CHAPTER – I

ENVIRONMENTAL WRITING IN AMERICAN LITERATURE – AN ECOCRITICAL AND ECOPSYCHOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Changing perceptions of nature in the American consciousness

- A brief history

Nature was ever present in American literature, even in its early records – the letters and reports sent by the early settlers to their mother lands about their encounter with the wilderness of an unexplored land. Yet these explorers of the New World cannot be considered as Americans in a strict sense of the term. They were transplanted Europeans, who approached wilderness with a preconception about nature. For most of them the land itself was just a physical and spiritual void, an unknown entity, which was to be conquered and civilized. The native Indians’ awe and respectful worship of their environment had little influence on these European explorers.

Two contrasting views of wilderness were prevalent among the early settlers. In some colonies, especially in New England, wild nature was seen as a symbol of savagery and temptation, an unholy, dark mystery, a challenge to reason. But in certain other colonies as in Virginia and Pennsylvania wilderness
represented a prospective garden that can be tamed and cultivated for future prosperity and progress of humanity. Thus the American Civilization bloomed on the wild lands of the New World, with a materialistic perception of nature as its focal point.

In the Jeffersonian era, the interest in wild nature took a slightly different direction. There was a genuine curiosity about the environment during this time, but it limited itself to taking an inventory of the entire American continent in order to discover resources of economic value. Jefferson’s emphasis on the development of a well organized agrarian society to add a rural character to American culture, showed his preference for a constructed landscape over the natural wild nature. The literature of the first half of the nineteenth century, inspired by British Romanticism, chose to celebrate nature, especially in poetry. William Cullen Bryant (1794 – 1878) was an early proponent of Romanticism in American literature. In Bryant’s poems, the poet’s observations of the beauty and power of American landscape are reinforced by meditations on the power of nature to transcend the physical in order to guide humanity to God. The portrayals of nature in his famous poems, ‘To a Waterfowl’, ‘Thanatopsis’ and ‘A Forest Hymn’, are characterized by a pervading tone of ethics.¹

In the latter half of nineteenth century, with the advent of industrialization and technological advancement, man’s relationship with nature began to change. But the increasing materialism of the age did not prevent a class of Americans from examining their relationship to the land around them. Once again nature became a subject for American art and literature. The landscape paintings of the Hudson
River School of American Painting indicated efforts of American society to harmonize agriculture and technology in its pastoral, rural towns. These painters were greatly influenced by writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882), the first genuine philosopher of America. Emerson’s *Nature*, published in 1836, highlighted his non-traditional attitude to nature and is hailed as the defining text of Transcendentalism. Emerson perceived nature as an intermediary between human experience and what prevails beyond nature.

Robert Kuhn and McGregor, in *A Wider View of the Universe – Henry Thoreau’s Study of Nature*, points out how Emerson “differentiated between his spiritual self (soul) and ‘all that is NOT ME’, which he labeled as NATURE.” For him nature was a proper setting that can help man seek the Over-Soul and hence, he insisted on a live experience of nature, a complete immersion in nature that will cause a loss of individuation and provide a profound, sanctifying religious experience:

“The woods and everything with in, existed, so far as Emerson was concerned, to serve as symbols for the higher unified world of which the human soul was a part. Each part and portion of the natural world represented this greater spiritual unity with equal perfection.”

Nature, for Emerson, was an evidence of God’s Providence for the new nation and his call for an original, close relation to nature was to ensure for humanity an original, direct relation to the divine. This anthropocentric concern prevented Emerson from developing a true concern for his environment as an expression of his ‘ecological unconscious’. Though he was aware of a kind of
interrelationship existing between man and nature, Emerson believed that nature was secondary to human intellect in the divine order.

Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862), the most original nature philosopher of America, seemed to have awakened the ‘ecological unconscious’ of America with his unique vision of the natural world. Though he was influenced by the Emersonian view of nature on the outset, a life spent in the woodland home made him realize that human beings do not deserve their traditional supremacy over all other creatures in this universe as they are component parts of a large and complex natural community. According to him, it was man’s delusion that he is the pinnacle of creation and hence separate from other creatures, that threw him out of harmony with the natural whole.

Robert Kuhn and McGregor trace the development of Thoreau’s vision of nature, which was an unusual insight in an age characterized by a presumptuous pride in the materialistic progress. The assumption that nature is limitless and it exists only for man was a source of confidence for the Americans. Thoreau did not share this pride and confidence as he found them unfounded. Yet he was not particularly interested in nature in the beginning. But his fortuitous encounter with nature during his retreat to the woods in order to hone his writing skills changed the direction of his life. Being inspired by Emerson and the principles of Transcendentalism, Thoreau initially sought to find a proper path to the universe of spirit so that he can make his own transcendental understanding heard in a world that is steeped in materialism. Gradually he started noticing the sights and sounds of
nature and nature became a living presence to him, which left an indelible impression on his mind. He found in nature a comrade to his own spirit.

The solitary walks in the wild left Thoreau enchanted to marvel at the majestic beauty and the sheer variety and complexity of nature. His efforts to study nature scientifically did not blind him from observing the complex system of interrelationship that existed between various species. Thoreau moulded his real life experience of the wild into a unique universal world-view with the aid of his understanding of Oriental religious literature and the history of Native Americans. His reading of several great works of Hinduism such as ‘Harivansa, Manu’s ‘Institutes of Hindu Law’ and the ‘Bhagavad Gita’ introduced him to certain profound theories on creation. McGregor records one view that greatly impressed Thoreau during this time:

“The words of Krishna to Arjun : ‘Know, O Chief of the race of Bharat, that everything that is produced in nature, whether animate or inanimate, is produced from the union of kshetra and kshetrajna, matter and spirit. He who beholdeth the Supreme Being alike in all things, whilst corrupting, itself uncorrupting; and conceiving that God in all things is the same, doth not of himself injure his own soul; goeth on a journey of immortality.’”

[“yavatsanāyate kinchitsatvāṃ sthavarajangamam
Kṣetrasya kṣetrajnāḥ samyogādvitiḥ bharatarashabh
Samam sarveshu bhuteshu thishanthamparameshwaram
Vinasyatvavinshyantham yah: pashyati sa pashyati.”]
This perception of nature, affirming one God’s permeating presence in everything in nature, struck an exceptional note in the western society as the prevailing European view of nature was based on the belief that nature was spiritually dead. A study of the history of Native Americans and their stories about creation also trained Thoreau to look at nature through a different angle. He was inspired by the Native Americans’ belief in the Universal Great Spirit that prevails in the universe and their perception of earth as their universal mother.

These two novel perceptions of nature seemed to have sowed the seeds of an ecological consciousness in Thoreau’s mind. The natural world appeared to him as a functioning whole, pervaded by the spirit of God. His Journal entries at this period throw light upon his realization that the earth was an organic entity embodying the spirit of God:

“The earth that I tread on is not a dead inert mass. It is a body – has a spirit – is organic – and fluid to the influence of its spirit – and to whatever particle of that spirit is in me.”

He noticed the unpredictable cyclic character of nature and that everything returns to its source for spiritual renewal. This universal world-view that Thoreau developed carried the rudiments of modern day ‘ecology’.

Yet what differentiated Thoreau from others was his realization that man, though a part of the natural whole, can cause enormous damage to nature. He did not use the term ‘environment’, but he could understand that it was man’s folly to separate himself from nature and to cause indiscriminate destruction to the earth:
“Henry noticed also that in attempting to separate themselves from nature, people diminish both themselves and the rest of the world . . . And the more people created artificial separation between themselves and nature – living in well-bounded towns and cities, where exposure to wild nature was carefully limited and controlled – the more sickly they become.”

One can find the incipience of ecopsychology in these words. His profound knowledge of the ecological principles made Thoreau realize the immediate need to mitigate the human folly through preservation and conservation. He advocated a harmony between the materialistic life in the cities and the sublime element of the wild. As a visionary, he knew that the fate of human civilization is determined by the man’s intelligence and sincerity in handling the wild. The concept of conservation-preservation is Thoreau’s legacy for the future America and he well deserves his position as the primogenitor of the green tradition of America.

Among the immediate successors of Thoreau, John Muir (1838 – 1914), the Scottish born American naturalist and conservationist, seems to be his most notable legatee. Muir is considered to be one of the patron saints of twentieth century American environmental activity. He was an advocate of preservation of wilderness in America. In 1889, with Robert Underwood Johnson, the editor of the Century, he initiated a campaign calling for legislation for the protection of the natural resources of the nation. His conservation campaigns resulted in the establishment of Federal forest reserves, Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks and eventually the National Park System. This nature preservationist’s writings, as ideas of an
ecological thinker, political spokesman and religious prophet, have profoundly influenced the American thinking and understanding of the natural world.

Muir considered the ‘wild’ as a gift of God and valued nature more for its spiritual and transcendental qualities. He perceived a dichotomy between civilization and nature and for him nature or wild was a superior teacher as it was a reflection of divinity. A great admirer of Emerson and Thoreau, Muir preferred experiencing nature to writing about it. Like Thoreau, he too made journal entries of his observations of nature, but he went beyond mere factual observation and described the sublimity of nature, giving an aesthetic and spiritual touch to the facts.8

Mary Austin (1868 – 1934) was another important American nature writer in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau. Her literary works provided a rare conglomeration of feminism, environmental ethics, social critique and interpretation of Native American culture. Her writings reflected the experiences of a life of public activism that she led for various causes, including environmental conservation and regional advocacy.9

Man became more disconnected from nature during the twentieth century due to the rapid urbanization and prevalence of utilitarian and consumerist culture. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, modern man became acutely and increasingly aware of the environmental issues, which had greatly influenced American politics and public policy. Pollution, urban sprawl, environmental degradation and climate changes, the loss of wild life and biodiversity – all these issues made ‘environment’ a major concern of 20th century American life. The
publication of Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* in 1948 was a milestone in American literary history that gave a proper direction to the twentieth century American environmental movement.

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), an American ecologist and environmentalist, was the founder of an ‘environmental ethics’ that emphasized the human responsibility towards the environment. His career in the Forest Service acquainted him with the prevalent practice of widespread killing of bears, wolves and mountain lions as they raised a threat to the livestock. He gradually realized how this ‘wilderness ethics’ that emphasizes the need for human dominance ignores the significance of predators in maintaining the balance of nature and hence, he advocated a biocentric ‘ecological ethics’ and wilderness conservation that exhorted the modern Americans not to harm the planet. In addition to this he objected to the rampant building of roads in wilderness areas and the increasing recreational demands related to this on public lands like the National Parks. His attempt was to convince the Americans that wildlife management is not for recreation but for restoring and maintaining diversity in the environment.¹⁰

The concept of wilderness acquired a new meaning when Leopold projected it as an arena for a healthy biotic community. According to him, conservation was a state of harmony between human beings and the land that they inhabit; by ‘land ethics’ he meant any attempt to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community which in turn can inculcate in man an intelligent humility in accepting his place in nature. Leopold knew that a code of ethics may not change the exploitation of natural resource, yet he thought it may emphasize the right of
nature to exist as it is at least in some areas. His hope was that man may learn to consider himself as just a member of universe and that this awareness may make him considerate about the land and its flora and fauna. Thus Leopold’s ethics of nature familiarized the principles of ecology to twentieth century American society. He criticized the role of culture in causing harm to the natural systems by creating a sense of sovereign ownership of land in human minds.

The publication of Rachael Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 is considered by many as the beginning of modern environmentalism. Greg Garrard, in his attempt to define the new critical idiom of ‘ecocriticism’ points out “the rhetorical strategies, the use of pastoral and apocalyptic imagery and the literary allusions with which Carson shapes her scientific material.”[^11] The *Silent Spring* produced a greater awareness of environmental issues and highlighted the impact of modern lifestyles on the environment.

To employ a historical perspective of the nature portrayals in American literature from its nascent state to trace how a ‘nature conscience’ has activated a ‘green conscience’ is a complex procedure which may invite criticism. This is because the writing about nature without recognizing the ‘culture-nature’ divide is nearly impossible. Though wild nature is often romanticized in American culture, it has simultaneously existed as an entity that has given a sense of identity to America; it has been a symbol of plenty which has inspired the nation to conquer nature. Hence many contemporary environmental writers have opposed the tendency to search for the roots of the ‘green consciousness in such an ambiguous tradition. For instance, Gary Snyder’s collection of poems, *No Nature* (1992), is a
refutation of American nature writing as he felt that the values emphasized in this tradition can only create an artificial distance between the word and the world.

It is difficult to define ‘nature writing’ as a genre. Usually when authors and ecocritics refer to this genre, they seem to have in mind “a non fiction prose essay describing a first person narrator’s efforts to establish an intensely felt emotional connection with the natural world.” Often the works considered as nature writing are bellettristic in nature. As Robert Finch, a noted practitioner of this kind of writing, points out “the natural pattern of nature writing is ‘excursion’- the venture out into something unknown and not familiar”, and “then coming back, and shaping that experience into something”

As ecocritic David W. Gilcrest points out the concept of nature as a subject of literature is

“. . . entwined in the currents and cross currents of English literary history. From the perspective of the early twenty first century the evolution of Romanticism typically marks the transformation of nature from its merely scenic or ornamental role in the neo-classical poetry . . . towards something like the subject or focus of much poetic endeavor.”

Once nature became accepted as a major subject of literary works, it gradually started gaining an environmental perspective – “the view that all beings, including humans, exist in complex relationship to their surroundings and are implicated in comprehensive physical and physiological processes.” It is essential to differentiate nature writing in which nature is just a point of aesthetic
appreciation from environmental texts. Gilchrest highlights the four criteria mentioned by Lawrence Buell in his famous work *The Environmental Imagination* to identify an environment text enable ecocritics make this distinction:

“1. The non-human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.

2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.

3. Human accountability to the environment is the part of the text’s ethical orientation.

4. Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant - - - is at least implicit in the text.”16

A critical study of the contemporary American writings on environment falls into the domain of ecocriticism, which is an emerging culture of environmental concern and the developing field ecological literary criticism that focuses on literature and environment. The term was coined by William Ruekert in 1978 to address issues related to landscape and environment that were never the concerns of literary groups. Greg Garrard in his work *Ecocriticism* quotes Cherryl Glotfelty’s definition of the new idiom of ‘ecocriticism’ which appeared in her ‘Introduction’ to *The Ecocritical Reader*,

“... the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism
brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.”\textsuperscript{17}

In another major work in the field, \textit{Ecocriticism Creating Self and Place in Environmental and American Indian Literatures}, ecritic Donelle Dreese mentions a few issues that are part of the usual concerns of ecocriticism: “how nature is represented, when it is represented, how the environmental crisis has influenced literature, and how concepts of the environment have evolved through the centuries.”\textsuperscript{18} This interdisciplinary field examines the vital link between literature and the physical environment, thus providing a richer understanding of the interplay of language and environment in literature. At the same time it analyses and understands the natural world, which itself is a complex and extraordinary text. A mere analysis of nature is not the aim of ecocriticism. Instead, it advocates a cultural change by inculcating a more biocentric world-view that will enable man to envision a global community that includes non-human and physical environment.

The ecritical mode of inquiry should have a broad cultural base in order for it not to end up as a mere branch of literary criticism. Garrard quotes the views of Richard Kerridge expressed in his work \textit{Writing the Environment} which emphasize the potential of ecocriticism to explore the cultural implications of any analysis of the literature about environment:

“The ecritic wants to track environmental ideas and representations wherever they appear, to see more clearly a debate which seems to be taking place, often part-concealed in a great many
cultural spaces. Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis.”

The unique vibrancy of environmental writing has made it a vast and swift growing field in the modern times. In this scenario, the contribution of ecocriticism to a better understanding and appreciation of the intimate links between word and world assumes a great significance as it promises new directions in the study of literature and environment. Ecocriticism has a major role to play in the contemporary society as it can fillip the global Environmental Movement. This new approach to literary studies can sensitize human beings to the need for an ecologically sustainable way of life by promoting ecological literacy in human society. Ecocriticism is an exhortation to read literary texts in a new light that enables man to appreciate the interactions between humans and their environment as portrayed in them. According to Greg Garrard,

“. . . environmental problems require analysis in cultural as well as in scientific terms, because they are the outcome of an interaction between ecological knowledge of nature and its cultural inflections. This will involve interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on literary and cultural theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology and environmental history as well as ecology.”

Responding to the radical changes that are occurring in the study of literature in the present age inevitably leads to an expanse in the literary boundaries. In this kind of an interdisciplinary exercise one branch of psychology that can be an
extremely useful means of analyzing the ‘green literature’ of contemporary American literature is ecopsychology. This is because the ideas and principles upheld by the ecopsychologists - a group of ecologists, psychologists and environmentalists - highlight the relationship between the internal and external psychology and hence can be used as an ecocritical means of inquiry into the relationship between human culture and the non-human natural world. A study of human mind in relation to its physical environment promotes a better understanding of a genre of literature that focuses on natural environment, wilderness preservation, man’s impact on the environment and his responsibility towards it.

Ecopsychology is a rapidly developing field of study which integrates two seemingly disparate branches of knowledge, ‘ecology’, the science of relationship between organisms and their environment and ‘psychology’, the study of human psyche. Ecopsychologists believe that there is an emotional bond between human beings and the natural environment out of which man has evolved. Ecopsychology is an attempt to foster this awareness of an intimate and profound symbiotic relationship with the environment. A deep rooted trust in this bond with the planet is considered essential as ecopsychologists believe that the health of the human beings and the health of the planet are interdependent.

Ecopsychology is not a novel or trendy branch of psychology. It just links the basic assumption of ecology, the interconnectedness and interdependence of all organisms, with the way the human mind works in order to turn man back to nature, his biological home, to make him feel nurtured. Nature is considered to be our extended body, an integral aspect of our ontology and the very ground of our being.
Man has realized the fact that he can not be physically disconnected from the life-sustaining environment. Yet he nurtures a psychological and spiritual alienation from nature. As ecopsychologist John Davis points out “the illusion of a separation of human and nature leads to suffering both for the environment and humans.”

The term ‘ecopsychology’ is coined by Theodore Roszak, Professor of History at California State University at Hayward, and is first used in his book, The Voice of Earth. Roszak believes that human psyche has first evolved in the arena of wild natural world. Hence he believes in the potential of ecopsychology as field capable enough to free ‘psychology’ from its narrow and closed environment to a broad external world of nature. The idea of this new scientific paradigm is expanded in Roszak’s 1995 anthology, Ecopsychology, co-edited by Mary Gomes and Allen Kanner. Roszak contends that ecopsychology is certainly not an innovation as a variety of other names such as ‘psychoecology’, ‘ecotherapy’, ‘environmental psychology’, ‘global therapy’, ‘shamanic counseling’, ‘sylvan therapy’ etc were used earlier to describe this field. Ecopsychology, in its search for ways to bond with nature, perceives a wide variety of ancient and modern nature-based cultures with approval. For instance, aboriginal pagan and Hindu cultures and shamanism are viewed without skepticism. These cultures have learned to entwine their self-identity with nature which enables them to lead a sustainable life within an environment.

Theodore Roszak, while tracing the evolution of psychology, considers Sigmund Freud’s theories as a baseline. When Freud explored the relationship of human psyche to nature in general and to the universe at large, he indulged in a lot
of abstractions about the ‘id’, the ‘ego’ and the ‘superego’. Eventually he was convinced that human-life and psyche were freakish developments in the universe. Nature was considered as a naturally lifeless arena in which life becomes a grim and meaningless struggle. This mechanistic view led to the assumption that in the absence of any significant human relationship to nature, human psyche can be studied and treated in isolation from the natural environment. From then, the western psychology’s approach to human mind is wholly within a narrow social context, a family context or perhaps a very personal context, but without any outreach to the non-human world that surrounds human life-space. The fact that man’s relationship with other species and ecosystem is evolutionary in nature and is based on man’s innate affinity to these is completely forgotten.

Freud’s disciple, Carl Jung, tried to find a more religious and spiritual interpretation of psyche. His concept of ‘collective unconscious’ “belongs to the cultural realm filled with high religious symbols and ethereal archetypes.” Yet the western psychiatric literature as a whole assumed that human beings exist in a condition of alienation from nature. Roszak quotes Freud once admitting human mind’s link with the cosmos, though with “a sadly candid stoicism”:

“Our present ego-feeling is only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive, indeed, an all-embracing feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world around it.”

Ecopsychologists accept this remark, sans the image of “shrunken residue”, as the remote origin of ecopsychology.
Roszak believes that at the deepest level of the human unconscious mind there is an ecological wisdom that constitutes the ‘ecological consciousness’. This exists deeper down than Freud’s ideas about sexuality or Jung’s ideas about religious archetypes. It is this ‘ecological unconscious’ that connects man with the flora and the fauna around him. Ecopsychology highlights this powerful, evocative vision of nature as a vital factor in the evolution of human psyche.

Ecological unconscious is the core of human psyche; its constituents to some degree represent the living record of cosmic evolution, tracing back to the distant initial conditions in the history of time. The realization that life and mind emerged during the process of evolution, along with other natural systems within the sequence of physical, biological, mental and cultural systems which together form the cosmos, helps the ecopsychologists to make a connection with the real experiences. The inherent sense of reciprocity that is a part of the ecological unconscious develops a sense of ethical responsibility towards fellow human beings and the planet. Hence, the reawakening the ecological unconscious is the major concern of ecopsychology.26

The ‘Gaia hypothesis’, developed by biochemist James Lovelock and microbiologist Lynn Marggeulis in mid 1970, propounded that the biota, oceans, atmosphere and soils are a self-regulating system that plays an active role in preserving the conditions that guarantee the survival of life on earth. Using this as theoretical foundation, ecopsychologists argue that the self-regulating biosphere ‘speaks’ through human consciousness, making its voices heard even within the framework of modern urban industrial culture.27
In order to draw upon the ecological unconscious as a resource for restoring human beings to environmental harmony Michael J. Cohen advocates activating a nature-connected thinking process:

“Reconnecting with nature consists of bringing into your consciousness a sensory natural way of thinking and relating to which you are born.”²⁸

Man is believed to have a multi-sensory nature which has a consciousness that he shares with the natural world. Reconnecting with nature enables him to be conscious of all senses and sensations and thereby reduces sensory omission.

Most of the ecopsychologists anchor their theories on the life styles and culture of nature-based people as they perceive the earth as a sacred place and lead a life of unmediated participation with the forces and cycles of the natural world. The wholeness of natural world moulds their social practices that spring from their healthy psyches. The psychological openness of the nature-based people is supposed to help them attain a sense of peace and satisfaction in their individual as well as social lives. This pure and natural state of mind, which is a symbol of an awakened ecological unconscious, is what Chellis Glendinning, a pioneer in the field of ecopsychology, terms as ‘primal matrix’. According to her, primal matrix is “the state of a healthy and wholly functioning psyche in full bodied participation with a healthy and wholly functioning earth.”; she considers it as a conglomerate of “a bodily experience, a perception of the world, or an attitude about being alive characterized by openness, attunement, wonder and willingness to say YES to life.”²⁹ This state of mind awakens man’s discerning power to differentiate between
good and bad, and care and abuse; it provides him the strength to say ‘no’ to various forms of oppression.

Chellis Glendinning lists three major dimensions of consciousness of primal matrix as:

a) A sense of belonging and security in the world, trust and faith. Chellis Glendinning considers this as the consciousness of the ‘I-in-We’, which the nature-based people inculcate in their children by the way they welcome the newborns and the way they carry the infants wherever they go in order to establish a symbiotic contact with nature. As evidence, she mentions Stanislav Grof’s concept of ‘perinatal matrix’, which posits the idea that the violence of birth destroys the sense of belongingness and connectedness that is innate in human beings.

b) The development of personal integrity and a sense of centeredness which are essential ingredients of a healthy psyche.

c) The ability to experience non-ordinary states of consciousness which can catalyze a psychological breakthrough or a spiritual awakening or a physical healing. This happens when there is a rupture in man’s ordinary perception which results in a rearrangement in his energy levels. Western science may reject such experiences of healing and revelation because of the absence of quantifiable evidence.\(^{30}\)

These three attributes together create a psychic dimension characterized by a sense of connectedness to the earth which engenders a feeling of security in human minds. Nature-based communities can lead an integrated life in close
communion with both the nature and the human community grown out of it as their psyche possess the attributes of belongingness and trust, a sense of centeredness and an ability to accept and understand the sacred revelations. Hence, Chellis Glendinning believes that the experience of primal matrix may make man realize that only a life “embedded in the rhythms of the earth”\(^{31}\) in the company of the flora and fauna can give man a sense of completeness.

Ecopsychologists generally consider the domestication of plants and animals and the creation of fences as the beginning of man’s severance from the natural world. This purposeful separation from the rest of the life in the natural world caused social and psychic dislocation. Chellis Glendinning considers this step in human progress as modern man’s “original trauma”:

“Because we are creatures who were born to live in vital participation with the natural world, the violation of this participation forms the basis of our ‘original trauma’; . . . Original trauma is the disorientation that we experience, however consciously or unconsciously, because we do not live in the natural world. It is the psychic displacement, the exile that is inherent in civilized life. It is our homelessness.”\(^{32}\)

The transition from hunter gatherer to the farmer ushered in population growth which made an increased domesticated production and technological advancement essential. Thus the steps in the much eulogized human progress seem to be the root cause for modern man’s dysfunctional relationship with the earth.
“The effect of this transition was more profound than any that had yet, or have since, taken place. . . . The human relationship to the natural world was gradually changed from one of respect for and participation in its elliptical wholeness to one of detachment, management control and finally domination. The social, cultural and ecological foundations that had previously served the development of a healthy primal matrix were undermined, and the human psyche came to develop and maintain itself in a state of chronic traumatic stress.”

Ecopsychologists share the belief that the alienation from the natural world seems to have truncated the development of modern man’s personality and his sense of personal definition. Chellis Glendinning describes the inevitable psychological conflicts that haunt man’s relations with nature as a consequence of this alienation:

“The newly domesticated adults were withdrawn and because of the demands of both livelihood and their weakened psychological state, incapable of nurturing their children’s need for love and support; at worst, they violated their children with disguised retaliation and displaced acts of violence – a historical cycle of humans mistreating humans ad nauseam.”

This is a picture of the post- hunter-gatherers’ primal matrix that exists in a chronic state of traumatic stress.
Ecopsychologist Paul Shepard while analyzing the link between human psychology and man’s increasing destructive environmental behavior in his essay ‘Nature and Madness’, points out the detrimental effects of agriculture on human psychology. According to Shepard, the ecocidal habits of man, more than being “a contemporary aberration of the industrial society”, “have deep roots in an ontogenetic crippling that can be traced to the invention of agriculture, an event which separated man from nature and created a false sense of separation of man from his habitat and so a crucial point in human history.”

Paul Shepard finds the roots of man’s ecologically destructive behavior in the upbringing of a child. Deficient infant – caretaker relationships and absence of adolescent transition-rites arrest the natural development, leading to the creation of childish adults. Suffering from this “epidemic of the psychopathic mutilation of ontogeny” modern human beings have become owners of the worlds flimsiest identity structure.

Theodore Roszak considers Bacon’s revolutionary concept of ‘knowledge’ as an instrument of human power over nature as the historical source of man’s alienation from nature because objectivity, which is the prime characteristic of scientific approach, happened to be an appeal for alienation. Roszak believes that the philosophy of Bacon was further developed by Galileo, Descartes and Newton and with the Newtonian synthesis; the complete objectification of nature was achieved:

“Henceforth, nature was seen to be spread out before the human observer like a value-neuter screen on which only the measurable
behavior of things might be registered. And behind the screen there
was understood to be . . . nothing, no will, no animating purpose, no
personality that might invite sensuous participation or answer the
human desire to penetrate and commune.”37

While exploring the roots of ecopsychology, Roszak feels that the oldest
healers, who were known as ‘witch doctors’, worked with in the context of
environmental reciprocity, though this was later perceived as sentimentality or
mysticism. He points out how the surviving primary cultures still possess an
animistic vision of the world. Judeo-Christian doctrine and scientific objectivity
censored this sensibility which caused an ecologically disastrous split, which Ralf
Metzner refers to as the “pathological alienation” between human consciousness
and the rest of the biosphere.38 This situation forces modern man to strike at nature
with hostility as he feels that nature has failed him. This hostile attitude to nature
which is created in human mind in the twentieth century with the progress of
civilization was hinted at in the words of Freud:

“Nature is eternally remote. She destroys us – coldly, cruelly and
reluctantly.”39

Chellis Glendinning considers the post-modern mind as “a rootless,
undigested perception of life whose hallmark is the absolute relativity of all human-
made experience – the very opposite of the primal matrix’s caring respect for the
nature-inspired differences among cultures and the penetrating sense of archetypal
patterning that binds them.” And hence according to her, this new world-view
frames the modern notion that all reality is “human constructed”, which shakes the
human mind to a sense of meaninglessness.\textsuperscript{40} Modern man experiences a sense of insecurity when he perceives the natural world as a ‘dead’ background for his cardinal human activities. As Roszak points out,

“We forget that nature is, quite simply, the universal continuum, ourselves inextricably included; it is that which mothered us in to existence, which will outsurvive us, and from which we have learned (if we still remember the lesson) our destiny. It is the mirror of our identity.”\textsuperscript{41}

Artificiality and a sense of dissociation are considered as the essential outcome of human progress and reconnecting with nature to return to the great web of life is the only panacea to satisfy the human psyche’s thirst for wholeness.

“Recovery from trauma requires the same keen-edged concentration that the fisherman brings to catching salmon with his hands . . . we need to be psychologically open, to attune ourselves to the flow of the world around us and to the flow of feelings and images within us.”\textsuperscript{42}

In the ecofeminist perspective, “despoiling the earth and subjugating women are intimately connected.”\textsuperscript{43} In modern societies boys are told from an earlier age that they must separate themselves from others in order to be respected and admired as men. The first alienation is the forceful separation from the mother, to identify with the father, who plays a distant role in daily affairs of the family. Thus an ability to disconnect and deny relationship is inculcated at a very early stage which
sows the seeds of a sense of alienation that dominate the adult life. Abetting this view, Roszak opines:

“There is no question but that the way the world shapes the mind of its male children lies somewhere close to the root of our environmental dilemma.”

Ecopsychology can be considered as an offshoot of the environmental movement. The American environmental movement originated as an upper class movement with a wilderness-centered ideology and later transformed into one of a more diverse membership and ideology inclusive of the urban environment. In his ‘Environmental Forward’ to Roszak’s book, Ecopsychology, Lester R. Brown assesses the achievements of this movement over the past forty years. Within this span of time the environmental movement has succeeded in projecting the health of the planet as a major social and political issue in every industrialized society. It is even considered as “the largest political cause ever undertaken by human race.”

In the past years environmentalists have been engaged in creating awareness about ecocide as an imminent catastrophe and organizing agitations. Leslie Gray, in her keynote address at the 1995 General Assembly of Unitarians in Spokane, Washington, opined that the ‘fear and guilt’ tactics usually employed by the environmentalists can only evoke responses like denial and despair. Human beings in the modern, technological society, even when they can understand the implications of the ecocatastrophe, have a tendency to distance themselves from the reality. Despite their knowledge about man’s impact on the environment, they do not attend to it as they do not connect their knowledge to other aspects of their total
experience. Ecopsychology recognizes the escalating pain and despair man feels at the destruction of the environment and finds him unable to put an end to it. According to Ralph Metzner, this is because the modern man is disassociated from his “ecological substratum” and hence he feels that his natural sense is disassociated from the greater realm of nature. It is here that ecopsychology, with its basic assumption of a “synergistic interplay between planetary and personal wellbeing” can play a significant role by adding a psychological dimension to the environmental movement.

Ecopsychologists in general feel that environmental movement has till recently ignored the “fragile psychological complexities of the public, whose hearts and minds it sought to win.” They firmly believe that ecopsychology can contribute to this cause as it can identify the irrational forces behind modern man’s ecologically destructive actions and persuade people to alter their behavior. According to Roszak, ecopsychology has

“... generated a new, legally actionable, environmentally based criterion for mental health and a new perception for environmental strategy. Environmentalists are no more grieving greenies to scare and shame the public, but allies of Earth in a noble and affirmative project... that of returning the troubled human soul to the harmony and joy that are the only solid basis for an environmentally sustainable standard of living.”
In this attempt the positive and affirmative motivations derived from a bond of love and loyalty to nature are developed as guidelines for man’s daily dealings with the environment.

Modern man living in an industrial and technological age leads a life of overconsumption and is haunted by negative impulses like greed, overindulgence, loneliness, an obsession to work, addiction and many other such dysfunctions. In an essay, ‘Beyond Gaia - An Exploration of Earth Consciousness and Gender’, Andrew Rothery points out that the dominant global philosophy of life prevalent in the contemporary world, which is characterized by a mechanistic view, is fast crumbling. Nature can not always be seen as a resource to be exploited and abused. The mounting distress of man and the volatile nature of human societies are directly related to the increasing destruction and the destabilization of the ecosystem. The only way out of the current situation is an immediate application of a new philosophy of life.51

An absolute separation from other beings and the surrounding nature is an illusion. The inevitable interactions and encounters with the surrounding nature instead of providing joy and meaning to life are now experienced as threats. At this juncture domination is seen as a way to hide dependence. In the urban-industrial societies this pattern is employed in the man-earth relationships too. To nurture an illusion of man’s autonomy, he tries to dominate the planet and control the natural process. If man wants to ameliorate an imminent ecocatastrophe, he must learn to acknowledge his dependency on nature gracefully and learn to live a life of reciprocity.
Ecopsychologist Clinebell identifies three types of actions in the realm of ecopsychology which form an ecological circle that promotes a healthy relationship between human beings and the earth. They are:

a) Inreach – the opening of self to be nurtured by nature.

b) Ureach – the energizing spiritual awareness that motivates and empowers us to engage us in outreach.

c) Outreach – When the human beings participate with others in action to save the environment.\textsuperscript{52}

It is these components of the ‘ecological circle’ that find expression in the modern environmental writings. In his essay, ‘Before Nature Writing: Discourses of Colonial American Natural History’, Michael P Branch describes how the modern environmental writing is different from the earlier nature writings which were mainly literary celebrations of nature:

“The current renaissance in nature writing studies has been inspired by a particular modern, ecological sensibility – one shaped in response to the accelerated degradation of American environment during the twentieth century.”\textsuperscript{53}

The contemporary American environmental literature is the inevitable consequence of the indelible impression created in the creative minds of American writers by social movements like the environmental movement. This genre of literature focuses on natural environment and the impact of the modern lifestyle on it, wilderness preservation and the social responsibilities of mankind to the environment as a response to the ecological catastrophe that looms large on the
horizon. Wilderness and landscape are powerful images in American environmental literature. The twentieth and twenty first century American environmental writers inspire greater awareness and appreciation of the natural world. The sense of interconnectedness that they feel urges them to voice the need to lead a life of harmony with nature to reestablish the ecological balance, by accepting the truth that man is an inseparable unit of nature. Ecopsychologists’ belief that the self-regulating biosphere ‘speaks’ through human consciousness, making its voice heard even within the framework of modern urban culture is an appropriate premise to analyze the literary works of contemporary American writers on environment.

America’s best environmental writers use highly evocative and lyrical prose to describe their excursions to the wild nature where they reflect on the meaning of nature. Their efforts to comprehend the language of the landscape have found an emerging culture of environmental concern.

Edward Paul Abbey (1927 – 1989), a pioneer of American west, like Thoreau has acknowledged the interrelatedness of all things in the universe. He too has left behind the urban cityscapes to escape into the wild in search of an American Eden. Hence, he is aptly considered the “Thoreau of American West”\textsuperscript{54}. In his non-fiction work \textit{Beyond the Wall} (1984) Abbey describes himself:

“Indeed I am a butterfly chaser, googly eyed bleeding heart and wild conservative.”\textsuperscript{55}

Born on January 29, 1927 in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Edward Abbey spent his childhood in the nearby town, Home. His Appalachian upbringing became a crucial factor in moulding the writer as a voice that spoke for wilderness. On his
first visit to Four Corners as a young man of seventeen, Abbey was drawn to the land of wilderness and the brilliantly red cliffs. After a short period of service in the military during the World War II, he returned to the West to explore its canyons, mesas, mountains and rivers. In 1947 he joined the University of New Mexico to pursue a degree in Philosophy. During the summers of 1956 and 1957, Abbey worked as a Seasonal Park Ranger in Arches National Monument, near Moab, Utah. The journal entries that he had made during this time became one of his most famous books, *Desert Solitaire: A Season in Wilderness* (1968), which he described as “A celebration of the beauty of living in a harsh and hostile land”, “… not a travel guide but an elegy.”

In spite of his refusal to be classified as a naturalist or environmentalist, Abbey is internationally acclaimed as a major environmental writer of twentieth century. He has authored twenty one books which are expressions of his scathing criticism of the modern industrial and technological culture and a genuine defense of the American West. The first two novels of Abbey, *Jonathan Troy* (1954) and *The Brave Cowboy* (1956) portray the basic anarchism in the nature of the traditional western hero, who is a loner and social misfit. His greatest creation, Cactus Ed, is considered as his own public persona. His magnum opus, *Desert Solitaire* and his comic novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) have earned Abbey his place in the Ecology Hall of Fame. *Desert Solitaire*, one of the most evocative descriptions of red-rock country, is considered as a classic of environmental literature that combines natural writing with the author’s philosophy of life and his political, social and spiritual views. Away from the destructive
effects of the modern urban society, a life in the midst of the harsh desert wilderness activates the ecological consciousness of Abbey which enables him to feel a sense of companionship with the flora and fauna of the desert. He pities the state of man, the only being on earth who has cut his umbilical cord with earth:

“Of all featherless beasts, only man, chased by his self-imposed slavery to the clock, denies the elemental fire and proceeds as best as he can about his business, suffering quietly, martyr to his madness. Much to learn.”

Along with this portrayal of man’s alienated self, Abbey’s Desert Solitaire is significant for his criticism of the cankerous growth of industrialization and industrial tourism which have sounded the death-knell for wilderness.

The Monkey Wrench Gang is a novel about four environmental activists - George Washington Hayduke, Doc Davis, Seldom Seen Smith and Bonnie Abbzug –whose crusade against ‘development’ of wilderness areas inspired many radical environmental groups and set forth a movement called ‘Earth First!’ Earth itself is the major character of the novel and it moulds the characters who share “a profound distrust of blind technology and a healthy hatred for the corporate interests whose lust for profit threatens the survival of the American Wilderness.” These eco-raiders’ declaration of war against builders of highways, dams and railways and strip miners is an “outreach”, the ecopsychological concept that refers to the attempts of human beings to participate with the rest of humanity in order to save the environment.
Like *Desert Solitaire*, Journey Back Home* (1977) is Abbey’s personal history - the story of his birth and growth as a human being, his urge to see his self as a part of this universe in order to escape his identity as a displaced person. The book begins with a flashback - Abbey’s three months maiden journey through American West as a seventeen years old boy which introduced him to the mysteries of nature. The second chapter, ‘The Great American Desert’, is a close parallel of *Desert Solitaire*. The rest of the book contains descriptions of Abbey’s excursions to various places- Big Bend National Park, Numa Ridge, Snow Canyon, Telluride Mountains, Big Woods, and Death Valley. The reader is invited to be the author’s co-traveler and to share his innate love for nature. Abbey blatantly attacks the strip miners for destroying the rangeland, erecting monstrous skeletal towers of steel and coal-powered plants over American southwest, the huge monsters invading the south west. He reinforces his fundamental right to breathe the untainted air of his planet and to experience its solitude. Abbey’s view of the destruction of the planet as an act of sick humanity is an ecopsychological perception.

*Beyond the Wall* is another work that portrays the vast deserts of America, which symbolize the ultimate freedom. Abbey portrays himself as a foot soldier who is passionately in love with the desert wilderness, seeking a chance to have an “intimate communion with the ground, this here ontological gravel, dirt, stone, sand, weeds, birdshit and coyote scat.” As a spokesperson of the voiceless in nature, Abbey posits preservation of the wild as an ethical responsibility of human beings, a responsibility that they have forgotten:
“Human progress and well-being are most important than preservation of the obsolete and uneconomic species, they say. False, I say. The defense of the wild life is a moral issue. All beings are created equal, I say. All are endowed by their creator (call that God or call it evolution) with some inalienable rights.”  

Abbey echoes the ecopsychological view that the sanity of the human mind depends on the health of the planet:

“Contempt for natural world implies contempt for human life. The domination of nature leads to the domination of human nature.”  

A planned trip down the Colorado River fills Abbey’s mind with a deep sense of loss when he sees the dam over the river choking Lake Powel and Great Canyon with sewage. Abbey’s universal vision of the planet as an evergreen tree is aimed at giving a proper mooring for the modern man who is drifting off in a wrong direction:

“The planet is bigger than we ever imagined. . . And we puny human creatures with our many tools and toys and fears and hopes make only one small leaf on the great efflorescing tree of life.”

Abbey’s semi-autobiographical novel, The Fool’s Progress: an honest Novel was published in 1989, just before his death. The protagonist, Henry Holyoak Lightcap, is an anti hero who is often considered as the author’s alter ego. When the story begins he is portrayed as shattered and lonely man in an empty house in Tucson, Arizona, after his third wife has deserted him. While seeking a recovery Henry realizes his alienation from his roots in nature; this realization makes him
take up an odyssey to his family farm in the Appalachian Mountains in Virginia. Before leaving the empty house in Arizona Henry shoots his refrigerator which seems to him as a symbol of deadly urban culture. The picaresque novel depicts Henry’s journey through the beautiful but ruined landscape of Tucson to West Virginia. Henry’s experiences and observations provide Abbey an opportunity to speak in defense of wilderness as the source of ultimate freedom and revolt against what the modern industrial society’s greed has done to the country he loves. Images of the dying land are seen through the eyes of a sick man and a dying dog in order to emphasize the novelist’s conviction that perils to the land are lethal to human spirit too. Henry Lightcap’s journey home is the search for a healthy land as he believes that only such a place can ensure physical and psychological health to its inhabitants. Meanwhile he “mourns for an America that has lost its way; its land destroyed by rapacious development, its language debased by jargon, and its character dominated by loveless materialism.”

Edward Abbey’s two novels – *The Fools Progress: an honest novel* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and his non-fiction works – *Desert Solitaire, Journey Home: Some Words in Defense of the American West* and *Beyond the Wall: Essays from Outside* – are taken up for analysis in this research work.

Gary Snyder, the Pulitzer Prize winning American poet, is a well-known environmental activist and a passionate environmental poet of the post-modern era. He deals with the themes of nature and love in a kind of poetry that constantly merges the physical life of beings with the inward life of spirit. The vision that
emerges in his works has its source in the cultural wisdom of American lore as well as in Zen Buddhism.

Born in San Francisco and brought up in Puget Sound in Washington, Gary Snyder’s earlier experiences in the wild natural setting of Pacific Northwest have engendered in him a deep love for nature. He graduated from Reed College, Portland, Oregon, with a B.A degree in Literature and Anthropology. After completing his post-graduate studies in Linguistics and Asian Languages from Indiana University and University of California- Berkeley, Snyder worked as a mountain fire lookout, forest ranger, logger and a sea man. These experiences find expression in his early writing as an attempt to maintain a sort of balance between physical labor and intellectual pursuits. He played a significant role, along with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, in the Beat Generation of 1950s. During this period, along with Jack Spicer, Robert Duncan and Robin Blaser, Snyder was identified as a poet of San Francisco Renaissance. In 1956 he left for Japan where he spent twelve years studying Zen Buddhism and researching and translating Zen texts. In the company of Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky Snyder traveled through India. In 1970 he returned to the United States, where he established a farmstead on the San Juan Ridge in the Nevada foothills of North California. Snyder joined the University of California, Davis, as a professor in 1986 training a new generation of writers. He is now the professor emeritus of English.

Snyder is considered as one of the founders of the deep ecology movement, a radical form of environmentalism that has influenced many activists such as ‘Friends of Earth’, ‘Earth First!’ and ‘Sea Shepherd’. Often considered as the ‘Poet
Laureate of deep ecology[^64] Snyder upheld a strong belief in the intrinsic value of all forms of life. His Pulitzer Prize winning work, *Turtle Island* (1974), is an expression of this conviction. Snyder’s works generally express his attempts to recreate an organic relationship with a natural bioregion. His philosophical and spiritual beliefs and views have formed the foundation for his social and political activities at the local and national level. Snyder was appointed to the California Arts Council in 1974 and the eight years when he served as an active member of this organization was the most productive period of the council.

Two distinctive awards were conferred on Snyder in 1997 – the Bollinger Prize for Poetry and the John Hay Award for Nature Writing- acknowledging his literary standing and concern for environment. U.S Poet Laureate, Robert Haas, introduced him once as

“… a friend, colleague and a major literary figure of twentieth century. A major poet and ethical voice in the best honored traditions of American Thoreau and the Japanese Haiku-master, Dogen. His work makes us far more alive and attentive; it reaches into our deepest and best resources, heartens us to the challenges and promises of restoration to a natural place from which many of us now feel ourselves estranged.”[^65]

Snyder has published sixteen books of poetry and prose in which he blends his precise observations of physical reality and nature with the insight derived from the study of Zen Buddhism. His works have provided him the medium to lend a voice to the voiceless of the nature. His knowledge of the Oriental and American
Indian cultures has made him a staunch supporter of a subculture that offers a harmonious relationship with nature.

Gary Snyder’s first volume of poetry, *Riprap*, published in 1959, celebrates the work of hand and is based on his experience in Yosemite as a trail crew laborer laying ‘riprap’, a kind of trail for horses. Nature becomes the workplace in these poems. The opening poem, ‘Mid August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout’ defines Snyder’s ecological poetics which is exemplified in his later writings. The poet’s reading of the land enables him to realize his position on earth and his relationship to the land. The poems of everyday working life in *Riprap* were later aligned with the translations of the ‘Cold Mountain Poems’ of 8th century Chinese recluse, Han Shan and was published in 1969 as *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems*.

The poems in *Myths & Texts* (1960), like those in *Riprap*, capture Snyder’s experiences during his travels and his working in the natural world. The poems in the first section, ‘Logging’, portray the disjunction between appearance and reality by blending incidents from the poet’s experiences in the lumber camps of Pacific Northwest with his early interest in the Eastern culture and philosophy. Trees assume a mythical significance and hence the poet’s participation in the ecocidal activity of logging engenders a sense of guilt in him and this becomes the dominant tone of the poems in this section. Yet towards the end of the section the sense of guilt is overcome by a ray of hope when the poet shows the possibility of looking at logging as an activity of clearing ground for new growth. The poems in the second section, ‘Hunting’, represent the communion of all life forms and highlight man’s ability to participate in the life of the ecosystem. Hunting is seen as an act of
‘outreach’ that instills humility in man when the hunter awakens a primitive consciousness in him. ‘Burning’, the third section, begins with a shaman’s song and moves on to the depictions of evil and destruction. Poetic art is seen as the poet’s effort to preserve the eroding values; principles of Buddhism and American lore empower the poet in this effort.

*The Back Country* (1968), with its wilderness setting, belongs to the literary genre ‘Mountain poetry’. The collection of poems is an affirmation of Snyder’s engagement with the Eastern culture and philosophy. The work consists of four sections—‘Far West’, ‘Far East’, ‘Kali’ and ‘Back’. Translation of Miyazawa Kenji’s Japanese poems concludes *The Back Country*. *The Earth House Hold* (1969) is a collection of poems and essays that clearly pronounces the poet’s ecological perspective. Snyder expresses his indebtedness to Zen Buddhism for his vision of an integrated, universal culture. In the essay, ‘Buddhism and the Coming Revolution’, he points out:

“Avatamsaka (Kegon) Buddhist philosophy sees the world as a vast interrelated network in which all objects and creatures are necessary and illuminated. From one standpoint, governments, wars or all that we consider “evil” are uncompromisingly contained in the totalistic realm. The hawk, the swoop and the hare are one. From the “human” standpoint we can not live in those terms unless all beings see it with the same enlightened eye.”

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For Snyder poetry is an ecological survival technique and he viewed poets, musicians, nomadic engineers and scholars as visionaries with the power to awaken the ecological consciousness of human beings:

“Poets, as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive.”

In *The Turtle Island* (1974), which is titled after the Native American name for the North American continent, Snyder swears his allegiance to a bioregion in his effort to create a sense of loyalty to nature in human minds. The poet feels that being rooted to a place is the only way to seek self in nature. *Axe Handles*, Snyder’s 1983 collection of poems, portrays the domestic environment and the poet meditates on the significance of family relationships in forming a healthy culture. Snyder’s views on society, culture and poetry are collected in many other works such as *The Old Ways* (1997), *The Real Work* (1980), *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), *A Place in Space* (1995) and *The Gary Snyder Reader* (1999). The long poem, *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, modeled on a Chinese sideways scroll painting, portrays human alienation from the physical environment and even from his own community. At same time, Snyder shows how human mind can connect to its environment by readjusting its perceptions. To sum up, as Bob Steuding observes:

“Snyder’s poetry truly influences one who reads him thoroughly to

“see” in a startlingly new way. Presenting the vision of an integrated
and unified world, the heroic poetic effort cannot but help to create a much needed change of consciousness."68

Gary Snyder’s *Riprap and Cold Mountain Poems, Myths & Texts, Earth House Hold, Left out in Rain, The Back Country, Turtle Island, Axe Handles, The Practice of the Wild* and *Life is a Miracle: An Essay Against Modern Superstition* are analyzed as a part of the present study.

Wendell Berry (born 1934), the Kentucky writer, farmer, cultural critic and social activist, is known for his love of the land and respect for the traditional values. His poems, essays, novels and short stories have earned for him an important place in the ‘green’ literary tradition of America, among Thoreau, Emerson, Gary Snyder and Edward Abbey. Berry laments the depredations of an industrial economy and the consequent degradation of the environment. His works extol the virtues of agrarian life as he believes that as a mode of living it can instill a sense of responsibility and humility in human mind, making man devoted to the land he resides. Berry believes in the importance of family and community as signs of a healthy culture which alone can ensure a sane humanity on a healthy planet. His views as a pacifist are also significant in the contemporary world. Two of his latest books, *The Way of Ignorance* (2005) and *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Christ’s Teachings of Love, Compassion and Forgiveness* (2005) are collections of his essays and speeches which express his faith in peace and justice. He emphasizes his advocacy of these principles with citations from the Gospels of King James version of the Bible.
Wendell Berry was born on August 5, 1934 in Henry County, Kentucky as the son of John Berry who was a lawyer and tobacco farmer. He graduated from the University of Kentucky with a B.A degree in Literature in 1956 and in 1957 he received his M.A degree. From 1957 to 1959 Berry taught at Georgetown College. When he received a Wallace Stegner Fellowship in 1958, he attended Stanford University creative writing program. A Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship enabled him to visit Italy and France in 1961. From 1962 to 1964, Berry worked as a professor of English at New York University’s University College. For the next eight years he taught creative writing at the University of Kentucky. In the 1980s he served as an editor of Rodale Press Publications but returned to teaching Literature in University of Kentucky. In 1964 he and his wife, Tania, purchased Lane’s Landing farm, five miles from his birth place in Northern Kentucky and decided to remain a farmer.

Berry is a prolific writer with forty volumes of poetry, novels, essays and short stories to his claim. The lyrical poems gained him recognition and marked his entry in to the literary world. The authentic poetry that Berry writes reflects his experiences in life and is resonant with his ideas about land, culture, society, ethics, economy etc. In his ‘Introduction’ to Berry’s *The Landscape of Harmony* (1987) Michael Hamburger aptly opines:

“... in everything he writes he draws on the totality of his experience, the totality of his vision... A central cohesion and wholeness is what his writing is about...”69
The Broken Ground (1964) is Berry’s first published collection of poetry and most of his fundamental concerns like cycle of birth and death and responsiveness to land are developed in these poems. The Collected Poems 1957 – 1982 contains nearly two hundred poems the poet’s first twenty five years of work. There are poems from The Broken Ground, Openings, Findings, Farming: A Handbook, The Country of Marriage, Clearing, A Part and The Wheel. Man’s alienation from nature and the resultant loneliness that he feels and the poet’s belief in the strong community ties and traditional values are the central themes of many of these poems. ‘The Mad Farmer’ is a representation of the poet’s concept of a sane man; a symbol of everything that is natural. He is portrayed as full of joy and celebration as he has sworn his allegiance to nature.

Wendell Berry’s fiction consists of eight novels and thirty two short stories, eleven of which are included in That Distant Land (2004). In his fiction, the author has created an imaginary town, ‘Port William’, and his stories explore the life in this small Kentucky town in an idealized, pastoral and nostalgic mode. The first novel about the community of Port William was published in 1960. While portraying characters of his various novels and short stories, Berry follows their family lineage which creates a Port William membership. Most of these characters are good, neighborly people like Mat Feltner, Athey, Burley Coulter, Elton Penn and Wheeler Catlett, who live in a faithful relation to each other and to the land. The major themes of Berry’s fiction are trust, fidelity and responsibility in the three important institutions of human society- marriage, community and land. The Port
William fiction also traces the changes in the agrarian practices of America, which caused the disappearance of the traditional agrarian society.

Berry’s novel, *Jaber Crow* (2000) depicts the life of local community of Port William as seen by its barber, Jaber Crow. As an expression of the novelist’s ecological unconscious, the story reflects Berry’s awareness of the sacredness of man’s relation to nature and the need to maintain an intimate connection with the flora and fauna. Berry’s *Three Short Novels* include *Nathan Coulter, Remembering* and *A World Lost*. These short novels too delineate the denizens of Port William and highlight the importance of past in the lives of human beings. Other usual themes like man’s interconnectedness with nature and the virtues of small-scale farming are also woven into the story line.

The non-fiction works of Berry reflect the values that the author cherishes as fundamental principles of life. They are mainly meditations on the essential characteristics of a healthy and sane culture in which man can understand his real place among the rest of the creation. Berry observes how the unbridled development, fuelled by the modern industrial and technological society, is lethal to human culture, reducing it to a mere institution to provide only ‘cures’ and not good health to humanity. He suggests that what modern man has to learn is to scale down his desire for more development and to accept a need-based development program. According to him, the ‘agriscience’ or ‘agribusiness’ that has replaced ‘agriculture’ is an example for man’s greed which needs to be curbed as blind development has already sounded the death-knell for human culture.
The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture (1986) is a classic among Wendell Berry’s works where a healthy farming is portrayed as a symbol of a sane and healthy culture. Farming is a spiritual practice for Berry. He believes that the dualisms that exist in the modern society – culture and nature, work and life, family and land – are creations of a mechanistic and profit-oriented economy and these schisms can be bridged only if the traditional agrarian life is revived in its cultural context.

Wendell Berry’s Collected Poems 1957 – 1982, two novels Jaber Crow and A World Lost and the non-fiction works The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture and Life is a Miracle are studied in order to explore the ecospsychological aspects in his writings.

‘The End of Nature’ (1989) written by another well-known American environmentalist and author is another work that is selected for study under this research work. William Ernest Bill McKibben (born 1960) has written extensively about nature and the human culture’s impact on it. Apart from the fifteen books that he has written about the impending ecocrisis and it signs like global warming, acid rains etc., McKibben has organized some major environmental action groups and protests in America. As the founder of a climate campaign, ‘350.org’, he organized 15,000 rallies in 180 countries since 2009. Another major environmental activity that his 350.org coordinated a planet-scale art project. Recognizing his contribution to the cause of environment, Time magazine described him as “the world’s best green journalist” and in 2010, the Boston Globe considered him “the nation’s leading environmentalist.”70
McKibben grew up in suburban Lexington, Massachusetts. During his undergraduate days in Harvard University he was the president of Harvard Crimson newspaper in the college. After graduation he became the staff writer for The New Yorker and contributed much to the ‘Talk of the Town’ column from 1982 to 1987. McKibben’s apocalyptic work, The End of the Nature, laments the physical and spiritual effects of human culture’s incursions into nature like global warming. Ecocritic, David Mazel, in his essay, “‘A beautiful and thrilling specimen” George Catlin, the Death of Wilderness and the Birth of the National subject’, considers The End of Nature as “…one of the most thoughtful, accessible and influential of the recent exegeses on the problematic of nature.” 71 According to Mazel, for McKibben nature is a place to escape in order to forget “the omnipresence of the cultural ubiquity of our footprints.” 72 McKibben’s argument in this work is that the anthropogenic climate changes have caused the end of nature. Nature, in its true sense, has ceased to exist, though we still live on the planet and experience the sunlight, rain and the winds. The life on earth is no longer natural.

The second book of McKibben, The Age of Missing Information (1992), is based on the author’s study of the ways in which television has changed modern man’s mode of experiencing the world around him. He thinks that humanity’s pride in having ushered in an age of information revolution is ironic:

“We believe that we live in the “age of information”, that there has been an information “explosion”, an information “revolution”. While in a certain narrow sense this is the case, in many important ways just the opposite is true. We also live at a moment of deep
ignorance, when the vital knowledge that humans have always
possessed about who we are and where we live seem beyond our
reach. An unenlightenment. An age of missing information.”

In the books that were published subsequently – *Hope, Human and Wild,
The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job and the Scale of Creation, May be One,
Enough*, and *Wandering Home* – McKibben also expresses his concern for the
environment and deals with the dangers of population growth and scientific
advancements like genetic engineering or with the art of living lightly on earth etc.
A critical analysis of the modern economy appeared in the book, *Deep Economy:
the Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future* (2007). *The Bill McKibben
Reader*, published in 2008 is a collection of forty four essays written over twenty
dfive years for various public causes. Apart from these books McKibben contributes
to various magazines including *The New York Times, Harper’s Orion Magazine,
Atlantic Monthly, Mother Jones, The New York Review of Books, Outside* and
*Rolling Stone.*

McKibben is conferred with many awards and fellowships for his
contribution to the literary world as well as to the environment. He was awarded the
Guggenheim and Lyndhurst Fellowships. In 2000, he won the Lannan Prize for
non-fiction.74

Annie Dillard (born 1945), a naturalist and mystic, is often considered a
successor of Thoreau. Though she defies the label of an environmental writer,
Dillard is a close observer of the complex web of life and she appreciates the
uniqueness of every aspect of it. Her excursions into nature and her acute power of
observation enable her to explore the mysteries of nature and experience intense moments of awareness. Environmental concerns of contemporary world are not explicit in her works. Her first non-fiction work, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1975. After that she tried her skill in a variety of forms—novels, essays, poetry, literary criticism and a memoir.

Annie Dillard (Meta Ann Doak) was born in 1945 in Pittsburg. *An American Childhood*, published in 1987, describes her family and her intellectual interests during the years of growing up. She studied Literature and creative writing for her undergraduate course in Hollins College in Roanoke, Virginia. In 1968, she earned her M.A degree in English. Her thesis for the post-graduate program was about Walden Pond as a central image in Thoreau’s narrative movement. She published many poems and short stories during the years after her graduation.

Annie Dillard’s first volume of poetry, *Tickets for a Pray Wheel* was published in 1974. In the same year appeared the Pulitzer Prize winning non-fiction narrative, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* which was the author’s intense perusal of the universe. Robert Mcfarlane in his article, “An Impish Spirit”, describes the background of this wonderful book:

“In 1971, after a near-fatal attack of pneumonia, Annie Dillard moved to Tinker Creek, a valley in the Blue Mountains of Virginia. She lived alone there for four seasons, in a house “clamped to the side” of the creek, “facing”, as she puts it, “the stream of light pouring down”. A year into her time at Tinker Creek, Dillard began
to keep a diary, a “meteorological journal of the mind”, in Thoreau’s wonderful phrase.”

This journal, which ran to over twenty volumes, later transformed into her magnum opus, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. Dillard’s wanderings in and around the valley, with its clouds, fences, river, trees, bull frogs, giant water bug, red-tailed hawks provide her intense moments of sensual experience, awakening her consciousness. Filled with wonder, she opens up to the landscape and voluntarily yields to its beauty, mystery, violence and death. This highly evocative experience enables her to realize the self’s alienation from nature and to restore it by awakening a kinship with all the other parts and processes in nature. Unabashedly she admits her perception of spirit in all the created things.

Annie Dillard’s way of experiencing nature exemplifies the belief of the ecopsychologists that the direct, unmediated and nonverbal experiences of nature are therapeutic for the individual and essential if the person is committed to living in harmony with nature. Yet Dillard is not concerned about the therapeutic aspect of the nature experience; her efforts to verbalize her experiences in nature seem to be an attempt to get deeper into her own consciousness, which is awakened by the nature-experiences.

Holy the Firm (1977) is based on her reflections on life and death, during her stay in an island near Bellingham. Living by Fiction and a collection of essays, Teaching a Stone to Talk, were published in 1982. Dillard’s experiences as a member of a delegation of six American writers and publishers from United States to China formed Encounters With Chinese Writers (1984). The Writing Life (1989)
is a description of her exploration of another unexplored territory. Using metaphors, stories and vivid imagery, Dillard communicates the joys and struggles of the writing life. The author’s practical experience of writing for a span of thirty years has provided her a deep insight which makes the book a rich experience. *The Living* (1993) is a novel about the pioneer generation in the Puget Sound in the nineteenth century. Spanning over a period of thirty eight years, it focuses on the lives of these men, the opening of the Pacific Northwest, the `settlement in the enormous forests, the distinctiveness of the region, the splendid landscape and the brave people who started a life there. The novel does not idealize the agrarian way of life but symbolizes the spirit of freedom, adventure and optimism of America. There is a true picture of the modern economy too as an economy that flourishes at times and then collapses at an unexpected time when man’s greed exceeds the limit.

*Morning Like This: Found Poems*, which was published in 1995 as the title suggests is a collection of poems that Dillard has gathered from the old books. *For the Time Being* (1999) is a description in highly poetic prose of the strange contradiction between human dreams and desires and the reality as perceived through the five senses. The delicately artful descriptions of deformed children are interwoven with horrendous pictures of human cruelty such as the live flensing that Rabbi Akiva suffered at the hands of Romans or the first Chinese emperor’s habit of burying Confucian scholars up to their necks so that his executioners could use their heads to practice their chip shots. Dillard portrays the strong faith and poetic intelligence of the Jesuit paleontologist and writer Teilhard de Chardin, the mystical delight of Baal Shem Tov and the grace of the obstetrics nurse Pat Eisherg with a
conviction that these are all reflections of the same spirit. For the Time Being presents meditations around evocative and recurring headings – Birth, Sand, China, Clouds, Numbers, Israel, Encounters, Thinker, Evil and Now. While presenting the historical context of human life on the planet by mingling the past and the present Annie Dillard expresses her belief that God is complete only in his creation and that God responds through His creation. The complex pictures of the world that the author presents imply the extent human devaluation. The Maytree (2007), which was selected for the Pen/ Faulkner Award 2008, is a short but poignant novel portraying a couples’ life of love in the post-WWII.

The fact that Dillard’s books have been translated into many languages indicates her position and popularity in the literary world. If Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is one of the hundred best non-fiction books, The Living is considered as one of the best hundred Western novels of the Century. Among the works of Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, For the Time Being, The Writing Life and The Living are analyzed under this research work.

A historical perspective of the attempts of the writers to depict nature proves that nature consciousness is innate in man. This interdisciplinary study tries to analyze the salient features of the depiction of this consciousness and how they are related to the various concepts of ecopsychology. In the present study an attempt is made to identify certain common concerns and views of two diverse fields of ecocriticism and ecopsychology. A thorough study of some relevant works of five major contemporary American writers – Edward Abbey, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry, McKibben and Annie Dillard - is envisaged to highlight how the portrayal of
their nature experiences correlates with the common perspectives of ecopsychologists and ecocritics.
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