

Reflection of Nature in Literature: An Eco-critical Study

Ambadas Dadasaheb Sakat
Kisan Veer Mahavidyalaya, Wai,
Dist. Satara, Maharashtra

Abstract: *Eco-critical study is an unique concept amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with humans and environment. Basically, it studies the everlasting correlation between literature and environment. This paper will give an overview of the significant role played by environment to compose any type genre in literature. I have tried to establish my argument that the people who are very close to the nature across the globe have a very close attachment with nature they loved the most. The present paper will look in to I) Concept of Eco-criticism II) Identification of Eco-criticism in America and Green studies in UK. III) Role of Shakespeare in bringing up Eco-critical approach in Elizabethan Drama. IV) Romantic era the glory of eco-critical poetry. V) Consciousness of Eco-criticism amongst modern poets. Thus, my intention is to explorer the man- nature relationship reflected in literature right from the adventurous journey of Columbus to the present era.*

Key words: Eco-criticism; Green studies; New England writers; back to nature; Ecology; WLA etc.

I) Concept of Eco-criticism: The present paper seeks to focus on reflection of nature in literature and how literature is used to promote an eco-critical awareness in the society. Henry Thoreau, an ecologist believed that nature is the way of achieving self- realization which highly influenced the writers to express their views on environment to preserve the beauty of nature for the welfare and longer existence of mankind. Basically, literature may be said to have started reflecting environment in 1943, when Columbus and others did adventurous journey and wrote their famous letters about difficulties and dangers they had to face and also about the wonders in environment they saw everywhere in the journey. Almost, all branches of literature have touched the term ecocriticism, first introduced in 1970s with the meetings of (WLA) Western Literature Association in which all theorists and ecocritics, with their papers, all entitled “*What is Ecocritism*” intended to find out how environment is represented by the great writers of the world in their literary work. It is also believed that the term ecocriticism was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “An Experiment in Ecocriticism” which focused on ‘green’ issues of the writers of American and British Literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

II) Identification of Eco-criticism in America and Green studies in UK: Cheryl “Glottfelty with her co-editor Herold Fromm in their collection of essays “*The Ecocritism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*” (1996) defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Since then this particular critical approach of ‘ecocriticism’ or ‘green studies’ has been regarded to be an emerging movement which began in the USA in the late 1980s and in the UK in the early 1990s. Based on the development, this approach is known as ecocriticism or green studies: The preferred American term for this approach is ‘ecocriticism’, whereas in UK it is called as ‘green studies’. But on the thematic background both concepts are identified with the same theme of the environmental awareness in literature.

To explain the term of ecocriticism in America we need to refer to great American writers like- Ralf Emerson(1803-1882), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) and Henry Thoreau (1817-1862): major nineteenth- century

American writers of ecocriticism, all also were the members of the group of the New England writers, essayist, and philosophers who achieved the highest place in the study of American culture and ecocriticism. In the same way to illustrate some of the concerns of ecocritical approach to literature, we should study Ralf Emerson’s first short book ‘*Nature*’ (1836), Margaret Fuller’s ‘*Summer on the Lakes*’ (1843), and Henry Thoreau’s ‘*Walden*’ (1999). All these three books are considered to be the most fundamental works of modern American literature of ecocriticism; calling humans ‘back to nature’. In UK ecocriticism or green studies takes its origin with British Romanticism of the 1790s with the great writers like- William Wordsworth, John Keats, P. B. Shelley, S. T. Coleridge, Robert Burns and others who were the most eminent nature writers and the contributors of the ecocritical study of the age.

III) Role of Shakespeare in bringing up Eco-critical approach in Elizabethan Drama: The concept of ecocriticism is varied from Elizabethan period to Modern era. The world famous Elizabethan dramatist, William Shakespeare, in his pastoral comedy ‘*As You Like It*’ proved that man is always happy in the company of nature. In this play we see that when the action moves to rural area everyone is happy, atmosphere is peaceful, greenery is to be seen everywhere and man lives happily along with all animals and natural things. This healthy environment in the play gives everything to all the characters in the play what they were expecting of. The song “*Under The Greenwood Tree*” “summarises the views of ecocritics on the adventures of the country life over the controversy of the court life. The song is:

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to live with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet bird’s throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall he see no enemy
But winter and rough weather.

IV) Romantic era the glory of eco-critical poetry: In literature, romantic period is highly known for the

description of nature and its impact on the nature poets in the era. William Wordsworth stands supreme amongst all other romantics for what he calls nature God, mother, guide, guardian and living thing on the earth. Poets such as Wordsworth were actively engaged in trying to create a new kind of poetry that emphasized the pastoral over the urban, often believing in the use of common language. He devoted his entire life into observing and studying nature and written many poems recording his ideas on man's relationship with nature. There are many references to natural beauty in Wordsworth's work, such as in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" in "Daffodils". Wordsworth's views on nature are found in his 'Tintern Abbey' where he calls nature:

The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
of all my moral being.

These two poems: 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Daffodils' emphasized moral influence of nature on the human mind. For Wordsworth, effect of nature is permanent and everlasting which makes sorrowful human heart happy forever. He is of the same view of the great saint: Tukaram, who says 'Vrukshavalli Amha Soyare' (Trees are Our Relatives) which implies the deep meaning of the conservation of nature for the welfare and existence of humans. Due to the deforestation of land and all kinds of pollution it becomes mandatory to focus on the concept of environment.

Robert Burns in his poem 'Red Red Rose' calls humans and nature equal to each other. His beloved is compared to that of red rose which is newly sprung in June. This equality shows that human being cannot live a happy life without healthy environment in the world. We might believe that love can last forever, but the comparison of his love to a flower, the speaker suggests that it is like the small red rose, sprung in June, may society preserve the whole nature forever. The lines:

O my Luve's like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

V) Consciousness of Eco-criticism amongst modern poets: Some important poets like William Blake and T. S. Eliot seem to be different in reflecting bad effects of deforestation on human life in the world. As one of the most prolific poets during the romantic era, William Blake expressed his passion and sorrow for the loss of environment in his 'Chimney Sweepers, (The Songs of Experience)' which emphasized how the decay in nature affected poor children in some of the factories in polluted modern cities like London. Some of his most famous lines include:

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying weep! weep! in notes of woe!
Where are thy father and mother? Say!
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

In the same way, T. S. Eliot considered the whole world as a barren place and human life seems to be meaningless to live in the polluted modern era. "The Waste Land" expresses with great power the disenchantment, disillusionment, and disgust of the period after World War I. Eliot in his 'The Hollow Men' expresses the hopelessness and useless purpose of human life in

the following lines:
We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless.

In my opinion, an ecocritical study of literature and environment becomes much worthy because it captures our attention towards the concept of environment what we need to be thinking about. Awareness of environment becomes a crucial concept so far as everlasting existence of human being is concerned. Thus, the paper concludes highlighting the aspect that what we saw is what we reap. If we protect the nature then it protects us in return while if we neglect it nature can make us to feel the inhabitant of the barren place.

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