

Citation: Farooq, S. A., Akram, A., & Nawaz, A. (2021). Grappling with Environmental Crisis: An Eco-critical Study of Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*. *Global Language Review*, VI(II), 276-287. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021\(VI-II\).29](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(VI-II).29)



Grappling with Environmental Crisis: An Eco-critical Study of Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*

Sardar Ahmad Farooq *

Amara Akram †

Arshad Nawaz ‡

Abstract

The present paper examines the exploitation of nature and its effect on Native Americans, who not only identify themselves with nature but also have a life-sharing bond of interdependence with it. The European colonisation not only displaced the Native Americans from their homeland but also exploited their resources. The destructive activities of the European colonizers wreaked a rift between Native Americans and their environment. Keeping these issues in view, Momaday depicts in House Made of Dawn the importance of restoring the Native Americans' lost identity by challenging the Euro-Americans' relegation of nature and Native Americans to a lower stratum to be destroyed and dominated. To restore his lost identity and peace of mind, Abel, the protagonist of the novel comes back to the natural world of his forefathers from the exploitative European environment. The research findings indicate the selected novel as a redressing measure to the existing environmental problems and advocates the cause of embracing the lost socio-cultural values of the Natives' ancestors that are rooted in nature.

Key Words: Eco-criticism, Restoration, Native Americanism, Euro-Americanism

Introduction

Since the rise of science, there has been an urge to make progress which continues to be detrimental to the survival of the natural environment and the mutual co-existence of all beings. Industrialization and scientific development have shown a reckless disregard for nature. "The scientific revolution was one cause of the death of nature; the rise of industrial capitalism was another" (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010, p. 45). The environmental crisis has always been a great problem for Native Americans since the European colonization. The Native Americans' concept of nature is based on a clear understanding and appreciation of nature. Their life and the natural world are interconnected in a delicate manner. For

them, "the mother earth, the four-legged and wings of the air appear to be relatives" (Neihardt, 2000, p. 55). They regard the earth with great veneration and call it mother. They believe that being the progeny of the single mother earth, human and non-human beings are all like family members. They are interlinked and cannot lead a life in isolation. Before the arrival of Europeans to the Americas, millions of people had been living on the American continent in perfect harmony with nature. "The Chippewa Native name Anishinabe or Anishinaabe (pronounced ah-nish-ih-NAH-bey), meaning "first people," is becoming widely used" (Waldman, 2006, p. 66). Native Americans had long been practicing farming

* PhD, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.

† MPhil, Riphah International University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Lecturer, Department of English, Government College University Faisalabad, Sub Campus Hafizabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: Arshadjappa@gmail.com

and used plants and herbs for medicinal purposes. Nature is an animate being for them and turns out to be more important when it becomes a part of their religion. They perform religious ceremonies and traditional rituals at the natural sites.

Native Americans' beliefs and norms are either overlooked or misrepresented, and the natural land is exploited by the lustful colonizers. "The first colonization of the area was by Don Juan de Onate, who mounted an expedition northward from New Mexico to look for mines and to Christianize the Indians. He brought with him 400 colonists, 10 Franciscan missionaries, 7,000 head of cattle, sheep, and horses, and founded the first Spanish colony in New Mexico" ([Merchant, 2002, p. 10](#)). The European settlers treated Native Americans brutally and destroyed their natural environment. Such unbridled exploitation resulted in fatal diseases and poverty. "Disease, starvation, and war had greatly reduced the numbers in these native cultures" ([McAvoy, 2002, p. 392](#)). There is a strong connection between the "marginalization and impoverishment of human communities and exploitation and degradation of the environment" ([Adamson, 1958, p. 16](#)). The natural world is transformed into industrial or urban sites, and Native Americans are displaced from the natural landscape to the reservation. On the one hand, the reservation is a deserted area where they cannot perform their religious ceremonies and cultural rituals; on the other hand, they suffer from spiritual sterility and "higher rates of disease and illness" ([U.S. Commission, 2003, p.ix](#)) in their new unnatural surroundings. Native Americans' harmonious relationship with nature has been disturbed, resulting in their social and environmental subordination. Environmental injustice "relies on keeping out of sight and out of mind the harm being done to the bodies of poor women and children and the poisoning of their local environments" ([Adamson et al, 2002, p. 208](#)). This injustice is manifested through the misuse of human and non-human life coupled with the inequitable distribution of the natural resources between the European and Native Americans. The present research work is an attempt to analyze the problems of Native Americans in relation to the loss of the natural world and highlights the significance of restoring their misrepresented environmental ethics and cultural norms.

Literature Review

Concern about the environment over the past quarter of a century has become a hot topic in literary studies. With the advancement of human civilization, the depletion of natural resources also continues as forestland has been exploited to run the wheel of industrialization. The march of human development has also caused a colossal change in the climate. Rudimentary concepts of the theory grew in the 1960s and the 1970s: "As a separate movement or school of literary criticism, ecocriticism started developing in the 1990s" ([Tošić, 2006, p. 43](#)). With the publication of Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* in 1996, Ecocriticism gained depth and recognition amongst the critics and academics. With the publications of literary critics of the twentieth century, such as Lawrence Buell and Joni Adamson, ecocriticism gradually received acceptance and professional legitimacy.

Lawrence Buell categorized the development of ecocriticism into three 'waves' (as cited in [Weidner, 2009, p. 195](#)), referring to different stages of ecocriticism. Scott Slovic also uses the word "Waves" (2010, p. 4) with reference to ecocriticism. The first wave of ecocriticism developed in the 1970s and the 1980s and transformed into a distinct school of literary criticism in the 1990s. The first wave ecocriticism laid emphasis on the presentation of the physical world rather than the human world: "first wave" environmental criticism concerns itself with nature writing and conservation-oriented environmentalism" ([Adamson, 2010, p. 12](#)). The goal of ecocritics was to "preserve the 'biotic community'" ([Coupe, 2000, p. 4](#)). The first wave of ecocriticism primarily disregards the effects of the relationship between environmental and social issues. It offers a narrow view of nature; it exclusively depicts the pastoral dimension and wilderness that does not include urban areas. The second wave of ecocriticism "covers multiple landscapes, cityscapes, and mindscapes, demonstrating how constructions of nature have profound cultural, political, social and environmental impacts" ([Campbell, 2010, p. 6](#)). From the perspective of the second wave of ecocriticism, a text is analyzed to reveal the fact that the destruction of the environment directly affects human life. The

third phase of ecocriticism emerged in 2000, and it is still in a developmental stage. Slovic identifies the following characteristics of the third wave of ecocriticism: "Eco-cosmopolitanism', 'rooted cosmopolitanism', 'the global soul', and 'translocality'... post-national and post-ethnic visions of the human experience of the environment...eco-feminism...and the concept of 'animality'" (2010, p. 7). The third wave of ecocriticism develops a relationship between nature and culture, whereas nature has always been looked at as an entity largely victimized by human society. Eco-cosmopolitanism, the applied eco-critical approach, is based on the accepted idea of both the second and third waves of ecocriticism that examines the problem of the rapidly deteriorating situation of the environment "by the increasing awareness that the environmental problems the world now faces are quite unaware of national and cultural boundaries" (Buell, 2005, pp. 81-82). The theory of eco-cosmopolitanism transcends the limitations of a particular culture or nation in the favour of the global concept of attachment. The concept of eco-cosmopolitanism reduces the boundaries and barriers created by a man who is a part of the whole ecosystem.

Native Americans' survival is dependent on the faith in the beliefs of their ancestors that human and non-human beings are interdependent and interlinked. They earn their modest living from herding cattle: "Cattle had become a major subsistence resource, incorporating some of the symbolic meanings of older parallel activities and resources" (Lewis, 1994, p. 67). These animals are not only a source of food for them but also play the role of a 'messenger' and 'assistant' (Silko, 1977, p.182). It is because of their love for the animals that, after hunting, Tayo offers prayers and pays regard to the sacrificial deer (Silko, 1977, p.46). Likewise, after killing the bear, Francesco smears his body with the blood of the bear and shouts to call his fellows. The tribal people congregate, and Francesco "gave them strips of the bear's flesh, which they wrapped around the barrels of their guns. And soon the women came with switches, and they spoke to the bear" (Momaday, 1968, pp. 183-184). Francesco shows reverence to the bear by performing sacrificial rituals to appease its spirit and apologies to the bear for

taking its life. The height of mutuality between humans and animals is that the protagonist of *The Ancient Child* is transformed into a bear. The said transformation ultimately leads to the restoration of his relationship with mother earth. Set is "restored to well-being" (Momaday, 1990, p.120) by his sudden transformation into the bear. Through the power of the bear, Set is cured, and he rediscovers his identity as well as develops a harmonious relationship with his surrounding environment. This transfusion of power through sacred tales into Set's body treats him physically as well as spiritually and enables him to get strength from his native land and the bear's paw medicine. The Native Americans' beliefs in nature are imbued with a sacred power based on the conviction: "God's mystery can be found everywhere-the in early morning mist, the rising sun, in the dense forests, on the vast plains, under star-filled skies, and beneath the changing phases of the moon. For the Natives, regardless of tribe, spirituality cannot be separated from society or from any aspect of life" (Temple & Velie, 2007, p. 342).

Since European colonization, Native Americans have been facing different environmental problems. They have drifted out of their homeland; they have been "distilled, dissuaded, disbanded, dug up..." (Howe & Gordon, 1999, p. 117). The colonizers have exploited the natural resources of the Native Americans, seized their homeland, and they are also forced to abandon their natural way of life. Euro-Americans are bent on wiping out native Americans' identity, and they are convinced that their tribal beliefs are dead. The ecological concept of Native Americans is not analogous to the European ideology that perceives "nature instrumentally" (Stoll, 2014, p. 87) and exploit it for materialistic purpose. The Natives have a cosmological philosophy that man and his physical environment are inseparable. They have a profoundly ethical relationship with mother earth and believe in "the principle of the 'right' of all individuals to be protected from environmental degradation" (Bullard, 2005, p. 34). The predominant feature of human beings is their obligation to other creatures of the planet. Owing to such a strong relationship with nature, they also have robust ties with their ancestors. Because of their love of the mother earth, they feel a deep regard for their ancestors who laid the foundation of the tradition

deeming all the natural entities the parts of one whole and set the pattern for their future generations.

In his eco-critical analysis of *House Made of Dawn*, Cheng Yueh-Chang observes, "It is because of the encroachment of the white colonizers that not merely inflicts the ecological disaster but change the contour of their land" (p. 253). The Native American concept of land is shattered with the arrival of the colonizers. Chang examines in "Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* tank machine that ran through the land...represented such intrusion of the mechanical forces into the natural world, ravaging the land destroying the peace of nature" (1968, p. 252). Momaday portrays the environmental disaster caused by growing industry and the intrusion of the machine. In this mechanized environment, Abel, the protagonist of *House Made of Dawn*, for instance, "found himself excluded and secluded because he was not able to see the mountain as it stood so far" (Chang, p. 255). Abel suffers in a hostile urban environment, as he is alienated from the natural world. From this perspective, Nicholas O. Warner observes, "*House Made of Dawn* often underscores the negative themes of alienation and the racial obliteration of the American Indian" (1968, p. 21). According to J. G. Ravi Kumar, in *House Made of Dawn* "Modern man's plight, his disturbed relationship to nature is illustrated by an Indian [the protagonist of the novel, Abel]" (2014 pp. 160-61). Abel wanders helplessly in a European environment due to his alienation from the world of his forefathers which is closely linked to nature. In the depiction of the Native Americans' tribal religion and culture *House Made of Dawn* raises the issue of the colonization of the Natives' motherland. Momaday illustrates not only a quest for the Native Americans' identity that involves journeying through geographic and psychic terrains but also implies that self-identity lies in the shadows of the past and infusion of nature.

Theoretical Framework and Research Method

This paper analyses *House Made of Dawn* from the perspective of Lawrence Buell's eco-critical approach of eco-cosmopolitanism. According to Lawrence Buell, "Eco-cosmopolitanism develops a spirit of cooperation and commitment with nature and physical environment" (Berry, 1972, p. 252). It presents human beings and the natural environment

as interdependent and mutually constitutive. In such a mutual relationship between man and his environment boundaries get erased and cultures merge up. Man is considered a citizen of the planet or world ecosystem. It is a movement towards a planetary perspective and globalization in ecocriticism that constructs human relationship with nature in a global perspective and depicts human-environmental experiences across the boundaries. It gives a holistic view of the relationship between human beings and their environment with a further point of view "that environmental sustainability and economic development are 'compatible, attainable and mutually inseparable'" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010, p. 67). It investigates the connection between social and environmental concerns. In the light of the selected eco-critical approach, the present research work points out the interrelationship between the Native Americans' issues of survival, identity, race, gender, class, and environment and calls for environmental justice. Moreover, the present work examines how nature is appropriated by Euro-Americans to spoil it and how N. Scott Momaday challenges the stereotypical representation of the Native Americans' "nature-oriented" (Buell, 2005, p. 2) culture through counter-narratives.

Data Analysis

Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* portrays such a bond of relationship between nature and Native Americans in which "the boundaries between humans and nature are permeable, and everything in the natural world is concerned to everything else" (Adamson, 1958, p. 106). Nature is presented as a home in which all the native communities live and function communally. Momaday depicts a phenomenal co-existence of nature and the Native Americans; the Natives' survival depends on nature. Their lifestyle is characterized by harmony and union with nature. Nature is not something external to be destroyed and subjugated; it is in a horizontal relationship with the Native Americans. This mutual relationship is "a culturally inflected process in which nature and culture must be seen as mutuality rather than as separable domains" (Buell, 2005, p.67). The novel suggests that the Native Americans, like animals and plants, live in perfect harmony with their physical environment; their socio-cultural values and

religious beliefs are embedded in nature. They want freedom of religion and love to follow their traditional lifestyle ([Deloria& Lytle, 1998, p. 252](#)). The non-human environment is not simply a background but a dynamic part of human life. It is a source of survival and peace that moves the protagonist of the novel from chaos to peaceful tribal culture.

Retrospective Penetration of Nature

From Adamson's point of view, the eco-critical study socio-historically serves to legitimize the claim of social values of people. Momaday gives a picture of the Native Americans' heritage and the natural lifestyle of their ancestors to make the coming generations aware of the importance of nature in their lives. He observes that the people who lead natural life have "a certain strength and beauty that I find missing in the modern world at large" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 189](#)). Abel, the protagonist of *House Made of Dawn*, goes through a long troublesome journey to connect himself with his ancestors' natural lifestyle. Abel's link with his ancestors' tradition and natural landscape serves to recover his lost identity. He considers his journey toward his homeland "right and beautiful" (Momaday 170). He re-establishes his identity by engaging himself with a ritual of his forefathers that enables him to know himself. He remembers the old-time he has spent with his family members and thinks of hunting. His memories of the past rejuvenate his native culture and enable him to reclaim his lost identity. In the Native Americans' worldview: "The strict categories such as traditional and modern, authentic and unauthentic, primitive and civilized, pure and tainted and natural and cultural no longer make sense" ([Adamson, 1958, p. 158](#)). Abel realizes that in order to secure his environment he has to revive and practice the traditional values of his ancestors.

Abel has been entrapped by the European culture; he was driven to alcoholism and violence. He recalls the "days and years without meaning, of awful calm and collision, time always immediate and confused" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 21](#)). He feels sorry for his loss of connection with his ancestral land and tradition. He comprehends his relationship with the natural environment through sacred stories of the

priest of the sun that enables him to realize his place in the tribal society. Abel recollects that his "grandmother was a storyteller" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 83](#)). She tells him stories and also teaches him the traditional lifestyle of her tribe. These stories interlink Abel with his past and develop an imaginative vision in him to strengthen his relationship with other beings. He recalls the tribal stories that his ancestors shared with him. These stories have healing power and give a sense of wholeness. The knowledge of the tribal natural way of life enables Abel to develop a relationship with other living beings as well as assists him to recall the socio-cultural history of his ancestors. Through this realization, Abel mends his rootless identity. Adamson emphasizes the need to develop a concept of nature that is "rooted not only in deep, reciprocal relationship to the natural world, but in our diverse cultural histories, in our different relationships to colonial oppression, and in the consequences of class and race marginalization" ([Adamson, 1958, p. xix](#)). Awareness of the natural life of his progenitors balances Abel's life. Consequently, he is happy with the invigorating realization. He is happy to see the rising sun behind the hills: "How the sun came up with a little wind and the light ran out upon the land" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 166](#)). The first light of the sun is a symbol of hope and life; with the emergence of the new day, Abel experiences a spiritual awakening. His health is restored with the idea of going back to the natural world of his forebears. Like Abel, the other Native American characters, such as Ben Benally and Tosamah, also return to their grandfathers to regain a true sense of their tribal identity. It is the natural lifestyle of their ancestors that provides them with protection.

Abel's grandfather, Francesco practices traditional values and participates in the religious ceremonies that give the lesson of community and unity. Francisco transmits all his knowledge to Abel about the Natives' socio-cultural values and religious beliefs. He shares with Abel the stories of his youth and teaches him to remain associated with the tribal tradition that has an intimate connection with nature. Francisco knows that Abel suffers spiritually as well as physically because of his alienation from his past. As a result of his separation from the tradition of his progenitors, Abel cannot develop a

harmonious relationship with his surrounding environment. When he comes back from the war, he finds his grandfather weakened and limp, his limpness symbolizes the loss of the Native Americans' way of life owing to "massive environmental disruption" (Buell, 2001, p. 238). But Abel keeps on reviving his ancestors' traditional values that have been transferred to him. After the death of his grandfather, Abel performs the ceremonies of his ancestors and loves to embrace his forefathers' traditions. His friend, Ben also advises Abel to go back to his ancestors' world of nature as he says, "I prayed. He was going home, and I wanted to pray... And we were going together on horses to the hills" (Momaday, 1968, p. 189). Abel finally finds out his destiny within the natural environment of his heritage. His connection with his tribal land enables him to know how his forefathers lived in communion with nature as well as contributes to healing him. Abel's healing continues by remembering the past history of his forebears. The revival of his ancestors' tradition strengthens his willpower and connection with nature. Native Americans have had an ethical and spiritual relationship with nature since a long time, which predates the European colonizers' arrival (Adamson, 2013, p. 161). They "dwelt upon the land twenty-five thousand years ago" (Momaday, 1968, p. 52) in a community with non-human beings.

Integration of Human Culture and Nature

Analysis of a literary work from the perspective of environmental and social issues is a broader concept of the environmental study that exposes environmental issues by "locating vestiges of nature within cities and/or exposing crimes of eco-injustice against society's marginal group" (Buell, 2005, p. 24). Buell's eco-critical approach is a shift from the traditional concept of nature to the broader concept that embraces human culture and nature. In Native American culture and religion, nature has great significance; the natural environment cannot be separated from the human-inhabited area. *House Made of Dawn* portrays the Natives' spiritual and moral vision that is rooted in nature. In pursuing his identity and homeland, Abel walks on the snow; in "the snow-covered valley and the hills" (Momaday, 1968, p. 85). Abel and his fellow runners get together. "The pale light grew upon the land"

(Momaday, 1968, p. 184), and meanwhile, it begins to rain. The pale light of the sun awakens the new day, and in daylight, Abel looks at the earth and other fellow runners. They can see the mountains and river and their community members busy in work. In such a pleasant environment, they feel no exhaustion.

The Native Americans' life depends on and is interlinked with the natural life. For them, "humanity and all things of the natural world are always emerging, always unfolding" (Buell, 2005, p. 2). They believe that animals and plants have central importance in human life and deserve moral consideration. Animals and trees are given respect and honor through ceremonies, stories, and songs. The sight of the eagle and the snake arouses spiritual feelings in Abel's mind. Abel is captivated by the image of "an eagle overhead with its talons closed upon a snake. It was an awful, holy sight, full of magic and meaning" (Momaday, 1968, p. 14). The eagle has great significance in the Native Americans' religion; the feathers of the eagles are used in religious ceremonies. It is assumed that the eagle is the symbol of freedom and courage. During hunting, Abel has caught an eagle that is unable to fly; therefore, he prefers killing the bird over letting it live in captivity. The free natural life of the eagle has great inspiration for him. Although after killing the eagle, Abel feels remorse because of his great respect and love for it. It is in the Native American culture that after killing an animal, they give respect to it. Such principles of the Native American culture develop a strong relationship between human and non-human beings as well as preserve their tribal tradition.

Human beings, along with plants and animals, are part of the whole ecosystem. Buell quotes Kathleen Dean Moore's statement that if you cut my hand and eyes I will live still but if you "take away the sun ... I die. Take away the plants and the animals, and I die. So why should I think my body is more a part of me than the sun and the earth?" (as cited in 2005, p. 23). An individual's survival is not possible in isolation from his/her physical environment. Momaday presents nature as a benign force to human beings and also stresses the importance of preserving death within nature. Abel remains associated with his tribal rituals to reconstruct his relationship with nature. He participates in different religious and healing ceremonies performed at the

natural sites. As Abel's healing ceremony incorporates the natural elements when "the little holy wind blows through his hair" (Momaday, 1968, p. 150) on the way towards the healing path Abel feels healthy and comfortable. While travelling on his "horse's back" (Momaday, 1968, p. 150), the whole body of the horse seems to him to be made of the natural elements. He feels that the ears of the horse are made of corn, the eyes of big stars, and the head is made of water, and "the long rainbow is in his mouth for a bridle, and with it, I guide him" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 150](#)). On his horseback Abel feels he is in the company of different other horses and sheep. This sacred journey of Abel is a way towards healing and wholeness. It reunifies him with his homeland and rediscovers his identity. These natural elements collectively transmit curing strength. The whole natural world contributes to restore Abel's health: "The drumbeats gathered in the room, and the flame quivered to the beat of the drum and thunder rolled somewhere in the hills" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 107](#)). The rising sounds of rainfall, rolling thunder, and sliding rocks with the combination of colours are intermixed to celebrate Abel's recovery from his mental trauma. He enjoys the company of nature; the unsullied breeze refreshes his exhausted body. He feels revitalized on the beautiful natural landscape. The natural scenes in the novel are the source of spiritual inspiration for Native Americans to strengthen their relationship with other beings. They utilize energy from nature and feel young and energetic.

Buell gives importance to both natural and human aspects in the environmental literature (2005, p. 84). He believes that Human beings cannot live in isolation from their physical environment. The human relationship with physical nature is indistinguishable and their attention towards and care for non-human nature make the world better and peaceful for all the living beings. The environment is a part of human life because of "humanity's ongoing interaction with the non-human forces in which our lives are embedded" ([Buell, 2005, p. 15](#)). There is something wrong with a person who does not feel the loss of place as Buell says that one-acts, and the consequences of one's actions are determined by one's surrounding environment. What you do and where you live are

equally important. With the loss of your soil, you lose your soul.

Sense of Place and Identity

Buell lays emphasis on the centrality of the earth; the planetary system is interconnected, and all the beings play their role to run it. All the living and non-living entities are part of the ecosphere, and "without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed" ([Berry, 1972, p. 67](#)). Native Americans consider the earth their mother, identity, caretaker, and source of sustenance and peace. Abel's relationship with his native land provides him with mental peace and serves as an aid to re-establish his lost relationship with nature. He discovers his identity by forming a connection with mother earth. In search of his identity, he moves towards "the cultivated fields" and "the long rows of the foothills" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 27](#)). Then he looks at the sky, the green land, and feels "the first breeze of the evening" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 27](#)). Abel's journey to reclaim his lost identity reaches its end in his homeland, where he "could see his grandfather, others, working below in the sunlit fields" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 27](#)). His life has been meaningless for a long, but finally, he arrives home on green farmland where his relatives live and work together. After coming back to his native land, Abel feels well and his relationship with his ancestors' lifestyle is also strengthened. Human beings belong to the earth that requires their "custodianship in return" ([Ashcroft & Tiffin, 2007, p.70](#)). Nature rewards humans when they love it. Abel's grandfather describes to him the stories of his forefathers' close association with their mother earth and also reminds him of his heritage: "Right there in the centre of everything, the sacred mountains . . . where you had to be" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 157](#)). In the mountains, Abel goes through his healing experiences and performs his religious ceremonies. The mountains have great importance for him in the sense that they provide shelter and sustenance to the wild animals like bear, deer, eagle, and buffaloes. At these mountain areas, Abel's staggered mind is stabilised and his lost identity restored.

Abel is reawakened owing to his relationship with his heritage and homeland. He gets strength from the lifestyle of his ancestors and restores his health and leads a complete life. He “was alone and running” (Momaday, 1968, p. 185) in search of the company. While running, he falls down and, in the rain, notices how his body is broken, being separated from the natural environment. When he looks at the sky, mountains, and the river, “Under his breath he began to sing... *House made of pollen, house made of dawn* (Momaday, 1968, p. 185). Abel wanders meaninglessly finally; the trees and the sun light reunite him with the earth. As the light of the sun is the herald of the beginning of the new day, in the same way, the light marks Abel’s resurrection into a new life. His favourite natural environment reinforces his connection with his tribal culture as “place and society are fused as a unity” (Buell, 2005, p. 104). Abel recovers his self-knowledge in connection with the motherland. He supplicates the mother earth to

- Restore my feet for me,
- Restore my legs for me,
- Restore my body for me,
- Restore my mind for me. (Momaday, 1968, p. 130)

In his native land, Abel becomes spiritually united with the natural landscape and his tribal culture. He gets optimum satisfaction from the natural environment in which his body recovers, and he claims: Happily I recover/Happily my interior becomes cool (Momaday, 1968, p. 130). The natural environment of his mother earth bestows on Abel true peace; he derives most profound mental peace from the natural landscape. Here he is physically healed as well as spiritually awakened. His union with nature is strengthened and he walks thus: “Happily, with abundant dark clouds” (Momaday, 1968, p. 130). Nature provides him with self-knowledge and enables him to unite with his tribe. The plants, flowers, and dark clouds bolster Abel’s connection with his native land. He feels pleasure to see the sky, the mountains, and the whole valley. The entire natural world bears witness to his relationship with his tribal heritage; the sights of the green farmland support him and strengthen his relationship with his tribal people. In order to achieve the level of spiritual

strength which is the characteristic of his community, Abel reunites and identifies himself with his surrounding environment. His life circle is completed when he comes back to the natural world of his ancestors. His naked body depicts his close relationship with the earth because it is made of the earthly elements themselves.

Momaday treats the earth as an animate being that offers all humans and non-humans room to survive on it, where they live “[h]appily, with abundant...showers ...plants” (1968, p. 130). Native Americans are not comfortable in the European environment, it is their native land that gives them peace and security. Their restored relationship with the natural landscape proves to be a panacea for all their sufferings and diseases. They have loyalty to the earth, which continues to sustain them. They consider themselves “a plain member and citizen of the land community” (Buell, 2005, p. 104). The earth is the only paradise of which they eat and drink, and the only sin for them is the destruction of the mother earth. Their tribal stories are based on their tradition, and religious beliefs, and they consider their homeland to be the setting giving birth to these stories. The Native Americans’ identity is intimately connected with the earth that echoes with tribal stories. In their native land, nature and culture are inextricably bound together, and they consider the place where they live home to all the species.

The Native Americans’ Vision of the Sacredness of Nature

The subjects of “vision, value, culture, and imagination are keys to today’s environmental crises at least as fundamental as scientific research” (Buell, 2005, p. 5). The Native Americans believe that nature has spiritual power; all the natural elements have their own significance in their culture and religion. Momaday links this rapport of the Natives with nature on the same basis as they develop a relationship with their family members. According to Momaday, the separation of man from nature cripples the human spirit. The description of nature at the start of the novel indicates that the natural elements have a healing influence and spiritual power and connect all the living creatures on the same platform as the “geese fly through the valley and then

the sky and the geese are the same color” (Momaday, 1968, p. 5). Birds fly together in search of their food and freely on the earth regardless of any boundaries. During the summer due to the hot environment: “Birds come to the tamarack on the river. The feathers of blue and yellow birds are prized by the townsmen” (Momaday, 1968, p. 5). The townspeople get together to “take the good harvest from the fields” (Momaday, 1968, p. 5). They work in the field and enjoy the company of the birds. The movement of the birds and townsmen gives a lesson of unity and mutual relationship between humans and non-humans. Native Americans feel pleasure in the presence of birds in the harvest field under the moon where water flows to provide a life force to the natural elements.

The “sacred natural world that was uncontaminated by humankind” (Adamson, 2013, p.72) provides mental peace to the indigenous people who live in a close association with nature; even they hunt in a community. They prefer to hunt the old and ill animals for food and offer prayers before pursuing an animal. They also make “apologies [when] it is necessary to kill an animal for food or clothing” (Boyd, 1974, p. 9). Before hunting, Abel goes to the river to wash his head in order to purify himself and begins to sing and offers prayers. The natural ceremonies are performed by Native Americans to revive their religious beliefs and cultural values. As Tosamah, “The Priest of the Sun” (Momaday, 1968, p. 77) enters with his sermon. He talks about Kiowa religious beliefs in the sacredness of nature which he heard from his grandfather. The ceremonies unite the tribal people on the same platform regardless of any difference and also strengthen their relationship with non-human beings. The Sun Dance Ceremony is performed in the novel; it is a religious ceremony that is practiced by most of the Native Americans and unites them with each other and with the physical world around them. The observance and practice of such sacred ceremonies have been passed down from generation to generation. These ceremonies restore their lost relationship with their mother earth as they suffer physically and mentally on account of losing contact with the natural environment. Likewise, Abel, Ben Benally, and Tosamah suffer because of their separation from nature; their mental peace is possible only through the restoration of their

relationship with the natural landscape. Ben and Tosamah realize that their problems can be solved by consolidating their diluted relationship with nature. Ben knows that Abel’s mental peace lies in his relationship with the native land. “In his pain and weariness [Abel] saw Milley and Ben running on the beach, and he was there on the beach with Milley and Ben, and the moon was high and bright, and the fishes were far away in the depth” (Momaday, 1968, p. 111). It is the natural environment that gives him strength and peace of mind. Abel comes back to his native land to take care of his grandfather, from whom he comes to know about the importance of the man-nature relationship. The return to the native tradition also means to turn to nature for protection and peace. After coming back to his native land and his ancestors’ tradition, Abel identifies himself with animals and birds that have great significance in the Native Americans’ religion and culture.

In the Native American culture, the figure four has great importance, mainly because it indicates four seasons and four directions. The tribal leader, Rolling Thunder turns his pipe to the four sides to extend invocation to nature for help and says;

- To the East where the Sun rises.
- To the north where the cold comes from.
- To the South where the light comes from.
- To the West where the Sunsets.
- To the father Sun.
- To the mother Earth (Boyd, 1974, p. 19).

Momaday has divided the novel into four sections: “*The Longhair*”, “*The Priest of the Sun*”, “*The Night Chanter*” and “*The Dawn Runner*”. The titles of the sections are also indicative of the Native Americans’ association with nature. *The Longhair* represents their natural lifestyle that they love to keep long hair. “An Indian man isn’t nothing without his hair” (Alexie, 1998, p. 63). They are not willing to cut their hair that naturally grows. They want to maintain a natural lifestyle; they consider it a violation of nature to cut their hair. In the boarding school when the administrator of the school tries to cut hair a Native student, Plenty Horses, he resists and says: “I am a Lakota... I will keep my long hair” (Momaday, 2007, p. 134). Hair is their identity; they do not allow Euro-Americans to touch their hair. The title of the second section, *The Priest of the Sun*,

depicts the Native Americans' love of nature; they worship nature and adore the natural sites. The sun provides them with energy as it is a regulator of the seasons. *The Night Chanter* illustrates the Native Americans singing songs in love of nature and their performance of different religious ceremonies and cultural rites at natural sites. The last section of the novel, *The Dawn Runner*, displays the significant theme that the Native Americans are in search of their tribal identity that has been misrepresented or oppressed by the colonisers. The unnatural and urban environment of Euro-Americans turns out to be a confining and dark atmosphere for the Native Americans, from which they desperately wish to escape and rush towards the world of "everlasting and peaceful" ([Momaday, 1968, p.150](#)) environment.

Conclusion

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary approach that deals with multiple aspects ([Jimmy, 2015, p. 3](#)). The fate of all the living beings depends on the mother earth for their survival ([Buell, 2005, p.125](#)). Human beings are accountable for their relationship with the non-human world. This moral lesson has been descended from the older generation to the coming generations. Nature is not simply the scenic background; it influences the Native Americans' life and determines their actions. The natural environment not only offers them refuge from sufferings but also cures their spiritual crises and physical problems. Their association with non-human nature leads them to the experience of healing and hence they attempt to get the essence of their natural life back. *House Made of Dawn* deals with the Native Americans' environmental concern at the populated areas of New Mexico, Los Angeles and Oklahoma. The environmental degradation and

social issues are inextricably linked ([Novotny, 2001, p. 722](#)). The ruination of nature means the humiliation and conquest of the Native Americans. Similarly, the Natives' removal from their homeland breaks the relationship between them and their communities. According to Halsey Native Americans' life is so simple that: "One must obey the kinship rules; one must be a good relative" ([Jaimes, 2003, p. 65](#)). They share all they have and support each other. Nature is an "inherent force which directs the world" ([Buell, 2005, p. 143](#)). They are in mutual relationship with the natural world that is a source of inspiration, protection and survival for them. Momaday's presentation of nature does not follow the Euro-American concept of "the hierarchical separations between human beings and other elements of the natural world" ([Elder, 1985, p. 172](#)). Human problems are looked at from the planetary perspective, under a holistic view in which all the creatures of the mother earth are treated equally. The boundaries get erased and cultures merged up. To solve the environmental problems it is necessary to "Think Globally, Act Locally" ([Adamson & Ruffin, 2013, p. 206](#)). One cannot solve global environmental problems without having a prior knowledge of the local environment. In the era of environmental crisis, there is a need to protect all the living creatures from the environmental hazards. Through all the possible ways Euro-Americans attempt to Europeanize Abel, he has been sent to the boarding school so that he will forget his primitive/natural lifestyle. But he resists European culture. Finally it was "thought he was going to plant some beans... Oh, he was going to make his way, all right" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 131](#)). In the alien Euro-American environment he always dreams "to go back home" ([Momaday, 1968, p. 140](#)). Finally he recovers his self by reconnecting himself with his native land and tribal culture.

References

- Adamson, J. (1958). *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism the Middle Place*. Library of Congress.
- Adamson, J. et al. (2002). *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Adamson, J., Kimberly, N., & Ruffin. (2013). *American Studies, Ecocriticism, and Citizenship Thinking and Acting in the Local and Global Commons*. Routledge 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017.
- Alexie, S. (1998). *Smoke Signal*. New York.
- Ashcroft, G. G., & Helen, T. (2007). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Berry, W. (1972). *A Continuous Harmony: Essays Cultural and Agricultural*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt.
- Boyd, D. (1974). *Rolling Thunder*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc.
- Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bullard, & Robert, D. (2005). *The Quest for Environmental Justice: Human Rights and the Politics of Pollution*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Campbell, A. (2010). *Narrating Other Natures: A Third Wave Ecocritical Approach to Toni Morrison, Ruth Ozeki and Octavia Butler*. Dissertation, Department of English, Washington State University.
- Coupe, L. (2000). *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Deloria, J., Vine, & Clifford M. L. (1998). *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*. University of Texas Press.
- Elder, J. (1985). *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Howe, L., & Roxy G. (1999) *Seventh Generation an Anthology of Native American Plays*. Theatre Communication Group, Inc.
- Huggan, G., & Helen T. (2010). *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Environment and Animals*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Jimmy, & Neema, Ba. Oct. (2015). "Ecocritical Approaches to Literary Text Interpretation" *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research* 18(2), 369-378. <http://www.ijisr.issr-journals.org/>
- Jaimes, & Guerrero, M. A. (2003) Indigenous Women in the Americas: "Patriarchal Colonialism" and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism, 18(2), 58-69, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15272001/2003/18/2>
- Kumar, J. G., & Ravi. (2014). "N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn as Socio-Cultural Phenomenon" *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies*. 1(5), 160-70.
- Lewis, & David, R. (1994). *Neither Wolf nor Dog American Indians, Environment, and Agrarian Change*. Oxford University Press.
- McAvoy, L. (2002). "American Indians, Place Meanings and the Old/New West" *Journal of Leisure Research*, 34(6), 383-392.
- Merchant, C. (2002). *The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History*. Columbia University Press.
- Momaday, N. S. (1968). *House Made of Dawn*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Neihardt, J. G. (2000). *Black Elk Speaks*. United States of America: University of Nebraska Press.
- Novotny, P. (2001). "Where We Live, Work, and Play: The Environmental Justice Movement and the Struggle for a New Environmentalism." Rev. of *Political Theory*, Cambridge University Press. 95(3), 722.
- Silko, L. M. (1992). *Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Penguin.
- Slovic, S. (2010). "The Third Wave of Ecocriticism: North American Reflection on the Current Phase of Discipline." *University of Nevada*, 1(1), 4-10.
- Stoll, M., & Adam, M., & Sowards. (2014). *United States West Coast An Environmental History*. Library of Congress.

- Temple, J. M., & Alan, V. (2007). *Encyclopedia of American Indian Literature*. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data.
- Tošić, J. (2006). "Working and Living Environmental Protection." *Ecocriticism Interdisciplinary Study of Literature and Environment*. 3(1), 43 – 50.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2003). *A Quiet Crisis, Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country* 624 Ninth Street, NW Washington, DC 20425, <https://www.usccr.gov/pubs/na0703/na0204.pdf>
- Waldman, C. (2006). *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*. Third Edition, New York NY 10001.
- Weidner, C. (2009). "Does Ecocriticism Really Matter? Exploring the Relevance of Green Cultural Studies." *Speaking a Global Language*. 15, 189-199.