



## **THE STUDY OF *AS YOU LIKE IT* FROM AN ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Ecocriticism is a recent trend in the field of criticism, emerged in the 1980s in the Western American Universities. But the history of ecocriticism goes back to the 1970s which emerged as a concept at the meetings of Western Literary Association. Simply defined, ecocriticism denotes the study of literature and biological and physical environment. In the USA the acknowledged founder is Cheryll Goltfelty whose collection of essays entitled The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology is a key collection of essays. The term ecocriticism is derived from 'criticism' and shortened form of 'ecology'- the science which studies the interrelations between the plant, animal life and their physical habitats. Ecocriticism in the USA was inspired by the writings of three major nature poets and essayists R.W.Emerson, H.D.Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller. Emerson's 'Nature' came out in 1836 anonymously. Thoreou's 'Walden' was published in 1854 and Fuller's 'Summer on the Lakes' during 1843. These were the chief writings from which ecocriticism seems to have been emerged.*

#### **ECOCRITICISM:**

Ecocriticism is known in the UK as Green Studies or environmental criticism, which emerged in the early 1990s. But the British ecocriticism was influenced by the writings of great nature poets, William Wordsworth, S.T.Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron etc. British ecocriticism is less developed than that of the USA. Jonathan Bate is the chief exponent of British ecocriticism. The history of the British ecocriticism goes back to the 1730s. The English pre-romantic poet James Thomson wrote about nature in his longest poem 'The Seasons', published between 1726-30. In this poem Thomson described the marvellous beauty of nature through lucid and simple language. But it was William Wordsworth, the



greatest English romantic poet, who wrote about nature in detail and exclusively and depicted beautiful natural sights and life in the contact of nature is free, happy, healthy etc.

The ecocritics from the USA and the UK focus on the presentation of nature in a work of art and the role of nature in the major literary texts as the main concern of their approach. Ecocritics rejected the traditional humanitarian approach to literature because it was anthropocentric and changed it to ecocentric. Ecocritics also focus on the devastation of the biological, physical environment, and natural species and their extinction due to the urbanization and industrialization. They pose questions like deforestation, pollution, natural degeneration and the environment crisis. Prominently, they are concerned with the binaries such as nature/man or culture/nature viewed as mutually exclusive oppositions. Many critics recommend the extension or Green Readings to all literary genres including prose fiction, poetry, and also to writings in the natural and social sciences, which exemplify them. They also denied the linguistic determinism and social constructivism.

Most of the scenes in 'As You Like It' take place in the Forest of Arden. The banished Duke takes shelter in the Forest of Arden with some faithful lords. He is very happy as he leads a joyous life in the forest. He says that the forest is a safer place to live in than the court. He differentiates between nature and public life. Living in the company of nature makes one not only healthy, but also declutters one's mind. But this cannot be said about the city life. Nature brings out one's inner strength because life in nature is without amenities and one has put up with many hardships. But, according to banished Duke, "Sweet are the uses of adversity". Nature also makes you look at yourself in different ways.

Every character after facing one or the other trouble escapes into the forest and seeks a relief and support in it. All the major characters find their ways to the forest. Nature in the play symbolizes tranquility, peace, joy and contentment, whereas court life is opposite this. When perturbed, all the major characters take refuge in nature and sense therapeutic, curing power of nature. Though there are no amenities in nature, the banished Duke cope with a lot of inconvenience and leads a very happy and carefree life, which is rightly compared with the golden age. He is content and prefers to live in the forest and never thinks of regaining the dukedom. On the contrary everyone at the court is perturbed and involved some intrigue.

In senior Duke's opinion, nature teaches us how to live in harmony with her. Animals and plants are part of nature and one has to be aware of them and should not destroy the physical environment and habitats of animals for our comforts. If the environment is damaged that will spawn many problems.



To seek solitude and peace one has to go to nature. The banished Duke is happy to be in the company of nature and away from crowded public places. He thinks that nature is a great teacher and teaches us moral and ethical values. Hence he says:

*‘...Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing.’*

The way we live today is having a very damaging effect on the environment. Explosion of population, deforestation, climate change, pollution, green house gases are damaging and degenerating the environment rapidly. So it has become of crucial importance to curb damage to the environment now, or else doomsday will not be far away.

Senior Duke knows that animals are original habitats of the forest and they should not be hunted indiscriminately to satisfy our greed. Wildlife habitats are being destroyed and many animal species are on the verge of extinction. Conserving natural environment and non-human forms of life is everyone’s responsibility, according to the banished Duke. And to duck out of this responsibility and destroy the environment for living the life of luxury would jeopardize the very existence of humanity. The Duke makes us aware of our responsibility that’s why he is a reluctant to kill a deer for food. There are songs of country life in the play and they are full of praise for nature.

*“Under the green wood tree and who loves to lie with me”  
“Blow Blow thy Winter wind....”*

These songs are about country life which is carefree and satisfying but men in the city life are unkind, ungrateful, selfish and scheming.

Touchstone, a clown, compares life in the forest with the life in the court. He tries to strike balance between them. Separating nature from humanity will not be in the interest of mankind. As humanity seems to be getting away from nature, this has led to many modern human malaise. The words ‘green exercise’ and ‘ecotherapy’ are coined recently which mean taking exercises or having a walk in the park and these have had a good effect on people. The relationship between nature and humanity is symbiotic and when both of them in harmony then only can we be at home.

All the characters who had gone to the forest came back again to the court life. But they came only after having lived in the forest and attained peace of mind and solitude. Their coming back to the court connotes that there should be balance between humanity and life.



The forest has its own existence, independent of language used by the Duke or Touchstone and it doesn't condition us to look at it.

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