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Ecocriticism and Indian Writing in English

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Ecocriticism is the study of literature and the environment from an interdisciplinary point of view. Nature and literature have always shared a close relationship as reflected in the works of poets and writers. The literary critics try to study how this close relationship between nature and society has been textualized by the writers in their works.

The word "Ecocriticism" has been used for the first time by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978. But it remained inactive in critical vocabulary until 1989 western literature Association meeting (in Loewd' Alene) when Cheryl Glotfelty received the term and worked for its use in the critical field which has been used as the "Study of nature writing" Glen love (Professor of English at the university of Oregon) seconded the call for 'ecocriticism' at the same WLA meeting. After the WLA meeting the term ecocriticism became popular among the scholars.

Ecocriticism & Literature.

The critics of this branch of the study investigate such things as the underlying ecological values in the context of word nature. The parameters like place, class, gender or race are also taken into consideration. It is considered as the study of the relationship between literature and environment. Ecocritics also consider other disciplines such as History Economics, Philosophy, Ethics and Psychology to be possible contributors to ecocriticism. William Rueckert who used the term ecocriticism for the first time in his essay *Literature and Ecology* (1978) Literary criticism examines the relations between writer's text and the world (Society). But Ecocriticism expands sphere of "The world" and studies entire ecosphere. The earth centered approach has been undertaken by ecocriticism to literary criticism. Literary scholars try to investigate several concepts such as question of value, meaning, tradition and language which are responsible for environmental thinking.

Ecocriticism tried to explore constructions of environment in literary texts and theoretical discourses. Literature always conditioned our philosophical understanding of nature and environment. Ecocritics have encouraged the others to Think serious about the aesthetic and ethical dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis. It has been also the matter of concern for ecocritics to see the fusion of language and literature into ecological implications. Arthur Lovejoy has contributed a lot in this field.

Indian English writing has also provided a platform for ecocritics to focuss on ecocriticism. In the works of Raja Rao one of the trios of Indian writing in English we can find the South Indian Village culture and environmental setting. It is nothing but the relation between man and nature. In his masterpiece *Kanthapura* Raja Rao has portrayed rivers and mountains which played a significant role in the lives of the people. Even the rivers and mountains were given the names of Gods. In this novel Raja Rao has focussed on the age old practice of our ancestors where nature was respected in the true literal sence.

R.K. Narayan has also created an imaginary place like Malgudi in the close vicinity of the nature. He has used landscapes as an important theme which considered significant in ecocriticism. The flowing Sarayu river, the ruined temple and the stone slabs influence Raju in *The Guide* and lead to his sainthood. Malgudi has been the symbol of



the traditional Indian shedding, the traditions and accepting the modern western civilization.

Nature has always proved to be stronger than man. The same effect of natural calamity over the human being can be seen in *So many Hungers* by Bhabani Bhattacharya. In this novel we can witness a panic picture of Bengal famine of 1943 where more than 3 Lacks people died of starvation. The novel portrays the problems of hunger, poverty and heroic suffering and sacrifice of the people. The eminent scholar Fisher comments about *So many Hungers* "In this novel the Bengal Famine is more than just a background; it is the very heart of the book"

However the concern for ecology became the center point of discussions towards the end of the twentieth century. The previous writers never wrote with the thought of ecology but it was just a coincidence. But Ruskin Bond is an exception to this inference. We can find the concern for nature in his works. The cities like Dehradun and Mussoorie form the settings of his works and portray his ardent faith in the healing powers of nature. His stories like *An Island of Trees*, *No Room for Leopard*, *The Cherry Tree*, All creatures Great and Small are about the relation of man with nature showing ecosystem.

The other prominent figure in this connection is Anita Desai whose works have the themes related to Nature which include animals, plants, birds etc. In her novel "*Cry the Peacock*" Anita Desai uses external landscapes to portray inner states of mind. Maya's inner life is effectively brought out through the landscape when we find her resentment against her husband for her inability to communicate with her. Hence she compares herself with peacock of Jungle.

In her another famous novel *Voices in the City* Monisha is repeatedly compared to the encaged bird in her home longing for freedom. Finally Monisha commits suicide to free herself.

The novelists like Kiran Desai, also shows the concern for nature through her imagery of the foothills of Himalayas, and Kalimpong. In her novel *Kanchenjunga* stands as the ultimate truth and makes its presence felt from time to time in the novel.

In this way ecocriticism gives growing attention to literary representation of nature and is sensitive to interdependencies of nature and is sensitive to interdependencies of the author (man) and the natural system. From the beginning the writers have been showing interest towards nature, culture and landscape. In later phase the more works were published which could be considered and read under the school of criticism.

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