




The Story of Water and Land – a Silent Cry of the Earth and Scream of the Waters- An Eco-Spiritual Journey to the Primordial through Literature to Save Nature and its Natural Resources

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DOI: 10.53103/cjlls.v4i2.151

Abstract

The earth is changing rapidly, landscapes that were once lush and green, rivers and mountains become desert places in the twinkling of an eye. Flora and fauna are being destroyed every day before our very eyes and animals birds and reptiles are being deprived of their natural habitats. There are graveyards of trees everywhere. Trees for eons have been the Sentinels of rejuvenation, they are being cut down mercilessly to make way for roads, metros, trucks, carrier lorries, industries, and factories that release foul poisons into the air. These denizens of greed and avarice in the name of advancements spew out polluted gaseous substances into cities and villages destroying forever the flora and fauna. These silicon valleys flowing with gold and silver pander to the avarice of man and spell doom to humankind. We humans are guilty of destroying nature. We are the primary predators who destroy the habitat of wild birds and animals and annihilate the gentle balance between nature and man. There is this great cruelty being meted out to every creature and living thing under the sun. These acts of ruthlessness have turned the eco-balance topsy-turvy and beyond any kind of repair. Climate changes are happening so rapidly and man-made natural disasters loom large in the horizon of our future. The natural habitat of every wild thing, animal, bird, and reptile is being destroyed at a rapid pace. The earth's ecological balance is crashing down so drastically. The world leaders are turning a blind eye to such a destructive imbalance in the ecosystem all over the world. Humankind is drowning in their apathy and the earth and resources we once knew are hurtling rapidly towards destruction. This concern for dwindling resources and the exploitation of the precious resources of nature and the threat that this poses on human life and the extinction of species and in the end the annihilation of the human race has given rise to a comparatively new branch of study, Ecology and the environmental science and literary theory evolved from it called Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism can thus be deemed to be the analysis of literature and ecology from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. Lawrence Ingalls Buell is a professor of American Literature at Harvard University and a pioneer of Ecocriticism. He says this stream of study is said to be interdisciplinary as it draws from the collaborative insights of historians, philosophers, writers, literary critics, and a dizzy array of cross-disciplinary conversations with life scientists, philosophers, climatologists, public policymakers, geographers, cultural anthropologists, landscape artists, environmental

lawyers, and environmental engineers (Buell, 2005) This article focuses on writers and thinkers who are making a great difference and awareness of ecological problems looming large in the future of Humankind.

Keywords: Nature, Destruction, Degradation, Water, Land, Ecological Spiritualism, Primordial, Untarnished, Pure Serene, Green, Covenant, Life, Ecocriticism

Once eons ago it is said in the Holy Book that darkness sat brooding over the void and the earth was formless and not a soul or fowl was upon it and the Glory of the Lord moved over the waters and there was Light. The earth came into being in all its verdant splendor. It was a wondrous thing, indeed! The earth was a place very long, long time ago where humans and animals and birds and trees and the whole of nature lived in bliss together. The Lord was pleased with His Handiwork and blessed man with all the earthly resources of food and water. But now a silent cry from the earth's womb rises to the heavens. Everywhere we turn we see a graveyard of trees and natural habitats destroyed. The governments claim all the forest lands in the name of agricultural development and to make skyscrapers in the name of development growth and advancing technology. We the people of the earth are hearkening to the coming end of the world in a supersonic frenzy in a blazing wheel of fire. We are trying to destroy the beautiful creation of earth and sky and air and water. The earth is breathing its last pangs of breath before the entire orb goes up in a flame of fire. We need warriors to fight this cause, from the ends of the world, a plethora of activists have risen to awaken the love for nature and the need for a renewal of the earth and its resources. Literature has been therapeutic in many ways for illustrating the destruction of the environment. Many literary texts are explicit in describing the power and beauty of nature and the world of human beings embedded in their natural surroundings. It can be observed that from the 1960s many writers started focusing on the changing relationships between man and nature. The concern for the ecosystem and the threat that the incessant exploitation of nature poses on life on earth has given rise to a comparatively new branch of literary theory: Ecocriticism. It is consoling and comforting to know that writers like Sarah Joseph and activists and environmentalists like Vandana Shiva are beating their wrists sore against a machinery of greed and avarice and their tiny voices will rise to awaken the soul of man to a longing for the primordial state of the harmony of existence.

Ecocriticism, the study of nature writing, is defined by Derek Gladwin as “the broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature culture, and the physical environment.” (Gladwin’ Ecocriticism). These eco critics and warriors of ecological balance and the environment are the beacons of hope in this demented world that exploits nature. His work is deemed a synchronized movement whose contributions have sweeping consequences not only in the domain of literature but also in various forms of art and media. The American

environmentalist Bill Mckibben attempts to make us sit and think in his book *The End of Nature* (1989) which tells us that nature we once knew has disappeared completely from the face of this earth due to excessive changes made to ecological balance by humans. He in his book describes nature as a force in itself that was previously independent of the actions of men but now has succumbed to the avaricious whims of man and is affected directly by their actions. The nature of ancient times has vanished due to excessive modifications by humans. We are changing the atmosphere by changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on this earth man-made and artificial (Mcbikken, 1989). Another critic and writer Robert Watson in his book *Back to Nature* points out it is no longer possible for us to regain the lost purity of nature. Kate Sopher, an eco-critic and philosopher in her ardent desire to protect nature has protested against the detrimental treatment of nature as a mere linguistic construct by calling attention to the fact that it is not a language that has a hole in its ozone layer but in reality, nature continues to be polluted and degraded as we refine our deconstructive insights at the level of the signifier (1995).

We don't realize that each of us is on a quest to find our sustenance for life. We don't realize that we humans are an integral part of our ecosystem and its destruction affects us just as much as it impacts other life forms on Earth. The critical theory of ecocriticism that came into prominence focuses on analyzing the relationship between human beings and the environment. Man gives no importance to the devastating effects that the destruction of nature can cause. It can be discerned that environmentalists and ecologists share a common cause which is making aware that human actions have adverse effects on nature as a whole and that it is negatively affecting the planet's rudimentary life support systems such as air, water, and soil. By destroying nature, we not only find ourselves in a state of utter loss, a loss which will cost us grievously, a loss of pure water to drink and fresh air to breathe. Eco-critics inspire us to contemplate this environmental crisis through their writings and hope to find means of putting an end to the degradation of nature. Ecocriticism can be deemed as an analysis of literature and ecology from an interdisciplinary viewpoint. This movement also helps us in gaining a better understanding of the unfolding environmental catastrophes in the contemporary world. In Sarah Joseph's novel, we see the degradation of a pure and serene, tranquil place called Aathi, which was once the source of life and became a rotting wasteland. These are the dire consequences we face when we as humans seek to destroy the balance between man and his major resource to life which is predominantly nature. These are the major themes and subjects brought to the fore by writers of eco-spiritualism as well. The beautiful creation that God has created is tarnished by the egoistic tendencies of man. He has grown so large that he seeks to overtake creation itself. The only way of saving the earth is to renew the sources of energy drawn for the subsistence of the human race. We are destroying a piece of ourselves when we destroy the earth and its resources to satiate our greed for money. We

are destroying our sublime relationship with the creator God who made everything bright and beautiful.

Machines of destruction are being invented every day, bombs and weapons and other gadgets and machinery, Bulldozers and cranes and axes and crowbars destroy the earth and nip a piece of our serene peaceful lives and take it away with them. They are like ogres silently murdering the fauna and the flora for our comfort. It is no longer possible for us to regain the lost pure nature. As the writer Bill Mcbikken states we have made every spot, on earth man-made and artificial. In every aspect of our lives, we find that humankind chooses to manifest an aura of artificial life that is not real but fake to the core. We have destroyed the purity of the things in nature to such an extent, that there is nothing real anymore. The seeds we sow, the food we eat, the water we drink everything is artificially made. We have hybrid trees, plants, and flowers. And with the onslaught of artificial intelligence, we will have a substitute for everything on the face of this earth. Man has exploited and played foul with his ability to think invent and advance his greed technologically and scientifically. is trying to supersede even the Divine covenants. For this humankind will face the consequences. This is a subject so close to the heart of man. These actions of ours will have devastating effects on the future of humankind.

Sarah Joseph in her unconventional novel *The Gift in Green* (2011) writes about the relationship between people and the land they inhabit. Aathi, untarnished and pure is a land flowing with milk and honey as the cliched expression goes, a place where nature has gifted bountifully, where water and earth and the birds and fish dance freely to the tunes of the seasons and the sun and moon and stars. It's a land where people live in harmony with the world and everything in it. A terrain where there is plentiful rice and fish and shrimps where people enjoy the bounties untold of health and wealth and good air and pure water. We are drawn like flies to fruit to this place called Aathi which inhabits the primordial consciousness of man. In our collective consciousness, we know a land like this where a covenant was made, eons ago by Hagar and her child with people of the desert. These wandering tribes came to stay and live after they made a covenant with water which is the energy that produces life from the earth. It's a tantalizing narrative that grips our minds to see a world inhabited by water which is the elixir of life being quartered and destroyed piece by piece breaking our hearts. It's overarching metaphor that makes life itself revolve around the memory of water as a source of Life and its imminent destruction makes us awaken to a time when there was no greed for money where nature and man lived in harmonious co-existence.

A war is being fought, a war which is lopsided and unequal fought by the corporate world against the innocent resources of land, water, and air. They seek to control even the air we breathe and the water we drink. We who drank pure water from streams in green pastures now barter and scramble for water from tankers and cans. Writers, activists, and ecocritics are valiantly fighting a losing battle that strives for humankind to fit back into

nature like Bill Mcbikkens writes in his treatise. We as humans who are made aware of this doomsday are filled with a sense of hopelessness, to be living in a world where we learn every day that some animal or bird has gone extinct. This hopelessness creeps into us when we are unable to figure out how to regain this lost world. We are at the end because we do not know who we have to fight, how to fight, and who are the powers and principalities that need fighting. The prophets have prophesied this losing battle which we rage in futility.

Many women writers and eco critics like Sarah Joseph argue that there is only one path to survival and liberation of nature. This is an ecofeminist viewpoint. This resurgence the ecofeminists feel will happen only through the woman who is symbolically associated with the earth, the womb of humanity from which all life precedes, the nourisher of the body of man. She creates life within her and she nourishes it with her life's blood. The author in her novel places woman and nature at the core of the revival of nature. Her resilience and her skills and her closeness to the earth and the rills and every whorl of plant insect and bird make her a warrior for the resurgence of nature. In her novel women have a unique place in the environment both as victims of ecological and environmental maldevelopment and champions for the cause of survival. Though they are victims of their environment, it is the woman who has to rise and own her place under the sun. Both Vandana Shiva and Sarah Joseph in their different trajectories place women at the centre of rebuilding lost natural reserves.

How does the woman rise to the forefront of this war and struggle towards emancipation because she is the nurturer and agriculture and cultivation, the growing of food is the ultimate source of her livelihood? Women according to the author like the character Kunjimathu and other characters in her novel, they resurge into a group of strong women who reclaim the stolen waters of Aathi. Agriculture and sericulture have been evolved by women writes the environmentalist and activist Vandana Shiva. She says most farmers in the world are women and girls are the most future farmers, they have been coached and trained by their mothers to nurture the land and earth and sea and water. She says women also make the most significant contribution to food security by producing more than half of the world's food, providing more than half the world's food. Food security is therefore directly linked to women's food-producing capacity. From field to kitchen, from seed to food, women's strength is diversity according to Shiva; women's capacities are eroded when this diversity is eroded.

This is what happens in Sarah Joseph's novel *Gift in Green* when the biodiversity is destroyed by evil, conniving people like Kumaran who amass wealth through unscrupulous ways. How can the people of Aathi save their land and river from the clutches of the likes of Kumaran, who does not have any love or respect for the land of his origins? Kumaran gives up the peaceful serene Aathi for the concrete jungle and after many years of working in the city, his greed makes him a monster for his precious land. He exploits

and destroys everything in his wake. His return to his homeland signifies the beginning of the end of Aathi. The road and bridges choke and suffocate the water – life, all creatures, birds, and butterflies flee the dying mangrove forests. Spurious chemicals are poured into the clean waters, it seeps into the paddy fields that have fed generations over several hundreds of years.

The death of Aathi is synonymous with and symbolic of the dying of Mother Earth itself. Once upon a time, it was a land of water and life and now it is reduced to a mere smog-filled mob of decay. How did this atrocity come into being, how was this land destroyed by the mechanizations of the human interface of greed and inhumanity? This is the story of Aathi and every land that has been destroyed by avarice corroding the peaceful framework of a land that once stood as a beacon of hope for many of its people. Here, where the primordial nature once reigned supreme, storytellers tell tales of the way water and life and earth all mingled in one tale of Hagar and Ishmael and the desert and the fountain of water that gave life to her son and herself. The storyteller is the voice of the divine in Aathi and he has the role of being the harbinger of all that nurtures the people with questions about intellect and a higher plane of thought. The rot and decay infiltrate into its ineffable harmony. It's a delightfully romantic vision of the world as it once was- and perhaps still can be. Sarah Joseph beautifully describes the reigning glory of Aathi, where man and woman and child live in close communion with nature. There is a comparative study done in this controversial novel between two places and two planes of existence, one place being infiltrated by change and decay and the other already rotting and in utter decay due to the searing delineation of all natural resources that bring life. The other place Sarah Joseph writes about is Chakkam Kandam, it is a place close to Aathi, but steeped in rot and destruction the people of Chakkam Kandam remember the glory their land was once upon a time, before the degradation and destruction began. The paddy fields that yield harvests of gold, the lagoon waiting to be milked of bounties worth millions, fishermen and mussel pickers, boats loaded with coir went to and fro on the river trading their wares in towns far away. This was before their land was destroyed.

We see in *The Gift in Green* that the exposure of the big city on the serene island of Aathi is most devastating and it signals the beginning of the end. It tells the story of how these pristine mangroves and untouched untarnished water bodies are exploited and ruthlessly destroyed. We see the marshes and mangroves once teeming with oysters and fish become a lifeless desert. Sarah Joseph writes in her novel *The Beauty of Marshlands*, she says marshes are meant to be wet and slushy, not dry and compact. She says there is a reason for this. Deep within the maze of a marshland are mysterious worlds that we know nothing about. Nowhere in the world was there water of such dazzling purity and no human hand was allowed to touch it, for in its confines lie treasuries of rice and fish. If this terrain is destroyed then human beings will be left to hop about on the barren burning earth. Thirst would kill the children, and all the fish would have perished. The birds would fly away and

the trees, desiccated with thirst, appear to have been scorched by wildfire.

The author, Vandana Shiva in her treatise, *Staying Alive* (2010) argues that there is only one path to survival and liberation for nature, woman, and man, and that is the path to ecological one, of harmony, sustainability, and diversity as opposed to domination, exploitation of surplus. In her book, she argues that there is a unique intimate link between the degradation of women and the degradation of nature. In her book, she echoes the theory of psychoanalytical feminism where it is seen that men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women. Theorists like Eva Feder Kittay reread Freud on femininity and talk about womb envy. It is observed from primordial times that the earth is synonymous with the womb of women and the destruction of the earth is a degradation of the woman and her nature to nurture and give birth. Vandana Shiva explores the unique place of women in the environment, both as rescuers and as victims of ecological degradation. Women from time immemorial have fought for the land and trees and nature and birds and animals, they are the champions of the earth. This is seen in Sarah Joseph's novel, *Gift in Green* where this mysterious girl loads her boat with cement bags the workers on the bridge had carelessly cast into the water. She worked hard and relentlessly, gathering the bloating bags. Here was one lone woman fighting against the ruthless mechanizations of development sacrificing the pristine purity of rivers and lakes which are the source of life for both the human and animal world. Is it the ignorance of a people or their scant regard that causes such painful degradation and destruction of all that is pure? Here she was trying to save the waters of Meenawari. She could not save those waters and it had become the toilet of bridge workers so the water in the Meenawari River had become nonportable. No matter how hard she rowed she could not move an inch forward on that sludge; the decaying garbage she had heaped from the river into the boat had increased the load. It was low tide and the sun was blazing hot she was thirsty but she found no water to drink, her lips and tongue were parched with thirst. This is a predicament of a people who have exploited nature beyond a limit.

Exploitation of nature causes widespread changes in the ecological framework of the earth. Eco critics and writers have written and argued and mulled over these widespread changes taking place in the natural fabric of our existence. Another woman in another part of the world, Greta Ehrlich an American writer and traveler whose findings about the harrowing account of human and environmental degradation are groundbreaking and shocking. She perceives the world through the eyes of an explorer who travels the world and records the changes that are taking place in countries around the world. She seems to be exploring the aspects of nature with her evocative prose and her first-hand experiences. She is an adventurer who packs her bags and leaves for destinations far away in places remote from human intervention. She is a seeker of destinations and landscapes unpolluted by human dirt and pollution. In her book *The Solace of Open Spaces* has become a classic of American nature writing, a celebration of life in Wyoming and the American West at

large. William Rueckart in *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* argues for the need for literature as models for energy flow, community building, and ecosystems. (Rueckart, 1996). He parallels poems to fossil fuels and says that while fossil fuels are exhaustible, poems continue to be a renewable source of energy as they originate from the inexhaustible treasuries of language and imagination. Nature has been immortalized in the works of poets and visionaries of the Romantic Age in the UK and the transcendentalists in the New World as well. In his famous book *Walden* Rueckart in his treatise says that "poems are green plants among us for they arrest energy on its way to entropy and in doing so... help to create a self-perpetuating and evolving system." (Rueckart, 1996). Michael Branch in the introduction to *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and Environment* states that ecocriticism is a call for cultural change. (Branch, 1996) which goes beyond analyzing nature and is a "move towards a more biocentric worldview, an extension of ethics, a broadening of humans" (Branch, 1996). Joseph Meeker in the *Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*, asserts that it is only humans who are literary creatures, they must discover the role of Literature in the well-being and survival of humanity and the natural environment as well as scrutinize the insight it offers into human relationships with the other species in the world around us (Meeker, 1972). Arne Naes in *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1889) discusses the rejection of the environment image in favour of the total-field image while elaborating on the Deep Ecology movement. Gary Snyder in *Writers and the War Against Nature*, "in an attempt to give a new perspective to the meaning of ecology uses the term "gift economy" and says that we are living to speak, amid a great potluck feast to which we are all guests and we also are eventually the meal. (Snyder, 2007) According to Snyder a Gift Economy focuses on saving the world rather than diminishing and devouring it. Snyder regards the contribution of the writer to be of the foremost importance in this context that deems that "Art takes nothing from this world: it is a gift to the world. It leaves it nourished."(Snyder, 2007) to counter all these upheavals happening in the natural world Art and Writing and Criticism have to intervene to make the world aware of the crisis in the earth.

The fight for survival is a fight that continues on this earth and for this earth. It focuses on saving this ecological balance that has been so irrevocably upset. We as human beings should tap this fountain of love for all things natural which is innately woven into our psyches to rise and stand and fight for nature.

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