

Environmental Sustainability in Steven Zaillian's *A Civil Action*

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Movies are reliably the best medium to deliver a message to a large audience. More than books, movies can evoke the feelings of humans through visual, music and dialogues. It is an effective medium to create awareness even to the illiterate people. Ecocriticism is a theory used mostly in the analysis of written texts, the application of ecocriticism to other artistic media, films, in particular, has been lacking: "Rarely has cinema general been viewed through an ecocritical lens, nor has there been much evidence in the main venues of ecocriticism of the sustained application of ecocritical strategies to film and cinema studies" (Ivakhiv). Literature and cinema both are interconnected to each other and comparison comes eventually. Films and stories are reliably the best medium to deliver messages to the society.

The word 'sustain' has been in the language for a thousand years. It comes from the Latin word *sustenare* meaning "to hold up". Environmental sustainability helps in the need of people to be met without affecting the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Also, it allows for long term environmental quality. It is also the biggest issues faced by mankind at

present. At the dawn of this millennium, environmental issues are on the front page news.

The world is in an emergency mode. Humans have spoilt almost all the natural resources, for their selfish needs like drilling the earth for oil and hydrocarbon, fishing, deforesting, etc. The Earth is in the eleventh hour, so many countries in the world have announced ‘climate emergency’. For this research, the researcher has chosen Steven Zaillian’s movie *A Civil Action*. Water contamination is the main theme of the movie, and this movie is based on real-life events, so the impact level would be high. Oxford Dictionary has declared the term “climate emergency” as the word of the year for 2019.

The movie *Civil Action* was released on 8 January 1999 in the USA. Steven Zaillian directed this film and did the screenplay, and it was produced by the Touchstone pictures. This movie deals with the problem of water contamination with toxic waste, dumped by two companies W.R. Grace and Beatrice Foods. As a result of the contamination, many kids were affected by a rare disease like Leukemia and other health issues also, such as skin rashes and miscarriages. The residents of Woburn in Massachusetts attempted to win justice after the contamination of their water system by the companies and lawyer Jan Schlichtmann takes on Grace and Beatrice in court on behalf of the people of Woburn. This movie is about the people of Woburn in Massachusetts against chemical giants W.R. Grace and consumer goods conglomerate Beatrice Foods. Twelve children had been contracted with leukemia in the town of 36,000 from the late 1960s to the early ‘80s. “Of these, eight lived within a half-mile radius of each other and six lived in one east Woburn neighborhood of just 200 families. Cancer deaths in town during the mid-1970s were increased by 17 percent.”(Randall, 2020) this is the fact of Woburn.

A new water well had been opened in 1964 near an industrialised square. Despite residents' complaint of "odour then. Chlorine or something" (26:55:06) but, the city refused to shut it down until 1979. Trichloroethylene (TCE) also found in the well water of Woburn. Chronic exposure to TCE over recommended occupational limits has been associated with damage to the liver and kidneys, although this is less well documented in humans than in animals, possibly permanent effects on the nervous system of humans. TCE most often enters the environment through brief emanations from metal degreasing industries and by spills or accidental releases to air, soil, and water. But in the particular scene of the movie the company's complete toxic wastewater directly mixed in the river of Woburn. The company not only contaminated the water but also the land "toxic solvent these factories dumped on the land" (23:00:06). Because of its high vapour pressure and low rate of adsorption in soil TCE evaporates fairly rapidly when released to the soil. The conglomerates failed to maintain the sustainability of the environment in Woburn. So in here the environmental sustainability completely collapsed, the main idea of this is the responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality. The groundwater of Woburn instead of saving lives of people and animals, it started killing people through the deadly leukemia diseases "two death over 15 years from leukemia eight of them children" (07:14:06) and who drink water containing TCE over many years could experience liver problems and may have an increased risk of developing liver cancer.

In a particular scene of the movie, the industry of Woburn "...are used two chemicals are used to waterproof leather" (36:23:06) and also to "Washed belts and gearboxes with it, and threw it in gully" (45:02:06) the problem started through the remaining chemicals of

gully. The company fails to follow the ethical of the chemical waste treatment. Not only this company but almost all the corners of the Earth neither developed countries nor developing countries, they don't have the sustainable environmental practice, people don't think of the future generation and they have no worries about them. The W. R. Grace company official's answer about the death of Woburn children is shocked it clearly shows the opinion of the future generation "...if I took hundred pennies and threw them in the air, half would land heads and half tails, right?"(28:41:06) these selfish behaviours lead humans to the crimes regarded Interpol as the third largest illegal business in the world after drug and arms trafficking is wild animal traffic raises a serious threat to the world's biodiversity survival.

The consumers are among the most important ones as this crime would disappear if supply and the high prices that people are ready to pay for them on the black market ceased to exist the "more endangered the species is, the higher the price is for it." (Activesustainability.com, 2020) The uncontrolled logging to get wood for furniture or other goods or even for farmlands is the most severe cause of this ecological crime. In the so-called developed countries, there are up to 50 million tonnes of electronic waste every year computers, mobile phones, appliances, TV sets, etc. "And up to 75% of all these is estimated to leave the official circuit and a good deal of them to be illegally exported to Africa, China or India." (Activesustainability.com, 2020) and the crime in the sea is day by day increasing a hundred million sharks are captured every year by specialised ships and up to 70 million of them are netted to only have their limbs cut off alive on the ship and then be thrown back into the sea. This practice involves a slow and painful death. The whole environmental sustainability collapsed in the name of modernization, country's development, and smart city concepts. This collapse will bring the change to nature Yuval Noah Harari says many call this

process 'the destruction of nature.' But it's not destruction its changing nature cannot be destroyed. The humans cannot tolerate this change all his science and technology won't help for the destruction like a tsunami, and deadly diseases like AIDS, Ebola, Corona, etc...

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