CHAPTER I

ECOLOGY AND LITERATURE

Man belongs to the earth in much the same way as animals and plants do. He is also a species of animal, part of the ecosystem of the earth and dependent upon it for his survival. The human species is a product of a long process called evolution in which the "ecological balance played a decisive role" (J. Donald Hughes 20).

Man's superiority arises out of the fact that he is the earth's only literary creature. As Joseph Meeker observes, though man lacks the "plant's" talents for "photosynthesis" and is unable to fly like birds, yet with his superior brain he is able to produce "great epic poems and mediocre office memos." This unique literary talent raises man above all other earthly creatures (3).

Recent research has shown that man is not the only animal with rational thought. Experiments with the great apes, for example, has shown that they can make and use tools in the wild and that they can solve problems and think symbolically. One must realise that human abilities developed through natural selection from "rudimentary but essentially similar abilities" is seen in other animals also. Instead of writing off such abilities in animals as mere 'instincts,' we must recognize the fact that mankind's "resemblances to other
animals are basic, far-reaching and important” (J.Donald Hughes 20). Man is not alone in the world but he is closely related to other living beings.

This subject which we now refer to as ‘ecology,’ has come to play a central intellectual role in our present age. Ecology is the study of the inter-relationships of living things to one another and their surrounding environment. The topic is wide ranging since it deals with the study of whole groups of living things interacting with one another. Such interacting groups are called ecosystems.

The word ecology has Greek roots. Oikos means home, which by extension means the whole inhabited earth. Logos means reason or study. Donald Hughes’ comment about it is quite noteworthy:

Human ecology, then, is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of the human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt; with its air, climates and weather; with its many living things, animals and planets, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. (3)

Although ecology may be treated as a science, we come to realise that its wisdom is universal. Paul Shepard argues that ecological wisdom can be approached “mathematically, chemically, or it can be danced or told as a myth.” Ecological reflections can be seen in “widely scattered economically different cultures.”

It is manifest, for example, among pre-classical Greeks, in Navajo religion and social orientation, in Romantic poetry of the
18th and 19th century, in Chinese landscape painting of the 11th century, in current white headian philosophy, in Zen Buddhism, in the world view of the cult of the Cretan Great Mother, in the ceremonials of Bushman hunters and in the medieval Christian metaphysics of light. (4-5)

Ecology has been a very distinctive feature of many an ancient literature also. A remarkable feature of Indian thought about the universe is the belief that all creation is an integral totality. The presence of a universal spirit binding the creatures of this universe is a recurring idea in most of the philosophical treatises of Indian literature. A mantra in the Chandogya Upanishad says: “Whether it be the tiger or the lion, the wolf or the bug everything originates from it” (qtd in Ramachandran 197). This concept has ecological and scientific relevance today, since all environmentalists consider this world as a great work of art.

The Vedas, The Mahabharatha and the Ramayana also reflect these ideas, teaching us the importance of Ahimsa or non violence. ‘Ahimsa’, the principle which preaches compassion towards all life forms, is the basic ingredient of most Indian religions. Rishi Patanjali described Ahimsa as the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline which truth seekers must follow strictly and without fail. Vedic Rishis who revealed Dharma proclaimed Ahimsa as the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between peoples and compassion within ourselves (Subramuniswami 195). The Rig Veda says:

Protect both our species, two legged and four legged.
Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O powers! (qtd in Subramuniswami 204)

The doctrine of *Ahimsa* has been praised in the *Mahabharatha* in the Vana Parva during a long conversation between Draupadi, Yudhishtira and Bhima. Lord Mahavira similarly exhorts people to desist from resorting to violence. He says, "All living beings desire to live. They detest sorrow and death and wish a long, happy existence. Hence one should not inflict pain on any creature, nor harbour any feeling of enmity. Not to kill any being is the essence of all wisdom" (qtd in “Non violence, basis for equality”). One finds a deep sense of engagement and a profound connection with the surrounding which is a remarkable feature of these writings.

Viewing ecology as a study of a natural web of life points to the fact that man stands somewhere in the web. The great sage Sankaracharya also believed that in this grand scheme of the universe, each individual, each creature and each item of matter has its allotted place. We realise that early man and nature were indisputably one and that nature was virtually unchanged by the human newcomer. In ancient times Indian Rishis offered their reverence to the Supreme, which they believed lived alike in water, fire, trees, herbs and in everything. The gods that are worshiped in the Vedas are apparently natural forces like *Surya, Ushas, Maruth* etc. The songs of the Vedic rishis express a
"deep sense of communion with God." *The Atharva Veda*, according to M. Vannucci, says:

Nature is to be understood as a friend, revered as mother, obeyed as father and nurtured as a beloved child. Nature is sacred because man depends entirely on it and because of this everything is sanctified, including man and the terrifying aspects of nature itself, such as glaciers, landslides, earthquakes, storms.

... (75)

In many ancient cultures, the non-human forms of life, birds, animals and even trees were believed to have super human abilities and powers. They were believed to possess a special kind of wisdom, and bear a special relationship to the sacred.

Lynn White Jr., in "The Historical roots of our Ecologic Crisis" points out that during ancient times people worshipped "every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill" (10). Before a tree was cut or a stone was removed from a mountain, or a brook was dammed, the spirit had to be placated. The same feeling is echoed in the *Manusmriti*, wherein a woodcutter has to chant a hundred *Rik* if he chops down a fruit bearing tree (Ramachandran 197).

A mantra in the *Swethaswathasopanishad* says: *Yo devo agnau yo atsu yo vishewam bhuvanam Avivesh/ya aushadhishu yo vanaspathishu thasmai devaya namo nama.* (To chop down a tree or to dirty a pool is sin against God) (qtd in Ramachandran 197). The tree was considered sacred from very early times. The Indus Valley seals, the edicts of Ashoka and the recent Chipko movement all point to the fact that the tree was nurtured and protected. It is
seen that many families and communities have their own sacred tree and they show particular attention and reverence to them. An interesting suggestion put forward by Siddhartha is that, if instead of cold tombstones and expensive samadhis, we could have living trees commemorating our lives, then we would be soon on our way to the "act of greening the earth" and connecting ourselves with our "primordial mother" (2).

The essential sense of unity among all living things is also seen in the songs and stories of the peoples of the western hemisphere. This sense is clearly indicated in the words of an old man Hiamove:

There are birds of many colors—red, blue, green, yellow—yet is all one bird. There are horses of many colors—brown, black, yellow, white—yet it is all one horse. So cattle, so all living things—animals, flowers, and trees. So men: in this land where once there were only Indians are now men of every color—white, black, yellow, red—yet all one people. (qtd in Allen 262)

The American Indian perceives all that exists as symbolic. This view embodies the Indian as one who is "close to the earth". He believes the earth to be alive just as human beings are alive. To him "the sun or earth or a tree is a symbol of an extraordinary truth" (Allen 256). Joseph Bruchac points out that the American Indian recognized animals "not only as spiritual beings but, in some ways as beings wiser than humans" (101).

St. Francis of Assisi also preached the concept of man and all living things as a part of nature. As Ruth Moore, in her book, *Man in the Environment* says, St. Francis believed in the humility of man as an individual and as a
species. All men and all living things were brothers in God’s creations, and therefore man can never be the master (103).

A similar idea on the law of life is formulated by D.H. Lawrence in his work *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine*, wherein he points out that: “Any living creature that attains to its own fullness of being, its own living self, becomes unique, a non pareil. It has its place in the fourth dimension, the heaven of existence, and there it is perfect, it is beyond comparison” (qtd in Sagar 165). Such incomparable, unique creatures, unfortunately find no existence in the midst of mankind.

According to Paul Shepard: “Man is in the world and his ecology is the nature of that inness. He is in the world as is in a room, and in transience, as in the belly of a tiger or in love.” (1). The relationship between animal and human behaviour, according to Joseph Meeker is not merely one of analogy. Men are not only like animals, they are animals. The acknowledgment of man as an animal in the ecosystem does not diminish man’s stature in the least (139). We are part of systems larger than ourselves. As Fritjof Capra explains in *The Tao of Physics*, the world is a “complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole” (71). There is a sort of interdependence between species in the ecosystem. Even the most exalted creature must depend upon those lower on the scale for its very existence; man and worm alike live to preserve each other’s life. A quotation by Edward Abbey seems quite relevant here: “We are kindred all of us, killer and victim, predator and prey, me and the sly coyote,
the soaring buzzard, the elegant gopher snake, the trembling cotton tail, the foul worms that feed on our entrails, all of them, all of us. Long live diversity, long live the earth!” (qtd in Scheese 309).

This idea is further elaborated by Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, who points out that every creature has its allotted place in the general economy of nature and no conceivable place stands empty. Each species serves to support others in this intricately connected web of life:

Thus the tree-louse lives upon the plants. The fly called *musca aphidovora* lives upon the tree-louse. The hornet and wasp fly upon the *musca aphidovora*. The dragonfly upon the hornet and wasp fly. The spider upon the dragonfly. The small birds on the spider. And lastly the hawk on the small birds. (qtd in Worster 35)

The notion of “dependent co-arising” or *pattica samuppada*, that is the central theme of Buddhism, reiterates the idea of interconnectedness. It suggests that no one is an island that we are all “interwoven threads in the intricate tapestry of life” (qtd in Siddhartha). The Buddhist writer Joana Macy very skillfully explains these interconnections by using the image of the jewelled Net of Indra. She says:

In the cosmic canopy of Indra’s Net, each of us, each jewel at each node of the net, reflects all the others and reflects the others reflecting back. This is what we find when we listen to the sounds of the earth crying within us – that the tears that arise are not ours alone; they are the tears of an Iraqi Mother looking for her children in the rubble; they are the tears of a Navajo uranium
miner learning that he is dying of lung cancer (qtd in Siddhartha 2).

Such wonderful ideas and thoughts instill in us a feeling that man not only does not occupy a special place but he is also not separate from the earth and the universe. This notion is well expressed in the words of the Native American Chief Seattle, who says “... the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth. If man spit upon the ground they spit upon themselves. This we know. The earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth. This we know. All things are connected like blood which unites one family.” Again in 1933 Luther Standing Bear, Lakota thinker, wrote: “All this was in accordance with the Lakota belief that man did not occupy a special place in the eyes of Wakan Tanke, the grandfather of us all. I was only a part of everything that was called world” (qtd in Siddhartha 2)

But man strangely fails to understand and accept such noble sentiments as he feels superior to all other beings. His sense of superiority overrides all other feelings for nature. The words of the late Robert Van Den Bosch, an outstanding environmental advocate seems quite apt:

Our problem is that we are too smart for our own good, and for that matter the good of the biosphere. The basic problem is that our brain enables us to evaluate, plan, and execute. Thus, while all other creatures are programmed by nature and subject to her whims, we have our own gray computer to motivate, for good or evil, our chemical engine. ... Among living species, we are the only one possessed of arrogance, deliberate stupidity, greed, hate,
jealousy, treachery, and the impulse to revenge, all of which may erupt spontaneously or be turned at will. (qtd in Tucker 655)

The human brain or the “gray computer” unfortunately is not put to good use; instead it is an instrument used to pillage and loot. A very good example of man’s ruthless destruction of Nature is illustrated in Ted Hughes’s poem “Revenge Fable”:

There was a person
Could not get rid of his mother
As if he were her topmost twig
So he pounded and hacked at her
With numbers and equations and laws.
He investigated, incriminated
And penalized her, like Tolstoy,
Forbidding, screaming and condemning,
Going for her with a knife,
Obliterating her with disgusts
Bulldozers and detergents
Requisitions and central heating
Rifles and whisky and bored sleep.
With all her babes in her arms, in ghostly weepings,
She died.
His head fell of like a leaf. (qtd in Sagar 121)

Another poem by David Wagoner presents the same situation. We find him moaning the felling of forests:

Five months after your death, I come like the others
Among the slash and stumps, across the cratered
Three square miles of your graveyard:
Nettles and groundsel first out of the jumble,
Then fireweed and bracken
Have come to light where you, for ninety years,
Had kept your shadows.

The chains and cables and steel teeth have left
Nothing of what you were:
I hold my hands over a stump and remember
A hundred and fifty feet above me branches
No longer holding sway. In the pitched battle
You fell and fell again and went on falling
And always falling and falling. (456)

The indiscriminate chopping down of trees has led to the disappearance of vast tracts of forests. Aldo Leopold in his essay “Axe in Hand,” poignantly expresses the pathetic situation of forests and derides man for felling trees: “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, but He is no longer the only one to do so. When some remote ancestor of ours invented the shovel, he became a giver: he could plant a tree. And when the axe was invented he became a taker: he could chop it down. Whoever owns land has thus assumed, whether he knows it or not, the divine functions of creating and destroying plants”(448).

Man’s superiority arises out of the fact that he is the only creature endowed with the ability to speak and therefore he considers himself as the only species on the planet worthy of being a topic of discourse. But ecology presents a different picture, humbling man to a non-entity. Christopher Manes observes: “As hominids, we dwell at the outermost fringes of important
ecological processes such as photosynthesis and the conversion of biomass into usable nutrients.” Therefore man’s claim as “the paragon of animals or the torchbearer of evolution” falls flat before this ecological fact. For example if fungus, one of the “lowliest” of forms on a humanistic scale of values, were to go extinct tomorrow, the effect on the rest of the biosphere would be disastrous, since the health of forests depends on this fungus. The disappearance of forests in turn would disrupt the hydrology, atmosphere, and temperature of the entire globe. On the other hand if Homo sapiens disappeared the event would go virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of the earth’s life forms (24). Similarly earthworms though in appearance “a small and despicable link in the chain of nature” if lost would make a “lamentable chasm” (Worster 8).

Here we are reminded of the stirring words of John Muir, the Californian writer, who declared that, though Man considered himself to be the master of the Universe, nature had other plans:

Nature’s object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one. Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit – the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge. (qtd in Guha 52)
Muir practiced what he preached and therefore he was able to embrace everything in Nature, welcoming its variety. He found the Sierra bear “the sequoia of the animals,” a rambler like Muir himself who was “everywhere at home, harmonizing with the trees and rocks and shaggy chaparral.” The water ouzel was a “brave little singer on the wild mountain streams.” To watch this bird and love it was “to look through a window into Nature’s warm hearts” (qtd in Guha 52).

The ability to practice unconditional love towards nature and its beings can surely change the world into a better place. The noted Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh’s words reflect this idea when he points out: “Birds’ songs express joy, beauty, and purity, and evoke in us vitality and love. So many beings in the universe love us unconditionally. The trees, the water, and the air don’t ask anything of us; they just love us” (133). In return we destroy them indiscriminately.

Mathew Fox advances a similar idea, pointing out that, it is when we realise the goodness of things that we are prepared to act for life and for the earth. Echoing Aquinas he says it is like “falling in love.” People could fall in love with galaxies or with species of wild flowers. They could also fall in love with fishes, plants, trees, animals and birds and with people too. This capacity for being in love is limitless, in fact, it is a feeling of “experiencing blessing” (213). When we experience this blessing, we come to realise the
interrelatedness of all creation. Alice Walker very beautifully expresses this sentiment in her book *The Colour Purple*:

My first step away from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed and I cried and I ran all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happens you can’t miss it . . . (167)

This feeling of oneness with all creation should be cultivated by all of us since each and every phenomenon in this universe, according to Thich Nhat Hanh concerns us, right from a pebble resting at the bottom of the ocean to the movement of a galaxy millions of light years away (131). An echo of these lines is seen in Walt Whitman’s poem “Song of Myself,” which comes from the very depths of his soul:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than
the journey - work of the stars
And the prismire is equally perfect and a grain
of sand, and the egg of the wren,
And the tree -toad is a chef-d’oeuvre for the highest,
And the running black berry would adorn
the parlors of heaven,
And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts
to scorn all machinery,
And the cow crunching with depress’d head
surpasses any statue,
And a mouse is miracle enough to stagger
sextillions of infidels. (72-73)

The reverence Whitman feels for all the living things of the earth is seen in the reverence Thich Nhat Hanh feels even for the small creatures like the snail or the butterfly:

We humans think we are smart, but an orchid, for example, knows how to produce noble, symmetrical flowers, and a snail knows how to make a beautiful, well-proportioned shell. Compared with their knowledge ours is not much at all. We should bow deeply before the orchid and the snail and join our palms reverently before the monarch butterfly and the magnolia tree. The feeling of respect for all species will help us recognize the noblest in ourselves. (132)

There was a time when man had great respect for the earth and its inhabitants. The life of early man reveals that though he adopted a hunting-gathering culture he lived in total harmony with his surroundings fully aware of his bondage and unity with his fellow humans and with other creatures of the universe. However, with the advent of Christianity, man’s view of the world changed. It proposed God as the creator of earth, man, plants and all living beings. The Genesis declared “And the Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden” with the injunction “to dress it and keep it.” And he also gave man dominion over the fish in the sea and the fowl in the air, and over every living being that moved upon the earth (Schumacher 107).

It can be argued that of all the major religions of the world, Christianity has been “anti-natural.” Lynn White Jr., argues that an average Christian
believed nature’s chief functions were to serve man’s needs. No religion other 
than Christianity had been more “anthropocentric,” thus excluding all living 
things other than man from the “realm of divine grace and in denying any 
moral obligation to the lower species” (qtd in Worster 27). The church 
authorities further insisted that as per God’s will man should exploit nature for 
his proper ends. Donald Worster illustrates this callousness of the church 
authorities citing the example of Pope Pius IX’s refusal to form a society to 
protest against the slaughter of bulls for sport and amusement, since, according 
to the Pope, an animal has no soul and thus has no claim on man’s moral 
sympathies (27).

Man took the biblical words affirming his dominion over nature literally, 
and such sixteenth and seventeenth century leaders of thought as Bacon, 
Descartes and Leibniz further supported it. Bacon in his Novum Organum 
upheld the idea of dominion: “If man endeavour to establish and extend the 
power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe, his ambition (if 
ambition it can be called) is without doubt both a more wholesome thing . . .” 
(qtd in Moore 101). Instead of humility, Bacon was all for self-assertiveness as 
is evident in his words: “The world is made for man not man for the world” 
(qtd in Worster 30). This utilitarian bias towards nature made man insensitive 
to the feeling of his fellow creatures as revealed in the callous words of Rene 
Descartes who declared that animals are no more than machines totally 
incapable of feeling pain or pleasure -- a view that had gruesome results in 
many laboratory experiments in France (Worster 40).
During the 18th and 19th century, Western man made great progress spreading all around the earth with complete control. The idea of dominance over nature was quite appealing to all. Walt Whitman in his "Song of the Redwood tree," celebrates the death of the "forest giants to the axes of man," for he found them yielding to a "superior race" and willingly giving way to civilization (qtd in Moore 102).

The development of science in its turn increased man's assurance and his feeling of control of nature. This control has led to the destruction of many parts of the planet with great rapidity. As Ingrid Newkirk suggests: "Science in its arrogance feels compelled to rearrange nature. It believes it can simply adjust the knob here or pop a baboon organ in over there and the world will toast its adventure with a plastic bottle of machine-extracted, genetically engineered champagne grapes" (96). She further says that science has committed too many atrocities on nature:

Science adores artifice as much as it despises nature. It dismisses as "anthropomorphic" any observations of the intelligence and sentience of beings it prefers to think of as unimportant machines. It makes its nest in the cold, unnatural setting of the windowless, temperature-controlled laboratory with its tube lighting and cold metal cages where it can privately manipulate its toy-of-the-moment until seduced by a shinier toy. In its private chambers it invents its own isolated language, designed not to elucidate but to obscure the real and nasty -- cries of tormented cats become "vocalizations," an electric shock becomes a "negative stimulus,"
and when birds open-mouth kiss during erotic play, that becomes "false-feeding." (96-97)

The worship of modern technology has become a "New humanistic religion" according to Joseph Meeker who feels that scientists, politicians, businessmen and even ordinary citizens have been held in its vicious grip (154). This blind adoration has led to the serious damage of our biological environment. The scientific inventions no doubt are beneficial to man but each of his successes seems to have posed unexpected threats to life. Discoveries such as "atomic energy, the endless growth techniques of economics, DDT, genetic controls over organic life, the medical breakthroughs which have encouraged population explosion . . ." have indeed threatened the continuation of life (156).

We have come to see the earth as a storehouse of minerals and other raw materials, "inert matter which we need to use in the furtherance of our physical and material needs." To us the earth is a mere producer of food and a garbage dump, not our larger body (Siddhartha). Mankind's innumerable inventions has at last spelt his own doom as observed by Joseph Wood Krutch, a noted writer of natural history: "We have engineered ourselves into a position where, for the first time in history, it has become possible for man to destroy his whole species" (28).

The continuing assault on the natural world by man has awakened in many concerned persons, the awareness of the need for corrective action to halt the desecration of our planet. Literary studies have played a major role in
dealing with these menacing environmental issues. Scholars throughout the world are finding ways to project the problem of environmental disaster in their respective disciplines. Adrian Franklin records that the emergence of disciplines like natural history, biological sciences, astronomy and geology greatly helped to undermine “the theological anthropocentrism” and that it took little time for “knowledgeable humans” to realise they no longer lived at the centre of the physical universe. They accepted themselves as one small cog in a very large, centreless system” (12).

Historians like Donald Worster have written environmental history, dealing with the reciprocal relationships between humans and land, considering nature not just as “the stage upon which the human story is acted out, but also as an actor in the drama.” Similarly anthropological works on primal cultures have helped many of us “not only to respect such people’s right to survive, but also to think about the value systems and rituals that have helped these cultures live sustainably.”

In the field of Psychology, some psychologists are trying to discover “the linkages between environmental conditions and mental health.” They believe that the main reason for our social and psychological illnesses is the modern estrangement from nature. Coming to Philosophy, we find the emergence of various topics like Environmental Ethics, Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Social Ecology. These subjects deal with the environmental
degradation facing the world today and they try to find a solution to form “right” relations with the earth” (Glotfelty xxi).

It was in the mid eighties that the field of environmental literary studies was planted and it started growing in the nineties. Literary theory, in general, examines the relation between writers, texts and the world. It was Joseph Meeker who introduced the term literary ecology in the Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology to refer to “the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It is simultaneously an attempt to discover what roles have been played by literature in the ecology of the human species”(9).

Such a type of literature, which presents models of man’s relationship with nature, is sure to influence both man’s perception of nature and his responses to it. “The most important function of literature today” as observed by Glen A. Love, “is to redirect human consciousness to full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world” (237).

In this increasingly urban society, nature writing certainly plays a vital role in teaching us to value the natural world. As Donald Worster suggests most of the nature essayists sought for a “lost pastoral haven, for a home in an inhospitable and threatening world” (16). Writers such as John Burroughs, John Muir, W. H. Hudson and Richard Jeffries produced a number of writings, that inspired scores of readers to seek solace in the “quiet peace of hay barns, orchards, and mountain valleys” (16).
Ecology explains the interconnectedness of man and the natural environment and therefore to study ecology and to study literature, it is essential to concentrate on the processes and relationships which govern the interacting of ideas, creatures, and environment. One of the important issues in contemporary native writing is how this literature affects and changes the reader's attitudes towards the environment and into a more environmentally sound behaviour. Scott Slovic citing Glotfelty says that critics and teachers bear a responsibility in pointing out the environmental implication of literary texts and to engage in "ecocriticism" (364). The word "ecocriticism" according to Glotfelty was first coined by William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." By ecocriticism Rueckert meant "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (xix).

Ecocriticism demonstrates how nature is presented in literature. We begin to understand situations like Eden, Arcadia, Virgin Land, miasmal swamp, savage wilderness etc. Ecocriticism therefore is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. It bears a similarity to Feminist criticism and Marxist criticism. When we examine Feminist criticism, it can be seen that it examines language from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism elicits an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts. Ecocriticism similarly is based on an "earth centred approach to literary studies." All ecological criticism points to the fact that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it." Glotfelty's argument is that
ecocriticism as a critical stance has “one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human.” (xix).

An interesting idea advanced by Sue Ellen Campbell states that we depend on all kinds of influences outside ourselves. She believes that we are part of vast networks, “texts written by larger and stronger forces” (137). She is echoing the same sentiment by Foucault who says, an individual is a node within a network (132) and of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who argues that we are what we are because of the symbolic order outside ourselves that creates us (132). Finding a strong similarity between literary theory and ecology she says “both criticize the traditional sense of a separate, independent, authoritative center of value or meaning: both substitute the idea of networks” (131).

When we observe ecological theory we notice that the centers are replaced by networks. The interconnectedness of different forms of life makes it impossible for us to do anything without causing a lot of side effects. Citing Arne Naess, Campbell observes “organisms are knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations.” Taking the example of a deer in the ecosystem she says:

A deer, for instance, has no being apart from things like the presence or absence of wolves, the kind of forage in the environment, the temperature and snowfall of any given winter, the other animals competing for the available food, the number of
hunters with licenses, the bacteria in its intestines that either keep it healthy or make it sick. (132)

From this argument Campbell concludes that according to theory and ecology there is no such thing as a self enclosed, private piece property, neither a deer nor a person nor a text nor a piece of land.

This idea points to the fact that human beings are no longer the center of value or meaning. Foucault in his book *The Order of Things* explains the concept of man as the center of intelligence and spirit as being outdated. Similarly Michael Tobias remarks, “From the biosphere’s perspective, the whole point of *Homo Sapiens* is their armpits, aswarm with 24.1 billion bacteria” (qtd in Campbell 133). The same feeling is expressed by David Quammen who reminds us of the various microscopic creatures that live on and in our skin “you are an ecosystem... a community of flora and fauna” (32). A parallel view put forward by the Thai Buddhist monk, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is:

The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees, and the earth. When we realise that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise... then we can build a noble environment. If our lives are not based on this truth, then we shall perish (qtd in Siddhartha 2).

The tradition of nature-oriented nonfiction originated in England with Gilbert White’s *A Natural History of Selbourne* (1789) and extends to America through Henry David Thoreau, John Burroughs, John Muir, Mary Austin, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Edward Abbey, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez, Terry
Tempest Williams etc. Glotfelty observes that “nature writing boasts a rich past, a vibrant present, and a promising future, and ecocritics draw from any number of existing critical theory — psychoanalytic, new critical, feminist, Bakhtinian, deconstructive — in the interests of understanding and promoting this body of literature” (xxiii).

The works of a lot of fiction and poetry writers manifest ecological awareness. Figures like Willa Cather, Robinson Jeffers, W.S. Mervin, Adrienne Rich, Wallace Stegner, Gary Snyder, Mary Oliver, Ursula Le Guinn, and Alice Walker have received much attention, as have Native American authors.

Perhaps among nature writers, Rachel Carson stands most prominent as she is best remembered for her “indictment of the life destroying potential of pesticides in her classic The Silent Spring” (Norwood 335). By portraying the threat to life posed by persistent pesticides in her books “Carson went on to inaugurate the literature of ecological apocalypse.” She despaired to live in a society that seemed adamant to destroy itself and all other forms of life either by fission bombs or DDT. With farsightedness, she urged scientists and engineers to accept a “humbler role and thereby ensure a more secure future for themselves and their fellow species” (Worster 23-24).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the awareness of the effects of pollutants on the biosphere and the potential for major ecological catastrophes was brought home with the events at Three Mile island, Love Canal, Times Beach, Chernobyl, and Bhopal. (Chapple xii). Most of the fiction of the 1980s, as
Cynthia Deitering finds, seems to be littered with references to garbage “signifying a shift in a culture defined by its production to a culture defined by its waste” (196). Saul Bellow’s novel *The Dean’s December*, discusses the topic of lead dispersal into the air, water and soil. John Cheever’s novella, *Oh What a Paradise it Seems*, deals with an old man’s “symbolic efforts to restore Beazley’s Pond” [a toxic dumpsite] to its original purity. *Mickelsson’s Ghosts*, a novel by John Gardner spins out the story of how Peter Mickelsson discovers his newly purchased farmhouse in a remote mountain community to be contaminated by illegally dumped chemicals. Many writers of this period were preoccupied with the notion of chemical contamination. This idea figured as an important theme in texts such as Don De Lillo’s *White Noise*, Walker Percy’s *The Thanatos Syndrome* Paul Theroux’s *O-Zone T*, Corghessan Boyle’s *World’s End*, Richard Russo’s *Mohawk*, Saul Bellow’s *More Die of Heartbreak* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* etc. Cynthia Deitering believes that references to toxic waste in recent American fiction seems to function both as a “cultural metaphor for a society’s most general fears about its collective future and as an expression of an ontological rupture in its perception of the Real” (197).

In this postindustrial economy, which depends upon “expeditious transformation of goods into waste,” we observe “parts of ourselves in our own garbage and also our personal histories” (Deitering198). We come to recognize ourselves as producers of waste. Everywhere around us we see an empire of waste – a handiwork of our own deformed brain. Realisation dawns upon us
with a sudden jolt that the refuse being dumped into the oceans and atmosphere for years and years in ever increasing quantities does not disappear. This situation is well expressed by Harold Fromm:

Suddenly the human race has been put into the position of affluent teenagers who dump beer cans from their moving sports car and then drive off. The cans appear to have vanished, but no, there they are, astoundingly enough, rolling around the neighborhood where they have been dumped. And when the teenagers arrive home, they find other beer cans dumped by other teenagers. The neighborhood is a place of beer cans; the ocean a place of toxic effluents, the sky is vaporized garbage. And to add insult to injury, man’s unconquerable mind turns out to have a mouth, through which it is fed; and worse still, it is being fed garbage, its own! (35)

This is the “wonderful handiwork” of man – “a great blunderer going about in the woods,” leaving a trail of disaster behind him. Mary Austin in her book *The Land of Little Rain* observes: “There is no scavenger that eats tin cans, and no wild thing leaves a like disfigurement on the forest floor” (40).

Yet another prescient voice was Barry Commoner, an ecologist, who wrote scathingly on the *effluents of affluence*:

It is economic motivation that has impelled the sweeping anti-ecological changes in the technology of production that have occurred since the Second World War. These changes have turned the nation’s factories, farms, vehicles, and shops into seed-beds of pollution: nitrates from fertilizer; phosphates from detergents; toxic residues from pesticides; smog and carcinogenic
exhaust from vehicles; the growing list of toxic chemicals and the mounds of undegradable plastic containers, wrappings, and gaggaws from the petrochemical industry. (qtd in Guha 79)

Loss of ethics, judgment, wisdom and compassion has led man on the road to moral degradation. He has brought about the extinction of many animal species and the wholesale disruption of world ecosystems and now threatens to destroy most of what he has created and much that he has not. As E.F. Schumacher in his book Small is Beautiful points out, modern man “in his excitement over the unfolding of his scientific and technical powers has built a system of production that ravishes nature and a type of society that mutilates man” (293). Environmental crisis is the most recent symbol of apocalyptic expectation and it may be the most pervasive and powerful threat yet recognized. As Glen A. Love insists, the catalogue of actual and potential horrors is by now familiar to us all:

The threats of nuclear holocaust, or of slower radiation poisoning, of chemical or germ warfare, the alarming growth of the world’s population (standing room only in a few centuries at the present rate of growth), mounting evidence of global warming, destruction of the planets protective ozone layer, the increasingly harmful effects of acid rain, over cutting of the world’s last remaining great forests, the critical loss of topsoil and ground water, over fishing and toxic poisoning of the oceans, inundation in our own garbage, an increasing rate of extinction of plant and animal species. (226).

It is time for us human beings to “grow up as a species” and change our ways. The distinguished cell biologist Lewis Thomas observes “it is up to us, if
we are to become an evolutionary success to fit in, to become the consciousness of the whole earth. We are the planet’s awareness of itself, and if we do it right we have a very long way to go” (52). Our present biosphere is the only habitable space we have, or are ever likely to have. As Arnold Toynbee observes in his narrative history of the world entitled *Mankind and Mother Earth*, mankind now has the power to “make the biosphere uninhabitable” and therefore an environmental disaster is sure to follow within a “foreseeable period of time” if prompt action is not taken up by the human population to “check the pollution and the spoilation that are being inflicted upon the biosphere by short sighted human greed” (9).

Human greed is the root cause of the desecralization of our planet. Gandhiji’s aphorism – a well-phrased one-line environmental ethic – strikes us to the core: “The world has enough for everybody’s need, but not enough for some people’s greed” (qtd in Shiva 275). Likewise, one of Gandhiji’s followers, Mira Behn, a “devotee of the great Primeval Mother Earth,” laments:

The tragedy today is that educated and moneyed classes are altogether out of touch with the vital fundamentals of existence – our Mother Earth, and the animal and vegetable population which she sustains. This world of Nature’s planning is ruthlessly plundered, despoiled and disorganized by man whenever he gets the chance. By his science and machinery he may get huge returns for a time, but ultimately will come desolation. We have got to study Nature’s balance, and develop our lives within her laws, if we are to survive as a physically healthy and morally decent species. (qtd in Guha 67)
To achieve this end it is necessary for all of us to remember the law of ecology spelt out by Barry Commoner “Everything is connected to everything else” (qtd in Rueckert 108). This need to see even the smallest, most remote part in relation to a very large whole is the central intellectual action required by ecology and of an ecological vision. A biocentric view of nature regards humans as being neither better nor worse than other creatures (animals, plants, bacteria, rocks, rivers) but simply equal to everything else in the natural world. (Campbell 128). Gary Zukav writes in The Dancing Wu Li Masters “There is no such thing as objectivity. We cannot eliminate ourselves from the picture. We are a part of nature and when we study nature there is no way around the fact that nature is studying itself” (3).

The arguments of these writers once again reaffirm the basic fact that human beings do exist as ecosystems. Therefore it is essential for us to pay attention not to the way things have meaning for us, but to the way the rest of the world i.e. the non human part exists apart from us and our language. Berger in his book About Looking reminds us that animals are silent; they have secrets and cannot reveal their thoughts. We have always to interpret, to provide the meaning for what we see, and for that we can only draw upon human values, emotions and interpretations. When we gaze at animals we hold up a mirror to ourselves (2 - 4).

The love of nature can be seen in the writings of classical poets like Theocritus, Virgil, Horace etc. Virgil’s pastorals show men as being oppressed
by society but comforted by nature. His *Ecologues* portraying peace and contentment is contrasted with the “thankless town,” the symbol of anxiety and misery and it is quite evident when he says: “Happy in thy old age, here, amid familiar streams and holy springs thou wilt woo the coolness of the shade” (qtd in Meeker 82). Echoes of these feelings can be seen in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Book IX, which is a good example of the idea that nature is indeed refreshment after the city.

As one who long in populous City Pent,
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Air
Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
Among the Pleasant Villages and Farmes
Adjoin’d, from each thing met conceaves delight,
The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,
Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound (IX. 445 - 51)

It was with the rise of romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that a resurgence of the pagan outlook toward nature came into being. Led by such figures as Goethe, Schelling, Wordsworth and other Romantics, a new generation sought to redefine nature and man’s place in the scheme of things. They believed that all nature was alive and pulsing with energy or spirit. Goethe’s poem “Epirrhenia,” spells out a basic romantic idea: “Separateness is the illusion/one and many are the same” (82). This great German poet naturalist, like his American counterpart Thoreau, believed that “in organic life nothing is unconnected with the whole” (qtd in Worster 82).
The Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron etc., have always been celebrated for their love of nature. Wordsworth in particular described it with inexhaustible enthusiasm, seeing:

In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul,
Of all my moral being ("Tintern Abbey", 107 - 11)

Wordsworth’s poems reveal an intimate bonding with the natural world and as the literary historian Jonathan Bate remarks, he also taught his readers “how to walk with nature.” For Wordsworth the Industrial Revolution came as a great curse on earth. He was aghast at the “outrage done to nature” by the cities and factories. The common people were no longer “breathing fresh air” or “treading the green earth.” This great nature lover believed, man could get solace only in the country, wherein lay “the secret spirit of humanity” (qtd in Guha 11).

As J.R. Watson argues, they all found a joy in the natural world which was not seen in “man- made institutions or practices” (50). Byron, likewise, gave expression to this sentiment in “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage:”

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me, and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly change,
Class’d among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain (III. st. 72)

Speaking about Byron’s attitude to mankind in general, Adrian Franklin observes that Byron found that men were mindless and cruel, completely missing the point of desirable human associations with nature and therefore he condemned all sorts of sports like hunting, angling etc (28). Rousseau was another Romantic, who by being close to nature, found the animal in himself, beauty and perfection in nature and nobility in wilderness.

Perhaps one of the most celebrated nature poets who vehemently decried the desecralization of nature would be John Ruskin. A well-known artist and art critic, Ruskin found modern towns “little more than laboratories for the distillation into heaven of venomous smokes and smells, mixed with a effluvia from decaying animal matter, and infectious miasmata from purulent disease.” England had been turned into a foul mire, “into a common sewer, so that you cannot so much as baptize an English baby but with filth, unless you hold its face out in the rain, and even then that falls dirty.” This was the disastrous consequence of viewing nature as something to be exploited. Ruskin’s eloquent prose is quite impressive:

Whereas the medieval never painted a cloud, but with the purpose of placing an angel in it; and a Greek never entered a wood without expecting to meet a god in it; we should think the appearance of an angel in the cloud wholly unnatural, and should be seriously surprised by meeting a god anywhere. Our chief ideas about the wood are connected with poaching. We have no
belief that the clouds contain more than so many inches of rain or hail, and from our ponds and ditches expect nothing more divine than ducks and watercresses. (qtd in Guha 13)

Ruskin, like Wordsworth believed Nature to be the best teacher for men and that “all other efforts in education” were in vain till “you have taught your people to love fields, birds, and flowers” (qtd in Guha 14).

William Morris was yet another poet and socialist who deplored the city’s growth, its “swallowing up with its loathsomeness field and wood and heath without mercy and without hope, mocking our feeble attempts to deal even with its minor evils of smoke – laden sky and befouled river.” Morris eagerly wished to turn England “from the grimy backyard of a workshop into a garden, where factories and cities would no longer exist. His long narrative poem “The Earthly Paradise” advises the reader to:

Forget six counties overhung with smoke,
Forget the snorting steam and piston stroke,
Forget the spreading of the hideous town;
Think rather of the pack-horse on the down,
And dream of London, small, and white, and clean,
The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green…….. (qtd in Guha 15)

Since man had lost his connection with nature and despoiled it, no wonder these poets yearned for such a paradise. Their writings were therefore, according to Guha, greatly influential in establishing environmental societies.
The early environmental movement in America was tinged with a romanticized vision of the natural world, familiar to us from the works of the Transcendentalists like Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman etc. Speaking about the beautiful world in his Early Lectures Emerson says:

The beauty of the world is a perpetual invitation to the study of the world. Sunrise and sunset; fire; flowers; shells; the sea - in all its shades, from indigo to green and gray, by the light of day, and phosphorescent under the ship’s keel at night; the airy inaccessible mountains; the sparry cavern; the glaring colours of the soil of the volcano; the forms of vegetables; and all the elegant and majestic figures of the creatures that fly, climb, or creep upon the earth - all by their beauty, work upon our curiosity and court our attention. The earth is a museum, and the five senses a philosophical apparatus of such perfection, that the pleasure we obtain from the aids with which we arm them is trifling, compared with their natural information. (qtd in Whicher 6)

We observe in Emerson a belief in nature as the source of beauty, peace and privacy. Lamenting the separation of humans from the rest of the natural world, Emerson in his essay “Nature” says: “We are as much strangers in nature as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds. The fox and the deer run away from us; the bear and the tiger rend us” (74).

Mankind has travelled a long way from the harmonious world of nature by losing the ability to see in it the interconnectedness between various creatures. Thoreau similarly believes that “the mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our lives” (qtd in Worster 93). But sadly modern man does not
experience himself as a part of nature but as an outside force destined to dominate and conquer it.

The principles, which Thoreau practised, can be seen in his works such as *Walden, A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. According to Scott Russell Sanders, Thoreau’s description of the Concord River, the Maine woods, Cape Cod, and Walden Pond are among “the most vigorous and penetrating accounts” of landscape writing (188). In many passages of *Walden*, Thoreau presented a “dynamic” nature as can be seen in his description of the “frozen sand melting and sliding down the railroad embankment, ice breaking up on the pond, geese circling overhead and muskrats burrowing underfoot” (189). His favourite pastime was watching this energetic landscape:

Sometimes, in a summer morning having taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in reverie, amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude and stillness while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window or the noise of some traveller’s wagon on the distant highway, I was reminded of the lapse of time. (Walden 111)

The total insensitivity of modern man towards nature grieved Thoreau. Speaking about the thousands of Americans who deserted their homes to go west or to the city Thoreau says:

Think of the consummate folly of attempting to go away from here. When the constant endeavour should be to get nearer and nearer here. Here are all the friends I ever had or shall have, and
friendly as ever. A man dwells in his native valley like a corolla in its calyx, like an acorn in its cup. Here, of course is all that you love, all that you expect, all that you are. (qtd in Worster 84)

Thoreau’s strong attachment towards one’s place is seen in the above lines and also his feeling one should not forget one’s roots and nativity while being ambitious. He firmly believed and emphasized that the society of nature is as important to the self’s development as is the human variety. “In Wildness is the preservation of the world,” Thoreau writes in “Walking” (344). Wilderness to Thoreau was something spiritual. A swamp for him was a “sacred place, a sanctum sanctorum” holding the “strength” and “marrow” of nature (Scheese 310). John Muir echoes the same declaration in his journal: “In God’s wilderness lay the hope of the world -- the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness” (317).

Nature to Thoreau was a vast community of equals and more, a universal consanguineous family. Thoreau could never bring himself to so elevate man above the rest of the earth or to claim for him any unique rights. He explodes in anger saying, “There is no place for man -worship.” In the spring of 1852 he wrote:

The poet says the proper study of mankind is man. I say, study to forget all that, take wider views of the universe. That is the egotism of the race. . . . Man is but the place where I stand, and the prospect hence is infinite. It is not a chamber of mirrors which reflect me. Man is a past phenomenon to philosophy. The
universe is larger than enough for man's abode. (qtd in Worster 85)

Here one is tempted to contrast Shakespeare's famous lines of Hamlet's apostrophe to Man in Act II Sc. II:

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! (809)

While Shakespeare considered man as the "paragon of animals," Thoreau condemned him as the nemesis of animals.

Nature and its beauteous forms was also extolled in the writings of William Bartram "the vagabond naturalist" of America. During his camp in a Florida swamp Bartram wrote:

The verges and islets of the lagoon were elegantly embellished with flowering plants and shrubs; the laughing coots with wings half spread were tripping over the little coves, and hiding themselves in the tufts of grass; young broods of the painted summer teal, skimming the surface of the waters, and following the watchful parent unconscious of danger, were frequently surprised by the voracious trout; and he, in turn, as often by the subtle greedy alligator. Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. (qtd in Sanders 186)
Bartram learnt a lot from his travels about the Indians, plants, soil and animals. He found nature as 'separate orderly, obeying its own laws (Sanders 186).

Influenced by Bartram’s writing, a new generation of writers in Europe, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Chateaubriand, “feeling encumbered by civilization,” were eager to have glimpses of the wilderness (Sanders 187). Chateaubriand’s New World romance *Atala* is a typical nature book portraying fascinating descriptions of landscapes. For example describing the Mississippi River he says:

> While the middle currents sweep the dead pines and oaks to the sea, one can see, on the side currents, floating isles of pistia and water lilies, whose pinkish yellow flowers, rising like little banners, are carried along the river banks. Green serpents, blue herons, pink flamingoes, young crocodile sail like passengers on the flower-ships, and the colony, unfolding its golden sails to the wind, lazily drifts into some hidden bend of the river. (qtd in Sanders 187)

These “fabulous shores” also displayed “mountains, Indian pyramids, caribou, bears drunk on grapes, and snakes that disguised themselves as vines to catch birds” (Sanders 187).

The late nineteenth century, as Franklin records, saw the emergence of a variant of Romanticism, which elaborated the idea of nature being beautiful but a ruthless system ‘red in tooth and claw’. This idea gained a lot of prominence, as it evolved from Darwin’s view, of the evolutionary law of natural selection.
and survival of the fittest. According to this view the killer instinct in humans was evolutionary and therefore by nature humans are aggressive, competitive killers. Hence humans elevated themselves above animals by killing them and subduing them (30). This view caused a lot of philosophical and political conflict in America. Cart Mill in his book *View To A Death in the Morning* observes:

From the very beginning, the American conservation movement has encompassed two rather different sorts of nature lovers; tender minded Romantics who want to preserve nature because it is holy, and tough minded Darwinian types, who want to preserve it because it is healthy. For the Romantics, nature is an open-air chapel in which one can commune with the Infinite and make friends with the forest creatures; for the Darwinians, nature is a kind of vast exercise salon, in which one can get rid of bodily flabbiness and spiritual malaise, work up a glorious appetite and polish off a couple of those forest creatures for supper. (149 - 50)

The twentieth century transformed the nature of sentiments towards animals. In Franklin’s view: “Post modern relation with animals are characterized by stronger emotional and moral content, a greater zoological range of involvement and a demand for more regulation and order” (35). The building up of social and emotional ties with animals evolved because humans found it increasingly difficult to establish and maintain such ties among themselves. During this period there was a great interest in wild animals in Britain and since most of the wild species here had been eradicated, people rarely saw any wild animal except in books or in zoos. But they appeared in
many “metaphysical stories” imparting moral lessons on “humanism, inequality, class conflict and nationalism” (43). Indigenous animals were widely used as national symbols and citizenship. It was at this time as elsewhere Britain saw the proliferation of “anthropomorphized, misanthropic and anti-hunting tales” (43). Wild animals started featuring in popular media like children’s adventures and pictorial books, cinemas, films and in popular television documentary. This popularisation of wild animals later on gave way to new forms of interest such as bird watching clubs, natural history clubs etc.

Television and video helped to bring animals into the living room in “greater quantities and in changing formats.” Children’s TV continued to be dominated by animal characters and themes apart from innovations such as the BBC’s magazine *The Really Wild Show* which had a “live, interactive, audience of children who asked questions, handled reptiles and insects with care rather than with repugnance, and joined in a dazzling series of quasi-scientific activities with a strong moral basis” (48). Documentary makers shifted their accent from mammals towards all genera, including “micro, nocturnal and subterranean fauna.” David Attenborough’s *Life on Earth* came as a great success during this period. Similarly Walt Disney’s series of “pro-animal genre of cartoons and films beginning with *Bambi* in 1944” was an instant success. Disney’s films always conveyed the “essential goodness of animals and the unpredictable treachery of humanity”. According to Franklin: “This relatively benign, sweet view of animals as better sorts of people than people themselves influenced every generation of the twentieth century” (54).
Animal stories – a tradition which has ancient origins – have delighted people of all ages. In order to highlight the sacredness of the non-human forms, the art of storytelling came into being. It formed part of the rituals surrounding the great sacrifices performed during Vedic and epic times. The *Mahabharatha*, which is a veritable mine of stories, informs us that storytelling sessions were held in the intervals between the performance of sacrifices that often stretched over long periods of time, days, weeks, even months. The *Pančatantra* and the *Jataka Tales* are the oldest surviving works of fiction that have delighted children of all ages, in all places, and still continue to do so. They belong to the rich, age-old oral literature of India, narrating stories of human and non-human characters. The *Jataka Tales* highlight Buddha’s nativity and his many incarnations as Bodhi Sattva, some in non-human forms.

Rhys Davids, the nineteenth century scholar, according to Martin Seymour Smith, believes the *Jataka Tales* to be “the most important collection of folklore extant.” The origin of these fables, as Martin Seymour Smith says, can be traced back to the fourth century B.C., and they also incorporate material of even earlier eras. The poet Aryasura was believed to have composed one version, *Jatakamala* in about 2000 A.D. All the stories relate interesting facts of the Buddha in some previous incarnation, and each is a story of the past occasioned by an incident in the present. Buddha appears in these tales in every human and animal guise – except as a female. Though some of the fables resemble Aesop’s, the *Jataka Tales* seem to be deliberately brutal. They not
only teach that men should be tender towards animals, but also the equivalence of all life (237).

The *Pančatantra* has had a great influence on world literature, and Chandra Rajan draws our attention to Arthur MacDonnell who points out that the *Pančatantra* had its “extraordinary influence on the narrative works of the whole Middle Ages.” Rajan notes that “because of its great antiquity and its extensive migration, traces of its influence might be detected in works of literature so widely separated in time and place as the *Arabian Nights*, the *Gesta Romanorum*, Boccacio’s *Decameron* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, *The Fables* of La Fontaine, some stories of Grimm, and in the unlikeliest of places, the Br’er Rabbit stories current in the southern United States” (xix).

Many stories in Indian literature feature talking birds and animals as their characters. The *Rig Veda* relates the story of Sarama, the hound of heaven who goes over the wild wastes of water as an ambassador to negotiate a trade deal for her masters (*devas*) with the *panis* (merchants), and fails. The golden wild goose in the *Mahabharata* story of King Nala and Princess Damayanthi, carries love messages between the two, which lead to their marriage. Similarly, the *Chandogya Upanishad* narrates the story of Satyakama, the Brahmana pupil, who was instructed by a bull and wild goose in matters relating to the nature of Reality. In such a literary tradition, it is natural to put words of wisdom into the mouths of non-human characters, and therefore, it is
easy for the human and natural worlds to interact as smoothly as they do and comment on each other (Rajan xl).

Apart from this we have the fables of Aesop too which tell the story of the hare, the fox and the grapes etc. Roger Sale commenting on the features of beast fables says:

Animals talked or acted like human beings in some ways, and most were to be found in fairy tales on beast fables. Fairy tale animals are usually enchanted and live in a world of human beings: beast fable animals usually participate in no magic and live in a world where human beings play a minor role . . .

In beast fables, animals talk like people, but in most other respects they are more realistically described than animals in fairy tales. Human beings are usually absent because the animals are, or represent, human beings. (77-79)

These stories made a lasting impact on children’s minds. Influenced by the success of these fables, modern writers started featuring animals in their works too. Edward Hoagland, delineating the various animal fables that sprung up later, comments:

So we’ve had Aesop’s and medieval and modern fables about the grasshopper and the ant, the tiger and Little Black Sambo, the wolf and the three pigs, Br’er Rabbit and Br’er Bear, Goldilocks and her three bears, Pooh Bear, Babar and the rhinos, Walt Disney’s animals, and assorted humbler scary bats, fat hippos, funny frogs, and eager beavers. Children have a passion for clean,
universal definitions, and so it is that animals have gone with children's literature as Latin has with religion. Through them they first encountered death, birth, their own maternal feelings, the gap between beauty and cleverness, or speed and good intentions. The animal kingdom boasted the powerful lion, the mothering goose, the watchful owl, the tardy tortoise, Chicken Little, real-life dogs that treasure bones, and mink that grow posh pelts from eating crawfish and mussels. (232)

Works dealing with the theme of animals flourished and we have a host of writers like James Thurber, Walter De La Mare, Richard Adams and Ted Hughes who came up with animal stories, in order to dwell upon the relationship between non-human and human forms. For example, James Thurber's *Fables For Our Time* and *Further Fables For Our Time*, which have been structured on the fables of Aesop carry a moral at the end.

In a very interesting story, *The Human Being and the Dinosaur*, Thurber very skillfully presents an argument between man and a dinosaur. Man who comes face to face with a dinosaur boasts of his abilities declaring that he is "the artfully articulated architect of the future," whereas the dinosaur is an excellent example of Jehovah's *jejune juvenilia.*" Man will go on forever, but he will be one with the "mammoth and mastodon, for monstrosity is the behemoth of extinction," for the dinosaur is "all wrong in the crotch, and in the cranium, and in the cortex" (384). Indeed there is no end to man's vanity and arrogance.
Walter De La Mare’s *The Three Royal Monkeys*, a true romantic work, deals with romance and nature as the main theme. Written specially for children the author has used child psychology in a very effective manner. Mary Fernandes points out that this work is neither a criticism of life, nor an escape from life. It is an attempt to try and find meaning and beauty in life and to achieve this he takes us into a world of innocence and dreams. He makes us aware of this world, which we recognize to be not just different but more authentic:

In doing so he displays qualities that were typical of romantic poets. Like every romantic he therefore believed that childhood is a sublime and sacred thing and that the child of nature grows up in some rustic region, more or less uncorrupted by civilization. From the sylvan surroundings the child draws beauty, innocence, an instinctive moral sense and an intuitive insight into the heart of things. Wordsworth’s Lucy Poems are a good example. De La Mare’s monkeys are not really monkeys; they are like innocent little children, who live close to nature in the forest of Munza-Mulgar. These monkeys perhaps share the quality of Rousseau’s Noble Savage, for although they have royal blood and behave for the most part with dignity; they are still in a sense ‘savage’ for they are beasts. (73)

While De La Mare ponders on the innocent and beautiful aspects of nature, Richard Adams in his *The Plague Dogs* takes us into a world of brutality—highlighting man’s cruelty on his fellow being. The Star-dog in the sky, who created all the different kinds of animals and birds, creates an intelligent creature Man, in order to take care of all the other creatures he
created. Entrusting the animals to man’s care, the Star-dog gives him the power to control them, to kill them for his needs and to keep their numbers from increasing beyond a certain limit. But man abused his powers and for that he is punished by the Star-dog. What Adams is trying to point out is that, as civilization evolved, modern man lost his sense of oneness with the world of nature, whereas primitive man found in nature, “the manifestation of a will and mentality somehow comparable to his own” (Fernandes 191). The chain binding man and beast together as in earlier times, now no longer exists as man has lost his innocence.

Thus we see that the ancients as well as the modern writers have time and again reiterated the fact of man’s lost innocence, which led him to the wanton destruction of Nature. This very same feeling also prompted Gerald Durrell to take up cudgels against Man, attempting to achieve it through his writings. He was fighting for a cause whose principle tenet was that “all life was sacrosanct, that all living forms were of value, that the sanctity of the gift of life was paramount, irrespective of what human or religion decreed” (Botting 505).

Alarmed by the ever-increasing human population, Durrell had some comfort knowing that there were a few people who cared for the precious lives of animals:

As mankind increases year by year, and as he spreads farther over the globe burning and destroying, it is some small comfort to know that there are certain private individuals and some
institutions who consider that the work of trying to save and
giving sanctuary to these harried animals is of some importance.
It is important work for many reasons, but perhaps the best of
them is this: man, for all his genius, cannot create a species, nor
can he recreate one he has destroyed. There would be a dreadful
outrcy if anyone suggested obliterating, say, the Tower of
London, and quite rightly so; yet a unique and wonderful species
of animal which has taken hundreds of thousands of years to
develop to the stage we see today, can be snuffed out like a
candle without more than a handful of people raising a finger or a
voice in protest. So, until we consider animal life to be worthy of
the consideration and reverence we bestow upon old books and
pictures and historic monuments, there will always be the animal
refugee living a precarious life on the edge of extermination,
dependent for existence on the charity of a few human beings.
(Encounters 103)

Durrell’s mission was to create a sanctuary for such endangered species
of animals on the verge of extinction. He achieved his goal, when at last, he
was successful in creating the Jersey Zoo, which housed such rare species of
animals. But such animals everywhere needed care and attention, therefore he
trained several people from different parts of the world for this very special
purpose. He believed that “a zoo should be like an octopus with a small center,
but long, long tentacles stretching into many places” (qtd in Whitley,
“Unforgettable Gerald” 144).

Dr. Desmond Morris, author of The Naked Ape and The Human Zoo,
marvelling at Durrell’s efforts to fulfil his ambition says:
His most important contribution to zoology was in the field of animal conservation, and what became known as Durrell's Army – the people he trained from around the world to go back to their own countries and save animals for themselves. (qtd in Bosely)