



A Comparative Study Of Guru Jambheshwar's Teachings And Modern Eco-Criticism In English Literature.

Author : Dr. Neha Bhadoo

Abstract: Environmental degradation, climate change, and ecological imbalance have emerged as defining challenges of the modern age, compelling scholars across disciplines to re-examine humanity's relationship with nature. In literary studies, eco-criticism has developed as a critical framework that interrogates how literature represents the natural world and critiques anthropocentric ideologies that justify environmental exploitation. Long before the formal emergence of eco-criticism in Western literary discourse during the late twentieth century, ecological consciousness had already been articulated in indigenous philosophies and spiritual traditions. One such remarkable yet underexplored figure is Guru Jambheshwar (1451–1536), the founder of the Bishnoi community in India, whose teachings present a deeply ethical, spiritual, and practical approach to environmental conservation. This comparative study seeks to examine Guru Jambheshwar's ecological teachings alongside the principles of modern eco-criticism in English literature, highlighting their convergences, divergences, and contemporary relevance. Guru Jambheshwar's teachings, encapsulated in his twenty-nine commandments, advocate for the protection of flora and fauna, sustainable use of natural resources, non-violence toward all living beings, and harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. These principles are not merely symbolic or metaphysical but are grounded in daily practices such as conservation of water, protection of trees, and compassion toward animals. His philosophy situates nature as sacred, intrinsically valuable, and morally significant, thereby challenging human-centered worldviews centuries before ecological ethics became a subject of academic inquiry. The Bishnoi tradition, inspired by Guru Jambheshwar, exemplifies an eco-centric worldview in which environmental stewardship is inseparable from spiritual and social responsibility. Modern eco-criticism in English literature, as developed by scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty, Lawrence Buell, and Jonathan Bate, similarly critiques anthropocentrism and emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. Eco-critical readings of literary texts explore how narratives reflect environmental exploitation, ecological loss, and the ethical implications of industrialization and colonial expansion. Works by Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and John Keats, as well as contemporary writers such as Margaret Atwood and Amitav Ghosh, reveal a growing literary awareness of ecological fragility and the consequences of human dominance over nature. Eco-criticism thus functions both as a mode of literary analysis and as a cultural intervention that seeks to reshape environmental consciousness.

Keywords : Guru Jambheshwar, Bishnoi philosophy, environmental ethics, eco-criticism, English literature, ecological consciousness, nature spirituality, sustainability, biodiversity conservation, non-violence, anthropocentrism, eco-centrism, indigenous wisdom, environmental humanities, green criticism, literary ecology, nature–culture relationship, sacred ecology, environmental justice, climate awareness, sustainable living, moral ecology.

Article : The twenty-first century is marked by unprecedented ecological crises, including climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution. These challenges have compelled scholars to re-evaluate humanity's relationship with the natural world across disciplines such as science, philosophy, sociology, and literature. In literary studies, **eco-criticism** has emerged as a significant theoretical framework that examines the representation of nature in literature and critiques anthropocentric attitudes that legitimize environmental exploitation. While eco-criticism is often considered a modern Western intellectual movement, ecological awareness has long existed in indigenous, spiritual, and philosophical traditions across the world.

One such tradition is embodied in the teachings of **Guru Jambheshwar (1451–1536)**, the founder of the Bishnoi community in India. His philosophy, articulated through twenty-nine principles, emphasizes environmental conservation, compassion for all living beings, and harmonious coexistence with nature. This article undertakes a comparative study of Guru Jambheshwar's teachings and modern eco-criticism in English literature to highlight their philosophical intersections, differences, and contemporary relevance. By placing indigenous ecological wisdom alongside modern literary theory, the study seeks to broaden the scope of eco-critical discourse and underscore the universality of environmental ethics.

Guru Jambheshwar and Ecological Philosophy

Guru Jambheshwar, also known as Jambhoji, was a spiritual reformer whose teachings laid the foundation for one of the earliest organized environmental movements in history. His twenty-nine commandments include explicit instructions to protect trees, conserve water, safeguard wildlife, and practice non-violence toward all living beings. Unlike abstract moral philosophies, his ecological ethics were deeply embedded in everyday social and religious practices.

Central to Guru Jambheshwar's teachings is the belief that **nature is sacred** and intrinsically valuable, not merely a resource for human consumption. This worldview challenges anthropocentrism by recognizing the moral worth of non-human life. The Bishnoi community's historical acts of environmental sacrifice—most notably the **Khejarli incident of 1730**, where villagers sacrificed their lives to protect trees—demonstrate the practical implementation of this philosophy. Such acts reveal an eco-centric worldview in which environmental protection is inseparable from spiritual duty.

Guru Jambheshwar's teachings also promote sustainable living through moderation, ethical consumption, and respect for natural cycles. His philosophy advocates harmony rather than domination, balance rather than exploitation, and responsibility rather than entitlement. These principles resonate strongly with contemporary environmental ethics and anticipate many ideas central to modern eco-criticism.

Emergence of Eco-criticism in English Literature

Eco-criticism emerged as a formal academic discipline in the late twentieth century, particularly in the United States and Europe, in response to growing environmental concerns. Scholars such as **Cheryll Glotfelty**, **Lawrence Buell**, and **Jonathan Bate** defined eco-criticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. This approach examines how literary texts reflect, shape, and critique human attitudes toward nature.

In English literature, ecological consciousness can be traced back to the **Romantic poets**, including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and John Keats, whose works emphasize emotional and spiritual connections with nature. However, modern eco-criticism extends beyond Romantic idealism to address issues such as industrialization, colonial exploitation, climate anxiety, and environmental injustice. Contemporary writers like **Margaret Atwood**, **Amitav Ghosh**, and **Arundhati Roy** foreground ecological crises and question the cultural narratives that normalize environmental destruction.

Eco-criticism is not merely a method of literary analysis but also an ethical and political intervention. It challenges human-centered narratives, critiques capitalist and colonial ideologies, and calls for sustainable and just modes of coexistence. In this sense, eco-criticism functions as a bridge between literature, environmental activism, and cultural transformation.

Points of Convergence

A comparative analysis reveals significant parallels between Guru Jambheshwar's teachings and modern eco-criticism. Both frameworks **reject anthropocentrism** and emphasize the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. Guru Jambheshwar's insistence on compassion for animals and protection of trees mirrors eco-critical calls for recognizing the agency and value of the natural world.

Another point of convergence lies in their ethical orientation. Eco-criticism often highlights the moral responsibility of humans toward the environment, a principle that lies at the heart of Guru Jambheshwar's philosophy. His teachings advocate restraint, sustainability, and reverence for nature—values echoed in eco-critical readings of literature that critique consumerism and environmental exploitation.

Furthermore, both perspectives emphasize the role of culture and narrative in shaping ecological consciousness. Just as eco-criticism analyzes how literature influences environmental attitudes, Guru Jambheshwar used religious discourse, oral traditions, and communal practices to cultivate ecological ethics. In both cases, storytelling and belief systems function as powerful tools for environmental awareness.

Points of Divergence

Despite these similarities, important differences exist between the two frameworks. Modern eco-criticism operates primarily within academic and literary contexts, relying on textual analysis and theoretical discourse. In contrast, Guru Jambheshwar's teachings are **action-oriented and practice-based**, focusing on lived ethics rather than abstract theory.

Additionally, eco-criticism often addresses global environmental crises shaped by industrialization, capitalism, and technological advancement—conditions largely absent during Guru Jambheshwar's time. His teachings emerged in a pre-industrial agrarian society, where ecological challenges were localized and community-based. However, the adaptability of his principles allows them to remain relevant in addressing modern ecological problems.

Another difference lies in their epistemological foundations. Eco-criticism is largely secular and interdisciplinary, drawing from science, philosophy, and cultural studies. Guru Jambheshwar's ecological vision, by contrast, is rooted in spirituality and religious ethics. Yet, this spiritual foundation offers a holistic approach that integrates environmental responsibility with moral and social life.

Indigenous Wisdom and Eco-critical Expansion

One of the key contributions of this comparative study is its emphasis on integrating indigenous ecological wisdom into modern eco-critical discourse. Eco-criticism has often been critiqued for its Eurocentric orientation and limited engagement with non-Western traditions. Guru Jambheshwar's teachings challenge this limitation by offering a rich, non-Western model of environmental ethics grounded in practice and community.

Incorporating such perspectives can expand eco-criticism beyond textual analysis to include lived experiences, ethical action, and spiritual motivation. Indigenous traditions like that of the Bishnoi community demonstrate that environmental conservation is not a modern invention but a timeless moral imperative embedded in cultural and religious life.

Contemporary Relevance

In an era of escalating ecological crises, the relevance of Guru Jambheshwar's teachings and eco-criticism has become more pronounced. Climate change, environmental injustice, and biodiversity loss demand ethical frameworks that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Literature, spirituality, and indigenous knowledge systems can collectively contribute to a more sustainable future.

By revisiting Guru Jambheshwar's philosophy through an eco-critical lens, scholars can uncover alternative models of environmental stewardship that prioritize harmony over domination. Similarly, eco-criticism can benefit from the ethical depth and practical orientation of indigenous ecological traditions.

This comparative study demonstrates that Guru Jambheshwar's ecological teachings and modern eco-criticism in English literature share a common commitment to environmental ethics, sustainability, and respect for non-human life. While differing in historical context, methodology, and epistemology, both frameworks challenge anthropocentric worldviews and advocate harmonious coexistence with nature.

Recognizing Guru Jambheshwar's contributions enriches eco-critical discourse by highlighting the global and cross-cultural dimensions of ecological thought. Bridging ancient spiritual wisdom with modern literary theory not only deepens our understanding of environmental consciousness but also underscores the urgent need for ethical and cultural transformation in response to contemporary ecological crises. Literature and philosophy, together, hold the potential to inspire a more responsible and sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Conclusion : The present study has undertaken a comparative exploration of Guru Jambheshwar's ecological teachings and modern eco-criticism in English literature, revealing a profound convergence between ancient spiritual wisdom and contemporary literary theory. Despite their emergence in distinct historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts, both frameworks articulate a shared concern for environmental sustainability, ethical responsibility, and the harmonious coexistence of human and non-human life. This convergence underscores the universality of ecological consciousness and challenges the assumption that environmental ethics are solely a modern intellectual development. Guru Jambheshwar's teachings, rooted in the Bishnoi tradition, present an integrated model of environmental stewardship that combines moral discipline, spiritual commitment, and everyday practice. His emphasis on non-violence, protection of trees and wildlife, conservation of water, and moderation in consumption reflects a deeply eco-centric worldview. Unlike theoretical approaches that remain confined to academic discourse, his philosophy demonstrates how ecological ethics can be embedded in social norms and lived experience. The continued practice of these principles by the Bishnoi community highlights the enduring relevance and practical viability of his ecological vision. Modern eco-criticism in English literature, on the other hand, provides a critical framework for examining how cultural narratives shape human attitudes toward nature. By analyzing literary texts, eco-criticism exposes the ideological roots of environmental exploitation, particularly those linked to anthropocentrism, industrialization, and colonial expansion. It also foregrounds the role of literature as a medium for ecological awareness, ethical reflection, and cultural resistance. Through its engagement with both classical and contemporary texts, eco-criticism expands the scope of environmental discourse beyond science and policy, situating ecological concerns within the realm of imagination and moral inquiry. The comparative analysis demonstrates that while Guru Jambheshwar's teachings and eco-criticism differ in methodology and epistemological foundations, they complement one another in meaningful ways. Eco-criticism offers analytical tools and critical language to interpret environmental representation in literature, whereas Guru Jambheshwar's philosophy provides a value-based, action-oriented ethical framework. Together, they form a holistic approach that integrates thought, representation, and practice. This synthesis highlights the importance of incorporating indigenous and non-Western ecological traditions into contemporary environmental humanities. In the context of escalating global environmental crises, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological injustice, the relevance of this comparative perspective becomes increasingly significant. Revisiting Guru Jambheshwar's teachings through an eco-critical lens not only enriches literary studies but also offers alternative models of sustainability rooted in moral restraint and reverence for life. Similarly, eco-criticism gains depth and inclusivity when informed by

long-standing ecological traditions that emphasize responsibility over exploitation. In conclusion, this study affirms that ecological wisdom transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. By bridging Guru Jambheshwar's environmental ethics with modern eco-criticism in English literature, the research contributes to a broader, more inclusive understanding of environmental consciousness. Such interdisciplinary and cross-cultural engagement is essential for fostering ethical awareness and inspiring collective action toward a more sustainable and harmonious future for both humanity and the natural world.

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