



## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE SELECT WORKS OF HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND ARUN JOSHI

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### **Abstract**

*Literature plays a vital role in the lives of every human. It focuses on every aspect of human life. Through literature one can identify his cultural tradition. It not only brings out positive and negative changes made by human from the ancient time but also gives remedy for the problems of the people in their daily life. Protecting environment is one of the main focuses in environmental literature. From nineteenth century onwards people witnessed enormous growth in environment literature that tried to create environmental awareness among the people because literature can be a powerful medium for creating awareness for the existing environmental crisis. Environmental criticism has alternative names as Ecocriticism and Green studies. "Ecocriticism was a term coined in late 1970s by combining criticism with a shorten form of ecology the science that investigates the interrelation of all forms of plant and animal life with each other and with their physical habits".<sup>1</sup> This present study aims to bring out the importance of nature in human's life and show a path to return to nature. In order to escape from this giant environmental crisis the American writer Henry David Thoreau and Arun Joshi an Indian writer provides a comfortable solution. Thoreau's *Walden* and Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* represent the significance of nature and both insist that one can never lead a peaceful life by destroying nature. This present study aims to bring out the importance of nature in human's life and show a path to return to nature.*

Keywords: Ecocriticism, environmental crisis, psychological.

### **Introduction**

Nature is a world with treasures to discover. It is a place where man could find a pleasant association between himself and the earth. It is a place full of peace, quietness and life. Decades have passed and everything has changed. The whole world has suffered changes. At the present time all are living in a world that is different from earlier centuries. Now, human beings belong to a culture where unluckily wealth, money, and power rule brains and beliefs. Nowadays people are not aware of the true

<sup>1</sup>. Abrams, M H, and Geoffrey G. Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: 11<sup>th</sup> ed. Delhi: Cengage Learning India Private Limited, 2015. Print. at p.98

sense of life and the surrounding world. In this century people have become more ambitious and selfish, since they waste their time trying to acquire more luxuries which are not necessary for life. But not all people have forgotten what the true objective in life is; there are a few people who know that the most important thing is not to achieve material things, but happiness. According to Henry David Thoreau and Arun Joshi happiness is rejecting worldly pleasures and mingling life with nature. Their main motto is to bring people back to nature and to protect them from the materialized world.

### **Returning to Nature to save ‘Nature and Human’**

In both works, the protagonists find themselves in the laps of nature. Thoreau feels comfortable in his life after the two years stay at Walden Pond. Like Thoreau, Billy Biswas also finds himself healthy and comfortable after mingling with the tribal people and by staying with them in the forest. Thoreau thinks that Walden Pond has refreshed his life and he feels that he is reborn. Biswas had many problems. His problems are psychological. It is nature that cured all his problems. Thus, nature plays vital a role in the lives of Thoreau and Biswas.

In both the works the protagonist enjoys a healthy and happy life on the laps of nature. Henry David Thoreau had been educated for four possible professions namely law, clergy, business and teaching but he was not interested in any of these professions prepared but he tried teaching for a short period.

In March 1845 he borrowed an axe and began to construct a cabin on Emerson's land by the north shore of Walden Pond. He moved into his cabin on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1845 and as Walden indicates, he attempted to reduce his needs to the barest essentials of his life and to establish an intimate, spiritual relationship with nature. It was at that point the work *Walden* starts. For two years from 1845 till 1847 he enjoyed the beauty of woods and wandered among them day and night observing nature closely. Nature taught him everything to lead a happy life. He created the work *Walden* by his own experience with nature. In the early morning before breakfast Thoreau swam in the pond; in the afternoon he bathed in the pond again when work ceased. He really enjoyed living at Walden Pond. Before he entered the forest he felt physically weak but once he entered into the forest he felt very healthy and strong. He ignored the modern world and modern comforts. “Economy” is the first chapter in this work, in this he speaks how to lead a simple life with nature. According to Thoreau luxuries are not rich life but being with nature and having healthy life is luxury:

Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are only not indispensable, but a positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than

poor. The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were a class than which none has been poorer in outwards riches, none so rich in inwards.<sup>2</sup>

According to Thoreau self-criticism is the first step to develop an individual's life. Many individuals unquestioningly accept what their parents and grandparents believe about the meaning of life. They are blindly accepting the traditional and conventional ways of living as handed by previous generations. But the truth is the younger generation misunderstood the preachings of the older generation. Ancient people are very close to nature and had a healthy life but by the modern invention, sophisticated life makes humans ill and weak. People are longing for luxurious life but the fact is being with nature is luxury. They are giving importance to taste of the food but not to the quality of it. Even people do not realize the purpose of wearing clothes. Clothes are used to cover the body but most of them think wearing costly clothes is civilization:

Surly not more warmth of the same kind, as more and richer food, larger and more splendid houses, finer and more abundant clothing, more numerous, incessant, hotter fires, and the like. When has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities: and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced.<sup>3</sup>

By staying two years in the forest he realised living with nature is more comfortable than any other thing in the world. He has reduced his belongings to things that are absolutely necessary for life. If a person is with nature he can support himself for a year with what he earns in few weeks. He advises his readers to follow himself as an example by simplifying their lives. He also explains his readers how to read in the chapter "Reading". According to him the modern fictions of America, made the readers dull but the ancient writings are considered realistic.

In the chapter "Sounds" he wonderfully describes the song of birds and insects. Only the train sound disturbs him a lot. A few visitors came to Walden while he was in forest. Except Emerson all are just visitors. He gets money from Bean Field to buy the necessary things for him. In the chapter "The Pond" he realised the purity of nature. When the winter season comes the pond freezes. He can easily see the surface of the pond. The purity of water made him to think of the purity of nature. The ice was like a glass. He avoids meat and other foods of a non-spiritual nature. Like the snake he has purified himself by sloughing off his old life and the corrupting influences of society. It was the starting point of transformation in his life. He completely attached himself to nature. In the chapter "Higher Laws" he tells that a man should be original to himself. Self-trust is more important for any man. In the chapter "Spring" he speaks about the rebirth of nature. When spring comes all birds and animals restart

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<sup>2</sup>. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Noida: Maple Press, 2014. Print. at p.17

<sup>3</sup>. Thoreau, Henry David. At p.18

their lives with new hope. In the final chapter “Conclusion” the narrator makes a final exhortation that his readers should also begin a new and finer life. He tells his readers that all are living inside four walls. One should not conclude that life is limited, shallow and ordinary. There is no need to travel around the world but they should mingle their life with the world of nature. In each chapter he gives awareness to his readers about nature and importance of nature.

In the novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* Arun Joshi tells the story of a young rich educated Indian from America who ends his life in the wilderness of Central India as a semi-naked tribal. Billy Biswas is the protagonist of this novel who came from a rich background. Biswas was an America-educated fellow but he was not satisfied with his education and money, his inner urges want only peace. He read many books to find peace. In his search for peace he marries Meena Chatterjee, a sensuous, gorgeous and good looking woman but his attempt ended in failure. She wants a luxurious life instead of a simple and happy life.

He rejected the modern world and went to Satpura and then to Maikala Hills where he finds a kind of peace. In the first line of this novel Billy has expressed his love for nature. “I came a thousand miles to see your face, O mountain, A thousand miles did I come to see your face”.<sup>4</sup> In Dhunia’s hut he meets Bilasia a young beautiful tribal girl. At the first sight he falls in love with her. Biswas says “I was afraid that after all this upheaval I may still have found the place where I really wanted to be. What helped me more than anything else was Bilasia”.<sup>5</sup> Bilasia was born and brought up in the forest and she loves nature more. When Biswas moves close with Bilasia he is able to smell herbs. It shows how pure she is and how she attached herself with nature. Biswas loved her for her natural qualities and finds peace while staying with her. After a period of time he realised nature can give more pleasure to him than Bilasia. He rejected all the worldly comforts and attached himself to nature. Then he felt very strong and relaxed from all worries. Biswas realised that true happiness lies in the laps of nature. Atlast he is free from all his psychological problems which he had from the beginning of the novel. He was very happy to be with nature and nature takes care of him in every aspect. Nature restores his childhood happiness.

According to Lionel Trilling, it “is a novel being a perpetual quest for reality and the most effective agent of a moral imagination”.<sup>6</sup> Meenakshi Mukherjee says that “It is a compelling novel about a strange quest, drawing upon myth and folk-lore to reiterate it’s elemental concerns”.<sup>7</sup>

Through these works the authors try to restore the balance of the universe by an appropriate change in attitude and outlook of the people on nature. These two writers did not simply appreciate

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<sup>4</sup> . Joshi, Arun. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. New Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2015: Print. at p.1

<sup>5</sup> . Joshi, Arun. at p.106

<sup>6</sup> . Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination*. New York : Doubleday, 1953. Print. at p.205

<sup>7</sup> . Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *The Twice Born Fiction: Themes and Techniques of the Indian Novels in English*. New Delhi: Heinemann Educations Books, 1971. Print.

nature; rather they expressed their awareness and consciousness. Both authors did not speak about the production of nature but they tell the readers how to return to it. If people return to nature there will be no need of protecting nature. Environment can be protected only by the human actions and not by serious laws. Hence it is the duty of the humans to protect nature.

Both the authors praise the beauty of nature. In *Walden* Thoreau initially loved to hunt fish but later he realised and stopped hunting. In the later stage he hates humans for their hunting nature. In *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* Biswas also hated humans for their hunting nature. In Maikala hills a tiger used to scared people and people planned to the kill tiger but Biswas convinced the village people and spoke with the tiger. After his conversation it returned into the forest. Both the works try to save animals. Both the protagonists are against the materialistic world, when Thoreau was arrested for not paying taxes properly he rebelled against the government and fought with the government for his rights in order to live alone with nature. In the same way Biswas hides his identity and leads a happy life with nature.

## **Conclusion**

The only difference between these two protagonists, is that Thoreau intentionally went to forest but Biswas accidentally but purposefully goes to forest. Both find happiness in their lives after mingling in the world of nature both physically and mentally. Through these works the authors try to restore the balance of the universe by an appropriate change in attitude and outlook of the people on nature. These two writers did not simply appreciate nature; rather they expressed their awareness and consciousness. Both works did not speak about the protection of nature but it tells the readers how to return to it. If people return to nature there will be no need of protecting nature. Environment can be protected only by the human actions and not by serious laws.

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