

The Book of Genesis: Genesis of Ecocriticism

Sehginlal Touthang

ABSTRACT

One of the greatest literary theories of the 20th century is ecocriticism. It emphasises on the enduring relationship that humans have with the natural world, as explored in literary works. The term *ecocriticism* was first used by William Rueckert in his easy 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' (1978). However, the roots of this budding, earthcentric literary theory lie deep in the past. Peter Barry divides the genesis of this recently developed theory in two: Great Britain and America. The former is concerned with the British Romanticism while the latter engaged with the American Transcendentalism. But the concept of ecocriticism has already started long before the Romanticism and the Transcendentalism. This study aims to transport readers and academics back to the universe's inception. The *Holy Bible* claims that God appointed Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, to watch over the heavenly garden, Eden. The greatest joy that God could offer was to give the serene beauty and biophilia to the first human beings. Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden as they disobeyed God. And they had to miss the tranquil, the quiet atmosphere of Eden Garden that they couldn't get anywhere else, that was the most agonising penalty. This paper aims to make a connection between current ecological issues and Christians' creationist beliefs. It tries to show that the genesis of creation is the genesis of eco critical theory. The fundamental principle of ecocriticism is as old as human civilisation, despite the fact that it is not quite a century old yet. Its origins require investigation and focus since they will enhance the theory's comprehension and interpretation.

Keywords: Genesis, Ecocriticism, Nature, Mankind, Adam and Eve, Environment.

One of the most important features of Academics and Researches is their relevancy with the contemporary world. In this sense, ecocriticism plays a crucial role in today's global warming era as it earnestly addresses ecological concerns and issues through literary works. To put it briefly, ecocriticism is a recent critical movement that aims to connect literary theory and criticism with contemporary ecological concerns. By incorporating ecological ideas into literature, it investigates the connection between the two fields. By concentrating on literary studies of how nature is portrayed in literary texts and literary constructions of the environmental problem in eco-literary discourses, it seeks to integrate literary criticism with environmental issues. John Loretta clearly explains the literal meaning of ecocriticism:

“Eco”, from the Greek root *oikos*, means “house”... Just as “economy” is the management or law of the house (*nomos* = law), “ecology” is the study of the house. Ecocriticism, then, is the criticism of the “house,” i.e., the environment, as represented in literature. But the definition of “house,” or *oikos*, is not simple. Questions remain: What is the environment? What is nature? Why did the term “environment,” which derives from the verb “to environ or surround,” change to mean that which is nonhuman? Are not humans natural and a prominent environment in themselves? Where and in what does one live? Ecocriticism is by nature interdisciplinary, invoking knowledge of environmental studies, the natural sciences, and cultural and social studies, all of which play a part in answering the questions it poses.

http://www.asle.org/assets/docs/Ecocriticism_essay.pdf

These questions still remain a challenge for today's learned scholars and thinkers. However, one gets a clearer view if one dives deeper in to the realm of the presentation of ecology in literary works. And to do this, one needs to see a clear picture of the inception of nature and nature-centric theory, ecocriticism.

It is a common acceptance that the term *ecocriticism* was first used by William Rueckert in his easy 'Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism' (1978). However, the roots of this budding, earth-centric literary theory lie deep in the past. The author of *The Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry gives two roots of ecocriticism— Romanticism in Great Britain and Transcendentalism in America. The former is concerned with the British Romanticism while the latter engaged with the American transcendentalism, yet the *Holy Bible* records man-nature binary relationship

as early as human civilization. Genesis, the first of the sixty six books of the *Holy Bible* records the beginning of the creation in details.

According to the Genesis of the *Holy Bible*, God created the universe and the first two human beings Adam and Eve in six days. He gave supreme authority to the human beings to control and dominate all other creatures on earth.

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (King James Version, Gen.2.28).

This is the beginning of the division between culture and nature. Since then, man always thinks he is a supreme creature and other creatures are created only to please him. Mankind has been living with this edenic concept since the inception of human civilization. God continued to bless mankind and said

“See I have given you every herb that yields seeds which is on the face of all the earth, every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food”; and it was so (Gen. 2.29-30).

God, the creator of the universe himself decreed that mankind should live on the products of the earth. Sadly humankind deliberately overlooks the interdependency of nature and men, and often claims the upper hand upon nature. Except the naturalists, the environmentalists and Eco-critics, most human beings can't help themselves from under-looking a vital role play by ecology not only in completing humans' life but also in maintaining harmony and balance in the entire cosmos.

The *Bible* seems to contradict itself. At first God gave men the supreme power upon nature and He also said that men should live on nature. And hence, it can be argued that the genesis of the earth-centric theory is in the Genesis of the *Holy Bible*. The Book of Genesis is believed to be written in the 4th or 5th century BCE. Thus, it predates all the famous ecological roots and Eco-critics such as romanticism, transcendentalism, William Rueckert, Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell etc. The gist of ecocriticism is to reflect the binary relationship of mankind and nature. And this relationship is

often unhealthy as men always treat nature as the other. Mankind's superior attitude towards nature has begun since God bestowed them the power to dominate nature. Mankind has sufficiently misused the authority given upon nature. They used it to satisfy their pride and ego over nature, giving nature a synonymous treatment of master and slave, self and other, strong and weak etc. The right attitude would rather be to protect, preserve and nurture nature by giving them a conducive atmosphere for growth and healthy life. Due to human greed and thoughtlessness, nature has lost its core values and it has been reduced to a mere object. Like environmentalism, the concern of ecocriticism is to acknowledge the indelible role nature has been playing on human culture and bring to the forefront of the literary scholars to give nature its due respect and importance. Also to warn the proud human beings of the imminent dangers those are arising due to the negligence of the emerging environmental threats. Ecocriticism also calls for scholars and readers to work unceasingly in combating today's environmental threats and dangers. For instance, when Adam and Eve missed the heavenly bliss at Eden garden they used 'fig leaves' to cover their shame and body. Our fore fathers lived in the woods and could survive for generations. The present generation still can't compare the highly advanced Air Conditioners with clean air from the dense forests. Yet, mankind still dared to assert their masterly authority upon the kind and humble Mother Nature.

'Place' is one of the most important elements of ecocriticism as Dr. Vathana Fenn rightly marks, "It [Ecocriticism] values highly the 'literary sense of place' not as setting but as an essential expression of bonding with or alienation from a specific natural context" (119). In all great literary works, from Anglo-Saxon Period to Elizabethan Period to Romantic Period to Post-Modern Period the indelible role of place in literary contexts has been shown visibly. Absurd plays are said to have negated all traditional notions of art and ushered in a new literary trend. However, The most read and analyse absurd text *Waiting for Godot* shows the importance of place in absurd texts. Following creation, God bestowed Eden, a celestial garden, upon Adam and Eve. The endless wait which is the only visible action of the play happens in an unknown and un-named geographical location where only a single tree stands to mark the place. This clearly tells that there is no literary genre that can really escape from a geographical location called [place which is an important aspect of ecocriticism. They required a place to dwell, which is a

geographical location. In this way, the act of assigning a location significance marks the start of creation. As a result, Genesis in the Bible contains all the features of ecocriticism, from undermining nature to interdependency of nature and mankind to compulsion of a geographical landscape for mankind are engrained in Genesis of The *Holy Bible*. Careful reading and analysis of menature relationship in the Genesis would draw academics nearer in discovering the ultimate and hidden meaning of nature-centric theory ecocriticism. Close reading of the first book of *The Bible* would also enable scholars to answer the arduous and demanding questions posed by the theory and it would also help in embracing the challenges that lie along the way of fulfilling the goal of ecocriticism. This will enlighten new scholars and academicians to broader their limited outlook upon limitless universe and its meaning. If one wishes to grab a satisfactory input about ecocriticism, one has to read Genesis of the *Holy Bible*. It is high time to put all hands on the deck in resisting the current ecological threats. Showcasing the presentation of nature in literary works is too insignificant to be an ultimate goal of ecocriticism. Academicians and Scholars should turn their attention to prevailing ecological and geological issues and try to educate readers and young minds to think and do in like manner.

Works cited

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi:Viva Books, 2010.

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. Faber and Faber, 2010.

Fenn, Vethana. “Roots of Ecocriticissm: An Expoloration of The History of Ecocriticism, A Literary Theory of The Post-Modern World”. *Journal of English Language and Literature*.Vol. 2. Issue 2, 2015. Pp114-119.

Holy Bible. Kings James Version, Duke Classics, 2012.

John Loretta. Greening the library: The Fundamentals and Futre of Ecocrticism. ASLE. n.d. May 30 2011. Web.(http://www.asle.org/assets/docs/Ecocrticism_essay.pdf)

Rueckert, William. ‘Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism’ in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1996.