

INVESTIGATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS THROUGH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

We are in the midst of an unprecedented crisis of declining biodiversity. The degradation of environment has been brought about by multitude of factors that causes a great concern at national and international levels. During the last few decades, Environment has posed a great threat to human society as well as the mother earth. The extensive misuse of natural resources has left us at the brink of ditch. Tremendous population growth, consumption of natural resources in a wild manner, industrialization leading to huge, uncontrolled urbanization, misuse of science and technology has lead to very grave environmental crisis. The fossil fuel is fast decreasing, rainforests are cut down, the cycle of season is at disorder, ecological disaster is frequent now round the globe and our environment is at margin. The devastation and degradation of Ecosystem requires the restoration of natural systems. Under these circumstances, there arose a new theory of reading nature writing during the last decade of the previous century called Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between literature and environment .It is a worldwide emergent movement which came into existence as a reaction to man's anthropocentric attitude of dominating nature. In this paper, the authors will try to explain the relationship between environment and literature. This paper will further attempt to explain how eco-criticism, usually thought to be a part of literary studies, has crossed the borders and, thus, seeks to engage with environmental issues and science studies. As a result, it has produced literature and scholarship and of high reputes which, in turn, has led to environmental activism ultimately helping to deal with the issues concerning environment.

Key- Words: *Environment, Environmental crisis, Ecological disaster, Literature, Nature, Restoration.*

INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and Environment or how a man's relationship with his environment is reflected in literature. Ecocriticism started developing in the 1990's. As we all are well aware about the fact that the world is facing ecological disasters. Only new technologies are not enough to solve these ecological crisis. Literature also has its role to play in it. Ecocriticism develops as a worldwide emergent movement which came into existence as a reaction to man's anthropocentric attitude of dominating nature. The term ecocriticism was first coined by William Rueckert in his critical writing "Literature

and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism” in 1978. Henry David Thoreau is considered to be the father of Ecocriticism. The word “eco” comes from the Greek root “oikos” which etymologically means household or earth and “logy” from “logos” which means logical discourse, so together they mean criticism of house (the environment) as represented in literature. As Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism “as a study of the relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to Environmentalist’s praxis” (The Environmental Imagination, 430) [1]. Patrick D. Murphy says that Ecocriticism is literary” criticism that arises from and is oriented toward a concern with human and nonhuman interaction and interrelationship.” Ecocriticism originated as an idea called “literary ecology”. Ecocriticism launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today’s environmental crisis. Global ecological crisis force literary scholars to recognize the important role literature and criticism plays in understanding man’s position in the ecosphere. Ecocriticism enables a critic to examine the physical environment in literary discourse itself, and to develop an earth centered approach to literary studies. The Ecocritic interprets nature writing texts, and the term “nature” is broadly used by Ecocritics. Nature in Ecocriticism does not mean just the beautiful dream of plants and animals. The nature here means the whole physical environment consisting of human as well as nonhuman. “The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other”(Frederick 147).[2]. While acknowledging the role of language in shaping our view of the world, ecocritics seek to restore significance to the world beyond the page. In this way, ecocriticism has a vital contribution to make to the wider project of Green Studies, which in Laurence Coupe’s words, `debates, “Nature” in order to defend nature` (Coupe 2000,5) [3].

II. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT AND LITERATURE

Ecocriticism originated as an idea called “literary ecology”. Ecocriticism is a way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the ecological crisis through literature, culture and physical environment. Ecocriticism launches a call to literature to connect to the issues of today’s environmental crisis. We can say Ecocriticism is directly concerned with both Nature and Environment. Global ecological crisis force literary scholars to recognize the important role literature and criticism plays in understanding man’s position in the ecosphere. Literary ecology is a projection of human ideas about human responsibility into the natural environment. Ecocriticism enables a critic to examine the physical environment in literary discourse itself, and to develop an earth centered approach to literary studies. One can say that texts do reflect how a civilization regards its natural heritage. If Ecocriticism wants to formulate a response to crisis of the natural world, it should first focus on the parallel paradigms in literary theory and parallels in the natural sciences, especially of physics, biology and geography. According to Rueckert, ecocriticism applies ecology or ecological principles into the study of literature. And Lawrence Buell defines ecocriticism "as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis"(The Environmental Imagination,430). [1]

III. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN LITERATURE

3.1. Ecology: Usually ecology is defined as the study of the relation of organisms or groups of organisms to their environment, or the science of interrelations between living organisms and their environment. Ecology means the whole of the physical environment consisting of the human and the nonhuman. The interconnection between the two creates a bond which is the basis of Ecocriticism. As long as there is a harmony between the living and the non-living, there prevails a healthy eco-system for the benevolence of mankind as well as the earth. "The modern ecological consciousness has a feeling that the balance between human and the natural world must be maintained. A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the other" (Frederick 147).[2]

3.2. Cultural Ecology: One of the implicit goals of the ecocritics is to rethink the relationship between culture and nature (Barry 252). The present ecological crisis is a bi-product of human culture. From the ancient times, the man has been continuously exploiting and struggling with nature. Environmental degradation started with the development in the early man's life in the form of various inventions and discoveries. These inventions and discoveries have created new tools, implements and made developments in every field of life like, industry, nuclear and other latest technological developments which are damaging the environment of man. Culture is something which has been created over the years by the people who have been living in an environment for ages. So long as man lived in close association with nature there will be no ecological threat. But with the advancement of science and technology man has got alienated from nature putting his own survival in a question. The natural environment is now replaced by the built up environment. Our global crisis is not because how ecosystems function. It is because how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature. It requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them. (Ecocriticism Reader)[4].

3.3. Sustainable Development: Ecocriticism advocates sustainable development for a better future of mankind in general. Sustainable development means that development "that meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". All organisms have their right to survive in their own way. The plants, the animals, the women, the marginal, the tribal - all have their role to play to keep up the earth's basic life support system. Limited use of resources will ensure the safe and secured future of the generations to come. "The most common measure to tackle environmental crisis is sustainable development" (Frederick 128). This categorically means the required use of natural resources without endangering the whole environment and the well-being of all human beings (Essays in Ecocriticism 36).[5]

3.4. Environmental Justice: Ecocriticism underlines environmental justice as man's voracious urge to conquer nature is somewhat misleading. We used to believe ourselves to be superior to the other life forms that inhabit the biosphere. But now we realize that nature is not a subordinate but a co-inhabitant of this earth ecosystem. We should change our self-destructive motives. If humans try to destroy nature, they will be paid back by their own coins. Our global crisis is not because how ecosystems function. It is because how our ethical systems function. Getting through the crisis requires understanding our impact on nature. It requires understanding those ethical systems and using that understanding to reform them.

3.5. Ecocriticism as an Interdisciplinary Approach: This unusual (interdisciplinary) combination of the physical and the spiritual can be seen in some of the terms used in ecology and ecocriticism. Two different and distinct disciplines, ecology and literary criticism, are combined in order to restore the Earth's health, which was lost owing to man's wrongdoing. It should be noted that ecocriticism is still not a unified approach. It is rather an area of diverse and overlapping projects and disciplines. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach which is by its very nature interdisciplinary. It draws its sustenance from the existing literary theories. All sciences come forward to contribute to the field. Therefore, new theories like Post-colonial Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Ecomarxism, Ecospiritualism are coming into light. But it differs from the other theories in that while all of them consider earth as a social sphere, Ecocriticism considers it as an ecosphere. All other theories are marked by their individual ego-consciousness while Ecocriticism is characterized by ecoconsciousness. In short, it is an earth centric approach to literary studies which promotes the understanding of who we are, where we stand, how we should behave with our mother nature etc. What Ecocritics Do: In order to meet with the present environmental crisis, the ecocritics play an important role in building up the eco-consciousness among the readers. For this they read major canonical writings; they look at the natural world differently than others. They shift our critical attention from the inner consciousness to the outer; rejects the belief that everything is socially or linguistically constructed: believes that Nature really exists beyond ourselves, but is with us and affects us (perhaps fatally if we mistreat it); apply growth and energy, sustainability and un-sustainability, balance and imbalance to view nature in literature.

IV. CONCLUSION

Therefore, Ecocriticism which was synonymous with the American nature writings as well as the British Romantic literature has now gained its momentum with worldwide eco-literature. Ecology, the study of the relationships of organisms with one another and with their environment, is a complex but fascinating area of biology that has important implications for each of us. But whatever, the definitions may be, the ecocriticism give us the scientific foundations for our understanding of ourselves and the nature and environment we interact with and live in. Ecocriticism helps us to understand the foundations of our agriculture, forestry, horticulture, game management, pest control, fisheries etc. its knowledge is found critically important for intelligent conservation whether in relation to soil, forest, wildlife, fisheries etc. it gives us basis for predicting, preventing and remedying pollution. It helps us to understand the likely consequences of massive environmental interactions, as in construction of dams and of diversion of rivers, and provides the rational underpinning biological conservation. Modern life style introduced many chemicals in the form of drugs, pesticides and other industrial wastes within the ecosystem. It will be only with the help of study of ecology that we actually trace these chemicals in the ecosystems and hence study its adverse impact on humans and the environment in general. Therefore, the basic laws of ecology apply well to him and its fundamental knowledge is must for man for his own existence on this planet. The fact that we are destroying species, habits and perhaps even the life-support system of the planet by our irresponsible behaviour is a depressing thought. However ecocriticism helps us to realize what we are doing and what we could do to try to put things right. This is where ecology fits in the picture. The common message is to keep nature in her pristine beauty; let not destroy what we cannot create. The more ecocritical writings will come into focus, the more man will learn to behave with nature in a proper way keeping in tune with the present environmental crisis.

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