



# Expounding Sustainable Development Goals through World Literature: An Appraisal

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**Abstract.** Literature can be defined as a reflection of society. Society is a dynamic entity like Literature. The influence of Literature in Modern society is indisputable. Each piece constitutes some form of expression. A Gulf News article asserts, “ In an era of Modern media, such as television and movies, people are misled into thinking that every question or problem has its quick corrections or solutions. However, Literature confirms the real complexity of human conflict.” In the Post Colonial Era, a lot of pieces of Literature in the English Language are predominant. Environmental concern is a much talked about topic in the contemporary era in World Literature. Various dimensions of the same have been explored by many literary geniuses, which are suitable for further interrogation in connection with the Sustainable Development Goals. The main objective of this paper is to closely look at the essence of Eco-criticism in Literature to promote Sustainable Development.

**Keywords:** Literature, Eco- criticism, English Language, Sustainable Development Goals.

## 1 Introduction

The globe is facing a universal crisis of climate exigency. Sustainable Development from the localized to the globalized turns out to be crucial if society has to get to grips with the challenges. The inevitable interchange would affect every facet of society, culture and the economy; hence it is a critical juncture to pay attention towards sustainability. This paper deliberates on the cognizance of Sustainable Development through the study of Literature. This will also explore Literature in a global context, the English Language, Literary History and Criticism within the texts and in the international literary forums. It would highlight a variety of authors in English from various national and international corners, from the classical to the contemporary. It is a very common belief relating to the area of Eco-criticism that literary texts help shape the reader's reasoning and outlook. Exploring different genres of literature which revolve around an eco-centric worldview is considered as reinforcing the adaptation towards a sustainable world: literature offers extensive and detailed accounts of the non-living enlightening us about a green and sustainable

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vantage point, which is not usually provided by any other medium of education. From a scholastic perspective, this idea is usually accepted that education through literature can help make "eco-citizens" as referred to in Massey and Bradford (2011). The aim and objective of this article are to channel a more fundamental as well as conceptual discussion on the relationship between literature and sustainability. This paper will examine the issues of ecological crisis and sustainable development through critical reading of literary texts. The themes like oriental representation of ecological consciousness, environmental evocations, and tracing nature's footprints in World Literature are to be primarily explored.

**Anthropocene Epoch:** This idea is very significant in understanding the effect of human activity on the Earth and its repercussions. It is an unofficial unit of geologic time which helps in describing the latest and contemporary period in Earth's history where human activity has an impactful impression on the planet's climatic condition and the whole ecosystem at large. As per the critic Timothy Clark, "knowledge of interconnection must somehow lead to an ethic of care".(Clark 2015, p. 189). Also, theories relating to the effects of reading narrative fiction, "as facile linkages between literary reading and ethical behaviour".(Keen 2010; Serpell 2014).

**Transcendentalism:** As per the idea related to the 19th-century movement of writers and philosophers in New England, an idealistic system of thought and belief loosely binds every individual and entity together. The thought process advocates the very idea that "in the essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of humanity, and the Supremacy of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of the deepest truth."

**Eco-criticism, Sustainable Development and Literature:** David Gray has referred to the idea of Eco-criticism in Literature promoting sustainable development. Literature cannot be possible beyond life, so it is all-inclusive of day-to-day life. He writes, "Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" also "sustainable pedagogy and sustainable education approach complex cultural and ecological issues from literary and cultural studies, and education respectively".(Glottfelty,1996, xxvi) William Rueckert first coined the term "eco-criticism" in his critical piece "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in eco-criticism" in the year 1978. So it refers to the criticism relating to ecology as portrayed in Literature. He believes that eco-criticism has relevance to the application of ecological principles in the field of literature. In this connection, Lawrence Buell has defined eco-criticism, "as a study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist's praxis"(The Environmental Imagination, 430). For quite a duration, Nature did not receive the due attention it deserves precisely by the literary critics. Eco Literature has a lot to offer in understanding the significance of the ecology surrounding us. "The idea that the roots of the ecological crisis are to be found in a failure of the imagination and that literary studies—the human imagination being their home turf—therefore have an important role to play in understanding and overcoming this crisis" (Bergthaller 2010, p. 730).

American philosopher, legal scholar, and classicist, Martha Nussbaum, argues that narrative fiction has a special potential for immersing readers in the experiences and problems of those different from oneself. Reading powerful and troubling accounts of the lives of, e.g., ethnic and sexual minorities, can contribute to fostering world citizens: "Narrative art has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist's interest—with involvement and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society's refusals of visibility" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 87). Traditional eco-critical studies of literature contribute to knowledge of the relationship between humans and the environment, and while information deficit models are inadequate, knowledge still plays a crucial role in solving environmental problems (cf. Owens 2000, p. 1144)

## **2 Sustainable Development and World Literature**

As per Gray's understanding, exploring eco-critical nuances in select World Literature turns out to be quite crucial. These pieces of literature on environmental orientation introduce "ecological literacy" among literature enthusiasts. The turnout is development in eco-consciousness which would ultimately result in the nurturance of Mother Nature. In the initial period of Eco-criticism, usually, American as well as British Nature writers took charge in the sphere of Global eco-literature. The idea of eco-consciousness in literature metamorphosed into a globalised one- from localized to delocalize to a globalised one. The ecological crisis is common to one and all, all over the globe. One and only Earth, if not taken due care, may pose threats to all human and non-human entities. Irrespective of the country or continent, the current world is facing the same shared crisis of ecology. So this effort to bring together a select world of literature can at least cater to this consciousness humbly.

## **3 Sustainable Development and American Eco/Green Literature**

This environmentally oriented study of literature brings about an ecological literacy among the readers who in the process become eco-conscious. A visible shift in its colour from local to global perspectives, given the present ecological crisis around the globe is of primary concern. Three major American writers have truly inspired the very spirit of celebrating nature as a 'life force' as demonstrated in the US, namely Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau. Emerson relished the impression of Nature in his introductory factual account 'Nature' with an unconventional approach towards nature called 'transcendentalism' (earlier mentioned), that 'nature is divine' or god. Reality can be best traced through exploring nature. Similarly, Margaret Fuller's travelogue 'Summer on the Lake During 1843' propounds the very idea of 'Transcendentalism' capturing the American Landscape in a broader sense and, at the same time demarcates the ulterior utilitarian motive of the habitants as well as colonizers and the tourists having spiritually

aesthetic ambition of exploring the same place. On the other hand David Thoreau's autobiographical narrative 'Walden' portrays his stay in a hut located close to the shore of Walden Pond. This masterpiece implies deserting the modern way of life and embracing nature for a real 'renewal'. It inculcates a larger and lasting impression on the 'ego-consciousness' to turn it into 'eco-consciousness'. Robert Frost needs another mention for his contribution towards nourishing effects of ecology on human life through his literary masterpieces like 'Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening' and a few more. Here he has extensively talked about the eternal beauty of Nature and the transient human living.

#### **4 Sustainable Development and English Eco/Green Literature**

Unlike the USA, In the UK Eco-criticism and related writings are a little less developed. American eco-literature usually portrays the celebration of Nature. But British eco-writings focus more on cautioning the readers towards the environmental hazards produced by 'governmental', 'industrial', 'mercantile' and 'imperial' agencies. 'The Song of the Earth' by Jonathan Bate asserts that 'imperialism' is a primary cause of deforestation. In his 'Romantic Ecology', explored the writings of William Wordsworth considering the 'pastoral tradition' which concentrates on the relationship between natural environment and human community. It caters to the stress-free urban life and helps in embracing the natural bounty. Even Bates has considered Wordsworth to be the earliest of eco-critics. Similarly, Raymond William has reflected on a stark contrast between the urban and rural lifestyle in his poem 'Country and the City'. The city life is the hub of modernity which solely offers loneliness. Another important work 'The Green Studies Readers' by Lawrence Coupe is an all-encompassing collection of critical texts which get to grips with the correspondence between ecology, literature and culture. So this compendium is a reliable source of as well as a productive portal to 'Green Literature' as includes a huge collection of resources to be utilized for research purposes.

#### **5 Sustainable Development and Indian Eco-literature**

Indian Philosophy incorporates enriched ecological perspectives since the Vedic Age, where in all creatures and organisms received equal significance. India encompasses rich bio-diversity that of the geography as well as the flora and fauna it holds. From the Northern region of the Himalayas to that of down South Kanyakumari, from the Eastern Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea in the West, the Indian landscape has versatility in its topographical features having a lasting impact on human beings. So naturally Literature produced by the genius of this land has a lot to offer in harmonizing literature with their writings. The number is also good and all have been subscribing to conglomerate literature and environment. Eco-critical essence is best found in the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. He was so much inspired by the influence of Nature on the human psyche as well as human life, he chose to establish Shanti Niketan in the abode of Nature, distanced from the

disturbing and chaotic city life. His classic literary pieces like 'Muktadhara' and 'Rakta Karabi' can be best cited as eco-critical texts vehemently criticizing human atrocities against Nature. Anita Desai's 'Fire on the Mountain' sends a similar message. It throws light on eco-critical issues like killing animals, population upsurge, and moral degradation- all these leading towards bigger damage and threat to the ecological order. Similarly, Kamala Markandeya too takes an interest in this crucial issue of ecology in her representative novel 'Nectar in a Sieve'. She has portrayed Nature as a destroyer as well as a preserver of life. Here Markandeya has revealed the malignant influence of industrialization which destroys the harmony of a peasant's life. In addition to that Arundhati Roy too has shown the harsh treatment of Nature by the human community in the pretext of advancement and restoration. Ruskin Bond is another literary genius who has extensively contributed towards this field of eco-criticism. Like 'No Room for a Leopard' projects the unimaginable condition of the animals post deforestation. 'The Cherry Tree', 'All Creatures Great and Small', 'The Tree Lover' and a few more show an interdependence of human beings with that of the eco-system. 'Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard' by Kiran Desai is highly critical of the hustle and bustle of city life. Here the protagonist is fed up with the hectic life and finds her resort in the Guava Orchard. Kiran has also portrayed another damaging dimension of Nature in her novel 'The Inheritance of Loss'. Kanchenjunga bears the brunt of the ruthlessness of human belligerence. All these writers have unmasked the anthropocentric tendency of humankind which ultimately contributes towards a destructive system which is ironically inclusive of them as well. Similarly Amitabh Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide' also accentuates the picture of an oppressed ecological structure created by humans. The Delta of the Sundarbans has been introduced as the rescuer as well as a demolisher of life and living. This novel is a sincere attempt to project the 'state-sponsored terrorism' for the eviction of the deprived Refugees from Bengal. Vandana Shiva is another renowned figure in the area of Eco-feminism, her 'Stolen Harvest' depicts the 'bio-piracy' of the West on account of patents from economically backward countries. So in this connection, colonization still prevails and it is not a matter of the past.

Eco-criticism as a scholastic discipline emerged a little late in India. The second wave of eco-criticism is now quite prevalent in India which can also be introduced as the 'social eco-criticism'. It permeates more towards eco-justice or 'environmental justice'. It has extended its horizon to accommodate issues like displacement, global and the cross-pollination of Literature and Environmental studies- Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise and Karen have asserted in their deliberation in an article 'Literature and Environment' that Second Phase Eco-criticism, "Has shown greater interest in Literature about the metropolis and industrialization; has tended to reject the validity of the nature-culture distinction'...has favoured a socio-centric rather than bio-centric and/or individual-experience-oriented ethics and aesthetics, placing particular emphasis on environmental justice concern. (419). In this connection it addresses the global concern, hence can be explored more in an interdisciplinary way with that of the concerns of sustainability.

## 6 Conclusion

Literature is an indispensable tool for national unity, integration and global communication. It plays a pivotal role in the attainment of sustainable developmental goals. Literature Education helps in economic empowerment; it is the avenue to sustainable development. It plays a significant role in almost all spheres of human endeavour, be it in education, politics, the judiciary, administration, economics, religion, government, business and legislation. Besides, if it is to create a system or an idea that is sustainable which means that one can keep going indefinitely into the future, the Literature becomes a key factor in the areas of education ultimately leading to national as well as global unity.

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