International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences
Vol-11, Issue-6; November-December, 2026

Peer-Reviewed Journal
Journal Home Page Available: https://ijels.com/
Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Green Voices: Environmental Consciousness in Indian Poetry

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Received: 17 Oct 2026; Received in revised form: 12 Nov 2026; Accepted: 16 Nov 2026; Available online: 21 Nov 2026
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Abstract— *Environmental consciousness has become one of the defining ethical imperatives of the twentyfirst century. Globally, ecological crises increase, and this reflects in literary studies as well. It gradually turned toward eco-criticism to examine how literary texts represent the natural world. Indian poetry has a rich heritage for eco-critical inquiry because its literary traditions are integrated with philosophical, cultural, spiritual notions of nature. This paper examines the evolution of environmental consciousness in Indian poetry. Through detailed engagement with poets such as Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, A.K.Ramanujan, Sugathakumari, ONV Kurup, Mamang Dai, the study argues that Indian poetry contributes distinctive ecocritical insights. Beyond romantic nature description, eco-poetry questions anthropocentrism, highlights environmental justice, and voices protest environmental destruction. The paper locates Indian poetry within global eco-critical assumption while emphasizing its roots in ecological epistemologies.*

Keywords— ***Eco criticism, Indian Poetry***

Present ecological environment is characterized by unstable climate condition, global warming, rising sea levels, extreme weather patterns, species extinction, deforestation, and pollution. Human activities like mining, industrialization, fossil fuel consumption, urbanization etc have significantly changed our eco systems. In this dangerous scenario, Literature increasingly plays an important role in nurturing ecological imagination and fostering a sense of ethical responsibility toward the environment. It has got a principal part in shaping how societies imagine their relationship with the natural world. In the late twentieth century ecocriticism emerged as a critical response to ecological degradation. Scholars like Cheryll

Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell envisioned eco-criticism as the study of the relationship between literature and nature. They argued that environmental ethics has got a pivotal role in literary texts, and it must be examined.

Eco-criticism challenges anthropocentrism, the view that places humans at the center of existence and instead, advocates eco-centrism. in the present time the earth's natural support systems are under severe pressure because of human activities such as pollution, deforestation, and environmental destruction. Because of this crisis, poetry cannot remain only a source of beauty or emotional pleasure. Instead, poetry must take responsibility and respond to environmental problems. Traditionally, literature often followed an anthropocentric view, which means a human-centered perspective where nature is seen mainly as something useful for human beings. This view should change to a biocentric vision, where all living beings, plants, animals, rivers, forests are considered equally important in the ecosystem.

It is high time that the focus is shifted from an anthropocentric vision to a biocentric vision. In the words of William Rueckert, "perhaps that old pair of antagonists, science and poetry, can be persuaded to lie down together and be generative after all" (107). Rueckert uses the term "Generative Poetics" by which poetry and ecology can be connected. In his opinion, a poem is stored energy and when it is read the energy is released and flows back into the language centres and

creative imaginations of the readers.(Eco criticism in Practice, p-42)

Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary field of literary and cultural analysis, emerged in the 1990s as a response to the growing awareness of ecological crises. In the Indian context, ecological consciousness is not entirely a modern construct. Traditional Indian beliefs emphasize interconnectedness between humans, animals, plants, rivers, and celestial bodies. In the words of R K Sinha

> In India, since ancient times, several members of the flora and fauna have been identified with particular personalities of the Hindu pantheon and are worshipped. Many wild animals, such as tigers, lions and elephants, and birds such as the peacock, owl and swan have been revered as the vehicles of Gods and Goddesses and worshipped. Several trees, such as mango, coconut, khejri, emblica, tamarind, ashoka, madhuca and wood apple, and herbs such as basil are considered highly sacred and worshipped. (278)

However, urbanization, economic development, industrial policies and post-independence developmental agendas, deforestation destroyed our ecological balances. Nitin Sambhaji Nipunge says "Following independence in 1947, India adopted a development model influenced by Western industrialization, emphasizing infrastructure, industrial growth, and urbanization. While this approach led to significant economic gains, it also caused widespread environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, and loss of natural resources". Indian writers gradually began to speak more openly about environmental problems. Ecological awareness in India has roots in ancient philosophies and was strengthened during the independence movement. Later, modern challenges further shaped this thinking. As a result, Indian English literature in the 20th and 21st centuries saw many writers exploring nature and ecological concerns. Colonialism turned nature into a resource, a commodity to be controlled, extracted, and exploited. "The postcolonial world continues to struggle with this legacy, as the logic of endless development mirrors the greed of empire" (Shiva, Earth Democracy 45). Abundance of nature, its destruction, environmental degradation, exploitation of nature, biodiversity loss etc are represented in Indian writings. Indian poetry, therefore, plays a pivotal role for examining the ecological anxiety and resistance.

Literature and nature's connection is deep-rooted in Indian Poetry. Poets from different cultures often find inspiration in the natural world. In Indian English poetry, this relationship becomes vibrant, because it is influenced by India's varied landscapes, nature worship, spiritual traditions etc Nature has consistently been a central theme in Indian poetry, beginning with ancient Sanskrit literature. Many poems follow spiritual traditions. They consider trees, rivers, and animals, as sacred. The ideas of sacred groves regularly appear in poems. Indian poets such as Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, include Indian landscapes and mythological elements. Toru Dutt's poem *Our Casuarina Tree* (1876) stands as a remarkable example. A. K. Ramanujan, Mamang Dai, Sugathakumari, ONV Kurup have drawn imagery and symbolic expressions from different elements of nature. Poets such as Gulzar, particularly in his collection *Green Poems*, question this human dominance and emphasize a more balanced relationship between humans and the natural world.

"When I pass through tree the forest it seems my ancestors are around me

I feel I am a newborn baby

And these tribes of trees

Are rocking me in their arms" (Gulzar. Green Poems)

Early Indian poetry in English, often presents nature as a caring and protective force. In the poem Our Casuarina Tree, by Toru Dutt, the poet describes the tree as a mother. The tree also brings back memories of her dearly loved siblings. She recalls the joyful times she spent playing under its shade as a youngster and appreciates the beauty of the casuarina tree.

But not because of its magnificence

Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:

Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,

O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.(Our Casuarina Tree)

Like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, an important poet of the early twentieth century, celebrates the beauty of nature and its spiritual power. In the poem *The Gift of the Sea*, she describes the enormous ocean as sacred. The waves are compared to priests who sing hymns, showing a spiritual connection. Naidu's Poetry creates a sensual Indian setting. Her of, flower sellers, rivers, and bazaars embed ecological imagery within everyday life. Writing during colonial rule, she reclaims indigenous landscapes as sites of cultural pride.

Gathered like pearls in their alien graves

Silent they sleep by the Persian waves,

Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,

They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,

They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance

On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France. *(*The Gift of the Sea 7-12*)*

A. K. Ramanujan's poem *A River* exposes the way society easily forgets past tragedies. Every year the river floods, and every year people forget the poor who lose their lives in it. Through irony, Ramanujan criticizes the indifferent attitude of the privileged people who watch such suffering from a distance. every summer

a river dries to a trickle in the sand, baring the sand ribs, straw and women's hair clogging the watergates at the rusty bars under the bridges with patches of repair all over them (A River*)*

Tagore's poetic vision embodies spiritual ecology. In *Gitanjali*, nature functions as both teacher and companion. The river's ceaseless flow mirrors spiritual journey. According to Tagore, nature is essential to human existence. In "The Sunset of the Century," he bemoans the destruction of the environment and the depletion of natural resources caused by industrialization. In "The Last Bargain," he begs people to be mindful of their actions and to appreciate the natural world. Tagore's advocates harmony between humanity and nature.

From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the vanished Flowers of an hundred years before.

In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one spring morning, sending its glad voice across an hundred years. (The Gardener)

By analyzing how books depict nature and human interaction with it, ecocriticism investigates the relationship between literature and the natural world. Many habitats, including rivers, woods, mountains, communities, and coastal areas, are frequently described in Indian English poetry. Poets illustrate how individuals are closely connected to their environment by portraying these landscapes. The environment is not merely a background setting; it becomes an important element that influences culture, livelihood, and identity. For example, poems may depict the dependence of farmers on monsoon rains, the sacred value of rivers, or the ecological balance of forests. Such representations highlight both the beauty of nature and the consequences of environmental exploitation. This perspective we can see in the poems of Sugathakumari, ONV Kurup and Mamang Dai. Sugathakumari's poetry emerges from activism, particularly the Silent Valley movement. Her verses mourn on vanishing forests. As Neha rightly said in her article *Sugathakumari: Poet And Environmental Conservationist Who Fought To Save Kerala's Silent Valley,* "Sugathakumari's poetry and her feminist activism were both centered on environmental conservation. She said that deforestation feels like an experience much like a big wave hitting her on the face. The Silent Valley movement sent her on a writing spree about the exploitation and degradation of nature". In *"Irupathionnam Noottandinodu"* (To the Twenty First Century), the Earth is shown as a sad and frightened mother standing with folded hands. She asks people to save her and wipe away her tears. The poem reminds us that it is our duty to protect the Earth because we depend on it for our survival.

O. N. V. Kurup's poem *A Requiem for Earth* is a powerful environmental poem that expresses the poet's deep concern for the Earth. The word **"**requiem" means a song of mourning for the dead, so the poem is written like a funeral song for the planet, suggesting that the Earth is suffering because of human actions.The main idea of the poem is environmental destruction caused by humans. Kurup shows how people, through greed, exploitation of natural resources, pollution, and careless development, have damaged the natural balance of the Earth. Through this emotional tone, Kurup warns readers and encourages them to respect and protect nature before it is too late.

'Eniyum marikkatha bhoomi!

—ninnasanna Mruthiyil ninakkathma santhi!

Ethu ninte(enteyum) charamasusrooshaykcu

Hrudhyathilinne kuricha geetham.'(Bhoomikkoru Charamageetham 5-8)

Mamang Dai is an important voice in Indian English poetry. She comes from Arunachal Pradesh and represents the voice of the tribal communities. Her poetry is closely connected with the culture, beliefs, and traditions of her people. Through these descriptions, she shows how all living beings are connected to each other.

Small towns always remind me of death.

My hometown lies calmly amidst the trees,

it is always the same, in summer or winter, with the dust flying, or the wind howling down the gorge. (Small Towns and Rivers lines 1-6)

Indian English poets use powerful symbols to express their concerns about nature and environmental problems. An essential framework for understanding Indian English poetry is eco-criticism, which emphasizes the complex connections between literature, culture, and the environment. Indian poets who write in English have responded to ecological calamities with creativity, empathy, and critical insight by using their work to challenge destructive behaviours and increase awareness of environmental issues. Through poetry these poets paint a picture of nature that is both rooted in tradition and attentive to contemporary challenges. Their work serves as a reminder that poetry can have a significant impact on ecological ethics and behaviour, and that the state of the environment is closely related to the state of culture and

civilization. In an age of planetary crisis, these "green voices" reshape ecological imagination. Poetry becomes ethical intervention, urging humility, responsibility, and compassionate coexistence. Indian poetry thus contributes significantly to global eco-critical discourse, offering a vision where aesthetics and ethics converge in defense of the living earth.

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