



## A CRITICAL APPROACH ON ECO-PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD IN URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST*

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### ABSTRACT

*Eco philosophy or Ecosophy, the term gives bouquet to various genres and critical studies related to eco literature/ eco studies of present time. The term denotes the harmonious living among the living creatures in the planet Earth. Living in Earth has long been become a survival contest as a result of excessive usage of natural resources for luxury comforts. Rather than quenching needs and necessities, resources are being used as decorative elements. The floral destruction alters the equilibrium and leads to the extinction of fauna, including the six sensed animals too. Only a world with integrated living survives the calamities under nature's umbrella is showcased in The Word for World is Forest by Ursula k. Le Guin. Le Guin in her novella depicts how the Athsea planet people lives in harmony with nature, as their way of living brings a nostalgic touch with Earth's ancestors who treasured nature thousands of years ago. The development of scientific knowledge and the inhumane human colonization behaviours are the paramount features that destroyed Earth in Le Guin's speculative novella and the habitants move on to destroy another planet similar to*

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*Earth's ecology. The author allegorically accuses the humans for the ecocatastrophe that destroys the natural eco system with the story of Terran (Earth) people invading another planet for wood and settlement, that destroys the eco harmony there. The natives are held captives and slaves, the flora being destroyed for commercial purpose, fauna gets hunted for mere pleasure, changing the ecological system of Athsea can be seen as extended allegories that depicts the author's views on ecological destruction, she witnessed in her time period. This study shows how the eco philosophy of Athsea planet gets destroyed and the agitation of the natives with the application of Hierarchy of needs by American Psychologist Abraham Maslow.*

**Keywords:** *Eco philosophy, Eco literature, ecocide, colonization, nature, ecocatastrophe.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Planet Earth, comprises micro, macro-organisms, creatures, organic as well as inorganic substances; and the harmonious equilibrium among them, makes it a breathable place. The harmony among the organisms, the food chain, intertwined lives of organisms are some major factors that balance the equilibrium. If the carnivores extinct, the lands would become barren with swarming herbivores and vice versa. So, the equilibrium exists in order to maintain the balance among the existents in the planet; the field of study about the relationship among these is called as ecology. The study, observation, research on those that helps in maintaining the balance of earth is catching the eyes of scientists, researchers, conservationist, ecologist and many.

The focus on environment, ecosystem and on nature shifted swiftly after the immense spur in the development of technology and invention of excessive chemical usage started to bring destruction to all the five elements of planet Earth. Rather than needs and necessities, luxuries and comforts exceed the production and consumption level, leads to massive destruction of forests and natural resources like rocks and corals. When the lands become barren as a result of excessive usage of pesticides, stagnant pools of plastic wastage because of cheap and liberal plastic usage, change in climate as a result of destructed rain forests and drained out lakes and rivers, a hole on Ozone because of excessive CO<sub>2</sub> emission—some people start to concern about the Earth and voice against the anthropocentric behaviour of humans. Scientists, conservationists, volunteers begin new ways to bring awareness about protecting the Earth. Some campaign it, some do awareness programs, rallies, and some do it by their writings.

The focus on ecosystem in the Earth leads the Scientists to coin terms like Ecology, Ecosystem, Eco-philosophy, Ecosophy, which denote the existing things and their relationship around the Earth. Yet the words Eco-crisis, Ecocide, Ecocatastrophe denotes the



destruction towards ecology of the planet. The term Eco-philosophy or Ecosophy means integrated living of all the living organisms that lives in the planet Earth. It is coined by French psychoanalyst Félix Guattari and the Norwegian deep ecology scientist, Arne Næss.

*The word 'philosophy' itself can mean two things: (1) a field of study, an approach to knowledge; (2) one's own personal code of values and a view of the world which guides one's own decisions (in so far as one does full heartedly feel and think they are the right decisions). When applied to questions involving ourselves and nature, we call this latter meaning of the word 'philosophy' an Ecosophy. (Naess)*

The single celled Amoeba to the huge white whale, every creature on Earth has its own purpose of existence, but the anthropocentric behaviour of humans causes a severe damage to almost all the existing things on Earth, that the equilibrium encounters a heavy blow in the past 50 years. To show this catastrophic existence of humans, numerous people attempt to broadcast it via social and influencing medias.

The American fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin takes it on another level of her writings to strike her readers' hearts. The speculative fiction writer creates a galaxy of her own and makes her characters to revolve in that universe with an imaginary futuristic view. In her works, she voices out anti-militaristic and anti-colonial views as a result of witnessing the rage of war in her period; by the influence of Taoism, she shows the reflections of both lightness and darkness in the flow of story; and also, characters with some anthropological kind of touch—All these as major characteristics in her works. She, in her novella *The world for World is Forest*, centralizes the lives of the natives of her imaginary planet Athsea and how the Athseans got colonized and violently abused by the hands of Terrans, the humans who travel to Athsea to take Timber to Terra (Earth), their planet. The colonization of Terrans and agitation of Athseans shows her views on war and its destructive nature, the dark and bright side of humans (both Terrans and Athseans) behaviour, and the anthropocentric nature of Terrans; witness for all her characteristic traits in a single work.

In her fiction, the lives of Athseans are intertwined with nature, especially with the trees in the planet Athsea. In their tongue, the word that means world is 'Forest'; it is in their nature to mingle with nature there. The Athseans depend on the forests for their livelihood. The ecology maintained there is likely for the survival of the Athseans livelihood. They, in return, never expects and tends to worship the nature of their planet. There isn't any god, nor a race or a culture; only a better integrated community of Athseans with other existing things on Athsea. The gigantic trees provide food, shelter and also acts as hideout for the natives. To denote the nature-oriented life in Athsea, the author allegorically represents the Athsean natives as green skinned beings. The wishes of the author upon the people of Earth are reflected on her Athseans. Their way of living is similar to that of the ancestors who lived thousands of years ago in planet Earth.



The representation of Athseans in Le Guin's novel has an uncanny representation with the ancestors of Earth. The fictional world of Athsea in the future, pictured by the author, is the actual representation of Earth in the human past. The resemblance could be witnessed in almost all their living behaviour--from using trees as shelter to considering them the lifeline in their world, the people of Athsea are the same as ancient Earthling. To create a connectivity with aliens, the author handled a rather nostalgic way of making the readers reminisce the good olden days that they have only heard about.

The intrusion of Terrans on the planet Athsea makes a huge blow to the ecosystem of it. The Terrans travel to Athsea in search of wood and settlement. Although the planet is alien to them, they invade it for its rich resources that are long extinct in their planet. As the story takes place in future, the Terrans (the people of Earth) runs out of every resource, neither trees nor animals available there. All the concrete and deluxe luxuries cut down till the last piece of wood and it has become rare to see a single tree to grow there. As a result of it, all the birds, animals and creatures that depend on forest and green extinct, with only the existence of domestic rats. Although the rats are the only animals that survive there, the men there hunt them for pleasure. The technological development there makes them one among the top tiers in the universe where there are other planet natives exist; Yet an empty bubble without anything to live on. The author here highlights the outcome of human-centric nature that is inbuilt in humans, by showing them emptying their own planet, colonizing and settling in Athsea.

The planet Athsea is rich in all the natural resources as Earth once had. It has a good ecosystem with all the organic and inorganic substances intact. Referring to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, the forest alone provides all the basic physiological needs to the Athseans. With the invasion of Terrans, it starts to get disturbed. The Terrans come to Athsea at first in search of good wood for their planet. By seeing the abundance of wealth in Athsea, they make arrangements to colonize and settle there. They clear the woods and build headquarters, buildings, apartments, prison rooms in Athsea. They colonized in separate areas and use the natives as slaves in the name of voluntary work, which snatches the Athseans' safety and security needs- the second basic need in the triangular theory of hierarchy of needs. The union of all planets in the universe forbids anyone to enslave people of other planet. Thus, the Terrans enslaved them in disguise. Driving the Athseans out of their homes by destroying trees as they live on hideouts made of trees and trunks; Forcing them to learn their language and forcefully separating the male and female Athseans to stop them from reproduction; Working them beyond labour hours just because they are thick skinned; Taking the Athsean women for granted and use them for their sexual needs; Enabling strict Terran laws in the lands of Athsea are some untalkable violence took place over the Athseans. Doing so, the basic needs like food, shelter, safety, family, security as well as the third basic need, love and belongings, also gets looted and destroyed by the Terrans.



The forests of Athsea are the live source of life for all the living creatures in Athsea, which provides all their basic needs. The Terrans start to cut the trees for the demand of wood in their planet. The woods of Athsea are far taller and sturdier than the ones found in Earth and the work is being done by the slaves who need neither salary nor sleep. It has become a striking deal for the Terrans and so, they furthered their work efficiently. Almost two-third the Forest in the area got cut down within a span of three Terran years. Some Terrans treat the Athseans as low as animals and the animals as creatures created to quench their pleasure hunt.

The characters in Le Guin's work depicts how the ecosophical damage happens and the way it is retrieved to its natural position. The character Don Davidson, the major anthropocentric personality, acts as a spark for all the fire that blasts in the later parts of the novella. He calls the native Athseans as Creechies and take their woman for sexual pleasure; He rapes and kills the wife of an Athsean slave named Selver and scars Selver when he comes to avenge his wife's death. He goes on hunting with other soldiers and hunt the deer and other exquisite animals by saying that animals exist only to satisfy the hunting pleasure of humans. He, along with some other soldiers, goes out to kill the Athseans and destroy their houses and surroundings without the knowledge of his higherups. He, in turn, represents the darkness in Taoism, a characteristic trait of the author. When the darkness prevails, the light comes for rescue. The slave Selver is the light that leads the natives towards their freedom from Terrans and other planet people. Selver gets agitated once he finds his wife's death and wounded by Davidson while avenging for her death. He gathers Athseans on other areas and meet messengers and people of various regions in Athsea. He gets the status of God among the Athseans and his words become Vedas to them. They see him as the person who would take them to their salvage.

The Athseans' enslavement, agitation and Selver's act of revenge can be shown with the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs pyramid. The American Psychologist says that one should have five needs to fulfil in life to live on; they are the basic physiological needs that lies at the bottom of the pyramid like food and shelter; the second one being the safety needs like health, employment and property; the third as love and belongings like friends and family and connections; the fourth is esteem needs like respect, freedom and recognition; and the topmost in the pyramid is self – actualization; For the Athseans the self-actualization is not getting back their freedom, but their trees and planet back. In the Athsean planet, the natives are deprived of all the four needs that makes the basement of the pyramid. Selver, along with fellow natives gets enslaved by the Terrans that makes them deprive their natural habitat. They lose their own shelter and stays in the prison and eats what is given by the Terrans. They are separated from their friends and family, neither taken care of while sick nor allowed to act of their own. They are restricted of their physiological, safety, belonging and esteem needs that are mentioned in Maslow's pyramid of needs.



The forests cut down, people enslaved, animals being hunted, convoys build everywhere—when the Terrans and other extra-terrestrials get to think that everything under their control, the revolt blast up under the lead of Selver. Selver is the embodiment of conservationist, who thrive to make the nature alive. Him, being the first one to get a vision of self-actualization after losing his self-respect and esteem as a slave and a failed avenge plan, inspires fellow people and convoys of other Athseans. He preaches that they must retrieve their land from Terrans. Under his command, the native Athseans marches towards their self-actualization and to get all their needs back. They killed Terrans and burnt their colonies, and their means of communication as a warning not to touch them. Davidson’s sneak attack at night costs him his own race. Terrans submit to Athseans and starts to flee. By the time the Terrans left, the natives of Athsea gets reunited with their families and friends, and recovers their source of food, shelter and life. Although Le Guin’s ending gives a faint satisfaction with the reunion of Athseans with their land, the plot shows the terror of ecological destruction. The natives of the fictional land get back their land but it is still a huge unanswered question in the world of the author.

The feel of home never returns even after the disappearance of Terrans from the Athsean land as the drastic impact still instincts faintly in the air of Athsea. The Athseans get their freedom with the cost of losing their homes and families. The land is back; yet not their home nor happiness. The hope of having the planet to themselves is left along with the thoughts of Selver leading to their future and self-actualization of fellows, lingers in the minds of Athseans. The planet Athsea is back to the hands of its natives, still with the severely damaged ecosystem. It is in the hands of the natives to either repair or let it be.

The Earth can handle the happy feet, not the vigorous beat of machines. “...when Nature says, ‘I give you the glory of the senses and of awareness, and the splendour of Earth,’ surrender yourself to these things...” (Devoe). Le Guin, by her novella, lets out a major issue by allegorically representing the Athseans. The planet Earth has provided us with abundant wealth. If the usage exceeds the needs and productivity, then it will lead to a huge ecological catastrophe. In her novella, she explains it with the Portrayal of Terrans as greedy beings and Athseans as ecological conservationists. It isn’t the end of anything, the change could happen if people take timely measures to conserve the ecosystem, is depicted by Le Guin in her novella.

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