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ECOTOPIANS AS ECOLOGICAL CITIZENS: A SUSTAINABLE ECOLOGICAL LIFE IN *ECOTOPIA*

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ABSTRACT

Preservation of the natural resources to maintain ecological balance known as sustainability is based on green politics that valorizes each ecological being irrespective of speciesism, and nationalism. Growing concern of scholars about the depletion of natural resources and ecological degradation shows approaching environmental apocalypse. In this regard, this paper examines how a just sustainable society following green politics is at the heart of the newly formed country Ecotopia in the novel *Ecotopia* written by Ernest Callenbach. The novel is named after the fictional country Ecotopia which is formed through its secession from America. The country is ecologically intact and its practices look awkward to the most developed nations. The protagonist of the novel, William Weston, the top international affairs reporter, goes to Ecotopia for diplomatic relations. However, he decides to stay in Ecotopia forever even ignoring his family and nation. What attracts him to stay in this country by ignoring his family and country is a questionable issue. Here, I argue that his decision to stay as ecological being is his infatuation to the sustainable development and green politics which lie at the heart of Ecotopia as it firmly asserts the dissolution of hierarchy in its daily affairs including national and international politics. As a qualitative research, the paper follows the theoretical insight envisioned by Val Plumwood and Karen Warren who argue that hierarchy is a cause of downfall of equilibrium between nature and humanity. The research method involved in the study is textual analysis. The paper concludes that a hierarchy-less society is a foundation for sustainable ecological development. Weston's decision to live in Ecotopia is the result of eco-centric

practice. Thus, the paper serves a refreshing approach in the development model based on ecological balance.

Keywords: Ecological self, ecotopia, green politics, hierarchy, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems have almost covered the world. The affirmation of environmental utopia is a lofty idea. However, this has been in practice in the ideal nation called Ecotopia. This study problematizes this affirmation to identify the causes behind such ideal state in the novel *Ecotopia* set in future corresponding to an ideal state where utopian sense of being and belonging is perceived in the characters and natural setting. *Ecotopia*'s optimistic vision is reflected in Callenbach's character, William Weston's final decision to stay in the recently seceded country Ecotopia. He has been sent to Ecotopia by the American president as chief international affairs reporter to begin unification process between Ecotopia and America. Though he is supposed to stay six weeks, his decision to become an Ecotopian leaving US citizenship and his family is a challenging issue. His initial observation and perception of Ecotopia and its citizens get changed the moment he reaches there as a reporter. His initial judgment of Ecotopians as 'savage' is his false perception resulted from hegemonic Western superiority. He begins to respect the Ecotopian life-style and culture. Without returning back to America, he lives there in Ecotopia permanently marrying Marissa. He has gone to make a story about Ecotopia but he himself has become a story. He is overwhelmed to see the patterns of ecological visions and sustainability.

The novel *Ecotopia* is well-read and reviewed text. Lohmann (2018) mentions about how Ecotopia as nation has been formed: He mentions, "Ecotopia imagines a near future, two decades after Northern California, Oregon, and Washington have jointly broken away from the United States to rescue themselves from ecocidal and hence suicidal laws and norms" (p. 178). Lohman clarifies that the newly formed nation called Ecotopia is fictionally made up of three states of America; California, Oregon, and Washington after they secede from the USA. He further talks about the green ideology functioning in Ecotopia, "The green ideology described in Ecotopia enables people to contentedly live within ecosystems' ability to regenerate" (p. 179). Ecotopians' interest living in green eco-system stands in contrast with endless economic growth. Crow (1989) also

mentions the formation of Ecotopia, “In Ecotopia- all of California north of the irredeemable Los Angeles, as well as Oregon and Washington, are transformed into a perfect society, a new evolutionary stage of humanity” (p. 9). The three states forming a nation called Ecotopia with perfection marks a new evolutionary stage for humanity. Cummings (1989) also asserts the evolution of Ecotopia as the nation and the party called Survivalist, “The Survivalist Party develops into a political force capable of winning over a majority of Washingtonians, Oregonians, and North Californians to the Ecotopian cause” (p. 70). The creation of an Ecotopian republic and its secession from the United States occurred within a year.

The dominant economy of the modern nation-state is replaced with the ecological sensibility in Ecotopia. Lohmann mentions, “Rather than subscribing to the fallacy of endless economic growth as a panacea, Ecotopian policies promote a stable-state economy that does not undermine ecological systems. Through ecological education, citizens recognize their interdependence with other living things and avoid harming Earth’s mutual support systems” (p. 179). The children are taught ecological awareness along with their inter-dependence with nature. Green politics is based on sustainable development. Gaard (2017) talks about sustainability, “For 'sustainability' to reach its full potential, its advocates will need to recast sustainability in dialogue with an ecofeminist, environmental justice framework” (p. 9). Though Gaard speaks from the point of view of ecofeminism, her central concern is to show the importance of sustainability which is based on the environmental justice movement. Gaard further explores the justice and ecology, “From an environmental justice standpoint, it’s clear that while dumping on inner-city communities of color, indigenous lands, or rural poor communities has become almost commonplace . . . This dumping isn’t environmental racism” (p. 12). Gaard opines that the anti-ecological and unjust practices are illegal from environmental justice standpoint. Such activities harm the concept of sustainability.

Crow (1989) again highlights the meaning of living in a new culture forming small units indicated by their scattered houses. He mentions:

People live in small units and practice new rituals, including annual war games, fought with spears, intended to channel the aggressiveness of young men. In most aspects of the society, matriarchal values prevail, and the country is ruled by a wise woman, President Vera Allwen” (p. 8).

Women are found in leading role and men explore their inherent instincts through fierce fighting. Though it looks wild, such a game lets them express their emotions.

Similarly, Lohmann (2018) mentions about evolution of Ecotopia as a nation. Crow (1989) also talks about the history of Ecotopia, "In Ecotopia, all of California north of the irredeemable Los Angeles, as well as Oregon and Washington, are transformed into a perfect society" (p. 9). Three states of America formed the nation. They are Los Angeles, as well as Oregon and Washington, which are transformed into a perfect society. In the same way, Cummings also (1989) asserts the evolution of Ecotopia along with practical political influence as the nation and the party called Survivalist. These studies have not focused on the daily life affairs in relation to hierarchy-free condition which is the main focus of the paper.

So, the primary concern in the paper is to see how green politics is structured in the life style of Ecotopians to enhance the sustainability in terms of human-nature interplay. Though Callenbach does not explicitly explore this issue, I argue that Weston's decision to stay in Ecotopia is the result of ecological literacy that he internalizes after his experiences and negotiations with Ecotopians. The implication behind such exploration is to put forward one idea for future research to see how far current governments employ such sustainable policies of green politics in the country's developmental model.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The paper has adopted a qualitative research approach. It is a library-based research based on textual analysis as research method. The primary text *Ecotopia* is selected as it best serves the intended purpose of research, i. e., the emerging concept of ecological sustainability in the novel acknowledges the green politics along with the dissolution of dualism and speciesism. While figuring out the novel from the intended research purpose, the researcher has selected the thematic lines from the primary text, interpreted the textual evidence by integrating theoretical insights envisioned Karen Warren, Val Plumwood and Greta Gaard. These scholars' critical views have been used as theoretical parameters to examine and analyse the text under scrutiny.

Warren (2017) shares her idea that the hierarchy of self and other is practiced to ignore the other. She talks about hierarchy causing dualism, "The dualism is further extended to the natural world. Warren states,

“Humans are different from plants and rocks in that humans can (and plants and rocks cannot) consciously and radically reshape the communities in which they are both members of community” (p. 391). She concludes that dualism is falsely conducted. Plumwood’s (2002) ideas of ‘strong hierarchy of activities’ is position-based particularly giving a focus on human-centered activities which she denies. Karen Warren’s take on non-hierarchical life systems is based on green politics where she respects all the ecological selves. Similarly, Gaard (1998) argues, “A non-anthropocentric conception of political citizenship must find some way of voicing the concerns of animals, nature, and future generations in any democratic process of decision-making” (p. 261). Weston’s previous citizen based on political democracy is crisscrossed as he came in the social contact of Ecotopia where liberal ecological democracy is in practice.

Sustainable development, environmental justice, and ecology are rooted in the connection between environment and the wellbeing all beings and things including humans. In this regard, Gaard (2017) observes, "Rooted in recognizing the links between human and environmental well-being, these three movements—sustainability, environmental justice, and ecofeminism—have synergistic potential for creating a broader and more inclusive movement for a just and ecofeminist sustainability" (p. 3). Sustainability and justice movement are interconnected if seen from ecofeminist point of view. Sustainable development, environmental justice, and ecofeminism have the potential vigor to create a just and ecologically sound society. The novel has been analyzed from different perspectives due to its utopian base.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ecotopians as Ecological Citizens: A Sustainable Ecological Life in Ecotopia

The newly formed nation Ecotopia is devoid of hierarchy and falsely constructed dualities. All the ecological selves that inhabit the surroundings enjoy freedom and equality. They prefer living in co-existing harmony. Their activities are sources for the developed nations to guess that Ecotopia would collapse soon.

People in the United States have thought that Ecotopia would collapse because it has not followed the way modern industrial countries have followed. The traditional and ecological ways of living and development are the measures for people to claim that Ecotopia would soon collapse.

Callenbach (2004) writes, "It is clear by now, however, that Ecotopia is not going to collapse as many American analysts at first predicted" (p. 4). Contrary to the pre-judgment of American analysts, Ecotopia emerged as a powerful sustainable nation. It affirms ecological vision in its daily affairs giving equal space to all the ecological selves. Talking about hierarchy as a cause of division between humans and nature, Gaard develops the concept of ecological citizenship which recognizes others in nature. Gaard (1998) argues, "Citizenship does not occur in a vacuum, and ecological citizenship shifts the context of "belonging" from the hierarchical nation-state to the ecological community, which includes human and nonhuman animals, plants, nature, and the promise of future generations" (p. 260). The provision to acknowledge all the beings in nature is the main tenet of ecological citizenship. This citizenship is based on egalitarianism rather than hierarchy.

The greenery has covered the nation which sounds odd to the most so-called developed nations. The houses are like gardens covered with vines, grass and greenery. They are scattered as if they are trees in the jungle. They are not painted or colored. Ecotopians are allergic to paint, "The Ecotopians must have been positively allergic to paint" (p. 9). They enjoy natural things rather than artificial ones. Moreover, they do not like to stay in a mediated environment. The houses stand in sharp contrast to the houses of modern cities, "a house with vines or bushes than paint" (9). The reporter William Weston is highly impressed with these eco-friendly activities in Ecotopia. In the same way, Sharma (2023) argues that-, "Environment and industrialization stand in sharp contrast to each other. Industrialization in the modern period, due to the rapid growth of the economic mindset of treating the earth as a resource owes much to colonialism" (p. 100-101). Sharma means to say that ecological sensibility and industrialization go in opposite directions, especially industrialization causing downfall to others. While integrating this into *Ecotopia*, it is observed that William Weston's pre-judgment of Ecotopia as a back-ward nation is the result of the industrial hegemony he has carried from his home-town. Sharma further writes, "In this modern era, people have started to think of nature as an inert object that has no power to act. The earth does not care about us; it will be there even if we all are gone. It remains completely indifferent to our being or not" (p. 110). The earth exists independent of humanity and this is what Ecotopians firmly believe on. They are people with green sensibilities.

Green sensibilities are perceived in the surroundings where William Weston goes. Trains are full of green natural stuff. The hanging herbs, plants and grass are seen in moving trains. The streets, motor-ways are covered with greenery. Callenbach asserts, "Their sentimentality about nature has even led the Ecotopians to bring greenery into their trains, which are full of hanging ferns and small plants I could not identify" (p. 7). The hanging small trees can be seen in the moving trains. In the same way, the vehicles run in two-way lanes smoothly. Neither there is a traffic jam nor there is pedestrian congestion. Besides, the bicycle lane can be seen in the remaining space. The lane's sides are covered with green stuff where birds' singing can be heard, "The remaining space which is huge, is occupied by bicycle lanes, fountains . . . there is even occasional song of a bird" (p. 11). Lands with greenery, and land with lanes having fountains are common things in Ecotopia.

Ecotopia has materialized the concept of stable-state policy, "Ecotopians claims of stable-state with ecological systems" (p. 14) with ecological vision. The policies are implemented and it has not experienced political turmoil, national fragmentation, and instability. The country is decorated naturally with flowers. The flowers are found in high volume. Ecotopians don't pick up flowers, as Callenbach asserts, "Evidently Ecotopians don't pick flowers" (p. 15). Instead, they let them bloom and fall so that the natural eco-system is naturally maintained. They don't treat flowers as objects to meet human needs. Warren's worry is on dualism. This is not found in Ecotopia. The dissolution of such dichotomy leads towards sustainable development.

Sustainable practice is seen in the food cycle from the waste decomposition process. Callenbach argues, "All food wastes, sewage, and garbage were to be turned into organic fertilizer and applied to the land" (p. 17). Out of total waste, ninety-nine percent is recycled and used as food fertilizers. The food production is five times higher than usual production. Ecotopians are not after material gains. In this regard, Sundaram (2013) mentions how sustainable development can be maintained by keeping green politics at the heart,

"The protracted global economic slowdown and the deep ecological crisis that the world finds itself in both call for a Global Green New Deal, similar to the New Deal of the United States that tackled the Great Depression. The 21st century New Deal must include developing countries and has to be economically, socially and ecologically sustainable" (p. 17).

The global economic orientation is problematic issue for green and sustainable development.

Ecotopians do not use concrete materials like cement or rods. They use wood as a reliable material to make houses or infrastructures. The buildings are made up of wood, "they are built almost entirely of wood, which has become the predominant building material in Ecotopia, due to the reforestation program" (Callenbach, p. 24). Ecotopians are aware of afforestation programs. Plumwood (2002) argues how hierarchy as a foundational principle causes a division between nature and humans as well as animals, "They were the supremos at the apex of the great chain of being, the rational hierarchy which awarded disvalue according to decreasing participation in reason and supposedly increasing participation in materiality" (p. 20). The hierarchy devalues one item of a pair assigning a lower value to one and a higher value to another. This hierarchy is not found working in the culture of Ecotopians. The animals, trees, and insects are equal to humanity contrary to the opinion. Plumwood (2002) asserts, "Her difference, thus represented as lack, represented as deficiency rather than diversity, becomes the basis of hierarchy and exclusion" (p.105). Thus, Marissa's infatuation with animals as observed by William Weston in the novel is the result of the environmental ethics that she carries. Plumwood further indicates the problems with hierarchy, "Human colonization in the small human empire of the farm, an empire which makes concrete human desire and human will in its social relations and its rational design of the earth and of the animals themselves" (p. 161). The hierarchy is the base for colonization.

The false dichotomies are created due to the seemingly insignificant differences keeping humans at the top. Plumwood (1993) argues, "The erasure of difference carried out under the sign of the same non-coincidentally brings humans out on top, yielding a hierarchy of nature based on the richness of experience or orders of consciousness in which the natural world is conceived as inferior to the human mind" (p. 130). The natural world is conceived as inferior and wild due to an anthropocentric view-point, "One way to do this is to insist on a strong hierarchy of activities, so that the denied areas are simply not 'worth' noticing" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 48). The formula of not-worth noticing applies to animals, nature and women in an anthropocentric and androcentric culture that has no space in an Ecotopia nation. For Michaud (1919), it is "a declaration of spiritual independence, a plea for religious autonomous independence, a plea for religious autonomy"

(76). Ecotopia is based on self-reliance. However, in Ecotopia, everything is worth-noticing and worth-reading. This egalitarianism is the foundation for green politics which is not a politics to include and exclude, rather it is a politics of respect, love and sympathy for the differences and diversity.

The previous studies of the novel Ecotopia have focused more on the issues of greenery and the idealistic side of utopia. In this paper, it is found that the causes for sustainable development are based on the egalitarian concept of ecological sensibility where the hierarchy has no place to influence the behaviors and activities of individuals and government. To maintain the notion of the stable nation along with sustainable green development, it is necessary to blur the false dichotomies to avoid hierarchy.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined that sustainable green development is based on a biospherical egalitarian concept of society where the false and constructed dichotomies are not entertained. The utopian concept of materialization of environmental ethics sounds odd at first to modern people like William Weston, however, his final decision to stay at Ecotopia, justifies that harmonious collaboration with nature is a base for sustainable development and individual growth. The concept of development on the ground that nature is a commodity is based on anti-environmental ethics. Removal of such tendencies along with a hierarchical chain of beings paves the way for environmental development where human beings are members of the larger part of the ecological world. The self-regulatory and self-renewable systems of nature are respected and implemented into practice. Thus, William Weston who is sent to Ecotopia by America working for possible unification between these two nation-states stays in Ecotopia as an Ecotopian citizen irrespective of his inherent nationality. A further study can be carried out on Eco-cosmopolitanism and Bio-regionalism in *Ecotopia*.

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