

The Integration of Social and Deep ecologies in the ecosophical poetry of Gary Snyder

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The movement for a better planet that arose in response to the global environmental crisis in the late 20th Century explored the issues that caused the hurried degradation of our ecosystem and put forward innovative theories about man's relation to nature. The new and debatable concept of Anthropocene that put an end to Holocene begins to see man as the sole perpetrator of the defacement of the planet. Scientific and technological innovations aided and managed by multinational corporations gave scant regard to nature. It is Ernst Haeckel who first coined the term ecology to encompass all living beings, their habitats and the relations between them. Haeckel defined it as "the study of all environmental conditions of existence" (Worster, 1977, p. 192).

There were many streams of environmental movements in late twentieth century which were as different from one another in their outlooks as they were different from the utilitarian attitude to nature by the corporate companies and the West. It was in his 1973 article 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements.'^[33] Arne Naess coined the term Deep ecology. He was trying to plumb deeper than what Aldo Leopold or Rachel Carson saw in nature. It was Rachel Carson who set the stage for a global environmental movement with her phenomenal book, *Silent Spring* (1962). It opened the eyes of millions of people to the silent tragedy happening around them in the form of pesticides rampantly used in America. Though the book was met with strong opposition from companies which engaged in the production of pesticides, Carson had already inspired a fierce environmental movement in the grassroots which finally led to the set up of the US Environmental Protection Agency.

The purpose of deep ecology is not limited to wage war with companies that pollute the planet with chemicals, but it excavates deeper to find question's about human life, society and relationship with the planet. A sensitive openness to oneself and also the nonhuman other in the planet goes a long way to lead a meaningful life on the planet. Earth First! Movement that began that began in the 1980s drew its inspiration from the philosophy of Deep Ecology. Eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Native American religions have much to contribute to Deep Ecology.

The American poet, Gary Snyder born in 1930 is known as a environmental activist with a philosophical bent towards the spirit of Deep Ecology.

Inspired by the environmental writings of Henry David Thoreau, Annie Dillard and Wendell Berry, Snyder also believed in a total immersion in nature. With a childhood spent in the Pacific North Gary Snyder grew as an ardent devotee of the natural world. Even at a very young age Snyder developed an ecological vision his poetry. His stint in the Pacific Northwest as a trail crew, as a dock worker on the San Fransisco docks and as a fire lookout on Crater Mountain in the Cascades of Washington gave him ample experience to write his first book, Riprap and the Cold Mountain poems in 1959. His appreciation towards all life forms without any hierarchical order gave birth to many poems and prose works. "I have had a very moving, profound perception . . . that everything was alive ... and that on one level there is no hierarchy of qualities in life--- that the life of a stone or a weed is as completely beautiful and authentic, wise and valuable as the life of say, an Einstein" (Snyder 1980, p.17).

The ecomysticism in his poetry and other writings exhorted for a deeper spiritual merging with the Earth. A deeper spiritual connection with nature as Deep ecologists believe, might refine the wisdom of people and they would understand the environment extensively.

But in his long relationship with nature, Snyder has gone far beyond romanticising the beauties of nature in order to pursue both the realistic and mystical elements in the world out there. According to J. Scott Bryson, ecopoetry has two main features: "An ecocentric perspective" which focuses both the human and the nonhuman and the biocentric one which

aims to build a new consciousness in defending nature. (2002, pp.5-6). Nature, unlike the anthropocentric view, is the the centre of the world.

The second feature later coalesced with many other outlooks regarding nature to form the philosophy of Deep Ecology. It developed as a reanalysis or a reevaluation of other environmental movements of the twentieth century. Deep ecologists critiques other environmental movements for sharing platforms with chemical polluters on many fronts. Gary Snyder says that the contention “within environmental circles is between those who operate from a human-centered resource management mentality and those whose values reflect an awareness of the integrity of the whole of nature. The latter position, that of Deep Ecology, is politically livelier, more courageous, more convivial, riskier, and more scientific.”^[39]But the philosophy of deep ecology is politically more incisive, bolder and also more logically sound. Sessions and Devall says that” deep ecology goes beyond a limited piecemeal shallow approach to environmental problems and attempts to articulate a comprehensive religious and philosophical worldview.” (Devall 65)

The philosophy of deep ecologists like Snyder was inspired by Spinoza’s metaphysics which is “a conceptualization of the idea of unity; there can be only one Substance or non-dualism which is infinite, and this Substance is also God or Nature. What we experience as the mental and the physical have no separate metaphysical reality, but rather are aspects or attributes of this one Substance. Individual things, such as Mt. Everest, humans, trees, and chipmunks, are temporary expressions of the continual flux of God/Nature/Substance.” (Devall 238)Here Sessions points to the Norwegian philosopher Jon Wetlesen’s ”meticulous comparison of Spinozism and the ways of enlightenment of Mahayana Buddhism” to support his claims (238).

Like many deep ecologists Snyder’s ecological views are also inspired and tempered by indigenous beliefs from various cultures including Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism and various Native Indian traditions. He saw in nature, a mother who provides all the living and nonliving beings with food, water and air. Moreover Snyder’s writings are also motivated by the Buddhist belief in the interrelation of all living beings on a spiritual plain. Dispelling the anthropocentric view that saw at the peak of life forms, Buddhism saw human being only as a

part of nature. In order to live harmoniously in the world man should learn to respect all life forms irrespective of their size or intelligence. An innate humility before the wonder of nature is a prime quality of both Buddhism and deep ecology.

Deep ecologists like Gary Snyder also finds much in common between environmentalism and Buddhism. With kindness and sympathy, joy and serenity extended towards all beings - living and nonliving - Buddhism leads the path for deep ecology. Snyder's ecological philosophy evolved from this deep Buddhist concern for other lifeforms and also from his anthropological interest in Native Indians.

The image that readers find in the first poem of Snyder's first collection of poems Riprap, titled "Mid-August at Sourdough Lookout" was inspired by Zen Buddhism even though it is tempered with Snyder's keen scientific temperament. The humility if the smallness of humanity is pitched against the "high still air."

Down valley a smoke haze
Three days heat, after five days rain
Pitch glows on the fir-cones
Across rocks and the meadows
Swarms of new flies. (Snyder, 2004, p.3)

The hugeness of the universe against which man's lot is thrown against insists on the need to be humble before nature. Snyder spent a considerable time in Suwanosejima, a small Japanese island to see how indigenous people live in harmony with nature. He has scant regard for the ways of the West with "its unconscious desire to render the wild world tame and to bend nature to its will" (Stueding, 1976, p. 153).

In yet another poem from the same collection titled "Water" Snyder says:

Pressure of sun on the rockslide
Whirled me in a dizzy hop-and-step descent,
Pool of pebbles buzzed in a Juniper shadow,
Tiny tongue of a this-year rattlesnake flicked,

I leaped, laughing for little boulder-color coil----
Pounded by heat raced down the slabs to the creek
Deep tumbling under arching walls and stuck
Whole head and shoulders in the water:
Stretched full on cobble---ears roaring
Eyes open aching from the cold and faced a trout. (Snyder, 2004. p.12)

Snyder gives equal merit to himself and all other beings in Nature, the poem vouchsafes. Man is not a dominant figure in the scheme of things. He occupies the same place as a trout that encounters in the stream. Hunt points out, "Rocks, trees, sheep, rabbits, coyotes, eagles, bear, deer, and ravens all speak to [Snyder], for him and through him"(Hunt, 2004, p. 1).The poems show "How the reinhabitation of the land will be aided by songs of knowledge and community"(Molesworth, 1983,p. 101). Each poem, in fact, "speaks to a consciousness built of a total harmonization of man with nature and man with man" (p. 101).

But Snyder as a poet doesn't stop at extolling the virtues of nature turning a blind eye to the calamity that is fast approaching. He writes in "Milton by Firelight":

In ten thousand years the Sierras
Will be dry and dead, home of the scorpion
Ice-scratched slabs and bent trees.
No paradise, no fall
Only the weathering land. (Snyder 2000,p.9)

Unlike many other deep ecologists Gary Snyder doesn't want to turn his attention away from the harsh reality. The scientific and technological inventions that the greedy corporates sponsor had already brought nature to its knees in the name of progress.

Perhaps the most popular collection of poems by Gary Snyder that embodied his ecological vision is Turtle Island (1974). It the work which has poetic and prose pieces, Snyder deal with "modes of action and with the unity of interrelationships in nature and its verification is the fullness of he environment it creates (Altieri, 1979, p. 135). Turtle Island took an

innovative path in envisioning nature totally different from Snyder's earlier works. Here there are songs that embody the spirit of vegetation, mountains, children, animals, rocks, rivers, etc. "Anasazi" the first poem in the collection invites the reader into a magical world he meets Anasazi, a member of an ancient North American people and his habitat. Snyder lived among Native Indians for a long time when he was a child. Their skill in basket weaving, pottery making, and architecture find an ardent admirer in the poet. Anasazi were admired for building their villages precariously on to the sides of steep mountains:

Trickling streams in hidden canyons

Trickling streams in hidden canyons

Under the cold rolling desert

Corn-basket wide eyed

Red baby

Rock lip home, Anasazi. (p.3)

Snyder's ecological vision is not limited to encompass human alone, tearing him away from elements of nature he is connected to, in his life. Trees, rocks, animals, birds, mountains all form an interrelated and intricate chain in his poetry. "Anasazi" convinces the readers that they can see themselves as products and preservers of a "physical environment" (Molesworth 1983, p.94).

Still it is unfair to circumscribe Snyder's ecological vision into deep ecology alone. Although he is widely considered to be deep ecology poet, Snyder's ecological outlook also associate him with social ecology. The basic premise of Social ecology is that it is social issues and social hierarchies that ultimately lead man to consider himself as the supreme form of life. The inherent tendency to dominate other human beings by discriminating them by means of class, gender, money, and caste powers is also the root of environmental crisis. So the solution to environmental crisis doesn't lie in man's attitude to nature, but in his attitude to one another. Janet Biehl and Murray Bookchin makes the distinction between social ecology and deep ecology clear: "Deep ecology...views first nature, in the abstract, as a 'cosmic oneness, 'which bears striking similarities to otherworldly concepts common to Asian religions. In concrete terms, it views first nature as 'wilderness, 'a concept that by definition

means nature essentially separated from human beings and hence 'wild.' (Biehl 123) Both notions are notable for their static and anticivilizational character." Biehl and Bookchin continue, arguing, "Deep ecologists emphasize an ungraded, nonevolutionary continuity between human and nonhuman nature, to the point of outright denial of a boundary between adaptive animality and innovative humanity." (140)

Gary Snyder agrees with both the movements agreeing that social changes would necessarily bring about a change in human's relationship to nonhuman nature. While many ecopoets escape the urban world and extoll the virtues of the wild untouched by human beings, Gary Snyder believes that one can find the wild even in the midst of a city. One must inhabit the place, be it the city or the country, he believes, know it deeply and flow with it. Here he differed from the Beat poets he belonged to. Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, fellow beat poets wanted to escape the urban way of life and would do nothing with civilisation in order to immerse in nature. Snyder believes that one can find the wild even in the city if one pursues the the right path.

Snyder's prose and poetic pieces tried to reconcile the wild and civilisation. Unlike the harsh stance endorsed by the deep ecologists which dismissed social issues to be the cause of environmental problems, Snyder understood the gravity of the situation. Even while he sang for rocks and rivers, the wild and the urban, the bird and the animal, extolling their beauty, the poet-seer could also see the deadly harm that modern civilisation causes. In this we can see Gary Snyder as a poet of deep ecology tempered by the ideologies of social ecologists who saw that the problem lies in the attitude and outlook of society. Snyder wrote in an essay entitled "Writers and the War against Nature" in one of his collection of essays *Back on the Fire* (2008, p.62), "What is happening now to nature worldwide, to plant life and wildlife, in ocean, grassland, forest, savannah, and desert in all spaces and habitat can be likened to a war against nature."

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