

Greening the Young Mind
Eco-consciousness in Contemporary English Language Fiction for
Children and Young Adults in India

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Chapter I Overture

Everything is connected to everything else.

- Barry Commoner's first law of ecology.

The term *ecocriticism* is derived from the Greek words *oikos* and *kritis* which together mean "house judge." The house is the world of nature, our widest home. "Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty and Fromm xviii).

The German zoologist Ernst Haeckel coined the word *ecology* in 1869. Joseph Meeker introduced the term *literary ecology* in 1972. Another American scholar William Rueckert created the term *ecocriticism* from the two words *ecology* and *criticism* in his essay "Literature and Ecology; An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (1978). The term *ecological poetics* was also used by him in this essay. In 1991 Harold Fromm organised an M.L.A. session entitled "Ecocriticism: the Greening of Literary Studies."

Ecocriticism is the preferred term in the USA, while in the United Kingdom, it is "Green Studies." USA celebrated the Transcendentalists of the 1840s. Emerson, Fuller and Thomson, whereas the UK Green Studies Movement was derived from the tradition of British Romanticism of the 1790s. Raymond Williams, the critic wrote the path-breaking essay, "The Country and the City" and Laurence Coupe, Richard Kerridge and Greg Garrard are other critics associated with the Green Studies Movement. The US movement is celebratory in nature. It appreciates the grandeur of nature. The UK movement is minatory in nature. It seeks to warn of the coming ecological apocalypse, and lesser ecological threats.

Rachael Carson's *The Silent Spring* (1962) set the trend for this area of literary study. In the USA, the publication in 1996 of *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm, was the cornerstone of ecocriticism. In 1992, Cheryll Glotfelty became co-founder of ASLE, which brings out the ISLE-Journal. "In the mid-eighties, as scholars began to undertake collaborative projects, the field of environmental literary studies was planted, and in the early nineties it grew" (Glotfelty and Fromm xii). Some universities began to include literature courses in their environmental studies curricula. Special sessions on nature writing or environmental literature began to appear on the programs of annual literary conferences, notably the 1991 MLA special session organised by Harold Fromm, entitled "Ecocriticism: the Greening of Literary Studies" (xviii). In 1985, Frederick O. Wage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature; Materials, Methods, Resources* and in 1989 Alice Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter* which promoted the study of writing on nature and the environment.

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Literary theory, in general, examines the relations between writers, texts, and the world, In most literary theory “the world” is synonymous with society- the social sphere. Ecocriticism expands the notion of “the world” to include the entire ecosphere. Ecoliterary terms such as *ecopoetics*, *green reading*, *literary ecology* or *ecological literature*, *green theory* and *green cultural studies* are new but the spirit behind them is ages old. “Ecology is a comparatively recent science necessitated by the march of western civilization because we over exploit our natural resources and remorselessly indulge in species annihilation, legally poison our rivers and seas over and above damming and polluting them smoke out holes in our atmosphere and engage in a hundred different ways of self destruction” (Murali 11)

Lawrence Buell in *Environmental Imagination* says that the non-human is not a mere framing device but a presence. Listing out the ingredients of an environmentally oriented work, he asserts that the human interest is not the only legitimate interest in this world. Therefore, human accountability to the environment should be a part of the text’s orientation (7-8).

Arne Ness, the Norwegian philosopher, professor and mountaineer is the advocate of *Deep Ecology* or *Ecosophy* (ecological wisdom). Arne Ness states the principles of Deep Ecology that are the platform upon which the framework of Ecosophy is built:

1. The non-human has value in itself.
2. Biodiversity
3. Kill only for vital needs (conserve).
4. Decrease in human population to make space for the non-human.
5. Present interference excessive, increasing.
6. Change in policies.
7. Simplicity, quality.
8. Activism.

Deep Ecology demands a return to the monistic viewpoint, the primal identification of humans and the ecosphere, an outlook close to Indian philosophy, especially the *Advaita* theory. As Rajakrishnan V. and Ujwal Jana point out, nature was respected during the Vedic Age (7). In the *Atharvana Veda*, the earth is seen as the nourishing mother who supports all living beings. The Rig Veda praises medicinal trees and plants that grow amidst human dwellings.

The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways of keeping the human community from destroying the natural community, and with it the human community. This is what ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive that is inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude toward nature” (Reuckert 107). This worldview blames anthropocentric dualism for the ills of the environment.

Joseph W. Meeker in “The Comic Mode” (155-69) says that while human social systems have only one animal to deal with, man, and a few domesticated plants and animals, a natural ecosystem

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