
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN LITERATURE

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Abstract: This paper deals with the 'Environmental Justice' as an important concept being depicted in literature.

Keywords: Eco-Justice, Eco-Internationalism, Environmental Ethics, Law

Introduction: 'Nature is the free gift of God' a beautiful quotation has become an illusion in today's world. We human beings have exhausted our own world. The major problems we are facing today is global warming and environmental pollution. The beauty and charm of nature seems to be dwindling with each passing day. We hardly find the green pasture, the snow covered mountains, the pure spring, the bountiful river as described in literature. The poor communities or nations struggle to preserve their natural surrounding and gain equal rights to access natural resources' and protect their natural resources. We human beings destroy our own surrounding by quarrelling over it. Stronger nations and powerful cultural groups dominate over the weaker nations and take undue privilege by exhausting the natural resources. Here, I would like to state an example of the hardships the developing nations face: It is a story of the Amazon rain forest, *The Great Kapok Tree* by Lynne Cherry written in 1990. It is about two men in the forest. The larger man told the small man to cut down the tree. When the small man tried to cut down the Kapok tree, all animals came to him and explained why he must stop cutting the tree. Here, the larger man represents the developed countries which need natural resources and the small man represents developing countries which have to sell or destroy their own natural resources. Therefore, this story can be related to environmental justice issues beyond national boundaries. While literature has always engaged with nature and the environment from a creative and aesthetic approach (through poems on nature and more), eco-criticism demands a close critical look at nature and the environment. I want to state another example from *A River Ran Wild* by Lynne Cherry 1992 which depicts how native people lived in nature and how development affected and changed the surroundings of a river with the passage of time. The most intriguing questions which arise here that make us ponder is 'Can a piece of literature make a more sustainable world? Literature is one of the most humane arts. We need to examine how humanistic judgment is represented in literature and how literature and law offer ethical corrective to certain unjust systems and institutions in society. Literature deals with variety of environmental concerns such as

animal welfare, pollution, global warming etc. Literature depicts views on nature emphasizing on non-human/human relations environmental and social justice within a global context. The literature which originated in the territory of the United States of America significantly differs from traditional European literature especially in the fact that that European Literature has originated from linguistically and ethnically homogeneous sources, whereas the literature of United States have always been a product of several cultures speaking various language. America's multicultural nature governs every aspect of its literary process which drifts it away from its traditional treatments. American transcendentalism which contributed to its "cultural independence" is reflected in the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson for whom the concept of nature has always been a source of inspiration. Emerson's understanding of nature however differed from the ideas of the first immigrants, the Puritans, for whom nature was a something dark, unknown, dangerous and a seat of wild tribes with whom they had to fight the metaphor of evil and death. There was a conflict between the surviving culture of Puritans, which was based on Calvinist sources searching for God in the Bible, and the culture which was emanating from the American soil, from nature. It could also be called the conflict between the old historical European, and the new natural American. Natural representatives like Wordsworth, Dickinson, Bishop, delved deeper into the realms of 'American Romanticism' and 'Environmental Imagination'. Thus, poetry, novels, fictions has glimpses of social conditions prevailing during the time with a major inclination to the laws which govern the day to day lives of the people. The best piece of American Literature has imprint of the legal processes. Equality, liberty and freedom has been the basic principles which acted as the base for American writers, poets, novelists and playwrights. "There will be no nature without justice. Nature and justice, contested discursive objects embodied in the material world, will become extinct or survive together."-- Donna Haraway, "The Promises of Monsters." Therefore diverse geographical, ethnic, and environmental issues are emerging which raises the issues of social inequality and oppression which brings into focus

'Environmental Justice'. New cases related to environment are emerging like protests over radiation poisoning, struggle to protect land and water rights, resistance to nuclear weapons testing and nuclear waste storage; needs to attain strict laws to safeguard the environment became essential. Writers such as Jimmy Santiago Baca, Linda Hogan, Barbara Neely and Karen Yamashita are artists who address issues such as toxicity and cancer, lead poisoning of urban African American communities, and Native American struggle to remove dams and save salmon. 'Environmental ethics' is related with the issue of responsible personal conduct with respect to natural landscapes, resources, species and non-human organisms. It demands a sense of moral responsibility which believes that if a person is morally responsible to do something then he knows what is required to save the natural resources and what is his duty toward the welfare and liberty of other beings. It is a person's own choice whether or not he should accept this and so it is a peculiar distinctive trait of humanity. One's response to these requirements reflects upon his value as a moral person. Therefore 'environmental ethics' has attracted the attention and concern of environmentalists and the general public. Until quite recently human effects on environment was regarded neutral, since people assumed nature was both impersonal and too vast to be injured by our interventions. We were unable to foresee the harm resulting from our dealings with 'Nature', but now we have understood that how it is we human beings who can cause massive and permanent damage to natural landscape. We have also learnt how we can cause these devastations, and how we can prevent them or remedy them. So, it becomes our moral obligation to act with care, foresight, forbearance and constraint. Still there are certain questions related to environmental ethics that makes us ponder as to why we need to care about nature? What is lost to mankind if species or landscape or wilderness is destroyed? What are we taking away from our future generations? Does land ownership imply depriving indigenous peoples of their customary land? And do we human beings have an obligation to preserve nature? All this controversy is due to the growing population and extensive exhaustion of the natural resources. 'Literature' which reflects the culture and society has pointed out this grim factor and warned people of the rapid natural destruction which would eventually lead to diminish the life on Earth. Eminent American writers such as John Steinbeck, Edward Abbey, Sarah Andrews, J.G. Ballard and Jean Giono through their literary works have pointed out the impact of environment on human lives. Edward Paul Abbey advocated environmental issues, criticized public land policies and propagated anarchist

political views. His best-known works *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Desert Solitaire* has inspired various radical environmental groups. The concept of personal liberty against the techno-industrial state with wilderness as background interested Abbey most. In most of his writings Abbey has criticized the park services and American society for its reliance on motor vehicles and technology. He wanted to preserve the wilderness as it is a refuge for humans but modernization is drifting us away from "Nature". Hence, Edward Paul Abbey raised the prevailing environmental issues and tried to portray through his works the dark side of our society which is materialistic and believes in making profit at the expense of 'Nature'. Sarah Andrews novels have been praised for their combination of science, nature and detective work within the mystery genre. James Graham Ballard's novels are a picture of bleak man-made landscapes and the psychological effects of technological, social or environmental developments. John Steinbeck in *Grapes of Wrath* explores socio ecology, how individuals interact with each other during the "Great Depression Dust Bowl" and are forced to shift farming due to drought. He provides an insight into the "Great Depression Period" and themes of racism, loneliness, prejudice against mentally ill and the struggle for personal independence. Jean Giono, a French novelist, a celebrant of nature whose works are set in Provence, whose rich and diverse imagery has been widely admired. His novels focused on how the society's rules laws and regulations have influenced the lives of individuals and how they are caught in deep anguish, pain and torture inflicted upon them by the unjust law of their society. 'Law' is regarded to be equal for everyone, impartial and supreme. But unfortunately through the literary pieces of American Literature we would see the opposite where the law favors the stronger and opposes the weaker section of the society. The struggle of individual against the omnipotent society and its laws is clearly depicted in the literature of the time. 'American literature' basically depicts how an individual accepts the injustices of the society and how 'Environment' ultimately ruins the lives and relationship of people and nations. The protagonist of the novels doesn't have the courage to go against it and if he raises his voice against the society, the society would brutally curb him down. So an individual becomes the victim of society and its laws. The basic genuineness of law is where the wisdom is ingrained in the law and it becomes immortal and is carried for generations to come. The message of humanity, equal rights and the need for universal brotherhood is clearly depicted in 'American Literature'. The vast enriching 'American Literature' has projected an authentic description of the American life and culture through its literary

works which covers all the aspects of its society and the gives a vivid description of the lives of a common man. The characters presented in the literature struggle against the injustice inflicted upon them by the society and are entangled in the laws framed by the society. The 'Law' which is considered to be impartial and genuine is unfortunately depicted a mere weapon or tool of the 'Whites' and the 'rich'. The role of law is to repair any kind of disparity in the society by emphasizing on equality but in 'American Literature' we can see how law acts as an agent in aggravating the tear in the society by its legal measures which leads to an irreparable damage forever. 'Literature' which reflects the culture and society has pointed out the grim factor and warns people of the rapid natural destruction which would eventually lead to diminish the life on Earth. Eminent writers such as Bowers, Hill, Zehle and Cheng-Levine have emphasized on the importance of eco-justice pedagogy, ecological democracy and eco-internationalism. They have used literature to deal with Eco-justice issues and discussed about the problems of environmental racism and have pointed out the need to regenerate community alternatives to an increasing population. According to Bowers "an eco-justice oriented education needs to inform people about the politics of toxic waste disposal, which not only encompasses minority and working class communities but also crosses national boundaries." He stressed on the fact that people need to learn to resist contamination of their local environment and environmental discrimination. . C.A.Bowers believed that there is also a need to use educational process to regenerate people to become more self reliant and thus have a smaller ecological dependence. Whereas, Warren in his book **"On the Road from Environmental Racism to Environmental Justice"**, has emphasized on the fact that we can't get justice by doing an injustice on somebody else. According to Warren environmentalism includes wilderness and wildlife preservation. 'Environmental Racism' occurs when people of color disproportionately bear the burdens and risks of environmental protection policies while the associated benefits are dispersed throughout society. Everybody should have a basic right to live and work

in healthy environments. The reality, however, is that people of color and the poor people overwhelmingly are disproportionately denied this right and continue to live and work in polluted environments. Civil rights leaders have long criticized these environmental inequities, but it is only recently that federal and state policymakers, legal scholars, and mainstream environmental groups have turned their attention towards developing a solution to the problem. Cooperation between these groups will aid in the efforts to rid the nation of 'Environmental Racism'. Warren suggested that more efficient methods of waste management need to be researched and developed. There is a need for efficient and proper disposal of hazardous waste. If hazardous waste are not properly disposed it would lead to increase the risk of harm to both the environment and human welfare. So, 'Environmental Justice' will be achieved through cooperation between local and national environmental organizations especially in decisions regarding the location of waste facilities and enforcement of environmental laws and regulations. Therefore, 'Ethics' is the most central human issue which begins with our choice of creating a more humane environment by affirming to treat each other as ends, not means, to enable us to be whole in a fragmented world. We should choose to treat each other as unique individuals having our own worth. We should educate ourselves to build ethical relationships and cultivate a humane community in a life-long endeavor.

Conclusion: Thus, it's important for us to understand environmental ethical matters on how any species or landscapes destruction eventually leads to a heavy loss to mankind and its future generations. Since, we human beings need 'Nature' for our own survival and it becomes our obligation to preserve it. Therefore, we should take a pledge to save our environment for the mankind to survive maintaining universal brotherhood, equality and unity among individuals and nations.

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