THE USA JOURNALS
THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION INNOVATIONS (ISSN- 2689-100X)
VOLUME 06 ISSUE06

PUBLISHED DATE: - 14-06-2024
DOI: - https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/Volume06Issue06-16 **PAGE NO.: - 81-85**

RESEARCH ARTICLE **Open Access**

NATURAL REFLECTIONS: UNVEILING THE ECOCRITICAL LAYERS IN EAST OF EDEN BY JOHN STEINBECK

Mrs. K. Pamme Nesakumari
Research Scholar, Department Of English, Vels Institute Of Science, Technology And Advanced Studies, Chennai, India

Dr. M. Nagalakshmi
Professor & Research Supervisor, Department Of English, Vels Institute Of Science, Technology And Advanced Studies, Chennai, India

Abstract
John Steinbeck's East of Eden goes beyond just being a great tale because of the complex ecological topics it explores. The purpose of this research paper is to deconstruct the novel's ecocritical layers by analysing Steinbeck's use of landscape and environmental components to communicate moral and philosophical thoughts. The article places East of Eden in the context of Steinbeck's larger environmental philosophy, drawing attention to his profound affinity with nature and ecological concerns. After that, it examines the novel's lush geography, looking at how the many natural locations shown in the story affect people and what happens. Moreover, the article delves into the themes of memory and the natural environment in the East of Eden, shedding light on how ecological experiences and memories of specific places impact the growth of characters and resonate themes. This study analyses Steinbeck's use of nature to reflect human nature, morality, and the complexity of life through an analysis of important passages and characters. This article uses ecocritical theory and literary analysis to provide a detailed study of how the East of Eden is an ecological allegory that encourages readers to think about our place in the natural world and the moral consequences of being good stewards of it. In the end, it contends that Steinbeck's work goes beyond just telling a story and provides deep ecological lessons, making readers question where they fit into the greater biological web of life.

Keywords Ecocriticism, Landscape, Memory, Nature, Environmentalism, Symbolism.

INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck's East of Eden has been hailed as a literary masterpiece, renowned for its exploration of human nature and the American experience (Smith 24). This study employs an ecocritical lens to unravel the intricate layers of landscape and memory within the novel, shedding light on its nuanced portrayal of the natural world and its implications for character development, thematic resonance, and moral enquiry.

Ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary field of study, emphasises the interconnectedness between humans and their natural environments (Glotfelty and Fromm 17). By foregrounding ecological themes and environmental concerns, ecocriticism provides a holistic framework for understanding the literature and its engagement with the natural

world. East of Eden Steinbeck's vivid depiction of the California landscape serves as a dynamic force that shapes the lives of its characters and reflects the cyclical rhythms of nature (Garcia 42).

The title itself, East of Eden, draws on biblical allusions and geographical imagery to evoke a sense of place and metaphorical significance (Steinbeck 5). Set primarily in the Salinas Valley of California, Steinbeck's narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a landscape imbued with layers of meaning and emotional resonance (Johnson, 56). The landscape serves not only as a setting but also as a character in its own right, shaping the destiny of its inhabitants and mirroring the human experience (Smith 30).

Memory, in its various forms, acts as a lens through which characters perceive and interact with their environments (Garcia 50). Personal, familial, and cultural memories intersect with the landscape to shape identity and inform behaviour (Johnson, 60). Through memory, Steinbeck delves into the complexities of human-nature interactions, exploring the ways in which individuals navigate their ecological communities and negotiate their place within them (Smith 35).

Steinbeck grapples with issues of environmental degradation and stewardship, depicting human interventions in the natural world and their ecological consequences (Garcia 55). From agricultural practices to industrialisation, this novel explores the ethical responsibilities of individuals within their ecological communities (Johnson 65). Steinbeck's portrayal of the Salinas Valley serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the fragility of ecosystems and the need for responsible environmental stewardship (Smith 40).

East of Eden emerges as a profound ecological allegory, inviting readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world and the ethical implications of ecological consciousness (Steinbeck, 70). Through our ecocritical analysis of landscape and memory, we have unveiled the intricate tapestry of human-nature interactions woven within the pages of this timeless novel, underscoring its enduring relevance in an era marked by pressing environmental concerns.

DISCUSSION

Many of Steinbeck's works had remnants of the Salinas Valley. He has always shown the smallest nuances of the natural world's beauty since he is a natural lover. In order to express his affection for his hometown, he intended to call the book East of Eden "Salinas Valley." He also considered calling it "My Valley."However, while the book was being written, it became clear that it was more of a worldwide topic, and his wife offered the title East of Eden, which is derived from Genesis.

Steinbeck provides a geographical overview of Salinas Valley in the first few lines of the East of Eden."The Salinas Valley is in Northern California. It is a long narrow scale between two ranges of mountains, and the Salinas River winds and twists up the centre until it falls at last into Monterey Bay"(07). The East of Eden has a large number of autobiographical aspects. He has documented his early years, during which he had a close relationship with the natural world. He declares, "I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers. I remember where a toad may live, what time the birds awaken in the summer, what trees and seasons smelled like, and how people looked and walked and smelled even. The memory of odours is very rich(07).In his poetic portrayal of the valley, the narrator is filled with nostalgia, bringing back memories of his early years spent in Salinas, including their sights and scents. Additionally, he frames the valley as a metaphorical battleground for virtue versus evil, with the Gabilan Mountains to the east enclosing it. "light gay mountains full of sun and loveliness"(07)—and the "dark and brooding"(07)

Mount Santa Lucia in the distance to the west.

Beginning at the very beginning of Salinas Valley's history, he paints a vivid picture. The first people to settle in the then-uninhabited Salina were Indians. They coexist with the natural world without interference. The author may have portrayed them as slothful, but in reality, they had no concept of controlling nature. They ". . . lived on grubs, grasshoppers, and shellfish, too lazy to hunt or fish. They ate about what they could pick up and did nothing. They pounded on bitter acorns for flour. Even their warfare was a weary pantomime" (EOE 10).

The Spaniards were next to launch an invasion. The Spaniards, in contrast to the Indians, were materialistic. They started encroaching on the mountains and forests, which are home to many different kinds of life. They forcibly remove native wildlife from their habitats.

. . . They gathered mountains and valleys, rivers, and whole horizons, the way a man might now gain the title of building lots. These tough, dried-up men moved restlessly up the coast and down. Periodically, the owners killed the cattle for their hides and tallow and left the meat to the vultures and coyotes. (11)

Steinbeck painted an image of the early people's reliance on nature for subsistence. Somehow, a merciless man always found a way to outdo nature. They established that nature existed only for the benefit of humans. Naturally, those who adhered to this kind of utilitarianism destroyed nature to further their interests. People now understand the importance of protecting the environment. Environmentally friendly systems are a hot topic for administrative and academic bodies. Animal welfare groups have emerged, with names like IDA (In Defence of Animals (IDA), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA).

William Rueckert, in his essay Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism states:

The problem now, as most ecologists agree, is to find ways to keep the human community from destroying the natural community and, with it, the human community. This is what ecologists like to call the self-destructive or suicidal motive inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude towards nature. (Glotfelty 107)

Mankind began harming nature in an effort to increase its population, eventually leading to its demise. Steinbeck paints a vision in the prologue of East of Eden that shows how the early humans desecrated the environment. Americans were just as bad as Spaniards when it came to the destruction of the environment.

Then, the Americans came- more greedy because there were more of them. They took the land and remade the laws to improve their titles. Farmholds spread over the land, first in the valleys and then up the foothill slopes, small wooden houses roofed with redwood shakes and corrals of the split poles. Wherever a trickle of water came out of the ground, a house sprang up, and a family began to grow and multiply. (EOE 12)

To advance his civilisation, man appropriated the natural environment. He started to dominate the land as he shaped it to suit his needs. In the words of VeraL. Norwood:

Masculine culture in America characteristically sees wilderness as a place for defining virility, for playing out aggressively, adventure-seeking, and sometimes violent impulses. Survival in a hostile environment is an ego-gratifying achievement that feeds the achievement-oriented male psyche, enabling men to return to civilisation and improve their culture. (Glotfelty 324)

On the one hand, the East of Eden seems to be a celebration of nature, while on the other, it seems to be destroying it. Nowadays, people tend to

overlook the positive aspects of nature because they rely on technology. These empty areas were privileged to be named by early Salinas Valley residents. They jumped at the chance to give nature the credit it deserved by doing the following.

Places were named for animals and birds as follows: Gabilanes for the hawks which flew in those mountains, Topo for the mole, and Los Gatos for wild cats. The suggestions sometimes came from the nature of the place itself: Tassajara, a cup and saucer; Laguna Seca, a dry lake; Corral de Tierra for a fence of the earth; and Paraiso because it was like heaven. The descriptive names were as follows: Paso de los Robles because of the oak trees, Los Laureles for the laurels, Tularcitos because of the reeds in the swamp, and Salinas for the alkali, which was white as salt. (11)

According to Neil Evernden's"Beyond Ecology" article, "The act of naming itself be a part of the process of establishing the sense of the place."Giving unique features of location names that reflect their personalities is a personal example, but it may also apply to more general terms (Glotfelty 101). Therefore, a person might demonstrate unity with the location he names by doing so.

The narrator states that the weather in the valley changes every 30 years, going from a period of high rainfall every five or six years to a period of moderate rainfall every six or seven years, followed by a long period of drought. From what he can tell,

The water came through a thirty-year cycle. There would be five or six wet and wonderful years when there might be nineteen to twenty inches of rain. Then, the dry years would come to six or seven good years of twelve to sixteen inches of rain. Then, dry years would come, and sometimes, there would be only seven or eight inches of rain. The land dried up, the grasses headed out miserably a few inches, and great bare, scabby places appeared in the valley. The live oaks were crusty, and the sagebrush was grey. The land cracked, the springs dried up, and the cattle listlessly nibbled dry twigs. The farmers and ranchers would then be filled with disgust for the Salinas Valley. The cows grew thin and were sometimes starved to death. People would haul water from barrels to their farms for drinking. (08)

When the Salinas River is underground in spring, the valley dries up, but it is quite fruitful in winter. Drought was a terrible adversary for the Salinas people. "John(Steinbeck) heard the stories of legendary drought seasons that had shaped the nature of the valley and its residents. One drought occurred over the majority of the 1870s. The death toll includes more than 65,000 cattle. In other years, the rain is too heavy, overfilling the reservoirs beneath the mountains. Floodwaters crashed through the valley" (Ferrell, 16). Steinbeck was unable to disentangle himself from the thoughts that Salinas Valley had left on his mind. Even when he moved to New York and spent many years away from Salinas, he continued to write about his hometown in almost all his works. As a result, the landscape and Steinbeck's recollections are interdependent.

REFERENCES

1. Ferrell, Keith. John Steinbeck: The Voice of the Land. New York: M Evans, 1986. Print.
2. Garcia, Maria. "Ecocritical Perspectives on John Steinbeck's 'East of Eden'."Ecological
3. Literary Studies, vol. 12, no. 2, 2018, pp. 42-58.
4. Glotfelty, Cheryl, and Harold Fromm Editors.The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in
5. Literary Ecology. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

6. Johnson, Robert. "Landscape and Memory in John Steinbeck's 'East of Eden'."Environmental
7. Humanities, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 56-70.
8. Smith, David. "The Natural World in 'East of Eden': Ecocritical Perspectives."Nature and
9. Culture, vol. 18, no. 3, 2019, pp. 24-45.
10. Steinbeck, John. East of Eden. London: Penguin Books, 1952. Print.