

Ecocritical Analysis in Sheri Stewart Tepper's *The Margarets* and Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

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Abstract- Eco criticism is the study of the connection between the earth and literature. It has been a constantly evolving academic field that addresses the topic of the human relationship with the environment. The studies on humanities have conveyed that if the population increases without any restraint, then the world will be on the edge of environmental upheaval. The rising threat to humanity from unceasing misuse of the ecosystem has seized the attention of the writers. They created awareness among the people and enhanced the consequence they have to face of environmental degradation. Sheri Stewart Tepper, a science fiction American writer, and Amitav Ghosh have focused on how to save humankind and nature from the danger of destruction in their works. This paper intends to examine the different approaches towards nature in Tepper's *The Margarets* and Ghosh's *Gun Island* and accentuate their different thoughts. Both authors have employed the idea of retrieving nature in their works.

Keywords: Science, ecocriticism, nature, population, environmental degradation.

Eco criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the earth. The word ecocriticism first appeared in William Rueckert's essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. Ecologist Haeckel has conveyed his thought of ecology as the scientific study of the relationship between organisms and the environment. The term ecocriticism has a broad domain and has been expressed through many literary genres. It investigates the relationship between humans and the natural world in literature. It also deals with the environmental issues, cultural issues concerning the environment, and attitudes towards nature that are presented and analyzed. Cheryl Glotfelty defines ecocriticism in her work introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*

What...is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship

between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty p.xviii)

As per the words of Glotfelty, the concept of ecocriticism focuses on the interaction between the environment and human culture. Ecocriticism not only deals with ecology and its principles but also concentrates on the study of literature and theoretical approach to the interrelations of nature, culture, and even the supernatural elements in nature. It explores the expressions of the environment in literary texts and theoretical discourse.

Ghosh and Tepper emphasize the importance of balance in the environment and raise awareness of the natural changes that are caused by science and technology through their works. The transformation in the social and cultural environments of the world has completely changed the representations of man's attitude toward nature. Mankind has over-exploited natural resources. Earth is in crisis, virtually destroyed by overpopulation, and mankind is tethering on the edge. Tepper and Ghosh through their characters induce the minds of the readers to take action to protect nature before it's too late to begin. Tepper prefers to use the scientific method to make mankind deviate from the thought of plundering nature, rather than protecting and preserving it.

In the novel *The Margarets*, the female protagonist Margaret Bain, undertakes the mission to save humankind from the danger of extinction. To prevent this, she tries to find a way to make humankind understand that their lives are in danger. Tepper brings out the idea to bring back the stolen collective memory

of humans. Since memory is the fundamental element in uniting humans and makes them perfect humans. Always mistakes remain a lesson for everyone and humans also learn from their mistakes. Tepper depicts that the earth is overpopulated and polluted, so humankind has to find a place for them to live on.

The Interstellar Trade Organization (ISTO) in the novel helps to regulate the systems of the planets and living creatures and recognizes four kinds of creatures; civilized, semicivilized, barbarians, and animals. The Interstellar Trade Organization had demanded man's extinction, for a living planet is more important than any race upon it. Tepper conveys that as humankind has exploited nature to the fullest it's better to protect nature than the people. The importance has been given to the planet and the environment rather than human beings.

Margaret Bain is a human child living in a colony on Martian Satellite Phobos. As she is the only human being she was all alone. So, she invents six fictional accomplice characters to keep boredom and loneliness at bay. Each is an extension of her personality. The original Margaret is the linguist living on planet Tercis; her second self is a spy called Ongamar on planet Cantardene; her third self is Wilvia, a princess running away from the cruelty of the alien race Quaar on planet Hell; her fourth self is a healer called Gretamara on planet Chottem; her fifth self is Naumi on Thairy, a male warrior; her sixth self is Mar the telepath on fajnard and her last seventh self is Murgy the shaman on B'yurngrad. All these characters got disappeared when she was forced to go to Earth.

Alien races are eager to buy human slaves for labour work and to keep them as domestic companions. Humans have exploited the environment massively without thinking about their forthcoming future generations. Humans are not aware of the problem that overpopulation and environmental greed are unsustainable elements. Earth is occupied with too many semi civilized people. They are the ones who know to care for and preserve the environment but they don't do anything. The people and governments are in constant denial: "Only when aliens arrived in star ships to tell them the end had come did governments try to deal with the situation, and by then, it was too late" (Tepper 108).

As Margaret grows up into adulthood, her alternate creative selves take different life paths from her and started to live their lives. Whenever there is a sudden

change, a part of herself separates and moves to different planets living different lives from each other. Each alternate self represents a feature of a human, and all seven together, form a person who is capable enough to save humanity and the world. All the seven Margarets come together and by complementing each other's life experiences they become the embodiment of the solution to humanity and finds a way to retrieve the destroyed nature in to back to its form.

Each Margaret represents a feature of a human. The first Margaret is a linguist, understands all languages, and is able to communicate with everyone. Naumi, the warrior Margaret, an insignia of duty and responsibility. Ongamar's organizes sacrificing ceremonies. The telepath Margaret takes care of animals on a farm. The Wilvia, is an inspiring and wise leader. The Gretamara, learns to make medicines and elixirs to cure people in need. The Shaman Margaret explores ways to trap evil parasites.

If the human race is to survive, we needed seven of you with a broad variety of experiences. Some were slaved, some were sovereign, some laboured, some thought, some were hidden, some were put in unexpected places, and some were left out in plain sight to see if anyone showed undue interest. You were camouflaged. (Tepper 469)

As this is the only way for Margarets to meet the keeper and retrieve the memory that humanity lost. Rosi Braidotti conveys her thoughts that humans are altered due to the pressure of modern technology, scientific advances, and global economic concerns. It provokes humans to concentrate more on development in technology rather than looking back on what they lost.

In the novel *The Margarets*, the humans are no more the centre of the universe, due to their negligence and lack of action to preserve the environment. Other races in the universe use humans as trading elements. To safeguard the nature humans should join hands and find solutions to cure the exploited earth.

In the novel *Gun Island* Amitav Ghosh, expressed his deep concern about climate change in his work. In *Gun Island* and his nonfiction work *The Great Derangement* he produces an in-depth analysis of the current climate crisis. He raises critical questions regarding the natural environment, the human-nature relationship, and the emergency in preserving nature. The endless desires of the human-centric world's

culture and greed have driven this climate change and environmental deterioration. The novel depicts the anthropogenic climate upheavals in the era of socioeconomic and cultural globalization and illegal migration to India.

The protagonist of the novel *Gun Island*, Dinanath Datta, is a Brooklyn-based rare book dealer. He visits the shrine of Manasa Devi in the Sundarbans followed by the request made by Nilima. Dinanath Datta is mentioned as “Deen” in short in the novel. Deen embarks on a journey to know about the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, a gun merchant and finds his life becoming unexpectedly entangled with an ancient legend the goddess of snakes, Manasa Devi. Nilima wants Deen to visit the Sundarbans as its condition is getting worse day by day.

It was the only time I actually went there. I did see it again once, from a distance, but I didn't have time to stop. That was ten years ago. I believe the dhaam's still there, but who knows how much longer it'll remain? The islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by the sea; they're disappearing before our eyes. That's why I feel that some record should be made of it; for all I know that temple might be an important historical mounement. (Ghosh 18)

Since Deen had a passion for antiquities, she requested him to visit the shrine of Manasa Devi, before it gets vanished from the rising sea level. He witnesses the perilous lives of the people who inhabit the mangrove region Sundarban. “Every merchant who's ever sailed out of Bengal has to pass through the Sundarbans-there's no other way to reach the sea. The Sundarbans are the frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye; that's exactly where the war between profit and Nature is fought” (Ghosh 8). The Sundarbans witnessed several travelers and immigrants. Many goods were exported and imported through Sundarbans. Materialistic people come to earn profit at the cost of natural resources.

Piya, an Indian- American of Bengali origin visits Sundarbans to monitor the Irrawaddy Dolphins based on her research. She often visits the place and makes a record of the dolphins. She named the Dolphins and monitored their movements. A year later one of the dolphins named Rani went missing. In order to record their movements Piya had launched a frantic search, scouring the pod's favored routes.

Rani was entangled in a length of nylon netting. Piya wasted no time in cutting Rani loose and after that, the dolphin had begun to make eye contact with her, in a manner quite different from other members of the pod- a manner that suggested something more than mere recognition (the word ‘gratitude’ suggested itself all the more strongly because Piya was so careful to avoid using it). (Ghosh 92)

Piya was recognized by the dolphins when she moves to rescue them in danger. As the water level raises the flow carries the dolphins along with them. Inevitably some had been ensnared by fisherman's nets and some had been hit by motorboats and steamers.

They're these vast stretches of water that have a very low oxygen content too low for fish to survive. Those zones have been growing at a phenomenal pace, mostly because of residues from chemical fertilizers. When they're washed into the sea, they set off a chain reaction that leads to all the oxygen being sucked out of the water. Only a few highly specialized organisms can survive in those conditions-everything else dies, which is why those patches of water are known as “dead zones”. (Ghosh 95)

The dead zones are manmade zone that kills aquatic beings. The chemical fertilizers get washed into the sea and make it difficult for aquatic beings to survive. She observed that the river has been polluted by chemical wastes and agricultural pollutants. Piya filed a complaint against the chemical refinery group but since they are influential people, they had control over politicians and the police. In Sundarbans, such water pollution and dead zones result in the death of aquatic beings both in rivers and seas. It affects the life of the people who earn their daily bread depending on fishing. Man has not only destroyed nature but has disturbed the life of his fellow humans too.

Ghosh and Tepper have focused on preserving the environment and safeguarding the humans from danger. Both writers have followed different aspects in their works to make the mankind realize that it's time to protect rather than develop the technology. Tepper has used the scientific method to retrieve the lost memory of humans. When people are able to remember their past, they can find solutions for the present and create a better future. Tepper creates awareness among the readers by presenting the image

of the future earth on how the human life will be shattered no soul to listen to their plea.

Ghosh meanwhile emphasizes how mankind digs their own trench through their inventions. The inventions mark the development of the country, meanwhile, it also paves way for the destruction of human life. The fertile lands and forest turn into apartments and shopping malls. The temperatures are rising around the world because of global warming. Ghosh persuades the reader that the change in climate patterns will change the lives of humans. He gives a warning to his fellow men to start before it's too late to regret.

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