

Ecopoets as Crusaders against Eco Terrorism

Dr. M.Poonkodi
Assistant Professor in English
Karunya Institute of Technology and Sciences
Coimbatore-641114

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the contributions of Ecopoets, who with a packed energy, make a clarion call to the humanity to stop the manipulation of nature that has led to the outcome of environmental crisis. The Ecopoets, all over the world like the ecologists have realized their roles to put an end to the environmental violence and sabotage through their poetry. Their objective is to criticize the predators who pander to their perverted desire to throw a fake image as the custodians of flora and fauna by killing the animals and felling the trees. They strive to discursively reiterate that all aspects of nature have right to live on this earth and also to caution us about the impact of global warming and such natural calamities. As evidences, poetry written by Indian, British, American, Canadian and African poets are analyzed. Gieve Patel in his poem 'On killing a tree' articulates with agony, the ruthless act of the jabbers who cut down the very old trees, an act bearing semblance to pulling out the heart and limbs of a man. Likewise Dilip Chitre and Gerald Hopkins condemn man's pursuit to alter the land impeding the growth of plants and trees. William Wordsworth has wrenched the heart of the readers through his poems on the death of deer that expose the vandalism exerted upon the animals by the hunters and poachers. Canadian poets like Daniela expresses her apprehension over impact of nuclear technology and African poet like Wueth Vakunta addresses the stripping off the resources of nature as Green Rape. All these poets bring forth their anguish for the attainment of human and environmental interface that helps in the sustainability of nature and ecosystem.

Keywords: Eco terrorism, Symbiosis, Ecopoetry, natural calamity, killing animals.

INTRODUCTION

In post modern era remarkable changes are happening in the study of literature. It has become inevitable to pursue interdisciplinary research congregating literature with different areas of study that results in emergence of new disciplines. Ecopoetry is one such new discipline that has connected ecology with poetry. As a preamble to the in-depth study of ecopoets as crusaders of eco terrorism, it is essential to know about environmental degradation that instigated many writers of various genres to reflect on it. The entire ecological system is disturbed by human beings' palimpsestic attitude of scraping land and depleting natural resources and that has set an alarm to alert us about the dangers waiting in this twenty-first century. A study of ecology as a scientific discipline is becoming popular today. It plays a crucial role in divulging the mystery about the three major environmental issues: Global changes; bio diversity; sustainable ecological systems. (Oswald, 2013).

The eco writers have realized that they are bound with a responsibility to bring forth canonical texts and creative works to give environmental literacy about the global climate warming, a colossal outcome of man's callous intervention into ecological system. Their main motif is not just to enlighten the readers about the depletion of nature and its causes but to hit the nail on them, make them repent and redo what they have messed up in the natural world. America's transcendentalist, Thoreau has voiced out his wish to live in wilderness untouched and unhampered by civilization. Aldo Leopold, an advocate to the theory of Land ethics has reiterated in his *A Sand County Almanac* that a man needs ecological training "to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community." (pg.189) Edward Abbey, a lover of desert, in his pursuit of eco-vision makes strong recommendation for 'ecotage' to save the wilderness of nature. Indian Bard Rabindranath Tagore in his drama *Muktha-dara* condemns the usage of machinery and the act of dam construction. Amitav Ghosh in his novel *The Hungry Tide* expresses his concern for

man's compatibility with flora and fauna and envisions a state of biophilic mutuality. Likewise, through the genre of poetry many ecopoets have expressed their obligations and responsibilities that they have towards the conservation of eco system. My aim here is to have my focal point upon Indian and foreign ecopoets who have voiced out their ecocentric views to ".... induce the attitudinal and active responses from readers" (Moore,2017) through their poetic renderings.

WHAT IS ECO TERRORISM?

All around the world, the Ecopoets go on a poetical crusade against eco-terrorism, a terminology that needed a clarification for the dual meanings linked with it. Terrorism refers to a calculated act of violence that harms others by interfering into their liberties in order to attain the objectives concerned with social, political or religious issues. (Chomsky,2003) The impact of it would be catastrophic, and ending in human loss. Today the term has assumed a rhetoric tone and its meaning has been extended to mean any kind of destruction of animate and inanimate objects belonging to the environment. Theorists of environmentalism have wide and broadened definitions tagged to the term eco terrorism, which could be also called as environmental terrorism. As defined by Timothy Schofield, the first meaning of Environmental or eco terrorism is "....the manipulation of environment in the name of political and ideological zealotry. It includes both the targeting the environment itself, such as contamination of water resources, and the use of environment as conduit for destruction; such as releasing chemical or biological weapons." (Bhatia,2001, 266). Encyclopedia Britannica also defines eco terrorism as "....environmental warfare (that) consists of the deliberate and illegal destruction, exploitation, or modification of the environment...." Of late the act of ecoterrorists does not end with the destruction of rain forest, cutting of green trees and killing of animals but also of the impact of war on the earth and people's excessive ecotourism.

As per the second meaning, eco terrorism brings to the forefront, the sympathizers of nature attacking on those who exploit natural world encapsulating within the flora and fauna. There are organizations like ELF and ALF in America that would attack violently on those who pose a threat to the environment. According to FBI these two militant groups have involved in 600 criminal acts and have killed many people. FBI calls them as eco terrorists and their acts as eco terrorism.

MERCILESS JABBERS IN INDIA AND ABROAD

India is a country that has associated nature with God. Indians worshipped the five elements of nature – Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Sky. They camouflage their admiration for nature with their spiritual thoughts. They worship a tree for the benevolence it pours forth. They are aware that a tree with its thick foliage of leaves, barks as wrappers, deeply burrowed roots, widely spread branches, fragrant flowers and edible fruits gives shelter; satiates hunger; cures ailments; provides material for building; boosts the economy. Sadly they turn oblivion to the fact that their depletion would harm the environment. Ruled by self conviction and conceitedness, people ignore biological phenomena behind the sustenance of tree and its resources. Their compulsion to survive and a desire to mechanize their life style have forced them to destroy nature.

The Politicians, governing India are subjective in their approach. A few decades before, Jawaharlal Nehru also failed to understand the sentiment of Indians. His sole aim was to build a new India, technologically updated and in par with western countries. He defied any form of opposition that arose for his nation building projects. One such favorite project of Nehru was constructing dam on the catacomb of the villages. Arundhati Roy vehemently attacked Nehru's uncompassionate words that shook the ecologists: "If you are to suffer, you are to suffer in the interest of the country." (1999) Construction of buildings and dams, widening of roads, permission to run chemical companies, generating of electricity from nuclear energy, and extraction of hydrocarbon and methane gas are some of the renovation processes continuously happening in India but opposed by the ecologists who have instigated the farmers and the public to revolt against the government that turned deaf to their pleadings. One such

ecologist, Mukilan who popularized the video of police personals' inhuman attempt to evict the rebels went missing for 150 days. It is Supreme Court that has to intervene to save the interest of the people from the Government that has functioned without any objectives, guidelines or any guidance from the authorities about the ill effects of the dams, road constructions and such acts in the context of progressive measures. When Court uses law and verdict as bludgeons to save the interest of common man, the poets would like to use their pen to teach, warn and instigate the people to act against eco terrorism.

The first poet who comes to mind is Gieve Patel, a popular Indian poet, in his poem 'On killing a tree' Gieve Patel satirizes the jabbers, for chopping the woods of a tree., apprehensive of its implications, trivializes the job of the cutter who squanders just few tree parts. Concealing his wrath, he tells them that such jabs would inflict minor injuries. Rather they should tumble-down the entire tree from its roots otherwise it replenishes quickly to their dismay. His instructions to kill a tree step by step might sound grotesque.

So hack and chop
But this alone won't do it.
Not so much pain will do it.
The bleeding bark will heal

Hidden lies his sarcasm and his pangs of sorrow. With fervent desire to educate men of the appalling situation, he connotes tree felling with cutting of limbs and plucking of the heart of a man. An inventory of verbs like scorching, choking, consuming, twisting, hardening, and withering scattered all across the poem, corroborates the violence flaunted and engenders a creepy sensation to the readers, invoking their sympathy towards the trees that are tormented and hatred towards the cutters. When cutting of trees has been the theme of concern and cause for wrath for various poets what distinguishes Gieve Patel from others is his sarcasm- sarcasm that puts man to shame.

Dilip Chitre's is another Indian poet and his "The Felling of a Banyan Tree" is subjective unlike Gieve Patel's. The poet finds his own father, under the pretext of cleansing the land, is ruthless in his directions of felling all the trees inclusive of the huge banyan tree. When other trees are supple to the axes of the fifty workmen, Banyan tree and its strong roots have to witness harsh uprooting that mentally upsets the entire family. The poet calls it a crime that haunts him lifelong. For the poet's grandma, trees are sacred and cutting them would cast a doom upon them. For an ecologist, cutting of a tree has an adverse impact upon the ecosystem. A tree creates a condition by itself that many other species come and live in it, leading to symbiotic relationship, an important factor of ecosystem. Unfortunately if a tree is felled, "...the ecosystem which the tree had supported so far collapses and insects and birds begin to leave the tree..." (Sumathy, 43). Bio diversity is another ecological factor that the poet indirectly talks about. Preservation of species is important for eco system. The extinction of species due to human intervention leads to a loss of eco balance affecting the entire humanity. Arbind Kumar Choudry, a versatile poet from India also expresses his futuristic concern for man in his poem "Feelings."

....
The sorrow of the sparrow
sparks the harrow
of a man of tomorrow (Ins. 4-6)

A tribal poet from North East India, Tamsala Ao has mustered her role as a crusader against the "corporate warriors" (Anupama,64) who trample on the green that in turn rings death toll upon her people. Her anger is towards British imperialism that has destroyed the wealth of nature. At the same time the poet anoints her ecological views with feminists concern and anger towards patriarchy, a version

of Indian imperialism that ill treats women. The act of cutting down trees is compared to an atrocious act that is committed against women:

Alas for the forest
which now lies silent
stunned and stumped
with the evidence
of her rape
as on her breast
the elephants trample
the lorries rumble
loaded with her treasures
bound for the mills at the foothill.

Charlotte Mew, a British poet bemoans the cutting of a tree and has not failed to invoke the readers' wrath over disastrous behaviour of the human beings who gloat at their own accomplishment of toppling the huge trees. The images employed by her to describe the sounds of axing, explain the viciousness of mankind in cutting down the trees. While chopping the tree, the cutters chat and laugh that imply their mood of celebration and tone of success: indeed a sign of perverted pleasure:

They are cutting down the great plane-trees at the end of the gardens.
For days there has been the grate of the saw, the swish of the branches as they fall,
The crash of the trunks, the rustle of trodden leaves,
With the 'Whoops' and the 'Whoas,' the loud common talk, the loud common laughs of the men,
above it all.

The depletion of tree has not only ruined the plush atmosphere during the spring season but also has taken away the spring from her, indeed caused a death within her. Her sympathy for the dead rat shows embodies the ethics of deep ecology that all creatures should be allowed to live in this universe:

I remember one evening of a long past Spring
Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding a large dead rat in the mud of the drive.
I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a god-forsaken thing,
But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive.

She has not been referred to by any critiques as an ecologist or a natural poet. We trace within her poetic mind, a deep ecologist defending biocentric egalitarianism. Likewise there are many British poets who could be declared as poets with ecological concern. They vehemently attack men and matters that have damaged the land and soil. Wordsworth's and Gerald Hopkins' earlier poems on nature were romantic and were spiritual. Later they were enraged on seeing the harm done to flora and fauna. In 'Binsey Poplars' Hopkins blames men with anger for cutting the poplar trees that "dandled a sandaled/ Shadow that swam or sank /On meadow...." (lns. 6-8). Yet its diminution gives pain and agony. He is fear struck at the "strokes of havoc" (ln. 21), and the cataclysm to be caused with the hedging of "Sweet especial rural scene" (ln 24) never letting the "After-comers" (ln.19) to see it.

OBLITERATION OF FAUNA

Wordsworth, who has found solace and comfort in the companionship of nature extends his concern toward fauna accusing man for his desire to kill animals for sport. In one of his poems, he exposes the cruel heart of men in pursuit of pleasure to satiate his egoistic pride. His "Heart-Leap Well", is the record of breathless chase of a hart by a knight named Sir Walter for thirteen miles. The knight chases the deer with a pack of hounds and this exorbitant run forces the hounds to fall down tired but the hart dashes to its favorite spot and drops dead with its last groan from its nostrils smearing the surface of a spring, gushing beneath the hill. The surface of the water trembles sensing the deer's final gasp of breadth. A wave of

sympathy and simultaneously a heat of anger would overwhelm the reader on envisaging the death of the deer and the knight's revelry to commemorate his hunting spree of killing a deer, "an unoffending creature." Wordsworth like the modern Ecopoets highlights the motif of man and animal conflict and showcase the ecological insanity of human beings. Undeniably he is against man's brutal attack on animals and truly he is a crusader against eco-terrorism.

An upcoming Irish poet Shelagh Bullman echoes the voice of Aldo Leopold who feels remorseful for killing a wolf. According to Leopold, killing an animal is causing an imbalance to ecosystem. Man has been persistently on his hunting game either for meat or for adventure. When many countries like France have altered their laws in favour of animals recognizing them as "living, sentient beings", still we find many with anthropocentric attitude giving importance to the need of human beings blind to the fact of havoc caused due ecological imbalance. Shelagh Bullman is a staunch believer on ecological rights destined for all creatures to live on this earth. She is troubled by human intervention into the wilderness wherein the wolves have been merrily exercising their rights as creatures of the earth. But man, the eco terrorist has strutted into its area with a gun and revel in shooting them. Wolves, the rulers of night hunt for its survival and we know what would happen if they stop feeding on animals. Negative impacts would be triggered which indirectly affect the human beings. The poet's single line, "Man and his gun your only rival" defines man and animal conflict as well the paramount threat faced by animals:

Rulers of the night, the wilderness in your home,
Man in his ignorance won't leave you alone,
Strong together you hunt for survival,
Man and his gun your only rival (Ins. 1-4)

There is another brigade of poetic warriors who were against animal poaching. Animal poaching is a grievous offence that exposes man as a terrorist. When hunters with power and pride killed animals for pleasure, there were avaricious men who killed them for their material prosperity. The poem 'Moschus Moschiferus' written by A.D. Hope laments over the hunting and killing of Kastura deer for the sake of money. The hunters resort to clandestine approach to lure the deer, playing music and as they come closer, the callously slaughter them for their musk pods. The trick they use to mesmerize the deer is equal to their malicious behavior of butchering the deer:

A wild enchantment lures him, step by step
Into its net of crystalline sound until
The leaves stir overhead, the bowstring snap
And poisoned shafts bite sharp into the kill
....
But when the woods are emptied and the dusk
Draws in, the men climb down and count their prey.
Cut out the little glands that hold the musk
And leave the carcasses to rot away.

The inhuman behavior in its extremity is expressed in the last two lines quoted: "Cut out the gland....carcasses to rot away."

There are poems that lament over the merciless killing of huge whales and dolphins. Joe Wilson, a modern poet, an observant of the atrocities on ocean against the large sea creatures is shocked watching fishermen hunting the fin whale. The repetition of the word 'fired' four times in the same line shows the cold-blooded sporting but formidable meanness of the shooters with volleys of bullets hurled from their rifles.

The most handsome of Wales was trapped and revealed

As shooters took aim and young children squealed.
They fired and they fired and they fired and they fired
Stopping only to reload

Kit Wright, in his poem 'Song of the Whale', tries hitting hard on man for his haphazard choice to make shoe polish and lipstick, killing whales. The long life and huge size of the whales are dwarfed to miniscule for the sake of making trinkets.

Heaving mountain in the sea,
Whale I heard you
Grieving.
Great whale, crying for your life,
Crying for your kind, I knew
How we would use
Your dying:
Lipstick for our painted face
Polish for our shoes.
Tumbling mountain in the sea,
Whale I heard you calling

EVICITION OF LIFE FROM EARTH

The term eco terrorism in the context of devastation of earth by stripping of nature is well defined by the African poet Wuteh Vakunta in his poem 'Green rape'. The title of the poem is suggestive and also creates a creepy sensation for the readers. As an eco poet he delves into causative effects of eco terrorism and at the same time as a poet he draws a pattern to enumerate wretched activities of terrorists:

Wondering what this Lexis stands for? /
Denotes environmental terrorism/
Yeah!
We're environmental terrorists/
We brutalize Mother Earth! /
Scorch her/
Pollute her/
Suffocate her/
Poison her/
Slash her/
Burn her/
Slice her/
Bruise her/
We're a killer nation! / (*Green Rape* 5)

When Robert Frost wrote these two lines, "some say the world will end in fire / Some say in Ice" he did not mean any ecological disasters. He just uttered the words of an average person who is apprehensive of the last days. Ironically Frost's lines have been the reverberations of men in 21st century. Daniela Gioseffi, the editor of Eco-Poetry.org has foreseen the holocaust to dawn upon the earth that is replete with war threats and ecological challenges through act of terrorism induced through man's greediness and desire for power. Inspired by Frost's lines quoted above, this poet has foreseen how the world would be and she expresses it in a peculiar narrative style incorporating prosaic contexts into her poetry 'Carbon Summer or Nuclear Winter':

Earth's fever rises. Polar caps melt. Glacial cliffs slide
into rising seas. Cities drown in flooding ports....
Forests cleared rip species from the web of life.

Greedy leaders sicken Earth while polluting bombs
while we buy and sell more junk....
Carbon emits tasteless,
odorless, out of sight, out of mind poison....
Chaos of floods, fires
as wars topple government.
Where lies collide with eco-logic
battle fields bloom with blood.

Earth locked in irons of medieval
religions, used by weapon makers to sell tanks, bombers guzzling oil,
threaten nuclear winter with carbon summer as apathy murders our children.

This is an appropriate poem to end the article with a note of warning to the readers. It is certain that world would come to an end either being burnt or frozen if the top leaders of the world threaten the world using nuclear bombs that lead to climatic change and loss of life on this earth. Apart from the jabber of trees and killers of animals, the indiscrete government and the irresponsible world leaders who happen to be war maniac and power mongers are also the eco terrorists. They are silent spectators and also the instigators of eco terrorism. The eco-terrorism takes place in every nook and corner of the universe, stealthily. No human law could take its toll upon the broachers of natural law. The eco poets created poems with an ecological vision to make human being comprehend that "...the two communities-human, the natural- can coexist, cooperate and flourish in the biosphere" (Rueckert 107). Their eco vision should be brought to fruition. Once terrorism against nature ends, a type of symbiosis known as mutualism between man and nature would emerge forth and that is the need of the hour.

REFERENCECS

1. Schmitz, Oswald.(2013) "Ecosystem Conservation : The Need for Ecological Science,"Ecology and Ecosystem Conservation. Island Press: USA, .P.no.4
2. Leopold, Aldo (2020). "The Outlook". A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There. OUP:USA.P.no.211
3. Noam Chomsky (2003), "Terror and Just Response," in Terrorism and International Justice, ed. James Sterba .New York: Oxford University Press.P.no 69.
4. Bhatia, K.L.(2001) qtd. "New Challenges to Federation". Federation and Friction in Centre State Relation. Deep&Deep Publications:India, P.no.266.
5. Elliott, Lorraine,(2013) "Ecoterrorism". Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica.inc: London, 2013. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecoterrorism>
6. Roy, Arundhati,(2013) "The Greater Common Good". The Algebra of Infinite Justice. Penguin Random House:India, .P.No.1
7. Gieve patel.'On Killing a Tree' Retrieved from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/on-killing-a-tree/>
8. Chitre, Dilip. 'The Felling of a Banyan Tree'. Retrieved from <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/dilip-chitre-s-the-felling-of-a-banyan-tree/>
9. Sumathy,U. (2009)"Ecopoetry".Ecocritical Practice.Sarup Book Publishers:NewDelhi.p.44

10. Mew, Chorellte. 'The Trees are Down'. Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/51731/the-trees-are-down>
11. Wordsworth, William, 'Heart Leap well' <https://www.bartleby.com/270/1/193.html>
12. Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 'Binsey Poplars'. Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44390/binsey-poplars>
13. Wilson, Joe. A Whale should not die like that. Retrieved from <https://hellopoetry.com/words/whale/>
14. Hope, A.D. Moschus Moschiferus. Retrieved from <https://allpoetry.com/poem/11681199-Moschus-Moschiferus-by-A-D-Hope>
15. Elgezeery, Gamal. Qtd. Environmental Terrorism in Peter Wuteh Vakunta's *Green rape*. European Scientific Journal. November 2014. Ed.Vol.10, pg.no.180.
16. Frost, Robert. 'Fire and Ice.' Retrieved from Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44263/fire-and-ice>
16. Gloseffi, Daniela. 'Carbon Summer or Nuclear Winter' Retrieved from https://www.eco-poetry.org/daniela_gioseffi.html