



## Role of Literature to Promote Environmental Awareness

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### ABSTRACT

Literature has served two roles since antiquity. To some, it is art for art's sake and to others; it is the mirror of contemporary society. Great literature is always built upon these two concepts. Down the ages critics have analyzed several contemporary issues of literary values like Classicism, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Marxism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Deconstruction, Post-colonialism, and Feminism and so on. But literary studies for a long time did not pay any attention to a serious issue, which is the environmental concern as represented in literature. The world has suffered a lot from global ecological crisis mostly due to human atrocities on nature. So literature cannot turn its face away from this. Towards the end of the previous century, a new area of studying literature came into existence. It is a scholarly approach to studying nature writing which is popularly known as ecocriticism. This environmentally oriented study of literature is also known as Environmental Literary Criticism, Green Studies etc. The present article seeks to explore the several Ecocritical issues as represented in the great nature novel, *Aranyak (Of the Forest)* by one of the major Bengali novelists named Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay whose works have often been translated into English. The present work will try to investigate how this long prose narrative can lead to the self-realization of a city dweller about his sin of deforestation although he had not any love for forest life in the beginning of the novel. As the novel progresses, we see a gradual change in his attitude to nature. His initial 'ego-consciousness' yields place to his 'eco-consciousness' at the end. Human nature interconnection which is the very basis of Ecocriticism is paramount in the novel.

**KEYWORDS:** *literature, environment, awareness, ecocritical, forest, ego-consciousness, ecological, novel, human nature*

### INTRODUCTION

Since prehistory, literature and the arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human-environment interactions.[1,2] The modern environmentalist movement as it emerged first in the late-nineteenth century and, in its more recent incarnation, in the 1960s, gave rise to a rich array of fictional and nonfictional writings concerned with humans' changing relationship to the natural world. Only since the early 1990s, however, has the long-standing interest of literature studies in these matters generated the initiative most commonly known as "ecocriticism," an eclectic and loosely coordinated movement whose contributions thus far have been most visible within its home discipline of literature but whose interests and alliances extend across various art forms and media[3,4]. In such areas as the study of narrative and image, ecocriticism converges with its sister disciplines in the humanities: environmental anthropology, environmental history, and environmental philosophy. In the first two sections, we begin with a brief overview of the nature, significance, and evolution of literature-environment studies. We then summarize in more detail six specific centers of interest: (a) the imagination of place and place-attachment, (b) the enlistment and critique of models of scientific inquiry in the study of literature and the arts, (c) the examination of the significance of gender difference and environmental representation, (d) the cross-pollination of ecocritical and postcolonial scholarship as ecocriticism has extended its horizons beyond its original focus on Anglo-American imagination, (e) ecocriticism's

evolving interest in indigenous art and thought, and (f) ecocriticism's no less keen and complex attentiveness to artistic representation and the ethics of relations between humans and animals.[5,6]

Literature and environment studies—commonly called “ecocriticism” or “environmental criticism” in analogy to the more general term literary criticism—comprise an eclectic, pluriform, and cross-disciplinary initiative that aims to explore the environmental dimensions of literature and other creative media in a spirit of environmental concern not limited to any one method or commitment.[7,8] Ecocriticism begins from the conviction that the arts of imagination and the study thereof—by virtue of their grasp of the power of word, story, and image to reinforce, enliven, and direct environmental concern—can contribute significantly to the understanding of environmental problems: the multiple forms of ecodegradation that afflict planet Earth today. In this, ecocriticism concurs with other branches of the environmental humanities—ethics, history, religious studies, anthropology, humanistic geography—in holding that environmental phenomena must be comprehended, and that today's burgeoning array of environmental concerns must be addressed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. At least as fundamental to their remediation as scientific breakthroughs and strengthened regimes of policy implementation is the impetus of creative imagination, vision, will, and belief. Even though, as the poet W.H. Auden famously wrote, “poetry makes nothing happen” in and of itself, the outside-the-box thought experiments of literature and other media can offer unique resources for activating concern and creative [9,10]thinking about the planet's environmental future. By themselves, creative depictions of environmental harm are unlikely to free societies from lifestyles that depend on radically transforming ecosystems. But reflecting on works of imagination may prompt intensified concern about the consequences of such choices and possible alternatives to them.[11,12]

The concept of place has always been of central interest to literature-environment studies. Part of the reason for this is intradisciplinary (to redress the historic neglect of setting relative to plot, character, image, and symbol in literary works). More significantly, however, ecocriticism's attention to place reflects its recognition of the interconnectedness between human life/history and physical environments to which works of imagination (in all

media, including literature) bear witness—hence the claim by one of ecocriticism's earliest spokespersons that its distinctive addition to the commonly studied triad of race, class, and gender was place as a critical category.[13,14]

Literature-environment studies obviously have no monopoly on place theory, an interest shared across the humanities as well as social and applied sciences. Ecocritical thinking broadly accords with humanistic geographers who conceive place-sense as a fusion of personal allegiance, social construction, and physiographic matrix, while often differing in practice as to the relative emphasis on place-attachment at the level of imagined individual experience versus at the level of the social collective. Ecocritical partiality for “narrative scholarship” (see previous section) is partly explicable as a way of striking a balance between these two claims. First-wave ecocriticism attached special value to the aesthetics and ethics of place-attachment at a local or regional scale, as modeled in the bioregional thinking of such environmental writer-critics as Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder, whose essayistic writings were more influential as catalysts for ecocriticism than were their fictive works.[15,16]

Environmentalism had defined itself from the beginning as a global as well as local mode of thought through its appeal to the “Blue Planet” image of Earth from outer space and its slogan “Think globally, act locally.” Increased interest on the part of literary scholars in globalization processes and the forms of identity they help to generate variously approached through such labels as transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, borderlands cultures, diaspora, hybridity, mestizaje (mixtures of indigenous and European ethnicities and cultures in Latin America), and nomadism began to exert pressure on a perspective mostly focused on the local and the regional. Finally, public discussion of global environmental problems such as biodiversity loss and climate change made obvious the need for ecocritical discourse to develop new ways of addressing global interconnectedness and less obvious the idea that local place or region was the only or best way to do this.[17,18]

Intersections between ecocriticism and postcolonial studies that began to be explored in the early 2000s marked a further stage in the integration of discourses about the local and the global. In the encounter between these two areas of study, it became clear that ecocritical frameworks had most often been national or even nationalist, whereas postcolonialist

approaches tended to focus on transnational and cosmopolitan webs of connection. Additionally, whereas ecocritics had emphasized ties to place, postcolonialists had foregrounded displacements. Further differentiating these studies, ecocritics had valued purity in ecosystems and places over the moments of hybridization and border-crossing that most interested postcolonial scholars. Ecocriticism's relationship to the natural sciences has always been extraordinarily ambivalent. Ecocritics, like environmentalists more generally, rely on the insights of biologists, ecologists, and chemists as the basis for their claims about the state of nature, and research findings from the natural sciences provide much of the social legitimation for efforts on behalf of conservation. But some ecocritics also see science and technology as root causes of ecological crisis, both in reducing nature to a mere object to be studied and manipulated by a detached observer, and in amplifying people's ability to inflict damage on nature. Consequently, ecocritical analyses have argued for a range of discrepant perspectives regarding the role of the natural sciences in cultural inquiry.[19,20]

Some ecocritics see the connection of their work to scientific research as the distinctive mark of literature-environment studies compared with other types of humanistic inquiry. They envision theoretical biology and the cognitive sciences as, ideally, the foundation for cultural research. Joseph Carroll and Glen Love, for example, in the spirit of E.O. Wilson's "consilience," aim to make evolutionary theory the basis for literary and cultural research. Culture, they argue, is based on the "adapted mind," "a biologically constrained set of cognitive and motivational characteristics"[21,22]

## Discussion

One of the major crisis's in this century is the environmental crisis. Humans as one of the creatures that inhabit the earth need to begin to realize the environmental issues around them. The children as the next generation must be educated well in order to raise their awareness about the present state of the environment. This study aims are to emphasize how green literature could help to encourage the children to get closer to their environment. The qualitative research methodology is employed in this study based on the interpretative philosophy. The Ecocriticism theory is applied in this study. Several of children literature books are used as the object of the study to prove that the children literature could indeed be a

very helpful tool for raising the eco-consciousness. The children books are used in this study are in the form of picture books. These books are *The Secret Garden* and *The Giving Tree*. Documentary analysis of ecocriticism was used to the children picture books to reveal the way to increase children awareness about their environment. The result of this study showed that those picture books are: 1. the authors are indeed very creatively showed their enthusiasm in raising environmental awareness 2. They depicted how nature and human connected each other. In the end, this study will hopefully increase children's love to protect, preserve and nurture the environment in the near future. Environmental awareness in literature has the power to inspire environmental activism. As the world grapples with the devastating effects of climate change, literature plays an increasingly important role in promoting environmental awareness and encouraging action to mitigate the impact of human activity on the natural world.

One way that literature raises environmental awareness is through nature writing. Nature writing is a genre of literature that celebrates the natural world and encourages readers to appreciate and protect it. Authors such as Henry David Thoreau, Rachel Carson, and John Muir have used nature writing to awaken readers' interest in these issues. Thoreau's classic work, "Walden," is a prime example of how literature can promote environmental awareness. Thoreau's vivid descriptions of the natural world and his celebration of simple living have inspired readers for generations. Thoreau's belief in the importance of living in harmony with nature has inspired environmentalists to advocate for sustainable living and conservation of natural resources.

Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" is another powerful example. In her book, Carson warned readers about the devastating impact of pesticides on the environment and human health. The book inspired a national movement to regulate and ban the use of harmful pesticides, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Ecocriticism is another way that literature can raise environmental awareness. Ecocriticism is a literary theory that examines the relationship between literature and the natural world. Ecocritics analyze how literature portrays the environment and how it can shape our understanding of environmental issues. By examining the portrayal of the natural world in literature, ecocritics can highlight the ways that literature can change social consciousness about nature.[23]

Sustainable literature is a growing genre that focuses on promoting sustainable living and environmental stewardship. Sustainable literature can take many forms, including fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Sustainable literature often features characters who live in harmony with nature and promote sustainable practices. By highlighting the benefits of sustainable living and the importance of protecting the natural world, sustainable literature can inspire readers to take action to protect the environment.

In addition to raising environmental awareness, literature can also inspire activism. Environmental activism is the work of advocating for environmental protection and conservation. Literature can inspire environmental activism by highlighting the beauty and value of the natural world and by exposing the devastating impact of human activity on the environment. Authors and poets can use their work to advocate for environmental protection and inspire others to take action. In addition, literature can serve as a powerful tool for organizing and mobilizing environmental movements.

In conclusion, literature plays an important role in raising awareness about environmental issues and promoting activism. Through nature writing, ecocriticism, sustainable literature, and other genres, literature can inspire readers to appreciate and protect the natural world. Literature can also provide a platform for environmental activism and serve as a tool for organizing and mobilizing environmental movements. As the world continues to face the challenges of climate change, literature will continue to be an important tool for promoting environmental awareness and encouraging action to protect the planet.[11,18]

## Results

Environmental literacy and ecocriticism refer to the work of educators, scholars, and writers to foster a critical understanding about environmental issues. Environmental literacy includes educational materials and programs designed to provide lay citizens and students with a broad understanding of the relationship between humans and the natural world, borrowing from the fields of science, politics, economics, and the arts. Environmental literacy also seeks to develop the knowledge and skills citizens and students may need to identify and resolve environmental crises, individually or as a group. Ecocriticism is a branch of literary studies that offers insights into the underlying philosophies in literature that address the theme of nature and have been

catalysts for change in public consciousness concerning the environment.

Americans have long turned to literature and popular culture to develop, discuss, and communicate various ideals about the natural world and their relationship to how Americans see themselves and function together. This literature has also made people think about the idea of progress: what constitutes advancement in culture, what are the goals of a healthy society, and how nature would be considered and treated by such a society. In contemporary times, the power and visibility of modern media in influencing these debates is also widely recognized. Given this trend, understanding how these forms of communication work and developing them further to broaden public participation, which is a task of environmental literacy and ecocriticism, is vital to the environmental movement.[20,23]

Educators and ecocritics take diverse approaches to the task of raising consciousness about environmental issues, but they share a collective concern for the global environmental crisis and begin with the understanding that nature and human needs require rebalancing. In that, they become emissaries, as writer Barry Lopez suggests in *Orion* magazine, who have to "reestablish good relations with all the biological components humanity has excluded from its moral universe." For Lopez, as with many generations of nature writers, including Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Edward Abbey, and Terry Tempest Williams, and Annie Dillard, the lessons to be imparted are learned from long experience with and observation of nature. Lopez suggests another pervasive theme, that observing the ever-changing natural world can be a humbling experience, when he writes of "a horizon rather than a boundary for knowing, toward which we are always walking."

The career of Henry David Thoreau was one of the most influential and early models for being a student of the natural world and for the development of an environmental awareness through attentive participation within nature. Thoreau also made a fundamental contribution to American's identification with the ideals of individualism and self-sufficiency. His most important work, *Walden*, was a book developed from his journal written during a two-and-a-half-year experiment of living alone and self-sufficiently in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts. Thoreau describes his process of education as an awakening to a deep sense of his interrelatedness to the natural world and to the sacred

power of such awareness. This is contrasted to the human society from which he isolated himself, of whose utilitarianism, materialism, and consumerism he was extremely critical. Thoreau famously writes in *Walden*: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." For Thoreau, living with awareness of the greater natural world became a matter of life and death.[14,19]

Many educators have also been influenced by two founding policy documents, created by commissions of the United Nations, in the field of environmental literacy. The Belgrade Charter (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976) and the Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1978) share the goal "to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems." Later governmental bodies such as the Brundtland Commission (Brundtland, 1987), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio (UNCED, 1992), and the Thessaloniki Declaration (UNESCO, 1997) have built on these ideas.

### Conclusions

Much empirical social science in the field of "narrative persuasion" has demonstrated that storytelling is an effective way to shift beliefs and attitudes regarding science and environmental issues. In part, this is because narratives promote a sense of identification with the story characters and immersion into the world of the story. Despite the rising popularity of climate fiction and prior research on narrative persuasion, research had not yet tested the persuasive effects of climate fiction. Our study provides the first experimental investigation of these effects — merging the fields of literary Ecocriticism with empirical social science. In this study, participants in the Concerned and Cautious audience segments of Global Warming's Six Americas were randomly assigned to read one of three short stories: "The Tamarisk Hunter" (a dystopian tale by Paolo Bacigalupi of climate catastrophe, set in a drought-ridden American Southwest), "In-Flight Entertainment" (a realist tale by Helen Simpson of climate denial in a conversation between airplane passengers). Participants in the control condition read "Good People" (a short story by David Foster Wallace, unrelated to climate change). We found that reading "The Tamarisk Hunter" or "In-Flight Entertainment" had significant positive effects on

readers' climate change beliefs and attitudes, including that global warming will cause more natural disasters and poverty, as well as levels of worry, perceived importance, and the perceptions that global warming will harm readers personally, as well as future generations. Consistent with prior research on narrative persuasion, we found that many of these effects are mediated by feelings of transportation by the story and identification with the characters. After one month, we recontacted the study participants in order to assess whether these persuasive effects remained over time. We found that the effect of reading these stories was no longer statistically significant, suggesting that the persuasive effects faded over time. Together, these findings highlight the importance of storytelling about climate change in general and of climate fiction in particular. However, we also underscore the importance of repeated exposure to multiple messages from different sources, because the persuasive effects of any one message can be transient.[23]

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