

A Brief Discussion on Human/Nature Relationship

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Abstract

No one would reject the fact that human has been always completely depending on nature for all his needs. However in modern days, when industry has spread its influence on human life, human gradually became alienated from nature. This alienation was felt so threatening by scholars that they have started an attempt to revive human's connection to nature. To cooperate with these attempts, this paper is going to have a precise look at human/nature relationship. It tries to elucidates the history of this relationship, shed light on the reason of human's alienation with nature, and discusses the attempts for a reconciliation between human and nature. The paper concludes its discussion by having a subtle and deeper look at human's relationship with nature in order to illuminate the positive psychological aspect of human/nature relationship hence to make human aware about the importance and benefits of an intimate connection with nature.

Keywords: Human/Nature relationship, Alienation, Reconciliation, Psychological Benefit

1. Introduction

No one would reject the fact that human has been completely depending on nature right from the moment that Adam in companion of Ave have putted their foot on this planet. Human has been depended on nature for all his/her needs hence there had been a deep connection between human and nature. However in modern days, when industry has spread its influence on human life mainly after industrial revolution, this connection has been weakened. Human was leading to depend on man-made industry in industrialized cities rather than pure nature; hence he had been gradually alienated from nature. This alienation was felt so threatening by scholars of different fields such as psychology, philosophy, environmental sciences, literature etc, that they have started an attempt to revive human's connection to nature. To cooperate with those attempts, this paper is going to have a precise look at human/nature relationship. The discussion will start in following section through a look at the background of human/nature relationship to elucidate the history of this relationship. Then the paper will shed light on the reason of human's alienation with nature, and discusses the attempts for reconciliation between human and nature. The paper concludes its discussion by having a subtle and deeper look at human's relationship with nature in order to illuminate the positive psychological aspect of human/nature relationship, hence to make human aware about the importance and benefits of an intimate connection with nature.

2. Human and Nature in History

Stephan Kaplan starts his *The Restorative Environment* with the claim that "early human beings were a part of nature" (134). No one would reject the fact that human have been completely dependent on nature throughout the history of his life on the Earth, actually "people have a fundamental physical, emotional, and intellectual dependence on nature" (Kellert 7). So we can confidently declare that the beginning of the history of the relation of human and nature is completely match to the beginning of human's history on the Earth planet, in the words of Raymond Williams, "the idea of nature contains.... an extraordinary amount of human history" (67).

Mythologies of different cultures are without exceptions severely in connection with nature and we can declare nature is everything in all mythologies, most of gods and goddess are from nature or the owner of natural power, and actually it is nature which gives meaning to them. Even different religious are in close connection to nature; human always has found and felt his/her creator more straightly and easier when he/she looks for him in nature, actually "God is the first absolute, but nature is His minister and deputy" (Williams 69).

Even the holy books of Quran and Bible always recommends human to look to nature if he/she is looking for being close to the great GOD. Lynn White also confirms:

Since God had made nature, nature also must reveal the divine mentality. The religious study of nature for the better understanding of God was known as natural theology. In the early Church, and always in the Greek East, nature was conceived primarily as a symbolic system through which God speaks to men. (11)

Humans connection with nature during the history can be seen in both kind of societies, either hunter-gatherer societies; which appears around 40000 years ago and in which the people provide their need and food from wild plant and animal, or the agrarian societies; which appears about 10000 years ago and don't depend on the wild but domestic land and agriculture for its need. According to Edward Wilson, "for more than 99 percent of human history people have lived in hunter-gatherer bands totally and intimately involved with other organisms" (32). Even when human was civilized and has come into the city he/she has been again dependent on nature through agriculture which has played an important role in developing the civilizations. Actually the domestication of wild plants and animals has given opportunity to human for leaving hunter-gatherer society and establishing civilization. Inside the city human was again in close relation to nature while his/her main occupation was agricultural. But suddenly something has happened which gradually has cut this relationship and made a gap between human and the natural environment, the enemy of that nice relationship was the industrial revolution.

3. Alienation and Reconciliation

By the black hands of industrial revolution most of the rural areas have been urbanized. After industrial revolution, everything surrounding human being was human-made; buildings, railways, roads, cars, and etc all take human away from nature. Technological and industrial advances like TV, telephone, mobile, computer, and internet have made human busy with facilities so his/her intimate relationship with nature was forgotten. And as was mentioned, postmodernity also put woods in the fire of human alienation from nature. As Roderick Nash states "Civilization severed the web of life as humans distanced themselves from the rest of nature. Behind fenced pastures, village walls and, later gated condominiums, it was hard to imagine other living things as brothers or nature as sacred" (xii-xiii).

While nature for millions of years had been the source of all physical and spiritual need of human, But according to Kaplan, "over the millennia the gulf between humanity and the natural environment has steadily widened. Now, however, there is growing concern that this gulf has become too great, that we have strayed too far for our own good" (134). Through the changes that industrial revolution has brought in human life and as a result of urbanization, a gap or better to say a deep gap was flourished between human and nature, because "urbanization in its original form can be seen as disruptive, even exclusive, of spontaneous wildlife" (Gogniat 12), therefore nature has lost its importance, and human became alienated from nature.

So the role of nature has changed and became something created to be extracted for human physical welfare; according to White, "Man's relation to the soil was profoundly changed. Formerly man had been part of nature; now he was the exploiter on nature" (8). So for the development of civilization, nature was greatly destructed and kept away as something out there. Human busy with his/her hand made industry, rarely has experienced the pure nature which has been the source of his/her psychological growth and tranquility during the history. Industry although has brought human a kind of comfort but let me say it not only has had no benefit for human's psyche, has had bad effects on it. Kaplan quoted from Kline an story "told by an Amish farmer" which sweetly discuss the advantages of GOD-created horse over industry-made tractor, I felt is sweet to mention here to prove that how natural creature of GOD seek our health both physical and spiritual much better than industrial products:

Because God didn't create the horse with headlights, we don't work nights... Owning a tractor, by contrast, would lead to a powerful temptation to plow after dark. He also pointed out that the horses need to rest after a morning of work. As a result the family could assemble for lunch and a rest. Again, owning a tractor would have made it tempting to eliminate this important midday respite. (136)

So, does a farmer who take benefit from natural creature would live better and healthier or a farmer who use industrial inventions? I can confidently declare that psychic unhappiness and diseases like depression, stress, and even suicide are the gifts of industry for human, and the only reason is the industries potential for detaching human from natural environment which is the source of psychic growth and transformation.

As was discussed in previous parts, human alienated from nature, exhausted from this absence of nature in his/her life or in other words missed his/her old intimate friends seeks to revive his relationship to nature specially to wilderness, for example wilderness programs were flourished especially in recent years to take people into wilderness for using its benefits. Thomas Lowry declares "man in his natural state was happy, healthy and virtuous; man's trouble derived from the spoiling and corruption brought by civilization" (xiv). So human returns back to nature by having mountaineering, hiking, going to beaches and jungle surveys, even in urban areas people try to go zoos and parks to remain in contact with nature. Ulrich and Parson quote from Shepard that "the earliest urban peoples went to considerable lengths to maintain some direct contact with nature" they continue to claim that "The beliefs that contacts with trees, grass, and flowers foster psychological well-being and help reduce the stresses of urban living seem to be as old as urbanization itself" (94).

So it is the spiritual and psychological benefits of nature which makes it important for human, according to Charlene Browne, "landscaped grounds and the inclusion of natural elements... may play a role in promoting psychological, social, and physical well-being among residents" (78). Kellert also confirms that human should be aware of the fact that the quality of life is higher when it is in relation with nature since it offers "the potential for emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually meaningful lives" (217). hence one of the salient benefits of nature is its positive effects on human's psyche and sense of self to help him/her in reach a better recognition of him/herself.

4. The Psychological Side of Human/Nature Relationship

According to Santostefano, "most persons believe nature provides children and adults with stimulation that is pleasurable, promotes a sense of well-being, and fosters positive, psychological development" (514). Nature has always been thought to be the best place in which human psyche can feel the best, "experiences with environments having vegetation or other nature should tend to have positive effects on psychological and physiological well-being" (Ulrich and Parson95).

Actually the psychological connection of human to nature and the relation which my study is going to investigate between women and wilderness is that kind of "immersion". Being "immersed" with something means that one should completely be devoted to that, in other words one should accept to devote everything for the sake of that. In the case of "immersion" with nature, it means to devote our energy, time and even money to being "immersed" with nature for days or even months, in the case of wilderness even it may need to endanger our life, as Gary Snyder asserts, if one "quest into an archetypal wilderness that is dangerous", he/she may "never see home again" (191-192).

Actually the psychological effect which nature could has on human would be the strongest one because it is through his/her psyche that human feel a connection to nature; according to Harold Searles, the natural environment is "one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological existence" (qtd in Saari 7). Actually the natural environment has a quality based on which human's psyche find itself in a live vast space, so this quality can arouse a sense of self through which human can know his/her place in this world much better which can be leaded to his/her knowing of the self or identity.

Some believes that there is a state of human self, which will only be awakened through human's connection to natural environment. David McCullough states that in nature "you get a spiritual well-being that you can get no other way" (174). So nature may have a unique effect on human especially in these modern days, Cathy Johnson confirms this claim while writing that "we went to the woods when we were bereaved or depressed or unable to deal with the pressure" (qtd in Glassman 17). According to Frederick Olmsted, nature "employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system" (qtd in Ulrich and Parson95). So nature can bring a "tranquility and rest to the mind" to think about our place and our self in this world.

In recent year's nature's role as a therapeutic for human is generally accepted and it is well known as a place where human can discover him/herself, it is widely known as a place of self-discovering. Among different kinds of nature, especially wilderness is the most appropriate place of self-discovering. Wilderness has strongest effect because of its purity, and because human there is completely in the hand of nature and out of control. Especially in the case of identity and nature, wilderness is a more appropriate space of transformation, because it is the purest and wildest nature which will definitely has stronger effect on human.

By providing opportunity for experiencing physical and spiritual challenges, wilderness would help human to discover his/her real abilities hence to recognize their true self.

5. Conclusion

To put it all together, it can be said that human have a deep connection to nature, and although this connection has been weakened by human's gradual dependence on industry, human's physical and psychological essential need to nature has not been weakened at all. Nature has been the source of psychological well-being and physical health for human from the beginning of his existence on the planet Earth. Hence there had been a strong and deep relationship between human and nature. But the industrialization and urbanization has gradually kept human away from his main home and caused a big gap in human's relationship with nature. Thus, human has been alienated from nature, and such an alienation can be called the main reason of all his physical and especially psychological disorders. But in recent years as this alienation and separation has been felt threatening both for human and nature, the attempts has been started for reconciliation between human and nature, a reconciliation which can bring a psychological well-being for human in these years of human degradation.

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