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Postmodern Psychological Aspects of Ecocriticism within/beyond the Ambit of Human Behavior

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Abstract

The term 'ecocriticism', still, gets an impression of an entrant in Indian context. Nevertheless, an adequate number of treatises are available where the roots of ecocriticism can be traced and most of them give birth to various assumptions to have an open platform for a longer debate on the peculiarity of human cognitive development and the impact of environment in which such development takes place and, definitely, visa-versa. This paper strives to get some suitable answers to the numerous esoteric questions under the intensive supervision of different psychological terminology and methodology. Psychology treats environment as an inevitably and explicitly coexisting entity to human beings where humans begins as an entrant, imply as an amateur and initiate as a mature one. During this whole process of human development, environment affects humans' psychology tacitly or unequivocally. Environment assists to create the feeling of beatitude and elation, fear and chafe, romance and erotica, sorrow and affliction and so on. In fact, psychoecocriticism helps to find out the interface of human psychology and environment, whereas ecocentricism specifies it. Some of the essential and odd behavior traits have been elaborately discussed in this paper.

Keywords: psychoecocriticism, ecolibrium, ecopathy, ecocentricism, environmental narcissism.

Psychology is an inevitable part of human existence and for human existence so the environment. Thus there is a great sense of bonhomie and integrity between the two— nature and psychology. Though an adequate number of treatises are available where the roots of ecocriticism can be traced but most of them are categorized within the environmental psychology. With an innovative standpoint it becomes significant to reinstate some of the unheeded but apocalyptic facets of such psychology and to explore the newness in the field of psychoecocriticism. In fact, such efforts fulfill the official mission of the Association for the Study of the Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in which it is vividly mentioned that nature writing figures "to promote the exchange of ideas and information pertaining to literature that considers the relationship between human beings and the natural worlds and to encourage new nature writings, traditional and innovative scholarly approaches to environmental literature and interdisciplinary environmental research." (cit., 1996, xviii) This interdisciplinary discourse also enrolls the study of environment and the human psychology together, albeit this is the least studied area among other existing academic disciplines. However, this area consists of various broad aspects of human society, custom, culture and everything linked to the natural environment.

The study of nature in terms of human psychology necessarily and fundamentally requires pointing out some of the psychological terms. One of these terms is tabula rasa, though the term is considered a psychological as well as a philosophical one, it also gratifies the needs of an ecocritic. This is the blank state of mind; it means an ignorant or innocent mind. As we

grow up, our respective capacity also grows up through experience and we see ourselves with great intellect and knowledge but when it comes to nature and other environment issues, we behave like an innocent infant (I deliberately mention innocent infant, as it is not a universal feature to find an infant inherently innocent, especially when it is described and observed under the Freudian ideology), who is in the *tabula rasa* state of mind. So, this is the state of *empirical tabula rasa*, means experienced blank mind when we pretend to be innocent. And unfortunately this innocent behavior is limited to the environment issues.

From the very beginning we have been consumers and still we are consuming and undoubtedly, we would remain consumers. We are proud to be consumers. Psychology treats such kind of thinking as a problem of the Self. This Self is the reflection of one's Ego. The tendency of exploiting the natural resources is preserved in Id, the unconscious mind and this Id, indeed, comes through culture and tradition, because in some tribes this Id is still not found, in other way, not provocative, that is why they are the true companion of nature. In fact, for a better companionship with nature this Self has to be eliminated. At this stage the relation of harmony and accord is established between nature and human being. This state of mutual totality is *ecolibrium*, where both satisfy each other and exist together without encroaching either's territory. Andrew Ross also suggests that nature and the self are not two separate identities, as he writes in a very leisurely mood, "our culture's need to be persuaded that ecology can be sexy and not self-denying." (1994, 15) No doubt Ross wants to create a charisma of nature among humans as to a large extent nature is always considered feminine whose charm would leave humans spell bound and flabbergasted.

In Indian panorama nature has been considered as an inevitable part of human life and custom but ironically it has not been considered as a valued term in its textual form. However, various poets and authors have presented the peerless and perennial Indian landscape through their visual imagery and metaphorical languages. It seems a resurgence of romanticism as they cherished nature. But, indeed, it is not their true ecological concern. The Indian Diaspora would require much more than this, if practiced with its *ecocentric* approach. It requires the peculiarity of relationship between humanities and sciences, between cognitive and praxiological aspect of human beings, between pedagogical and cultural perspective of ecocriticism and, above all, between text and nature. As the interpretation of a text requires the understanding level of the reader as well as their cognitive acceptance, the interpretation of the environment also becomes significant to be elaborated through its radical assumptions. When the environment gets a textual interpretation it includes some amenable facts, such as people's alignment with nature as consumers, their exploitative practices, their orthodoxical tendencies and so on. Ergo, it is relevant to study environment and human beings in terms of their psychological perspectives. It is to diagnose the problems of human beings in relation with their surroundings. In this process of ecopathy, the individual has to be made understand that he/she is an integral and essential part of nature and nature has all the possible remedies for the redressal of their problems.

Psychology views nature as a metaphor of life and a source of temptation and desire. Richard Kerridge writes, "Psychoanalytical...critics have been writing about natural world as primarily metaphorical and symbolical, a displacement of other, unstated desires and political sentiments." (2009, 534) Initially the two major terms 'displacement' and 'unstated desire' become an interface for the human cognition and environment as the former receives what the latter provides. So, environment has a strong character to play with the meek human mind, as it behaves like bait to the hungry humans; but unfortunately the consequences give some eerie details where environment is getting depleted day by day and losing its possessed

strength. However, there is a great connection between human mind and environment, as most of the psychologists and ecocritics see this. Jonathan Bate, illustrating from Wordsworth's poem 'The Excursion', states, "Everything is linked to everything else, and, most importantly, the human mind must be linked to the natural environment." (1991, 2) Endorsing Bate's ideas Kerridge also explains, "Bate is drawing an implicit analogy between material connections, such as the circulations of nourishment, that an ecologist would identify, and the emotional process – the way the loved place acts on the mind – explored in the poem – 'The Excursion'. For Bate this is more than analogy." (2009, 536) What Kerridge explains through the expression 'the way the loved place acts on the mind' has a great significance in terms of understanding the truth behind the human tendency to get his association with environment. This is basically an identity of the Self through the place. This place is attached with the emotion of the Self. Though one's attitudes, appearance, memories, ideas, feelings, sentiments and other various types of character traits one can understand the particular environment one lives in. According to Edward O. Wilson, "this place identity is a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of broadly conceived cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives." (1978, x) The cognitive mind is what we experience in our daily life. This is, in fact, an interaction between the individual and the place. Nature or the non-human environment does not merely frame the history of human beings but also implicates the psychological development of human race.

There exists another quite different psychoanalytical view which is based on Lacan and Žižek's observations. Lacan's 'mirror-stage' theory, in which identity of the self is re-established through the deconstruction of the self and the 'real' is achieved, is later analyzed by Žižek in terms of the ecological crisis. In Kate Rigby's words, "He (Slavoj Žižek) has observed, to the extent that the ecological crisis pertains to what Lacan terms the 'real', that which precedes, defies and disrupts symbolic representation, it remains strangely elusive to thought, even while pressing in upon us daily, shifting the literal ground of our being." (2007, 151) To understand this 'real', a proper and an apt language is required and for environmental issues a 'fertile language' is needed. This fertility will come out through the proper selection of words and this selectivity is based on our cultural difference and diversities in our thoughts. But the use of this fertile language is possible only when one's perspective and contention is *ecocentric*. This ecocentrism requires the complete indulgence of an individual in the environmental issues. This language also embodies the particularity of an individual's views and concern to set up a 'real' aura of nature. If the user of this language does slight mistake, the whole concept will be amiss interpreted. Thus, only the conscious, active and intellectual mind can create such illusionistic identity in language, means the illusion is created through the identical representation of the real. The barbaric and uncivilized language cannot be the medium of expressing nature because, "Nature", itself as Raymond Williams remarks, "is perhaps the most complex word of the language" (1985, 219) (This may take the discussion to the depth into the linguistic evaluation)

Some of the fundamental elements in Western culture are also the responsible factors for the ecological crisis. In these elements some are essentially psychological such as phallogocentrism and rationalism and some are philosophical and political such as tragedy, pastoral and metaphysics. Such cultural traits are more or less responsible to ecological crisis. In Lynn Townsend White's words, any of these elements "bears a huge burden of guilt." (1967, 1204) But further he himself gives an explanation, "What people do about their ecology depends upon what they think about things around them." (1205) so the concern of the people with their surroundings plays a great role to decide the health of the particular environment. The adaptation of environment within the individual's recognition is the

importance of the non-human beings. In fact, ecocriticism or ecoliterature is a human effort to restore the non-human world and psychology provides the right way of thinking towards this non-human.

Environment, in general or particular, is in itself indigenous (undoubtedly, in terms of its periodic existence). This peculiarity can be easily observed within the various objects associated with the environment- biotic or abiotic, indeed territorial- and also beyond the human reach- the celestial. The different human orientation and attributes towards environment could be better examined under some distinct behaviour traits concretizing the radical approach and denouncing the status quo. However, namely these human traits are cultural as well as psychological and the cultural domain of being indigenous incorporates to maintain and preserve the ecological balance and additionally, it is the heterogeneous culture which helps not to segregate between the environment and the existence of human being. The two are weaved to create one world and both affect each other simultaneously.

It is widely accepted that *ecological* diversity cannot be conserved without cultural diversity that the long term security of *human race* depends on maintaining this intricate relationship. There is also a growing realization that cultural diversity is as important for the evolution of civilization as biodiversity is for biological evolution. The promotion of homogenous cultures poses a serious threat to human survival on both fronts. [*Italics mine*] (OHCHR, indileaflet10.doc, 2)

It is quite interesting to explain a term *ecophobia* which is generally considered a psychological disease. Though it is perhaps one of the newest terms in this field, it shows sufficiently the impact of environment on an individual's thinking and behaviour. Simon C. Estok coined this term to analyze the cultural, social and racial oppression and the psychological outcomes in some of the Shakespearean plays like *The Tempest*, *Henry V* and *The Merchant of Venice*. These plays are "integrally connected to the process of environmental domination and commodification." (Raber 2007, 160) So, this is a different view to see the relation between nature and human beings. It is obvious that any natural calamity brings the same situation to an individual where he/she suffers from ecophobia. After Tsunami this became a very common to all of them who experienced or even who did not experience. The fear of the strength of nature and the possibility of self-destruction always haunt a common being. To a particular extent, a sense of detachment and alienation can be observed in an individual towards nature and to some extent this reaction can be a revolt against nature. Lloyd Davis in his recent edited book entitled *Shakespeare Matters: History, Teaching, Performance* published in 2003, includes all the essays having the essence of ecophobia. In the ecophobic perspective of a critic's world, materialistic reading of nature becomes an integral part and this materialistic conception clogs the rational boundary between nature and humans completely.

The Study of environmental psychology is explicitly problem oriented. There may be four basic steps in this process –

- a. Identification of the problem,
- b. Anatomizing the consequences developed due to the particular problem,
- c. Analyzing the causes (esp. the root causes; though simultaneously the relevant and irrelevant causes must receive some sincere attention) of the problem and
- d. Discovering a solution finally.

In fact, this particular methodology of assessing the problems and coming to a possible solution is influenced by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher whose notorious work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* left an indelible imprint upon the researcher involved in the psychological assumptions in any interdisciplinary work whether related to art, science and technology.

But this is not an easy task for a true ecocritic. This process involves the psychology of the society and the individual together. This ecological branch of psychology grabs the individual's concern to his/her day to day problems caused by environmental changes or on the contrary, it finds out individual's encroachment into the natural arena through various means.

Psychoecocriticism transcends the traditional experiences and brings out the text into the nature. This ecotextual presentation is full of emotion, motivation, self-esteem, sensation, perception and consciousness. There may be a good solution what psychology provides through a term 'Narcissism' to avoid the ecological crisis. Narcissism is generally considered as a misnomer term. However, in some conditions it behaves like a healthy one. When someone is obsessed with the self-love and an unhealthy self-absorption, he/she is found mentally ill by the psychologists. But when this obsession is turned towards environment, it could establish a healthy relation between the individual and the nature. This condition will enrich their mutual relation. This is *environmental narcissism* and the obsessed person is an *environmental narcissist*. It generates a new trait in one's personality and makes one calm and free from the mental stress and illness. This is the state of empathy develops between the two. Ecocentric behaviour is also an essential part of this environmental narcissism.

Thus psychoecocriticism brings the newness in the field of ecological and environmental study in relation with psychology of human beings – who are an inevitable part of this ecosystem and also, the psychological interpretation of text having the ecological concerns.

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