

The Case of Connection: A Bibliographic Essay on Emerging Human Ecological Criticism

*Sonia Irum**

ABSTRACT: *The following essay is a brief review of literature, particularly over the last 40 years, regarding the human ecological/psycho-ecological studies produced by scholars of various fields. This essay provides both an explanation for today's renewed interest in the subject and why Human Ecology as an interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary study remains relevant within contemporary society; additionally, it offers a few other ecocritical discussions whilst considering several areas of inquiry, including geography, religion, postcolonialism, and environmental justice, etc. Further, it analyses the influence of such environmental studies, the relationship between humans, nonhumans, and literature, and how the twentieth-century consumerist attitude for better living conditions was a precursor to the twenty-first-century climatic change and environmental degradation.*

Keywords: Ecocriticism; Environment; Nature; Human Ecology; Psychoecology.

* Email: sonia.irum.2015@live.rhul.ac.uk

The birth of environmental consciousness originated with *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel L. Carson, whereby she states, ‘our ecological thoughtlessness was matched only by our lack of philosophical maturity’; considering the book focuses on the damage we are doing to both the world and ourselves, she criticises the mindless race towards technology, modernisation, and use of chemicals (e.g., pesticides as a by-product of World War II). Within the 1990s, environmental issues widely became viewed as one of the greatest challenges for mankind; the issue was highlighted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or Earth Summit) in 1992. Hence, since this time, a reorientation of literary critical thinking in ecocriticism towards deep engagement with nonhuman world in multiple ways has been noticed.

Ecocritics felt a responsibility to preserve natural environment through their studies, awakening in others the realisation of their own personal connection to nature as a vital part of psychological/mental/physical health, considering such studies enable people to struggle for environment-friendly life. Leading from this, *Principles of Human Ecology* (1993) discusses the relationships between ‘technology, environment, evolutionary level inhuman societies, implications of dependence on wild plants and animals for demographic variables, settlement patterns, social organisation, and horticultural, agrarian, pastoral and commercial industrial societies’; it examines the causes of criminality involving ecological, micro-level and macro-level factors, disease exchanges, concepts of endemic versus epidemic diseases, technology, and environmental deterioration; similarly, the book *Forests: The Shadows of Civilization* (1993) by Robert P. Harrison is a powerfully argued scholarship of humankind’s place within nature, future of lifestyle, and earth and ecological dilemmas.

Taking up the task further, arguments considering ‘the sustainable, socially equitable and spiritually rich way of life’ are discussed by Alan R. Drengson and Yuichi Inoue in *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology* (1995): this compilation is a collection of essays that stimulate readers to explore their own ecological selves; it additionally provides literature on the deep ecology movement to both argue and support the integrity of the natural order of things for the wellbeing of all living things. Both the deep ecology movement and the shallow technological approach share some of the concerns this anthology discusses. Another important work, *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (1995), a collection by psychotherapists, thinkers, and eco-activists demonstrating how the health of the planet is inextricably

linked to the psychological health of humanity (individually and collectively), surfaced that same year. The book is a remarkable work, making readers grasp the disconnection occurring between the psyche of nature and the human psyche in technologically advanced industrial societies.

Aiming to devise practical actions and changes in lifestyle compatible with environmental values and respect for all life, eco-consciousness in either literature or ecocritical study of literary works examines the roots of our environmental, psychological and social problems. In a similar vein, as proposed by Reeds in *Encountering the World: Toward an Ecological Psychology* (1996), psychology should be studied as a natural science. Thus, human ecological study reminds us of lost connections with the nature that we contribute to within this ecosystem. Human ecological debates inform us that although we utilise environmental resources, we do not contribute to maintaining the environment's health: our advancement in technology protects us, not the environment. Hence, as the world grows more urbanised, it is essential we remain conscious of our social attitudes and consumption practices, and so we can currently witness a global discussion in almost every social and academic institution regarding sustainability and our present consumption patterns. We should consider *Human Ecology and World Development* as a significant work: this was the result of a symposium organised jointly by the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council and the Huddersfield Polytechnic (held in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England in April 1973); within, it discussed the processes of development to preserve/enhance the quality of human life, and maintained that, 'human ecology is moving towards a central place in development studies' (p. vii). Included within the compilation are some essential research papers, such as "World Trade Patterns and the Developing Countries", "The Global Ecosystem", and "Ecological Effects of Current Development in Less Developed Countries".

A philosophical approach to environment can be seen in *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism* (1995) by Warwick Fox; this work discusses ecology and environmentalism, arguing about transpersonal ecology as a distinctive approach to ecophilosophy. It additionally discusses ecophilosophical issues ('lifestyles and political actions that flow from the adoption of an ecocentric orientation towards the world' (preface)). *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* (1996) by Mathis Wackernagel and William E. Rees is another seminal work on ecological foot printing, presenting a model to educate people on how

actions affect the natural resources of earth and its capacity to bear; it highlights all the points of sustainability thinking and illustrates that everything on this planet is interrelated and cannot be separated.

Human Ecology: Basic Concepts for Sustainable Development (2001) by Gerald G. Marten is a coherent set of concepts concerning both how ecosystems function and how human social systems interact with ecosystems; the concepts and wide range of topics allow us to understand how the jump from theory to practice can be made. Similarly, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology* (2001) is another valuable work by Theodore Roszak that discusses the bond between the human psyche and the living planet that nurtures all of life, investigating the link between our own mental health and the health of the greater biosphere, the relationships between psychology, ecology, and offering new scientific insights into the systems of nature.

Topics like ecological engineering, landscape ecology, energy analysis, and the effects of various innovations or systems of technologies on the environment, have been convincingly discussed within *The Nature of Design: Ecology, Culture, and Human Interaction* (2002) by David W. Orr; the 'frenetic search for profit or power' within industrial societies and its effect on ecological health is criticised, and it tackles the problem of human survival in the twenty-first century. The last chapter of the book (Charity, Wildness and Children) paints consumption as 'stressing the earth to the breaking point' (p. 174). Discussing the origin of the word 'consume' (as defined by the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*), the author explains it as 'to destroy by, or like, fire or (formerly) disease'; thus, for the author, a 'consumer' is 'a person who squanders, destroys, or uses up'. In this older and clearer view, consumption implied 'disorder, disease, and death' (p. 174).

Another valuable source is *Human Ecology: Fragments of Anti-Fragmentary Views of the World* (2003), which is divided into chapters ranging from topics such as self-organisation models to sociological questions, ecological economics, ecological laws, the moral dimension of ecology, human ecology as a transdisciplinary science, biohistory and biospheres, structuration, foundations of human existence, ecoregional strategies, and the crisis of urbanity. It contrasts how natural environmental disasters were once thought of as rage of either God(s) or other external forces, and how they are now attributed to the actions of humans (p. 286). *Encyclopedia of Human Ecology* (2003) by Julia R. Miller examines the interdisciplinary and complex topic of human

ecology. Knowledge gathered from disciplines studying individuals and groups is blended with information concerning the environment from fields such as family science, geography, anthropology, urban planning, and environmental science; simultaneously, professions intended to enhance individual and family life (e.g., marriage and family therapy, clinical psychology, social work, and dietetic and other health professions) are represented alongside those concerned with the preservation, conservation, and management of the environment and its resources. Similarly, the article *Urban Human Ecology* (2004) by Frederick Steiner discusses cities as human ecosystems. The author describes eight concepts to apply on urban contexts and explores human ecology as a beneficial model to plan the built environment.

Human ecology explores a variety of different levels; ‘from the narrow focus of human household economics to the global issue of humans as the agencies of unconcerned and irresponsible consumption of landscapes and resources’ (preface, p. vii) is discussed in *Ecological Studies: Analysis and Synthesis* (Vol. 182) (2006).

Human Ecology: Biocultural Adaptations in Human Communities (2006) by Holger Schutkowski presents a variety of cultural responses to different biotic and abiotic environmental conditions, additionally discussing the biocultural definition of a human being. In a similar vein, *Human Ecology Economics* (2008) is another appropriate source that presents an interdisciplinary framework for understanding ‘world conditions and human systems’ (p. i). Global concerns addressed in the book include resource scarcity, climate change poverty and inequality, financial instability, social conflict, and governance crisis. It additionally incorporates articles like “The Active Consumer”, “An Evolutionary Approach to Social Welfare”, “Marxian Reproduction Schema”, “The Dynamics of Technological Knowledge”, “Evolution, Order and Complexity”, “Growth Theory”, “The Enigma of Globalisation: A Journey to a New Stage of Capitalism”, and “Neoliberalism and Consumer Capitalism”.

Another relevant book, *Nested Ecology: The Place of Humans in the Ecological Hierarchy* (2009), is divided into seven chapters, each examining personal, social, environmental and cosmic ecology to develop a practical sustainable ecology. It explains the ‘world as a complex emergent system, “nesting” multiple subsystems; nature consists of communities within communities’. The work aims to enrich ecological thought by considering our understanding of psychologists, economists,

politicians, sociologists, cosmologists, philosophers, and even religious thinkers; it discusses the awakening of consciousness among people concerning their actions and attitudes that not only impact the ‘physical, social, biological, and cosmic spheres of being’, but also the ‘ultimate environment in which they live and move and have their being’ (foreword). *Human Ecology: Contemporary Research and Practice* (2010) is one of the most important sources out of a selection of articles from *Human Ecology: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, which represent a cross-section of work bringing multiple dimensions of human ecology.

Critique of the capitalist systems are found in *The Ecological Thought* (2010) by Timothy Morton, which attempts to understand what a post-capitalist, post-environmentalist world might require of us; the author criticises the fashionable, shallow environmental movements, and questions the very idea of being human as a separate special state of affairs from other forms of being. He convincingly utilises imagery to indicate the growing and withering of both ourselves and everything around us, i.e., the flow of life. For him, we are living in a ‘Mesh’. This book opens with a chapter on critical thinking that invites readers to consider ecology as things like global warming, recycling, solar power, animal liberation, relationships between humans and non-humans, and green voice, inviting us to review how true ecological society would look: ‘What would an ecological mind think? What kind of art would an ecological-minded person enjoy?’. Questions such as these are linked with ‘the ecological thought’ (p. 1).

The Small Heart of Things: Being at Home in a Beckoning World (2013) by Julian Hoffman is a source that intimately analyses the countless ways in which connections to the natural world can be deepened through both consciousness and perception, the narrative supporting human and natural communities alike and seeking the silent stories that sustain us. This work focuses on exploring the idea of patient attention by developing an accord and harmony with our living place: earth. It interweaves human stories with those of wild creatures, as well as investigating many psychological connections which can teach us to be at home in the world. *Environmental Crisis in Young Adult Fiction: A Poetics of Earth* (2013) by Alice Curry presents a well-researched and nicely contextualised pioneering study of dystopian, post-apocalyptic young adult fiction engaged with environmental crisis and its consequences, examining Anglophone American, Australian, British, and South African texts. She conveys that, in contrast with materials for younger children, eco-themed young adult literature has been understudied, and discussing ecofeminist spiritualities

Curry's book is a welcome and timely contribution to provide restorative responses to 'dislocation in human-earth relationship'.

Human Ecology: How Nature and Culture Shape Our World (2016) by Frederick R. Steiner is a valuable work that adds new dimensions to the field of human ecology: combining an open mind and skilled hand, Steiner deftly unravels fields of landscape ecology and human ecology, his syntheses providing a new understanding whilst addressing persistent societal challenges involving ecology, culture, nature, humans, and people. The anthology *Vital Signs: Psychological Responses to Ecological Crisis* (2011) by Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totton focuses on the signs of hope and healing that have started to appear regarding ecological crisis; this work centers on inclusiveness of other-than-human and more-than-human in the ecosystem, and points towards human culture's detachment from its ecosystem.

Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives (2010) brings together research bridging ecocriticism and postcolonialism; the collection covers issues such as international environmental policy, land and water rights, food production, poverty, women's rights, indigenous activism, and ecotourism.

Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment (2010) by Laura Wright is another sufficient source to study writers' efforts to raise ecoconsciousness amongst readers; the author explains the relationship between bioregionalism, cosmopolitanism, and transcendentalism by examining the way in which postcolonial writers have written about the environment. The polemic essay *Discourses of Nation, National Eco-poetics, and Ecocriticism in the Face of the US: Canada and Korea as Case Studies* (2009) by Simon Estok discusses colonialist implications based on the fact that American geographies tend to become matters of global interest; one of the key issues that this article argues is that a continuing alliance between postcolonial and ecocritical studies can help us to look profitably at what are very important interconnections (those with environmental effects and postcolonial implications) between discourses of nation on one hand and national eco-poetics on the other.

Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment (2011), edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, is the first edited collection to bring ecocritical studies into a necessary dialogue with postcolonial literature; the volume is a rich source to exploring the relationship between humans and nature around the globe, discussing texts

from Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and South Asia. It highlights the literary imagination as crucial to representing what Eduardo Glissant calls the 'aesthetics of the earth', and thematically organised essays discuss culture, cultivation, arboriculture, deforestation, the lives of animals, and the relationship between the military and tourist industry.

The article *Postcolonial Ecofeminism, Women and Land in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve* (2012) by Gurpreet Kaur outlines postcolonial ecofeminism in Indian activism and fiction writing; the dualism of nature/culture is provided to explain how this dualism impacts notions of a gendered (ecological) citizenship. Kaur analyses Kamala Markandaya's novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, from materialist postcolonial ecofeminism, which reflects the postcolonial environmental condition that its characters engage in to survive materially to survive. Another article, *Bend Like the Grass: Ecofeminism in Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve* (2011) by Dana C. Mount, represents a rapidly changing India with increased economic bustle and urbanisation, highlighting the rural life characters feel most deeply about, as well as a sense of community and connection with the land; it represents the struggle of rural women of the South in a modern world. *The Canon of East Asian Ecocriticism and the Duplicity of Culture* (2014) by Hannes Bergthaller is another article that provides important East Asian ecocriticism, as the discussion contributes to the debate of the Western canon in East Asian ecocritical studies.

George Marshall's insightful book *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change* (2014) discusses the psychological mechanism that puts us in doubt about the reality of climate change; the author finds the answer in what all human beings share: values, motivations, prejudices, fears, cognition, perceptions, and our tribal instincts. By recognising our shared motivations and fears, we can move towards a common purpose to rethink environmental problems as inhabitants of the planet.

Ecocriticism of the Global South: Ecocritical Theory and Practice (2015) constitutes diverse and innovative ecocritical voices from underrepresented and developing nations; it additionally represents regions that are the front line of the human struggle to invent sustainable and just civilisations on a risked planet. Yaqoob's chapter, "Environmental Consciousness in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English" in this book delves into emotionally barren inner lives of the characters; their psychological disturbances and diseased minds due to the disturbance in the environment around them. Similarly, the role of anthropology within

economic development due to the formation of complex ‘socionatural systems’ (as dubbed by John W. Bennett) is discussed in *Human Ecology as Human Behavior, Essays in Environmental and Developmental Anthropology* (2017); this book will be of great interest to environmentalists, anthropologists, and economists. The interlocking of human behaviour with the natural environment has given rise to new forms of dependence, and the essays within the book target the contemporary managements leading to disasters.