

The Concept of Dynamic Objectivity in Mildred D. Taylor's "Song of the Trees"

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Abstract

From time immemorial, human beings have been living together with nature and utilizing the boundless gifts offered by nature. At present, human beings have become so cruel as to be ungrateful for nature and are destroying it for their selfish needs, forgetting that their actions could result in a dystopian world. Understanding the concept of "Dynamic Objectivity" is much needed to safe guard nature in the contemporary era. Dynamic objectivity means the concept of looking at nature not as a fixed entity, but as a living subject with full of life and energy. The short story "Song of the Trees" by Mildred. D Taylor showcases dynamic objectivity with the help of the Logan family, who strive hard to save the trees from white lumberman Andersen. This paper aims to establish the relationship between the short story "Song of the Trees" and the concept of dynamic objectivity.

Keywords: Eco-Literature, Dynamic Objectivity, Inert Matter, Empathy, Commonality .

Nature has always offered its best to human beings. Human beings try to find solace in nature and often they consider nature as their comfort zone, but the bitter reality is that human beings fail to embrace and safeguard nature. They wish to receive the gifts offered by nature, but in return, nature is getting destroyed by human activities. The ruthless acts of human beings are the root cause of global warming, soil erosion, landslides, drought, and other natural calamities. Human beings are not ready to understand that rapid increase in temperature can result in a dystopian world and could affect the future generation. The "Song of the Trees" by Mildred D. Taylor serves as a masterpiece in making the materialistic world understand the essence of safeguarding nature. The short story "Song of the Trees" by Mildred D. Taylor, showcases how a little girl's love for trees made herself and her family members to fight against the white lumberman in Mississippi during the Great Depression.

Mildred D. Taylor is an African American author famously known for her short stories about the Logan family. Taylor was born in Mississippi in the year 1943, and her short stories deal with the history of Afro -Americans. The "Song of the Trees" is a prominent

work in Logan Family Saga and serves as a prequel to the Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, (1976), which received the Newbery Medal and was a finalist for the National Book Award. The “Song of the Trees”, portrays how Logan family tries to embrace nature. Eight- year- old Cassie, the daughter of David Logan, believes that trees can speak and respond like human beings. Cassie’s mother and her elder brother Stacey try to bring back David to stop Andersen, the white lumberman from cutting down trees on Big Ma’s (Cassie’s grandmother) land. The relationship the family members have with the trees, especially the relationship between Cassie and the trees proves the idea of treating nature not as a fixed one, but giving a metaphorical status as a speaking entity. This concept of conceiving nature more than an inert matter is called dynamic objectivity. This research paper aims to demonstrate the elements in “Song of the Trees”, which act as a driving force to establish dynamic objectivity.

In the essay “Ecofeminist Literary Criticism”, Gretchen T. Legler has discussed about dynamic objectivity to prove that nature is full of life and energy. Legler mentions about Evelyn Fox Keller, an American philosopher, feminist and historian of science who has contributed to a better understanding of dynamic objectivity. According to Keller, the commonality between mind and nature is necessary to understand nature. In Reflections on Gender and Science, Keller defines dynamic objectivity as, Dynamic objectivity aims at a form of knowledge that grants to the world around us its independent integrity but does so in a way that remain cognizant of, indeed relies on, our connectivity with that world. In this, dynamic objectivity is not unlike empathy a form of knowledge of other persons that draws explicitly on the commonality of feelings and experience in order to enrich one’s understanding of another in his or her own right. (117)

The concept of dynamic objectivity allows people to empathise with fellow beings and to lead a life in harmony. In eco- literature dynamic objectivity means the objective of human beings not visualising nature as a fixed or inanimate thing, but looking at nature as a living subject. Nature has energy and continuously the energy evolves to create something new. In the “Song of the Trees”, Cassie’s attitude towards trees expresses dynamic objectivity. Cassie’s articulated kinship with the trees on Big Ma’s land shows her eco- friendly nature. Stacey, Cassie’s elder brother, many times tries to make Cassie believe that trees cannot respond or talk, whereas Cassie continuously tries to communicate with the trees.

Cassie says, “Good morning, Mr. Trees”, I shouted. They answered me with a soft, swooshing sound” (Taylor). Cassie’s way of expressing her morning wishes to the trees seems very unique. The word “Mr.” signifies a male gender; normally people use “Mr.” or “Mrs.” as sign of respect and to address a person in an official way. So, Cassie using the word Mr. to wake up the trees might seem weird. However scientifically, trees are living beings and they do reproduce. Cassie is a small girl to understand all these scientific concepts, but she firmly believes that trees can understand human language as well as her inner feelings and emotions.

Cassie cannot bear the sight of trees being down by the white lumbermen. After witnessing the horrible sight of white lumbermen cutting down the trees, Cassie feels, “But now they would sing no more. They lay forever silent upon the ground. Those trees that remained standing were like defeated warriors mourning their fallen dead” (Taylor). Cassie empathizes for the dead trees and she compares the trees to brave warriors who have lost the war after unimaginable struggles. Cassie’s relationship with the trees seems divine and authentic. Cassie is not old enough to understand that saving trees could bring rainfall or can create a utopian world. Cassie can be compared to the girl in the poem “It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free” by William Wordsworth, who is known for her unconscious sympathy and her forever communion with nature. Like the little girl in the poem, Cassie is unconscious about her self-righteousness. Cassie’s care and concern for the trees, treating trees as human beings, signifies dynamic objectivity.

Cassie's mother, Mary who is suffering from an illness denies the offer of Andersen in order save the trees on Big Ma's land. Mary knows that she needs money for her treatment, but she feels saving the trees is more important than saving her own life. Marie sends Cassie to bring back David from his work place to fight against Andersen and his crew. David prohibits the white men from cutting down trees, and he saves the trees on Big Ma's land.

Everyone in the Logan family, even the little ones, strives hard to safeguard the trees on Big Ma's land. The Logan family members could have accepted the money from Andersen and allowed him to cut down the trees. If they had done this, they might have lead a sophisticated life, but Logan family's care and concern towards nature made them to decline the offer and they safeguarded the trees. The attitude of looking at the trees as their family members and believing that trees have commonality with human beings symbolises dynamic objectivity.

Day by day, nature is getting deteriorated due to various scientific advancements. Misusing the technology and overusing machineries and chemical compounds can ruin nature. In the present situation, human beings cannot live without technology. Human beings use the products offered by nature to lead a luxurious life. Again and again, they are ready to the receive the gifts from nature rather than restoring by various acts like planting trees, reducing the use of chlorofluorocarbons, reducing the use of products made from wood, avoiding mixing of chemical compounds with water bodies, etc. In this contemporary period, it is difficult to completely avoid the lifestyle that could affect nature; therefore to some extent the concept of dynamic objectivity should be understood and utilised to safeguard nature. Dynamic objectivity allows human beings to empathise with fellow beings and it could build a constructive world.

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