

**Transition from Ecocriticism to Eco-nostalgia; Exploring Emerging  
Research Pathways in Indian Writing in English**

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**Abstract**

The word Eco-Nostalgia has two different senses of meaning blended into one. Eco means ecology and nostalgia for the sentimental memories of the past. So Eco-nostalgia should be understood as the sentimental reminiscences of the past related to the physical environment expressed in literary works of art. This article investigates the transition from Ecocriticism to eco-nostalgia on the ground of Indian Writing in English (IWE).

The change of time has witnessed the change in the dimension of critical analysis of the literary texts. The eco-critical perspectives have wider possibility of deeper analysis of the text with an eco-nostalgic point of view with emotional, memory based sentiment of loss and longing for an ecologically tuneful past.

The research article is a sincere endeavour to promote the concept of Ecocriticism and to conceptualize the eco-nostalgia among the young brigade of researchers to draw their attention towards their upcoming research explorations in Indian Writing English in this less explored area.

**Keywords:** Transition, Ecocriticism, Eco-nostalgia, Emerging, , Research, Pathways, Indian Writing in English

**Introduction:**

Physical environment plays a very major role in all the stages of human life i.e. from birth to burial. In the course of human development, Nature has played a pivotal role for the growth and prosperity of human life. All living organisms except humans have lived in this glob without slightly perturbing physical environment. *In*

*the initial stage, man has used Nature for survival, then for comfort and now for greed.* The concept of co-existence seems almost diminished and man has exploited it so terribly that there hovers the danger of the existence of both man and Nature. Many governments, NGOs and individuals of the world have been able to sense and sniff the danger in time and have already started working on it. In the midst of all this, how can this, a very huge community of letters (literary people) be isolated from contributing all that is possible for this divine mission of saving and preserving the physical environment! History has been the witness of the fact that literature has absolute power and responsibility both to represent the good and evil sights of society to bring necessary modifications in human thinking as per the need of the time. Now it's time to modify the mindset from greedy lust to absolute love towards physical Nature. Gandhi was absolutely right in the opinion that Nature can meet man's need but not greed.

#### **Ecocriticism as a Literary Theory:**

At the dawn of the 21st century, a newer dimension of literary theory emerged due to the sincere efforts of Cheryll Glotfeltry of Nevada University, Reno. A literary theory called Ecocriticism which is very simply defined by herself as "A study of the relation between literature and physical environment." Since the last three decades, Ecocriticism seems to be catching considerable interest and clear attention of the authentic and genuine literary scholars of the world. As a literary critical theory, it offers very good space for the study of relation between literature and physical environment. This, being an interdisciplinary approach of studying literature and environment, offers a unique aspect of studying literature through ecological perspectives.

Resources favour the facts that the term Ecocriticism has been for the first time used in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism*. He explains it as the concepts of ecology and ecological perspectives to be applied to the study of literary works of art. However it officially got into shape in mid 1990s with the publication of two seminal works *The Ecocriticism Reader* by Cheryll Glotfelty and Herold Fromm and *The Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell. An association of literary scholars, teachers, students, artists and lovers of environment has been founded under the title ASLE; *Association for the study of literature and Environment*. The home page of ASLE website explains that the association is dedicated to facilitate interdisciplinary and innovative approaches to the study of nature and culture through various forms such

as nature writing, art, ecological scholarship, poetry, music, creative writing and film etc..

ASLE organizes a biannual conference which is an opportunity for the teachers, students, research scholars, professionals and all those who deal with the environment in literature. ISLE; *Interdisciplinary study of literature and environment*, is the official quarterly journal of ASLE that seeks to explore the relation between human beings and the natural world.

A considerable amount of creative work has been produced on this new genre even since its official establishment as one of the theories of literary criticism through the three waves of Ecocriticism. As per the opinion of Loretta Johnson, the first wave of Ecocriticism focused on nature writing, eccentric texts and nature history. The second wave focused on the un-built to build environment, from wilderness to urban landscapes. Scott Slavic believes that in the third wave of Ecocriticism, the global concepts of place are being explored as eco-cosmopolitanism, where scholars and teachers find new and old ways to connect their work to social transformation. Ecocriticism is understood by some other names like Eco-poetics, Environment Literary Criticism and Green Studies.

Physical Nature has been a medium for the representation of human feeling and sentiments in literary expression for centuries. The fact can be well measured in the poetic expression of the Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, Shelly and many other minor poets in English literature and Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot and many others are American poets. Nature for them as mentioned earlier was a means of literary expressions in similes and metaphors not an agent of survival. Presently it has been a need of the time and it is very obvious that if humankind wants to survive, Nature must survive. Literature can play a pivotal role for creating love and respect for physical nature in society. The need for mutual co-existence paves the newer dimensions of literary expressions. Ecocriticism is a current literary critical theory that explores, appreciates and nurtures ecological values, examines human perception of wilderness and investigates on how nature or the physical environment has been characterized in modern literary expressions.

#### **Eco-Nostalgia as an Innovative Notion:**

The concept of nostalgia; an off-shoot of Ecocriticism, should be understood as the memories of the happy past experiences with physical Nature which one often slips into as one considers oneself misfit or unfit in the current environment. Here nostalgia is a feeling of expression either mourning to the present unavoidable

situation or escape from it or injuries due to it. The irony is that one can't recreate the past and so the result is frustration, depression or such other psychological complexities which continue to give endless mental unrest.

Eco-Nostalgia is a coined word having two separate senses of meaning into one. Eco- is for Ecology or the physical Nature and Nostalgia- is for the sentimental reminiscences of the past happy experiences. So Eco-nostalgia can be understood as the sentimental reminiscences of the past related to the physical environment. The past environmental experiences were happy and enlightened one but due to the present colonization, modernization, industrialization and many other disturbances, the incursion to Nature is deadly and the same has been exploited to the extent that, there is a question of existence for both the living organism and the Nature itself.

The concept of Eco-nostalgia can be considered as an off-shoot of the current literary trend called Ecocriticism, a wonderful trend of literary criticism that focuses on the environmental ethics that protect and preserve the physical Nature that still can be a lifeline for all the living generations. The non-human living species like birds, animals, plants, trees, and others take from Nature as per their basic needs and live contentedly without causing much damage or disturbance to Nature. The same can be true to some of the human groups like tribal, Indians, and villagers those who live happily with close association to physical nature. *They take from nature like that of a wasp sucking nectar from a flower.* Such people live happily and peacefully within the limited available resources. The blind rush of modernization and industrialization has given, to this so-called modern human generation, nothing but depression, oppression and restlessness and the ultimate return to Nature is the only way out. So the sentimental belongingness for the past physical nature, whose interregal part one used to be, overflows and expressed in some or the other way in a literary creation. Such experience can be understood as Eco-Nostalgia.

The concept of Eco-Nostalgia can be applied where the present experiences with physical Nature are not happier than the past experiences used to be. Due to the present unfit or misfit situations, or due to the excessive use of the physical Nature and the visible danger caused to it, the victims or the well-wishers of the planet Earth either mourn about the past happy experiences with the physical Nature or slip into the past reminiscences with the physical Nature. And this all can be due to unexpected consequences due to the senselessness and thanklessness towards the physical Nature. The concept of Eco-Nostalgia can be applied to the literary expression in which such sentimental reminiscences for the past happy experiences with physical Nature, expressed in prose and poetry.

**Critically Studying Indian Writing in English through Eco-nostalgia Lens:**

An individual is always emotionally attached to the physical environment in which s/he is born and brought-up. The early memories of an individual are permanently stored in his/her mind and heart forever. His/her present physical, mental, emotional and intellectual growth, his/her hobbies, habits, behaviour pattern and every other thing has a kind of lasting impact on the physical environment along with the social environment in which he/she has been born and brought-up.

Migration of any kind is painful, be it temporary or permanent, for further studies, job-placement, partition, banishment, or exile. In such situations, along with other belongings, memories of a physical environment also get migrated. It takes time to get readjusted with the newer people and place, so an individual feels little delighted to be with the old memories of the previous situations for temporary relief. For instance, a countryside individual migrating to a metropolitan place feels a high magnitude of loneliness and isolation in the beginning. A permanently banished or exiled individual feels a deeper sense of nostalgia for the native land or the left-out physical environment along with the society in which he/she has born and lived. If expressed in literature, such experiences can be taken as eco-nostalgic expressions.

More to it, due to the adverse effects of industrialization and urbanization, the Nature has been much disturbed or damaged or ruined completely and an individual may not be happy with the current changes and he/she remembers the previous physical environment and here eco-nostalgic sentiments overflows powerfully in a form of fictional works of art like a poem, a story, or a novel. The argument can be understood with one illustration like a small school boy who swings on a branch of a huge Bunyan tree every day way back from school in the evening but in the name of redevelopment, if the tree is uprooted and the surrounding land seems barren in absence of it. A school boy, now a young man, writes a poem remembering the tree and his school days memories attached to it as he is not happy perhaps with the present physical development happening with utter corruption practices.

Literature can be one of the best ways of expressing the overflow of powerful nostalgic feelings and sentiments. One can find ample examples in literary creations like poetry and prose of various types.

In support of the concept of Eco-nostalgia, the investigator has searched for such literary creations that have similar presentations.

**From Ecocriticism to Eco-nostalgia; An Eco-nostalgic Turn in IWE:**

Eco-nostalgia represents a shift in literary sensibility from activism to affect, from critique to commemoration. It represented a sentimental craving for a past where human life was closer to nature. This transition reflects a broader cultural and psychological response to the rapid ecological changes brought by globalization and urbanization.

Eco-nostalgia is evident in the poetic works of Jayanta Mahapatra, who often romanticizes the natural landscapes of Odisha, or in Ruskin Bond's writing, where the hills and forests of Mussoorie are depicted with fond remembrance. The movement is not merely aesthetic but also ideological, framing nature as a lost cultural heritage. This presents fertile ground for research into how literary imagination reconstructs ecological histories.

Indian Writing in English occupies a unique position, on both sides of indigenous themes and global forms. As environmental degradation becomes increasingly tangible, Indian English literature has begun to articulate a deep-seated sense of loss.

R.K. Narayan in *The Guide* and Anita Desai in *Fire on the Mountain* portray the spiritual and emotional connections between humans and nature that seem increasingly absent in contemporary life. These texts offer a reflective, often melancholic, view of an eco-systemic wholeness that once was. Eco-nostalgia here becomes a mode of cultural safeguarding and conflict.

#### **Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies:**

Studying eco-nostalgia within Indian Writing in English necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Key theoretical frameworks include:

- **Postcolonial Ecocriticism:** In which one can examine how colonial histories and environmental degradation interconnect.
- **Cultural Memory Studies:** The researcher can work on understanding how literary texts work as repositories of ecological memory.
- **Affect Theory:** Here, the research scholar can investigate emotional responses to environmental loss.
- **Anthropogenic Studies:** One can contextualize literature within the broader discourse on human impact on the planet.

Methodologies may include textual analysis, archival research, oral histories, and ecological ethnography. Combining literary analysis with fieldwork can provide insights into the real-world ecological knowledge that informs literary nostalgia.

#### **Research Possibilities:**

**Comparative Studies:** Here an investigator can do a comparative study of Indian English literary texts having eco-nostalgic footprints with those from other postcolonial regions.

1. **Genre-specific Research:** One can check the possibilities of exploring eco-nostalgia perspectives in poetry, short stories, children's literature, or travelogues in Indian writing in English.
2. **Myth and Ecology:** Here, one can explore the possibility of studying the reimagining of ecological myths in contemporary Indian English literature.
3. **Urban Eco-nostalgia:** One can find ample illustrations of urban writers memorializing the lost natural spaces in Indian English literature. The researcher can further investigate this line.
4. **Diaspora Perspectives:** The investigator can further analyze how nostalgia for Indian ecological spaces showcases in Diaspora Indian English writings.

**List of Books based on Environmental Themes:**

There are some significant literary works in Indian Writings in English that reflect on the physical environment as one of the chief thematic prospects. From the literal storylines, and thematic studies, if a researcher shifts his/her attention to some other dimensions like the one which is suggested here, one can find ample opportunities for genuine research. One should go deeper rather than going broader to do the same. Some few literary works depict environmental themes through either eco-critical or nostalgic lenses as follow:

1. **Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*:**  
The researcher can explore the Sundarbans' ecological fragility, and human struggle which the writer has focused on.
2. **Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*:**  
The researcher can possibly investigate the environmental degradation and social critique which the writer has subtly interwoven.
3. **Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*:**  
The researcher has an opportunity to study the landscape, climate, and colonial disconnection from nature which the author has touched on.
4. **Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*:**  
The research investigator can magnify his glasses on the isolation and deep communion with natural surroundings that have been portrayed in the book.
5. **R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*:**  
The scholar can explore the spiritual transformation through nature and water symbolism here in this book depicted by R. K Narayan.



6. **Ruskin Bond's *Rain in the Mountains*:** The writer evokes a strong sense of place and eco-nostalgia for the Himalayan hills which a research explorer might be interested in.
7. ***Selected Poems of Jayanta Mahapatra*:**  
The researcher can do research exploration with certain selected poetic works of the writer by studying the landscapes steeped in cultural memory and ecological imagery.
8. ***These Hills Called Home* by Temsula Ao:**  
This Assam born poet who has created a considerable consciousness and created a space for North-eastern states into the mainstream Indian English literature. She has clearly captured ecological memory and oral traditions of the Northeast in her poetic creations. One can check the deeper possibilities for the eco-nostalgic viewpoints
9. ***Times of Siege* by Githa Hariharan:**  
Born in Coimbatore (TN) India and recipient of the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1993, Githa incorporates environmental and historical reflection in this book which may attract a fresh research investigator to tread further.
10. **Mamang Dai's *The Black Hill & The Legends of Pensam*:**  
The researcher can explore folklore and nature, evoking a sacred relationship with the land in her poems and novels which she has carefully blended in her poems.

The above listed work should be considered as sparkling glimpses just to kick-start the research investigation in eco-nostalgic perspectives. As reading goes deeper and consultation to experts goes broader, newer horizons keep on extending and opening up the newer possibilities for a very genuine, original and authentic research exploration.

### **Conclusion:**

The transition from Ecocriticism to eco-nostalgia in Indian Writing in English signifies a broader cultural and emotional reckoning with environmental change. While Ecocriticism focuses on critique and activism, eco-nostalgia invokes memory and mourning, offering a powerful, if more introspective, mode of ecological engagement. This shift opens up extensive avenues for scholarly inquiry that are rich in both literary value and interdisciplinary potential. As India continues to struggle with ecological crises, its literature offers; a mirror and a memory, a critique and a commemoration, deserving of rigorous academic exploration.



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