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Aspects of Ecology in the Select Literary works of American Beats: An Investigation

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Abstract

The literary products of the Beats reflect the companionship between humans and animals. Beat novelists and poets project the elements of compassion for the species and the inanimate things through their eco-sensible prose and poetry. Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti are very famous literary figures of the Beat Generation. All of these Beats have raised their protest against the war and the social industrialization or establishment which was seen in America and in the other parts of the world. Beats have full appreciation for the oriental countries and their love is manifested in their novels and poems. Beat writers have given a new shape to their literary works by the inclusion of the views and ideas which pertain to spirituality and religion; they posit their faith in the religious function of literature for achieving social and environmental harmony. Beats incorporate visions and dreams in their works and establish themselves as the seekers of reality and truth. This paper attempts to explore Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac and Ferlinghetti's ecological consciousness through their select works and also how and in what sense they highlight the grave issues of the global ecology and provide the humanity the solutions in this regard.

Keywords- Ecology, Spirituality, Modernity, Disharmony, Crisis

Introduction

It was William Ruckert who introduced the term 'Ecocriticism' in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. He laid emphasis to apply ecology to literature. Ecology is a multidisciplinary study of the interconnection of the organism and their environment. All the important aspects of global ecology are dealt in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's "The Ecocriticism Reader" (1996). 'The Ecocriticism Reader' reinforced and popularized the concept of "Ecocriticism" in all the genres of literature. It is defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. . ."

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(The Ecocriticism Reader: XVIII). Jack Kerouac's deep love and reverence for nature and its environment is manifested in his two famous novels entitled "The Town and the City" and "The Dharma Bums".

In "The Dharma Bums", Ray Smith is an important character and he himself gives the realistic account of his personal life which is intimately and firmly connected to the world of the natural environment. Smith is a passionate man who likes to walk across the landscapes; he is always delighted to behold the serene beauty in nature.

He attributes his life in nature to that of heaven. In this novel, nature and heaven become synonymous to each other. It is, no doubt, the magic of Ray's eco sensible words that the readers of different tastes come to a single platform and they feel unique elevation in their understanding and relationship with the physical environment. Ray Smith is under the spell of utmost enchantment to the picturesque scenery of the landscape. His feelings of joy arrive at its true elevation as he tells the readers in these remarkable words, "I chopped some wood and added it to the pile behind the stove. The fog began to blow in from the Pacific, the trees bowed deeply and roared. From the top of the hill you could see nothing but trees, trees, a roaring sea of trees. It was a paradise" (166).

Peter is an interesting character in Jack Kerouac's novel "The Town and the City". He expresses his chief ecological concern over the hunting of the aquatic animals.

This novel is definitely an eye-opener for the entire humanity and persuades them to think again and again with respect to how to maintain equilibrium in our global environment.

In this context, Peter tells:

We catch a fish, we lock him up in the compartment where there is no water and he suffocates and dies, alone, while we drive along in the Fresh New Hampshire air. He had the water of this brook and the sunshine in the afternoon and now were going to throw him in the back of the car and let him die, There it is. (494)

Peter's poignant words of the fish hunting sensitize the readers to a great extent. Fish hunting has become a habit now-a-days. It is a case of too much persecution of the aquatic animals Blue whales, sharks, small fishes, and the other species are vanishing each passing day. Aquatic animals and plants must grow and live according to their will. They have full right to breathe the natural air and to warm their bodies and relax under the sunshine. But the man must not pull them out of the water because doing so will result in the end of their lives. Ocean sea, lake, brook are undisputedly their natural places of living and vegetation so the man has to be very careful if he does any sort of encroachment in their habitats. These aquatic animals should not be frightened to see him, Instead they should dance, rejoice and swim across the water.

Jack Kerouac's "The Dharma Bums" is a remarkable piece of work and it makes its readers reach towards the high altitude of ecological consciousness. Kerouac has incorporated the scene of the mountain climbing and has beautifully portrayed in how to climb up a

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mountain shapes the spiritual growth and wisdom of the climber. Through the habit of mountain climbing, a man can arrive at a better and deeper understanding of human life and also of his environment. To climb up a mountain soothes one's grief, dispels ignorance, uplifts wisdom, and provides unhampered energy to accomplish the desired goals.

In other words, climbing a mountain makes the people ready and perfect to cope with the challenges and to accomplish grand tasks. Preservation of the mountains is very essential in the present scenario, for the frequent trilling of rock pieces of the mountains for the industrial purpose and in the name of construction of bridges, roads, railroads, highways and buildings is raising an alarm of the ecological crisis. The chain of the mountain attracts the rain and let it rain significantly. Gypsies live in near the mountain region and they go up the mountain with their domestic animals or cattle in search of the fodder. Animals graze there and the gypsies store plenty of food stuff for its further usage in the tough days. Some species of the animals and birds also live in the caves of the mountains. Rare plants and herbs are found in the mountain regions. Therefore, the humanity must preserve it and revere it for the things related to the ecology of the environment. Thick Thien asserts in the context "A person who practices religion is like a person who climbs to the top of the mountain. The many different methods are the many different ways one climbs up the mountain".

Ray smith's experiences of his spiritual attainments are quite evident in his transcendental vision as he says in the following words,

"The warm wind made the pines talk deep one night when I began to experience what is called sampatti which in sanskrit means Transcendental vista.

I saw an ancient vision of Dipankara Buddha – It was devoid of any sensation of I being myself, It was pure egolessness, just simply wild ethereal activities devoid of any wrong predicates. . . devoid of effort, devoid of mistake. Everything all right, I thought". (146-47)

The above lines mirror Smith's fickle mind arriving at a state of complete harmony and he experiences his egolessness and gains perfection in his spiritual wisdom and attainments. Moreover, he observes the web of complete balance and order in the natural environment. There is no disturbance which seems to be visible in the natural habitat and all the elements of the environment are happy and all right.

Beat poets and novelists have shown their intimate tendencies to pen down about the world of animals by showcasing every aspect of their activities which happen in the animal kingdom. Such literary works enhance the environmental knowledge of the reading public which they are not familiar with. Beats treat them as an important part of their literary voyage; they include different kinds of animals in their poems and novels and let them voice out their joys and grieves they feel in their natural surroundings. Beats are very committed in their literary ventures which are the products of their protests made against pervading social evils and the environmental tyranny.

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In Kerouac's "The Dharma Bums", Ray Smith happily accepts the reality of his likeness for even the meekest creature and by standing by his own words he discloses about his intimate friendship with the ants. Smith proclaims, "My other great friends were the ants,... I even got down on my knees and talked to the ants" (160).

The ants do not enjoy the same privilege of physical composition like that of humans. But they symbolize the firm determination of mounting up in life with utmost passion and commitment. They teach the humans the lesson of how to maintain the unbreakable unity in their families and social community because unity is the strength.

Gregory Corso's "The Mad Yak" is an eye-opener poem in the sense that it poignantly describes the soul screaming words of a yak when this ignorant and poor animal is on verge of losing his life in the cruel hands of the people. This poem is rich in its ecological implication and unhides how the selfish people oppress the lower animals for their material fulfillments. The poor yak with his benumbed eyes says about his approaching fate in these lines:

"I am watching them churn the last milk
they'll ever get from me.

They are waiting for me to die,

They want to make buttons out of my hones". (42)

The yak is commonly found and raised in the hills and the inhabitants residing on the hills take maximum works from this animal. The yak is bound to endure heavy workloads and never expresses his inner resentments as well as pain while carrying heavy goods on his shoulder. The owners of the yaks have to feed them properly in order to make their physical stamina. A yak is a humble animal and it is the need of the time that the owners and their families extend their love and compassion to this very useful cattle.

The statement of the Yak is highly symbolic in this fast changing world. People have forgotten the ethics of the environment and they kill the animals for the accumulation of so much wealth. A yak is definitely a multipurpose animal and people must not kill him just for the allurements of making buttons from his hones. Hilly inhabitants obtain milk and woolen from a yak. They sit on his shoulder and move from one place to distant locations for their business oriented works; they make mufflers, jackets, caps, sweater from his wool and sell it off in the markets.

During the winter season people protect their bodies from the intense cold through those woolen-made garments. The yaks save the humanity from the danger of cold so it is the foremost responsibility of the human being to save their existence through protection which might ensure their balanced population.

Gary Snyder in "The Real work", a collection of his interviews and talks, tells about the condition of the land which is very much poignant and rings an alarm of the threats of massive imbalance in the global ecology Gary Snyder pinpoints, "They buy vegetables from

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the supermarket but do not think about the soil these grow in” (3). Snyder’s statement definitely projects his hard protest against the offenders of the agricultural land who repeatedly exploit the soil through inducting mechanized tools in their farming and also sprinkle hi-tech fertilizers and pesticides in the hope of heavy production of vegetables and food grains.

The people guided by selfish intentions do not spare the time to know how much pain the land endures with. They go to the market, take money from the wallet, give it to the vendor, and fill the vegetables and fruits in the plastic-made bags. It is ridiculous to observe that the modern men are losing their health and wealth after math of their constant negligence of the agricultural land soil. Instant accomplishment of the agricultural and the industrial targets is an enormous hindrance in the process of nature. Every work or phenomenon is conditioned under the umbrella of the law of nature. A Flower blossoms at a particular period of time. The crops will ripen and be reaped by the farmers at a fixed time. Gary Snyder, being an active activist of the environmental justice, opens the eyes of the technocrat people for becoming conscious of their health and hygiene and avoid chemical fertilizers and pesticides and the modern equipments of the agriculture.

Conclusion

The entire world is witnessing serious ecological imbalance as a byproduct of killing of the animals, demolishing the green trees, omitting the poisonous smoke/gases from the factories and chimneys, trilling across the mountain regions, polluting the sources of water, etc. All these factors distort the global ecology and create obstacles in the proper functioning of the Earth’s Ecosystem. These factors also give the rise of the continuous global warming and the climate change which are observed in natural catastrophes such as, frequent heat-waves, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, acid rains, unseasonal rainfalls, poor quality of harvests and vegetables, unexpected cold and heat even during the normal days of the winter and the summer seasons, etc. American Beat poets and novelist have played the decisive roles to pinpoint the long pressing issues related to our Earth’s Ecology. They are very sensitive to avert further threats of the ecological disasters. Through their prose and poetry, they inculcate in the readers’ hearts a strong desire for eco friendly works and also inspire the young generation to be active in support of the events and activities which would make this planet clean and green. In the present scenario there is definitely an urgent need of the further research on the eco-literature of the famous Americans Beats.

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