

ECOPSYCHOLOGY- EMERGING SYNTHESIS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND THE ECOLOGICAL

N. Rama Gommathi, Reg. No. 21111274012014, Research Scholar, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli -627012, TamilNadu, India)

Dr. D. Nalina Palin, Associate Professor, Department of English, St. John's College, Palayamkottai, (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abishekapatti, Tirunelveli -627012, TamilNadu, India)

Abstract

Life is not always smooth sailing. Human life is full of ups and downs and people become easily perturbed and stressed while facing problems of any sort in different facets of life. Sitting idle cannot solve problems but, it is best to control emotional equilibrium so that one finds out the most pertinent solution to reduce stress and to solve problems as and when required. Environment sometimes enacts very effectively in stress management and reduction process. It is a kind of healthy reciprocation between the humans and environment where they live or even interact with each other for overall betterment. This healing mutualism among the humans and environmental components is termed as Ecopsychology, which treats people psychologically by bringing them spiritually closer to nature. This article explores and introspects the concept-related issues and implications of Ecopsychology precisely.

Keywords: Emotions, Psychology, Ecology, Equilibrium, Ecopsychology

The term Ecopsychology is synonymous with the term Environmental Psychology. To comprehend and derive the word "Ecopsychology", the word is "Ecopsychology" nothing but the amalgamation of two words i.e. Ecology and Psychology. Ecology is a branch of Biology that is concerned about the interaction among the organisms and the biophysical environment which includes both abiotic as well as bio components. On the other hand, Psychology is all about the science of the human mind and behaviour. It includes the study of consciousness and unconsciousness phenomena and deals with feeling and thought as well. Therefore, now it is significantly expressed that the term Ecopsychology is very much interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary as this is nothing but the aggregation of these two pivotal issues or subjects i.e. Ecology and Psychology. So, to define Ecopsychology in a better way is that Ecopsychology encompasses the keen relationship that lies between the natural world and

human beings through the harmonious practice of psychological as well as ecological principles that promote sustainability. The concept of Ecopsychology has been formulated depending on both the ecological construct and psychological construct.

Ecopsychology explores humans' psychological interdependence with the nature or environment and deals with and the implications for identity, health and well-being. Thus the topics or areas of Ecopsychology include emotional responses to nature or surroundings; the impacts and consequences of environmental issues such as natural disasters, global climate change and the transpersonal dimensions of environmental identity and concern as well.

In the words of Davis, the concept of "Ecopsychology" is being formulated and further fostered on the following three major insights: Human beings and nature have a deeply bonded relationship as they are dependent on each other keenly. The result has always been suffering for both the environment and people as well, when human beings and nature become detached or dissociated with each other. Ecopsychology recalls and recognizes the relationship between nature and people, leading to the inevitable healing process for both. The following postulates is considered the universally accepted baselines on which the superstructure of Ecopsychology is being built:

- i. A profound re-visioning of mental health and human consciousness should be considered as one of the basic notions of Ecopsychology.
- ii. Utmost importance should be given to the basic idea that human beings are interconnected with the earth which is a living system. Thus, to resolve any sort of problems related to both the earth and mankind, this interconnection must be considered overall.
- iii. It must be recalled that the human consciousness is intrinsically engaged or involved in creating as well as maintaining ecological crisis.
- iv. It also fosters a new cosmology that embraces spiritual teachings, scientific models and understandings, ancient wisdom and non-western knowledge of indigenous culture.
- v. The drive to live in harmony with the natural world and its rhythm is the prime concern of Ecopsychology.
- vi. The significant notion of sanity ought to be redefined to incorporate our planetary home. It is expected that a healthy mature human being naturally develops an ethical responsibility for the earth.

- vii. The needs and rights of the persons are as same as the needs and rights of the planet - this notion must be exhorted through the practice of Ecopsychology.
- viii. Ecopsychology embraces the goals of gender as well as racial equity along with cultural justice naturally.
- ix. Ecopsychology must try to utilize all the intuitive and emotional modalities, scientific approaches, and spiritual practices, drawing on mythological understandings along with pluralistic epistemology and methodology as far as applicable. (Biswas 94-95)

Ecopsychology plays some other pivotal roles which are as follows: Ecopsychology helps in a dedicated examination and better understanding of the emotional bonding that exists between the human being and environment which is beneficial to both of them. Ecopsychology brings in a psychological approach to environmental activism that results in greater effectiveness. The feeble interrelations or connections embedded in human nature congruence are healed through ecopsychological interventions as they help to comprehend the complexity of these bonds and suggest healing. The notions of Ecopsychology motivate the individuals to take necessary actions that benefit the environment also. It is being used also to discourage people to be refrained from taking such actions that might impact Mother Nature adversely. The processes of “greening” and “re-greening,” which promote the ideas of ecological resilience, are fostered by ecopsychology.

Theodore Roszak, a cultural historian, published a book titled *Voice of the Earth: An Exploration into Ecopsychology*, in 1992. Roszak, although not a psychologist, makes a compelling case for the integration of the two seemingly unrelated fields of psychology and environmental studies in the interest of environmental recovery and restoration. The fundamental tenet of Roszak’s argument is that human exploitation and destruction of the environment are pathological and require psychological examination. The need for a connection between the personal and the global in light of the present environmental issues gets even more critical (Roszak 1995). Humans are unable to distinguish between their psychological actions apart from the larger environmental setting in which they are living. Roszak’s work essentially established the area of ecopsychology, starting with the Institute of Ecopsychology at California State University-Hayward, even though by no means the first to make such assertions. The work of defining and explaining precisely what is meant by ecopsychology and what it means to be a practising ecopsychologist has been a tricky

enterprise as organisations, institutions, programmes, websites, and conferences came into being. Perhaps more than a practice, ecopsychology served as a rallying cry for Roszak, who believed that human sanity is rooted in the natural world and that environmental deterioration and devastation require a psychologically educated perspective.

The idea and area of ecopsychology have become fragmented along fault lines between academia and private practice, environmental spirituality and activism, philosophy and practical fieldwork in the years since the release of Roszak's foundational volume in 1992. Particularly, ecopsychology has continued to emphasise experiential learning, obtaining support from liberal studies programmes and private psychotherapists. Ecopsychology is a concept and field of study that is frequently associated with workshop environments and a "getting-back-to-nature" mentality. Ecopsychology has been the subject of some nominal academic study, but for the most part, this work has lacked a critical theoretical dimension, orientation, locating assistance among independent psychotherapists, and liberal studies programmes.

There is no definite, acknowledged definition of ecopsychology. One is impressed by the variety of ways the term is used in the literature on ecopsychology, and one gets the sense that many ecopsychologists are still trying to define their area. Ecopsychology may become impossible to define and understand amid a sea of sloppy, potentially conflicting, interpretations if this tendency continues. Therefore, ecopsychologists must be very explicit about what ecopsychology is and is not; that is, ecopsychology must be defined and delimited clearly.

The prefix "eco" has been first introduced to "psychology" by Roszak in 1992, and he did so because he understood the crucial need of doing so as well as the clear twin goals of "ecologizing psychology" and "psychologizing ecology." Regarding the first objective, Roszak contends that if traditional psychology is to have a positive influence on the environmental problem, it must urgently reconsider its theory and practice within an ecological perspective. Regarding the second objective, Roszak thinks that the environmental movement desperately needs "a new psychological sensitivity" and has a lot to learn from psychology in terms of how to persuade individuals to alter their ecologically harmful conduct. Three years later, Roszak responded to support his first assertion:

Ecopsychology is the name most often used for this emerging synthesis of the psychological (here intended to embrace the psychotherapeutic and the psychiatric) and the ecological. Several other terms have been suggested:

psychoecology, ecotherapy, global therapy, green therapy, Earth-centred therapy, re-earthing, nature-based psychotherapy, shamanic counselling, even sylvan therapy. . . . But by whatever name, the underlying assumption is the same: ecology needs psychology, psychology needs ecology. (4-5)

The growing synthesis of the psychological and the ecological, according to Roszak, is ecopsychology. However, others have attempted to broaden or alter that definition, even changing the discipline's name, purportedly to reflect different goals or perspectives. The purpose of ecopsychology, according to Roszak in *The Voice of the Earth*, is to "bridge our culture's long-standing, historical gap between the psychological and the ecological, to see the needs of the planet and the person as a continuum" (14). To this aim, Roszak identifies two fundamental goals: (a) to ecologize psychology, or to reimagine psychology within an ecological framework, and (b) to psychologize ecology, or to create an environmentally conscious movement that is psychologically sensitive and intelligent. (20)

Roszak's concept of ecopsychology aims to both ecologize psychology and psychologize ecology. The first goal has gotten a lot of attention up to this point. The second objective, which sought to equip environmental activists with psychological knowledge and skills to help them in their work, has mainly fallen short of expectations. According to Lester Brown,

Every political movement has its psychological dimension. Persuading people to alter their behaviour always involves probing motivations and debating values; political activism begins with asking what makes people tick. What do they want and fear and care about? How do we get and hold their attention? How much can people take—and in what order of priority? Have we overloaded them with anxiety or guilt? How do we make credible the threats we perceive? Movements that fail to think carefully about this may fail to persuade. (xiv)

According to Brown, the question that the environmental movement should be asking itself is, "Are we effective? Most clearly, must consider our influence on the general people, whose hearts and minds seek to win. Time is running out, and the stakes are tremendous" (xiv). Roszak, a writer and lecturer on environmental issues, regretfully notes

the environmental movement went about its work of organizing, educating, and agitating with little regard for the fragile psychological complexities of the

public. . . . As intensely aware as environmentalists may be of the complexity of the natural habitat, when it came to human behaviour their guiding image was simplistic in the extreme. They worked from a narrow range of strategies and motivations: the statistics of impending disaster, the coercive emotional force of fear and guilt.(2)

It is time, according to Roszak, for the environmental movement to “create a psychological impact statement. Do we just have two motivations to play on: dread and desperation? Like any political activists focused on their goals, environmentalists sometimes start with flawed and limited assumptions about what drives people” (38). Roszak essentially thinks that environmentalists have forgotten that changing people’s behaviour is the primary point of environmental politics and that they have failed to recognise that every environmental issue has a psychological component (21). According to the official line of reasoning, “once the relationship between human psychology and environmental destruction is better understood, environmental groups will have the information needed to design and evaluate interventions that effectively encourage humanity to address unprecedented, yet frequently invisible threats” (1). The common ecopsychological issues of denial, psychic numbing, overload, consumer- and techno-addiction, repressed grief, environmental anxiety, and indifference are among the things that, in Roszak’s opinion, ecopsychologists can teach environmentalists about to move beyond the limited range of negative motivations that they have relied on to more positive reinforcements.

Andy Fisher, a Canada-based psychotherapist’s ambitious book, *Radical Ecopsychology: Psychology in the Service of Life*, clearly and publicly states that “both an introduction to ecopsychology and an attempt to encourage the field to become more comprehensive and critical” (Fisher xiii). What ensues is a very short summary of the fundamental philosophical ideas of ecopsychology as well as a foundation for a new “radical” ecopsychology. Fisher gives his views a thorough theoretical foundation. As a scholar, Fisher takes great care to completely cover all of his conceptual ground; at times, the book reads like a theoretical tour. According to the author, who is a self-described environmental activist, his book is intended to be read by “students, psychologists, ecologists, environmental educators, philosophers, critical theorists, activists, and general readers” (Fisher xiii). The author defines terms and gives readers direction when the going gets theoretically challenging. An effort is made to provide some consistency to a fairly disjointed collection of concepts and ideologies in the first few pages of the introduction to ecopsychology, which is a useful overview of the

key topics and developments in the discipline. In this part, Fisher explains what he refers to as the “four tasks” of ecopsychology and gives a brief overview of its main objectives. This section is a gold mine for understanding what ecopsychology is all about. Fisher claims that the main claim of ecopsychology is

that if we accept the ecological view that we are members of the biotic community, rather than its mere exploiters, then we may learn to recognize the natural world as a social and psychological field, just as we do the human community. (5)

The main objective of the book is to help articulate—to give voice to and develop an understanding of—the embedded feature of people in the greater natural environment. Ecopsychology has the potential to make a significant contribution to the realm of environmental thought and advocacy. Additionally, it aims to propose a theory of loss that explains how humans lost their respectful, empathetic, and beneficial connection to nature. It is clear to see, therefore, how ecopsychology cannot be pinned down as any one “thing”—It is a critical intervention in psychology’s dominant paradigm, an assertion about the emotional and affective aspects of environmental degradation, a reading of human destruction of nature through the lens of “pathology,” an effort to comprehend how people relate to and interact with nature, and finally, an effort to re-establish a connection with nature. It is said by Fisher that “These tasks identify the common burdens that befall ecopsychologists, regardless of our particular orientations or vocabularies, for they derive from a historical moment we all share” (6). Fisher is making an effort to unify a diverse sector. The first assignment Fisher gives is a “psychological” one: “to acknowledge and better understand the relationship between the human and the natural world as a relationship”,

Ecopsychology is a psychological undertaking that essentially says ‘we too are nature’. Its first task is therefore to describe the human psyche in a way that makes it internal to the natural world or that makes it a phenomenon of nature. Stated otherwise, the task is to build a psychology that expands the field of significant relationships to include other-than-human beings; a psychology that views allpsychological and spiritual matters in the light of our participation within the larger natural order. (7)

Fisher’s theory, which has significant ramifications for the practice of psychology, holds that what is required for individuals to perceive themselves as a member of this wider biotic community. The active and relational features of the human-nature dialectic are

highlighted throughout. According to Fisher, “how to bring greater psychological know-how to ecological activists is of special concern to ecopsychologists. The people may become more resistant and despairing as a result of guilt, shame, and fear tactics rather than empowered to take action” (23).

Conclusion

The research area of ecopsychology examines how people interact with the environment and its issues. The literature on environmental racism, environmental protection, and environmental damage may all be thoroughly researched via the lens of ecopsychology. The study of literature from ecopsychological standpoints helps to spread an appreciation for the environment via literature. Literary scholars see that literature also lends the environment a voice through the lens of ecopsychology.

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