

Ecopoetry and Environmental Consciousness in Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman

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Abstract

In American literature Ecopoetry can be traced back to the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and Walt Whitman (1819-1892). Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the two transcendentalist poets can be called the precursor to eco-poets in American literature. The major premise of transcendental eco-wisdom is that connection with nature is necessary for a person's intellectual, aesthetic, and moral health and growth. It also emphasizes relation between human and non-human world. We can understand relation between nature and human life present in Thoreau as a touch stone in Walden and in Walking. On the other hand Emerson's Nature is preoccupied with environmental consciousness. Interestingly both Nature and Walden are essays but eco-poetic trait in them makes these two pieces an important part bearing important eco-poetic messages. And Walking too has valuable ecological messages in it. About the inclusion of essays of Emerson and Thoreau in this thesis is in the sense is that their work have some qualities that bear the testimony of poems. In this connection we can remember John Elder's indication in the Imagining the Earth (1985). John Elder in his Imagining the Earth refers Oliver about the inclusion of nonfiction in the discussion of ecopoetry: On the other hand John Elder in his book Ecopoetry a Critical Introduction (2002) acknowledges that ecopoetry had its modern inception

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from the transcendentalists; he says in his Foreword in this way “the emergence of ecological poetry from the work of Emerson and his cycle. The transcendentalists scoured and resculpted the terrain of American literature.” (ix) All these prove that Thoreau and Emerson were early proponent of ecopoetry. Apart from Emerson and Thoreau’s masterpieces, Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass sings the vibrant song of nature and its theme is very much close to earth, considering this Whitman has been included here along with two other nature poets Emerson and Thoreau. In Leaves of Grass Whitman fits his lyrics to be in shape for ecological purposes which are exceedingly contemporary issue.

Keywords: *Eco-aesthetic, nature, spirituality, wisdom, universe, environment, transcendentalism.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Eco-aesthetic evidences in ‘The Method of Nature’

Emerson’s writing is intellectually detailed and he is critical over technological dependence and rushes for economic gain that is harming nature. Though he did not give any direct assertion against the wrong-doers of nature but symbolically his writings showed his ardent love for nature. In his book *Nature* (1844), we notice his abstract faith that upholds the superiority of nature. Emerson takes an unhesitating anthropocentric view. He sees nature as a great and holy teacher of the self-reliant man who will look beyond its uses as mere commodity and see it as infused with spirit and wonder. Particularly, in the last half of *Nature* and some of his lectures, Emerson shows us his exuberant anthropocentrism. He wants to say that the self is glorified and empowered only by cosmic perspectives. Emerson sees the cosmic view of man’s place in the universe in his lecture *The Method of Nature* (1841), in the lecture he further warns us about our private will to bring about a metamorphosis to nature. He bemoans the ‘material interest’ of American people in *The Method of Nature* (1841) lecture. He is against any type of aggression to nature. In the 1844 essay *Nature*, Emerson discusses the harmony and unity between man and nature thoroughly. He believes that the world is divided into two parts: the self (the soul) and the outside world which he refers to as "nature". He discusses the relationship between the two parts and explains that there should be a balance between the two parts. If this balance exists, then the self can communicate with the outside world successfully. This is, in fact, a very spiritual essay; the essay is divided into eight chapters: *Nature, Commodity, Beauty, Language, Discipline, Idealism, Spirit and Prospects*. In all of the parts we get his impulsion that seeks a world which is ecologically balanced.

Emerson in *Nature* discusses the affinity between man and nature. In *Nature* Emerson emphasizes how man takes advantage of nature. Nature came as spiritual and emotional premises to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941); in the same way Emerson did not believe nature to be only as a source of resources. Wordsworth, on the other hand, took nature as a potion; he found a healing effect on nature. Likewise the great Romantics, we find a really totally different usage of nature in Emerson. The lack of personal interaction with nature, Emerson believed was a total lapse on our side. In *Nature* Emerson, Like Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), shows the interconnectedness of nature and man. Man must live with a

harmonious way with nature. In *Nature*, we see, Emerson shows this beautiful harmony and interconnectedness between man and nature in all the chapters. Not only harmony Emerson also gives emphasis on the spiritual relation between man and nature in this significant essay. He also on the view that man must give back nature what he gets from nature or must reciprocate with nature.

Wordsworth and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) like Emerson who was not their contemporary also advocate balance in the unruffled nature. Emerson indicates this balance between man and nature in the very beginning of the essay *Nature*. He says that The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other [...] His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man. (*Nature*, 1074)

This quotation depicts the writer's intention to have a balanced relationship between man and nature. He also in the faith that a healthy relationship between man and nature gives the man spiritual bliss.

In the *Beauty* chapter of *Nature* too he advocates the same balance when he says "A leaf, a sun-beam, a landscape, the ocean, make an analogous impression on the mind. What is common to them all, - that perfectness and harmony, is beauty." (*Beauty*, 1080). Almost in all the chapters this balance between man and nature is emphasized. Emerson in the *Language* chapter reminds us of balance between man and nature as he thinks it is necessary for a robust growth. But, he warns, when man goes beyond the mutual benefits and dependence of nature and wants to subordinate and use nature for his self benefit then the balance is ruptured.

Spirituality and solicitude in nature as Emerson

In his essay *Nature*, Like Romantic poets he asserts the value of solitude that nature provides us. According to Emerson, humans must take themselves away from society's flaws and distractions in order to experience the "**wholeness**" with nature for which they are naturally suited. Emerson believes that solitude is the only way humans can fully adhere to what nature has to offer. Reflecting upon this idea of solitude, and humans' search for it, Emerson states importantly when he says "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society." (1074)

It is obvious that in this quotation Emerson reminds us of nature's power to soothe humans.

At the beginning of Chapter I, Emerson describes true solitude as going out into nature and leaving behind all preoccupying activities of society. Emerson is in the view that when a man gazes at the stars, he becomes aware of his own separateness from the material world. The stars were made to allow him to perceive the "perpetual presence of the sublime." (1074) he further says every night, they (the stars) demonstrate that God is ever-present. They never lose their power to move us. His outlook is that we retain our original sense of wonder even when viewing familiar aspects of nature anew. The whole nature though it may look scattered but its every component works in a unified way to give a total perception to a man.

Our pleasure in the countryside, which is made up of many particular forms, provides an example of this integrated vision. In this purpose Emerson *Nature's* first chapter clears it,

“Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child.” (Chapter 1, *Nature* 1074)

Emerson then says about our way of looking nature. He emphasizes on this because the more we grow older the more we lose the capacity of looking nature as our close part. In our childhood we experience nature as a source of wonder and awe; the way Wordsworth experiences nature in the poems *Tintern Abbey* and in the ode to *Intimations with Immortality*. Unlike children, most adults lost the ability to see the world in this way. In order to experience awe in the presence of nature, we need to approach it with a balance between our inner and our outer senses. All aspects of nature correspond to some states of mind. Nature offers perpetual youth and joy, and counteracts whatever misfortune befalls an individual.

This is an in fact spiritual way to view nature. Emerson laments the existing tendency to accept the knowledge of nature. He asserts that all our questions about the order of the universe — about the relationships between God, man, and nature — may be answered by our experience of life and by the world around us. Each individual is a manifestation of creation and as such holds the key to unlocking the mysteries of the universe. Nature, too, is both an expression of the divine and a means of understanding it.

Truly saying Emerson uses spirituality as a major theme in his essay, *Nature*. Emerson reminds us of the divine as something large and visible, which he referred to as nature; such an idea is known as transcendentalism, in which one perceives anew God and their body, and becomes one with their surroundings. Emerson confidently exemplifies transcendentalism, stating in *Nature* that within these plantations of God, a decorum and sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousands years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith.

Emerson's spirituality like that of Whitman relates man and nature together. Emerson sees nature circulating around him like “currents of the Universal Being”; (*Nature*, 1075) he considered that there was a spiritual sense of the natural world around him. So he becomes totally amazed, he grows “a transparent eye-ball” in him. “a transparent eye-ball” is a word is used by Emerson and by this word Emerson means for an all absorbing eye of the nature. Therefore a man having this can take all that nature gives. It makes a person one with nature. On the other hand about Emerson's senses of “Universal Being”, Emerson states, in the seventh chapter namely *Spirit* he says further that the aspect of nature is devout. He praises nature that is the source of our intellectual growth to spirituality because like the figure of Jesus, she stands with bended head, and hands folded upon the breast. He further says that the happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship. (*Spirit*, 1095). It is also a trade mark quality of Tagore to feel the celestial in the nature. In Tagore's many poems he could be found as a devotee to the Almighty through the medium of nature.

Another point that Emerson wants to focus on is that man only takes from nature but does not give back to nature or does not take proper care of nature. And the way man dominates nature whether it is right or wrong, man does not bother. In *Nature*, Emerson lays out a

problem that he attempts to solve throughout the essay: that humans do not fully accept nature's beauty and all that it has to offer. According to Emerson, people are allured by the world around them; so they do not properly understand nature. They do not understand properly what nature gives to humans, and humans do not reciprocate.

Nature as a resource to Emerson

In the four chapters — *Commodity*, *Beauty*, *Language*, and *Discipline*— Emerson discusses the means in which man employs nature ultimately to integrate with the workings of the world. In Chapter II, "Commodity," he treats the most essential uses of nature — for heat, food, water, shelter, and transportation. Different elements initiating from sources like metals, plants and animals to the basic elements of earth, air, fire and water supports earth's inhabitants. All the elements of nature work together for the betterment of mankind. Moreover, man also uses nature in ingenious way to facilitate its usage; by his wisdom man utilizes the resources of nature. *Commodity* chapter important in the sense that Emerson focus on the significant side how nature is necessary to our living on this earth.

Emerson like Wordsworth and Keats see nature as a source of beauty, in the *Beauty* chapter of *Nature*, Emerson begins with this thought. "A nobler want of man is served by nature, namely, the love of beauty."(*Nature*, 1076). By this the writer wants to give his view that beauty is more important than commodity discussed in the *Commodity* chapter, as commodity only meets physical needs. Beauty has a restorative power. The reason is that natural beauty makes us nobler. It may not necessary for physical need but it has its importance in restoring our mental strength. Beauty has its importance in three levels of our lives – firstly it has healing power or medicinal quality – a man in stress living in tedious urban setting can relive his stress, secondly it has spiritual elements- it enhances noble man's virtuous quality. Nature rewards those whose minds are noble. A virtuous person is full harmony with nature's beauty. Thirdly nature is pleasing to intellect- it is a conscious way to try to find an expression of God in nature. It is a meditation type search.

Like the Gaia hypothesis Emerson seems to profess very early the self generative process of the nature though it was in a transcendentalist way. The eternal aesthetic cycle of nature is captured in this way.

"Nothing divine dies. All good is eternally reproductive. The beauty of nature reforms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation." (Chapter III, "Beauty,"1080)

Emerson's thinking here fits well with Gaia principle. The Gaia hypothesis or theory proposes that organisms interact with their inorganic surroundings on earth to form a self-regulating, complex system that contributes to maintaining the conditions for life. In *The Voice of the Earth* (2001) part three, in Ecology chapter it is stated that "Let us assume that the psyche, like all natural systems, retains the capacity for creative self-adjustment."(213) So it is apparent that This idea was voiced in *Beauty* part of Emerson many years back then now.

In Chapter IV, *Language* Emerson first states that words represent particular facts in nature, which exists in part to give us language to express ourselves. As Emerson says words represents objects in nature, these individual objects signify spiritual realities, and nature symbolizes spirituality.

Emerson gives examples from etymology and the origin and development of words. The interdependence and close relation between man and nature is once again articulated in *Language* chapter. Emerson says that man is in the superior position because he can understand the meaning of all things and related to all the beings on earth. Objects cannot be, on the other hand, understood without man. (*Language*, 1081) The infinite spirituality is mixed as a sign of language in the nature and Emerson tells that “words are signs of natural fact” (1080) further he goes on to say that - Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind. (*Language*, 1081) Emerson asserts that there is universal understanding of the relationship between natural imagery and human thought. An all-encompassing universal soul underlies individual life.

In the *Language* chapter he argues that our secondary desires as – desires for riches, pleasure, power, praise lessen our power over nature. Thus a sound and balance way of living between man and nature is lost.

Emerson says that the visible creation is the terminus or the circumference of the invisible world. (1084) He writes of all nature as a symbol for the human mind, and asserts that there is a very close relation between moral and material laws. As for Emerson, every individual has a link with the universal thinking that links persons to objects i.e. the whole nature. This provides the spiritual side of this chapter.

In Chapter V, *Discipline* Emerson argues that nature serves to educate man through both the rational, and "Reason." He gets this reason from S.T. Coleridge. Nature teaches us about its differences and similarities – it requires an understanding to perceive it. He says that Debt and Property are economic issues. It is Emerson's metaphysical idea that Nature is it self useful but our will shapes it to be more useful. Emerson then states that we need reason to fully understand the nature and in this case intuition is necessary. By reason we logically and rationally deduct different natural phenomena. Reason is like moral teacher. As Emerson says; it offers ethical and spiritual insights. Every natural object is like sermon offers spiritual and divine truth. Then Emerson comes to the point that all things in nature create a single whole, as he says “Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world”. The writer also emphasizes on unity in the chapter as usual. The nature is vast so he calls us to find unity in Variety. Though nature is endlessly different it gives us a unique and identical impression. The unity is more fruitful when it fully embody spiritual truth base on true relationships between people. Whether nature is subjective or objective does not prick Emerson, he rather shows concerns over the physical changes that man by mechanical apparatus makes to nature. These changes and distortions point out the separation between ourselves and nature.

Emerson deals with nature's spiritual qualities and purpose in Chapter VII, *Spirit*. Emerson here suggests that there is a universal spirituality beyond ordinary understanding. Nature has

spiritual properties in it whether we fail to see it or not. But our understanding to that mystery of nature is meager. But our ignorance to nature's mystery does not diminish its value. Emerson says that nature is a phenomenon not a substance. Human emotion can understand nature but ultimately nature remains alien to us. Nature has an animating spirit by which it expresses itself to us. Emerson further says that in each and every object, including humans possess a universal essence. This essence or spirit is the life force behind the continuous creation and evolution of life around us. This spirit creates the unity in nature. What Emerson initially warned is important here also; by our gradual indifference we are alienated from nature.

Emerson is very much aware of the lack of consciousness by the man to understand the full meaning of nature in *Spirit*. So he indicates upon the universal spiritual problem of growing separation between man and nature. He says in an important extract that:

We do not understand the notes of the birds. The fox and deer ran away from us; the bear and tiger rend us. We do not know the uses of more than a few plants, as corn and the apple, the potato and the vine. Is not the landscape, every glimpse of which hath a grandeur, a face of him? (*Spirit*, 1096)

By this Emerson cites the growing separation between man and nature. His spiritual identity is found once again.

The essay's final chapter *Prospects* reflects on how to judge nature. Emerson advocates that intuition is more powerful than science to understand nature. He goes back to his ever referred point of unity and Emerson theorizes that each person is a microcosm comparing the universe as a macrocosm. He identifies the imbalance created by man's loss of an earlier sense of the spiritual meaning and purpose of nature. Finally, what Emerson puts forward is very much ecological. He philosophize we have lost our utopia or dreamland from this earth because we are very much separated from dynamic nature; for this we are far away from the wholeness and unity within nature. Emerson ends up optimistically and opines that our proper thinking and insight can unite nature and humanity and this would bring nature in the perfection and an undivided wholeness between man and nature.

An early Emerson lecture on *Humanity and Science*(1836) reasons that since "Nature proceeds from a mind congenial with ours" that it is "overflowed and saturated with humanity" In his lecture on *Water*, he describes the unseen cosmic processes of water which operates far beyond man's puny direction, yet water always serves us, not just physically but also by exalting "our highest sentiments" so that we see each drop "in every step of this ceaseless revolution serving the life, the order, the happiness of the Universe." This cosmic view of man's place in the universe is elaborated in a later lecture on *The Method of Nature*,(1841). He again here accuses that men are really so much materialists they are not bound by the principle of life rather they are merely pleasure seeker. In the essay he sees nature as an universal entity not a particular thing. So it is a mistake in our side to consider nature as a particular thing. Nature is always changing and it has a self regulating process. Here lies Emerson's spiritual and own idealism on nature.

Thoreau's "Walden" is a masterpiece of eco-centric thoughts

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) is considered a seminal contributor to American environmental thought. His texts are full of eco wisdom. Especially in *Walden* or *Life in the Woods* and in *Walking* his meditation upon nature is mentionable. *Walden* though may be written in 1854 can be judged as a masterpiece of eco-centric thoughts. Thoreau has become the prophet of wildness for modern environmentalists and naturalists. Thoreau thinks in rather warm way that “in Wildness is the preservation of the World.” (*Walking*, 1964) As nature was becoming victimized in the period of fast urban growth in Thoreau's time; Thoreau tries to show the fine qualities of wild nature that should be taken care of. Thus *Walden* and its surrounding nature has become a great piece of writing not only for the rookie students but also holds a deep meaning for the thinkers and naturalists. Biological detail of the pond is an important part for the eco-critics. *Walden* has scholarly messages in one side and on the other side it possesses environmental warning. In this present environmental crisis Thoreau's *Walden* has become very much related topic for eco-critical reading. *Walden* is divided in many parts, they are- *Economy*, *Where I lived and what I lived for*, *Reading*, *Sounds*, *Solitude*, *Visitors*, *The Bean Field*, *The Village*, *The Ponds*, *Baker Ponds*, *Higher Laws*, *Brute Neighbors*, *House-Warming*, *Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors*, *Winter Animals*, *The Pond Winter*, *Spring*, *Conclusion*. Among them some chapters give us important ecological ideas.

In *Walden*, or *Life in the Woods* Thoreau shows his eco - socialist sensibilities as well. He takes serene shelter in the area of Walden Pond, in Concord, in Massachusetts and works himself for his sustenance. This proves that, by this Thoreau wanted to become closer to nature and showed clearly a mutual dependence between man and nature. This mutual dependence between man and nature and benefiting from nature by not harming it, is a part of eco-socialism. Thoreau sheltered in such a lonely wild area that in a mile there was hardly any one living there. But he became intimate with the nature, the pine trees and the birds that would hover over his head and of course the Walden Pond. He called it – “a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust.” (*Economy*, p.1774). He argues that, in fact in large cities people live in very small fraction of the whole; on the other hand in wilderness man can live, in a sense, in bigger areas and in vast liberty. This living style of Thoreau also reminds us of Thoreau's self-reliance.

This self-reliance is also found in *The Bean- Field*. He plants beans in two and a half acres of land himself and grows bean without applying any manure. This is a deep ecological sign of Thoreau which protects nature. Love for self-made shelter is a notable idea that *Walden* offers and this striking idea we see also present in many other romantic poets and writers. In the very beginning of living in Walden area Thoreau makes his own hand made house. This is out of Thoreau's love of nature and love for simple living. Though, the cutting of the woods for making his living place hurts Thoreau so he emphasizes in *Economy* part that man should be a friend to nature. Man should not be a foe to nature. He must take from nature but not demolishing its core or heart. He can take from nature after being fully acquainted with it not as an outsider.

In the *Economy* chapter in *Walden* Shelter becomes a big question for Thoreau. And we by this time know that home making or shelter is a major question for the modern eco-poets. Thoreau could see the approaching problem relating to shelter really very early. In this connection Jonathan Bate remembers Thoreau's apprehension very pertinently by this quote:

There is no such thing in nature as what Thoreau in the section of *Walden* entitled "Shelter" calls 'superfluous property'. The savage has his shelter, writes Thoreau, the birds their nests and the foxes their holes, but 'in modern civilized society not more than half the families own a shelter.' (*The Song of the Earth*, 179)

In reality the problem with shelter is now an ever growing problem for every big town and it has become a global issue now. Thoreau ably could grasp this degrading scenario in an era when there was a deluge of people in the large cities in America.

Another thing that Thoreau emphasizes, quite like Emerson, is that there must be a spiritual bonding between man and nature and a true love for nature can ensure it. The superstructure that is made on earth is done by denting nature and Thoreau is strongly against it. He also shows his tendency against machine in *Walden*. He would rather choose house made of logs in favor of building that destroys the nature. He is very clear to declare his detest of artificial and false living which dislodges the nature, he says vehemently – "I love better to see stones in place. The grandeur of Thebes was a vulgar grandeur." (*Economy*, 1798). Thus it becomes very clear that Thoreau was against destroying nature unnecessarily. He is aghast of seeing lust of man because man's lust is not limited to fulfilling necessities but to fulfill ever growing luxury by utilizing nature. Another important view of Thoreau is that every one should be an active part of nature to find his livelihood. He says as for him he could manage well enough by working about six weeks in a year to meet all the expenses of living. This observation of Thoreau can be called really environment friendly and in this case he sounds like an eco-social activist.

Thoreau also gives ideas from Eastern ideology namely Indian thoughts in *Walden*. The view that Thoreau gives is that fresh nature can perfectly awaken our imagination and intelligence. He says citing Vedas that "All intelligences awake with the morning." (*Where I lived, and What I lived for*, 1815); so a fresh nature is much more necessary for creativity because it energizes us physically as well as spiritually. Thoreau also opines again that it is impossible for any mechanical aids to awaken ourselves intellectually but a soothing dawn can do it successfully. In *Where I lived, and What I lived for* Thoreau finally invites us to live like nature. We should along with the same rotation of the nature awake and sleep and should live as deliberately as nature.

About friendly understanding and intimacy with nature Thoreau was the early champion. As Helen Bowdoin says in *Thoreau and the Environment*:

Henry Thoreau liked to get his feet muddy; all nature was a tonic for him. Nearly every day, year round, he was out walking—exploring and studying every nook and cranny in Walden Woods, Estabrook Woods, and the rest of Concord, and recording in his journals in vivid detail what he heard and smelled and saw.

This effort of Thoreau gives us ample evidences to find out ecological traces in him.

Helen Bowdoin says further about Thoreau's environmental entanglement:

Thoreau is an American original — an amazing mix of land surveyor and pencil designer, naturalist and social reformer, poet and philosopher. But Thoreau himself had something perhaps more revealing to tell us about himself and his work. "My profession is always to be on the alert to find God in Nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, of nature.

Thus this effort of Thoreau helps us to get lifelike picture of Walden surroundings. This was possible because Thoreau himself had first hand experience living in Walden for two years two months and two days for his spiritual discovery. Though it was done only for spiritual awakening we get much more for our sundry studies. As it was said before it is a great source for discovering and deconstructing for knowing environmental issues.

Helen Bowdoin focuses on Thoreau's exaltation of nature:

"In a river, he found the flow of eternity; climbing a mountain he felt his spirit move closer to God." "I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows." It was as though he could see through Nature to a glimpse of the divine. What might sound to us like a contradiction made perfect sense to him: "Heaven is under our feet as well as over our heads." Exalting his own small world of Walden Pond and Walden Woods and the Concord countryside, Henry Thoreau exalted nature for all of us everywhere.

Regarding the above quotation it can be said that Thoreau in more than one occasions, in *Walden*, called this earth a latent heaven. The earth with its flora and fauna is no less than a heaven. Walden is the source of harmony with aesthetic beauty that comes from the balanced way of life that it ensures. Spring, winter, summer, birds, trees and various fruits surrounding the Walden shows this ecological motion and balance which were being diminished in many large cities in the USA. It is the microcosmic ecological heaven. And it makes us aware of Philip Sydney's (1554-1586) *Arcadia*.

There works a sense of bliss in Thoreau in Walden area. The writer considers him rich by the natural bounties "if not in money, in sunny hours and summer days." (1869) and interestingly there is inter-textuality with Rabindranath Tagore again; in Tagore's *Creative Unity* Tagore resonates the same feeling of being blessed by nature. As quoting it from Tagore would give us the same level of reflection regarding the ecological bliss from both the premier writers of two different literatures. Rama who was "giri-vana-priya" or lover of the mountain and the forest said one day to Sita: "When I look upon the beauties of this hill, the loss of my kingdom troubles me no longer, nor does the separation from my friends cause me any pang." [59]

Another important feature of *Walden* is that the pristine nature never gets changed but we the people get changed and handle nature in an indifferent way and for our profitable means. But the eco-sensitive writer, Thoreau is aware of this, so the forest surrounding, the Walden attracts him with same magnificence as it attracted large folk of people from time immemorial. The writer painfully discovers his own change like the large scale change in the society, the writer pangs, "It is it self unchanged the same water which my youthful eyes fell

on; all the changes is in me.” (1869). Again striking eco-sensitivity is seen in the writer who is an ardent lover of the various birds in the Walden on the wake of clearing the forest for the sake of human utilization “How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down.” (1869). About cutting trees we remember again Bibhutibhusan and his *Aranyak*. In *Aranyak* Bibhutibhusan remorsefully talks to Munchi about the cutting down of trees in Kolkata area. In later part of

.*Walden again* Thoreau’s ardent love for birds is found. In this case, Thoreau may be called early eco-writer for his love for eco friendly living and love for the various birds and creatures of wild and trees. Thoreau says in rather eco-sensitive fashion “for I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds; not having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them.” (1813)

Birds which are now decreasing in an alarming rate; Thoreau shows his deep concern for them. When the ground is only partially bare of snow, Thoreau sees wildflowers, grasses, cattails, and other weeds which survived the winter, which feed the early birds. The red squirrels move under Thoreau's house and make noise chirping away, even when he stamps on the floor. About this great tradition of love for bird Jonathan Bate highly praise Thoreau along with Whitman in *Imagining the Earth*. (222)

It is said before that not only the serene milieu, birds and trees of the Walden but also a simple life is mostly cherished by Thoreau. As it is also said beforehand that Thoreau believed in “simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust.”(1774). Simplicity is more than a mode of life for Thoreau; it is a philosophical ideal as well. In his *Economy* chapter, Thoreau asserts that a feeling of dissatisfaction with one’s possessions can be resolved in two ways: one may acquire more, or reduce one’s desires.

Walking(1862) is an essay by Thoreau says about the man’s effort to search for and understand the wild. Proper walking, or sauntering, requires that the walker leave everything behind and submit fully to the experience of the walk, forgetting the town and avoiding the narrowly constricted path afforded by the well-defined road. We get some valuable ecological message in it .It depicts man’s relation to nature and shows clash between nature and culture. It has another name *The Wild*. Thoreau himself said that *Walking* is a seminal essay by him. In fact it is combination of two lectures delivered by him. In *Walking* he sees nature in its most intense form. He begins with a deep ecological tone “I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness.” (*Walking*, 1953)— "absolute freedom and wildness" — is his subject. As a walker he does not choose to walk in towns or man made villages; his target is untrodden wild paths. As he writes legs are not to sit upon; it is for walking and finding out the mysterious of virgin nature. He cites examples of Wordsworth’s and says that Wordsworth did not like to confine him in indoors rather chose out of doors world. (*Walking*, 1956) Thoreau also names some other great poets who would walk to discover the unknown nature – they are Chaucer, Menu, Homer etc. In the essay while walking his affinity for woods, rivers, trees and birds are obvious. He grieves in the essay for decreasing numbers of pigeons or birds. He is in favor of free birds and animals instead of tame one. This is really a unique ecological feeling. His feeling for woodland is so

acute that he shows his premonition for an alarming future that will grab the whole woodland.

Another thought that cross the mind of Thoreau that he wants to keep his walking journey towards west. This has also a significance regarding this Eldar John comments in “The Footpath of Tradition” in *Imagining the Earth* that:

To travel west for Thoreau meant moving into new encounters with both wilderness and the reorientations of Asian cultures; in either case, one experienced a healing forgetfulness of convention’s trivial strictures. But certain kinds of forgetting are the prologue to right remembering, as we turn back eastward to study our newly recollected origins. (*Imagining the Earth*, 106-107)

This walk for Thoreau meant a meaningful life by this he would forget the agony of a lost culture and wilderness and have a soothing effect upon his mind.

The essay is written in a lucid language and runs as sweetly as a wild beautiful brook. There are some famous utterances in the essay that reminds us that Thoreau was clearly an early lover of wilderness and ecologically conscious. He pays homage to our ancestors and also the wild living. If he were given a chance he says that he would choose wild man. This is quite compatible with his love for wild nature. He is in the view that wildness preserves and structural advancement destroys the nature. So comes the famous line “in Wilderness is the preservation of the world.” (*Walking*, 1964) In fact the whole essay centers round the theme of love for wilderness and wild life as well. So we see Thoreau’s despise for business, mechanical life and artificiality that urbanization brings. His love for wilderness makes him denounce city life. He says himself famously “I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing in to the wilderness.” (*Walking*, 1961) He further says that the good thing is wild thing. Thus he comes very near to the modern day deep ecologists. The following lines proves this again. He says in the praise of wilderness “Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest” (*Walking*, 1965). This proves how much unknowingly Thoreau became one of the foremost deep ecologists. Interestingly, like Whitman’s wishes Thoreau also wants to be a wild animal. In *Walking*, he cherishes that every man should be a like of wild antelope. (*Walking*, 1965) In the same place he wants every man to be a part of nature. This sense of Thoreau is exceedingly modern when the modern people are losing their natural entity.

Thoreau believes that every State which has risen to eminence has its roots in the wildness. So when he is alone he wishes to seek his place in darkest wood. (*Walking*, 1966) He is also in the view that a town is saved by swamp and most of the part of a town should remain forest. He emphasizes cohabitancy of man and nature in *Walking*. He goes further and opines that the civilized nations like Greece, Rome, England have their past from forests. (*Walking*, 1967) This is Thoreau’s predilection for forest life unlike a life whose foundation would be stone instead of wilderness. In short he says “all good things are wild and free”. (*Walking*, 1969) Therefore finally Thoreau wants back the wild culture not the culture that is spoiling the nature. (*Walking*, 1971) All the thoughts in *Walking* make *walking* a very important ecological piece of writing.

Comparative studies between Thoreau and other eco-poets

Thoreau and Emerson both give emphasis on the connectedness and integration on human being and landscape. In Emerson cultural criticism comes abundantly and in Thoreau nature philosophy and exalting the value of wild nature comes prominently. Important point is that Thoreau and Emerson inspired many subsequent writers to write upon nature and environment. On the other hand in Emerson's *Nature* we find an anthropocentric view, Emerson sees nature as a great and holy teacher. Emerson believes that nature has a nourishing effect upon man. His way to find the teachings of nature comes somewhat like Tagore; as a symbolic and spiritual way. Another similarity that Emerson shows with Tagore in this case is that human being must have a harmonious balance with nature for the only one Spirit that expresses its existence through trees, animals and human being in a unified process. Though Emerson did not say anything of the annihilating atrocities of man to nature but his warning comes as occasional metaphors. In his writing like that of Tagore one thing is clear that men are destroying nature but they are supposed to be dependable to each other or complementary to each other.

In the similar fashion we see Tagore like Thoreau build his Santiniketan to live in serene ambience, though in a little bit diverse way. We also see in the later modern period Eco-poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) builds a hand-made house named "Hawk Tower" in Carmel; it seems that he might have got the idea from Thoreau who did it many years back.

Love for secluded land, that Walden area provides to Thoreau is reminiscent of Wordsworth's (1770-1850) poem *Tintern Abbey*. The words 'deep seclusion', 'wild secluded scene' and 'vagrant dwellers' remind that how closely did Wordsworth and Thoreau thought in making romantic ideas. Again in the ode *Intimations of Immortality* we see that nostalgic Wordsworth reverberates some ideas that are akin to Thoreau's *Walden*. 'celestial light', 'cataracts ...from the steep' 'visionary gleam', these words again take us to Thoreau's secluded and dreamy Walden area. On the other hand we get some similarities between Thoreau and Keats as well, especially in the rich description of nature; the only difference is that Keats's is imaginary one but Thoreau's is in reality (Concord, Massachusetts) not in any visionary plain.

Mentionable thing is that, apart from Feeling an intimate part with nature Thoreau is also aware of its separate integrity. Thoreau found in nature the very roots of his vitality, his awakening of artistic self and his faith. Both he and Emerson pointed to a safe way for us, who lived in a more diminished and often polluted nature, they urged to discard our false sense of dominion and superiority and discover our proper ethical and spiritual place in nature.

In the chapter *Solitary of Walden* Thoreau becomes much elated in the solitary nature and becomes friends with pine trees as his companion. In the chapter *The Bean-Field* Thoreau's eco-socialism is fully found. He shows great affinity with nature. He is attracted to nature so deeply that he does not only love the Beans but also feels for the weeds. Extraordinarily, here we find a similarity between Bolai, the innocent boy in the story *Bolai* by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). Both of them show same softness for the weeds. This is a great eco-centric affinity of the both writer who wants to see nature in its wild condition.

Like Rabindranath Tagore's early days in Shilaidaha and Patisar Thoreau also chooses life in remote and natural area away from urban societies. Both of them at this period showed their eco-socialist trait. Thoreau takes our attention to nature which is obscured by the modern culture. He advises us to walk in the wild on a daily basis, for immediate experience reminds the walker that neither the scientist nor the philosopher, neither the merchant nor the minister, has a privileged claim on truth. For Thoreau, too often, so-called knowledge is "positive ignorance," (*Walking*). Lived experience enables the walker to engage culture critically rather than be succumbed to conventional wisdom. The often quoted Thoreauvian aphorism, "in wildness is the preservation of the world," (*Walking*, 1964) is not so much a preservationist credo, although it is often interpreted as such, as the heart of an evolutionary philosophy of nature and culture. Thus it is clear that Thoreau's choosing a life of solitude and separation from the human hustle and living a hermit like life that depends upon love, caring and sharing with nature really makes *Walden* the forerunner of ecological writing in English language.

Apart from birds another important part of nature that attracts Thoreau is tree like that of Emerson. He in more than one occasions say about trees. Thoreau was so dear to Walden area that even the trees became friend to him. It reminds us Rabindranath Tagore's love for trees in *Aranyadebata*, and *Banobani* and in the short story *Bolai*. The following line is really unique for love of tree's sake in any literature. Thoreau's relation with trees is very ardent. His love is evident in *Economy* chapter as he gives his most passionate expression for trees "Before I had done I was more the friend than the foe of the fine tree," (*Economy*, 1791)

Thoreau is marveled by the beauty and tranquility of Walden environs and it reminds us Bibhutibhushan's *Aranyak*, many a times, where the writer, Bibhutibhushan, cannot remove from his mind the mesmeric effect of Lobtulia and Fulkia-Baihar forest area till his last days of life. Bibhutibhushan gives us a very vivid pen picture of Lobtulia and Fulkia-Baihar forest area. Thoreau like Bibhutibhushan's *Aranyak* gives us a graphic description of Walden region:

It was a pleasant hill side where I worked, covered with pine woods, through which I looked out on the pond, and a small open field in the woods where pine and hickories were springing up[...]They were pleasant spring days, in which the winter of man's discontent was thawing ..., and the life that had lain torpid began to stretch itself. (*Walden, Chapter 1. Economy*, 1789)

Here Thoreau's love and attraction for nature and its tranquilizing effect upon mind is obvious. It also reminds us of the healing effect of nature upon mind in Wordsworth's *Daffodil* poem.

On the other hand in America's big metropolitan cities trees were being rare and man began to live in some huddling places. In American growing cities the claustrophobia is Like Eliot's *Waste land* is sensed by Thoreau many years back then Eliot, he says "The house is still but a sort of porch at the entrance of a burrow." (1791)

As Eliot says in the *Waste Land* which is a modern poem:

I think we are in rat's alley

Where the dead men lost their bones. (ii. *The Waste Land, A Game of Chess*)

This similarity is really very striking as the two writers belonged to two different times but the approaching claustrophobic living that they delineate is truly shocking and alarming prediction for a secure human living. So, Thoreau chooses on the contrary woods leaving claustrophobic city life; In the woods the physical and moral boosting is ensured as Thoreau says “I will breathe freely and stretch myself in this respect, it is such a relief to both moral and physical system;” (1793)

Regarding this Wendell Berry makes us aware of Thoreau’s watchful appreciation. In his essay “Divided against Ourselves” in *The West Side of Any Mountain*. Wendell Berry proceeds in this way:

[...] with the wildness Thoreau claimed was necessary for the preservation of the world. This appreciation of wildness leads to an acute space-consciousness that harmonizes [...](*The West Side of Any Mountain*, 30)

Thoreau’s views against unthoughtful material advancement are provided by his likings

nature as Thoreau says this way “Towers and temples are the luxury of princes. Nations are possessed with an insane ambition to perpetuate the memory of themselves by the amount of hammered stone they leave.” (1798)

His position is rather towards the unbroken state of nature. His thoughts more than one occasions sound completely eco-centered and anthropocentric “If I could ever find the twig he sits upon! I mean *he*. I mean the twig.” (1931).

In the 19th century at the period of Thoreau the notorious activity to exploit the nature was going on in large scale. Thoreau points out the oppressive traditionalism. Since ice is the only product of Walden Pond that is useful, it becomes a symbol of the social use and social importance of nature, and of the exploitation of natural resources. Thoreau’s attraction with the ice industry is acute. Thoreau describes the ice cutters are seen en masse to peel off the pond in winter. The fight between economic gain and protection of nature thus becomes violent. The greedy ice cutters represent society in miniature, with all the calculating exploitations and injustices that Thoreau sees in the world at large. Therefore, the work of the icemen on Walden becomes an emblematic minuscule of the confrontation of society and nature. But Thoreau ends the essay in an optimistic way because like Emerson he believes that nature has self-regulating power to revive from ashes. Then decay brings happiness to Thoreau as he knows well enough the power of humans is less than the regenerative forces of nature. Eventually, Thoreau's viewpoint becomes yet again nature-oriented. Nature seems to have the capability to oppose the destroyers of society. The blocks of ice are gone, melting back into Walden. Thoreau is satisfied knowing that the spring will come and with it ageless look of his much-loved pond. It reminds us P.B.Shelly’s (1792-1822) *Ode to the West Wind* where Shelly like Thoreau waits for spring to regenerate the nature again. In the chapter “Culture as Decay” of *Imagining the Earth* John Elder on the same view about the redemptive power of the poets says “the past and the dead only become accessible for recombination in the present because of their decay. Poets are like mushrooms or fungus (32). In the same chapter “Culture as Decay” Elder also gives examples from *Tradition and Individual Talent* of T.S.Eliot showing that past is closely related to present.(33)

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) as an eco-poet

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is another most prominent American poet in whom eco-centered trait can be found in mentionable extent. The troubled relationship between man and nature is obvious in American eco-poetry till nineteenth century down to the present time. Like Wordsworth Whitman insists on the personification of the abstractions. Whitman shows like romantic poet's the relation of man and nature. To him, as to Emerson nature is divine and emblem of God. The universe is not dead matter, but full of life and meaning. He loves the earth, the flora and fauna, the moon and stars, the sea and all other elements of nature. He believes that man and nature form a vital part and must never be disjoined.

Walt Whitman the great American poet produces numerous words, with spontaneous overflow having no limits, no norms. His *Leaves of Grass* collection stands unrivalled in the expression of freedom and richness of being a masterpiece of Ecopoetry. The questions that he asks possesses germ of eco-consciousness:

A child said what is grass? Fetching it to me with full hands
How could I answer the child? I don not know what it is anymore than he.

[...]

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see
and remark, and say Whose? (*Song of Myself, Leaves of Grass, 2201*)

The above quotation showcases the poet's high praise of the petty thing of nature. Like the Ancient Mariner's awakening by giving recognition to the petty and every creation of God here Whitman gives the answer of a child questioning about grass, first he calls the grass "the flag of disposition," woven from his own hopes. Then he calls it the "handkerchief of the Lord," he also calls it a "scented gift" by this Whitman wants to remind us of the power of the God. Later he calls it "uniform hierglyphic" indicating that it grows around all people regardless of race and country. This all consuming ideas of the writer make him an early eco-centered poet.

In *Song of Myself* Whitman famously says "I think I could turn and live with animals" Mary Oliver focuses it on her essay "Both Sides of the Beautiful Water" in this fashion:

It is not my intention to imply that this aspect of Oliver's work is somehow original or revolutionary. After all, Whitman's famous "I think I could turn and live with animals" passage from "Song of Myself" is only one of my famous articulations of the problem[...]. (*The West Side of Any Mountain, "Both Sides of the Beautiful Water", 81*)

In fact Mary Oliver insists in the essay to have a more intimate relation between man and the nature what Whitman more or less showed in his poems that sings ardently the songs of a virgin land that's relation is not ruptured not a bit from the flora and fauna.

It is very much interesting to note that in the collection of poems in *Song of Myself* the poet begins his poetic journey seeing a spear of grass:

I loaf and invite my soul,

I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

Song of Myself is the longest poem in *Leaves of Grass*, is a jolly celebration of the human self as an all engulfing state that interacts with all creations. Here a spear of summer grass evokes the deepest thought of the poet; as all and everything on earth are intertwined.

Another important thing is that, he shows love for every creature on earth, he adores every life manifestation, and admits their superiority over artificial human monuments. The following lines from *Leaves of Grass* will well support the poet's creation of song for deep ecology:

I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of stars

And the pismire is equally perfect, and a grain of sand, and an egg of the wren,

The tree toad is a chief d'oeuvre for the highest,

And running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven,

And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery,

And the cow crunching with depressed head surpass any statue,

And a mouse is a miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

(*Leaves of Grass*, 2116-2117)

Importantly he again shows his adoration for petty grass. Whitman praises the smallest creation of the God even a tree toad which he calls the greatest creation of God. This earth is not merely a muddy lump to him; he reckons it a microcosmic heaven. All the things on this earth even a mouse is miracle to him.

Though He sings the loftiness of nature and creature still he does not debase humans. On the other hand he does not like the marching of artificial civilization but do not hesitate to praise man and woman. He never excludes humans from the nature rather he asserts the innate kinship existing between the earth and the human being. So He sings the song of man surrounded by nature:

Immense have been the preparations for me,

Faithful and friendly the arms that have help'd me.

Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,

For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,

They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

Before I was born out of my mother generations guided me,

My embryo has never been torpid, nothing could overlay it.

For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
 The long slow strata piled to rest it on,
 Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
 Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths and deposited it
 with care.
 All forces have been steadily employ'd to complete and delight me,
 Now on this spot I stand with my robust soul.

(*Leaves of Grass*)

This long citation from the *Leaves of Grass* shows Whitman's philosophy of unity between humans and the universe. This view of Whitman is anthropomorphic view which is quite opposed to anthropocentric or Christian view. This macrocosmic view of Whitman that upholds both man and the lowest creature and show love and respect for all, definitely makes him a forerunner of eco-poetry.

Emily Hegarty focuses on Whitman's vanishing Native American era on the triumphant age of scientific aggression:

Whitman hints, "the cities, farms, factories" will also fade and be "utterly lost". Such texts can be read as complicit in the national era sure of the continent's genocide because they substitute for the violence of colonization the seemingly scientific and impersonal process of evolution and extinct. (*Eco-poetry a Critical Introduction*, 168)

It is really the fear of corporate polluters who are grabbing lands and vegetation for industrial and urban growth and Emily Hegarty very clearly finds in Whitman's awe of losing the intact nature from the grab of the white men.

Apart from showing his keen love for natural phenomenon and earth Whitman also not without pang for it:

What is the earth of our affections? unloving earth , without a throb to answer ours.

Cold earth, the place of graves. (*Passage to India* , 2185)

In the poem *Passage to India* Whitman is greatly impressed by modern technological advancement, ie. advancement of transportation, of his time. But Whitman thinks this development is only the expansion from the past. So in a way the poem wants to bridge a spiritual bondage between different parts of the world which is also possible. Though the poem celebrates the scientific advancement still it envisions that the separation between man and nature will be eliminated eventually.

In the Book XIV *Song of the Redwood-Tree* from *Leaves of the Grass* seeing a Redwood tree is being cut down Whitman gives a poignant farewell which is really moving and very closely eco-poetic in tone:

Farewell my brethren,
 Farewell O earth and sky, farewell ye neighboring waters,
 My time has ended, my term has come. (*Leaves of the Grass*)

This again makes us realize that Whitman would hold the natural objects as having life so he personifies even a tree here.

For Whitman's great sympathy for nature and all natural objects the tribute given to Whitman by J. Scott Bryson as an ecopoet is noteworthy:

A poet working from an ecological perspective on the world would not be able to present the poem as Whitman has; an ecopoet, in order to continue to write poems of nature, must necessarily alter his or her poetics. (*Ecopoetry A Critical Introduction*, 5)

Thus it is obvious that Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman these three great American poets wrote something that is really important for ecological reading. They also played chief role to inspire subsequent writers to write based on ecology and problems that surrounds it.

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