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## Man and Nature Relations in *Birches*: A Saga of Ecocritical Philosophy

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### **Abstract:**

The present research article is written with the modern critical philosophy called 'Ecocriticism'. It is a unique practice in the present era. It denotes the scientific study that investigates the interrelations of all forms of plants (nature) and animal life with each other and also with the physical habitats. It is also referred as Ecology, environmental criticism or green studies. This in total defines its scope as the critical writings that explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment and the damage made by our activities on it. As Ecocriticism is the interrelationship between literature and the environment it states about how the surrounding is reflected in texts The paper try to look at the selected poem named 'Birches' by Robert Frost from an ecocritical perspective. Although there has been many poems in American literature which deals unambiguously with the nature, the attitude towards nature in those poems were that of pastoral impulse, an artistic admiration of nature or a thoughtful and numinous approach towards environment. The paper makes an ecocritical analysis of 'Birches' to give expel to the general worsening of the environment.

**Keywords: Nature, Physical Environment, Ecology, Ecocriticism, Literature, Culture, humans, Damage, Deterioration, relations.**

### **Introduction:**

It was in 1990s, with this crisis of environmental concerns we inaugurated this Ecocriticism and it becomes a recognized field of literary studies. The organization was named as ASLE- Association for the study of literature and environment. The other specific approach to this study lies in the general philosophies of Western civilization and religion. They are deeply anthropocentric. They are interested in human beings who are opposed to or superior to the nature and then they are free to exploit natural resources and animal species for their own purpose.

Representation of nature or environment in literature is as old as the production of literature and the world. The prominent reference of this is in Hebrew Bible that is of the Garden of Eden. The pastoral form used by the Greeks Theocritus in 3rd century BC. This practice then continued by the roman poet Virgil in his Aeneiad, with the depiction of ideal rural life. James Thomson 'The

seasons (1726-30) are called a new era of nature writing. This is perhaps called the intimate, realistic and detailed description of natural environment.

In America, the pioneer writing of nature was inaugurated by William Betram's travel through the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. (1791) further this was succeeded by Henry David Thoreau's Walden (1854)

Then, these writers in mid nineteenth century in America and England had already brought the attention of mass from the writings of those threads to the environment by urbanization and industrialization. Later years had brought a massive drive against the human despoliation of nature which was further termed as 'environmental movement'. The most discussed writer in such writings is John Borroughs and John Muir.

In the twentieth century, the environmentalists and scientists have already warned everyone to stop deforestation and despoliation of the surroundings. This mass campaign was initiated with the programmes like documentaries, films writings and other visual Medias for effective implementation. The two influential books are written in this era are 'A saved county almanac' by Aldo Leopold (1949) and Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962), both concerning at and drawing attention to the massive degradation of the environment and the devastation brought by newborn chemical pesticides on wildlife both on land and in water.

Presently the approach has got a mere influencing drive. This sometimes named as 'Deep Ecology' which aims at replacing this anthropocentric approach into Ecocentricism. This philosophy relies on the grounds of equal importance to the environment and the human species, in addition to the values and even moral and political rights.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. To discuss and trace the origin and development of Ecocriticism.
2. Apply principles of Ecocriticism to the poem named Birches.
3. To discuss Birches as the representation of nature and culture of Ecocriticism.
4. A critique of the various notions associated with Ecocriticism.
5. To bring out the possible remedies and measures to stop the depletion of our surrounding.

**METHODOLOGY:** For primary data the original articles from the ecocritical text have been used. The original poem is studied from Frosts collection of poems. Secondary data has been also used with the help of the library method. Cyber library is also utilized when necessary.

### **ECOCRITICAL READING OF BIRCHES.**

In the book The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture ,Lawrence Buell gives an idea about what primarily constitutes an ecological

work: 1) The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. 2) The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. 3) Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation. 4) Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text (7-8). Based on such grounds the poem is reflecting the concerns and nature in it in the manner it is narrated further. "Birches" (1916) revealing natural scene.. Its brightness is amiable, bittersweet conjecture help make it one of Frost's most popular poems, and because its shifts of metaphor and tone invite varying interpretations. The poem tells us back and forth amid two visual perspectives:

Birch trees as bent by boys' playful swinging and by ice storms,

Further his desire to "get away from earth," importantly qualified by "awhile," shows a yearning for the ideal or perhaps for the imaginative isolation of the birch swinger. His "I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree ... toward heaven" suggests leaving earth, but he reveals by his quick apologetic claim that he doesn't mean that. He wants to be dipped down again toward earth, but the pursuit of the ideal by going sounds like death, as his quick apology acknowledges. Frost does less in this poem than in "After Apple-Picking" to suggest a renewed pursuit of the ideal in life rather than a yielding to death. His main pursuit is continual balance between reality and ideality.

Birches begins by evoking its core image against the background of a darkly wooded landscape:

When I see birches bend to left and right  
 Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
 I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
 But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay  
 as ice storms do. (Birches stanza 1)

Here not really the destruction to those birches by boys as the swing to it but natural sources as the damage by ice storms.

Often you must have seen them  
 Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
 after a rain. They click upon themselves  
 as the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
 As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
 Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
 Shattering and avalanching on the snow crust--  
 Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
 you'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen. (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza, Birches)

The birches bent "across the lines of straighter darker trees" signifying the beauty once it holds and then onwards the diction go on high change tone. This is rightly put up in Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* defines Ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship of the human with the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself." then, almost a third of the poem describes how ice storms bend these trees permanently, unlike the action of boys; this scene combines images of beauty and of distortion. The fallen "inner dome of heaven perhaps" alludes to Shelley's "dome of many colored glass" to suggest the shattering of the ideal into everyday reality. This stanza is suggestive of the representation of nature in literature on primary level and the importance given to it by the poet on another ground or level.

You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
 Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
 Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
 Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. ( Birches Frost)

The above stanza is the true representation of the nature in different words. This is aptly put up by Vinayak Krishna Gokak in the "Introduction" to *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry*, "Indo-Anglian poets have loved to write about and also the philosophic or mystical attitude with which they have responded to Nature."

But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
 With all her matter of fact about the ice storm,  
 I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
 As he went out and in to fetch the cows--  
 Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
 Whose only play was what he found himself,  
 Summer or winter, and could play alone.( Birches Frost)

Here perhaps the boy could be the poet himself and a true love of nature and the surrounding. Really feels happy to be among nature. In other words he may take his cows in the field of those bended birches and feed the cows and that destruction according to him is more suitable than the damage made by the snowfall and storm.

One by one he subdued his father's trees  
 By riding them down over and over again  
 Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
 And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
 For him to conquer.  
 He learned all there was  
 To learn about not launching out too soon

And so not carrying the tree away  
Clear to the ground.  
He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then be flung outward, feet first, with a swish,  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.( Birches Frost)

This stanza is suggestive of what Glotfelty has said "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment."(Glotfelty)

The boy cuts all the trees those were a property for him inherited from his father but just to play he eradicate and wipe away everything that costs him as well as the nature.

One figure seems to imply another image of the farm  
Youth swinging up, out, and down to  
earth again recalls the boyhood of the poet,  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.( Birches, Frost)

For anyone but Frost the "pathless wood" is commonplace. But for him it carries a multifaceted of meaning shaped somewhere else. The uphill wavering of the boy becomes a crest for imagination sway away from the warped, dark wood; a swing away from the "straighter, darker trees"; a swing into the absolute freedom of isolation, the severing of all "considerations." This is the transcendental phase of redemptive consciousness, a game that one plays alone.

I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over.  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk,  
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,

But dipped its top and set me down again.  
 That would be good both going and coming back.  
 One could do worse than be a swinger of birches. (Birches, Frost)

One really needs a nature to befriend with it. At the end of "Birches" a precious balance has been restored between the claims of a saving mind in its intense, inspirational form, and the claims of common sense certainty. To put it in another way, the psychic needs of change supplied best by redemptive thoughts are unbiased by the equally deep psychic need supplied by cynical ironic awareness for the remedy of dull realities and everyday considerations. The beliefs uttered in "Birches" poses no danger to accepted values or beliefs, and it is so temptingly positive that many readers have cherished the poem as a stunning success. At last Glotfelty's views in connection to ecocritical writings as the poem birches really come true as he had said, "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnection between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman." (Glotfelty)

### Conclusion:

Today the whole planet is in environmental crisis. The biosphere is in danger, the depletion of forests, natural resources, the unlimited cutting of plants, the extinction of animal species, the explosion of human population etc have really brought everything to an end and difficult to sustain. This reminds me of the poet G.M.Hopkins, bringing his alarming tone or the real representation of the spoliation of nature in coming years, the following lines tells us the forecast of nature in future if we continue to do this with our surrounding.

"What would the world be? Once bereft  
 Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
 O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
 Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet. (Inversnaid, G.H. Hopkins)

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