

## **Ecocritic: A Bridge between Nature & Literature**

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### **Abstract**

No living being can deny their appreciation and profound fondness for nature which to some becomes the muse and flows down through ink on white canvas in the form of verse or prose. A major part of literature either praised the divinity and beauty of nature or impact of nature on human life. Whereas there are literary works that depict the destructions and disturbances human activities have caused to nature through deforestation, heavy industrialization, immigration, and overuse of natural resources. The vigilant minds have criticized it and warned humanity. They are Ecocritics who try to bring awareness of the need to go back to nature for healthy living. If you protect nature, nature will protect you. Destroying nature is equal to suicide. Ecocritic tries to bridge this gap of ignorance, negligence and unawareness regarding the natural resources. We have to use them sparingly and protect the earth. Harmonious living is the only way out to environmental threat. Hence, Ecocritic builds the bridge of awareness, harmonious living, interconnected and interdependent relationship between man and nature. Ecocritic speaks for nature through literature. Thus, Ecocritic describes the inherent interwoven existence where a man without nature is incomplete and nature without a man is dull.

Ecocritics don't just read the text but apply a critical mind to bring out ecological aspects and highlight the interconnectedness of nature and literature present in the text. Thus, they build a bridge between nature and literature.

**Keywords:** Ecocritic; Discourse; Prexis; Interconnectedness; Interdependence; eco-consciousness; eco-perspective; Environmental study

### **Introduction**

Who is an Ecocritic? What does Ecocritic do? What is the role of an Ecocritic? Today environment has become a burning issue and environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources have warned humanity of impending doom. The whole world is concerned about emitting pollution, temperature rise, and increasing natural calamities. The day is not far when the earth would be deprived of fresh air, groundwater and green vegetation due to rise of temperature and increasing pollution. Today, there is a dire need to go back to nature and adopt natural methods of living. We do celebrate environment day (5th June) earth day (22nd April), world water day (22nd March) etc but these days remain just celebrations and nothing concrete happens thereafter. Moreover, human beings tend to forget nature at the cost of comfortable living.

From ages, people have spoken and written of nature. Bards have sung for nature and poets have found a muse in nature. But today it is considered just a storehouse of resources

for the human to consume. There is a need of a prophet who speaks for nature. One who warns humanity to mend their ways and protect nature what has been given to them for no cost. This work is taken up by an ecocritic. Ecocritic speaks for nature through literature. He studies literature with an eye on nature and tried to draw interconnectedness between man and nature. He does not study literature in isolation but wears the green specs. It is not wrong to call him a natural scientist or scholar of nature-human relation. Thus, Ecocritic describes the inherent interwoven existence where a man without nature is incomplete and nature without a man is dull. If nature is beauty, man is its appreciator. Both are interconnected with mutual existence. Ecocritic studies this aspect and describes that nature is the canvas on which humanity thrives. Thus, ecocritic is a bridge between nature and literature.

## Ecocriticism

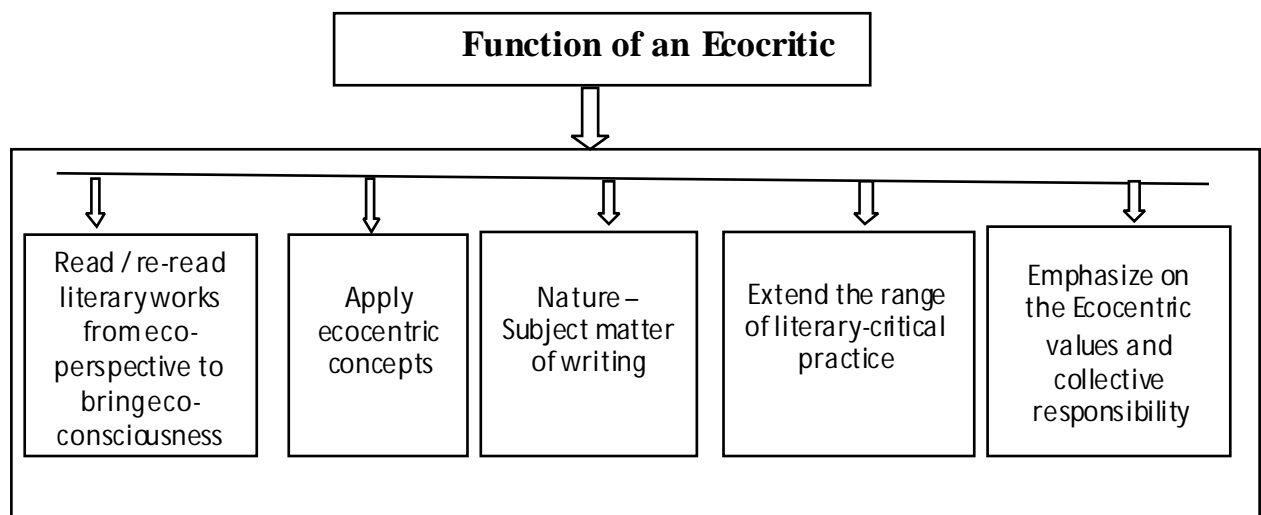
William Rueckert is widely considered to be the first one to use the term 'Ecocriticism'. He used it in 1978 in an essay titled "*Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism*" to focus on the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. (The Ecocriticism Reader) It is in the mid-eighties, the need to establish ecocriticism as a genre was felt and worked out primarily through the work of the Western Literary Association (WLA). Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm brought out a volume titled *The Ecocritical Reader* in 1996. In the same year, Lawrence Buell published *The Environmental Imagination*. Discussing the emergence of ecocriticism as a movement Glotfelty distinguishes between "eco" and "enviro" as prefixes. "Enviro" she suggests implies that humanity is at the centre, surrounded by everything else. "Eco" on the other hand implies independence. It encourages considering nature and culture as interconnected parts of the earth's ecology.

## The Role of An Ecocritic

It is said that poets die, genres change, writing narratives also change, literary theories and trends change gradually but writing on nature remain immemorial. Nature has been a subject of poetry from the beginning till date. Nature has been an inspiration and an inherent force for many writers to produce their literary piece of great merit. Analyzing these works today with an environmental perspective leads to ecocriticism. The study of literature with one eye on nature and finding ecological implications is termed as ecocriticism. The critic who studies this interconnected – interdependent coexistence is called an ecocritic. Thus, it is an interdisciplinary point of view which analyses the works of writers, research scholars and poets in the light of environmental issues and nature. Thus, Ecocriticism coined by William Rueckert in 1978 describes it as a study of the earth. It is an earth-centred approach in Literature. Many have called it with different names like environmental literary criticism, nature study, green study, ecopoetics, etc. Ecocriticism leads us to introspect into the way we live, represent, interact and construct the environment around us, both 'natural' and manmade. Thus, ecocritic is an enlightened mind who sees the disappearance of green fields, hears the cry of nature destroyed at the cost of feigning development.

**What Ecocritics do?**

How does a tree grow? How does the seed sprout? What makes a tree produce fruits? Why does it rain? How trees are useful to human life? Etc. These are the questions asked by environmental science. What is the cause of pollution? What is the reason behind the rise of temperature? Causes of e-waste, a decline of bio-diversity, rise of pollution etc. are the concerns of an environmentalist. Moreover, how literature reflects these concerns of protection of earth and natural resources? Deforestation is a human-caused phenomenon that leads to a rise in pollution, climate change and depletion of natural resources. Man is inherently a part of this earth and no existence possible outside. This is the concern of ecocriticism. Thus, Ecocritic reads literature with an insight into nature. He is the Lorex – the voice of the environment.



**(Figure 2, Functions of an Ecocritic)**

The function of ecocritic is as given in the above chart. They re-evaluate the literary work with an eye on the environment and try to find environmental values, concepts and envisage the readers to protect the environment. They don't just read the text but apply a critical mind to bring out ecological aspects and highlight the interconnectedness of nature and literature present in the text. A major function of an ecocritic is that of a Prophet – *messenger of nature*. Though nature speaks to people and it speaks through signs and symbols which can be understood only by the prophet of nature. Hence, it is not wrong to call an ecocritic a prophet who understands the language of nature – as depicted or portrayed in literature and warns humanity about the danger creeping around them. Unless we collectively take any concrete action to curb overuse of natural resources, the earth will not remain a happy place to live in future.

Ecocritic is the voice of nature as represented in literature time immemorial. His major function is to remind humanity that we are 'the trustees' of nature. The idea was given by Mahatma Gandhi, who said, "*Nature has enough for every man's need but not for every man's greed*" – it is called the doctrine of trusteeship. He said that we are the trustees of nature and not owners. Being a trustee we must preserve and protect what has been handed over to us for the coming generation. This is the primary function of the Ecocritic; to bring an awareness of collective responsibility to protect, preserve and conserve nature. Moreover, ecocritic tries to

depict the age-old coexistence and peaceful living being disturbed by so-called modern-industrial-deceptive development.

## **Enquiry by an Ecocritic**

Ecocritic is an investigator into the core ecological values. He depicts nature as it was and as it is at present, i.e., treatment of nature as a home, healing place and today it is just a commodity used for one's profit. Thus, Ecocritic reads a literary work with certain questions in his mind to bring out the environmental values and worth. As Glotfelty and Fromm mentions, Ecocritic seeks to study, explore and analyze a text by asking certain questions from a literary work.

Ecocritic enquires into:-

1. Representation of nature in literary work.
2. How nature oriented text add to the canon in literary and cultural studies?
3. What role does the landscape play in a text?
4. Does the work influence, express and inculcate ecological values, wisdom and environmental awareness?
5. Does the work fall into a genre of nature writing?
6. Does the nature, landscape or depiction of wilderness play as the protagonist of the work?
7. How the writer (Man/Woman) views nature and how does the work affect the nature – human relationship?
8. How the writer does presents into contemporary literature the Paradigm shift taking place in environment – an environmental crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
9. What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies?
10. What type of relationship does the work depict between environment and human?
11. What amount of awareness and values does the work instill into humanity and its contribution to literature?
12. How literary studies lead to environmental activism?

There are many such questions that an Ecocritic asks and highlights environmental values to humanity. When someone cuts a tree, he does not only cut the tree but destroys a part of the environment to which he is responsible. He cuts off the inspiration of a literary person. He cuts off a home of biotic beings. There is a big chain of such interrelatedness in the environment.

Ecocritic sees this and becomes a voice; caring and concerning voice of the environment in literary theory.

## Literary Tools used by an Ecocritic

Ecocritic analyses a text using ecology, environmental studies and literature. It is a multi-disciplinary approach. Ecocriticism has been influenced by insight from Philosophy, Development Studies, Phenomenology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Ecology, Feminism, Marxism, and other disciplines and approaches. Thus, to evaluate a text it works at the level of discourse and praxis.

- **Discourse:** drawing together a culture's ecological approaches/problems and its cultural texts that address or ignore the same. It is the evaluation of a text by juxtaposing an approach or an issue and exploring ecological values in to. For instance, finding an eco-social issue in a text, the Ecocritic brings out the hidden areas that others might fail to interpret.
- **Praxis:** contributing to ecological awareness by re-reading canonical cultural texts. An Ecocritic goes back to canonical works which the world acclaimed to be of great merit but ignored eco-critical aspects. Thus, he re-reads and highlights that from ages hence, the environment has been a subject of writing, influence and analysis. But today it needs a greater awareness as this source of inspiration is at stake.

These two tools are used by ecocritic to evaluate a text. They look for natural representation in literature with an ecocentric perspective. Peter Barry has rightly stated that ecocritics focus outside, on the house and its environs, rather than the inside, on the owner and his psychology. Major ecocritics have studied romantics: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Walt Whitman, Thomas Hardy etc as well as Transcendentalists Emerson, Thoreau and Fuller. Major ecocritics are Cheryll Glotfelty, Herold Fromm, Laurence Coupe, Jonathan Bate, Patric Murphy.

## Conclusion

Love for nature is inborn. No living being can deny their appreciation and profound fondness for nature which to some becomes the muse and flows down through ink on white canvas in the form of verse or prose. A major part of literature either praised the divinity and beauty of nature or impact of nature on human life. Whereas there are literary works that depict the destructions and disturbances human activities have caused to nature through deforestation, heavy industrialization, immigration, and overuse of natural resources. The vigilant minds have criticized it and warned humanity. They are Ecocritics who try to bring awareness of the need to go back to nature for healthy living. If you protect nature, nature will protect you. Destroying nature is equal to suicide.

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