

**Volume 6, Issue 1 (XXXV)**

January - March 2019

ISSN 2394 - 7780



ज्ञान-विज्ञान विमुक्तये  
UGC  
University Grants Commission  
Journal No.: 63571

**International Journal of  
Advance and Innovative Research**  
(Conference Special)

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**Indian Academicians and Researchers Association**  
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**Journal - 63571**

**UGC Journal Details**

**Name of the Journal :** International Journal of Advance & Innovative Research

**ISSN Number :**

**e-ISSN Number :** 23947780

**Source:** UNIV

**Subject:** Multidisciplinary

**Publisher:** Indian Academicians and Researchers Association

**Country of Publication:** India

**Broad Subject Category:** Multidisciplinary

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**ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN LITERATURE****Sharmila Jajodia**

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College (Autonomous), Mumbai

**ABSTRACT**

*Environment is very important aspect of our lives especially in Indian culture and literature since time immemorial as ancient Indian culture gives immense importance to nature which has been reflected in literature too. But our greed for more and more has led to ecological imbalance due to industrialization, scientific, technological development and resulted in varied pollution, global warming, drought, unseasonal rain, flood, foggy atmosphere, tsunami, storms, etc. This has affected our health as well. Therefore environmental protection has become emerging area in various branches of knowledge including literature worldwide and concepts like Ayur vastra, eco-criticism, eco-feminism, eco-poetics, e-waste, green clothing, green studies, green initiative, organic food and zero waste policy came into existence. Consequently, writers and critics alike have paid attention to the global issue- climate change, ecological balance and sustenance through their output. In the light of following observation, this paper is directed to analyse environmental concerns in literature and how the literary personalities have tried to find solution for this grave problem.*

*Keywords: Environment, health, literature, protection, society*

**RESEARCH PAPER**

Environment is at the centre of human life and human activities are at the centre of environmental sustainability. Therefore, literature and culture can't be divorced from environmental concerns. Indian literature and culture consider nature as an indispensable aspect of human existence be it religious literature- The Bible, Ramayana, Mahabharata, myths, rituals, festivals, songs etc. There are unlimited examples in folk culture and literature that show respect for nature. Nature is also treated as one of the powerful deities and the various elements of nature are worshipped as gods and goddesses in Indian culture. Vedas revere earth for its bounties and forces of nature for maintaining harmony in our lives. Our scriptures tell us that divinity prevails in every element of nature; nature can't be controlled rather it is to be invoked for co-operation.

In our ancient Indian culture, trees are worshipped because trees play a vital role in balancing the entire ecology including the lives of human beings. Trees spread happiness in our surroundings but deforestation is taking place rapidly for human settlement and development affecting our lives. Increasing population has created excessive pressure on the planetary life. Subsequently it has started the war of survival between human species and other species of the earth. The consequence of human intervention is extinction of many plants and animals from the surface of earth. Overpopulation has also led to overconsumption of the natural resources. It has also increased the use of toxic substances for production of crops which has reduced the regenerative capacity of nature. This can be seen the way rates of crime – within the house and outside the house, are increasing. If one sows good seeds, one reaps good harvest; as there are more concretes and less trees in our surroundings nowadays, the positivity and happiness is missing in human lives, the result is varied pollution, global warming, drought, unseasonal rain, flood, foggy atmosphere, tsunami, storms, etc. This has affected our health as well. Therefore environmental protection has become emerging area in various branches of knowledge including literature worldwide. Thus concepts like Ayur vastra, eco-criticism, eco-feminism, eco-poetics, e-waste, green clothing, green studies, green initiative, organic food and zero waste policy came into existence. Consequently, writers and critics alike have paid attention to the global issue- climate change, ecological balance and sustenance through their output since the explosion of environmentalism in the late 1960s and 1970s. British Marxist critic Raymond Williams's seminal critique of pastoral literature in 1973, *The Country and the City*, laments the loss of pastures and professes a decidedly green socialism. Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974), another early eco-critical text argues that environmental crisis is caused primarily by a cultural tradition in the West of separation of culture from nature, and elevation of the former to moral predominance.

Though William Rueckert coined the term 'ecocriticism' in 1978 in an essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" yet Eco-criticism was formally initiated by the publication of two seminal works- The Eco-criticism Reader, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and The Environmental Imagination by Lawrence Buell, in the mid-1990s. Rueckert expresses, ecocriticism denotes "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". He introduces ecology of poetry, where ecological principles are used to relate poems to the natural worlds, comparing poems to energy pathways and green plants.



Eco-criticism was first defined as “the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment,”<sup>1</sup> by Cheryl Glotfelty in 1996. (Pandhare,12)

Lawrence Buell defines “‘eco-criticism’ ... as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis”. Thus eco-criticism studies literature and environment.”<sup>2</sup>(Pandhare,12)

Wordsworth and the other romanticists were worshippers of nature and their ‘Return to Nature’ was a clarion call to all those who disconnected themselves with nature. Wordsworth tried to show that the rural and rustic life glorified by him was under attack due to dominance of science, technology and the urban elite culture. Thomas Hardy in his regional novels made an attempt to recover the rural and rustic English life that was rapidly vanishing from the nineteenth century English countryside scene. The regional literature could be understood as an extension of romantic ecology i.e., to reinterpret pastoral, regional, provincial, rural literary texts as engagement of our relationship with natural environment. Eco-criticism’ as a contemporary discipline examines attitude of literary pastoral land, regions as texts in the context of nature and also explore different patterns of interrelatedness of human and non-human structures because the rapid globalization is a menacing attempt to uproot the global community from its pastoral life. This pastoral life, rural and regional identity as against the super-industrial globalized and computerized community appears to be a non-existing entity. The naturalists were closer to the unconscious; they were centered on the psychology of Freud, Jung and William James. John Alcorn says that Hardy through the depiction of the landscape is referring to an actual wisdom literally present in nature, though unfathomable to the mind of man. For the first two decades of the twentieth century, landscape became a dominating influence in English fiction. Darwin’s influence and in turn Hardy’s impact of landscape description and more significantly the manner in which landscape enters in the art of storytelling was felt immensely. Hardy seems to be looking at his characters through a landscape telescope. Hardy is the trend setter of a landscape through fiction; the imagery teeming life within organisms has its beginnings in Hardy. Hardy’s diaries indicate that he was extraordinarily fond of animals; the foliage and fruit of forest and orchard occupy the centre of Hardy’s world. “I sit under a tree and feel alone: I think of certain insects around me magnified by the microscope; creatures like elephants, flying dragons etc., and I feel by no means alone.”<sup>3</sup>(Pandhare,13)

The microscopic examination of vegetable and insect dominates in the novels such as *Great Mansions*, *Sons and Lovers* and *Rainbow*. This is obviously Hardy’s impact on his followers because in Hardy’s novel most sustained ecstatic passages of botanical descriptions are found.

The opening chapter of “*Jude the Obscure*” enters upon his experiences with animals: Jude’s job ‘as scarecrow’ where he identifies with the birds, the episode of the pig’s pizzle and later the drama he undergoes helping Arabella slaughter a pig. Hardy’s diaries indicate that he was extraordinarily fond of animals; the foliage and fruit of forest and orchard occupy the centre of Hardy’s world.

D. H. Lawrence wrote in 1922: “Mr. Hardy is never more reverent and more exact than when he is speaking of forest.’ He wrote about Hardy’s language, ‘I would like to be a tree for a while.’ Hardy himself referred to this quality of his writing, ‘I sometimes look upon all things in inanimate nature as pensive mutes.”<sup>4</sup>(Pandhare,14)

Hardy’s method of describing landscape reflects this sense of all things in nature as ‘pensive mutes’ and this quality in his fiction will be echoed continually in travel literature and the fiction of naturalists. Darwin and his English disciples, Thomas Hardy and Aldus Huxley broke the traditional patterns of pre-Wordsworthian landscape painting and they continued a new basis invariably in terms of physical rather than theological structures perceiving and expressing the relationship between man and his environment and lower forms of nature. Hardy’s characters continually move across landscape e.g., Jude to Christminster for scholarly achievements. Hardy’s contribution as a naturalist novelist is a gift of symbolism of landscape and biological imagery. Besides, the dialectics of relationship in Hardy’s novels between landscape and character continually expresses an involvement of microscopic vision projecting a search for a language of the unconscious and a sensuous grasp of space. Thus literature particularly regional literature plays vital role in environmental protection.

To understand environmental concerns in Indian English literature, “*Felling of the Banyan Tree*” by Dilip Chitre and “*On Killing a Tree*” by Gieve Patel can be analysed easily employing eco-critical approach.

In the first poem, Chitre tells that my grandmother used to say, “Trees are sacred. Cutting them is a crime.”(5-6) But my father cut down all the trees – the sheoga, the oudumber, the neem except the Banyan which posed a problem for him as he had to employ 50 men with axes for 7 days because it was 200 years old. The poet says,



“Whose roots lay deeper than all our lives/ ... The banyan tree was three times as tall as our house/ Its trunk had a circumference of fifty feet/ Its scraggy aerial roots fell to the ground/ From thirty feet or more so first they cut the branches/  
Sawing them off for seven days and the heap was huge/ Insects and birds began to leave the tree/ And then they came to its massive trunk.”(9-17)

Thus Chitre tells how much efforts are made to cut down the trees. Similarly Gieve Patel in his poem “On Killing a Tree” says that one can’t kill a tree by just chopping the branches off, one has to make a lot of efforts to destroy it from the root because it grows slowly, consumes earth, water, air and light for years and sprouts itself.

“It takes much time to kill a tree,/ Not a simple jab of the knife / Will do it.” (1-3)

He further expresses: “So hack and chop/ But this alone won't do it. / Not so much pain will do it.”(10-12) because the tree has the capacity to heal its bark, its boughs will expand again. The tree has to be pulled out completely from the root and is to be tied out and cut off from its source, the earth. Thus the tree is a very strong entity of nature.

No, / The root is to be pulled out- / Out of the anchoring earth; / It is to be roped, tied, / And pulled out-snapped out / Or pulled out entirely, / Out from the earth-cave, / And the strength of the tree exposed,/ ...”(19-26)

Then the tree is scorched and choked in the sun and the air leading to “Browning, hardening,/ Twisting, withering,/ And then it is done.” (33-35) Thus the tree cutter / killer has to struggle a lot to murder a tree.

Both, Chitre and Patel are indirectly posing a question to the naughty children of mother earth if they make efforts consciously or unconsciously to destroy ecological balance, why can't they make efforts to save the environment. The two poets are advising the society to follow environmental ethics. They are giving the message that one should plant and save trees for happy and healthy lives; channelize energy in forestation, not in deforestation.

Simon Estok noted in 2001 that eco-criticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections.

The Govt. of India's Cleanliness Drive Swachh Bharat Mission and Awareness Campaign regarding don't defecate in open are also carelessly treated by many who don't believe in doing their duty as citizens of India. There are toilets but are not being used due to one or other reason. Immediately after the launch of the Mission by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014 on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti by asking people to take oath to keep the surrounding clean people didn't bother to put the garbage (plastic water bottles, paper plates, etc.) in the bins and so he has to remind the public after his each election rally to put the waste in the bins.

Similarly we are dreaming of Digital India but what about the E-waste produced by us in offices, homes and elsewhere? Do we know how to dispose it off? Whatever e-waste India produces only 50% of it is disposed off rest of it is lying in our surrounding only and is very harmful for health. If we talk about the management of domestic waste (garbage) how much public support one gets is also to be considered. See, a few years back Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has started this policy and asked the public to keep the dry and wet waste separately but it failed due to no-cooperation from public. It has started the same policy again how much successful it will be, time will only tell. So just talking and blaming various agencies, administration and govt. doesn't make sense unless and until we all come together and consider this earth and surrounding nature our own because nature has enough to satisfy our needs but not to satisfy our greed, Gandhi has said.

So Christine J. Cuomo in her article 'Ecofeminism, Deep Ecology, And Human Population' mentions Naess's Deep Ecology principle of reducing human population because of the limitations of earth's carrying capacity.

To conclude, firstly, we need to make optimum utilization of natural resources and follow the 3 Rs- reduce, reuse and recycle. Secondly, we also need to adopt the formula of simple living to reduce exploitation of bounties of nature or avoid pollution or ecological imbalance. Thirdly, we need to reuse like one industry's waste can be reused as a raw material by another industry; fourthly, we need to recycle as much as is possible. Even corporate world need to contribute under the corporate social responsibility to follow the 3Rs. Then only we can protect the environment and make it worth living for our next generation.


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**Principal  
Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College,  
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