, Eco Spiritualism and so on. Thus, it is not only related to ecology but also to the study of literature and explore the environmental sensibility in literary texts. This interdisciplinary approach has been studied in the texts through imagery, gender construct, man woman relationship, tourism, culture which have wider meanings.

Eco Criticism in literature got its inspiration basically from three prominent American writers which are Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau and their works celebrate nature as the major life force of human beings. All the three writers considered as 'transcendentalists'. As per Emerson view, reality can be perceived by studying nature. Fuller's works deal mainly with American landscape and therefore reveal his spiritual attitude towards nature. But Thoreau considered as the father of Eco Criticism.

His work 'Walden' is an autobiographical account of the two years spent living in a hut near the shore of Walden pond. It is a classic example of leaving out the modern life and a 'return to nature'. Robert Frost is another major American poet who used woods, lakes, stars, horses etc to reveal the relevance of nature in the lives of human beings. His 'Stopping by the Woods' discusses the everlasting beauty of nature.

Other than America, India is also very rich in natural resources and surmounted a huge collection of lakes, seas, forests, mountains and biodiversity. Thus, literature in India is not away from this ecological perspective in literary texts. Anita Desai's 'Fire on the Mountain' is a very good example of ecocritical approach in texts which deals with animal killing, deterioration of nature in the hands of human beings, population explosion, moral degradation of man resulted into a threat to the ecological system thereby caught frequent fire in the forest.

Another Desai's novel 'Cry, the Peacock', the unexplored female psyche has been represented through the nature imagery. Desai uses myriad images of zoological, botanical, actions representing colours to indicate the psychology of the female protagonist of the novel named Maya. For example, 'crows' as an imagery used to deal with the theme of alienation in the novel. "Crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and the crows can eat anything....." (Desai 7)

Kamala Markandaya's 'Nectar in Sieve' represents nature in both of its roles i.e. as a destroyer and a preserver. The novelists here shown the ill effects of industrialization and the solace and comfort one can find in the peasant life. The female protagonist of the novel Rukmani left all her relationship with city life and with her husband started living a rural life. She is very much attached to her land somehow responsible for their poverty as well. The very beginning of the novel indicates her relationship with the rural environment. She often recalls her early married life in these words: "While the sun shines on you and the fields are green and beautiful to the eye, and your husband sees beauty in you which no one has seen before, and you have a good store of grain laid away for hard times, a roof over you and a sweet stirring in your body, what more can a woman ask for?" (Markandaya 8).

Arundhati Roy's 'God of Small Things' talks about the exploitation and misuse of natural environment by human beings in the name of modernization and rapid industrialization which is one of the dominant themes of the novel. Here the authoress shown an awareness towards a 'return to nature' and raised her voice in the favour of environment which is now under the threat of pollution. Even she discusses the massive destruction of nature and thereby exposes the cause of it in the moral degradation of human beings and as well as to the dehumanization. Ruskin Bond's 'No Room for a Leopard' presents the pathetic condition of animals after deforestation. His other novels like 'The Tree Lover' and 'The Cherry Tree' show the interdependence of human beings and nature.

Amitav Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide' reflects the oppressive forces used by human beings to mishandle and mistreat natural resources. The novel talks about the changes that occur in the natural world with that of humanity. It also discusses the imbalance between flora and fauna and between man and nature. Raja Rao on the other hand used natural elements in most of his novels like 'Malgudi Days', 'Man Eater of Malgudi', 'Kanthapura' and so on. He depicts the village and its environment, nature playing both negative and positive roles, Saryu river transforming the life of the central protagonist Raju in 'The Guide' and many other references. According to the need, mood and situation, even the use of nature kept on changing with the writers. Bhabani Bhattacharya depicted the natural calamity in 'So Many Hungers'. The novel discusses the tragic effects of famine on the inhabitants of Bengal. The writer employed many techniques related to nature, symbols, imagery in the novel. For example, the characters Laxminathan and Samrendra Bose compared to Jackals and Vulture due to their greedy nature.

2. CONCLUSION:

Thus, it can be concluded that nature acted as a supporting element in literary texts. It is an expressive form to reflect different situations, colorful atmosphere, gloominess, disturbance and changes occur in the lives of human beings. The prevalent environmental imbalance forced the writers to rethink and rewrite the natural elements in a serious manner. Writers kept on enforcing the balance between humans and nature and laid emphasis upon the environment protection and eco balance. Different kinds of environmental issues often used by intellectual writers such as biological, social, political, spiritual, psychological etc. An eco-critical analysis of literary texts invites the human beings to have more environmentally conscious thinking. Nature

thus played a crucial role in shaping the identity of humans through the application of natural elements upon their lives. Nature in some texts acted as benign and creator while in others as aggressive and destructive depending upon the treatment nature got from human beings. It is therefore necessary to develop a balance between the relationship of humans and nature to have a sustainable development in the society and world.

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