



## An Ecocritical Analysis of *Trees* by Emily Dickinson

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**Abstract:** This paper studies Emily Dickinson's poem *Trees*, which is part of the NCERT Class XII English textbook *Kaleidoscope*, from an ecocritical point of view. The main aim is to understand how Dickinson shows nature not just as a background, but as something alive, active, and full of feeling. The study uses ecocriticism as the main theory and a simple idea framework that looks at nature's beauty, usefulness, and the harm done to it. The paper explains how trees, birds, flowers, and other natural things are given human-like qualities and shown as being deeply connected. By closely reading the poem, the paper shows that Dickinson wanted people to love and protect nature. This kind of analysis of the poem helps students and teachers think more deeply about environmental issues. In today's time, nature is in danger because of human activities like cutting trees, pollution, and global warming. In such a time, this analysis of *Trees* gives an important lesson: we must take care of the environment so that future generations can also enjoy its beauty and benefits.

**Key Words:** Ecocriticism, Emily Dickinson, NCERT, Nature,

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### 1. Introduction

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) was one of the most important poets of the 19th century America. She lived a quiet and private life. And so only a few of her poems were published during her lifetime. After her death, 1,789 of her poems were published. Her poems are special because she used capital letters in different ways, used many dashes, and wrote with unique images and a musical style (National Council of Educational Research and Training 2024).

Nature is very important in many of Emily Dickinson's poems. She did not think of nature as something separate from human life. Instead, she saw it as something closely connected and full of meaning. Her poems often make us feel that nature is alive, aware, and sometimes even wiser than people. Because of this, her writing matches what we now call "ecocriticism" — a way of studying literature that looks at the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

One such poem is *Trees*. It is full of deep meaning and beauty. In this poem, Dickinson describes a summer scene where trees and other parts of nature seem full of life and energy. The trees are not just a background—they feel like living beings with their own power and presence.

This paper looks at the poem *Trees* through an ecocritical point of view. It tries to understand how Dickinson presents nature not as silent and passive, but as something alive and emotional.



This study helps us see how her poetry teaches us to look at nature with more care and respect, which is very important in today's time when nature is often damaged or ignored.

## 2. Literature Review

Ecocriticism is an emerging field in literary criticism that studies the relationship between literature and nature. According to **Cheryl Glotfelty**, "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). This approach to textual analysis helps readers understand how writers describe nature not just as a background, but as an active part of human life.

Many scholars have studied how nature is depicted in literature. **Buell** explained that writers use their imagination to respond to environmental problems (2005). Glotfelty also affirmed that literature plays an important role in discussing nature and ecological issues (1996). **Gatta** connected nature in literature with religion and American culture (2004). Similarly, **Farnsorth** studied how New England writers like Emily Dickinson wrote about their surroundings (1994). More recently, **Chahal** studied some of Dickinson's nature poems and found that she described nature in a deep and meaningful way (2023). A research paper by **Abdel Mageed** provides a detailed ecofeminist interpretation and presents a new perspective to appreciate the nature poetry written by Emily Dickinson (2017). Furthermore, **Zhengao** wrote about "Dickinson's personal life and the transcendentalist thought of her era, and interprets Emily Dickinson's poems from an ecocritical perspective" (2024). All these studies help readers understand how deeply Emily Dickinson cared about nature.

Even though many scholars have written about Dickinson and nature, the specific poem *Trees* from the NCERT Class XII *Kaleidoscope* textbook has not been studied much from an ecocritical point of view. Most research talks about her more famous poems but does not look closely at *Trees*.

This research fills that gap by focusing on *Trees* using both a theoretical and a conceptual framework. It studies how Dickinson presents nature through this poem and what ecological message can be understood from it. This kind of analysis adds something new to Dickinson studies and helps students and teachers see her work in a fresh, meaningful way.

## 3. Objectives:

The main objectives of this study are:

1. To study Emily Dickinson's poem *Trees* using an ecocritical approach to understand how nature is shown as an active and aware force, not just a background.
2. To use a conceptual framework based on the beauty, usefulness, and damage to nature to analyse the poem.

## 4. Methodology

This paper uses a simple and detailed study of the poem *Trees* by Emily Dickinson. It follows a qualitative method, where the poem is read and understood deeply, not with numbers but through ideas and meanings. The paper uses an ecocritical approach to see how nature is shown in the poem. It also uses a basic idea framework that looks at nature's beauty, its use, and how it is sometimes harmed. The poem is explained line by line, and thoughts of other writers and scholars are used to support the study. The goal is to connect the poem with today's environmental issues.

## 5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the analysis of the poem is based on the following points:

1. Ecocriticism:
  - a) Focuses on the relationship between literature and nature.



- b) Nature is presented as alive, interconnected, and autonomous, deserving respect and protection.
- 2. Personification:
  - a) Dickinson gives human qualities to natural elements (e.g., sun, animals, plants).
  - b) Nature is portrayed as a dynamic, living system with its own agency.
- 3. Animism:
  - a) Attributes spirit or consciousness to nature (e.g., trees dancing, flowers striving).
  - b) Encourages respect and recognition of nature's value beyond human use.
- 4. Aesthetic Reflection on Nature:
  - a) The poem suggests real nature surpasses human art (e.g., Van Dyck's paintings).
  - b) Emphasises nature's inherent worth, advocating for its conservation in its natural state.

## 6. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the analysis of the poem is based on the following points:

- 1. Nature is beautiful:
  - a) Nature is full of beauty. Everybody likes trees, animals, the sun, birds, flowers, etc.
  - b) Nature looks calm, peaceful, and magical, bringing happiness and making us feel connected to the Earth. It very often arouses a feeling of nostalgia.
- 2. Nature is useful:
  - a) Nature is not only beautiful but also very useful for us. Everything in nature is a resource to us.
  - b) Nature gives us things we need to survive, like clean air, food, and medicine.
- 3. Nature is being damaged, and it needs conservation:
  - a) Right now, nature is getting harmed a lot. Trees are being cut, pollution is killing small creatures, the sun's heat is rising because of global warming, and many plants and animals are disappearing.
  - b) This damage is harming both nature and humans, and we need to protect and conserve it.

This framework mixes ecocriticism, that is, how humans and nature are connected, nostalgia, that is, remembering our happy moments with nature, and environmental protection, that is, the need to save nature. It shows that nature's beauty and value should inspire us to care for and protect it.

## 7. Textual Analysis of *Trees* based on the Theoretical Framework

### Enjoying Nature's Music and Movement

The first stanza shows that nature is full of life and music:

“The Trees like Tassels hit – and – swung –

There seemed to rise a Tune

From Miniature Creatures

Accompanying the Sun –” (Dickinson 107)

Here, Dickinson compares trees to tassels, making them seem as if they are dancing with joy. The “Miniature Creatures” seem to be small insects or birds making music along with the sun. This shows how all parts of nature—plants, animals, sunlight—work together like a musical group. It reflects the idea that everything in nature is connected.



## The Sun as Sovereign

Dickinson gives the sun a human-like quality:

“The Sun shone whole at intervals –

Then Half – then utter hid –

As if Himself were optional

And had Estates of Cloud –” (Dickinson 107)

She writes “Himself” and “Sun” with capital letters, as if the sun is a powerful person. According to Dickinson, nature is not here to serve humans—it follows its own rules. The sun shining and hiding as it likes shows that nature has its own will and importance.

## Voices and Actions of Animals

In the second part of the poem, Dickinson talks about animals behaving like humans:

“A Bird sat careless on the fence –

One gossiped in the Lane

On silver matters charmed a Snake

Just winding round a Stone –” (Dickinson 108)

She writes about birds gossiping and a snake getting charmed by something shiny—maybe sunlight. This gives animals a sense of thought and feeling. By doing this, Dickinson helps us feel closer to animals and respect their place in the world.

## Flowers as Living Beings

Flowers are also shown as active and full of life:

“Bright Flowers slit a Calyx

And soared upon a Stem

Like Hindered Flags – Sweet hoisted –

With Spices – in the Hem –” (Dickinson 108)

The image of flowers as “Hindered Flags” shows that they grow with effort, but beautifully. The mention of “Spices” adds a sense of richness and mystery. Dickinson shows that plants are strong and have their own special beauty.

## Art Cannot Match Real Nature

In the final stanza, Dickinson says that real nature is better than any painting:

“Twas more – I cannot mention –

How mean – to those that see

Vandyke’s Delineation

Of Nature’s – Summer Day!” (Dickinson 108)

She refers to Sir Anthony van Dyck, a famous painter, and says even his art cannot capture the full beauty of nature. This line reminds us that no matter how good human art is, it can never be better than the natural thing. Dickinson asks us to value nature as it truly is—not just how it looks in pictures.

## 8. Textual Analysis of Trees based on the Conceptual Framework

1. The trees swinging like tassels, the tune of miniature creatures, the sun hiding behind the clouds, the orchards growing, the birds singing, shining stones where snakes wind, bright flowers slitting calyx etc are all very beautiful. Nature is full of beautiful things that touch our hearts and make us feel happy. The trees move gently in the wind, like tassels swinging softly. Tiny creatures make sweet sounds. When the sun hides behind the clouds, the sky looks calm and golden, making everything look magical. Orchards grow fresh fruits, showing signs of life and happiness. Birds sing sweet songs in the morning, filling the air with joy. Even the shining stones look beautiful as snakes



quietly move over them. Bright flowers slowly open their petals, showing their lovely colours like little gems in the green fields. Every small thing in nature is special and full of beauty. These simple sights make us feel close to the earth and remind us of how wonderful the natural world is. Nature is, thus, very beautiful.

2. The trees, small creatures, the sun, the clouds, the birds, the stones, flowers, plants are all very useful to us. Trees give us shade, fruits, leaves and flowers. Small creatures like insects help in growing plants and keeping the soil good. They produce sweet and musical sounds. The sun gives us light and warmth. Clouds bring rain which gives us water. It helps farmers grow crops. Birds eat harmful insects and spread seeds. Stones are used for making houses and roads. Flowers make the world beautiful and help in making fruits. Plants give us food, medicine, and fresh air. All these things help us live a better life.
3. Nowadays, many things in nature are getting spoiled or lost. People are cutting trees for land and wood. Small creatures are dying because of dirty water, air, and chemicals. The sun is becoming hotter because of global warming. Clouds are not giving proper rain due to climate change. Birds are losing their homes and food. Stones are being taken out too much for making roads and buildings. Flowers and plants are also getting destroyed because of human work. All these things are very important for our life. We should protect them and use them carefully to save nature for the future. According to Karen Ellis, Chief Advisor, Economics and Development WWF-UK, "If we start to understand the value of nature to our society and economy, we will recognise the importance of living in harmony with nature, rather than destroying it for short term gain. So many governments and businesses around the world are now realising this, and starting to act – it gives me real hope for the future."(WWF-UK, n.d.).

By reading and appreciating this poem, we feel love and respect for nature. This analysis points out to us how trees, animals, birds, the sun, clouds, flowers, and plants are very important in our life. They remind us of our childhood days and makes us feel nostalgic and bring back sweet memories of the past. The analysis also warns us that people are harming nature in many ways. It gives us a message to take care of nature and use everything carefully so we can save it for the future.

## 9. Conclusion

The poem *Trees* shows nature as an active and lively force. It implies that we see it as more than just a background. This paper, using an ecocritical approach, has looked at how Dickinson presents nature as full of life, with each part, trees, animals, the sun, flowers etc being alive and aware. Dickinson shows nature as something beautiful, strong, and independent. The poem inspires the readers to appreciate nature. It reminds them that human beings should live in harmony with it, and should not try to control it.

The conceptual framework which focuses on the beauty, usefulness, and need to protect nature, gives us a deeper understanding of the ecological aspect of the poem. Dickinson's portrayal reminds us of nature's importance in giving us joy, resources, and emotional comfort. The conceptual framework warns us about the damage people are causing to the environment. Deforestation, pollution, and climate change are today's burning issues, so Dickinson's poem inspires the readers to protect and care for nature. Thus, the poem *Trees* is not just about celebrating the beauty of nature, but also a call to take action.

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