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Presentation of Race within an Ecocritical Discourse in Ruth Ozeki's

All Over Creation

Abstract

We live in a world increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster. It is now a truism to say that mankind is efficiently committing ecocide, making the planet inhospitable for life of any kind. Ecocriticism originates in a bio-social context of unrestrained capitalism, excessive exploitation of capitalism and environmental hazard. Ecocriticism has been influenced by insights from Philosophy, Sociology, Feminism, Marxism and other disciplines and approaches. This paper analyses how race is presented within an Ecocritical discourse in Ruth Ozeki's novel *All Over Creation*. In *All Over Creation*, Ozeki explores the utopian vision of agriculture through her characters' involvement in the critique of genetic engineering.

Key words – Ecocriticism, Race, Environment, Pastoral, Counter-pastoral

Ecocriticism, also known as Environmental Criticism and ‘green criticism’ is a rapidly emerging field of literary study that considers the relationship exists between the physical environment and human beings. Ecocriticism or ‘green studies’, both the terms are used to denote a critical approach that began in USA in the late 1980s and in UK in the early 1990s. As Cheryll Glotfelty noted in the Introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Just as Feminist Criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist Criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, environmental critics explore how nature and the natural world are imagined through literary texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

Ecocriticism emerged as a concept which first arose in the late 1970s in USA, takes its literary bearings from three major Nineteenth-century American writers Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau whose work concentrates on celebration of nature and wilderness. Literary responses to environmental concerns are as old as the issues themselves. Ecocritics reject the notion that everything is socially or linguistically constructed. “Nature, then, isn’t reducible to a concept which we conceive as part of our cultural practice (Barry 243).

Ruth Ozeki is an award-winning writer, filmmaker and Zen Buddhist priest whose novels are widely acclaimed for integrating issues of science, technology, environmental politics, philosophy, etc into unique hybrid narrative forms. Ozeki’s *All Over Creation* brings original characters and circumstances in a refreshing manner to the literature of Americana. It deals together concerns about industrial agriculture, seed saving, environmental protest, the

different ways in which human relationships are revolved around the physical environment space, immigration, politics of reproduction, etc.

A broad range of ecocritical work across different theoretical orientation relied on various forms of localism, theories and poetics of place and local belonging. This emphasizes localism as a base of environmental thought that helps in the emergence of ecocriticism as a new disciplinary project in American studies.

The ecocritical thrust of Ozeki's novels with its intertwining racialization emerges initially in her novel *My Year of Meats* in 1999. The troping of mixed race, and the racial consciousness in ecological terms is seen in *All Over Creation*. The novel centers on an ecocritical awareness through a critique of pastoral. In these terms, Ozeki provides a critique of ecocritical discourse around race. *All Over Creation* blends nature and technology which acts as a key to the counter-pastoral. The setting of the novel is in the potato-farming town of Liberty Falls, Idaho. It revolves around the return of a Prodigal daughter Yumi Fuller. With the help of the three multi-racial children Yumi nurses her parents while come to terms about her return to the white community of her childhood. Simultaneously, a group of hippie environmentalists' "Seeds of Resistance" came across the country to meet Yumi's father who became the Prophet of genetic modification.

Idaho is initially constructed as a pastoral village. Yumi remembers the farm as "living proof to us all that...man could work in harmony with nature to create a relationship of perfect symbiotic mutualism (Ozeki 6). Presentation of race within an ecocritical discourse is shown through the counter-pastoral construction of Farming in Liberty Falls. Ozeki's work goes beyond the tried tropes of counter-pastoral as it engages with issues of race and environment. Ozeki challenge these issues of racism in addition to toxic discourse that creates a counter-pastoral vision of Liberty Falls. Pastoral is exposed as an idealized space only for those having a certain colour.

Ozeki also showcases the lives of multiracial characters through the sexualized, fertile imagery of crossbred human plants. Through her work Ozeki considers issue of race and emplacement, and the related issues of race and mixed race in ecocriticism at a deeper level. The counter-pastoral moves with the racialization through question of bioethics and an entanglement of multiracial identity with plant genetic modification also forms the core of the novel. The narrative of *All Over Creation* embraces the complexities that surround the contemporary practice of agriculture without reducing the conflicting interests into totalizing narratives.

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