



An Ecological study of Black Elk Speaks, Mad Bear and Rolling Thunder

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Abstract - This study aims to explore the issues of ecology and environmental justice in American Indian biographies. The paper examines the strong connection of American Indians with nature in three biographies *Black Elk Speaks*, *Mad Bear* and *Rolling Thunder*. American Indians have a very strong connection with nature and they treat nature as a living 'Being'. The Biographies *Mad Bear*, *Black Elk Speaks* and *Rolling Thunder* highlight the issues of displacement, loss of land, environmentalism.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, American Indianess, Identity crisis, Cultural Genocide.

I. INTRODUCTION

American Indian Literature highlights the issues of ecology and environmental justice in an elegiac and sad tone. American Indians have a very strong connection with nature and they treat nature as a living 'Being'. Nature for American Indians is a sacred being and they treat the natural objects as their relatives. American Indian soul is solely synchronized with the sacred nature and they treat nature as a supreme 'Being' and it 'possesses equal importance for them. American Indian literature moans the trauma of terrific loss of eco-system. Native Americans respect nature and have religious ties to it which estranges them from the euro-Americans. American Indians believe in the spiritual powers of nature and according to them each and every object of nature is sacred and important and possesses sacred powers. Native Americans have a great harmony with the objects of nature and value nature as highly sacred being.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-criticism is the study of literature and its relation to physical environment. It addresses the issues and relationship of human to nonhuman nature. Eco-criticism studies the criticism of environment elucidated in literature. Eco criticism discusses the xenophobic, materialistic, scientific and imperial behaviors which destroy the harmony of environment. The term Eco-criticism is coined by William Rueckert in 1978 in his famous essay "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Eco-criticism" (Glotfelty, 1996, p.3). Eco-criticism refuses the stereotype notion of the world that nonhuman nature is inferior to human nature. The main focus of Eco-criticism is to study nature through the lens of literature and in this way discuss the literary edition of human and nonhuman nature. Eco-criticism is an interdisciplinary branch of studies discusses the global crisis of environment and involves sociology, philosophy, history, geography and psychology. Eco-criticism focuses on the issue of environment and sheds light on the deteriorating effects of motorized and mechanical attitude toward nature.

Eco-criticism highlights the ethical and non-ethical behaviors toward nonhuman nature. It elucidates the environmental problems and their solutions as Glotfelty (1999) talks about the environmental restoration and says "if we are not a part of the solution, we are part of the problem" (qtd in Oppermann, 1999, p.30). Eco-criticism focuses on the 'earth-centered' study in Literature and draws attention to the devastating attitude of mechanical men toward nonhuman nature. It discusses the environmental conscious issues in literary studies. Eco-critics want to discuss the environmental problems and crisis in literary studies. Eco-criticism discusses the relation of culture and nature and emphasizes the importance of both as both get effected by each other. Harold Fromm and Cheryll Glotfelty are the pioneer critics in the studies of Eco-criticism. *The Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks In Literary Ecology* (1996) is a collection of Ecological essays collected by Glotfelty and Fromm which draw attention to the importance of ecological approach to literature. Glotfelty and Fromm talk about the global

environmental catastrophic situation and strive for its restoration. (Qtd in Glotfelty and Fromm, p.6).Glen A.Love's "Revaluing nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism" is another developmental step in Eco-criticism theory. Love emphasizes the role of eco-consciousness instead of ego-consciousness. He elucidates the significant role of nonhuman nature in human's life and draws attention to the sacred side of nature which is ignored by the mechanical man (Love,1996,p. 8).nonhuman nature is equally important to the human nature according to eco-critics and they strive for it in their texts.

Modern man neglects the sacred part of nonhuman nature and subjugates nature. Dante Curtin elucidates the issue of '**Environmental Racism**' and connects the suppression of man and nature and says "The Connection, in Literary theory and practice, of race and the environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other" (Curtin, 11).Nature is suppressed by the cruel ways of man according to the critics of eco-criticism as Crosby calls it '**Ecological Imperialism**'.Crosby illuminates the ways through which nature is subjugated and treated as 'other' in a dominating society.(Qtd in Huggan and Tiffin,p.3).Eco-critics discuss the '**hegemonic centrism**' and draws attention to the barbaric ways of the destruction of nonhuman nature. They stood against the institutionalized murder of 'other' nonhuman nature. The voice of the nature is silenced according to the eco-critics and nature is turned into a silenced subject from a valuable being.(Manes, 1996, p.18) .Eco-criticism illuminates the rights of nonhuman nature on human nature and believes in social justice with environmental justice. The maxim of '**environmental justice**'was first raised by the ecological martyr Ken Saro-Wiwa who was executed on November 1995.He stood against the pollution of water which destroyed the water species.(Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, P.35).Eco-criticism illuminates the destruction of Land and Environment and seeks for '**EnvironmentalSalvation**'. Eco-Criticism discusses the issues of nature and the natural objects are considered as the ecological-literary devices by the eco-critics.(Qtd in Oppermann,p.38).

III. DISCUSSION OF DATA

American Indian Literature highlights the issues of ecology and environmental justice in an elegiac and sad tone. American Indians have a very strong connection with nature and they treat nature as a living 'Being'. Nature for American Indians is a sacred being and they treat the natural objects as their relatives. American Indian soul is solely synchronized with the sacred nature and they treat nature as a supreme 'Being' possess equal importance for them. American Indian literature moans the trauma of terrific loss of eco-system. Native Americans respect nature and have religious ties to it which estranges them from the euro-Americans. American Indians believe in the spiritual powers of nature and according to them each and every object of nature is sacred and important and possesses sacred powers. Native Americans have a great harmony with the objects of nature and value nature as highly sacred being.

American Indian biographies illuminate the issue of ecology in a very poignant tone and shed light on the destruction of eco-system. Native Americans give equal importance to the non-human nature and rise against the genocide of ecological life. American Indian culture has a great harmony with physical world and environment which is illuminated in American Indian biographies. Eco-criticism as a theory has one strand with ecology and the other with literature and the American Indian biographies represent this connection of literature and environment in a beautiful way. The discourse of these biographies has a pure synchronization with ecology and celebrates the rituals of environment in a very religious way. American Indians struggle to maintain their traditional identity which is harmonious with nature. Native Americans own nature as a relative of their own and strive hard for the '**environmental Salvation**'.The land is considered very much sacred to Native Americans and have a reciprocal relation to nature.

Black Elk Speaks is a biography, a personal narrative of an American Indian holy man translated by John G.Neihardt. It traces the pre-reservation to reservation life of the Sioux tribe. It poignantly traces the cultural displacement and the loss of land of the Sioux tribe. *Black Elk Speaks* the historical genocide and trauma of the loss of land at the hands of 'Wasichuas'. *Black elk Speaks* shows an affinity with nonhuman nature and a great respect for nonhuman life. Black Elk starts narration of his life to Neihardt and elucidates the importance of nature in American Indian life as he says "It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two -legged sharing it with the four-legged and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit"(Neihhardt,1979,p. 1).The life of American Indians revolve around the nature and nature is treated as a sublime being by them. Native Americans believe in traditional ways of life and according to them nature is a relative to them

possesses all rights which a human has in the society. The whole sphere of American Indian life is harmonious to nature and the respect to nature reflects in each and every aspect of their life such as the names of individuals are harmonious with nature. Names such as Black elk, Crazy Horse and Iron Hawk show the American Indian's affinity to the objects of nature. The months, years and places are also names in the same very way such as the month of December is 'Moon of the Popping trees' and September is 'Moon when the calves grow hair'. *Black Elk Speaks* illuminates the beliefs of American Indian about nature as they believe in the spiritual powers of nature and regard nature as a sacred being. The natural objects are used by the American Indians for cure for instance water and fire is an integral part of American Indian ceremonies. *Black Elk Speaks* discusses different traditional ceremonies of Indian life which show a complete harmony and affinity with nature for instance the Heyoka ceremony, War dances, Horse dances and the Dog vision ceremony all revolve around the sublimity and elevation of sacred Earth. *Black Elk Speaks* sheds light on the 'earthed -centered' life of the American Indians which is very much visible in each and every aspect of Indian life. The vision of Black Elk is all about the natural objects which bring peace on the earth. The herbs, cup of water the spotted stick all show the desire of Black Elk for peace on Indian land which is destroyed by the wasichuas.

Black Elk Speaks elucidates the issue of 'Ecological Imperialism' and sheds light on Indian's strife for their land and against Ecological Imperialism. The chapters of 'Fight with three stars', 'Wasichuas in the hills', and 'The Butchering at Wounded Knee' all show American Indian's strife against Ecological Imperialism. In his Invocation song Black Elk addresses the all Objects of nature and seeks help from them for peace and power. Black Elk addresses different objects of nature and says "Hear me, Four Quarters of the world-a relative I am! give me the strength to walk the soft earth, a relative to all that is...(Neihardt,4). The world of Indians is very much traditional and *Black Elk Speaks* shows how Indians crave to maintain kinship with nature. The American Indians strive against the Ecological racism by the wasichuas who according to the American Indians destroyed Indian harmony with land and nature as Black Elk says "The wasichuas came, and they have made little islands for the us and other little islands for the four-legged... wasichua; and it is dirty with lies and greed"(Neihardt, 1979, p. 8). The American Indians stood against the cultural genocide and the loss of land. Black Elk narrates the history of the cruel murders of Native Americans by wasichuas in his chapter 'Butchering at Wounded knee' and mourns the loss of people and land. The land which is considered very much sacred by the Indians was snatched by the wasichuas and exploited. The battles traced in *Black Elk Speaks* are the instances of the Indian strife for the 'Environmental salvation'. Nature is treated as a sacred and sublime being by the Indian Americans but the Wasichuas silenced the voice of nature by destroying the harmony of nature and Earth Mother. The Native Americans pay respect to nature to a very great extent and mourn the loss of land and destruction of the eco-system. *Black Elk Speaks* elucidates the different objects of nature which are very much sacred to the Native Americans such as the sacred herb which was gifted to Black Elk by one of the fathers in his vision and had a great significance in Black Elk's life. *Black Elk Speaks* illuminates the American Indian's respect for nature and animals. The horses and bison are very much sacred for the Sioux tribe and horse become very much sacred for Black elk in his vision. The American Indians perform rituals like 'Horse dance' and value animals as their relatives. Black Elk connects himself to eagle feels affiliation and kinship for it. The whole sphere of *Black Elk Speaks* spins around the Ecological loss of American Indians and mourns for the 'environmental salvation'.

Native Americans regard nature as 'Supreme Being' possesses great powers which control their lives. *Rolling Thunder* commemorates the sacred and spiritual powers of nature and grieves the loss of land and demolition of eco-system. *Rolling Thunder* is a biography of a medicine man narrated by Dough Boyd. The American Indians approach to life is 'earth-centered' and they value each and every object of and believe in the spiritual powers of the objects of nature such as Rolling Thunder calls the 'herbs' his helpers to cure humanity and says that he feels the feelings of the herbs and says "Often Herbs just appear when they are needed"(Boyd,1974,p.9). Rolling Thunder venerates plants, feels association and connection with them and pays respects to the plants. American Indians pay respect to all objects of nature such as Rolling Thunder put coins at the head of the plants to pay them respect and show his regard for the plants. The American Indians have a different kind of affinity with nature which alienates them from the Euro-Americans. Nature and Man according to American Indians are one and part of one being. They believe in the spiritual powers of nature and take what is needed and make apologies to the animals when they need to slaughter them and then they use the whole of it only for good purposes. Natural objects have mystical powers according to Rolling Thunder and he says even a simple water can cure you if you pray over it. (Boyd,1974,p.9). Rolling Thunder calls nature an 'Organism' a living Being and can hear the melodious voice of nature which according to famous Eco-critic Glotfelty is 'Silenced'(Glotfelty,8) by the

destruction and demolition. American Indians could hear the voice of nature in each and every object of nature such as Alice Floto in *Rolling Thunder* communicates to the bees and dogs. Rolling Thunder strives against the “ecological racism” and the way nature is marginalized and made ‘other’ by the Euro-Americans. *Rolling Thunder* elucidates the sublime position of nature in American Indian life and says;

“Great Spirit is the Life that is in all things—all the creatures and the plants and even the rocks and the minerals. All things ...have their own will and their own way and their own purpose; this is what is to be respected”(Boyd,1974, p. 52).

Rolling Thunder celebrates the sublime issue of nature on one hand and mourns the genocide of the natural environment on the other hand. He craves for the ‘Environmental salvation’ and illuminates the incidents which disturbed the harmony of American Indians and nature. Rolling Thunder sheds light on the treaty of 1863 which was made in Nevada between U.S government and the Shoshone tribe. The treaty which was paid in blood according to Rolling Thunder disturbed and destroyed the harmony of nature and Shoshone tribe. American Indians take what they really need and they take it with reverence and never waste anything. Rolling Thunder discusses the Indian ways and draws a comparison between white ways and calls whites ‘trophy hunters’ who hunt just for the sake of their name and prize and never care and thin that what they kill. He calls them destructive, greedy and inconsiderate while the Indian way is very much considerate and cordial. Human and nonhuman nature has a melodious harmony in American Indian life which is highlighted in *Rolling Thunder* as Rolling Thunder communicates to different objects of nature for instance to the clouds and snakes. It rains when he communicates to the clouds and the snake leaves when Rolling Thunder communicates to it. Rolling Thunder draws attention to the voice of nonhuman nature and says that nature doesn’t understand the language but get the meanings. Rolling Thunder highlights the issue of ‘spiritual’ spirit of nature and draws a comparison between Indian ways and the scientific ways of medicine. A physical pain and infection according to the American Indians is a sign of spiritual impurity and to cure such a disease needs much more than the physical body. American Indians believe mainly in man not the sickness and they cure the man while Euro-Americans look at the sickness not the man.

Eco-criticism raises voice against the devastating effects of modernizations and Industrialization on nature. Rolling Thunder poignantly discusses the same issue and says “They’ve taken everything, ..., Killed every bit of life here, trees, Indian tea, sacred herbs, everything”(Boyd ,1974,p. 173). Rolling Thunder elucidates the ways Indians lands were exploited by the Euro-Americans. The broken treaty of Shoshone and the issue of ‘Eli’ chains and pinion tress is an environmental genocide by the Euro-Americans. The progress of civilization damaged the face of earth according to Rolling Thunder and mourns the death of each Pinion tree. The American Indians are declared the ‘custodians of land’ by Rolling Thunder and he treats nature as a sublime ‘Being’. The nature is marginalized by the Euro-Americans and the American Indians strive to restore its real state and place as Rolling Thunder says that the Indians want to live in harmony with nature. Glen A. Love, a very famous Eco-Critic in his essay “Revaluing Nature; Toward an Ecological Criticism” (qtd in Joni Admson,2001,p.23) talks about the diversion to ‘Eco-consciousness’ from ‘ego-consciousness’. Rolling Thunder highlight the environmental genocide and says we are still losing our lands...and they are still killing our people. “(Boyd,1974,p.78). Rolling Thunder bewails the loss of land, cultural heritage and beliefs.

American Indians customs and culture believe in ‘Unity’ with nature. *Mad Bear* illuminates the ‘unity’ of American Indians with nature. American Indians live in complete harmony with nature and possess strong bond and connection to each and every object of nature. *Mad Bear* illuminates the significant role of ‘Earth’ in American Indian life. Earth is considered very much important and sacred in Native American life and they call it ‘Earth Mother’ .*Mad Bear* sheds light on the deterioration of ‘Earth Mother’ by the Euro-American interlopers. American Indians were subjugated by the Euro-Americans and in the same very way nature was silenced by the Euro-Americans. *Mad Bear* mourns the loss of land and the destruction of Earth Mother in a very harsh tone. Indian Americans venerate nature as a spiritual being and *Mad Bear* bereaves the issue of deforesting and calls it a ‘rape’ of Earth Mother by the Euro-Americans .Eco-criticism focuses the issue of despoliation of nature and rebel against it through their written work. Cheryl and Glotfelty elaborated the point of physical world and human culture and say they are very much interlinked and connected.(Glotfelty,1996,p.18). *Mad Bear* elucidates the same aspect of human and nonhuman nature. Human culture has a great link to the nonhuman nature. The traditional ceremonies of American Indians all spin around the natural objects and American Indian believe in the mystic powers of nature as *Mad Bear* says” In our religious services we pray for all people, no matter what colour, skin—and for the animals, and all things around us in Mother Earth”(Boyd.78). American

Indians strongly believe in the spirit of Nature and traditional ways which relate to nature. Mad Bear predicts upcoming events which shows his great harmony with nature. American Indians listen to the voice of nature which was silenced by the devastation of Euro-Americans. The American Indians don't believe in the mechanic modern life and stay in harmony with nature. Nature for them is sacred and they believe in 'collectiveness' and 'unity' as mad bear say"Cooperate,cultivate and live, Compete,Combat and die"(Boyd,1994,p.8).Competition is near to death for the Native American life and Mad Bear illuminates this issue in a very ironical tone. Mad Bear doesn't believe in the dictum of 'survival of the fittest' which brings American Indians in conflict with the main stream of America. Euro-Americans strongly believe in competition and mechanic ways of life which according to Native Americans is death. American Indians pay respect to Earth Mother and for the Euro-American, the connotation of Earth is different. The Notion of earth for Euro-American is derogatory as according to them anything which belongs to nature is dirty, earthy and inferior. *Mad Bear* illuminates the role of nature in American Indian life and discusses the Indian way of life which pays great reverence to nature as Mad bear says" Simple thing, giving thanks to Mother Earth-every time you eat, every time you walk on the grass"(Boyd,1994,p.61).The American Indians stood against the 'ecological imperialism' as Mad Bear bereaves the issue of juniper and Pinon trees which were cleaved by caterpillar tractors. The deforesting this way destroyed the whole ecological life, plants, animals and Mad Bear calls it a funeral of relatives. Mad bear narrates the story of false face for Dough Boyd which is a symbolic story and reflects the white ways of deterioration of nature.

IV. CONCLUSION

Eco-criticism discusses the materialistic, scientific and imperial behaviors which destroy the harmony of environment. American Indian Literature highlights the issues of ecology and environmental justice in an elegiac and sad tone. American Indians have a very strong connection with nature and they treat nature as a living 'Being'. The Biographies *Mad Bear*,*Black Elk Speaks* and *Rolling Thunder* highlight the issues of displacement, loss of land, and environmentalism.

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