



Dynamics of Ecocriticism

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Abstract

Literature has phenomenal connection with environment. Environment has been treated in different ways in literature and there were various levels of development over the years. It is known under different tags and later critics coined an interdisciplinary stream to discuss and criticise the literary works as Ecocriticism. Literature represents the ages and it helps to understand the social issues and its changes. Globalisation, Industrial revolution and World Wars have golden hands in the development of this literary form and at the same time these three have destroyed the major part of environment. Environment and Culture are interrelated and when environment changes there will be changes in culture too. Literature notices and point out all situations through works and generations about the changes. This paper is about the historical and gradual development of Ecocriticism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, globalisation, environment, criticise

Introduction

"I dreamed a dream there would be spring no more, that nature's ancient power was lost".

(In memoriam LXIX)

Ecocriticism is one of the most celebrated and discussed terms of twentieth century English literature. It was an inactive follow up version of Thoreau's Environmental approaches in 1860s. The word 'ecology' was used first as a scientific term by German Zoologist Ernst Heinrich Philip August Haeckelin in 1869, to bring out new scientific approaches to the Mother Nature. Later the same term Ecology came into literature to create awareness in the social issue of natural degradation and discuss the same in literary way as literature is the reflection of life. The Ecological Writing has alternative use such as Environmental Writing, Nature Writing, Green Studies, Environmental Ethics and Green Reading etc. The motif behind the Ecological Writing was the continuous degradation of the environment and the self or ego centered life rather than eco centered life style. M.H. Abraham describes Anthropocentric in his work *A Glossary of Literary Terms* as "it is claimed that the reigning religions and philosophies of Western Civilisation are deeply anthropocentric; that is, they are oriented to the interest of human beings, who are viewed as opposed to and superior to nature, and as free to exploit natural resource and animal species for their own purposes" (97). The Anthropocentric thought grounded and justified from the Biblical words; "God gave man dominion over the fishes in the sea, the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and all the creatures that move along the ground" (*The Green Symphony* 7). Philosophies, Enlightenment Movement, Humanism of Eighteenth century, developed Scientific Philosophy and Technological – industrial complexes had great part in

bringing out the anthropocentric thought as well as religious texts. The reason behind the Ecological crisis can be found in religious texts and philosophies rather than Industrial Revolution. Colonisation, freedom fights, World Wars, Technological and Scientific developments of the 20th century also can be the noted influences behind ecological degradation. As literature represents the life and social settings of 18th to 20th century literary works which emphasise the ecological situations and environmental crisis.

T.S Eliot's *Wasteland* and Samuel Becket's *Waiting for Godot* are two examples of literary works which register the ecological degradation of the age. At the same time different religious texts and sutras can be considered as the first Environmental Writings. *Manusmriti*, the oldest Hindu text of the laws of living life, says that "If one cuts a fruit giving tree he will have to recite Gayathri Mantra 100 times". In *Geeta* Lord Krishna says to Arjuna "earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect, ego these constitute my nature (prakrti)" (*The Green Symphony* 8). These texts mean how much Hindu religious text warns and introduce environmental consequence in its text itself. All these religious texts are considered to be the first influence for Ecological based literature, but human never considered and continued the attitude.

The root form of Ecocriticism and Ecological or Environmental Writings can be traced to nature writing. Nature has an inseparable connection with literature and natural elements have been used to embellish poetry. Romantic movements had a huge contribution to nature writings. William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge are the well known nature writers of Romantic literature. But there is a misunderstanding about the nature writing that the use of natural elements in poetry is known as nature writing. On contrary Nature writing is a piece of literary work which concentrate on thematic aspects of environment, it may be

about the beauty of nature or environmental issues. John Milton had used natural elements to describe God's creation like heaven and earth, in his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. William Shakespeare also described Garden of Arden by using natural elements in the play *As you Like it*. These two works cannot be considered as an example for nature writing, because the centre theme and author's intention is different rather than discussing about the Mother Nature. Wordsworth's poem "Daffodils" is an example for nature writing because the intention of the poet is clear in this poem. Wordsworth worshiped nature and said that 'God is there in the nature'.

Nature writing is a style in literature which has been treated and celebrated in the history of English literature. The term Nature writing has treated and grown to a shape in Romantic period. Later the style and growth had changed from embellishing the beauty of nature to discuss the natural degradation of the age. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a great change and follow-up in the field of nature writing and it contributed new words and approaches to literature. As a result of continuous follow up of new approaches which resultant the birth of updated styles of Nature writing as Environmental writing. Environmental writing has continued till the formation of Ecological Writing. The word ecology is derived from Greek language and *eco* means house and *ology* means study, so ecology means study of home. The word 'ecology' first used in a scientific study of nature. Later literature borrowed the same term in to literature and it represented environmental related works. The term Literary Ecology was introduced by Joseph Meeker, but the term Ecocriticism was coined by William Rueckert in his essay "literature and ecology; an experiment in Ecocriticism". It was a gradual development started with American literature's writers with Thoreau and Emerson in late nineteenth century. American literature emphasise the topic Environmentalism as the first attempt and later a special situation brought out the new and relevant term as Ecological Writings and Ecocriticism. At the same time the Ecological Writing can be seen in different languages and even in British literature. It is known and treated in different names by different countries. Green Studies is one among the different names of Ecological Writing, but it had not formed and organised by critics. Its considered as the British version of Ecological Writing and it seems as continuation of nature writing of Romantic period. There is no history or special occasion and unique style or format about green studies as well as Environmental Writings. At the same time 'Ecocriticism' has coined in the late twentieth century by Cheryll Glotfelty and Herold Fromm.

Glotfelty was a scholar and she was doing research on Thoreau's *Waldon* and Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*. There was no special stream to discuss the works in literature hence she invited all critics and known authors for a gathering. The get together formed a new group and named as ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and Environment). The second meeting of ASLE witnessed the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader; Land Mark in Literary Ecology* (1996) an anthology of Ecocritical essay, in which Glotfelty redefined Ecocriticism as "...the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious

perspective, and Maxist criticism brings an awareness of mode of production and economic class to its reading texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies."(*Ecocriticism Reader* Xviii).

There is wandering question about the differentiation of Ecological Writings and Ecocritical writings. At the same time these questions will be there with Environmental Writings and nature writings. First of all the works which had published in the time of Romantic period emphasise and discusses the theme environment as the back born which will belong to nature writings. In the same way after Romantic period it's considered as the birth and beginning of Environmental writing. The term Ecocriticism derived from a social issue which surfaced and reflected areas in literatures. There are many such terms originated from social issues. Feminism and Maxism are two best examples, are also related to Ecocriticism. When Glotfelty defined the term Ecocriticism she states that Ecocriticism is same to feminist and maxit criticism. Because when feminist approaches from a female centered and gender, maxit approaches from an economical, class and social side, Ecocriticism do the same through eco centered approach. Feminist approaches discusses about inequality, gender discriminations and social issues against women. Maxist approaches discusses about class issues, economical and other social issues of common people. At the same time Ecological writings discusses about environmental degradation and other environmental related issues. These environment based works can be called Ecological literature. There is a common mistake that literary criticism discusses social and other issues in a direct way. There are many types for criticism and social critics do criticise social issues and literary critics do analyse and judge literary works from literary perspective. Ecocriticism discusses Ecological writings in literature side as Feminist criticism.

'Ecocriticism' is a worldwide discussed term and it's a developing branch of literature. There are many words related to ecology such as eco friendly and economics. Eco-Feminism is another term related to Ecocriticism. But Eco-feminism concentrates on gender issues. Ecocriticism is a deep rooted branch of Nature writing from Romantic literature. After Romantic Age there was high degradation in environment hence, Environmental literature born with the shape to nature writing in literature. Later Ernst Heinrich used the word 'ecology' and Joseph Meeker introduced and William Rueckert coined the term Ecocriticism in the second half of nineteenth century. Hence in late twentieth century Ecocriticism has been redefined by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, through their publication of an anthology of '*Ecocriticism Reader*'.

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