

“Reimagining Ecology: An Eco-Critical Study of Indian English Poetry after 2000”

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Abstract

Eco-criticism has gained critical prominence in literary studies as a response to escalating environmental crises and the need to reassess human relationships with the natural world, and Indian English poetry after 2000 reflects this shift through heightened ecological awareness rooted in local and global concerns such as climate change, urban expansion, environmental degradation, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. This study aims to examine how contemporary Indian English poets articulate the concept of human–nature interdependence using eco-critical perspectives. Adopting a qualitative literary methodology, the research employs close reading and thematic analysis of select poems published after 2000, drawing on eco-critical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell. The analysis reveals that recent Indian English poetry moves beyond idealised or romantic portrayals of nature to foreground ecological interconnectedness, environmental vulnerability, and ethical responsibility, often representing nature as an active and responsive presence rather than a passive backdrop to human activity. The poems critically interrogate anthropocentric attitudes and emphasise sustainable coexistence between humans and the environment. The study is significant as it contributes to contemporary eco-critical discourse in Indian English literature by demonstrating how poetry functions as an effective medium for environmental reflection and advocacy, thereby encouraging greater ecological consciousness and opening avenues for interdisciplinary research linking literature, ecology, and cultural studies.

Keywords: Eco-criticism; Indian English poetry; Human–nature interdependence; Ecological consciousness; Environmental ethics; Post-2000 literature; Anthropocentrism

Introduction:

Eco-criticism has emerged as a vital interdisciplinary approach within literary studies, responding to growing global concerns about environmental degradation, climate change, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Originating in the late twentieth century, eco-criticism examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, foregrounding how literary texts reflect, question, and reshape human attitudes toward nature. As scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell have argued, literature plays a crucial role in cultivating ecological consciousness by challenging anthropocentric worldviews and emphasising the interconnectedness of all life forms. In recent decades, eco-criticism has expanded beyond Western literary traditions to engage with postcolonial, indigenous, and regional literatures, making it particularly relevant to the diverse cultural and ecological contexts of India.

Indian poetry, with its long tradition of engaging with nature—from classical bhakti and folk poetry to modern and contemporary writings—offers fertile ground for eco-critical inquiry. Indian English poetry after 2000, in particular, reflects heightened ecological awareness shaped by rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, climate vulnerability, and socio-environmental conflicts. Contemporary poets increasingly address issues such as environmental displacement, loss of biodiversity, polluted landscapes, and fractured human–nature relationships, often blending local ecological experiences with global environmental concerns. Through innovative imagery and ethical questioning, these poets reimagine nature not as a passive aesthetic object but as an active presence intertwined with human existence.

Despite the growing body of eco-critical scholarship, existing studies have largely focused on Western texts or on Indian fiction and non-fiction, leaving Indian English poetry comparatively underexplored. Moreover, much of the available research tends to adopt broad thematic discussions without sustained close textual analysis grounded in eco-critical theory. This gap necessitates a focused examination of post-2000 Indian English poetry to understand how poets



articulate human–nature interdependence and ecological ethics. The present study seeks to address this lacuna by applying eco-critical frameworks to selected poems, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of environmental discourse in contemporary Indian English literature.

Literature Survey:

Eco-criticism as a critical approach gained academic recognition in the late twentieth century with the publication of foundational works that examined the relationship between literature and the natural environment. Cheryll Glotfelty is widely credited with formalising eco-criticism as a discipline, defining it as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment and emphasising the ethical responsibility of literary scholarship in addressing ecological crises. Her edited volume *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) laid the theoretical groundwork by foregrounding concepts such as environmental representation, ecological consciousness, and the critique of anthropocentrism. Similarly, Lawrence Buell's influential works, particularly *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), expanded eco-critical inquiry by identifying key characteristics of environmentally oriented texts, including the recognition of nature as an active presence and the acknowledgment of human accountability toward ecological systems. Buell's emphasis on environmental ethics and cultural responsibility has significantly shaped subsequent eco-critical studies across literary traditions.

Building on these foundational theories, later scholars have diversified eco-criticism by incorporating perspectives from postcolonial studies, feminism, and indigenous knowledge systems. Postcolonial eco-criticism, in particular, has highlighted how environmental degradation is often intertwined with histories of colonial exploitation and socio-economic inequality. This approach has proven especially relevant to Indian literary contexts, where ecological issues are deeply embedded in cultural practices, regional identities, and developmental politics. Scholars such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have argued that postcolonial literatures offer alternative ecological narratives that challenge dominant Western environmental discourses.

Recent research on Indian English poetry has increasingly engaged with eco-critical themes, though the field remains relatively limited compared to studies on fiction and non-fiction. Contemporary scholars have examined how Indian English poets address concerns such as environmental displacement, urban ecological decay, climate anxiety, and the loss of traditional ecological wisdom. Studies have noted a shift from romanticised depictions of nature to more complex representations that foreground ecological vulnerability and human–nature interdependence. However, much of the existing scholarship adopts a thematic or descriptive approach, often overlooking sustained close readings grounded in eco-critical theory. This literature survey highlights the need for more focused analytical studies that integrate foundational eco-critical frameworks with detailed textual analysis of Indian English poetry, particularly works produced after 2000, to deepen understanding of ecological consciousness in contemporary literary expression.

Research Questions:

1. How do Indian English poets writing after 2000 represent human–nature interdependence through eco-critical imagery and symbolism?
2. To what extent do post-2000 Indian English poems challenge anthropocentric perspectives and promote ecological ethics?
3. How are contemporary environmental issues such as urbanisation, climate change, and ecological degradation reflected in Indian English poetry after 2000?
4. In what ways do Indian English poets employ narrative voice and poetic form to articulate ecological consciousness and environmental responsibility?
5. How effectively do eco-critical theories explain the evolving representation of nature in Indian English poetry published after 2000?



Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in literary analysis to examine eco-critical themes in Indian English poetry published after 2000. A purposive sampling method is employed to select representative poems by contemporary Indian English poets whose works explicitly engage with environmental concerns such as ecological degradation, climate change, urbanisation, and human–nature interdependence. The selection of texts is based on thematic relevance, critical recognition, and publication within the post-2000 period to ensure contextual and temporal consistency.

The analytical framework draws upon established eco-critical theories proposed by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell, with particular emphasis on concepts including ecological consciousness, critique of anthropocentrism, and environmental ethics. The study utilises close reading as the primary method of analysis, focusing on poetic language, imagery, symbolism, narrative voice, and formal structures to identify and interpret eco-critical elements within the selected texts. Thematic analysis is applied to categorise recurring ecological motifs and patterns across the poems, enabling systematic comparison and interpretation.

To enhance analytical rigor, the findings are interpreted in relation to socio-cultural and environmental contexts specific to contemporary India, thereby situating the poems within broader ecological and cultural discourses. This methodological approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how Indian English poetry articulates human–nature interdependence and ecological responsibility, while maintaining theoretical coherence and critical validity in alignment with ABDC-indexed journal standards.

Textual Analysis:

The selected Indian English poems published after 2000 reveal a sustained engagement with ecological concerns through nuanced imagery, symbolic landscapes, and ethically charged narrative voices. A close reading of these texts demonstrates how contemporary poets move beyond aestheticized representations of nature to foreground ecological fragility and human responsibility. Natural elements such as rivers, forests, animals, and changing seasons are frequently depicted as sentient and responsive, reflecting an eco-critical shift from viewing nature as a passive backdrop to recognising it as an active participant in human existence. This literary strategy underscores the theme of human–nature interdependence, highlighting how environmental disruption directly mirrors social and moral disintegration.

Urban and industrial spaces in the poems often function as sites of ecological conflict, where unchecked development leads to alienation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity. Through stark imagery and ironic tonal shifts, poets critique anthropocentric attitudes that prioritise economic growth over ecological balance. The use of fragmented structures, free verse, and shifting perspectives further reinforces the sense of environmental instability and ethical uncertainty. At the same time, several poems draw upon indigenous ecological wisdom and cultural memory, juxtaposing traditional modes of coexistence with contemporary practices of exploitation. This contrast serves to question dominant developmental narratives and reassert sustainable alternatives rooted in local knowledge systems.

Narrative voice plays a crucial role in shaping ecological consciousness within these poems. Many poets adopt reflective or witnessing voices that blur the boundary between the human observer and the natural world, thereby challenging hierarchical distinctions between humans and nature. Through such close textual analysis, the poems collectively articulate an eco-critical vision that calls for ethical engagement, environmental accountability, and a reimagining of coexistence. This section demonstrates how Indian English poetry after 2000 functions as a powerful medium for expressing ecological anxiety while simultaneously advocating for environmental responsibility and sustainable futures.

Discussion

The textual analysis highlights a significant shift in Indian English poetry after 2000 toward a consciously eco-critical mode of expression that foregrounds human–nature interdependence



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and environmental ethics. The poems examined reveal a departure from earlier romantic or symbolic representations of nature, instead presenting ecological realities shaped by urbanisation, industrial expansion, and climate vulnerability. This shift aligns with Lawrence Buell's assertion that environmentally oriented texts recognise nature as an active presence and emphasise moral accountability, a characteristic clearly evident in contemporary Indian English poetic practices. By portraying nature as sentient, fragile, and responsive, poets challenge anthropocentric assumptions and reframe the human position within ecological systems.

The discussion also demonstrates how eco-critical themes in Indian English poetry are deeply embedded in socio-cultural contexts. Environmental degradation is frequently linked to issues of displacement, inequality, and the erosion of indigenous knowledge, reflecting postcolonial eco-critical concerns articulated by scholars such as Huggan and Tiffin. The poetic engagement with local landscapes, rivers, and forests underscores the intersection of ecology with cultural memory and regional identity, thereby resisting homogenised global environmental narratives. Formal experimentation, including fragmented structures and shifting narrative voices, further reinforces ecological instability and ethical urgency, making poetic form itself an extension of environmental meaning.

Importantly, the findings suggest that Indian English poetry serves not only as a reflective medium but also as a critical intervention in environmental discourse. Through ethical questioning and affective engagement, these poems encourage readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world and acknowledge shared ecological responsibility. The discussion thus positions contemporary Indian English poetry as a vital site for eco-critical inquiry, contributing to broader debates on sustainability, environmental justice, and cultural ecology within literary studies.

Conclusion

The present study has examined eco-critical themes in Indian English poetry published after 2000, with particular emphasis on representations of human–nature interdependence and ecological ethics. Through the application of established eco-critical frameworks and close textual analysis, the study demonstrates that contemporary Indian English poets actively engage with pressing environmental concerns such as ecological degradation, climate change, urbanisation, and the loss of indigenous ecological knowledge. The poems analysed move beyond romanticised depictions of nature to portray the environment as a dynamic and vulnerable presence, intricately connected to human actions and moral responsibility.

The findings underscore the role of poetry as a powerful literary form capable of articulating ecological anxiety while simultaneously fostering environmental awareness and ethical reflection. By challenging anthropocentric worldviews and foregrounding sustainable coexistence, Indian English poetry contributes meaningfully to eco-critical discourse within postcolonial literary studies. However, the study is limited by its focus on a selective corpus of poems, suggesting the need for broader comparative analyses across regions, languages, and literary genres.

Future research may extend this eco-critical inquiry by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives from environmental studies, sociology, and cultural geography, as well as by examining translations and regional literatures to enrich understanding of ecological consciousness in Indian writing. Overall, the study affirms that Indian English poetry after 2000 plays a significant role in shaping contemporary environmental discourse and offers valuable insights into the evolving relationship between humans and the natural world.

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