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ECO-MATERILALISM: A DISCUSSION IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF MARY JANE OLIVER

Bhishma Kumar

UGC NET-JRF

PhD Research Scholar, Patna University, Patna

Department of English

Abstract

Of course, the relation of the man with the nonhuman world is an intrinsic phenomenon. They have been closely related to each other since time immemorial. As time passed, the dependence of the man over nature increased very rapidly that brought over exploitation into the natural resources. He at first started using them sporadically, but later it became an indispensable part of his daily life. Growing industrialization, increasing population, and greed for the money and wealth among the people across the globe prompted their hungry actions immeasurably to utilize them as much as they can. This over use of nonhuman objects by the man fetched imbalance into the ecosystem of the Earth: Global warming, deforestation, soils erosion, water pollution, air pollution etc. are some of them which the planet Earth is facing these days. Degradation in the ecosystem of the earth is becoming perilous day by day, and this is not fair for the biotic as well as abiotic at any cost. For all this, today, the intellectuals from every field of discipline such as, science, ecology, environmental study, sociology, philosophy, politics, and also the literature have come forward with their own findings and advices that are, even if, not enough to handling the

trepidations, but are necessarily a praiseworthy step. As for the literature, it helps people's unconscious mind consider over the anxiety, and invoke it to do something better for the solutions of the predicaments. The discussion in literature about the man and his relation with the nature has brought new areas of study into the field of literary theory and criticism, such as; Eco-criticism, Eco-feminism, Materialism, Eco-materialism etc. This paper draws an outline of Eco-criticism, Eco-feminism, and Eco-materialism followed by "Eco-Materialism: A Discussion in the Selected Poems of Mary Jane Oliver."

Keywords: Nature, Eco-criticism, Eco-feminism, Materialism, Eco-materialism.

Introduction

Even after knowing the hazardous circumstances of the ecosystem of world, the man is deranging the nature to continue his life without considering it, without looking its bad impacts on the every living organism. For anybody or anything, it is absolutely not a just step. "Nature, in the broadest sense, is the natural, physical, or

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material world or universe. "Nature" can refer to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. The study of nature is a large, if not the only, part of science. Although humans are part of nature, human activity is often understood as a separate category from other natural world."(Frederic & Denis). Frederic and Denis are overtly in the opinion that nature includes human beings. It is true, but they are separated from it on the basis of their actions. And it is these actions of the man that have created threats to the environment, and the ecology.

"Eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between the literature and the physical environment."(Glotfelty xviii). According to the other definition, it is "an interdisciplinary field of study that analyses how the natural world is portrayed in literature, typically in relation to modern environmental concerns." (Lexicon). Eco-criticism in literature studies the literary texts, and examines carefully how the human beings are treating the natural world. Eco-criticism plays a vital role into the field of literary theory and criticism to uncover those actions of the human beings which are in favor or against of the earth's ecosystem, as the definitions by the intellectuals uncover above.

Oliver's literary products have, as everybody knows, multiple meanings all related to the evils of the present system of the world. In fact, she does not talk only nature and its relationship with the man, but she talks also on the shocking conventions of the lately emerged society where discriminations between the man and the

woman are seen. This school of thought cleared the way for considering the woman's plights in the literature and literary criticism, and that is the result of Eco-feminism. "Eco-feminism is a branch of feminism that sees environmentalism, and the relationship between women and the earth, as foundational to its analysis and practice. Eco-feminist thinkers draw on the concept of gender to analyse the relationships between humans and the natural world." (Merchant). It is very explicit from the definition of Merchant that an eco-feminist thinker scrutinizes the literary works to find out how a woman and the nature are treated in them.

Another aspect, as it becomes clear from her poems, of Mary Oliver is to think over this materialistic society where she finds the entire world, today, is running after the physical comforts. And that these physical comforts have begotten the devils to the society. For this greed for materials which are limited in the nature gave way to materialism in the literary criticism. Materialism can be defined in many ways, but some of them which are most common are, "the belief that having money and possessions is the most important thing in life." (Cambridge Dictionary). "A tendency to consider material possessions and physical comfort as more important than spiritual values." (Lexico). From the above definitions, at least it becomes very obvious that a materialistic society, which is breathing today, for the desire of wealth and money, does not care the nature and its significance properly.

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Eco-materialism is, today, closely related to the environment, ecology, and the ecosystem of the earth because all the activities of the man are entirely dependent on the nature and its assets. Eco-materialism is “a global system of material exchange between human beings, and between human beings and their environment.”(Trittin). So, it is a matter of great concerns that how the natural resources should be utilized keeping in mind that the balance in the ecosystem does not disturb. The summit across the world vis-à-vis the over utilization of the materials from the nature is frequently organized to consider the issue. Mary Oliver a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award winner almost in all her poetry has talked about the nature and her love for the wild flora and fauna, as in the Romantic Age, the Romantic poets talk about it.

Oliver is predominantly known to us as a great nature poet, but, undoubtedly, it is not only so, her poetry uncovers many aspects of the natural world and the human’s activities towards it, especially the stringent conditions of a woman in the male dominated society, and of the nature in the man dominated world. Inside her poetry, Eco-criticism, Eco-feminism, Materialism, Eco-materialism, and also the other school of thoughts are visible if it is studied circumspectly. The following two selected poems are here under consideration in the perspective of eco-materialism.

- I Worried
- Ocean

I Worried

A soul inside a human-frame is very apprehensive to breathing in a highly materialistic society. She goes into deep contemplations, and is doubtful whether the present world will survive longer or not in this man centered system where his dependence over the natural reserves has brought a great damage to the environment, and the whole ecosystem. Oliver, in this poem, presents her inner sufferings before the artificial society.

I worried a lot. Will the
garden grow, will the rivers
flow in the right direction,
will the earth turn
as it was taught, and if not
how shall
I correct it?

Her questions to herself or the world over the life of the garden, rivers, and the earth indicate the bitter greed of the man. His infiltration everywhere into the natural world has turned its inherent values of an object into another side. The exploitation of the nature to a greater extent has pushed Oliver into the sea of skepticism. She is not confident whether her heinous action against the ecology or the environment will be forgiven. “Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven, / can I do better?” In the intoxication of hunger for wealth, a man forgets everything. His power of taking right decision is dead, as Oliver puts it through this poem.

Ocean

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Having multiple meanings, the “Ocean” unveils also the evils of the highly modernized and technologized world where the man in the name of development is disturbing the ecosystem of the earth day by day very rapidly. This action in real sense performed by him is not at any cost ethical, and also it has not brought him happiness and satisfaction even if he calls it a progress. Without noticing the damage in the ecosystem, he is for self satisfaction neglecting the plights of the other, the whole untouched natural beauty. Oliver’s advice to mingle with the nature is truly a praiseworthy step for protecting it, and the environment as well as the ecosystem of the earth. Like so many other literary figures, Oliver, too, through this poem has preached the society to love the nature, and preserve its reserves for a better future for the next generation.

I am in love with ocean
lifting her thousands of
white hats
in the chop of the storm,
or lying smooth and blue,
the
loveliest bed in the world.
in the personal life, there is
always grief more than
enough,
a heart-load for each of us
on the dusty road.

Oliver becomes very poignant when she looks at the personal life of anybody where she finds them under the curtain of grief. This is why, because she finds a rapid destruction in the ecosystem due to the growing hunger of the man for acquiring wealth and money by exploiting much the natural resources which are limited in the nature. “Dusty Road” in the poem symbolically stands for the rising trade and commerce, deforestation, population and so on. However, she is not against for all these if she is studied deeply. To use the natural reserves is not unfair if they are used appropriately.

Conclusion

Oliver’s poetry, characterized by its simple and clear language, undoubtedly, talks of the relationships between the man and the nature. Without any confliction, she is one of the most prominent writers of this modern age who has gone beyond the conventions of the modern age to look forward to collecting the wealth and money. She likes to spend all her worthy life with the natural world which she thinks is real pleasure for all the entities. However, it is not only so, she has put a lot of questions over the psyches of the modern man. Through her works, Oliver has raised so many typical questions dominating extremely the present materialistic society, for example; woman’s conditions in the

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system, exploitations of the nature and its reserves, spirituality in nature and so on.

Eco-materialism is a new area in the field of literary theory and criticism that studies the literary texts explicitly or confidentially to talk about the apt conservations of the natural and their aftermath to the human race. Oliver's vigilant eyes have not ignored it. Oliver's poems, "I Worried" and "Ocean" here discussed in this paper to an extent have discussed all the elements of eco-materialistic approach. Oliver for bringing out the hungry mind of this exceedingly developed society of the present world to think over the problems at least once has performed uprightly a pious work for conserving the nature, its beauty, and its living and nonliving organisms.

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