# Green Rhetoric

## Trends in Environmental Discourse

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*Edited by*
**Anwesha Gogoi**
**Maitreyee Dutta**

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# Preface

The 21st century is not just a witness to rapid advancements and technological progress, but also stands as a spectator to the rapid environmental degradation and rising ecological crisis, which paints a bleak picture of humanity's future. From unstable climate changes to the extinction of species, from toxic capitalism to human-animal conflict, it demonstrates that the environmental crisis is not just a scientific or technological problem, but also a concern of imagination, worldview, and values. Over time, the relationship between human beings and the environment has undergone significant evolution. There has been a renewed sense of urgency with the conscious awakening regarding the critical environmental dilemma that plagues the present and future of survival. From idealisation to a romantic approach towards Nature, to urgent calls for discourse, resistance, and activism, there has been a fundamental shift in perception as minds engage with various discourses in each avenue that falls under the purview of Nature and its resources – be it Literature, Architecture, Commerce, or even Governance.

This volume, titled Trends in Environmental Discourse, aims to provide a platform for these diverse discourses from a range of voices across genres, geography, and disciplines. This edited book is a rich collection of prevailing environmental issues, theoretical

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engagements, and a critical overview of narratives and society. The Chapters in this work depict the complex entanglement of humans with the environment, drawing from ecocriticism, cultural studies, animal studies, indigenous epistemologies, postcolonial theory, governance, policy and society as a whole.

The Editorial Team has compiled a collection of interconnected perspectives that encompass a broad spectrum of themes, dividing the volume into two parts. Part A traces the shift from the idealisation of Nature through the Victorian era to Modernist and Postmodernist anxieties. There is a profound reflection on. Wordsworth, Keats, and Coleridge's aesthetic engagements with nature critique their romantic detachment from industrial realities and highlight the limitations of their pastoral nostalgia. It then transitions through Victorian industrial criticism (Hardy, Dickens) to Modernist fragmentation (Eliot, Woolf), concluding with the rise of cli-fi and eco-activist narratives in contemporary literature, particularly in the works of Atwood, Powers, and Roy. Mythology is also incorporated into the discourse exploring socio-ecological issues by blending mythology and ecology, as seen in the reimagining of ancient texts in modern literary works, which can critique environmental degradation. A couple of chapters also deal with Animal Studies, challenging anthropocentric views that prioritize human reason. Exploration of ecological themes in films and dystopian fiction is another area of focus which deals with the collapse of societies due to environmental crises and catastrophes that seem all the more possible with the scientific shifts in the world. Furthermore, from the exploitation of tribal lives to the haunting of environments with the anxiety of the artificial, the volume also explores ecofeminist readings and gender as a significant theme in ecological discourse.

Part B highlights the growing global ecological crisis and addresses the need for sustainable development and a multifaceted

approach that integrates an understanding of human behaviour and psychology to promote environmental education and awareness.

This part also explores environmental governance and policy, challenging existing socio-political inequalities and power dynamics that lead to ecological injustice; thereby encouraging a fundamental re-evaluation of the ethical relationships between humanity and the natural world for the rise of resilient and equitable communities. The psychology of sustainable consumer behaviour, community engagement, and public opinion regarding policies, regulations, and justice are emphasised as essential factors to achieve harmonious coexistence. In this regard, the Auroville model of Tamil Nadu is proposed as a model for sustainable living and rethinking human-nature relations. The idea of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam is analysed to detach from the anthropocentric view that commodifies the environment. Vaishnavism is discussed in relation to its impact on socio-environmental landscapes, highlighting the interplay between faith and sustainability. The final chapters focus on NEP 2020 and the scope of Environmental Education for the students, along with a cross-stream comparative study highlighting the ground reality of the same in specific areas.

This volume thereby demonstrates that literature and culture are not merely passive occurrences, but are active factors that shape environmental awareness, evoke empathy, urge action, and mobilise communities to come together for a positive approach to addressing the environment and the deteriorating ecological balance in society. In a world facing an escalating climate crisis, biodiversity loss, and profound social inequalities, the insights offered in these pages are vital. They underscore the critical need for interdisciplinary approaches, highlighting how academic research can connect with real-world activism and policy. We hope the chapters herein provide valuable insights and inspiration for scholars, students, policymakers, and concerned citizens alike, fostering a deeper

understanding and a collective commitment to a more sustainable and equitable future.

The editors wish to thank the contributors for their illuminating work and dedication to exploring these critical issues.

**—Editors**

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# List of Contributors

1. **Dr. Kanika Godara,** Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Education, Galgotias University.
2. **Arpan Mitra,** PhD Research Scholar, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata.
3. **Priyam Baruah,** Guest Lecturer, Department of English, BRM Govt. Model College, Doomdooma, Assam.
4. **Mrs. V. Vidneyangelpriyadharshini,** Research Scholar (Part-Time), Department of English, School of Engineering and Technology, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Tiruchirappalli.
5. **Dr. R. Vijayalakshmi,** Professor, Department of English, School of Engineering and Technology, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Samayapuram, Tiruchirappalli.
6. **Pratik Chakrabarti,** Assistant Professor, Govt. General Degree College, Kushmandi, West Bengal.
7. **Sujit Malick,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, TDB College, West Bengal.
8. **Paharee Konwar,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dhakuakhana College (Autonomous), Assam.
9. **Arghya Kar,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Model Degree College, Diblong.

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10. **Dr. Kinshuk Chakraborty,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Janata College, Kabuganj, Cachar, Assam.

11. **Soumyadeb Roy,** ABACUS Institute of Engineering and Management.

12. **Sordha Borah,** M.A in English, Dibrugarh University, Assam.

13. **Parishmita Taye,** Research Scholar, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh.

14. **Nitasri Kakati,** Assistant Professor, Department of English, Khagarijan College, Nagaon, Assam.

15. **Likhanta Buragohain,** Postgraduate student, Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, Assam.

16. **Dr. Chintalapati Neelima Rani,** Assistant Professor, Department of Management, Guru Kashi University, Bathinda, Punjab.

17. **Dr. Suman Ramapati,** Assistant Professor, Department of Business and Management, Institute of Advanced Research, Koba Institutional Area, Gandhinagar, Gujrat.

18. **Ridwan Ishola Mogaji,** Graduate Assistant, Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University.

19. **Sampada Pujhari,** Post Graduation, Pondicherry University.

20. **Nayandeep Sardar,** Post Graduation, Pondicherry University.

21. **Jharna Morang,** Assistant Professor, Khagarijan College, Nagaon, Assam.

22. **Sumit Kar,** Department of Geography, Kandra Radha Kanta Kundu Mahavidyalaya, Kandra, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal.

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23. **Dr. Jay Prakash Rajak,** Department of Geography, Mandar College, Mandar, Jharkhand.

24. **Dr. Bikul Barman,** Department of Geography, Bhattadev University, Bajali, Assam.

25. **Bichitra Pegu,** Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Khagarijan College, Nagaon, Assam.

26. **Asikul Khan,** Research Scholar, Jadavpur University.

27. **Naba Prasanna Boruah,** Assistant Professor, Department of Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) Chaiduar College.

28. **Jharna Dowarah,** Assistant Professor (Contractual) Dibru College.

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# PART A:
# Storying the Anthropocene: Narratives, Resistance and Transformation

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# 1

# From Romantics to Resistance: Reimagining Environmental Discourse in the Anthropocene

*— Dr. Kanika Godara*

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## Introduction

Throughout history, literature has served as both a reflection of and a response to humanity's evolving relationship with nature. From the Romantic era's idealization of the natural world to the Anthropocene's urgent calls for ecological activism, literary discourse on the environment has transformed dramatically. The Romantic poets—William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats—depicted nature as a sublime, spiritual force, a refuge from industrialization and human corruption. However, as environmental degradation intensified during the Victorian era, writers like Thomas Hardy and John Ruskin began addressing the anxieties surrounding industrial expansion and ecological loss. Modernist literature, particularly T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land (1922), depicted a fragmented, industrialized world, further distancing literature from Romantic reverence for nature.

With the advent of the Anthropocene—a geological epoch characterized by human-induced climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental destruction—literature has shifted from admiration to activism. Climate fiction (cli-fi) has emerged as a significant literary genre, challenging traditional narratives and drawing attention to ecological crises. Writers such as Amitav Ghosh (The Great Derangement), Margaret Atwood (Oryx and Crake), and Richard Powers (The Overstory) use literature as a form of resistance, advocating for environmental awareness and justice. This paper examines the evolution of environmental discourse in literature, illustrating how contemporary narratives reflect a growing concern about addressing ecological collapse.

**Romanticism and the Aestheticized View of Nature**

Romantic literature is often considered the foundation of modern environmental consciousness, with scholars such as Jonathan Bate (1991) and Karl Kroeber (1994) emphasizing its role in shaping ecological thought. In Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition, Bate argues that Romantic poetry was one of the earliest literary responses to industrialization, fostering a deep reverence for nature as a spiritual and moral guide. However, he critiques the Romantics for their aestheticization of nature, which often obscured the realities of environmental degradation. Similarly, Karl Kroeber, in Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind (1994), suggests that Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth and Shelley, anticipated ecological concerns by portraying nature as an autonomous entity rather than merely a backdrop for human experiences. However, critics such as Timothy Morton in Ecology Without Nature (2007) challenge this perspective, arguing that Romantic nature writing reinforced a dichotomy between humans and the environment rather than promoting an

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integrated ecological consciousness. The influence of Romanticism on later environmental discourse is evident in works such as Thomas Hardy's novels, which, as Glen Love (2003) suggests in Practical Ecocriticism, depict the slow intrusion of industrial modernity into rural landscapes, foreshadowing later ecological anxieties.

## Nature as Sublime and Spiritual: The Wordsworthian Vision

William Wordsworth is perhaps the most emblematic figure of Romantic nature poetry. His work reflects a deep emotional and philosophical engagement with the natural world, portraying it as a source of moral instruction and spiritual renewal. Wordsworth reflects on his evolving relationship with nature. The poet describes how nature has shaped his soul and provided him with a sense of moral guidance:

> "For I have learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes /The still, sad music of humanity" (Wordsworth 89–92).

Here, Wordsworth moves beyond a simple admiration of nature's beauty, suggesting that nature possesses a more profound spiritual significance that informs human morality. The natural world becomes a moral force, guiding human behaviour and providing a sense of inner peace. Wordsworth's reverence for nature was, in part, a reaction to the increasing industrialization of Britain. The Industrial Revolution had transformed the landscape, replacing pastoral beauty with factories, polluted rivers, and urban expansion. As Raymond Williams notes, Romantic poetry was often "a lament for a disappearing rural world, yet one that failed to engage with the material forces causing this loss" (Williams 54). This disconnect is evident in Michael: A Pastoral Poem (1800), where Wordsworth tells the story of an old shepherd who is displaced due to economic

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and industrial forces. While the poem mourns the loss of traditional rural life, it stops short of directly critiquing the industrial forces responsible for this displacement.

## Keats and the Transcendence of Nature

John Keats's poetry further exemplifies the Romantic idealization of nature, portraying it as a space of transcendence and permanence in contrast to human mortality and suffering. In Ode to a Nightingale (1819), Keats contrasts the fleeting nature of human life with the seemingly eternal existence of the nightingale:

> "Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down" (Keats 61–62).

The nightingale becomes a symbol of nature's timelessness, untouched by human decay and suffering. This idealization, however, reflects a Romantic detachment from ecological realities. The poem presents nature as an unchanging and eternal force, ignoring the fact that human activities, such as deforestation, pollution, and habitat destruction—were already threatening the natural world. While Keats's poetry offers a profoundly personal and emotional engagement with nature, it largely neglects the environmental consequences of industrialization. As critic Tim Fulford argues, Keats's depiction of nature "remains locked in a realm of aesthetic contemplation, detached from the social and environmental crises of his time" (Fulford 76). This highlights a broader critique of Romanticism: while the movement celebrated nature, it often overlooked humanity's role in its destruction.

## Coleridge and the Power of Nature

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry diverges from Wordsworth's and Keats's in its portrayal of nature as both sublime and terrifying. His work often depicts nature as a powerful force that exceeds

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