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Grave Ecological Issue of River Pollution as Reflected in William Carlos Williams' "Paterson"

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Abstract

The supply of water must be in proportion to the requirement of the people and the sustainable use of water will solve the problem of the scarcity of water for its usage in the multipurpose works. Sustaining the water is a part of Blue Revolution. In "Paterson", William Carlos Williams exposes the surface reality of the contamination of the water of Passaic river and affirms that most of the water of the river is being contaminated by the sewage of the cities, towns and the chemical products of the industries. The contamination of water becomes the cause of various water related diseases. It creates a bad effect on human and animal's skins and bones. The polluted water further multiplies the chance of the intestinal and gastro related problems and hinders the digestion of foods. Whatever the ecological crisis aroused in the city of Paterson, Williams honestly documented it with the incorporation of the historical evidence in his magnum opus 'Paterson'. The water related problems due to the pollution of the Passaic river become impersonal in the sense that the people of the whole world are getting victimized with the similar condition of the poor quality of water as a byproduct of inadequate management of the sources of water and the impurity and decay of the various rivers. William's "Paterson" draws the attention of the worldly people to the mounting threat of the imbalance in the global ecology as the rivers are losing their natural tendencies of containing fresh water and it's a massive challenge for the existence of the species on the earth. This present paper investigates the root cause of the pollution and decay of the Passaic river in William Carlos Williams' "Paterson". This investigation would be very much helpful to understand the impurity and decay of the various other rivers of the world. It intends to unearth the authentic solutions to stop the ecological issue of river pollution through a minute study of Williams' "Paterson".

Keywords- Eco-Spirituality, Deep ecology, Oneness, Equilibrium, Crisis, Sustenance

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Introduction

William Carlos Williams is a popular poet of the 20th Century American Poetry whose epic-poem 'Paterson' is a very important compendium of environmental history of the then time. In 'Paterson', he took a painstaking effort to unearth the history of the landscape of his place and also included the wretched condition of the Passaic river as a consequence of the establishment of the industries throughout the city of Paterson.

The selection of the local setting to impart his ecocritical concerns places him America's environmental poet with utmost caliber. Williams' ecological views regarding the Passaic river co-relates him with Henry David Thoreau, for he in his "Walden" exposes the corrupt and the industrialized society which is undoubtedly detrimental to the smooth circulation of the ecosystem. The atmosphere near the Walden Pond is very enchanting as it lets a man distract himself from the material attachment. The Passaic river and the Walden pond in one way or other symbolize vigor and fertility and a worldly man can take maximum inspiration from them and work in a systematic manner to be close to nature. Joel Conarroe in Paterson: Language and Landscape affirms, "In choosing to use local setting and local subject matter, Williams demonstrates his affinity with another profoundly American writer, Henry David Thoreau" (p.11.)

It is interesting to observe that William Carlos Williams embodies the transcendentalist view in his Paterson which guides the humanity to return back to the refuge of the landscape or the natural environment and strive hard to make the society free from the shackle of corruption and falsehood.

William Carlos Williams like Thoreau's Walden pond, located in Concord Massachusetts, used to spend his time in a close observation of the flow of the Passaic river. He understood and came to a solid conclusion that the water of the Passaic river is getting stagnant and is also losing its natural flow as the waste materials of the factories and also the poisonous liquids from all the parts of the city are uninterruptedly going to the river and are drastically impacting the lives of the aquatic animals and plants.

The water of the river has already lost its natural property as it is not potable and rings an alarm of ecological imbalance. William Carlos Williams successfully in his Paterson' raises this issue and tries to convince the readers that the capitalist attitude breeds the selfish desire for setting up the factory in bulk and it instigates a man to overexploit the natural resources and also deform the beauty and shape of the landscapes. William Carlos Williams is undisputedly the champion poet of the environmental or eco-poetry he is one the rare poets in the history of American literature to utilize his poetical wisdom in his poetry for different and aspects of the landscapes and climate with a strong determination to save the Earth's ecology. It is now quite appropriate to mention John Elder's remark for Williams' poetry as he says in this context, "Poetry becomes a manifestation of landscape and climate, just as the ecosystem's flora and fauna are" (p.39).

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The pollution of the Passaic river is in fact the moral pollution which is deeply rooted in the society. Moral pollution creates the space for the corruption and the industrialization even at the cost of ecological unrest. In “Paterson”, the poet is worried about the uncontrolled decay of the Passaic river because the people have violated the ethics of the landscapes of nature and are establishing industries to fulfill their selfish goals.

The poet expresses his deep concern over the pollution of the Passaic river in the following lines:

“Smash the world, wide!
-if I could do it for you-
smash the wide world
a fetid womb, a sump!
no river! no river
but bog, a swale
sinks into the mind or
the mind into it, a ? (Paterson :170.)

Generally the water is a precious boon for the creatures of the earth by the divine grace of God. It is a fluid of construction and not destruction. Water is a life force so the people of this industrialized world have to display their full commitment to the safety of the water of rivers, ponds, lakes etc. In Paterson William Carlos Williams provides a practical solution to save and clean the rivers. One must trace out the root cause of the pollution of the river. The poet affirms that the massive pollution is the result of the uncontrolled establishment of the industries which discharge the poisonous fluids which get merged in the water of the river. Due to the storage of the waste materials in the river, the natural flow of the water gets reversed; it hampers the proper reproduction of the aquatic animals.

The above lines of the poem are very much relevant and work as an eye-opener to protect the constant degradation of the river. The ‘fetid’ womb’ in the fourth line stands for the infertility of the river due to over pollution and ‘bog swale’ denotes the inactivity as the flow of the water has been drastically reduced and the ‘blank spaces’ pertain to the poet’s anxious soul which is not at its peace in the light of the people’s selfish conduct towards the environment as the city of Paterson has already become an abode of industries.

The downfall of the ethical values was showcased in the capitalist’s negligence towards the elements of the environment, especially dumping of dioxin in the water of the Passaic river. As a consequence, there became the scarcity of potable water throughout the city of Paterson. The river began to lose its natural tendency; it rotten due to the waste materials and the water became acidic which deformed the shape and colour and decreased the rigidity of the buildings of Paterson.

Fishes were also the victims of the ecological imbalance, for these aquatic creatures were no longer suitable for human’s healthy diet as they did not contain the required nutritious minerals and vitamins for human’s physical growth and stamina. The existence of

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the rivers in any country symbolizes unbreakable prosperity. A river is always a river for human's development and survival. A river is a channel of domestic and foreign communications at effectively works as a bridge to make the citizen of different nations know one another's history and civilization. Any activity with respect to import and export is possible without the existence and safety of the rivers of the whole world.

Gandhi Ji had a divine opinion about the existing rivers; he used to tell that the protection as well as preservation of the river is in fact the preservation of one's own culture and civilization. In "Paterson" William Carlos Williams holds the similar attitude like that of M.K. Gandhi as the poet's voice was later on heard and realized and the government of Paterson initiated to formulate rules in order to clean and safeguard the Passaic river. Williams' environmental concern in connection with social industrialization has also been raised in Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" (1962).

In "Paterson", the poet's main focus revolves around the city of Paterson, and Carson in her "Silent Spring" hints about her own place Springdale, Pennsylvania, which has become a victim of massive industrialization. The river is no longer pristine and this town has been reduced to a center of ecological crisis. Rachel Carson in "Silent Spring" pinpoints in these words, ". . .a grimy wasteland its air boiled by chemical emissions , its river polluted by industrial waste" (P.XIII.)

What happened with the landscapes and the climate of Carson's Springdale and Williams Paterson, it was a solid evidence of the modern man's selfish thoughts to overpower nature. The pollution and decay of the Passaic river was definitely the outcomes of the people's mechanized mind to convert the city into a hub of industries and they ignored its future consequence that would bring doom and destruction and the future generation would seek for the new alternatives to save the Earth from the ecological crisis. When one plunges deep into Williams' Paterson, one comes to know about the poet's intention that it is 'a long poem upon the resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city'. (Paterson: XIII.)

The 'Beats' of the twentieth century American literature have also the raising ecological threats through their works and enriched the literature with their constructive ideas. In the following lines, the poet talks about the horrible condition of the Passaic river which persuades the human race to ponder in their minds about the effect of uncontrolled industrialization on the rivers :

"Half the river red,
half steaming purple
from the factory vents,
spewed out hot,
swirling bubbling the dead shinning mud" (p.36.)

It is the chemical reaction of the smoke and the acidic materials of the factories of the city that has created the whole mess in this regard. The water has become hot and its bubbling denotes the extent of the persecution done to it by the modern society. It rings an alarm of

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utter danger in the aquatic world. In this situation the prime concern becomes the survival of the species and the plants. The dead bank hence refers to the ground reality of the interruption in the intake of water of the city from the Passaic river. Even the non-aquatic animals depend on the water of the river to quench their thirsts. If the water is poisonous, it takes their lives. The meek animals have no voice to protest with respect to the polluted water. Therefore, it is the humanity which has the sole responsibility to protect the sources of water, especially the rivers. The land which is near the river, retains its fertility and produces plenty of food grains for human's need. Rivers teach the humanity the lesson of mounting up in each phase of life. The availability of plenty of water in any river is beneficial for the harvests.

A river is a perfect eco-symbol of inspiration through which a man can complete rare works and attain prosperity in his does not let an individual loose his hope of getting enormous success in any type of venture of his or her profession. In other words, the flowing stream of the water of the river sings the melodious song of not to give up in life even facing hurdle in series.

Therefore the people of this industrialized world have to be conscious of the evergreen advantage of having. This epic poem has the permanent validity in the field of eco-poetry because all the environmental aspects have been accurately encapsulated and correspond with the factual history of the area. The readers also come to know about the exploitation of the land for the production of pearls, frequent fish hunting for recreation and the killing of animals for fulfilling the passion of adventure. Williams Paterson has created the spell of magic on the reading public as this grand literary production of the poet encompasses everything which concern with the physical environment. In the physical environment, every object has its own utility for a healthy ecology on the earth. It means the objects of the nature are interconnected to one other.

Richard Gray in his "A Brief History of American Literature" writes, "Williams then, is the great populist in American poetry, for whom the world is a democracy of objects. There are no hierarchies, no one thing is more important than another, each is to be valued for itself" (p.184.)

Conclusion

The way through which Williams raises the grave ecological crisis of river pollution in his Paterson, sensitizes the people from all parts of the world to rethink about the present status of the rivers which are either polluted or decayed. Paterson is a realistic account of the Passaic river, a river adjacent to the city. The place and the river chronicle the ground realities of the dearth of water and starvation and also the people and animals totally in dangers.

The poet's long epic poem is a massive hit in the sense that it compels the humanity to learn from the history of the decay of the Passaic river and the climate of the city of Paterson. What did happen with the Passaic river and the city of Paterson, the same can victimize the other rivers and the people of existing place.

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To stop the water pollution of the rivers the Govt. must ensure the recycle of the waste products of the industries especially those made of plastics. The plastic made materials must not be stored near the populated areas and it must not go directly in the rivers as its water will be very poisonous and it will make its banks totally barren. Controlling the rapid establishment of the industries may minimize the frequent omission of toxic gases and the acidic fluids which get dissolved in the rivers and have a strong tendency to make the entire water impure and poisonous. The dumping of the waste materials must be out of the crowded towns or cities and the dumping place must be very far from the rivers.

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