

Nature's Voice in Fiction: A Comprehensive Study of Ecocritical Elements in Modern Novels

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Abstract

This study explores ecocritical features in contemporary novels in-depth under the general heading of "Nature's Voice in Fiction." Examining the complex relationship between literature and the environment, the study looks at how modern writers include ecocritical elements into their writing. The symbolic function of natural environments, the dynamics of interactions between humans and nature, and the narrative portrayal of environmental issues are important areas of concentration. This research attempts to explore the various ways that environment serves as a character, catalyst, and metaphor within fictional settings by examining a few contemporary novels from a variety of genres. The research adds to a more complex understanding of ecocritical discourse in literature by illuminating how important it has become in creating stories that connect with current ecological issues.

Keywords: ecocriticism, literature, discourse, ecological issues, environment.

Introduction

"The Earth is what
We all have in
Common"

- Wendell Berry

Ecocriticism is a widely employed word that encompasses the study of literature and other forms of media with a focus on environmental issues. The general attention has been drawn to the pervasive effect of science and technology in today's technologically driven environment. The dominant perspective posits that technology in isolation has the potential to facilitate achievement, permeating nearly all facets of human existence. In the midst of this rapid advancement in technology, people have constructed a man-made world that has come at the cost of the environment. This has resulted in a multitude of environmental issues, including excessive heat in tropical regions, persistent drought, global warming, desertification, deforestation, floods, droughts, and pollution. One concerning phenomenon is the tendency of humanity to frequently disregard the environment, resulting in significant consequences for various facets of existence on our planet, encompassing food, habitat, fashion, social class, gender, psychology, religion, and economics. The notion of eco-balance transcends particular regions or geographic locations; it has evolved into worldwide

phenomena, necessitating the shared obligation of the entire human species to uphold a habitable environment. The incorporation of ecological consciousness and environmental awareness has become an essential component of contemporary society, with a particular emphasis on sustainable development. Literary thinkers and academicians have developed an eco-centered approach called 'ecocriticism' in response to ecological crises. This critical theory, which has thrived in the last thirty years, signifies a shift away from previous criteria such as class, gender, and region in critical analysis. The rise of environmental hazards in the early 1900s resulted in the general acceptance of ecocriticism on a global scale.

Ernst Heinrich Haeckel, a German biologist and philosopher, coined the term 'ecology' to describe a field of biology that focuses on the interactions between organisms and their physical environment. Ecocriticism expands this study to analyze the interaction between humans and their surroundings, embracing both organic and inorganic factors. The etymology of the term 'ecology' may be traced back to its Greek origins, where 'oikos' denotes 'household' or 'home,' highlighting the interdependence of all living organisms within their collective habitat, Earth.

The official recognition of ecocriticism occurred throughout the 1990s through the publication of two

significant literary works: *The Ecocritical Reader* (1996) authored by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) written by Lawrence Buell. The concept of 'ecocriticism' encompasses the scholarly examination of the interplay between literature and the physical environment, similar to how feminist criticism scrutinizes perspectives that are sensitive to gender and Marxist criticism delves into the exploration of economic class within literary works. Ecocriticism is based on the comprehensive examination of the interconnection between living creatures and their surroundings. Significant contributions to this field have been made by notable ecocritics such as Lawrence Buell, Simon C Estok, William Howarth, and Glen A Love. In the current era, known as the 'century of the environment,' ecocriticism continues to play a vital role in questioning postmodern critical viewpoints and advancing the continuous conversation surrounding environmental concerns. Glotfelty is recognized as the progenitor of ecocriticism in the United States, promoting a literary studies approach that prioritizes the environment. She expressed that:

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

During the 1960s, the concept of ecology gained significant prominence across various academic domains, including but not limited to plant and animal biology, anthropology, physics, and chemistry. Although the origins of nature writing may be traced back to the 18th century, there has been a significant revival in ecological or environmental literature. The present-day methodology functions as a substitute for conventional "nature writing," broadening its purview to encompass habitats, pastoral landscapes, fauna, and avian species under the domain of environmental literature. Literature has depicted nature and ecology in various ways, encompassing religious, philosophical, personal, symbolic, formal, and political aspects. The commentary provided by Donald Hughes regarding this evolution is particularly remarkable.

"Human ecology, then is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water both fresh and salt; with its air, climates and weather; with its many living things, animals and planets, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the Sun." (Hughes 3)

Ecocriticism aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and interconnections that exist between human beings and nonhuman creatures. This theory seeks to restore the integration between humans and non-human entities, with the goal of reestablishing the lost linkages between humanity and the world. In her preface to the inaugural ecocriticism reader, Cheryll Glotfelty observes that...

"If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class and gender were the hot topics of the twentieth century, but you would never know that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you might never know that there was an earth at all. (Glotfelty xvi)

Lawrence Buell has extensively explored American pastoral experiences from multiple perspectives, including social, political, gender-based, pragmatic, and environmental situations. The author lays considerable importance on the rising challenges posed by ecological upheaval and highlights the presence of environmental themes in literary works. Buell (1995) argues in his publication *The Environmental Imagination* that doing this study necessitates a steadfast dedication to environmentalist practice. Buell emerges as a prominent character within the realm of ecocriticism, primarily recognized for his significant examination of Henry David Thoreau's ecological literature and its influence on the development of American society. In *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (1998), Timothy Morton provides a valuable contribution to Buell's theoretical framework by offering insights into the dynamic nature of the concept of 'nature' and harmonizing with Buell's perspectives. In the present context, the term "nature" embraces a wide range of creatures that exist on the planet Earth. Richard Kerridge's definition in the British

Writing and Environment (1998) further supports these notions;

"The ecocritics want 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" (Kerridge 5)

Glen A. Love, a prominent critic, has made substantial contributions to the field of ecocriticism through his written works and scholarly endeavors. The individual's objective has been to establish a connection between the fields of natural sciences and humanities. The exploration of love has raised a fundamental inquiry, prompting contemplation on the interrelation between human nature and ecocriticism. The investigation served as a catalyst for his authorship of the book titled *Practical Ecocriticism* in 2003. In the first section of this scholarly work, Love provides a comprehensive analysis of the pragmatic dimensions of ecocriticism.

"At the beginning of the third millennium and of a new century often heralded as – the century of the environment, a coherent and broadly based movement embracing literary environmental interactions, commonly termed – 'ecocriticism', unlike all other forms of literary inquiry, encompasses non human as well as human contexts and considerations. On this claim, ecocriticism bases its challenge too much postmodern critical discourse as well as to the critical systems of the past." (Love 5)

Although there were some movements in ecologically oriented criticism during the 1970s, it was not until the late twentieth century that the study of literature and the environment was acknowledged as a growing field. The term "Eco" in ecocriticism is derived from the field of ecology and focuses on the examination of the interconnections between living organisms within their natural habitats and their interactions with the surrounding environment. In a similar vein, ecocriticism delves into the interrelationships between literature and the environment, scrutinizing the manner in which literary works depict human interactions with the natural world. This multifaceted investigation, separate from the realms of natural science and humanistic fields, embodies an

unorthodox amalgamation of both. Prominent ecocritics, such as Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P Branch, and Glen A Love, are not limited to any specific literary genre. The comprehensive and all-encompassing nature of the environment highlights the necessity of adopting an objective perspective in the field of literary environmental studies or ecocriticism, in order to exert a more significant influence on human conduct in relation to the environment. The focus of ecocritical studies has primarily been on theoretical dimensions and nature literature, with a particular emphasis on the American literary tradition. In conjunction with the notable contributions made by Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm, there have been other distinguished critics who have made significant contributions in this field. Prominent works in the field of environmental studies encompass Simon Schama's seminal work *Landscape and Memory* (1995), Kate Soper's influential publication *What is Nature?* (1998), Dana Phillips's influential publication *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (2003), and John Parham's multifaceted publication *The Environmental Tradition in English Literature* (2002), among various others.

Origin and Need of Ecocriticism

The occurrence of ecological crises and environmental disasters is not limited to contemporary times; ancient Greece also encountered environmental concerns, exemplified by the occurrence of soil erosion resulting from deforestation. In Indian culture, deities are frequently portrayed in the natural world, and many elements of the surroundings are venerated. The origins of numerous ancient religions and philosophical movements can be traced back to the inadequate treatment of the environment by humanity. Ancient scriptures attributed sacred functions and symbolic meanings to trees and forests. In Hindu mythology, the woodland 'Aranyaka' is depicted as a gathering place where all Gods convene to deliberate on the advancement of humanity. Today, people still congregate in natural environments to think about the well-being of humans. In the modern day, the increasing demands of civilization and urbanization have provoked a critical reflection on the urgent need to address

deforestation and the loss of ecological resources. This awareness underlines the significance of rethinking and altering our attitudes about the environment. Ecological consciousness arose in the 1960s, particularly stimulated by Rachel Carson's landmark book, *Silent Spring* (1962). This experiment revealed the adverse impacts of indiscriminate chemical and pesticide use on the ecosystem, hurting both human and animal life. The release of *Silent Spring* triggered a surge of environmental consciousness, causing historians, anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, and psychologists to rethink the relationship between the environment and humans. The official start of ecocriticism as a distinct discipline happened in the 1990s. Early ecocritical writings are attributed to Thoreau and Emerson, with Thoreau's 'Journal' regarded the starting point of American nature literature. Prior to 1990, literature had not extensively addressed ecological concerns. Two key events paved the path for increased environmental awareness. In 1995, Professor Lawrence Buell's book, *The Environmental Imagination* is based on his thorough research of Thoreau and the Transcendentalist movement. This study not only gave a clear definition of nature writing but also critically investigated how literature depicts and develops the environment, incorporating this fringe genre into mainstream American literature. *The Ecocritical Reader* was issued the next year, in 1996, by Harold Fromm and Cheryl Glotfelty. Glotfelty, as mentioned in the Introduction, expressed:

"This book outlines the genesis of the literary response to environmentalism, which unlike it might seem, did exist, only it never constituted a unified and identifiable front, but consisted of isolated articles and essays." (1996: xvi-xvii)

In his statement, Glotfelty posits a correlation between literature and nature. In her writing, she has made significant contributions to the field of environmental studies by incorporating references to the esteemed American author Wallace Stegner. According to Stegner's proposition,

"...that the subject of ecocriticism remains large and loose and suggestive and open, simply literature and the environment in all the ways in which they interact and have interacted". (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: xxii)

While Glotfelty expands the scope of ecological study, Buell adopts a narrower definition of nature writing, which includes nonfictional texts such as science papers, philosophical writings, and travel guides. Both critics have a shared objective of fostering ecological consciousness. The ecocriticism manifesto, as presented in the Introduction to the *The Ecocriticism Reader*, underscores the importance of a holistic comprehension of the environment. It surpasses the conventional understanding of 'nature,' which solely refers to areas unaffected by human settlement, considered 'wild' and inhabited solely by animals, plants, and rocks, and instead encompasses a broader and more inclusive concept of the environment.

"But nature per se is not the only focus of ecocritical studies of representation, other topics include the frontier, animals, cities, specific geographic regions, rivers, mountains, deserts, technology, garbage and the body." (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: xxiii)

Ecocriticism, as a critical theory, extends beyond the examination of nature in literature. It signifies a shift towards a bio-centric perspective, an ethical expansion that encompasses nonhuman life forms and the physical environment within the global community. Gary Snyder introduces the concept of the "Gift Economy" to provide a fresh viewpoint on the fundamental nature of ecology. Snyder posits that a gift economy is characterized by its contribution to the preservation of the world rather than its depletion and consumption. Within this framework, the role of a writer assumes a crucial position, as Snyder emphasizes that "Art does not deplete the world; rather, it functions as a gift and an exchange." "It leaves the world nourished" (Snyder 39). Greg Garrard argues that although ecocritics may not have the knowledge to debate the 'problems of ecology,' they are still responsible for going beyond academic boundaries and developing their own 'ecological literacy' to the best of their ability (Garrard 5). In his book, Garrard thoroughly examines how individuals use, protect, or ignore the environment. He argues that the capacity to "define, explore, and even resolve ecological problems in this broader sense" contributes to the unique nature of ecocriticism among modern literary and cultural theories (Garrard 6).

Various scholars acknowledge the imperative need for ecocritical studies, considering the planet's heavy burden

of pollution, industrialization, and numerous other issues caused by human activities. Human behavior is identified as the primary culprit in this environmental predicament. Literary studies and literature-driven awareness play a crucial role in addressing these challenges, sensitizing individuals to environmental issues. The earth, bestowed upon humanity by a higher power, entails the responsibility of preservation. The theory of ecocriticism emerges as the most relevant approach, emphasizing landscapes as dominant characters. When authors establish meaningful connections with places, and characters resonate with their surroundings, a profound relationship is forged, marked by empathy. The landscape encompasses non-human elements such as rocks, soil, trees, plants, rivers, animals, air, and human perceptions and acceptance of them. Literature that delves into these aspects is deemed eco-literature, focusing on the places to which humans belong. Analyzing how closely humans interact with their surroundings—which include the weather, climate, plants, animals, soil, air, water, rocks, fire, minerals, ice, and animals—makes one think about their roots and how important it is to protect them to survive over the long term. This ecocritical issue presents itself in two main ways. Man is a part of the natural world. Man is therefore a lifelong wanderer yet, at the same time, is inextricably linked to his accustomed physical and cultural surroundings. Man travels the natural world in search of his roots and sense of self. The conclusion of the 20th century has amply demonstrated the need for everyone to contribute in order for the world to survive. The realization that the survival of the earth is the biggest challenge facing the twenty-first century emerged in the final decade of the twentieth century.

Ecocriticism and Literature

In the eighteenth century, the concept that nature represented scientific truth was closely associated with the terms "plentitude," "continuity," and "gradation." Valuing nature was considered synonymous with accurately representing human nature. The works of Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett are particularly remarkable for exemplifying this perspective. With roots in pre-Christian or Vedic antiquity, nature has been honored as the Great Mother throughout history. The idea that nature exists for human benefit first

appeared in Christian philosophy, treating man as a natural child. This prenatal mindset-based perspective provided justification for the exploitation of environment and nature. Elizabethan pastoral literature, such as William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Spencer's *The Shepherd's Calendar*, Sir Philip Sydney's *The Arcadia*, and dramas and romances by University Wits like George Peele, John Lyly, Robert Greene, and Thomas Lodge, illustrated how people used nature. Natural philosophers such as Francis Bacon attempted to develop a methodology that emphasized the superiority of humans over nature in the 17th and 18th centuries. The 18th century's poetry, especially those of James Thomson and Mark Akenside, showed how human skill might harness nature. In *The Seasons*, Thomson depicted a harmonious coexistence of human industry and the natural world, highlighting the function of industry in enhancing and beautifying human existence. *The Pleasure of Imagination* by Akenside highlighted the transformational power while nostalgically recalling the Tyne valley.

Art has always been associated with environment and ecology, contrasted with human creativity in natural processes, since the time of Shakespeare. In his book *The Defence of Poesie*, Elizabethan poetry critic Sir Philip Sidney argued that poetry was an ideal and advancement over nature. His claim that "Her (Nature's) world is brazen; the poets only deliver a golden" stands in sharp contrast to the novelists of the eighteenth century, who saw nature as veracity. By separating poetry from the unadulterated beauty of the natural world, Sidney sought to raise poetry to a higher plane. James Thomson tried to create a balance between urban and rural aspects in eighteenth-century England. On the other hand, William Wordsworth became a pioneer of what would be called "nature" poetry in the 19th century, during the Romantic Movement. The concept of self-communication with nature, especially in its untamed and rural forms, was central to Wordsworth's creative utterances. His research established the groundwork for changing viewpoints on ecology and nature. American critic M.H. Abrams discusses Wordsworth's vision of nature and its transformational power in his work *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

"Wordsworth's cardinal standard of poetic value is 'nature', and nature, in his usage is given a triple and primitivistic connotation: Nature is of the common

denominator of human nature; it is most reliably exhibited among men living 'according to nature' (that is to say, in culturally simple, and especially a rural environment): and it consists primarily in an elemental simplicity of thought and feeling and a spontaneous and 'inartificial' mode of expressing feeling in words" (Abrams 87).

As a result, Wordsworth and other Romantic poets' writings make nature and ecology central topics. By the time of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), published in the Victorian era, nature has been portrayed as essentially hostile, evil, and unaffected by human presence. Other literary works, including Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which describes Nature as "Nature red in tooth and claw," also reaffirm this portrayal (Tennyson 3). In his analysis of nature-ecology, Thomas Hardy equates it with a stoic destiny that controls humankind. Through the formal expression of W.B. Yeats' poetry and the political inquiry of Ted Hughes' writings, the symbolic portrayal of nature-ecology becomes a recurring issue in English literature during the 20th century. There are other ways to tackle this issue, as British dramatist Christopher Fry points out in his suggestion, "How nature loves the incomplete." She is aware that drawing a conclusion would put an end to her (Fry). It is a marvel if one can discover the secrets of nature, as its behaviors and responses defy logic and present a mystic puzzle for humanity to solve.

Indian Perspective of Ecocriticism

The origins of Indian literature in English date back to 1498, when Vasco de Gama arrived in Kerala. The roots of this literary tradition then spread to India during the British colonial era and continued to flourish once the effects of globalization were felt. Prominent individuals including Sri Aurobindo, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, and Rabindranath Tagore have made substantial contributions to Indian English-language literature. The way that English literature is currently viewed is noteworthy; this is demonstrated in *Postcolonial Environments* by Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2010). Mukherjee specializes on current English-language Indian fiction, examining the environmental issues facing the subcontinent via the writings of writers such as Ruchir Joshi, Amitav Ghosh, Indra Sinha, and Arundhati Roy. This method offers a novel and noteworthy addition to the developing conceptions of "green postcolonialism."

Nowadays, Indian writers are receiving prizes and international acclaim for their works; Indian English literature explores a wide range of topics, including social realism, gender issues, diversity, magic realism, diasporic literature, and ecological concerns. Spokespersons for Indianness in a variety of genres have been carried by several Indian authors. Novelists and poets who use landscape and nature in their writings include Bhabani Bhattacharya, Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jayant Mahapatra, and R.K. Narayan. Their literary works highlight the importance of the environment in human life by illuminating the complex link between humans and nature. Authors such as Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and Kiran Desai have been inspired by the current global concern over global warming to write about a range of environmental issues, including political, biological, social, racial, regional, seasonal, and psychological aspects, in an effort to promote a harmonious relationship between nature and human life. Particularly, authors who have highlighted nature in their writings and emphasized its interaction with humans include R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgaokar, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, and Anita Desai. Nature is a major influence on the development of people and storylines in R.K. Narayan's fictional universe of Malgudi, for example. In the same manner, Raja Rao uses natural elements in *Kanthapura* to express his opinions and emphasize the significance of these aspects in human existence. In her book *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya presents nature as both a destroyer and a preserver, whereas Bhabani Bhattacharya presents nature as hostile and destructive in *So Many Hungers*. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai's psychological novel, she delves into the cravings, dejection, and discontent of Maya, the heroine. The narrative used nature as a symbol to underscore the importance of gentle nurturing and to reflect the deference that women ought to be accorded. The main topic is the absence of companionship, which echoes the disregard for women's needs and the natural world. Writers such as Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Arundhati Roy in 'The God of Small Things' underscore the interdependence of Nature and Humanity. Prominent author Amitav Ghosh emphasizes the significance of ecological balance in *The Hungry Tide*. The Sunderban

islands are the focal point of the book, which also discusses the environment's intricate ecosystem and the situation of Bangladeshi refugees. In the story, Ghosh prioritizes environmental and animal protection while highlighting the interdependence between humans and the natural world.

Cultural Orientation of Ecocriticism

Compared to Western civilization, Indians have a stronger bond with nature. In the West, there is a mastery and utilitarian attitude to meeting human wants, separating man from nature. The attachment to animals is not considered a natural rule, but rather a human preference. But in India, reverence for nature is a deeply held belief, not just a matter of personal preference. Indian philosophy holds that humans are part of nature and will eventually return there to live in a harmonious coexistence. The Indian tradition emphasizes that man is an essential component of a system in which everything is interconnected, and it is cosmocentric. But as Western civilization has taken hold, humanity is moving toward becoming a human-centric planet, which suggests disrespect for and possible harm to nature. An understanding of the harmonious relationship between nature and the physical environment is deeply rooted in the Indian worldview. Poetry from the classical era speaks for the poet's deep appreciation of the natural world. Indian philosophy, which has its roots in the Vedas, explains the natural relationship that exists between biological nature and humanity. The philosophy promotes harmony in oneness rather than the idea of supremacy, which reflects the core tenet of the Indian worldview. This is in contrast to Western society, which sees nature as the "other" and as something that is subservient to human speech. Offering an alternative philosophy, the Vedic and Upanishadic viewpoints emphasize the moral and ethical principles that governed how humans interacted with and treated the natural world. Composed between 1600 and 600 BC, the Vedic literature is the oldest known literary work in India and examines many facets of the natural and biological world within religious contexts. The *Atharvaveda* which depicts man's prayers to mother earth for a fertile and nourished nation, protection from natural calamities, and a pleasant habitation for future generations, generously respects nature and environmental factors. In

addition to the Vedas, the Hindu perspective has been effectively conveyed in other literary works, namely the Upanishads and Puranas. This viewpoint is characterized by a profound reverence for all living beings and recognition of the interdependence and concordance among various life forms, encompassing flora, fauna, flora, and fauna, as well as the fundamental constituents of the natural world, namely earth, air, water, and fire.

According to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, there exists a correlation between the human body, plants, trees, and space with the bodily functions of flesh, muscle, bone, and marrow. Additionally, the three constituents of life, namely earth, fire, and water, are associated with the human faculties of breath, sight, and skin (1.7). Several passages within the Vedas caution against the detrimental effects of greed, selfishness, and exploitation on humanity. Instead, individuals are encouraged to foster a state of mutual interdependence. This knowledge is further conveyed through the *Taittiriya Brahmana*.

"...the same divine milk that circulates through creatures here on earth lights the suns – all the suns of the galaxy. It condenses also into the forms of the clouds. It pours down as rain and feeds the earth, the vegetation and the animals. The individual with the awareness of this secret cannot be avaricious for an portion of the abundant food that may come to him. He will share it willingly with his companions. He will not wish to break the circuit by hoarding the substance to himself.... His food avails him nothing: when he eats, eats his own death" (2.8.8).

Lord Krishna articulates the identical concept in Shloka 20, Chapter 10 of the Bhagavad Gita.

"aham mama gudakesha sarva-bhutashayasthitaḥ
aham adishcha madhyam cha bhutanam anta eva cha"

Translation is –

I am the self seated in the heart of all creatures. I am the beginning, the middle and the very end of all the beings. All the beings should be treated alike.

Dr Pankaj Jain, an Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas, possesses expertise in the field of South Asian Religions and Ecology. He has established connections between contemporary environmental challenges and the ancient Indic traditions of Jainism and Hinduism. Recognizing the intricate nature of Hinduism as

a religious and cultural phenomenon with diverse local and regional manifestations, Dr. Jain has conducted research on various traditions in relation to present-day concerns.

"The earth can be seen as a manifestation of goddess, and must be treated with respect. The five elements – space, air, fire, water and the earth – are the foundation of an interconnected web of life. Dharma – often translated as "duty" – can be reinterpreted to include our responsibility to care for the earth... *Panchamahabhut as* (The five elements) create a web of life that is shown forth in the structure and interconnectedness of the cosmos and the human body. Hinduism teaches that the five great elements (space, air, fire, water and earth) that constitute the environment are all derived from prakriti, the primal energy. Hinduism recognizes that human body is composed of and related to these five elements, and connects each of the elements to one of the five senses. The human nose is related to earth, tongue to water, eyes to fire, skin to air and ears to space. This bond between our senses and the elements is the foundation of our human relationship with the natural world. For Hinduism, nature and the environment are not our existence and they constituting our very bodies" (Jain 109).

"One who plants one peepal, one neem, one bar, ten flowering plants or creepers, two pomegranates, two oranges, and five mangoes, does not go to hell," is the message of *Varah Purana*. From a practical perspective, planting these trees and participating in plantation customs are said to bring about long-lasting enjoyment, independent of religious beliefs. Plants give forth oxygen, which makes life happier and healthier for people. The Upanishads, Puranas, and other later literature, as well as the Vedas, expressly express the Hindu viewpoint on nature. An appreciation for all life and an emphasis on how interwoven everything is within the larger rhythm of nature characterize this point of view. There are references to forests and wilderness in the epic *Ramayana*. The protagonist identifies with the forest, and a stunning and peaceful scene replete with fruit and nut trees, birds, and beasts is used to eloquently represent Rama's banishment. During Rama's banishment, the forest becomes the saints' home and place of employment as they participate in spiritual activities. As a peaceful, serene spot with ecologically balanced plant and fruit trees, birds,

animals, and people, "Ashok Vatika" is another noteworthy location. Hindu epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* use imagery of gardens and forests to represent the various ecological environments in which people interact with nature and move across social classes. The *Mahabharata* depicts a societal structure that was primarily pastoral at first but progressively developed into early kingdoms. Ecocritics contend that protecting the environment requires caring for all living things, including people, animals, birds, forests, and mountains. Vast natural landscapes and lives submerged in nature are portrayed in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, illustrating a lovely and happy coexistence between humans and the natural world. These texts romanticize the search for inner calm and the resolution of existential issues.

The middle Ages introduced a range of cultures and customs, resulting in diverse perspectives on nature and the connection between humans and the natural world. The majority of cultural heritage during this period is derived from Greek and Latin intellectual systems and literary genres. This diversity is crucial for the progress and growth of medieval civilization. Helen Ellerbe's elucidation in *The Dark Side of Christian History* states that...

"In the West, Christianity has distanced humanity from nature. As people came to perceive God as a singular supremacy detached from the physical world, they lost their relevance for nature. In Christian eyes, the physical world became the realm of the devil. A society that had once celebrated nature through seasonal pagan festivals began to commemorate biblical events bearing no connection to the earth. Holiday lost much of the celebratory spirit and took on a tone of penance and sorrow. Time once thought to be cyclical like the seasons, was now perceived to be linear. In their rejection of the cyclical nature of life, orthodox Christians came to focus more upon death than upon life" (Ellerbe 139-155).

In the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon proclaimed that nature should be compelled to serve and subjugated, rather than being valued or respected. In essence, Bacon advocated for the exploitation of nature rather than valuing or respecting it. The term "paganism," which originated from Christianity, was derogatorily used to describe rural inhabitants who engaged in spontaneous worship and coexisted harmoniously with the natural environment.

This was in stark contrast to the artificial rituals devised by urban manipulators of human consciousness within Christianity. In the early stages of religion, people developed a deep respect and admiration for the natural world and its forces. However, it was only in the later stages that people began to comprehend the ethical aspects of these abilities, delving into the distinction between good and evil, and determining what actions are deemed acceptable or unacceptable. Dr. Giriraj Shah highlights in *Glimpses of Indian Culture' that Mahatma Gandhi*, the most passionate nationalist in the country, observed:

"I bow my head in reverence to our ancestors for their sense of the beautiful in nature and for their foresight in investing beautiful manifestations of Nature with a religious significance". (Shah 106)

Greek philosophy first appeared with the Pre-Socratics and became well-known, particularly in the fifth century BC. Socrates' philosophical contributions marked the beginning of the age, and Plato and Aristotle came next. This philosophical movement not only signaled the beginning of European civilization, but it also fundamentally altered how the West saw the natural world. Within the same civilization, the natural world was once believed to be ruled by irrational gods and uncontrollable forces. This idea reminds me of Hindu texts, where gods control natural forces and elements and display human-like emotions and conduct. Nonetheless, literature and the arts frequently portrayed these gods' emotions in human form, with them reflecting human vices and being profoundly anthropomorphized. The Enlightenment is frequently praised as the age of reason in the Western history of ideas. Its most important feature is the enormous boost it gave to faith in science, encouraging a strong trust in scientific reasoning. This era's conception of existence reduced the importance of human emotions, sentiments, and the illogical side of human nature. Values replaced reason, religion was reduced to superstition, and science became the primary interpreter of truth, giving rise to an intellectual and analytical attitude that dominated society. During this time, poetry and creativity were not as prevalent. On the other hand, the current postmodern era welcomes the age of logic, in which truth is recognized for all of its dimensions. This change is in line with the modern

interpretation, which departs from the Enlightenment's monopoly on reason. As demonstrated by Rene Descartes, modern thought acknowledges the significance of multiple dimensions and facets in the search for truth.

"All science is certain, evident knowledge. We reject all knowledge which is merely probable and judge that only those things should be believed which are perfectly known and about which there can be no doubts." (Descartes 55).

This viewpoint holds that all knowledge must be verified rationally and logically, be repeatable, and be subjected to scientific analysis. Early English literature has depicted landscapes in a variety of ways, presenting the location as a character. Nature has been an important backdrop for the literary plot, taking place against. The majesty and supremacy of nature are emphasized in these works, which also show humanity living in perfect harmony with their natural environments. An accurate portrayal of the interaction between man and nature can be found in the way that culture and environment are portrayed. Global academic spokesperson Cheryl Glotfelty states, "Work as usual seems unconscionably frivolous as environmental problems compound." We contribute to the problem, not the solution (Glotfelty xxi).

Consequently, the researcher poses a significant inquiry in her study,

"In what manner can we actively contribute to the process of environmental restoration?" "From within our capacity as professors of literature" (Glotfelty xxi)

This scholarly contribution should consider both the literary and ecological aspects without neglecting the other. Ecocriticism provides a conceptual framework for studying the connections between literature and the environment. Literature reflects the visually and culturally created elements of the surroundings. It is inherently connected to the ecological awareness issues that humanity must address, as it directly engages with concepts that are distinct to humans, such as meaning, value, language, and imagination.

Every ecocritics work within the same parameters, taking into account the ways in which literature transmits particular ideals that advance ecological consciousness. Literature, they argue, should never ignore environmental challenges. One could consider ecocriticism to be a methodology. Ecocriticism can also be regarded as a

method if the goal is to achieve the reorientation of conceptual and critical tools. Nature is holistic and full in and of itself, not just an accessory or something on the sidelines in literature. Spiritual books that stress the cultural dimensions of human existence include the ancient origins of ecocriticism and ecological knowledge. This necessitates a thorough examination of tribal and folk culture in addition to a global study of environmental movements. In cultural studies, regional and global analyses are equally important. Ecological literature, also known as environmental wisdom, provides guidance through narratives depicting cultures that once existed harmoniously with the natural world. These narratives highlight various instances of destruction, such as the loss of non-human environments, species extinction, and inadequate management of bioregions. It is crucial to acknowledge and comprehend these factors, as articulated by Islamic philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

"There must be a radical restructuring of the intellectual landscape to enable us to take this type of knowledge of nature seriously, which means to accept the findings of modern science only within the confines of the limitations that its philosophical suppositions, epistemologies, and historical development have imposed upon it, while rejecting completely its totalitarian claims as the science of the natural order" (Nasr 287).

The perception of ecology and its components is highly subjective due to the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of writers. In literary works, there exist numerous interpretations of nature and other environmental factors. These interpretations are influenced by various factors that impact psychology and the human mind, thereby shaping individuals' understanding of themselves in relation to their surroundings. Consequently, the portrayal and depiction of the environment in literature vary depending on the individual and the nation. This diversity prompts inquiries into the underlying reasons for the diverse perspectives on ecological awareness observed across different countries. These perceptions may differ based on factors such as gender, social class, geographical location, and personal viewpoints. This is due to the significance of incorporating these factors.

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