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Ecology and Literature

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Literature, being one of the Fine Arts, serves not only in shaping personalities but in forming the social structures as well. As a form of Art, Literature holds this asset: whatever is provided by the other forms of theoretical life in a rationalized process, naturally degrading to becoming rather tiresome to the reader, is offered by Literature - and apparently Art in general- in a pleasing way through the enticement of the Fine and the expression of the Beauty. Paul Valéry wrote that: "Ruminations ought to be concealed within the lyrics of a poem as does the nutritional value in a fruit. A fruit is a form of nourishment but seems to be simply an indulgence. We simply feel the lust but at the same time we also receive an essence. It is Enchantment that veils the inconspicuous nourishment it boasts" (Papanoutsos, 1969). As it is commonly accepted, Literature usually resorts to describing Nature in an attempt to creatively depict - since admittedly the artist does not emulate but simply creates - Beauty. Both scholar and folk Literature "pattern" the beauty of Nature (the elemental form of Lyricism), thus giving the literature the opportunity to bring forth his/her creative ability. On the other hand one of the most fundamental objectives of Social Studies is, as mentioned by Professor Houser, "to promote self-development and social understanding for the improvement of society at large". Additionally, according to him, since emotions are a fundamental element of human experience, the use of Literature - just as of other approaches based on Art - may contribute towards the realization of this objective (Houser, 2001). At this point however, it should be mentioned that the success in raising environmental awareness along with the concomitant change in the children's conduct (a result not always achieved through the typical use of Environmental Education) through the reading of relevant books has already been demonstrated by different researches (Chawla, 1998 & 1999; Tanner, 1980; Gardner and Stern, 1996). Moreover, another survey, conducted in secondary teachers, has shown that their reading books in class has contributed decisively in raising environmentally responsible students in comparison to the contribution of the TV and the newspapers (Hsu and Roth, 1998). Moreover, the significance of environmental awareness, especially to youngsters, is worth being stressed since they are the future adult citizens to participate dynamically towards the conservation of the environment. Ecology has been a very distinctive feature of many an ancient literature also. A remarkable feature of Indian thought about the universe is the belief that all creation is an integral totality. The presence of a universal spirit binding the creatures of this universe is a recurring idea in most of the philosophical treatises of Indian literature. A mantra in the Chandogya Upanishad says: "Whether it be the tiger or the lion, the wolf or the bug everything originates from it" (qtd in Ramachandran 197). This concept has ecological and scientific relevance today, since all environmentalists consider this world as a great work of art. The Vedas, The Mahabharata and the Ramayana also reflect these ideas, teaching us the importance of Ahimsa or non-violence. 'Ahimsa', the principle which preaches compassion towards all life forms, is the basic ingredient of most Indian religions. Rishi Patanjali described Ahimsa as the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline which truth seekers must follow strictly and without fail. Vedic Rishis who revealed Dharma proclaimed Ahimsa as the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between peoples and compassion within ourselves (Subramuniswami 195). The Rig Veda says: Protect both our species, two legged and four

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legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O powers! (qtd in Subramuniswami 204.

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