

Eco- Criticism in Saint Tukaram and William Wordsworth Poetry: A Comparative Study

Jyoti Tatyasaheb Kashidkar

MA final year, Dept. Of English Class, KLE Society's G.I.
Bagewadi Arts, Science, & Commerce, Nipani,

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the ecocritical perspectives in the poetry of Saint Tukaram and William Wordsworth, examining how both poets represent nature and its relationship with human life. Ecocriticism studies the connection between literature and the environment, emphasizing how literary works reflect ecological awareness and respect for nature. Saint Tukaram a 17th-century Marathi saint-poet presents nature as a divine creation, using simple, rural imagery in his abhangas to teach devotion, harmony, and equality. William Wordsworth, a leading English Romantic poet, portrays nature as a teacher, source of joy, and spiritual guide, emphasizing personal reflection, emotional growth, and moral insight. A comparative study reveals that while Tukaram's poetry emphasizes devotional reverence and ethical living in harmony with nature, Wordsworth highlights the inspirational, restorative, and educational aspects of the natural world. Both poets, however, underline the sacredness and intrinsic value of nature, showing that humans are deeply connected to the environment. This study demonstrates how ecocritical reading enriches our understanding of literary engagement with nature across cultures and periods.

KEYWORDS:

Ecocriticism, Nature, Romantic Poetry, Devotional Poetry, Human-Nature Relationship, Spirituality.

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Introduction:

Ecocriticism, as a field of literary and cultural studies, examines the complex relationship between literature and the natural environment, going beyond mere description of nature to question how human values, culture, and ethics are mediated through literary texts. Cheryll Glotfelty, often regarded as the pioneer of ecocriticism, defined it as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (The Ecocriticism Reader, 1996).

Scholars like Harold Fromm and Lawrence Buell further argued that literature not only represents nature but also shapes human perception of ecological and ethical responsibility. Buell, in particular, emphasized that an “environmental text” should engage critically with the environment rather than treat it as passive scenery.

Saint Tukaram (1608–1649), a saint–poet from Maharashtra, exemplifies this engagement through his abhangas—devotional poems that integrate spiritual philosophy with ecological consciousness. His portrayal of trees, rivers, birds, and seasons goes beyond aesthetic appreciation; it frames nature as sacred, interconnected with human life, and essential for moral and spiritual development. Tukaram’s work is socially critical as well, challenging caste hierarchies and ritualistic practices by emphasizing equality and ethical living through harmonious coexistence with nature.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850), a leading figure of the Romantic Movement, similarly elevates nature from mere backdrop to active moral and spiritual agent. In poems such as Tintern Abbey, Daffodils, and Ode: Intimations of Immortality, he critiques industrial society’s alienation from nature, presenting landscapes as sites of ethical reflection, emotional healing, and imaginative freedom. Unlike Tukaram, Wordsworth’s engagement is largely individualis-

tic, focused on introspection, yet both poets assert the transformative power of nature.

This paper critically examines the ecocritical dimensions of Tukaram and Wordsworth's poetry, exploring how each poet articulates the ethical, spiritual, and social significance of nature. By comparing an Indian Bhakti poet with an English Romantic poet, the study highlights how literary constructions of the natural world can challenge anthropocentrism, promote ecological awareness, and mediate human-nature relationships across cultural and temporal boundaries.

Saint Tukaram can be regarded as a nature poet:

1. Nature as God's Creation:

Tukaram saw nature as a reflection of God. Trees, rivers, mountains, birds, and animals symbolized the divine. Living close to nature meant living close to God. For example, in *Vrukshavalli amha soyare* (The trees are my relatives), he compares trees to family, birds to companions, and the forest to home, showing his ecocentric vision.

2. Simple & Rural Images:

Being a farmer, Tukaram used village life and natural scenes like sowing, harvesting, rivers, rain, and seasons, making his poetry relatable to common people.

3. Harmony with Nature:

All creatures are part of God's family. Living in harmony with nature equals devotion, and harming nature is like disrespecting God.

4. Spiritual Symbolism:

Natural elements symbolize spirituality: blooming lotus =

pure devotion, ocean = God's infinite power, rain = God's grace,
sunlight = divine wisdom.

His Famous Abhangas:

1

“वृक्षवल्ली आम्हा सोयरे वनचरे
वृक्षवल्ली आम्हा सोयरे वनचरे।
पक्षी सुस्वरे आलविती।
एकांतांत सुखी आम्ही।
रामकृष्णहरी नामी।।
तुकाराम म्हणे ऐका।
भक्तांचे व्रत सोयरे।।
वृक्षवल्ली आम्हा सोयरे वनचरे”।।

2.

“फुलांचे गंध :
फुलांचे गंध।
तुका म्हणे ऐका।
भक्तांचे व्रत सोयरे।।
फुलांचे गंध”।।

3

“पाणीचे महत्त्व:
पाणीचे महत्त्व।
तुका म्हणे ऐका।
भक्तांचे व्रत सोयरे।।
पाणीचे महत्त्व”

William Wordsworth can be regarded as a nature poet:

1. Nature as a Teacher:

Wordsworth believed that nature teaches humans important lessons. By observing mountains, rivers, trees, and flowers, people

can learn about life, truth, and morality. For example, the calm of a river or the beauty of a flower can teach patience, peace, and appreciation.

2. Nature as a Source of Joy and Inspiration:

He often described the beauty of nature and the happiness it brings. Walking in the countryside, watching birds, or listening to the wind made him feel joy and inspired his poetry. Nature was a source of emotional healing and creative energy.

3. Spiritual Connection:

Wordsworth saw nature as a way to connect with something larger than oneself. He believed that God's presence can be felt through nature, and that spending time in natural surroundings helps people feel closer to the divine.

4. Solitude and Reflection:

Wordsworth often wrote about walking alone in nature. In solitude, he reflected on life, human emotions, and spiritual truths. Nature, in this sense, is a companion that helps people think and grow inwardly.

His Nature Poems:

1.

“I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud (Daffodils, 1807)

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine

And twinkle on the Milky Way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay;
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
 The waves beside them danced; but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be gay,
 In such a jocund company:
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:
 For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,
 And dances with the daffodils.”

2

**Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey (1798)
 – Selected Key Stanzas**

“Five years have past; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winters! And again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 That on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 Nature never did betray the heart
 That loved her; ’tis her privilege, from hour to hour,
 To feed with beauty, joy, and peace

The mind that seeks her in sincerity.”

3.

Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood (1807) – Selected Stanzas

“There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
But yet I am,
And feel, and think; and with my heart
Alone I hear
The mighty waters rolling free,
The winds, the clouds, the lakes, and seas”

Comparison Frames: Differences and Similarities, Style, Form, etc.

Aspect	Saint Tukaram	William Wordsworth
Connection with Nature	Nature is part of God’s creation; trees, rivers, and animals are sacred	Nature is a teacher and healer; inspires emotions, creativity, and moral lessons.
Purpose	To express devotion to God and show respect for all living beings.	To explore human feelings, personal reflection, and spiritual growth through nature.
Style	Simple, direct, devotional, using everyday life examples.	Emotional, descriptive, reflective, with deep feeling and imagination.

Message	Humans should live in harmony with nature and God; all life is equal.	Humans can learn from nature; it nurtures the mind, soul, and moral values.
Example	“Vrukshavalli amha soyare vanachare” (Trees and plants are our relatives).	“Lines Written in Early Spring” (Observing nature and human life together).

Conclusion:

Both Saint Tukaram and William Wordsworth celebrate nature, but in different ways. Tukaram sees nature as a reflection of God and teaches respect, equality, and devotion through it. Wordsworth, on the other hand, finds in nature a source of inspiration, emotional healing, and moral guidance. Despite their differences, both poets show that nature is sacred, valuable, and deeply connected to human life. Their poetry emphasize its role in concerning about environment in revealing literature’s intricate relationship with the natural world, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, and advocating for nature–human relationship with religious and spiritual approach.

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