

# Global Challenges of Earth Protection and Philosophic Foundation of Cherokee Indian Religion: the 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Transcendentalism and Georgian "Gialove" in Poetry

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## Abstract

Environmental issues now present a greater challenge for the global society than ever and demand better cooperation among nations around the world to save the planet and humans from inevitable disaster which may be caused by environmental degradation. Air and water pollution, depletion of soil, loss of biodiversity, extinction of many species are the result of inhuman and irrational attitudes towards the earth and the gifts of nature. Civilization means more people demanding higher standards of living which has direct disastrous impacts on world ecosystems because it stimulates exploitation of renewable resources, such as fresh water, forests, and fertile topsoil.

This article ecological problems caused by the brutal consumption of natural resources and the attempt of international community to protect the earth; also it argues that many ancient civilizations, and among them aboriginal Cherokee people, worshiped universal spirit of nature and tried to maintain balance with nature. Based on the analysis of famous essay *Nature* by the 19<sup>th</sup> century American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson and the short stories by Georgian poet and writer Vazha Pshavela, the article reveals the authors' philosophy of nature interpreted as a *Universal being*.

The central idea of the paper is that the most important for mankind is to restore "wholeness" with nature and save it from the flaws and distractions imposed by "civilized society" in the post-industrial era. "Gialove" - is an Earth-affection philosophy, which was brilliantly demonstrated in Vazha's poetry and stories.

**Keywords:** Biodiversity, Cherokee Indian Religion, earth, earth care, ecology, nature care, "Nature" by Emerson, philosophy of Transcendentalism, universal spirit of nature, Vazha Pshavela

## Introduction

### Environmental Problems and Global Society

Many International organizations are founded to unite world community, raise their awareness and advocate that it is necessary to love and protect the earth, *Mother Nature* – the source of life, beauty, and commodity for over 300,000 plant species, over 600,000 species of fungi, and about ten million animal species. Many renowned scientists publish the results of their studies to make obvious how important it is to care for common resources. The biologist Garret Hardin, in his article *The Tragedy of the Commons*, argues that resources that are noted in "common", like the world's atmosphere and its oceans, tend to be overused, even to the point of environmental collapse (Hardin, 2003, p. 361). Another threat is that food shortage and environmental degradation may actually bring nations and peoples into conflict with each-other. Canadian political scientist

Homer Dixon believes that interrelated environmental problems incur serious social consequences, foster conflicts and violence. Dixon concludes by drawing out the implications of the conflicts arising over the distribution of diminishing natural resources, that it is a threat to international security. "Some experts propose that environmental change may shift the balance of power between states either regionally or globally, producing instabilities that could lead to war" (Homer-Dixon, 2003, p. 363).

How could it happen that "for the first time, a single species – *Homo Sapiens* – has become a vast, destructive ecological force?" (Flavin, 2003, p. 381). And indeed, if we, humans, do not assume the heavy burden - protect and save the world - it is destined to collapse. One of the first international conventions on Biological Diversity, 1992, provided the first comprehensive framework for preservation of bio-diversity across the globe.

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The question is who should bear responsibility for protecting the environment, particularly of the territories, noted as “commons”, by for determining and enforcing environmental standards?

### Going Back to the Roots of Unity between Humans and Nature

Were not our ancestors wiser to worship and protect the nature than we are in the 21st century? Do we need to invent a new philosophy? Or, shall we look back and seek the answer to those most urgent ecological problems we face today in the religion, philosophy and poetry written by our wise predecessors? All ancient civilizations worshipped nature and its almighty forces, while the present attitude of a civilized man towards environment is vastly void of any high esteem or reverence; and this negligence of nature (proved by every day activities) increases as the people's scientific knowledge of nature expands. Is this what was expected to get from accumulation of scientific knowledge about the nature? Many centuries ago when the European civilization reached the continent of America, local aboriginal tribe, including the Cherokees, had developed a “religion” which was based on a worship of nature.

These indigenous people strongly believed in supernatural forces which according to them linked human beings to all other living things in nature. Everything in their environment - plants and animals - were bearers of an intelligent and supernatural spirit, and Indians considered themselves as the part of the environment in which they existed. The central focus of the religion was that men should not rule over the nature, but instead, they must try to find their proper place in it to keep the balance among each other as well as among animals, plants and themselves. For example, a healer might listen to the spirit of a plant to find out what disease that plant could cure; a hunter might pray to the spirits of animals for guidance and forgiveness (Raley, 1998, Retrieved from Chumburidze, 2016.)

Balance and harmony in the environment was a core principle in the religion of the tribal people which determined the way of life, their attitude towards the nature. In order to respect and cooperate with all diversity in nature, the natives found ways to conserve its parts, in other words, they used to take and use only a small portion, so that the future supply of the resource should not be threatened. That means that when Cherokees gathered medicinal plants in the forest, they harvested only every fourth one they found, leaving the other three to grow undisturbed for future use. All these practices contributed to maintaining the equilibrium with the outer world. The Cherokees believed that provided the balance of nature was upset, everyone would have trouble. They feared a loss of balance could cause sickness, bad weather, failed crops, poor hunting, and many other problems (Raley, 1998).

Violation of the principle of the rational approach to the natural resources has become one of the dilemmas for the present world. Cherokees called on the spirits from the Upper World to help restore balance and harmony to the Middle

World. Many researchers claim that “the quiet crisis of the planet has started and we face a threat of food shortage”. In the scientific article, Georgian researchers, Margvelashvili and Lolishvili argue that main reason of soil degradation in Georgia and globally is its uncontrolled consumption and unscientific approach. The authors present the arguments for their assumptions based on the example of Georgian agriculture, such as, uncontrolled plowing of soil, insufficiency in application of organic and mineral fertilizers, soil erosion caused by water and wind, soil contamination with plant protecting chemicals, and other Margvelashvili & Lolishvili, 2016).

International conferences held in Georgia initiated and organized by the Georgian Academy of Agricultural Sciences deal with different aspects of degradation of natural resources caused by: global warming, climate change, the black holes in the ozone layer, or ozone shield region of Earth's stratosphere that absorbs most of the Sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation. International Scientific Conference “Global Warming and Agro-biodiversity” held by the Georgian Academy of Agricultural Sciences in 2015, Tbilisi, Georgia, has revealed different aspects of negative consequence of the global warming, and particularly its destructive effect on the existence of the wide spectrum of ancient endemic and wild species, which means that historical bonds between the different plant formations could be lost. (Aleksidze, 2015, p. 28). Also, it was specified, that global warming is the result of human anthropogenic activity which will gradually lead the nature to destruction, the scientific evidences to which were amply presented in the conference presentations (Conference Proceedings).

Global depletion of the ozone layer directly affects climate change and causes a series of irreversible negative changes on the earth. Since the 1960s, a number of international treaties were ratified and amended to ban Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) production in the developed countries under the Montreal Protocol, because CFRs contribute to ozone depletion in the upper atmosphere. After 1995, the same laws were passed in developing countries. Today, all of the world's 197 countries have signed the treaty on CFC. In 1996, only recycled and stockpiled CFCs were available for use in developed countries like the US. This production phase out became possible because of efforts to ensure that there would be substitute chemicals and technologies for all ODS (Ozone Depleting Substances) uses. On August 2, 2003, scientists announced that the global depletion of the ozone layer may be slowing down because of the international regulation of ozone-depleting substances. In a study organized by the American Geophysical Union, three satellites and three ground stations confirmed that the upper-atmosphere ozone-depletion rate slowed down significantly during the previous decade. Some breakdown can be expected to continue because of ODSs used by nations which have not banned them, and because of gases which are already in the stratosphere. Some ODSs, including CFCs, have very long atmospheric lifetimes, ranging from 50 to over 100 years. It has been estimated that the ozone layer will recover to 1980 level near the middle of the 21st century. A gradual trend toward “healing” was reported in 2016 (Ozone layer From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

The above said states, that inter-relation of humans and nature is not based on mutual respect, and that mankind has been upsetting the balance of nature since the period when civilization of the 20th century entered into force, showing his disrespect towards the laws of nature. Also, as the practice showed, international community, hand in hand with the governments of all nations, have the ability to undertake the responsibility and save the earth from anticipated disaster.

### What should 21st Century Society Learn from Emerson's Philosophy?

A long journey in search of philosophic and poetic thought which would be sensitive to the problem stated above led us to Ralph Waldo Emerson, the father of Transcendentalism, and Georgian poet and writer Vazha Pshavela. Both lived in the 19th century, the two poets – one in America, and the other in Georgia, the Caucasus Region, were developing very similar philosophies of nature.

Ralf Waldo Emerson, (1803 – 1882), great American essayist, poet, philosopher and lecturer, characterized by intellectual breadth and depth of judgment, addressed wide range of problems. The poet fused close observation of New England landscape with far-reaching spiritual exploration. He dealt with the issue of Nature's divinity in many of his writings, including essays, poetry and lectures. Emerson formulated and expressed the philosophy of transcendentalism in his 1836 essay "Nature". Following this groundbreaking work, he gave a speech entitled "The American Scholar" in 1837, which Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. considered to be America's "intellectual Declaration of Independence". Emerson was well familiar with Indian religion and was inspired by the divinity of nature which is a result of Holy God spreading its gifts throughout its surface. In 1845, Emerson's journals show he was reading the *Bhagavad Gita* and Henry Thomas Colebrooke's *Essays on the Vedas*. Emerson is considered a poet who led the transcendentalist movement of the mid-19th century. He was seen as a champion of individualism and a prescient critic of the countervailing pressures of society.

Transcendentalism is a belief system that espouses a theory of non-traditional appreciation of nature that suggests that God gives spirit to nature, so it is only true reality which could be perceived and intuitively experienced directly from nature because it is not based on logic or intellect, but rather on people's intuition and knowledge passed down by their predecessors. Transcendentalism argues that humans have in-born knowledge about themselves and the nature and the world around them, or what "transcends" beyond what they can see, hear, taste, touch or feel. A transcendentalist is a person who accepts these ideas not as religious beliefs but as a way of understanding life relationships. The land is deeply saturated by God spirit and often wears colors of the spirit – changing its mood and shades.

Emerson's Essay *Nature* includes eight sections: Nature, Commodity, Beauty, Language, Discipline, Idealism, Spirit and Prospects. Each presents different perspective

on the relationship between humans and nature. Humans use the Nature to satisfy their basic needs, such as, their desire to delight, or communicate with each other, and finally for their understanding of the world. Emerson suggests that humans cannot fully accept the beauty of the nature, and worries that man's alienation from nature could become deeper. However, the truth is that humans do not need any interpreters to enjoy direct communication with the nature as they are the part of it, but they are often distracted from this by the demand of the world and society. Emerson feared that man's alienation from the nature could grow and become disastrous over the centuries. As the time flies and the world becomes more civilized, people are losing the "wholeness" with nature, instead, are engrossed in the demands of the Society ruled by the market. Emerson presents the nature in its endless divine circulation which nourishes the humans and where a true *Spirit of Nature or Universal Being* is hidden. Unless a man tries to find spiritual sense of nature around him, his alienation and weakening will proceed. For over the two centuries after the Nature was written, the process of human's alienation from nature has been progressing, urging the world to become loveless, void and desperate, which will ultimately lead both the earth and its inhabitants to natural catastrophes. The divine, century-old connections, spiritual aspiration, trust and respect between nature and man which existed for centuries, is being now devastated in search for comfort and luxury; and all in the name of Civilization.

Emerson's philosophy is idealistic. In the preface of 1836 edition of *Nature*, he puts a passage from the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus, which suggests the primacy of spirit and human understanding over nature. At the beginning of Chapter VI, "Idealism," Emerson questions whether nature actually exists, whether God may have created it only as a perception in the human mind. Having stated that the response to this question makes no difference in the usefulness of nature as an aid to human comprehension of the universal, Emerson concludes that the answer is ultimately unknowable; whether real or not, he perceives nature as an ideal. (Nature, (essay) from Wikipedia).

In Commodity chapter Emerson says that the beauty of nature is a source of delight and "Eye is the best of artist" as we perceive the beauty of the world by the virtue given to us by God. By admitting it, Emerson shares the philosophy of Subjective Individualism of English philosopher – Berkley.

*And the best gift of God*

*Is the love of superior souls* (Emerson, 1994, p. 450).

God, the Spiritual Being could be perceived through nature, whilst everything must be spiritual and moral in which there should be "goodness" between nature and humans. Looking back to the epoch of Emerson, we regret how much of that "goodness" has been wasted, and that the process still continues.

When considering thousands of scientific articles in which the researchers try to persuade the mankind regarding the calamities leading to full-size cataclysms which are already on the way, and which have already shown its irreversible results, we try to find the ways the public could

be persuaded to find the revelation in the love of nature, and that reality could be understood by studying nature. As Emerson teaches,

*“Every natural action is graceful. Every heroic act is also decent, and causes the place and the bystanders to shine. We are taught by great actions that the universe is the property of every individual in it. It is his if he will. He may divest himself of it; he may creep into a corner, and abdicate his kingdom”* (Nature, essay, ch.3. Beauty).

The warning of the genius poet of the 19th century sounds rather awesome today; there is a feeling that humans have totally forgot how to care about the nature, and that they do not feel personal responsibility for the safe world.

Waldo Emerson's philosophy is well presented in his poetry. In his poem Water he shows different poetic personality, freer and more unconventional in both form and subject matter.

*The water understands  
Civilization well --  
It wets my foot, but prettily,  
It chills my life, but wittily,  
It is not disconcerted,  
It is not broken –hearted,  
Well used, it dekeeth joy;  
Adorneth, doublet joy;  
Ill-used it will destroy  
In perfect time and measure,  
With a face of golden pleasure,  
Elegantly destroy* (Emerson, 1994, p. 377).

In the poetry of Emerson the nature is always in balance, it rules the lives of humans who should adorn it and will be richly granted in return. There is a warning that, if the nature is badly used it shall destroy “with a face of golden pleasure”. Sadly, the world has witnessed many times the destructive results of ill-treated nature. Emerson's prose sonnet Woods starts with the following words:

*Wise are ye, O ancient woods! wiser than man,.... men have no language to describe one moment of your eternal life. This I would ask of you, o sacred Woods, when you shall next give me somewhat to say, give me also the tune wherein to say it. ... though a man have heard them [tune] for seventy years, are never the same, but always new, like time itself, or like Love* (Emerson, 1994, p. 366).

Woods in Emerson's sonnet talk with “winds, or rains, or brooks, or birds” about eternal truth which sounds anew each time. The secret of the nature is that it is “never been repeated”, and the man should always listen to the tune of nature, which tells about genuineness and authentic state of affairs.

## Vazha Pshavela's Philosophy of Live Nature in Poems and Short Stories

Brothers by intellect and spirit: harmony and unanimity between two brother poets and philosophers never knowing each-other with oceans between them.

Vazha Pshavela (real name Luka Razikashvili, 1861-1915) a distinguished Georgian writer, poet, philosopher and public figure assumed the pen-name from the homeland, high mountainous region in North Caucasian range where he was born and where he spent all his life (Vazha Pshavela, 2012, p. 95) The Poet views man and nature in a harmonious complexity and regards the nature as alive. The mountains, valleys, flowers and rivers are all part of the wholeness to which humans also belong. The emotional and intellectual unity between mankind and the earth with all its habitats is a key to understanding the poet's philosophy. It is a symbolic language, and the poet's attempt to make animals, plants, mountains and humans communicate with common language seems natural as they talk about the universal truth, sharing their problems, joys and sorrows.

Each short story or poem has a concept word which conceals the true philosophic idea of the literary work. The texts include sacred events, traditions, or scenes which bear highly symbolic meaning (Vazha Pshavela, 2012, p. 97)<sup>1</sup>.

Vazha Pshavela Inspires every lifeless thing to be alive but the attempt to find proper place for a man in that system is not markedly solved. Nature is a homeland and it equally belongs to every live creature – be it an animal, plant or human. In a short story “*The Roots*” we see how the earth gives away all his energy free of charge, gives it for love and never asks anything in return. The roots of oak trees cry because they witness the fall of a once mighty oak tree: “*A hardhearted and ruthless man broke our heart and smashed down our child [oak tree] and he left us full of tears. He started cutting it with an axe, splitting it into pieces. He did not give any heed to our child's and our moaning.....We are bleeding and you call it “juice of tree”* (Vazha Pshavela, 2012, p.118). The live creature which was nourished by the blessed earth is cut down, and the most embarrassing is that the earth cannot reject this brutal act of the man, because, “*The Earth is the mother of all and cares for one and all.... Blessed be thy breast, our mother, our fountain of sources, and our breast-feeder!*” (ibid, p. 119). She, the Mother Earth, feeds humans and understands their needs also; however the end of the story sounds really tragic. In the result of utilizing of the natural resources beyond its capacity, nature is crying a lot: “*We are sorry to leave and abandon our dwelling place where we were born, brought up and where we felt life within us... We are left roofless, bare and hungry, in the end we shall collapse and go down too, falling miry depth.*” The misuse of natural resources drag humans to disaster, and it: “*may cast us off ashore on a wilderness, where the scorching sun might wither and dry*

<sup>1</sup> The passages given in the article are from the stories by Vazha translated by Lali Jokhadze.



us up, make our name vanish all together." The allegory of The Roots is vivid and clear, it predicts the future of the humans who might find themselves on the verge of vanishing lest they take care of Mother Nature, their homeland, their only property. *Heavenly Powers, have mercy and compassion on the suppliant poor and wretched roots!* (ibid, p. 122).

Prediction of the declining communication between man and nature due to many reasons is given in a short allegoric story "Once Only Spoke the Rock". The story is one long dialogue between the rock and the man. Enormous awesome cliff addresses the man blaming people for love of empty and vain words, for cruelty, for all the transgressions, as he sees blood and tears shed on the earth. The man invites him to talk with people directly with same grace and solemnity, but the Rock rejects, saying that the people would think him "a sheer apparition and stop listening to him". The Rock sees men as consumers who would "take an iron rod, detonator and blow the rock up, splitting it into pieces" (ibid, p.165). The Rock is wise and perceives the true nature of men: He destroys nature to build his own house, build walls or carve grave stones. The philosophic attitude of Nature towards the people is biblical: the Rock understands that they are sinners and so they are destined to make mistakes: "Man shall again sin, make mistakes and then they will repent. Later he shall again try to correct the mistake" (ibid, p.164). The only message the Rock sends to mankind is "Men, Love Each-Other! This should be the first commandment so that every mother should whisper into her suckling every day" (ibid, p.165).

The magic word LOVE emerges in the story giving a strong belief that the Nature, the wisest and the noblest, filled with the Holy Spirit and divinity LOVES us, humans, suffers when observes injustices; She, who understands the reason of the mistakes made by the humans, forgives them for having consumer's attitude towards Nature, forgives and loves. But the problem is that men are filled with mistrust: "Man does not trust in man, even if you tell him righteous things" (ibid. p.163). They would not even trust their years and eyes if He ( the Rock) will talk to them, hence, at the end of the story, the Rock refuses to continue the dialogue he started with the man, wretched and miserable the Man goes to the Rock many times, but "it never stirred nor gave any sign of life. It seemed to be clad into some black armor, blurred dimly with mist and fog, hiding from me forever (Pshavela, 2012, p.166).

## Conclusion

The words sound like an awesome warning: the earth and all natural resources seem to be dressed into sober attire, and the true divine connection, open-hearted dialogue between men and nature seems shattered and torn for long.

The central philosophic idea presented in Emerson's Nature and in Vazha Pshavela's literary works should become a guiding principle for the wise and intellectual societies, for the governments and farmers, for young genera-

tions, for all who care for the further happy life on a heavenly beautiful Green Ball, our home-planet! The utmost mission of the mankind is to save the earth from the ecological catastrophe, its soil from depletion, people from the threat of famine, and the nations from severe competition for natural resources leading to violence, wars and destructions.

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