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Recent Trends in
Language, Literature, Social Science & Commerce

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- Chief & Executive Editor



Eco-Cultural Criticism in Literary Study: A General Perspective

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Abstract:

Ecological literary study had emerged from 1993 as a recognized critical school. Eco-cultural theory comprises the area of Ecocriticism. It is deeply rooted in deep ecology, bioregionalism and cultural studies. The environmental activist and ecocritics believe that the adverse environmental conditions are intertwined within a crisis of politics, culture, values and worldview. The characteristics of eco-cultural theory reveals that it is a critical focus on human-non-human or human- environment relations, human intra-social and political relations, and the interaction between these two categories. Secondly the emphasis is given on the cultural aspects of these relations. For the emergence of eco-cultural theory, socio-ecological and institutional contexts are taken into consideration.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, deep ecology, bioregionalism, eco-cultural theory ...

The word 'ecocriticism' first appeared in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. But it remained inactive in critical theories until 1989. Scholars started to undertake collaborative projects in the field of environmental literary studies in the mid- eighties. In 1989, Cheryl Glotfelty in Western Literature Association meeting established the term and also worked for its use in the critical field. At the same time, in 1989 Alicia Nitecki started The American Nature Writing Newsletter. A new Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) was formed in 1992. The mission of ASLE's was to promote the exchange of ideas and information related to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and natural world and to encourage new nature writing, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature, and interdisciplinary environmental research.

Within three years ASLE's membership topped 750. In 1993 Patrick Murphy established a new journal, ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment, to give an opportunity for critical studies of the literary and performing arts and dealing with environmental considerations. These would include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their depictions, the human/nature dichotomy and related concerns. Thus Ecological literary study had emerged from 1993 as a recognized critical school.

Eco-cultural theory comprises the area of Ecocriticism. It is deeply rooted in deep ecology, bioregionalism and cultural studies. Like "Environmental Cultural Studies" or "Green Cultural Theory", Eco-cultural Theory maps out a road for this field. It follows in the tradition of critical social theory but admires it in environmental thoughts and radical ecology. The word ecology has Greek roots. Oikos means home i.e. the whole inhabited earth. Logos means reason or study. In ecology plants, animals and people are related to each other and their environment. All these are interrelated and interdependent in this relationship. Any disturbance in one





component disturbs the other. Culture has an association to ecology. When ecology affected ultimately culture is affected. In this regard Kumari Shikha also states,

History has proved this every now and then that with every change in the civilization the relationship of animals and human beings has also changed and the effect on civilization of the changes in environment has been so acute that sometimes it has wiped the whole civilization from the face of the earth (Shikha 17).

The environmental activist and ecocritics believe that the adverse environmental conditions are intertwined within a crisis of politics, culture, values and worldview. Adrian Ivakhiv says in this regard,

From an anthropological and cultural perspective, the ecological crisis is not merely a scientific fact, but it is more importantly a cultural fact: it is conceived, imagined, discussed, and acted upon through the diverse cultural expressions of humanity. It is "made sense of" culturally, and our responses to the crisis are enabled as well as constrained by our imagination and interpretation of the crisis (Ivakhiv).

The characteristics of eco-cultural theory reveals that it is a critical focus on human- non-human or human- environment relations, human intra-social and political relations, and the interaction between these two categories. Secondly the emphasis is given on the cultural aspects of these relations. For the emergence of eco-cultural theory, socio-ecological and institutional contexts are taken into consideration. In the last few decades, the development in the field of Cultural Studies has provided number of theoretical and analytical tools for understanding the 'culture'. The questions of class, race, gender, identity and difference are focused within an eco-cultural studies but it includes the relationship of humans with their extra-human environments. It also covers the questions of eco-cultural identity and difference. Eco-cultural identity and differences here means the relations between different modes of human interaction or involvement within non-human nature i.e. productive labour, leisure, religion, science, myth etc. and the politics within which these relations are made obligatory, resisted, legitimized and marginalized. According to Adrian Ivakhiv,

Eco-cultural studies see culture as the "battleground" or terrain within which different ideas about nature and the environment, human- environment relations, and environmental politics and actions, are articulated and contested (Ivakhiv).

Eco-cultural Critical Theory combines the perspective of environmental thought and cultural studies. It reveals the relationship between humans and nature. The aim of eco-cultural study is to critically assess the ways nature and non-human species, ecosystems have been defined and treated in popular culture for example as objects, resources, commodities, lifeless mechanism etc. Secondly critically assess the cultural representation of relations between human societies including their gender, race, class differences etc., relationship between human beings and the extra human world and their interaction. The central feature of the eco-cultural critical theory is to focus on intra-human and extra-human relationship which are intertwined and mutually influential. The third aim of eco-cultural study is to encourage different or contradictory hegemonic modes of interaction between human communities and the extra-human world. Eco-cultural Critical Theory aims to develop the ways of speaking and representation which recognize that humans are absorbed within a living world or nature/ environment in which they are participants. This participation has developed throughout history and even today. Human participation in natural- cultural relations is facing stress from leading hegemonic forms.





Eco-cultural Theory here challenges these nature- cultural relations of human beings. Next and the last aim of Eco-cultural Critical Theory is to express the challenges regarding world economy, impending ecological problems, increasing cultural displacement, deteriorated condition and its realization and technology based lifestyle faced by a complex 'postmodern' society in which terms like 'environment' and 'nature' have become politically weighted signifiers.

In short, Eco-cultural Critical Theory particularly asks the questions like: How do human ideas, concept of nature, earth, landscape and the relation between humanity and non-human or nature/ environment reflect and constrain? How do these human actions and ideas are in relation to the extra-human world revealed in the text and how do they condition one's actions today? How do these ideas interact and interconnect with particular kinds of human social relations and culture? And what are the planned involvements aimed at constructing the relations between human and non human nature?

Thus Eco-cultural Critical Theory describes anthropocentric resourcism, environmental injustice and highlights the interconnections and relations between different forms of oppression and exclusion by revealing the involvement of human interactions and non-human environment. The study of eco-cultural theory is the need of time and to mould the destructive psychology of the modern man from material world, to make him aware of his surrounding, requires a deep study in this particular field.

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