

AN ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE EXTENDED ECOSPHERE IN THE POETRY OF ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN

Dr.Gazala Gayas

Associate Professor in English.

A.S College, Srinagar,

Jammu & Kashmir, India

Abstract

The connection between nature and poetry is a very old one. The paper presents an engaging discussion on Archibald Lamp man as a poet of nature and ecosphere. It talks about the idea of preserving nature in art. Nature is an inseparable part of Canadian writers. Lamp man is not the only lover of nature, but he worships it. When rural life is predominant, nature occupies the central position. The natural world according to Lamp man is a complete world of harmony. Lamp man describes true solitude as going out into nature and leaving behind all preoccupying activities as well as society. The strong sense of the spirit of the place evoked by Lamp man's poetry continues to arouse responsive chords in the contemporary readers. Through the art of poetry, he presents myriads of deep ecological concerns in pursuit of the ecological balance between nature and man and even the human beings themselves.

Keywords: Nature, Ecology, Ecocriticism, Ecosphere, Harmony, Man, Rural, Urban, Environment, Destruction, Society, Industrialisation, Geographical, Landscapes, Ecocritics etc.

Introduction:

Natural and geographical landscapes have always been involved in the analysis of place, and this provides the first core concept of ecology. Lawrence Buell a famous eco-critic argues that "environmental literature constructs places in a particular way not just by naming objects but by dramatizing in the process how they matter. The resource in the articulation of environmental unconscious (44). A place like an environment encompasses human perceptions and aspirations as well as the biophysical characteristics that can be measured and monitored. Natural landscapes frame the geography, and environmental history of a particular place seeking, to increase awareness about it and linking it with other ecological approaches. As Pramod Nayar in *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory* maintains:

Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the presentation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards nature and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches. (242)

Natural landscapes play a vital role in nature poetry. The distinctiveness and character of landscapes help to define a sense of place at both local and regional levels. Landscapes provide poets with pleasant surroundings and amenity. Mountains, rivers, lakes not only give solace and peace to one's mind, but they play an important role in human survival also. Life on earth is possible only because of this non-human nature, which is a part of the human world. Ecocriticism by and large is concerned with the relationship between humans and their natural landscapes. Natural landscapes play an important role in establishing a healthy relationship between man and the ecosystem.

Gary Snyder, the poet Laureate and father of Deep Ecology, believes that nature is constituted of microscopic organisms, animals, plants and human societies. Snyder was emphasizing on the need to change the consciousness while endorsing social changes to harmonizing human's relationship to non-human. The very fact that any nature poem describing landscape which shows that it is an ecocritical work and establishes a relationship between nature and the environment. If the fretful life of city dominates nature, humankind will be agitated and life will become meaningless, a core concept of Eco-Psychology. Ecocriticism is the result of this new consciousness. That very soon, there will be nothing beautiful in nature to discourse about, unless humans are careful. If people realize the importance of nature, it offers them a harmonious life. As Henry Wadsworth expresses in his *My Lost Youth*:

Often I think of the beautiful town

That is seated by the sea
 Often in thoughts go up and dance
 The pleasant streets of that old town
 And my youth comes back to me. (1-5)

Landscapes enable the Environmental historian to evaluate the history of a particular place. Man values landscapes because of their inherent interest, contribution to both national identity and local distinctiveness, their artistic inspiration - and for goods and services they provide. The landscape seems to be one of those words that contain, or include many things such as animals, trees, grass, hills, mountains, lush green forests, deserts, oceans, sky etc. Each organism has a well-defined role in the ecosystem. Human beings always exist in relation to other living beings. As Donald Hughes in his book *North American Indian Ecology* 1996 comments:

Human ecology, then is a rational study of how mankind interrelates with the home of human species, the earth; with its soil and mineral resources; with its water, both fresh and salt, with its air, climate and weather; with its many living things, animals and plants, from the simplest to the most complex; and with the energy received ultimately from the sun. (3)

It includes a wide variety of land regions, vast maritime terrains, thousands of islands, hundreds of lakes and inland waters and the longest coastline on the earth. Significant landforms include the Appalachian Mountains, St. Lawrence River, Canadian Shield, Canadian Arctic Archipelago, Great Lakes, Hudson Bay, Great Plains, and the Rocky Mountains. It is known for its cold winters and hot summers. In Canada, winters are dreary and bring a sense of loneliness, yet they are magical and marvelous. It is full of cedar and fir, and shady groves of maple and popular, of towering peaks of the rockeries and the rounded ancient granite of Canadian shields, of lush land, and seemingly endless rolling prairie, of rivers that reach thousands of miles inland and of possibly more lakes, of quiet sandy beaches, and coasts where the mountains plunge into sea.

Canada is a place filled with fascinating landscapes, and amazing adventures, the diversity is huge. The grand lakes, magnificent falls, woods fauna, and flora contribute to the beauty of Canada. It is famous for its geographical features and beautiful landscapes. As Allen Robert, a Geologist in his book *Illustrated History of Canada* (1970) states, "the sun sets on a golden lake and moon glow bathes a heavenly volcanic landscape falling snow dusts the shaggy coasts of musk oxen and colorful puffins flock together on an island rockery and world famous flowers blossom on the northern tundra" (12). Landscape in Canadian literature contributes to building an identity that is separate from Europe. It seems to stabilize a sense of self and place for those writing in English. Clay Roberts in his book *Wet Lands of Canada* (1998) puts it:

The land of the beautiful Maple the gold and red Maple leaves the sweetest Maple syrup, the Niagara Falls, the Great Lakes, the golden color of wheat and corn the enchanting rocky mountains the tat stands full of oil and natural gas, the tiny fishing posts and the massive container terminals the beautiful clear cities oh Canada! Love you very much lack words to describe your beauty.
(80)

He always wanted to be in the company of a beautiful nature. Nature acts as a metaphor for enduring permanence carrying within it a message of tremendous significance. In Canadian literature love for nature, poetry is obvious as it the largest country endowed with natural habitation, natural landscapes, and artistic beauty all around the Canadian landscape. The natural image is recurrent in the poems of Lampman. Don Scheese an ecologist is of the opinion that "any text where the landscape is a dominant factor should be considered an ecocritical one" (5). An attachment with the place is definite and one also wants such beautiful landscapes to be preserved, which is the core concept of third wave ecocritics. The essence of ecocriticism according to Cheryl Glotfelty is to analyze a text where nature is dominated and the text where there is a sense of preservation of nature. Lampman was a wanderer and whenever he felt that he was upset he used to stroll around the beautiful lakes, forests, and mountains to feel nature and get refreshed. Lampman in the letter to his friend E.W. Thomson, a magazine editor and short story writer, writes in June 1895:

I was so far gone in hypochondria on a Saturday last that I had not the spirit to go to the office at all. I went straggling up to Gatineau road and spent the whole day and most the next under the blue sky and eager sun and then I began to perceive that there were actually earth and grass and beautifully trailing clouds in the tender fields of heaven. I got to see at last that it was really fine and that perhaps I was alive after all. (2)

The first collection of poems by Archibald Lampman, *Among the Millets* (1988) opens with a poem which depicts the fields of Millet. The poet is elated to watch the clouds floating in the sky. "The dew has washed the face of earth/ it is gleaming in the grass the morning hours are seven" (1-2). To Lampman, even the clouds are part of his presence. Watching clouds moving in the sky he feels that the clouds too are alive, and belonged to heaven. Everything around him is a part of the great universe. "I fain to watch you pass / so soft white clouds of heaven" (3-4). Lampman composed his volume of *Among the Millet* fifteen years after Confederation. Like many other writers and intellectuals of this period, he believes that there are a new country and a need towards which he can direct his loyalty and eloquence. The poet leaves behind the fretful world and seeks peace and tranquility in nature:

Your sweet poets I will dream
The men of old for molding
In simple beauty such a dream
And I could lie beholding

Where daisies in the meadow toss,
 The wind from morn till evening
 Forever shepherd you cross
 The shining field of heaven. (7-14)

When rural life is predominant, nature occupies the central position. The natural world according to Lampman is a complete world of harmony. He turns his imagination back to the past when the poets used to watch the clouds, and the poet then questions the clouds "by which name they used to call you" (16). Lampman describes true solitude as going out into nature and leaving behind all preoccupying activities as well as society. The strong sense of the spirit of the place evoked by Lampman's poetry continues to arouse responsive chords in the contemporary readers. Eco-Psychologists, like Theodore Roszak in *New Therapy: Bio-Science* advocates that "while today the human mind is affected and shaped by the modern social world, its deep structure is inevitably adapted to, and informed by, the more than human-natural environment in which it is evolved"(45). Lampman advocates like an eco-psychologist that nature is the best friend and companion and helps people to get back in touch with the natural world. To him, nature is not just beautiful but is living and soothing. Lampman believes in the sublime effect of nature. After watching clouds dancing in the sky, his imagination moves back to the past, when his predecessors used to watch the clouds. Lampman presents clouds as part of Eternity and man just an observer, is mortal comes and goes:

Where daisies in the meadow toss,
 The wind from morn till even,
 Forever shepherd you cross
 The shining field of heaven. (17-20)

A poem of natural description by Lampman is "Spring on the River" from the collection of *Among the Millets*, depicts the Canadian river landscape, "O sunshine hot on the river" (1). The poem is set on a river bank and the poet addresses the first line of this poem to the sun as, "oh sun" and requests it to shine hot on the river so that ice melts and the river starts flowing. After the long winters, the river has become lifeless and it wants to flow from mountains to plains to enjoy dancing through woods because it is reborn. The poem is a long description of the river flowing down into the valley. The poet here uses phrases like the "sawmill" is "moaning ever" which symbolizes the presence of a machine in the pastoral world. The murmuring sound of the river is soothing to his ears but the moaning sound of sawmill annoys him:

For the ice is turning on an ashen hue
 and the still bright water is looking through
 Oh! The hum and the toil of the river
 The ridge of the rapid sprays and skips
 Loud and low by water lips tearing the wet pines into strips
 The sawmill is moaning ever

The little grey sparrow skips and calls
On the rocks in the rain of the waterfalls. (18-25)

The whole poem is addressed to the sun because it is a source of life and energy to the human as well as the non-human world. The poem is a depiction of interconnectedness and interdependence in the world of nature. The Sun which is the source of energy makes human as well as nonhuman survival possible on the earth. The river which again is a source life on this earth is an important component of our environment. Lampman believes that nature is dark and dreary but bright as well. There is always a hope of new life evolving from nature. After harsh winters it the sun which warms earth again and fills it with life and rejuvenation. To Lampman nature is a living process, always evolving itself. Like many deep ecologists, he too believes in nature's process of evolution.

The means by which Lampman imaginatively recreates geography and history of his place and the evolution of his craft provides an insight into his developing sense of locality. Therefore, it is important to discuss the landscapes and places that inspired him. He became intrigued by the imaginative possibilities of certain landscapes and colorful episodes in the past. Lampman's Canadian landscapes are almost entirely confined to the Ottawa-Gatineau district. Both the form and content of his verse, especially his earlier verse, tend toward the pastoral- a middle ground between wilderness and city- which provides a calm moment of simplicity and contemplation. Lampman's famous poem, "Among the Timothy," opens with a joyful mood. Among the fields of Timothy, the poet feels drowsy while watching the beautiful landscape, sky, clouds, grass and all are but part of the natural landscape of Canada. It is in this poem that the poetic inspiration is restored to him:

And here the scented swaths that gleam
Mixed with dead daisies, it is sweet to lie
And watch the grass and the few clouded skies
Nor think but only dream
My heart a heaven opening like a flower
A sweeter world where I wonder strayed
Begirt with shapes of beauty and power
Of dreams that moved through that enchanted clime
With changing breath of rhyme. (32-40)

Lamp man's views resonate with Joseph Meeker, a great ecologist, who in an essay, "The Comic Mode" very aptly maintains, "Human behaviour has generally been guided by presumed metaphysical principles which have neglected to recognize that man is a species of animals whose welfare depends upon successful integration with the plants, animals, and land that make up his environment" (163). Lamp man like Meeker believes that man is a part of great nature and without nature man is nothing. The sonnet "Late November" is a fine description of the winters in Canada. To Lampman snow cladded mountains are magical but the dark and dreary winters bring a sense of alienation among the people. The opening lines

of the poem depict a landscape which is bare and dry. The forests are "leafless" and are covered by snow. The next line describes the darkness of night which brings in a sense of loneliness. People are inside their homes nature is alone bearing the harshness of winters. The poet is walking through the forests and is enjoying the snowfall. Poet dreams of the days when the trees are once again full of leaves and the landscape is green. Lampman is not pessimistic in his attitude; he believes that change in nature is good as it follows the process of dying and recreation:

Felt the warm glow about my feet
And shuddering betwixt cold and heat
Drew my thoughts closer, like a cloak
While something in my blood awoke
A nameless and unnatural cheer
A pleasure is secret and austere. (7-12)

Like Shelly's "Ode to West Wind", "Late November" brings a hope to the poet that it is winter which gives birth to the beautiful earth. Shelly invokes the Wild West wind of autumn which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they may be nurtured by the spring. Lampman in the last lines, "I alone am neither sad nor shelter less nor gray / wrapped round with thought, content to watch and dream" (11-12), expresses the hope of the rebirth of the earth. Lampman believes that nature goes through the process of regeneration and in this way makes earth alive again. The poem ends with a hopeful note and the poet views nature as a source of truth and authentic experience. David Souk in his book *Major Canadian Authors* (1975), writes about this sonnet, "Lampman recorded his vision of nature images from the Canadian Landscape. The sonnet "In November" demonstrates Lampman's skill in observing and describing landscape in a manner true to Canadian experience" (32). In his second collection of poems, *Lyrics of Earth* the second poem, "The Forest Moods" the poet once again makes a declaration that nature is the ultimate source of pleasure and source of peace to his burdened soul. The poet as an observer goes in the woods and takes note of a variety of birds and flowers within the reach of his perception. The moods with which he associates his subjects vary, but his response remains consistently affirmative. The songs of some birds strike him as nostalgic, while those of others seem to express gleeful contentment with the present mood. The poet is able to say about the flowers in general that, "every leaf of their sheaf is fair (3)".

In the last stanza, the mood of mirth and joy gets transformed into sadness. The poet is sad because the human race is suffering from the agonies of pain and sorrow. The cause of agony and sorrow is increasing urbanization and lust for money. "Careless and bold, without the dream of woe / the trilliums scatter their flags of snow" (13-14). The poem begins with a naturalistic and detailed landscape of the Canadian woods, but the poem ends on a dark note, stating that man has lost faith in nature and has turned to cities to explore a new world of industries and capitalism. The poet turns from the joyful scene of woods to a world of worries

and frustrations. Rivers lakes, fields, falls, all such words describe Mother Nature as a complete entity. It is not mere imagination or dreams it is a true depiction of Canadian natural landscape. But the poet sometimes feels disturbed by the thought that countrysides are being replaced by cities and through his selfish desires, ultimately man is going to suffer. The poet believes that human beings are responsible for the destruction of nature. By converting wilderness into industries and highways, man is disturbing the ecological balance of this planet. As such the primary aim of ecocritics is to save earth from any kind of disaster. As Polly Higgins, a legal scholar and an environmental activist in her book, *Eradicating Ecocide* define Ecocide as, "the extensive destruction, damage to or loss of ecosystem of a given territory" (63). Lampman describes the 'Mother Nature' in her all attires.

In the poem, "Meadow," the poet describes April day among the meadows. He presents a picture of solitariness and serenity in this poem. Living a simple life and being close to nature makes the poet feel happy. He rejects the city life and accepts the wild world of nature. He believes in equality of all in the ecosystem and thus places nature as a part of the world. He does not present himself as a dominant figure, but a small part in this big universe. The theme that Lampman emphasizes is that everything has its own position in the universe and nothing is superior:

The bluebird peeping from the gnarled them
Prattles upon his frolic flite fringes
The inbounding flight across the golden morn
And azure gleam from off his splendid wings
Here the slim pointed swallow swap and pass
Down the far off river the black crow
With wise and wary visage to and fro
Settles and stalks about the withered grass. (4-11)

The green grass, chirping of birds, azure-green waters all are living in harmony with each other, and they teach a man a lesson of ambiance and peace. Lampman believes that nature soothes the burdened souls, cures every pang and woe, which is a great concern and concept in Eco-Psychology. An integral part of this practice is to remove the individual from the interiors of office buildings and homes and place them in the company of nature. According to eco-psychologists, a walk in the woods or in a green park is refreshing because it is what humans need to do. Eco-Psychologists have studied the beneficial effects of inhabiting natural settings and looking at the landscapes on the human psyche. Theodore Roszak in the book *The Nature of Sanity* (2012) writes, "If a culture is disconnected from nature, humans are prone to a variety of delusions, and that to some degree life in the wild forms the basis for human sanity and optimal psychological development have studied the beneficial effects of inhabiting natural settings and looking at the landscapes on the human psyche"(5). "The Islet and the Palm Tree" is a dramatic poem by Lampman. The poet dramatizes the situation how a palm tree converses with an islet. Their conversation signifies their need for each other. "O gentle sister spirit when you smile / my soul is like a lonely covered isle/islet shadowed by a

single palm" (1-3). Through this poem, the poet brings into the fact that the natural world is the world of order and harmony and everything is related to another one. The smile of the islet brings happiness in the world of a palm tree.

Another landscape poem of Lampman "On Lake Temiscamingue" is a depiction of a beautiful lake in Canada. It is a large freshwater lake on the provincial boundary between Ontario and Quebec. The poet in a very vivid manner depicts the landscape around the lake. The lake is the formation of two lakes and in between them is an elm tree watching the wild waters. The poet believes that the lake has its home in the wilderness and dancing through the hills and mountains reaches to meet another lake. The poet compares the lakes to lovers, who are very passionate to unite. The elm tree is witness to their union:

The somber forest and wan hit the lake
Halves with its stem gray stem
And pendant green
The shadowed point
Beyond it without break. (3-7)

Every natural object seems to have a perfect time. The murmuring of bees, the thud of dropping apples, and other fruits in the garden create an atmosphere of joy and happiness. The wind goes murmuring through the mountain oaks:

Faint whiffs creep out along the blue and die
I hear far in among the motionless trees
Shadows that sleep upon the shaven soil
The thud of dropping apples peach on peach
Stretch plots of performed orchards, where the bees
Murmur among the fringed golden roll
Or cling half drunken to the rolling peach. (5-11)

Lampman in his very famous poem "Heat" depicts the landscape of Ontario under the full sun of a summer day. The poet describes the effect of heat on nature, including people, "Up the steep hills it seems to sweep / Beyond and melt into the glare" (1-2). Davis Stock comments on Lampman's "Heat". The "Heat" is often regarded as Lampman's most perfect piece, is the exquisite rendering of an Ontario landscape as perceived under the full sun of a summer day. In the first Stanza, the intensity of the heat is caught by images of motion that render the landscape liquid" (123). Almost all the poems of Lampman depicts landscapes of Canada in a very exquisitely, some of which are remarkable for their vividness and sensuousness. The colorful and glittering pictures of landscape and their descriptions define him as a picturesque nature poet, but this description takes him in conformity with the sublime effect of nature. Alison Byerly, in his essay "The Use of Landscapes" very rightly maintains that the aesthetic view of landscape inculcates in viewers a sense of humanity. He believes that the landscapes must help to provide an aesthetic experience:

The anesthetization of landscape permits the viewer to define and control the scene, yet fosters the illusion that the scene is part of self-regulating nature. The viewer seems to be an accidental spectator of the beauties of nature when in fact man has created the view himself by announcing and promoting it as scenic. The idea of wilderness refers to the absence of humanity, yet the wilderness has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it. This paradox requires that we experience the wilderness without changing its status as wilderness. This can only be done by constructing an aesthetic image of the Wilderness that allows us to avoid confronting its reality. (54)

Lampman is annoyed by the urbanization and industrialization and yearns for an ideal world where there is no hierarchy. The poets depict the beautiful aspect of landscapes, but more often believes in the sublime aspect of nature. Lampman through his landscape poems describes his love and regard for nature. Lampman through their poems makes a call for the archetypical shift from anthropocentric to the eco-centric set of values. Through the art of poetry, he presents myriads of deep ecological concerns in pursuit of the ecological balance between nature and man and even the human beings themselves. The study made so far proves, beyond doubt that literature can make positive contributions towards the awareness of the environment around. It offers a canvas where man and nature should live in harmony with each other. After analyzing his landscape poetry, Don Scheese an ecologist is proved right when he says, "any text where the landscape is a dominant factor is an eco-critical one" (5). The poet is of great benefit to the world of literature and ecology. He enables man to feel and experience the nature around. Lampman preserves his places in his verses, thus enabling eco-historians to study the history of the environment of his place Canada.

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