



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Developing a Sustainability Mindset Through Nature Poetry

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**Abstract:** To a greater or lesser extent, many poets have passionately voiced their environmental concerns in their writings. Poetry about nature promotes writing that makes the reader feel closer to the natural world. It propagates the concept that Earth is our home, and that as inhabitants, we have a need to educate ourselves in ways that will promote mutual respect and cooperation between humans and other species. Men have traditionally chosen to avoid discussions about environmental sustainability amid the hectic pace of metropolitan life. Nature poets, endowed with the ability to imagine, provide a compelling depiction of the sorrow they feel at the tragic detachment of man from nature. The truth is that environmental sustainability is not possible without an appreciation of the environment that we live in with such vivacity. Therefore, environmental poetry encourages consciousness by offering ecological viewpoints on sustainability, bringing us closer to this understanding.

**Index Terms - Nature, environment, ecology, sustainability, poet.**

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear. (5-8)

Written in 1794, during the Industrial Revolution, Blake's "London" shows the dismal experience of living in a city as well as its bleak, depressing atmosphere. The poet argues that the urban environment is inherently oppressive and makes people mentally crippled due to excessive commercialization and the unprecedented growth of industries and mills that corrupt our interpersonal relationships and corrode our understanding of the beauty of nature and human life. Thus Blake's "London" is, in a way, one amongst the galore of poems that ponder mankind's natural inclination for a life of untrammelled impulses which insinuate his utterly nonchalant frame of mind regarding the resource constraints in the world. However over the past two decades in particular, we have witnessed unprecedented economic growth greatly to the detriment of the environment. The reckless use of Earth's natural resources has proved immensely deleterious for the quality of life and overall climate patterns in the atmosphere. Though development is accelerating at full tilt in response to the increasing needs and desires of the earth's dwellers, what stands as a persistent problem is that not everyone seems to be reflecting or contemplating the pitfalls that follow unbridled economic growth and audacious human practices.

Much ink has been spilled by researchers, academicians and environmentalists to educate people in the most plausible ways pertaining to the significance of sustainable development. Literary fiction often addresses issues that are contemporary and are of paramount importance in a way that is not only illuminatingly explanatory but also delightfully instructional so as to optimise maximum learning. However, education for sustainability is not just about bequeathing technical information about the environment but resuscitating students' consciousness to imagine a better future; to appreciate the embedded and dependence of society on natural systems. The idea of sustainability calls for an earth-friendly approach and compels humans to develop a sympathetic perspective on the prevailing ecological imbalance and its impact on people's well-being and environment. Sustainable development is a sincere endeavour to instill in our minds that the burgeoning technological advancements and ever-growing human needs are a menace to the bounded environmental resources. Hence it is mandatory to use the resources discreetly, meticulously and judiciously in order to enable future generations to enjoy the luxury of resources that the present generation is enjoying at the moment.

Many poets, in their compositions have fervently expressed their ecological concerns. Nature poetry advocates such content that deepens a sense of nature's presence in our lives. It disseminates the idea that this planet is our home and we ought to assimilate knowledge conducive to a harmonious and peaceful co-existence between nature and man. In the continual flux of city life, man has always preferred to escape from debates based on the relevance of environmental sustainability. Imbued with the power of envisioning, nature poets give a moving demonstration of the grief that they feel at the sad disengagement of man from nature. The

truth is that environmental sustainability is not possible without an appreciation of the environment that we live in with such vivacity. Hence, to bring us close to this realization, nature poetry inspires awareness by presenting ecological perspectives on sustainability.

Environmental poetry is an ingenious and vigorous creative medium that emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between man and the biosphere. Nature poets compose poems eulogizing the beauty and indispensability of nature in our lives, the emotion of which is engendered by a sensitive understanding of the world around us and not by scientific theorems. To William Wordsworth, the pantheist, nature gives us a long-lasting joy that is extraneous to the ephemeral pleasures of an epicurean lifestyle. In his autobiographical poem, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", Wordsworth speaks of his indebtedness to the beautiful forms of nature in the Wye valley from where he had been physically distanced for a considerable period of time. However, amidst the noisy turbulence of towns and cities, whenever he looked at the world with a forlorn glance, he felt a sincere gratitude towards the pulchritudinous natural forms as they never ceased to delight him with 'sensations sweet' which not only pacified his agitated mind but also ameliorated his weary soul. Wordsworth has noticed that these sensations reinstate tranquility by warding off noises, disruptive to his well-being and at the same time vanquishing the vexatious feeling of loneliness torturing his soul. Again when the doleful shades of disquieting urban activities lacerates his tender heart, he can only find solace in the undefiled natural dominion that not only acts as a comfort-giver but also a healer to his wounded soul:

...when the fretful stir  
Unprofitable, and the fever on the world,  
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,  
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee [Nature] (53-56)

What we can't overlook in the poem is the magnanimous role that nature plays in the life of man. With all sincerity, Wordsworth has projected nature as the friend, guide and guardian of man that would always direct him to the right path and save him from being misled. Nature has not only nursed his ennobling thoughts but has duly nurtured and fostered his ambition to garner the world with 'acts of kindness and love' to others. It is the poet's profound conviction that says, 'Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her' (122-3) and hence he proudly stands as a joyous benefactor and protector of it. Wordsworth maintains that, as a benevolent custodian of our moral being, nature elevates our minds with thoughts of sublimity that can't be destroyed either by inconsiderate discernments or by the devious ways of deceitful people. In fact, what the poet wants to convey is that nature is pure and sanctified and has always instilled altruistic values in humans and hence it should not be jeopardized by the feverish commercial activities of the malicious city dwellers.

In his work "The World Is Too Much with Us", Wordsworth elaborates upon the ascendancy of urbanization upon the beauty of natural environment- he presents before us an avaricious society inhabited by money-grubbing individuals who are out of tune with nature. An advocate of simplicity and purity, the poet vehemently opposes the so-called decorous men of the mechanized society who have ignored the pristine and ethereal beauty of nature to find happiness in the ephemerality of the decadent society. The poet not only deplores the depraved and unprincipled outlook of a murky, defiled world but also alludes to the desperate need for an ecosystem based on the principles of environmental sustainability:

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers. ( 5-7)

Wordsworth, as a rational thinker, wasn't averse to technological upgradations, but his main concern was the uncontrolled burgeoning of the advancements to an extent that would eventually galvanize the irrevocable - that is, the complete disappearance of the unadulterated beauty of nature. In "Steamboats, Viaducts and Railway", Wordsworth ponders upon the pernicious nature of industrial revolution and demonstrates his agony at the hilarious contortions of the beautiful forms of nature:

In spite of all that beauty may disown  
In your harsh features." [Industrialization] (9-10)

With similar anguish but greater resentment, Wordsworth published his poem "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway" in 1844 when it was decided that a railway will be constructed between Kendal and Windermere. The inescapable situation of industrialization incessantly gormandizing nature greatly aggrieved him and as a violent reaction to this conundrum, he wrote this protest poetry that begins with an alarming question:

Is there no nook of English ground secure  
From rash assault? (1-2)

This question succinctly encapsulates Wordsworth's fear and trepidation at the danger looming over the natural landscape. The poet beholds the exponential rate of industrialization as a contagious disease and makes an earnest solicitation to the readers not to endure this blight and grapple against the brutal decimation of natural life:

Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orresthead  
 Given to the pausing traveler's rapturous glance:  
 Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance  
 Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,  
 Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong  
 And constant voice, protest against the wrong. (9-14)

We humans are not callow or wet behind the ears to misconstrue the indispensability of nature in our lives- the truth is, we live in a rapacious society that is characterized by extreme apathy and an insatiable greed for material acquisition. "The Tree Agreement", a poem written by Elise Paschen portrays the cold-blooded nature of sentient beings and condemns the self-centred attitude of such men who are ignorant of the service provided by trees. The poem is a verbal tussle that takes place between the poet and her neighbor who is bent upon chopping off the Siberian tree as it 'overwhelms' his property but the poet, infused with an unflinching devotion towards the cause of afforestation, strongly opposes the man by reminding him that the tree is a home to many and destroying it would be a heinous act. The neighbour's perception of the Siberian elm tree as a 'weed'(2) tree not only projects his distaste and disrespect but also manifests his failure to comprehend that the tree is the very source of comfort and belongingness to other living creatures and cutting it down will cause them to lose their habitat. Paschen goes on to exclaim, 'We shelter under leaf-board, crossway for squirrels, branch house for sparrows, jays.'(10-11) The failure to appreciate natural beauty on the part of man is the dominant theme in "Binsley Poplars", a poem by Gerard Hopkins. Hopkins, who has taken immense delight in rural life is now seen lamenting the graceless growth of modern suburbs. He describes this disturbing spectacle vividly and expresses his grief on the merciless destruction of aspen trees in abundance that serve as natural resources on earth. He felt that this wanton destruction was an attack on nature and through poetry he is trying to redress the balance.

Brooding over similar circumstances, Oliver Tearle seems to be more embittered and enormously afflicted with the neglect of ecosystem and the rampant destruction caused by humans. In his "Earth Summit", Tearle using the myth of Pandora's box persistently reminds us of the necessity of balance and restraint in human lives for he believes that resources once exhausted can't be replenished. The reckless human activities are analogous to the unsettling energies of the box that play mischief with the order and harmony of the world, thereby despoiling the consistency that is required to run a human community efficaciously :

The air grew hot and dark.  
 Among her luggage-landfall was a jar.  
 Unstopped, it filled the world with strains so high  
 they burnt through layers beyond our atmosphere. (5-8)

For Carl Dennis too, poetry serves as a vehicle for our growing anxiety and fear of the climate crisis, as well as of environmental degradation and the depletion of resources. "The Green House Effect" by Dennis creates awareness about the ecological issues through the implementation of visual imagery and demonstrates how global warming will contribute to the creation of a dystopian future for humanity:

'Life will be different, good tillable land so dear  
 The suburbs will give way to farms, the cities  
 Fill up again with people too poor to own cars' (7-9).

Perhaps, Joseph Wood Krutch, the American author and philosophical naturalist known to us for developing his pantheistic philosophy and ecological concerns wasn't exaggerating when he said, 'if we do not permit the earth to produce beauty and joy, it will at the end not produce food either'. ( Krutch 295-305)

Increased urbanization and considerable changes in the socio- economic and political conditions have drastically affected the lives of children across the world. The fast-paced, technology-driven life of the modern kid has made him ignorant of the natural beauty and simplicity of pastoral life; so to say, he is deaf to the chirping of birds and blind to the movement of trees with the breeze. Tiadora Anderson, expressing her grief towards the children of the present generation urges them to revel in the beauty of nature and enjoy the remaining unconsumed nourishment in environment in her poem "Run as Fast as You Can". The kids are advised to break all inhibitions and run faster than lightning to 'out run man's greed'(13) of destroying the 'little bit of green'(14) because once they reach adulthood, the dream of flying will seem quite distant. Perhaps these children who remain untutored and untouched with the essence of naturalism, grow up being vain and materialistic and are seen roaming around the shopping precincts buying a few puffs of air called 'Pure Oxygen Huts' (11). The truth is, over the last two decades, the capacity of nature to support human needs and desires has plummeted but this has in no way ameliorated the moral standards of the inhabitants of the earth. In fact, with the speedily decelerating amount of resources, man has become more envious, covetous and increasingly acquisitive. The pertinent idea finds a well-defined expression in the caustic remarks of the poet Tiadora Anderson in the poem "Pay Up":

We destroy all those  
 That were free and God-given. (14-15)

In consonance with Anderson, Sylvia Stults in her poem "Warned" makes a moving appeal to the residents of Earth to be mindful regarding their reckless activities. She earnestly requests all to be kind and considerate towards nature that has been given in bounty to mankind as a chargeless gift. However man's exploitative nature has turned him blind to this munificence and probably he has

become oblivious to the bitter reality that if nature is not conserved and preserved, the world will inevitably end with cataclysmic results:

Protect what has been given for free  
Our waters,skies,wildlife and trees  
For once they are gone, don't you say  
Consider yourself warned of that fatal day. (17-20)

Much before the advent of the official cry of sustainable development, poets as Emerson and Walt Whitman visualised the need for environmental sustainability in the words and deeds of humanity. "A Song of the Rolling Earth", a poem by Walt Whitman is an insightful deliberation on the parochial perspectives of man that have reduced the earth to a silent submissive, passive figure because of its inability to speak the language of humans. The imbalanced relationship between nature and humans is caused by the human assumption that nature is the other and different from them. Nature is subordinate and underneath human culture. In the poem, the poet personifies nature as a perfect maternal figure, one who 'does not argue, / Is not pathetic, has no arrangements, / Does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise'(31-33). Though the poet is also seen celebrating anthropocentrism, stating that the world has been garnered with endless resources only to be consumed by humans, he is not altogether blind to the fact that resources in its carrying capacity are limited but the growth of human culture is rapid and uncontrollable:

The earth is just as positive and direct as it was before,  
Facts, religions, improvements, politics, trades, are as real as before,  
But the soul is also real, it too is positive and direct,  
No reasoning, no proof has establish'd it,  
Undeniable growth has establish'd it. (108-12)

Thus, the idea of sustainable development is the answer to this undeniable growth of human civilization. It has been stated that the poet had already predicted the emergence of sustainable development and warned people to put more consideration on earth to get a better environment. In conducting sustainable development, there must be a sustainable society within it :

When the materials are all prepared and ready, the architects shall appear.  
I swear to you the architects shall appear without fail,  
I swear to you they will understand you and justify you. (122-124)

In other words, the preservation of the ecosystem can only be imagined and fully attained with the conviction of immensely thoughtful and responsive citizens who will leave no stone unturned to transform the world into a better place. Though the governments of countries across the world have devised plans and strategies to save our planet, growing a sustainability mindset is largely a matter of intrinsic motivation without which the dream of cleaner and safer urban environment is unimaginable.

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