



Eco consciousness in the poetry of British, American & Indian Literature

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Abstract

The connection between man and environment has varied from the early periods of human settlement on the earth to the present day. The earth is facing an environmental crisis on a scale extraordinary in human history. This crisis is already responsible for high levels of human suffering and, if it continues, risks the extinction of human life on the planet. The most damaging environmental issues in the world today are: Air pollution, Solid waste, Soil erosion etc.

This Research paper attempts to find out the environmental concerns in British, America and Indian English poetry and trace the conservationist attitude of People towards nature. It studies the human exploitation of the natural world. It has come into popular use as a means of denoting poetry with a strong ecological emphasis or message.

Key Words: *ecological, crisis, exploitation.*

Introduction

Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as is evidenced in the works of poets and other writers down the ages in almost all cultures of the world. The study of Literature and environment consciousness is an interdisciplinary study termed as "Ecocriticism". Ecocriticism begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems: the multiple forms of ecodegradation that upset planet Earth today. The term "ecocriticism" was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.*" Interest in the study of nature writing and reading literature with a focus on "green" issue grew through the 1980's and by the early 90's. Ecocriticism is defined as "the study of relation between literature and physical environment" by Cheryl Glotfelty and Fromm 1996 (xviii) in the Ecocriticism Reader.

While eco-critics study literature written throughout history and analyse its relationship to the environment, most of the scholars has focused on British and American and Indian literature from the nineteenth and

twentieth century's. The decay and damage of environment is a serious threat to the forthcoming generations and we should try to manage and control it at war footing level. Even the key literary figures have discussed various aspects of nature in their writings to develop a sense of responsibility among the masses and to make them think & rethink of Environmental Preservation.

The poem "Tree" by Tina Morris, the twentieth century British poet makes the present generation realize what the world would be without trees.

They did not tell us
what it would be like
without trees.
Nobody imagined that the
whispering
of leaves would grow silent.

Above mentioned poem is a message in respect of conservation of nature. The poet holds a mirror before the reader's imaginative eye. This consciousness of the writers has brought the two disciplines ecology and literary criticism together. The purpose is to restore the Earth's health, which was lost owing to man's wrong doing.

Sir John Betjeman (1906-1984), in his poem "Inexpensive Progress" is highly relevant to modern times. It is a satirical attack on the obsession of modern man with so called progress at the expense of nature. It reveals how increasing industrialization and urbanization is destroying nature and defacing its fair face.

Encase your legs in nylons,
Bstride your hills with pylons
O age without a soul;
Away with gentle willows
And all the elmy billows
That through your valleys roll

In the above mentioned lines the poet has shown deep concern for nature. It is a satire on modern

man, who is destroying nature in the name of progress. The poet laments the loss of gentle willows and beautiful elmy trees. Modern man is insensitive to the beauties of nature and his only concern is technological advancement. But technological progress is deteriorating the environmental equilibrium which in turn will prove dangerous for mankind in the form of Acid Rains, depletion of Ozone layer, increase in CO₂ ratio to O₂ etc.

W. H. Davies (1871-1940), a twentieth century poet, was a prolific poet of brief and affecting nature lyrics. His lyric "Leisure" bemoans modern man's inability and passivity in responding to the beauties of nature. We always find ourselves in a tearing hurry to acquire material success and fame. What we instead get is neurosis and weariness in life. The poem reminds us of Stevenson, who aptly observes in his essay *An Apology for Idlers*: 'Look at one of your industrious fellows for a moment, I beseech you. He sows hurry and reaps indigestion; he puts vast deal of activity out to interest, and receives a large measure of nervous derangement in return.' This is exactly what Eliot reproduces in "The Waste land" when he exposes the squalor, the ugliness, and the horror of a modern man's neurotic life:

'My nerves are bad tonight.
Yes, bad. Stay with me.
Speak to me. Why do you
never speak? Speak.
What are you thinking of?
What thinking? What?'

A life led in the lap of nature is full of calm, serenity & peace of mind. So, the poet suggests that nature should be preserved and nurtured as it is permanent source of joy. poem the modern's man attitude to nature has been focussed at. Modern man is running a mad race of amassing more and more wealth which provides the luxuries of life but not peace of mind. So, it becomes the prime duty of all writers to care nature, to preserve it as it is the only source of joy which has pleasant effect on mind. Nature relieves modern man from the worries of modern day problems. W. H. Davies says in his poem "Leisure" shows deep concern for nature.

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and
stare?
No time to stand beneath the
boughs
And stare as long as sheep or
cows:
No time to see, when woods
we pass,

Where squirrels hide their nuts
in grass.

William Wordsworth's some of the most famous lyrics, including "Michael" (1800), which portrays simple shepherd who is deeply attached to the natural world around him. Wordsworth's autobiographical poem "The Prelude" (1850) records the poet's evolving understanding of nature, and "The Excursion" (1814) is a long philosophical reflection on the relationship of humanity and nature. The Romantic interest in nature is particularly significant to ecocritics because Wordsworth was revolutionary in his politics, and the preservation of natural world was one element of his radical thinking.

The world is too much with
us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay
waste our powers.
Little we see in Nature that is
ours;
We have given our hearts
away, a sordid boon!

In the above mentioned lines the poet says that the people of his age are busy increase wealth and spending the same at all hours of the day. In this manner they lose their spiritual power. They can't say that they are interested in certain objects of nature. They are insensitive to the sight of moonlight falling on the surface of the sea or the picture of the winds. In his poem "Daffodils" he relates a real-life experience. The poet says that daffodils are source of joy to him whenever he is in a 'vacant' or 'pensive' mood.

Wordsworth in his poem "Nutting", he tells how one morning he left home on a nutting expedition. He felt like a king after collecting nuts from there but he felt a sense of pain when he sees the sky intruding through the mutilated bower and silent trees. The scene of destruction troubled his conscience and filled him with a feeling of guilt. The poet draws a moral lesson from this experience of boyhood days and states it to his sister Dorothy in the last three lines of the poem. He exhorts her to move through the woods in gentleness of heart and gentle touch of hands for there is life, a spirit in the woods.

Later nineteenth-century English writers of note include Thomas Hardy in whose novels the sense of place always takes centre stage, and Matthew Arnold, whose love poem "Dover Beach" (1867) is said to be one of the finest descriptions of place in English poetry. Victorian essayists who wrote about nature include John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle, both of whom lamented the destruction of the environment due to industrialization.

American Writer Henry David Thoreau's "Walden" (1854) narrative describing the two months the author lived in a small cabin in the woods near Walden pond, in Massachusetts'. Other American writer of the period whose work has been seen important by ecocritics include Cullen Bryant, James Kirke Paulding, Walt Whitman and Robert Frost.

"Stopping By Woods on A Snowy Evening" is one of the most quietly moving of Frost's lyrics:

The woods are lovely, dark
and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Indian poet Gieve Patal shows ecocritical approach in writing the poem "On Killing A Tree". He describes the process of brutal and merciless murder of a tree. The tree has been personified here and in the first stanza it is shown growing and maturing like a human being and in the second and next stanzas the process of killing a tree is described:

It takes much time to kill a
tree,
Not a simple job of the knife
Will do it.....
So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much of pain will do it.

The poetry of Nissim Ezekiel(1924-2004) is known for love, loneliness, human foibles, and many other things, but not for the portrayal of the nature. The poems which require ecocritical attention for portrayal of nature are poems like "Squirrel" and "Sparrows". Another poem that challenges culture is A. K. Ramanujan's "Snakes" from his first collection The Strider's. The persona in the poem afraid of the snake, he kills it and feels that he is safe in the woods.

William Rueckert says: "The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying natural community, and with it the human community. This is what the ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude towards nature. (Glottelty 107)

An ecocritical reading of Keki N Daruwalla's poem "A Boat ride along the Ganga", Reveals how man is responsible for polluting the holy river. The poem begins with a simple description of an evening, but the poet's "conscience" for "hygiene" makes him curse it.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is the responsibility of everyone to protect our environment. Let us fulfil our

responsibilities in environmental protection, creating a quality ecological environment and sharing wonderful green living together. If human beings desire a healthy survival on earth, environmental awareness is the need of the hour. The concept of sustainable development was a milestone in this conference, which refers to the equitable distribution of natural resources between present and future generations. Along with the govt. & non-govt. organisations, the writers of all countries and generations have shown their sensitivity towards conservation and preservation of nature. Some of the spokesman of eco-criticism from Britain, America & India have been critically analysed and studied in the present research paper with reference to Environmental concerns in their works.

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