



Literature and Environment: Deep Ecological Perspectives in the Ibis Trilogy and the Maddaddam Trilogy

Anjali¹ & Dr Sanket Kumar Jha²

1. Research Scholar, University Department of English, Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar
2. Assistant professor, University Department of English, Lalit Narayan Mithila University, Darbhanga, Bihar

Abstract

We are all breathing in a technocrat era of climate change. In this contemporary world, the biocentric ambiance is vanishing and the anthropocentric environment is evolving. One of the most pressing concerns today is undeniably the deterioration of planet Earth. The uninhibited exploitation of nature and its aftermaths of pollution, devastation, and wildlife extinction are the harsh realities of our times. Due to unnecessary needs and irrelevant demands of humans, nature is declining and decaying day by day. To ameliorate this disparity between humans and nature, a recent branch of ecological philosophy called Deep Ecology has evolved which claims that, like humanity, the living environment as a whole has the same right to live and flourish. This philosophy emphasizes the interdependence of humans and non-humans in the ecological sphere and thus advocates a balance between the two. Literature is a reflection of life and it always plays a prominent role in establishing a deep relationship between humans and their surroundings. Deep Ecology is creating a buzz in the literary world nowadays. It offers a philosophical basis for environmental advocacy which may, in turn, guide human activity against self-destruction. In the twentieth century, a new genre of literature reflecting the ecological concerns has come in vogue. For instance, Amitav Ghosh' *Ibis trilogy* deals with the continuous exploitation of India's land for poppy cultivation by the British Imperialists. Margaret Atwood as an environmentalist also talks about the deterioration of ecology and her *Maddaddam trilogy* studies the impact of scientific advancements such as genetically modified crops and lethal microbes on human existence. This article is a sincere attempt to highlight the ecological concerns and deep ecological perspectives in the *Ibis trilogy* and the *Maddaddam trilogy*.

Keywords- Deep Ecology, *Ibis trilogy*, *Maddaddam trilogy*, Environmental ethics, Ecological concerns

Deep ecology is not considered a distinct movement but part of the green movement. The philosophy of Deep ecology is rejecting the idea of humans as authoritarian guardians of the environment. The phrase 'Deep ecology' was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. "For Arne Naess, "Ecological science, concerned with facts and logic alone, cannot answer ethical questions about how we should live. For this, we need ecological wisdom. Deep ecology seeks to develop this by focusing on deep experience, deep questioning, and deep commitment. These constitute an interconnected system. Each gives rise to and supports the other, whilst the entire system is, what Naess would call, an ecosophy: an evolving but consistent philosophy of being, thinking, and acting in the world, that embodies ecological wisdom and harmony." [2] Naess

rejected the idea that beings can be ranked according to their relative value. Næss states that from an ecological point of view "the right of all forms [of life] to live is a universal right which cannot be quantified. No single species of living being has more of this particular right to live and unfold than any other species." This metaphysical idea is elucidated in Warwick Fox's claim that we and all other beings are "aspects of a single unfolding reality". [3].

Proponents of Deep ecology believe that the world does not exist as a free resource to be fearlessly exploited by humans. Humans should understand the inherent value of every living thing whether plants or animals or insects. Deep ecology offers a philosophical basis for environmental advocacy which guides human activity against perceived self-destruction. In the western civilization, according to the Scala naturae, also known as the great chain of being, the human beings are at the top of a hierarchy of complexity, intelligence, and value. But in our Indian civilization, every being on this earth has the same intrinsic value and God is the supreme power only. There is no bigger or smaller concept in it. Even Darwin provided the theoretical and mechanistic proof that "all life on earth is related by descent with modification, showing that humans are a byproduct of the same natural nonprogressive and dispassionate processes that apply to all other living beings" (Darwin). Humans should know that there is the ultimate supreme power of this whole universe, God and everything runs under his power. God has made the humans most intellectual and active among all the other beings, but it doesn't mean that human overpowers every other living organism. The ethics of Deep ecology hold that a whole system is superior to any of its constituent parts. This whole system, the whole universe is made of both human and non-human things i.e., flora and fauna, and every being has its own value in its own way and they are necessary to constitute this world. God has made a proper and planned chain in which every being whether human or non-human, is interdependent on each other. If any one of them is removed or extinct, it will disturb the whole chain of process. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life have value in themselves and these values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes. By having great intellectual ability, Man thinks that God has created this whole universe only for their sole purpose. Humans have no right to reduce the richness and variety except for their vital needs. Due to the increasing human population, the flourishing of non-human life is decreasing. So, to flourish in non-human life, humans must decrease the alarming rate of the growing population. As the population increases, it requires more roads, more construction buildings, more factories, and companies for employment, and for all these purposes, they will cut down the trees, uproot the mini plants and shrubs, and by cutting down the giant trees, they destroy the nests of many birds which was built there on trees and in this process, they killed a number of birds too. And the sad thing about this is that they don't even feel sad or sympathetic towards them. Humans are becoming blind monsters in satisfying their irrelevant needs. The human interference with the non-human world is increasing rather than decreasing and it is making the extant situation rapidly worsening. Man has been exploiting nature since the dawn of civilization. Humans are big but they are not great and there will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.

Amitav Ghosh is very vocal about anthropogenic climatic crisis. Ghosh "argues that despite a long history of human artistic engagement with the "earth as a protagonist" in social narratives, nonhuman actors are strikingly absent in the contemporary novel... that humanity needs a compelling alternative to this idea and that artists and other actors in the cultural sphere need to think creatively about what these alternatives might look like and how they might be enacted" (wordpress.com).

Amitav Ghosh examines the inability of the present generation to grasp the scale of climate change in the spheres of Literature, History and Politics. Ghosh's eco-narrative is an imaginative form of fiction that portrays all negative aspects of anthropogenic disturbance to biogenic ambience. Ghosh drafts what Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin describe as "greening postcolonialism" in Postcolonial Eco-Criticism, whereby he offers a new perspective of concerns and debates that affect the world at large and the way these issues can be highlighted through eco-narrative versus eco-tourism, eco-critical activism, environmental advocacy and aesthetics (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, p. 12). Amitav Ghosh's concern for the environment can be easily found in all his works like *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Great Derangement* (2016), *Gun Island* (2019), and the *Ibis trilogy*. *Ibis trilogy* consists of three novels namely *Sea Of Poppies* (2008), *River Of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood Of Fire* (2015) is based

on the opium trade between India and China run by the East India Company which mingled huge trafficking of girmitiyas, workers, and convicts from Calcutta. The opium trade between India and China causes a huge loss to the greenery and fertile land of India. Consistent cultivation of opium makes the land barren and unproductive. Britishers don't allow the Indians to grow anything else but opium. Ecocide and Ecological imperialism are the major concepts covered in this trilogy. Indians have become foreigners in their own country. Indians are forced to grow opium and the men who deny doing so, are immigrated forcefully to Mauritius by leaving their land and home. This trilogy shows how humans themselves are the prime enemy of both mankind and ecology. The heavy smoke which comes out from the Ghaziabad opium factory leads to many health issues and respiratory diseases in men. The earthenware pots which are used to store the raw opium get discharged into the river Ganga, thus polluting the water and affecting the aquatic lives too. In day-to-day life, people used to go to the river Ganga for a bath, and their everyday needs is satisfied by the river.

“After massaging poppy-seed oil into kabutri’s hair and her own, Deeti draped her spare sari over her shoulder and led her daughter towards the water, across the field” (SOP87).

The polluted water causes the algal bloom which reduces the level of dissolved oxygen in water, thus disturbing the fishes and aquatic lives to get proper oxygen for their survival. The highly polluted air that comes from the factory disturbs not only the metabolic functions of humans but also of insects and animals.

The butterflies too “flapped their wings in oddly erratic patterns as though they could not remember how to fly” (SOP28).

“The monkeys never chatter or stolen things or food but came down to eat the remains of the opium effluents and would climb back into the branches to resume their scrutiny of the Ganga and its currents” (SOP91).

The land was exhausted fearlessly for the profit-making motives of the European empires which led to the unbalanced plundering of human and natural resources. The monoculture of poppy cultivation has metamorphosized India’s resources and society to its worse than worst condition. Opium cultivation brings a catastrophic situation to the production of food crops which are major lifelines for the people of that locality.

In River of Smoke, Serang Ali revealed to us the exploitation of an island named Great Nicobar on the far side of the mountain. He pointed at the sky where flocks of swift flying birds were wheeling and soaring, the islanders call them hinlene. These birds are the source of their wealth as people pay a lot of money for their nests. And they sell it in China where people boil and eat them as daal. Another character named Fitcher was saddened to see the decline of Botanical Gardens.

“Where once there had been orderly, well-spaced trees, and picturesque vistas, there seemed to be nothing beyond but a jungle” (ROS37).

A character named Paulette Lambert is called the child of nature by her Botanist father. For her,

“The love of nature had been a kind of religion, a form of spiritual striving. Tending a garden was no mere matter of planting seeds and pruning branches but it was a spiritual discipline for her, a means of communicating with forms of life that were necessarily mute and could be understood only through a careful study” (ROS78).

The war between the British and China caused great harm to the regular cycle of climatic conditions. The blasts seemed to dry the heat and humidity, making it hard to breathe. Heavy displacement causes Dysentery among people.

“The gunfire shots caused heat waves to spread all over the atmosphere and as the hours passed the heat continued to mount and the vast swarm of flies, midges, and stinging gnats invaded the fortresses, drawn by the smell of rancid foul materials” (FOF 567).

Literature is as old as human language, and as new as tomorrow’s sunrise and literature is everywhere. Whether it may be Indian or Western countries, ecocritical aspects are reflected by each of the writers in their ways of dealing with ecological issues. Every writer has spoken about the relationship between the living being and the environment. One such recent writer who has successfully created her space for herself as Canada’s most popular novelist of the contemporary age is Margaret Atwood. Atwood’s works encompass a variety of themes including gender and identity, religion and myth, climate change, and power politics. In her works, Atwood recurrently presents her observation about the relationship between humans to animals. Margaret Atwood is a pescetarian. Themes related to the degradation of the environment and the rights of animals can be easily seen in most of her works like *Surfacing* (1972), *Edible woman* (1969), *Cat’s Eye* (1988), and *Maddaddam trilogy*. *Maddaddam trilogy* consists of three novels namely *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013). Atwood’s trilogy traces the role of traditional anthropocentrism behind this unprecedented crisis of destruction of natural habitats and depletion of natural resources. Currently, because of climate change, the permafrost is melting, glaciers disappearing and sea ice receding. Atwood even talks about the disappearance of the permafrost, “The northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane.” Margaret Atwood called climate change the “everything change.” Globalization and Industrialization caused by men have a major impact on climate change as it causes a lot of pollution, global warming, extinction of species, and climate adversity. Men, in the name of innovation and invention, cause only destruction and devastation. In *Maddaddam trilogy*, Atwood depicts the misuse of knowledge and technology and it further studies the impact of scientific advancements such as genetically modified crops and lethal microbes on human existence. Rather, the novels offer an alternative vision in which the hope for a better world is not invested in inventions but the ability to think creatively.

Oryx and Crake is told in the jumbled narrative form which moves back and forth between the novel’s present and the past. Snowman, the protagonist of the novel recalls his past childhood happy memories at the beginning of the novel which starts in the present time. He is the only human being left in the last of the novel along with the genetically modified animals and new humans-like species called crakers in this post-apocalyptic world. The novel deals with contemporary issues like worldwide warming, genetic engineering, declining resources, scarce species, sexploitation, and a wearing down of kindness. Jimmy, the Snowman is always concerned and worried about the animals. At the bonfire, when the animals are being burned, jimmy is ill at ease after seeing this because he cannot see the pain of any animal. He could see the animals looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes.

“At the bonfire Jimmy was anxious about the animals, because they were being burned and surely that would hurt them. No, his father told him. The animals were dead. They were like steaks and sausages, only they still had their skins on.” (OAC)

Pigoons are created by mixing the genes of pig and rangoons. They are so created because a perfectly modified pigoon can grow five or six kidneys at a time.

“Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs, much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one.” (OAC)

Jimmy is told to eat the pigoons and this will upset jimmy because he didn’t want to eat a pigoon as he thinks of the pigoons as creatures much like himself. He thinks of himself as pigoon’s friend.

“Pigoon pie again,” they would say. “Pigoon pancakes, pigoon popcorn. Come on, Jimmy, eat up!” (OAC)

Crake is snowman’s best friend and a gifted scientist who eventually developed and released the catastrophic plague that ravaged the earth’s human population. In rejecting the idea of God, Crake also rejected the idea of capital-N “Nature,” a quasi-divine notion that he believed encouraged a false distinction between what is natural and what is unnatural.

In the novel *The Year of the Flood*, the lethal microbes that swept away the whole planet spared no one except the ones who are the protectors of nature; The god's gardeners, Ren and Toby. God has created all the creatures in a balanced way. The stronger ones consume the weaker ones. The law of equality is applicable to all the creatures created by the Almighty and all the creatures should be treated with same kind of empathy and compassion.

“Vultures are our friends, the Gardeners used to teach. They purify the earth. They are God's necessary dark Angels of bodily dissolution. Imagine how terrible it would be if there were no death!” (TYF 4)

Toby and Ren are the creatures of God who have care and concern for other creatures living on the earth. The whole planet is facing the major environmental issues and its fierce effects. And in this critical situation Ren and Toby plan to cover the whole barren rooftop with greenery. Atwood thinks that Man is responsible for all these negative impacts and only man can make positive changes to it.

“Some would term our efforts futile, but if all were to follow our example, what a change would be wrought on our beloved Planet!” (TYF 13)

Atwood has presented a nicely crafted plot with the concepts of humanity and science. God has made all the creatures on the earth with similar kinds of traits. Man has modified a fusion version of pigs, called 'pigoons'. Man tries hard to convert the world of his ease, but the similarity with which everyone is born is the ultimate truth. Ren prays to God that man should not be arrogant by having privilege of being powerful creature on earth. She thanks God for making every creature similar.

“We thank Thee, oh God, for having made us in such a way as to remind us, not only of our less than Angelic being, but also of the knots of DNA and RNA that tie us to our many fellow Creatures” (TYF 64)

All the creatures are children of God. If one creature can consume certain thing, then the other one can also do the same. So, in this way if one is consumed harmlessly, then it can be done by others also.

“We recited together: “All food comes from the Earth”. (TYF 180)

The third novel, *Maddaddam* is written from the viewpoint of Zeb and Toby. In this volume the planet is in the state of ecological ruin.

“So, there is only one thing left to do. Either most of them must be cleared away while there is still an earth, with trees and flowers and birds and so on, or all must die when there are none things left. Because if there are none of those things left, then there will be nothing at all. Not even any people.” (MADDADDAM 354)

Zeb was carrying Adam when he was very thin and his face was all wet. And Adam said, I'll be fine. Pray for me.' He smiled and said Zeb that

“Don't worry. I wouldn't have lasted long. Plant a good tree.” (MADDADDAM 442)

Conclusion

“One of the first
Conditions of
Happiness is that the
Link between man
And nature shall not
Be broken.”

-Leo Tolstoy

Ecocriticism functions as a tool to enable people think and act in consideration of environment from the platform of literature. Literature, too works as one of the powerful media to connect people towards the issues affecting lifestyle of human beings for their betterment. So many authors have worked to answer the question,

“...call for a carefully case-based, historically contextualized analysis of contemporary social and environmental problems”. (Huggan 7)

Most Ecocritical works share a common motivation i.e., to spread sensitivity towards ecological aspects. These environmentalists analyze how environment and nature have been treated as marginalized factors in the process of growth and development. Margaret Atwood ultimately reveals the ultimate concept of happiness. – forgiveness is the only gem with the great person. Man can achieve this great state of happiness only by forgiving all the malice from his heart and initiate a new journey of life accepting concept of ‘Vasudhaiv kutumbkam’.

“Give up your anger and your spite,
And imitate the Deer, the Tree;
In sweet Forgiveness find your joy,
For it alone can set you free.” (TYF)

One of the most important functions of ecocriticism is to project literature as an ecological principle or ecological energy within the larger system to cultural discourses (Zapf, 2006: 55). Hence ecocriticism has moved beyond biological deterministic views of nature-culture relationships and forges toward acknowledging the aspect of difference and independent dynamics of cultural and intellectual phenomena (ibid, 2006: 51). Ghosh beautifully pictures how the monoculture of opium endangers all the living beings in the physical environment and that finally ends up in the exploitation of nature and imbalance of the ecology. The fictional enterprise of underlining the need for social and political change speaks of Ghosh’s envisioning of a ecocritical green world and the need to dwell as responsible inhabitants who believe in global justice and sustainability on our planet.

Works cited

Glotfelty, Cheryll, *Introduction to The Eco Criticism Reader: Landmarks in literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm.

<http://wordpress.org>

Huggan, Graham and Tiffin, Helen. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. London; New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Næss, Arne (1973) *'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement.'* Inquiry 16: 95-100

Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. India: Penguin Books, 2008. Print.

Ghosh, Amitav. *River of Smoke*. India: Penguin Books, 2011. Print.

Ghosh, Amitav. *Flood of Fire*. India: Penguin Books, 2015. Print.

Atwood, Margaret. *Oryx and Crake*. Virago Press. London. 2003. Print

Atwood, Margaret. *The Year of Flood*. Virago Press. London. 2009. Print

Atwood, Margaret. *Maddaddam*. Virago Press. London. 2013. Print

Leo Tolstoy Quotes." BrainyQuote.com. Brainy Media Inc, 2022. 28 December 2022.
https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/leo_tolstoy_151957