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ONENESS OF LIFE IN A SIMPLE PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Chanabasappa Sidramappa Mulage

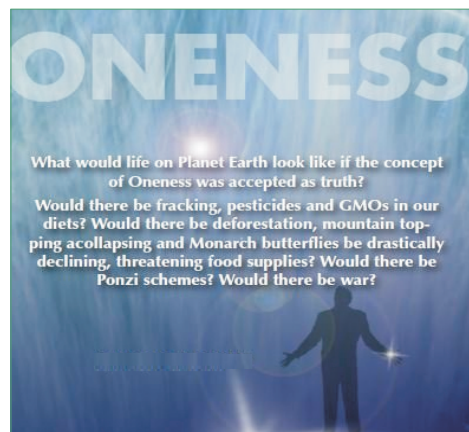
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ABSTRACT

A *Simple Philosophy, a letter written by Seathl, the chief of the Native American Suquamish tribe in 1854 to Franklin Pierce, the then President of United States of America is widely hailed as an important piece of literature on nature. Chief Seathl expresses various eco-concerns*



in it and appeals to the white man to preserve nature as there is oneness of life i.e. the mother earth is a sort of an intricate web and all living beings on it are inter-related. That the views expressed in the letter by Chief Seathl were ahead of his time has been proved by today's various environmental problems like

global warming, thinning of ozone layer, many kinds of pollution, etc. The letter carries home the message that all things – living and non-living – are created by the same God who loves them all equally. Therefore, if you cause harm to one, God punishes you as you have posed danger to the whole of His creation for it is a kind of intricate web. The present paper attempts to analyse and interpret the letter to bring out the universal message in it, viz the oneness of life. It also tries to prove the relevance of the message today.

KEYWORDS : *Man, nature, mother earth, oneness of life, symbiotic relationship.*

INTRODUCTION

A Simple Philosophy, a letter written by Seathl, the chief of the Native American Suquamish tribe in 1854 to Franklin Pierce, the then President of United States of America, is widely considered to be an important piece of literature on nature. It represents the oneness of life, the symbiotic relationship of man with other creatures in nature. Like eco-critics, Chief Seathl believes in the

reciprocal relationship of man and nature, and warns man, especially white man of his doom if he causes damage to nature i.e. the mother earth. The letter is a plea to man, especially white man who is robbing the mother earth for his greed to conserve nature and have a peaceful and happy coexistence with other living beings who too are the children of the mother earth.

Symbiotic Relationship of Man with Other Living Beings in *A Simple Philosophy* : *A Simple Philosophy* is a letter written by Seathl, the chief of the Native American Suquamish tribe in 1854 to Franklin Pierce, the then President of United States of America. Though the letter is addressed to the President, in particular and the white Americans, in general, the message it gives is universal in terms of the eco-concerns expressed in it.

The Native American tribes had been living in peace and harmony with nature before the white Europeans migrated to the US and started confiscating their land. Before it actually happened the aborigines of America had never thought in their remotest dream that such thing would befall them. They could never imagine of buying or selling of the land for they loved it as their mother. Therefore, Chief Seathl asks the white people:

How can you buy or sell the sky – the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. We do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us?

Nature was the God for the Native American tribes and therefore everything in nature was sacred. That is what Chief Seathl says:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.

The aborigines were more civilized and spiritually more advanced than the white Americans for they knew full well that there is oneness in nature, nay in the whole cosmos. They knew and believed in the interdependence of all creatures and lived accordingly respecting the tiniest creature. They lived according to the laws of nature and so happy and contented, though not developed in materialistic sense. They knew the most important and essential art as to how to make peace with the nature in whose lap and company they lived. They were not greedy; instead they took from nature what was needed, not a bit more than that and in return they took care of nature and treated the earth and everything on it as their brother. However, the white man's appetite was unquenchable. About it, Chief Seathl says:

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on.

The white man in America was an outsider and so had neither liking nor love for the land unlike the Native Americans. Moreover, he was born and brought up in a city and therefore did not have any attachment with nature; he loved and lived in a city. On the other hand for the Red Indian life in a city was no life at all, he loved to live in nature. About this difference in likes, attitudes and lifestyles of the white man and the Red Indian, Chief Seathl writes in the letter:

The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. ... There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the leaves of spring or the rustle of insect wings. ... the clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lovely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? The Indian prefers soft sound of the wind itself cleansed by the mid-day rain, or scented with pine. The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath – the beasts, the trees, and man. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the smell.

In a broader sense, the white man stands for all the materialistic people who are greedy and

robbing nature to satiate their insatiable greed. These people are causing all kinds of pollution for their narrow interests, thereby harming all living beings. Mahatma Gandhi once said: "There is enough in the world for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed". The red man lived according to these words of Gandhi.

Tukaram, a great saint who lived in Maharashtra, India in the seventeenth century valued nature like Chief Seathl. There are many similarities in their views about nature. Saint Tukaram in one of his *abhangas* (devotional poems) calls nature his relative and states that in the solitude of nature there is only happiness. He further says that while in the company of nature one is away from evil thoughts and deeds; here one is unaffected by the evil things of the world. According to Saint Tukaram nature helps us to introspect, to speak with ourselves and the God and thereby taking us near Him. Thus, nature helps us achieve salvation by keeping us away from the evil influences of the worldly matters and by making us think of and pray the God. In this way, Tukaram speaks of the benefits of the company of nature.

Shakespeare's plays, especially comedies have been studied from the perspective of the good effect of nature on the lives of the characters. According to such studies, there are numerous problems in the lives of major characters, when they are living in a town; however, when they go to nature or forced to seek refuge in nature, all of their problems are resolved. Duke Senior in Scene 1 of Act 2 in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* says:

Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
 Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
 Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
 More free from peril than the envious court?
 Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
 The seasons' difference, as the icy fang
 And churlish chiding of the winter's wind,
 Which, when it bites and blows upon my body,
 Even till I shrink with cold, I smile and say,
 "This is no flattery. These are counselors
 That feelingly persuade me what I am."
 Sweet are the uses of adversity,
 Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
 Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.
 And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
 Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
 Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

Here Shakespeare's seems to imply that a human being comes to know about his true self only in the company of nature. Nature helps man come out of the illusion of his worldly possessions. It helps him to realize his true self and the blessings of the God thus taking him near Him. Like Shakespeare and Saint Tukaram, Chief Seathl too found 'tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything'. For him and his people earth is mother and everything on the mother earth is sacred.

CONCLUSION:

Through his letter Chief Seathl pleads man to conserve nature and not destroy it wherein lies his good. He makes us see the oneness of nature and the reciprocal, symbiotic relationship of man with nature and its creatures. The philosophy of Chief Seathl is really simple for the simple, poor people living in the lap of nature who are truly civilized as they live by this philosophy. However, this philosophy is very much difficult for the white man who represents us all who live in concrete jungle, the so called civilized people; in fact we do not want to understand this simple philosophy. However, it would not be wrong to say that it is high time we woke up and realized the importance of the message Chief Seathl gives in his letter *A Simple Philosophy* and resolved to live according to the message in order to save the mother earth, man and her other children. It will be the best gift to our future generations. Otherwise, we ourselves will be responsible for the doom of humankind.

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