

The Role of Water in Steven Soderbergh's *Erin Brockovich*

J. Premkumar,

Assistant Professor of English,
Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli-17
calligraphyprem@gmail.com
and

Dr. Suresh Frederick,

Associate Professor and UG Head,
Department of English,
Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli-17
sfheber@gmail.com

‘Water’ is a transparent and nearly colorless chemical substance which is the main constituent of Earth’s streams, lakes, and oceans, and the fluids of most living organisms. Its chemical formula is H_2O , meaning that its molecule contains one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms, that are connected by covalent bonds. Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman says “Water is the basis for all forms of life. All creatures require water for their physiological activity. Hence the need of the hour is to conserve and properly harness all available water resources”. So water is the important source of life. Recent days of human technology cannot create a single drop of water, but nowadays only for the money multinational corporations and global conglomerates are extracting and polluting water unsustainably.

Environmental issues have inspired many authors, Researchers and movie makers to put the issues in their works. Films and stories are dependably best media to deliver a message to other people on a mass level. For this research paper the researcher has used Susannah Grant’s screenplay of the movie *Erin Brockovich* as a primary source and using other elements, “Films communicate not only through imagery, metaphor, and symbol; visually through action and gesture; verbally through dialogue, but also directly through concrete images and sounds” (Boggs 3). Such as the acting, cinematography, lighting, costumes, dialogue, and characterization, are used here for better understanding of the film. The fact that the film is based on a true story also adds complexity to its message, and while audiences may be in disagreement about whether they find the story inspiring, the film is undoubtedly unique.

‘Ecocide theory’ is a term coined by Arthur Galston, the researcher has used this term for this research study. The Oxford dictionary definition of Ecocide is ‘Destruction of the natural environment, especially when deliberate’. The word Ecocide was recorded at the Conference on War and National Responsibility in Washington 1970, where Arthur Galston proposed a new international agreement to ban Ecocide. Erin Brockovich’s arguments against Ecocide occurred in the southern California town Hinkley and her claims as found in the screenplay of the movie.

This research paper attempts to critically examine in the light of Abraham Galston's famous theory called 'Ecocide theory'.

Erin Brockovich 2000 is a biopic, drama, and romantic movie. This movie is a true story that is carried out from the biography of Erin Brockovich directed by Steven Soderbergh. An American director who was nominated in the same year for the Academy Awards, Golden Globes and the Directors' Guild of America. The producers are Danny DeVito, Stacy Sher, Michael Shambegh, Gail Lyon, and John Hardy. The screenplay writer is Susannah Grant. This was distributed by Universal Studio and Columbia Pictures. The duration is 130 minutes. This film was released in United States on March 14, 2000, and March 17, 2000.

This movie story begins with a desperate woman Erin Brockovich, who was a single mother for three children, divorced and looking for a job. She got a job in a small firm in California. When she was working there, she found a box which carries a real estate case that was not finished yet. She was confused when she read the data of the case inside the box, because she found many health related notes of the people of Hinkley. Then she asked permission of Ed Masry her boss to find out what happened. There, she finds the fact that Pacific Gas and Electric Company used contaminated hexavalent chromium or poisoned water around Hinkley. Therefore, it resulted in severe health problems of Hinkley's citizens, who were affected by cancer, kidney failure and asphyxia. Erin felt so sorry and promised to make PG&E to pay for what it had done to the Hinkley's citizens. When Erin took up this case she felt as if all those problems had happened to her own family.

"*ERIN; ...Environmental Health Services of the discovery of 0.58 ppm of the hexavalent chromium in on-site ground water*" (Erin). Pacific gas and Electric Company deliberately contaminated the ground water with hexavalent chromium is to prevent corrosion when water is used to cool down the machines which were used in the factory. This company dumped the excess of water into ponds, but they skipped the ethical choice to prevent the contamination. They did not worry about the environment even though they knew the consequences. The company contaminates not only the ground water and also polluted the drinking water and pools, because of regular contamination of water, it has become poisonous. This contaminated water leads people to severe health problems like "*respiratory disease, liver failure, heart failure, reproductive failure, chronic headaches, bone or organ deterioration*" (Erin). Humans are very anthropocentric in nature by destroying forest and to build mega structured buildings, they tend to use big machines ultimately these machines end up producing toxic chemicals.

As "*Erin spots a few dead frogs in the water*" (Erin). It is clear that the water was contaminated, it was not only affected humans and also animals. If frogs become extinct the breeding of bugs would be enormous. Frogs eat moths, flies, grasshoppers, crickets, mosquitos, and spiders. Frogs as a natural population controller of insect's infestations would become rampant if they were to die out. Not only the insects be annoying, but they could wreak havoc on crops, which could lead to more chemicals and pesticides being used. And that's probably one of

the reasons frogs are dying off. Pesticides are also believed to be responsible for the large die-off of bees, another alarming environmental problem. It affects whole eco system.

Erin convincing hundreds of families to sue the \$28 billion company Pacific Gas and Electric, which has poisoned the water supply of Hinkley, California with hexavalent chromium. The verdict of the case says the company has to pay \$333 million as a penalty for the damage it has done to the people and environment. It has become the largest settlement in a direct action lawsuit in United States history.

In America, people are well educated and they are powerful among all nations, they know the value of water and its importance, even though they pollute the environment. In most countries, the majority of people spend more than 30 minutes to fetch water. But in some regions, especially sub-Saharan Africa, many people spend more than 30 minutes and some more than an hour on each trip to fetch water. This burden still falls mainly on women and girls they are responsible for this task in eight in 10 households that don't have a piped supply. Fresh water sustains human life and is vital for human health. There is enough fresh water for everyone in this Earth. However, due to bad economics or poor infrastructure, millions of people especially children die, because of diseases associated with inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene. Water scarcity affects more than 40 per cent of the global population and is projected to rise. It is estimated that 783 million people do not have access to clean water and over 1.7 billion people are currently living in river basins where water use exceeds recharge. For a luxurious and sophisticated life people are moving to cities from villages, Even in India like countries people are lending their farm lands to the multinational companies and started shifting to cities. In cities people knowingly contaminating the rivers, many of the disease are spreading only through the contaminated water. "If we destroy nature, nature will destroy us", because of the human's Ecocide drinking water demand is increasing in most countries. So people must know and understand the importance of water and environment for their happy and healthy living.

Works Referred:

Brian McFarlane "Novel to film: an introduction to the theory of adaptation". Clarendon Press, 1996, Oxford.

Boggs, Joseph M. and Dennis W. Petrie. *The Art of Watching Films*. 7th ed. McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Erin Brockovich. Dir. Steven Soderbergh. Perf. Julia Roberts, Albert Finney, and Aaron Eckhart. Universal and Columbia Pictures. 2000.

Grant, Susannah. *Erin Brockovich*. 1998.

Glotfelty, Cheryll and Harold Fromm. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology*. The University of Georgia Press, 1996.

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/mar/17/access-to-drinking-water-world-six-infographics>

<https://zenit.org/article/pope-s-audience-if-we-destroy-nature-nature-will-destroy-us-video/>

Frederick, Suresh. "Striving for Symbiosis: An Ecocritical Study of Selected Poems of Tagore's The Gardener". *Indian English Poetry: Recent Explanations*. Gauri Shankar Jha. Ed. Authors Press, 2008.

Selvamony, Nirmal, Nirmaldasan and Rayson K, Alex. Ed. *Essays in Ecocriticism*. Sarup, 2007.