

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT: A PERSPECTIVE ON PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to show how literature projects the world in numerous forms and shapes and thereby conveys its message to the readers so as to bring human - nature harmony in it and how contemporary youth takes up different issues, prospects and challenges for developing a sustainable environment in and around the places we inhabit. The environment we, the human beings, share with all other living and nonliving things is an endangered one and it is high time to realize this and bring about this consciousness among all. In this paper my endeavour remains to show how the selected poems of the post-modern British poet, Ted Hughes project the violence and the psychological aspects of the post-war human beings through the indications of the animal behaviour, sometimes by contrast and also in other times by indirect comparisons. Both physical and psychological violence due to post-war disillusionment and despondency left the people psychologically barren. The animals depicted in the concerned poems by Ted Hughes trigger and spur the readers and attempt to awaken the instinctual behaviours of the human beings which lay dormant in them in the present days of material pursuits. The objective of this paper is to bring out how the poems of Ted Hughes expose the states of mental health and environmental balance that are essential in respect of a sustainable living concern in order to maintain a healthy psycho-social balance in the human – environmental ecosystem.

Key words: *Psycho-social environment, violence, sustainable development, role of youth, challenges.*

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Introduction:

Ted Hughes's conceptualization of the external nature and its subsequent projection for the discerning readers remain confined not only to the human-less and animal-less landscapes, but also includes the encapsulated and intertwined human communities inhabiting it and its subhuman and nonhuman creatures and objects.. By dint of poetic imagination, the utterances in his poems acquire additional dimension which act as an eye-opener and a medium for curbing violent anthropocentric ideology among the readers. Needless to say, literature, acting as a powerful medium for awakening an essential consciousness, also aids in sustaining the environment and thereby brings about a resistance to violence on the environment.

The aspects and objects of the environment as depicted in the poems can easily substitute and take the place of the human beings and thus reveal the present real state of psychic violence in the human beings. Ecological imbalance and its impact on flora and fauna, and all living beings including human beings have become a matter of great concern for people of every walks of life. The Geo-environmental conditions and issues that intervened the poets, writers and environmental activists included in the paper constitute the unnatural plights of the animals, birds, landscapes, seas, rivers, mountains, forests due to the anthropogenic effects. Nature and the environment are important to human beings. They exist as an integral companion to human beings and are essential for their emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing. Human beings, as a part of nature also ensures their position as a part of natural ecosystem. Any kind of violence on nature and the environment disrupts the entire ecosystem in some way or the other. Exploitation and destruction of the natural ecosystem destroys the biological foundation of all the living and the non-living things on the planet. The awareness on ensuring a sustainable environment

and the utter need to contribute to the stability and constructing a mutual harmony of the ecosystems have been extensively carried out even within the domain of literary output. Indiscriminate exploitation of nature, natural resources and the environment have been answered by the violence inflicted by nature on human beings. Violences caused by nature on human beings include the natural calamities including flood, draught, earthquake and others. However, the violences inflicted by nature is the outcome of the excessive exploitation already brought out to it. The physical violence brought about by nature due to anthropogenic effects induces psychological violence on human beings in particular, as the desire of the human beings to manipulate and exploit nature are the most predominant ones. As environmental activists, educators and literary craftsmen, the poets seek fundamental changes in the attitudes, behaviour and ethical considerations of individuals and social institutions through examples and enlightenment, if not by violence, conflicts and chaos, in order to ensure a sustainable environment with mutual harmony of the ecosystem. The literary vehicle, as a product of a specific culture gets transformed in terms of another culture and thus gains a common platform of togetherness to communicate philosophical truths that reflect practical aspects of life.

Poems as a form of Dialogue:

Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* notes 'Dialogic relationships are possible not only among whole (relatively whole) utterance; a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position' (Bakhtin, 184-85). Taking the cue further, Hirschkop suggests that so long as any utterance is, according to Bakhtin, 'essentially dialogical' (Hirschkop, 23), poetry also is 'dialogical; it just pretends that this is not the case' (Hirschkop, 23). In this way, Hirschkop's argument comes up with the fact that dialogicity is not only possible in poetry, but always constitutes poetry. Hinged upon this opinion, Ted Hughes' selected poems are examined in the light of sustainable living concerns from the perspective of psycho-social environmental ethics that resist environmental violence.

The stories and memories of the violence meted out by the great war, in which William Henry, Ted Hughes's father took part, narrated to the budding poet had left a permanent imprint in Ted Hughes's life and later gave shape to his poetic genius. Ted Hughes himself admitted that his first six years shaped everything. In a letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon collected in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, Ted Hughes cites:

In those first six years of consciousness, in which I shared in my brother's Eden,

We never met one other soul walking out there – except the farmers, who had adopted my

brother anyway. So, you can see, it was not only real, but – as far as our ordinary home

and school life was concerned – secret and internalized. Naturally, I extended that feeling of private possession to the entire natural world and all the creatures in it.

Nobody else seemed to have the faintest interest in it. And I should mention – that stretch of country, which climbed to empty moorland – was an hour of several million

people. It was the geographical middle of the Northern industrial belt between Hull and Liverpool. (Reid, 623)

Jonathan Bate in *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* has also observed, 'The war haunted Ted and his father because it had decimated a generation of the Calder Valley's young men. The sorrow in the air of the valley came more from the war than from the decline of industry.' (Bate, 40)

Poems and the Environmental State:

The poems in consideration, project the post-war disillusionment, identity-crisis, dissatisfaction, and the psychological and environmental state that have already resulted in the disruption and disintegration of the basic sustainable concerns for a proper survival strategy on this planet. A few lines from "Wodwo" are significant here :

Do these weeds

Know me and name me to each other have they

seen me before, do I fit in their world? I seem
 separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
 out of nothing casually I've no threads
 fastening me to anything I can go anywhere
 I seem to have been given the freedom
 of this place what am I then?

(CP, 183)

The above passage, apparently a monologue quoted from the last poem, "Wodwo" in the collection named *Wodwo* (1967) by Ted Hughes depicts a spirit of the forest or at best be said, a shape of a half-man and half-animal creature, caught in a moment of self-musing upon the thought of his identity. Wodwo is engulfed by the sense of bewilderment and wonders about his relationship with the world and the environment he inhabits. The question "What am I then?" haunts every individual who has faced the horror and violence of the post-war world. It reveals an agitated and tormented psyche trapped in a dark night, in a claustrophobic state. Reflected back from the surrounding objects of nature, the monologue of Wodwo becomes a dialogue, along with a communion with the semantic positions of the weeds, leaves, river, and other living and non-living objects in the poem. Conjecturing his relationship with the world, Wodwo represents the condition of the present state of the so called civilized people, lost in material pursuits at the cost of depriving natural human instincts. The anthropomorphic presentation in "Wodwo" is again cited for a proper depiction of a person who lost his identity and the sense of his roots in the wake of violence caused to the instinctive behavioural and cognitive response to the sense of supremacy of the environment:

...if I go
 to the end on this way past these trees and past these trees
 till I get tired that's touching one wall of me

for the moment if I sit still how everything
 stops to watch me I suppose I am the exact centre
 but there's all this what is it roots
 roots roots roots and here's the water
 again very queer but I'll go on looking.

(C. P. 183)

Wodwo here seems to disdain his cultural roots and denounce the Biblical interpretation of the creation of the world. However, Wodwo gradually comes to realize that he has been given the freedom to inspect, observe and judge, rather than accept unthinkingly the assumptions and beliefs of the different aspects of nature and the culture created in this world. Dominance of Nature has been given utmost importance here and at the same time there has been a marked observance of the violation of the predominance of the Bible or Christianity with regard to the concept of creation. Here, nature rules and remains the supreme authority. All creatures have been given self-dignity and endowed with equal status in the face of the earth. The poem *Wodwo* thus amply brings out the crisis developed due to psychic segregation from nature. The psycho-social environmental critique, adopting a polyphonic principle epitomizes a metalinguistic mode of speech where the addressors of Wodwo foreground their speech through their silences which in turn find limitless speculations in Wodwo himself. The zoomorphic presentation of the poem craves for a balance in the ecosystem by projecting the violent psychic condition of the post-war modern man. It urges the readers to bring about awareness so as a sustainable living condition can be properly maintained by implanting the seed of harmony in the environment. The passage below from "Wodwo" projects a barren world:

The sea cries with its meaningless voice
 Treating alike its dead and its living,
 Probably bored with the appearance of heaven

After so many millions of nights without sleep,
Without purpose, without self-deception.

Stone likewise. A pebble is imprisoned
Like nothing in the Universe.

Created for black sleep. Or growing

Conscious of the sun's red spot occasionally,

Then dreaming it is the foetus of God.

(C P, 179)

The artist like Ted Hughes infuses life into the sea, stone and a pebble in "Pibroch". He entitles them as objects with human consciousness that cry and scream. They all seem to lead a meaningless existence in a universe which is devoid of any hope, development or purpose. The sea along with the pebbles and the landscape produce a sense of desolation and futility of existence. A brooding atmosphere of meaninglessness and absurdity of ecological violence is created. The life-infused pebble dreams itself as 'the foetus of God' (C.P, 179). The word 'foetus' reminds one of a fully developed embryo in the womb. Here it is not an ordinary embryo but the 'foetus' or embryo of God. The pebble is growing conscious of the sun's red spot and dreaming it as 'the foetus of God' (C.P 179) compels the reader to think of the birth of a new God who like Yeats' 'rough beast' in "The Second Coming", would emerge in order to create a new habitable place for all to live peacefully within the domain of a perfect ecosystem, devoid of environmental violence.

Conclusion:

Lynne Pearce in 'Bakhtin and the dialogic principle' states about Bakhtin's 'Hidden polemic' (one of the subcategories of 'double voiced speech') that,

'Hidden polemic', then, is the term that Bakhtin invokes to describe those words and

utterances *not present in the text* and which they try to defend themselves against.

This somewhat paranoid conceit of words and utterances anticipating, and then

fending off, the criticism, or judgement, of others was epitomized, for Bakhtin, by the

narrator of Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*. In this text, the hero's

'confession' is addressed to an unnamed 'other' whose criticism is greatly feared. At

times, this 'other' is embodied in the presence of a censorious 'gentleman' reader',

but for much of the text the inter-locutor remains an invisible presence who polices

the speaker's every word and compels him to tell 'the truth'. (Waugh, 228)

Then it can well be understood that the silent speech of the red spot of the sun is in conflict with the stone's utterances and it creates a hidden polemic to assert its authority. The pebble's voice wages a war at the unuttered or hidden voice of the old sun. The reader will be content to interpret the 'foetus of God' as an emerging force of violence in the form of a new sun which will do away with all the environmental injustice. The new sun will wipe out anthropocentrism and ensure equal ecological status, dignity and environmental justice for all living, non-living and natural objects of the universe. The poems in consideration thus, amply bring out the psychological projections which can provide living concerns that can sustain the environment and the world as a whole by resisting environmental violence. Literary works embed ideas and concepts that bring alteration of the psychic orientation in human beings. Awareness spreads and ultimately leads towards change that pave the path of sustainable development in the world we live in. Violence exists in numerous forms and violence exists as a normal, instinctive act on the part of the human and non-human beings. But, the difference crops up and takes a massive shape when the violence inflicted upon others, whether human or non-human results in a mass devastation, affecting the nature, environment and the planet we live in. Unnecessary killing and devastation caused due to anthropogenic influences prove quite contrary to animals who do not kill unless they are hungry and concerns their own security.

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