

# AN ECOLOGY INTERVENTION IN AN ENGLISH STUDIES PROGRAMME Contexts, Complexities and Choices

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**Abstract:** Over the past few decades, there has been a critical mass gained regarding the need to engage purposefully with Ecology. Unfortunately, this has not provoked any stimulating work within the Humanities and Social Sciences academia. In fact, alongside growing realisations about the necessity to address Ecology, there is a glaring absence of any significant engagement. In response to such a vexing reality, the Department of English at Christ University chose to initiate an Ecological venture within its Honours programme. This paper captures – the vigorous debates it lit up, the tough choices that had to be made, and the promise it offers – that complex journey.

**Keywords:** Ecology, English Studies, Anthropocentrism, Ecocriticism, Bioregionalism, Empiricism, Instrumental Rationality, Ecofeminism

## 1. Introduction

Ecology has become a subject of increasing significance at different levels. The Kyoto Protocol,<sup>1</sup> the UNESCO's announcement of Biosphere Reserves, the appointment of exclusive environment reporters in premier news channels, the emergence of ecology as an electioneering and governance issue (the German Greens),<sup>2</sup> the 'eco-friendly' tag attached to different products in the market, etc. are proof enough of ecological concerns having gained currency as a key global debate. Academia as well

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<sup>1</sup>The Kyoto Protocol is an initiative by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) that lays down international regulations for reducing emissions; <[http://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/items/2830.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php)> 5.

<sup>2</sup>The German Greens are a political outfit who built their identity based on environmental activism. They have had considerable success in shaping the environmental consciousness of Germany. Back home, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, Niyamgiri Hills protest, Koodankulam uprising, etc. are able to influence political debate and even transform into electioneering issues.

has started recognising this phenomenon. While many environment and ecology-centred science courses got introduced in the twentieth century, the Social Sciences and Humanities have taken their own time to acknowledge. The World Social Science Report 2013 does acknowledge the urgency with which work needs to be done. It states: “The gap between what we know about the interconnectedness and fragility of our planetary system and what we are actually doing about it is alarming. And it is deepening.”<sup>3</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty in the Introduction to *Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*<sup>4</sup> shares a similar disappointment. She admits the late entry of the Humanities to the Ecology project. She goes on to argue that English Studies as a domain has remained almost ignorant of the environmental crisis. She states: “... there have been no journals, no jargons, no job, no professional societies or discussion groups, and no conferences on literature and the environment. While related humanities disciplines like history, philosophy, law, sociology, and religion have been “greening” since the 1970s, literary studies have apparently remained untinted by the environmental concerns.”<sup>5</sup>

It is indeed with the publication of *Ecocriticism Reader* in the 1990s that engagements with Ecology have started mushrooming within the Departments of English. However, growing awareness has not prompted most of the Departments of English in varied colleges and universities in India to respond. A quick check into the Departments of English and their UG syllabus in Delhi University, Osmania University, Mumbai University, etc. show the glaring absence. It is in this context that this narrative account of an Ecology intervention in the Department of English, Deanery of Humanities and Social Sciences at Christ University needs to be made sense of. This paper captures the designing of a course titled “Ecological Discourses and Practices”, for an Honours in English Studies programme at the university’s Department of English.

As course design is a powerful means of encoding the values and aspirations centred on the teaching-learning process, studying it helps us decode the same. In this specific case, we will be able to understand the precautions taken, complexities involved, and the deliberations that shaped up while designing the course of a sensitive and key subject like Ecological

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<sup>3</sup>International Social Science Council, “The World Social Science Report 2013: Changing Global Environment,” <<http://www.worldsocialscience.org/activities/>>.

<sup>4</sup>Cheryl Glotfelty, “Introduction” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, University of Georgia Press, 1996, XVI.

<sup>5</sup>Glotfelty, “Introduction,” *The Ecocriticism Reader*, XVI.

Discourses and Practices. Broadly, this paper highlights (1) the opening up of English Studies to accommodate a course on ecology, (2) the rationale for the course, (3) the values and aspirations that guided varied choices, (4) the thought process behind titling the course (5) the need for furthering such ecology-centred experiments in the academia, and (6) the final syllabus.

## **2. English Studies: Shifts and Opportunities**

Post-1990, the Departments of English have undergone remarkable changes in the way they define and choose their texts, employ methods to interpret, and work on their disciplinary being.<sup>6</sup> The larger critical turn that Humanities and Social Sciences have encountered and the entry of Cultural Studies have been the key stimulants in bringing about these radical epistemological and ontological shifts in the Departments of English. Further, the unease sponsored by the dominance of English language in the social, political and cultural domains and the easy spread and assertion of Departments of English in postcolonial lands like India have invited critical investigation, leading to re-assessment of the basics and re-ordering of the whole set up.

The re-branding as ‘Department of English Studies’ as against the older ‘Department of English’ in many a case is a clear indicator of the scale of impact. It has marked a transition, if not a rupture from those days of liberal humanism-driven-literary studies and learn-language-through-literature pedagogic processes. English Studies today asserts the plurality of possibilities and accommodates a range of new and exciting epistemological ventures. Now Postcolonial Studies, Gender Studies, Film Studies, Cultural Studies, etc. are a definitive curricular part of many Departments of English Studies. All these epistemological sites have not only redefined – from the name to what is to be done, what is to be aspired, how it is to be done, etc. – the disciplinary essence, they have also responded to the problematisation of what is a ‘text’ and have subsequently accommodated anything worthy enough of interpretation as ‘text’. For example, a journalistic account of an acid attack on a college-going girl could ignite a plethora of debates on the complex male-female inter-relationship in our times. It can also open up discussions on the body,

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<sup>6</sup>For a critique of the complex contemporary self of the English language and the politicisation of institutionalising English, see Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India*, Columbia University Press, 1999 and Susie Tharu, *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties*, Oriental Blackswan, 1998.

gender, youth, beauty, law and justice, etc. As a result, an orthodox Department of English's practice of investigating gender equations in the society through literary texts loses credence. Further, it challenges the capacity of Literature to be an all-exhaustive field. It is in this context of revised boundaries and redefined focus that Ecological Discourses and Practices within an English Studies programme needs to be understood.

### **3. Rationale for the Course**

When the idea of introducing a course on Ecology for the BA Honours in English Studies<sup>7</sup> programme was mooted within the Department of English at Christ University, the faculty warmed up with enthusiasm. However, the Honours programme with a brief history of three years had a settled composure and it posed an interesting problem. If some course had to come in, something had to be left out. While nobody doubted the validity of the course on Ecology, quite a few were apprehensive about the veracity of the new entrant to compete with the other courses: Indian Literatures, Linguistics, Colonialism and Postcolonialism, East-West Encounters: Shifting Perspectives, and Approaches to Reading and Writing. The toss up was tough as the mentioned courses had already been tried out over three semesters and had gained stability and popular credence.

This pleasurable predicament, coupled with the culture of internal critiquing in the department, stimulated a healthy debate. The defence in favour of the course was debated on the basis of three reasons. (1) Within Humanities and Social Sciences academia, despite many outstanding works, most academic ventures have been carried out with an anthropocentric world-view. (2) Ecology is too often seen to be a concern for science. However, a Humanities and Social Sciences intervention is as well a need of the hour. (3) Unlike never before, due to a hyper-consumerist culture and the resultant fast shrinking natural resources, Ecology is a major concern for reflection for all humans on earth.

First, to understand why the anthropocentric worldview is dominant within the Humanities and Social Sciences, we need to know how it came into practice. William Blake, one of the foremost poets of England, was deeply aware of where the empiricist tradition of Locke, Hume, Newton

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<sup>7</sup>At Christ University, the Honours in English Studies is an option for the third year BA students of triple majors like Psychology, Sociology and English (PSEng), Journalism, Psychology and English (JPeng), and Communicative English, English and Psychology (PSEng). The Honours programme has 12 courses offered by the Department of English, spread across their fifth and sixth semester.

etc., was heading even as early as the 18th century. His poem *Urizen*<sup>7</sup> launched a scathing attack on the scientific, instrumental rationality that was taking over the European Psyche. Blake by naming the character *Urizen* (you + reason), and depicting him like a Newton-like character, was critiquing the idea of reason divorced from other faculties of the mind like emotion, imagination, etc. It is this form of disconnected quests of knowledge that the British and other colonisers went on to triumphantly impose wherever they ruled.

Instrumental rationality, thus, came to be one of the defining features of the British mode of conceptualising higher education. Charles Wood’s Despatch, Charles Grant’s Tract, Macaulay’s Minutes etc. were all part of the lineage. Macaulay<sup>8</sup> – as it is popular postcolonial knowledge now – went on to assert that Indians were uncivilised and uncouth and needed western education in order to become like the British, at least in the future. This colonial discourse, be it in socio-cultural practice or in the educational sector, has had scant respect for nature. Many eco-activists have underlined this problematic often. Greta Gaard, while asserting the merit of eco-feminism, states:

... the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western intellectual tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, animals, emotion, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture, and the mind.<sup>9</sup>

For example, the British went about destroying the Wetlands of Nilgiris thinking that they are nothing but wastelands. They introduced tea, eucalyptus, etc. and have thereby upset the hydrological wealth and biodiversity of the Nilgiris. Further, the Enlightenment has embedded within the Humanities and Social Sciences framework a disenchanting world-view of nature, nature-culture binary formation and the subsequent problematic prioritisation of culture. The resultant furtherings of this entrenched discourse are (a) (Hu-)man, the ‘cultured’ entity has the sixth sense whereas all other life are incapable of deliberation. (b) The *Homo Sapiens*, because of being cultured, have evolved out of its inferior phase within nature. Worryingly, both these presumptions have over a period of

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<sup>7</sup><[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Book\\_of\\_Urizen](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Book_of_Urizen)> accessed 2 January 2014.

<sup>8</sup>See <[http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html)> accessed 24 January 2014.

<sup>9</sup>Greta Gaard, “Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature” <[www.ocis.temple.edu/tempress/chapter/948\\_ch1.pdf](http://www.ocis.temple.edu/tempress/chapter/948_ch1.pdf)> 5. Accessed 20 January 2014.

time become naturalised, not allowing us to admit that the fallacious bias. For example, the majority of us end up unreflectively understanding nature with a reductionist utilitarian stance, taking nature as natural resources and cows as cattle. This is in contrast to some of the fast disappearing heterogeneity of practices like worshipping mountains, seeing the divine in animals like the elephant, rat, etc. A different emotional relationship with nature at large is evident in these practices. There was respect for the interconnectedness of all life. But the modern, enlightenment-driven instrumental rationality misrepresents the complex diversity of reality and makes most intellectual search less rigorous and more flawed with its anthropocentric world-view. Actually, there is hardly any academic acknowledgement of the fact that we as humans are one amongst thousands and thousands of species that inherit the earth and that our existence is only feasible on the basis of an inter-species dependence. Eco-activists like Arne Naess, Rachel Carson, Vandana Shiva have time and again indicated the delicate nature of our existence and the complex web of life we are all part of. So any attempt to study humans and our society holistically cannot afford to ignore this inter-connectedness of all life.

Secondly, because we ignore or reduce – the sociology of different species, the philosophy of interdependence in nature, the history of flora and fauna in colonial and post-colonial eras, etc. – the study of Ecology to be stand-offish work and not as a serious and definitive part of Humanities and Social Sciences intellectual venture, we end up producing and consuming limited and limiting knowledge. The World Social Science Report 2013 states:

Environmental problems cannot be separated from the other risks and crises that comprise current global realities. They are not disconnected challenges; they do not occur in discrete, autonomous systems rooted in the environment on the one hand, and in society on the other. Instead, they are part of a single, complex system where the environmental, political, social, cultural, economic and psychological dimensions of our existence meet and merge.<sup>10</sup>

So there is a pressing demand for working on the interstices of disciplines and exploiting the synchronic possibilities of disciplinary knowledges.

Thirdly, our day-to-day life with increasing materialistic needs and depleting natural resources and the resultant problems are good enough to

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<sup>10</sup>International Social Science Council, “The World Social Science Report 2013: Changing Global Environment,” <<http://www.worldsocialscience.org/activities/world-social-science-report/the-2013-report/>> accessed 24 January 2014.

highlight the hydra-headed nature of the problem. Water woes, (hu)man-animal conflicts, climate change, shrinking bio-diversity, pollution, sand mining, etc. have invited mixed and often conflicting responses from different quarters. For example, mega dam projects receive big support and strong opposition. While the state and related multi-national corporations are for it, ecological activists are against it. Today, the burgeoning ecological crises across the world are echoed in a variety of voices at the intellectual, political, economic, historical and cultural planes. In fact, it is a definitive call for humanists and social scientists to work on this fertile field. In case, we keep doing what we have been narrow-mindedly doing, – prioritising issues like Corporate Social Responsibility and ignoring the damages done to the biodiversity of a region by approving huge dam projects – it can only be at the cost of being self-defeatist, skewed, and unethical.

Hence, studying Ecology within a Humanities and Social Sciences framework is an intellectual, contemporary and ethical need. But one could ask why within English Studies. English Studies today – as already hinted at before – operates on the cultural plane, along with the linguistic, aesthetic, philosophical, etc. Knowing that the cultural relationship with nature matters in conservation, wildlife policy making, etc., English Studies, apart from addressing the cultural concerns of ecology, can offer a different space for varied interdisciplinary ventures on ecology.

Finally, East-West Encounters, a course that looks at the crisis of the much theorised so-called Islamic East versus the so-called Secular West in the post-2001 scenario had to give way for the introduction of Ecological Discourses and Practices.

#### 4. Guiding Values

After having been sufficiently convinced of the legitimacy of the course, a small team within the department started reflecting on the foundational values with which it would nourish the project. One of the first driving codes was to take the course beyond the printed-text confinement. A course on Ecology demands this and therefore visual texts and field trips were built in. A visual text like a movie is at once intense and engrossing. By choosing to locate a visual text within the syllabus, we hoped to dislodge the centrality long cherished by the printed text. Girish Kasaravalli's *Dweepa*<sup>11</sup> was the chosen visual text. It is a moving account of an indigenous community's struggle against the State's call for building

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<sup>11</sup>Girish Kasaravalli, *Dweepa*, Film, 2002.

a dam. The film debates issues on bioregionalism, the State's perception of indigenous communities and their relationship with nature, etc. Apart from serving as an excellent case study to discuss the problems of dams and displacement, the text was capable of reaching out to the aural and visual senses of the learner.

Our intellect's sensory enquiry was hoped to be tapped through this movie. However, we were aware that the visual text is as well a representational medium. So, by introducing field trips, we hoped to create a direct encounter with varied aspects of nature that would facilitate experiential learning and encourage the learners to formulate their own text-and-experience yoked knowledge. So, a three-day field trip to a chosen part of Western Ghats has been made a compulsory part of the paper.

Secondly, library hours (one hour per week) were chalked out within the syllabus to bring in constant updates to the different debates that were likely to emerge in class. An example from one of our semester's experience (June-September 2013) should be able to throw light on this. We were debating the anthropocentric nature of our day-to-day existence. The arguments bounced off to consumerist culture. Knowing the seriousness of the issue, we chose to read Chapter IX of Ramachandra Guha's "How Much Should a Person Consume?"<sup>12</sup> as part of the library hour work. We followed it up in the next class by listing down how much each of us materialistically draw from nature, to lead a sophisticated life. We contrasted this with other species utilising natural resources to lead their day-to-day life. This sparked off a series of thoughts and kindled eco-consciousness. In fact, without even any instruction being given, the class became more judicious and used the fans and lights only when they happened to be of utmost need. One of the boys recommended to the university's management that the use of polystyrene on campus be stopped in the cafeteria. (The management did admit the merit of the suggestion and banned the use of polystyrene bowls for serving food.) One of the girls shared that not burning crackers during Diwali was a conscious choice that she took during her childhood years and that the discussions are restoring faith in her stance.

As a department, we were aware that quite regrettably, the academia in our times often perceives activism as rash and radical. The different measures put in place to curb student politics across different institutions in the country constitute a signal to divorce the intellectual process from

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<sup>12</sup>Ramachandra Guha, "How Much Should a Person Consume?" <[http://www.vikalpa.com/pdf/articles/2003/2003\\_apr\\_jun\\_001\\_013.pdf](http://www.vikalpa.com/pdf/articles/2003/2003_apr_jun_001_013.pdf)> accessed 4 January 2014.



activism. Over a period of time, this has made the academia to consolidate its observation in the following manner: intellectual work is deep, contemplative and far-reaching; activism is its polar opposite, instinctual, lost in the here and now and unacceptable. As a result, the intellectual spaces (if the academia is to be considered so) and the political spaces (read activism) pick up a sense of mutual mistrust and do not come to the talking table. Feminism has gone through this phase and has learnt its lessons. Philosophy has tangentially responded by creating a space for Applied Philosophy. Taking cognizance of this scenario in an ecological encounter, we chose to empower the learner with a heightened ecological consciousness. By introducing the inspiring ecological selves of different people, we hope(d) that the course will affect the learner in a constructive and creative manner, far beyond the qualification-bound meaning of education and prompt them to derive their own special relationship with ecology.

### **5. Title: Ecological Discourses and Practices**

Naming anything has its own pros and cons. We can attempt to convey the essence of an entity in the way it is named. By naming, we might not just impose a semantic closure, but also suppress the complexity it embodies. However, naming is unavoidable as it hints at the prioritised mode of understanding an entity and also demarcates the boundaries, at least roughly. Keeping this philosophy of naming, the course title has been carefully worked out.

The term ‘Environment’ in common parlance refers to the habitat in which an organism(s) lives. However, it usually does not convey the complex network in which life and nature ought to be understood. ‘Ecology’ on the other hand, by its very definition accommodates the organism and related concerns like habitat, prey, predator, disease, climatic condition, offspring, etc. It is a broader way of approaching nature. This is more or less a settled understanding and it is reflected in the way some departments of English Studies accommodate a course on “Ecocriticism” (Ecology + Criticism) as part of their programmes.

In terms of the cause for which it stands, Ecocriticism has parallels with Ecological Discourses and Practices. However, it disregards (if not, stays ignorant of) the post-structuralist shifts that have broadly re-defined Humanities and Social Sciences. For example, its very title has not gone through the post-structuralist scanner. In case, it had, it would have gone with a title like ‘Eco-critique’ and not with ‘Ecocriticism’. In addition, true to its conventional mode, Ecocriticism as a practice approaches texts from a

literary point of view and does not necessarily warm up to interdisciplinary approaches. No wonder, *The Ecocriticism Reader* by Cheryll Glotfelty, which is considered to be a seminal text of Ecocriticism, has the sub-title *Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Considering such factors, the course design was consciously veered away from ‘Ecocriticism’.

The ‘Discourses’ part of the title indicates the diversity of ideas and ideologies that populate the field. It ranges from the Euro-American intellectually-driven eco-activism to the so-called third world’s day-to-day survival-based eco-activism. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*<sup>13</sup> – which is a part of the syllabus – makes penetrating observations on this. Piya, a western educated cetologist, comes to the Sunderbans with the hope of studying the Irawaddy Dolphins. She takes the support of Fokir, a lonely fisherman. Their attempts to get a deeper sense of the Dolphins bring out the contrasting eco-activist models they practice. Such juxtapositions enable the reader to compare and contrast how responses to nature – based on different experiences from different life worlds – have different origins, objectives, perspectives and destinations.

The ‘Practices’ part of the title draws attention to certain special relationships with ecology. If Chris MaCandless believed in Thoreau’s philosophy and chose to “live deep and suck out all the marrow of life”<sup>14</sup> by living dangerously (and eventually dying) in the deep woods, ‘Maram’ Thangasamy<sup>15</sup> believed that his life’s mission is to plant as many saplings as possible and pass on the fruits of his toil to posterity. The course, as a further emphasis on the ‘Practices’ aspect, makes it compulsory for the student to have a three-day field visit to the biological hotspot – Western Ghats. This visit is supplemented in the syllabus by an interview with Madhav Gadgil, on the delicately poised ecology of Western Ghats. So in the first year of its introduction, the students were taken to Dandeli-Anshi Tiger Reserve in the company of a resourceful Forester, who shared plentiful details regarding the flora and fauna of the reserve, the conservation work and the threats to biodiversity within the reserve, pressures of tourism, etc. In the second year, we took the help of Keystone

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<sup>13</sup>Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2004.

<sup>14</sup>Henry David Thoreau, “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” *Walden*, <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WALDEN/hdt02.html>> accessed 8 January 2014.

<sup>15</sup>M. J. Prabhu, “Greenspace: Tree Man”, *Frontline*, <<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2926/stories/20130111292609200.htm>> accessed 20 January 2014

Foundation,<sup>16</sup> an NGO working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve over twenty years with indigenous communities on eco-developmental issues.

The organisation gave us scholarly resource people and arranged bird watching sessions, gaur monitoring session (to understand how in recent times the Gaur has become a threshold animal in terms of man-animal conflict), interaction with the Kurumba community, and a visit to the Banagudi Sacred Grove. The syllabus also ensures that the learning from such field trips is taken up for evaluation later in the semester. Thus, such discourses and practices put together, prompted the title “Ecological Discourses and Practices.”

The Department of English at Christ University at the time of conceptualising this paper was keen on giving its best shot at “Ecological Discourses and Practices.” At the same time, it was aware of its limited expertise in the domain of Ecological Studies. So, it was decided to bring together minds that had already done credible work in the field. Dr Meera Baidur, Dr Nirmal Selvamony, Mr Theodore Baskaran, and Dr Sashi Sivramkrishnan<sup>1</sup> were roped in and were asked to go through the first draft. After meticulous scanning, they gave plentiful suggestions and shared many insights. Following their scholarly inputs, the department further brainstormed on its specific constituted-ness and produced the following course design.

## 6. Syllabus

Title of the Course: Ecological Discourses and Practices

Course code: HEN 553

Marks 100

Credits: 4

Total no. of hours: 75

Description: This paper is conceptualised to address one of the pressing concerns of our times – Ecology. Framed from an English Studies perspective, it first attempts to help the entrant get grounding in the field and then gradually leads on to discuss Anthropocentrism, Eco Activism and Ecological Self. The paper understands that it cannot address its objectives with a textual engagement alone and hence opens up for field visits.

Objectives:

- To introduce ecological concerns to the students of English Studies

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<sup>16</sup>See <http://keystone-foundation.org/> accessed 24 January 2014.

<sup>18</sup>Dr Meera Baidur is a Professor at the Manipal centre for Philosophy and Humanities; Dr Nirmal Selvamony is the Head, Department of English at Central University of Tamilnadu, Thiruvavoor; Mr Theodore Baskaran is a Film Critic-cum-Nature Writer and; Dr Sashi Sivramkrishna is a Writer-cum-Professor.

- To explore an interdisciplinary engagement with Ecology
- To examine diverse contexts and concerns in the field
- To promote ecological consciousness
- To acknowledge field work-based learning as an important academic practice

Entry Level Knowledge: Working knowledge of English and basic ecological awareness

Expected Learning Outcome: Ability to understand ecology at a deeper level and locate self and nature in such a framework

Unit I: Introduction

10 Hours

*This unit introduces the students to a basic domain-specific vocabulary and key debates.*

“Nobody Was Supposed to Survive” by Alice Walker

Terms and Concepts: Altruism, Ecology, Environment, Biodiversity, Biocentrism, Anthropocentrism, Conservation, Climate Change, Cloning, Food Chain, Carbon Foot Print, Ecosystem, Ecopsychology, Ecofeminism, Ecocriticism, Environmental Ethics, Environmental Philosophy, Gaia Theory, Deep Ecology, MOVE, Behavioural Ecology, Genetics, Habitats and Niches, Biomes, Political Ecology, Postmodern Environmentalism, Sustainability, Symbiosis, Environmental Overkill, Ecocreation, Eco-Warrior, Social Ecology, Ecotopian Discourse, Ecological Philosophy, Ecological Self, Romanticism, Utilitarianism

Excerpts from *Environmentalism: A Global History* by Ramachandra Guha

The Ecology of Affluence: The significance of *Silent Spring* – how a book by a woman scientist changed the world; The Environmental Debate – Science and the discourse of ecological crisis; The Environmental Movement – Environmental Action in Europe and the United States; Radical American Environmentalism – the competing claims of Deep Ecology and Environmental Justice; The German Greens – how a protest movement became a political party

The Southern Challenge: The postmaterialist hypothesis is challenged; The Environmentalism of the poor – Social Action among the desperately disadvantaged in the Third World; An India/Brazil Comparison – ecological degradation and environmental protest in two large and important countries; A Chipko/Chico; Redefining Development – bringing back nature and the people.

*The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature* by William Cronon

Unit II: Anthropocentrism 15 Hours

*This unit invites the students to understand and critique how most of our perceptions are guided by anthropocentric conceptions.*

Unearthing the Roots of Colonial Forest Laws: Iron Smelting and the State in Pre- and Early-Colonial India by Sashi Sivramkrishna

*Flowering Tree – Introduction and Short Story* by A. K. Ramanujam

*Dweepa* by Girish Kasaravalli

*The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh

Unit III: *Eco Activism* 15 Hours

This unit introduces students to diverse cases, contexts, and complexities of eco-activism in the country and abroad.

“Integrated Study Needed for Ghats,” an interview with Professor Madhav Gadgil, by Lyla Bavdam

“Protecting Urban Diversity” by Harini Nagendra

*Mother Forest: The Unfinished Work of CK Janu* by Bhaskaran

“Greenspace: Tree Man” – by M J Prabhu

*The Man who Planted Trees* by Andy Lipkis

Unit IV: *Ecological Self* 10 Hours

*This Unit, by exhibiting renowned cases of people who have exhibited an ecological self, invites the students to consider one of their own.*

“Where I Lived, and What I Lived for,” Excerpts from *Walden* by Thoreau

*The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (or) *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer

Unit V: Field Visits and Library Work 25 hours

Field visits are to enable the student to gain an experiential sense of biodiversity, forest life, and city ecology.

One hour of library work per week, adding up to 15 at the end of semester is part of the curriculum. This is aimed at enabling the student to freely explore the domain without any teacher regulation.

CIA I (Mid Semester): Written test. 5 out of 7 to be answered. Maximum mark per question: 10.

CIA II: A written test on Unit I.

CIA III: Field Work and Library work based assessment.

End Semester: Written test. 5 out of 7 to be answered. Maximum mark per question: 20.

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## 7. Conclusion

Gone are those days when disciplinarily-confined knowledge transactions were the unquestionable norm. Today, higher education is a lot about crisscrossings, cross pollinations, transgressions, and disciplinary fluidity. Such transitions have opened up exciting intellectual ventures. English Studies has exemplified this attitude by embracing Postcolonial Studies, Gender Studies, Film Studies, etc., in the recent past. Given this context, Ecology is in the threshold list. If more departments of English (Studies) could open up to accommodate Ecology – which is irrefutably an important and essential concern of our times – in their curriculum, it will pave the way for more socially relevant, and contemporary academic transactions. Other disciplines could as well be roped in to produce collaborative projects on Ecology.