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Eco-Aesthetic Reading of the “Book of Genesis”

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Abstract

Aim: In this article the aim is to make a reading of the Book of Genesis from an Eco-Aesthetic point of view. This study aims to explore the ecological and aesthetic dimensions embedded in the Book of Genesis. It examines how creation narratives reflect an intrinsic harmony between nature and the divine. The paper seeks to interpret Genesis through an eco-critical lens to uncover environmental consciousness within its theological framework. It also highlights the aesthetic portrayal of nature as sacred and purposeful in biblical literature.

Methodology and Approach: The Book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, provides profound insights into the origins of humanity and the universe. This paper examines the text through an eco-aesthetic lens, uncovering a paradigm for harmonious existence between humans, nature, and the divine. By focusing on the relationships and ruptures described in Genesis, particularly the fall of Adam and Eve, this research explores the loss of eco-aesthetic sensibility and its implications for contemporary ecological ethics.

Outcome: The paper highlights how the prelapsarian state exemplifies holistic integrity and communion with natural and spiritual order, advocating for a renewed eco-aesthetic awareness in human life.

Conclusion: The Book of Genesis is very much amenable to a reading from an Ecological and Aesthetic perspective creating a wonderful vision about life, humans and nature. It also adds valuable insights about the causes of the current maladies in relation to the relation between nature and man.

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Genesis serves as a foundational text in understanding humanity's place in the cosmos. The narrative of creation, fall, and early human history resonates with themes of ecological balance and spiritual connection. This paper proposes an eco-aesthetic reading of Genesis, emphasizing the interplay between human beings, nature, and the divine. Eco-aestheticism, as used here, refers to a state of holistic integration, characterized by harmony between humanity and the natural world, rooted in an appreciation of beauty, order, and interconnectedness. The study argues that the alienation experienced by Adam and Eve post-fall signifies the loss of this eco-aesthetic sensibility.

The creation narrative (Genesis 1-2) depicts a universe imbued with order, beauty, and purpose. God's repeated pronouncement that creation is "good" underscores its intrinsic aesthetic and ecological value. The Garden of Eden symbolizes the ultimate eco-aesthetic ideal, where humanity lives in unbroken communion with nature and God. Adam and Eve's roles as stewards reflect a harmonious relationship with their environment. The disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3) results in a profound disruption of harmony. Their realization of nakedness signifies not just physical exposure but existential estrangement from nature and themselves. The curse on the ground (Genesis 3:17-19) illustrates the ecological consequences of the fall, introducing toil and imbalance into the human-nature relationship.

While Genesis highlights humanity's alienation, it also offers glimpses of potential restoration. The covenant with Noah (Genesis 9) reaffirms God's commitment to creation, suggesting that harmony can be partially regained through ethical stewardship. An eco-aesthetic reading of Genesis calls for a re-envisioning of humanity's role as caretakers, fostering a renewed sense of responsibility toward the environment. Eco-aestheticism advocates for the integration of ecological consciousness into spiritual and ethical frameworks. Genesis encourages an appreciation of creation's intrinsic worth and interdependence. The prelapsarian state exemplifies stewardship as a sacred duty. Contemporary ecological crises call for a return to this ethos, emphasizing sustainability and reverence for life. Genesis frames humanity's relationship with

nature as inherently spiritual. Restoring eco-aesthetic sensibility involves reconnecting with this spiritual dimension, fostering a deeper understanding of humanity's place within creation.

Genesis is the first book of the Bible, which deals with the origin of Man and the universe. This study tries to attempt an eco-aesthetic reading of the book of Genesis and also strives to provide an eco-aesthetic paradigm for human life in this universe. The main characters appearing in the book of Genesis are Adam and Eve, the first man and his woman, who lost their sense of security after their defiance of God. They lost their sense of security as well as their eco-aesthetic sense and felt alienated from the nature [with which they had a holistic harmony until they defied God] and themselves also [as they realized that they were naked]. The eco-aesthetic sense here means a state of holistic integrity and perfect communion of the individual with natural or spiritual order/ hierarchy. The scope of the current study includes the study of the concept of eco-aestheticism, the eco-aesthetic paradigm in human life and nature, the eco-aesthetic sense as something seen in the pristine condition of the nature and man before the fall as seen in the book of Genesis.

Eco-aestheticism could be construed as the art of leading life without causing harm and disturbance to eco-systems, life and environment. The art of constructive appreciation of nature's beauty and an eco-friendly life style also comes within the ambit of the idea of 'paradise' as seen in the book of Genesis. A blend of God, Nature and Man in a triune relationship can be read in the book of Genesis. God created the beautiful garden, 'the paradise', and entrusted it to the Man. In the 'Book of Genesis', it can be read that God created everything as per the need of each and every creature in the universe. God never wanted any creature to be alone so he created suitable pairs too. Whatever he created, God pronounced everything as 'good,' after its creation.

Man should cultivate an eco-aesthetic sense in his life otherwise he will find this life monotonous and meaningless. If he wants to lead a meaningful and peaceful life on earth he must assimilate the spirit of eco-aestheticism in and throughout his life. The 'Book of Genesis' marks the creation of flora and fauna

and the entire universe. It also simply reveals the aim, objectives and importance of Man, Nature and God in a very amiable relationship in this earthly life. The onslaught of anti-eco-aestheticism in life also can be read in the 'Book of Genesis.' The 'Book of Genesis' can also be considered as an 'aetiology' of the perils of human life on earth, where one can also find the solution to the illness and conflicts of modern man.

According to the pristine order of things, God commands and Nature obeys. This was always the case with Man as well. Man was always submitting to the will of God, before his fall from grace. His uninterrupted obedience is the first mark of eco-aesthetic method of life as seen in the 'Book of Genesis.' This unconditional obedience makes Man very much in tune with eco-aesthetic way of things. But the Nature is helpless before Man, who has fallen from the grace of God, the Almighty. The formlessness and the desolation of the earth were given form and identification with the timely interference of God. There is a beauty in experiencing the calm and serene surrender of nature before God. One should be able to enjoy the hectic day as well as the serene night because the power of God is there in the day and night. It was the mighty hands of God that separated the day and night to make the life of Man on the earth meaningful and beautiful. This beauty of multiplicity is the gist of early part of the book of Genesis.

The earth was formless and desolate in the beginning. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness and the power of God was moving over the water. Then God declared that there should be light, and then light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw. Then he separated the light from the darkness and named the light day and the darkness night (Gen.2.5). Why the day first and then the night second is to be pondered here. Day is the time of movement, growth, development, giving, taking, working. On the other hand, darkness was called night, a time of rest and stillness. Absence of darkness is light meanwhile the absence of light is darkness or night. It was essential to develop a concept of work and rest, and that was why there was this division of day and night. It was also mandatory for developing a time consciousness among the creatures including man. It was necessary for them to identify time to wake

up, to eat, to run, to bathe, to seek food, to go around, to collect water, to drink water and so on. When it was dark, they felt, it was time to rest and sleep; while it was dawn, they slowly felt as it was time to wake up and move around. Thus, a sense of time and mobility was developed among the creatures by the creator by the separation of day and night.

The stars were not counted as on the earth, and were considered unapproachable as opposed to the earth. So, they could not be accommodated along with the earth where the creatures have to live on. So, the creator did a miracle of separating the sky the sea. Fire and water cannot stay together. They have to be separated for their comfortable identification by others. When one looks at the sky only, one can grasp the greatness of the earth and vice versa. Instead of keeping water in between the sky and the earth the lord willfully brought water to the land, the earth, the most fertile, fruitful and lively. The sea placed at the valley of the earth declaring the glory of life and God bringing up all the lives on the earth. Thus, the merging of the earth and the sea proclaims the love of God to his creatures. Just like a father's care for his son, God, the creator, was ensuring for Man a typical resemblance of God. Man was blessed to see the flowers, grains, plants, fruits and roots. The uninterrupted growth of plants and trees is the basic sight of pleasure around the Man on the earth.

The creation of the gigantic kings of the sky was yet another systematic arrangement by God for man. God never wanted man to be restless and reckless so he appointed the sun to rule over the day and the moon to rule over the night, and also made stars to assist them and to give light to the earth. The shared duty of stars to protect and promote the life on the earth can be read over this activity of God. At the same time the responsibility of man not to disturb the comfortable survival of them in the sky also can be understood here. The big ones and the small ones make the celestial body great and perfect. At the time there nothing unwanted, unimportant and misplaced either on the earth or on the sky. All the lives on the earth are to be protected and promoted, for they are the basic traits of life which are preservers, protectors, and promoters, and of life on the earth.

Vegetation is beautiful but it cannot be enjoyed in the absence of animals and birds. So, all should be protected and respected by all on this earth. The creator wanted all creatures to respect mutually. God created all these creatures and shared with them the responsibility of shouldering the duty of multiplication. He blessed them all and told the creatures that live in the water to reproduce and fill the sea. And he told the birds to increase in number (Gn.1.22) nobody is to curtail the flow of multiplication on the earth and the sea. Any thought or action against it is a great sin. Variety proclaims the glory of good. So, he permitted the variety and multiplicity on the earth.

Then God said and “now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us. They will have power over the fish, the birds and, animals-domestic and wild- large and small” (Gen.1.26) How peaceful and beautiful would be the life of human beings on the earth if they would have read and followed these words. Everywhere on the earth and the skies man is trying to dominate and establish power over others and the nature which resulted in wars and conflicts on the earth. When man began to crave for the power which was not really bestowed with him by the creator, there began restlessness in the mind of man and thus in the world. Everywhere man is trying to overpower each other and others, whereas God has asked to him to have power over the fish, birds and animals and guard the earth. This mutual acceptance of man, nature and God is a source of world and individual peace. “So, God created human beings making them to be like himself. He created them male and female and blessed them and said, have many Children, so that your descendants will have all over the earth and bring it under their control. I am putting you in charge of the fish, the birds and all the wild animals, I have provided all kinds of grains and all kinds of fruits for you to eat; but for all the wild animals and for all the birds; I have provided grass and leafy plants for food” (Gen.1.27.30).

Male and female combination is the beauty of human existence on the earth. There is a vocation in being male or female on the surface of the world. There is a pleasure, pain, giving, taking, growth, stability, fall and durability in being together in spite of being different. It is the call for multiplication. It is

purely godly and natural for man to stay together as man and woman. Any claim or attempt to put male and male or female and female together is anti-god, anti-nature, and unnatural trait and tendency from the part of human beings.? Why does the man dare to do so, not even animals dare to do? Anti –godly and anti-nature and unnatural cannot survive long. So, man must leave any attempt from his part to move on such a path. Though not bringing chain to the freedom of human beings, the field of eating or food habits, can be read between the lines that it is good for human beings to develop a habit of being vegetarian which is good for their long and healthy life. God provided all kinds of grain and all kinds of fruits for you to eat.

It was to give an awareness to man that he is not the center of the universe but only the part of it, that god made man from the soil. Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life giving breath into nostrils and the man began to live (Gn.2.7) It was also to make him aware that he has got nothing to be too much proud of for even the air he breaths or the life he is having is not credit but on the mercy of the creator. Man must always remember that he is fully sustained by God in this world. Therefore, man should take enough care to keep this ecology as pure as possible and the environment be considered as holy as his life.

The man in this universe is to cultivate and guard it. Man has got no other right on the earth other than these two functions. He is a visitor to this world. He has been placed on this universe amidst the vast collection of grains, fruits, trees, rivers etc. He has got the license to enjoy it as much as he can or wants but if he tries to possess it unnecessarily or excessively or to exploit the treasures of the universe he will be punished or suspended from the garden of Eden, or the world itself. He will be driven out of this world without much delay. Then the Lord God placed man in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and guard it. He said to him “you may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree, if you do, you will die the same day (Gen.2.15.18). Even God likes to be called after his name. Man should be able to call everyone by name if possible in

his life. It is a symbol of recognition, intimacy, dearness, mutual respect and freedom. Man named all the plants and animals and objects on the earth. God made man to name all so that he may guard them and protect them and they have a feeling of belongingness and dearness. It is our duty to keep a good chain of relation with all animals, birds, and plants on the earth.

Pain and sorrow are the realities of the world, they are inborn and brought up by man. They are inseparable and unconquerable. The sweat on the forehead of the man and the pain of woman at the time of delivery are different sides of the same coin (Gen.3.16). Weeds and seeds are the two realities of the universe and worldly life. Man cannot get rid of them. He has to learn himself or train himself to adjust with them in his life. Weeds and the thorns are also the symbol of personal agonies of man in this life. He cannot totally avoid them. Very often they are result of his own thoughts words and deeds. So, he has to eat them once a while in his life. (Gen.3.18). Wealth without work is one of the cravings of man. But man, by birth is destined to hard work and wealthy life. Any trend or thought against this is a sin, for man is born to work hard and human body is built up for hard work. Laziness and unnecessary comforts are harmful traits of human body that lead to its destruction (Gen.3.19).

Silence is the beauty of nature and human life and while observing plants, birds, animals, mountains, rivers, sea etc, provide a lot of pleasant feelings to human sense. It plays a big role in human character formation and, without enjoying the silence of the world and the silence within, he cannot grow perfectly. It doesn't mean that man can be alone in this life for a long time. This part of loneliness and enjoying the silence is, to be, being with God himself. There is always a desire for man for being with nature and God. Man is born to be with nature, man and God. There is a blend in this Trinitarian meeting. Any absence of these three elements can cause disturbance in human life. Man cannot bear any defeat caused by other man on this earth. So, he goes for searching some other power which become the source of his defeat. Czeslaw Milosz in his work gives some reading on God's role on human suffering. A man cannot bear the thought

of being crushed by physical compulsion. He deifies the force that rules over him investing it with superhuman trait, omniscient reason with a special mission:

Singing and singing the silent song
Walked and walked here and there.
To the loneliness of London town
With god in silence
He walked here and there. (78)

There is an order in nature which should not be disturbed by human beings. Man has been placed to protect and preserve the natural rhythm and layer, symphony, harmony and sequence of the universe. It is man's duty to maintain the responsible and respectful relationship between animals, birds, plants, the landscape and aqua phenomena, air, the stars and the sky without any harm and disturbance. Man shall not fail to read the language of the environment at any cause. He should be able to maintain the good relationship with the nature and natural elements personally and to care for them dearly. He should develop such a relationship with the animals, birds, plants, trees, wind, etc. by calling their name. Male female relationship should be promoted by man at any cost. Any other distortions would be anti-ecological, anti-natural and anti-human. Man should cultivate a relationship based the reading from the nature. In spite of man's busy life, he should find enough time for rest. One day in a week is a must for human survival. Man should always develop an attitude of hard work. Any wealth without work is anti-nature and anti-human.

Man should stop complaining about others for his failure. He should learn to shoulder up the responsibility of his haves and haven't, dos and don'ts and also the success and failure. He should learn to appreciate other's achievements and good actions. He should be ready to give away his unwelcoming deeds for the nature and society. He should not indulge in any activity that weakens the man-to-man relationship, man-to-nature and man-to-God relationship. Because man is on the earth, he is to guard the life and the universe, to proclaim the glory of the God on the earth and to promote the grandeur of nature, the dwelling place of man forever. Man should deal with the nature in such a way that he is only an integral

part of the universe. It is not nature that lives in him but it is he who lives in nature so he should cultivate such a habit of obedience and loyalty to the nature throughout his life following a sustainable living habit. An eco-aesthetic reading of Genesis provides valuable insights into the interrelatedness of humanity, nature, and the divine. By examining the text through this lens, we can uncover paradigms of harmony and stewardship relevant to contemporary ecological challenges. Genesis invites readers to embrace an eco-aesthetic sensibility, fostering a holistic and ethical relationship with the natural world.

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