**Ecological Concern for Survival in** **Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing and Dhruv Bhatt’s Akoopar – the *Infinite***

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**Abstract**

The economic growth has taken a big toll from the environment. All developing countries demand more energy consumption that leads to environmental degradation. Some of the countries have started using environment friendly technology, but still environment degradation has been the current concern for all academicians as well as responsible citizens across the globe. The increasing need for this kind of consciousness has led to search for alternate sources to solve environmental problems. Man utilizes all environmental resources, so he bears the responsibility to adopt sustainable life style to cater to the issues in protecting environment. The novels Surfacing by Margaret Atwood and Akoopar – the Infinite by Dhruv Bhatt explore the theme of survival through ecological concern. In these works, the authors illustrate the importance of environmental preservation and the impact it has on human existence. Despite coming from different backgrounds and settings, both authors convey the message that when humans live in harmony with nature, they ensure not only their own survival but that of all living beings. By emphasizing the connection between humans, the environment, and the impact of human actions on the natural world, Atwood and Bhatt highlight the need for ecological awareness in order to maintain a sustainable and fulfilling existence.

**Key Words**

Environment, Woman, Survival

**Introduction**

The progress of any nation and the economy of the same country is interlinked. But the progress of any culture or nation can never go beyond the limits of its natural sustainability. Any progress is worth only if it protects the environment. Man has bulldozed trees, farms, jungle to build concrete jungle. Many of the disasters that human race are result of such deeds. In the race of progress, man has put life of human being in danger. There are so many spokespersons of environmental issues like Vandana Shiva and Sadhguru who have taken charge to save mother earth. With advancements in industrialization and globalization, humans have become more focused on materialistic pursuits, neglecting the importance of the environment. Yet, it is crucial to remember that all the resources necessary for our survival on this planet are a gift from nature. Humanity seems to have blindly prioritized progress, forgetting our origins and the interconnectedness of all living things. Unfortunately, environmental degradation is evident worldwide, including in countries like Canada and India. When we disregard our roots and the significance of our natural surroundings, our very existence becomes endangered. As a result, it is imperative that we reflect on the importance of our environment and the role it plays in our survival.

Ecological imbalance and ecological degradation have become a global issue of concern. This not only puts the human race in danger, but the whole ecological system is affected. It endangers all people along with its ecosystem irrelevant of caste, colour, region, language, custom or rituals of human race. Man is facing hazardous effects of environmental degradation across the world in the form of depletion of ozone layer, global warming, famines, flood, earthquake, cyclone etc. man is responsible for all the imbalance and hence, man only can save the environment by implementation of sustainable development.

The primary goal of literature is to raise awareness about societal, economic, gender, and class-related issues. Similarly, literature plays a crucial role in promoting environmental consciousness with the aim of creating a sustainable environment where human life can thrive. Literature acts as a reflection of human culture, making the study of literature inherently linked to the study of culture. The theory that examines human life in literature from the spectacles of environment is known as ecocriticism.The easiest way to understand the ecological trends in literary theories would be to learn what these people do. One must be aware that traditional theories in literature put emphasis either on linguistics or on the cultural and social background. The eco-critics put all the weight on the nature and believe that nature exists as a force which affects our evolution directly as a society. For the intellectuals involved directly in the development of the green studies as world is not consists of only language or culture or social elements. Eco critics tend to bring out the part which nature plays – either in writing or in general purview. However, as it entered into field of literary theory, a part bifurcated and established itself as solely devoted wing concerned with the re-reading of literary text and bringing out the role of nature, representation of nature and natural elements in the literature produced worldwide. It is a fact that the major focus of green studies is the regional literature of different places where the variety of fusion of nature is observed. Nevertheless, the well-known authors, poets and literary figures always remain the central source which feeds the thought and findings of these studies.

Ranjit Lal, an environmentalist and a columnist in *The Indian Express* refers Valmik Thapar’s ‘*Wildfire: The Splendors of India’s Animal Kingdom*’ cited that the book is a stunning reminder to care for the environment in which we are living (*The Indian* Express. pg. 16). The progress can never be at the cost of destruction the sources gifted by the God. If man will not care for the ecosystem in which he survives and flourishes and will keep on wasting the resources, then a day is not too far when he will need another planet to sustain for his existence. On the World Environment Day, 5th June, 2015, *The Indian Express* talks about sustainability, changing human habits and lifestyle that destructs the resources. The need arises to think about sustainability when the existence of being is in danger. Man has realized the need to re think about the resources and found alternate ways to the sustainable development.

Lawrence Buell has suggested certain criteria to examine a text from environmental point of view. He believes that the non-human dimension is an actual presence in the text where human and non-human factors are integrated, the human interest is not privileged over everything, the text shows humans as accountable to environment and any actions they perform that damages the ecosystem and environment is the process rather than a static condition. Constant threat and quest about the environmental survival put the existence of the whole human race in question. As a result of this several writers have advocated caring attitude to the environment. With the same concern Arne Naess has led us to the concept of ‘Deep Ecology’. Naess has advocated the ecological view, avoiding the anthropological one. He has pointed out some parameters to study environment-oriented text differently. They are as – human life forms are an integral part of the world, there has to be an emotional relation with the nature, and not merely a rational – intellectual one, human and non-human both life forms have intrinsic values, the value of non-human life is not dependent upon the usefulness of these life forms for humans and the emphasis should be on appreciating the quality of human life. The existence of the human being is relevant and sustainable only when the whole human race celebrates its existence with the environment.

The novels of Margaret Atwood and Dhruv Bhatt put emphasis on the idea that the characters act along with nature in the process of sustainability. These characters blend their life with the landscapes and with the environment in which they live. Their interconnection with their environment is used as a strategy to subvert the conceptual frameworks of today’s destructive perception of nature. Hence, the novels present nature as an active character of the story in an ecologically informed literary discourse. Throughout the plot water, mountain, sea, animals, fish, bird act as the eco-literary tool of postmodern writing. All the characters involved in plot directly or indirectly are ‘earthbound’ and so they establish interconnected relationship between culture and nature. Human emotions are merged with nature to create stories in the plot of the novels, thus the novel projects an ecological awareness. Greg Garrard has explained the same in ‘*Ecocroticism*’,

“ecocriticism traces…the interplay between local myth and scientific knowledge, the tensions between human place and climatology… an interesting field to explore the interconnection between science and literature… including ancient literature as well” (Garrard 210).

These kinds of ecological implications help readers to empathize as well as appreciate the philosophy of ecological concepts in their life. The readers also realize that through these kinds of stories they have adopted the religion called environment preservation unconsciously and that guides them in their thoughts and actions. The environment rejuvenates readers’ life. Thus, the writers like Dhruv Bhatt also regenerate and rejuvenate basic values of Hindu culture and advocate the same. Sharifa Vijaliwala comments in this regard,

“Indian Culture travels from information to knowledge and knowledge to wisdom.” (Vijliwala web)

**Ecological Concern in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing***

Margaret Atwood's novels often explore the theme of survival, both on an individual and cultural level. Atwood contends that powerlessness and silence are closely linked, thus advocating for women to break free from societal constraints and find their own place of happiness. In her novel Surfacing, Atwood delves into the complexities of human-nature relationships. The story sheds light on the disruptions caused by modern lifestyles, prompting the characters to embark on a journey towards nature. As the natural world greatly influences human psychology, the characters' actions and reactions are heavily influenced by their environment. Atwood uses these elements to address the ecological imbalances caused by human greed. In an interview, Atwood emphasized the importance of the environment, stating, "Our tools have become very powerful. Hate, not bombs, destroys cities. Desires, not bricks, build them." Only through sustainable development can true progress be achieved. Through this novel, Atwood explores the political power dynamics at play. She paints a vivid picture of nature's destruction for personal gain in the novel's opening chapter, presenting a landscape that encompasses not only rocks, trees, and water, but also the realms of the mind, heart, and soul. The protagonist deeply identifies with nature, shedding light on the interconnectedness between the self and the natural world.

“I lean against a tree; I am a tree leaning… I am a place”- Atwood, *Surfacing* (181)

And then

“I am part of the landscape; I could be anything a tree, a deer skeleton, a rock.”- Atwood, *Surfacing* (187)

The protagonist finds a profound connection with every aspect of nature, making her unable to ignore its destruction. Atwood aims to convey the message that Earth, often seen as mother earth, possesses the unique power of creation and reproduction bestowed upon her by a higher power. The protagonist firmly believes that rejecting nature equals rejecting a fundamental part of life. She speaks out against the violence perpetrated by Americans, who are held responsible for the devastation, expressing her discontent with the following words:

“I wanted there to be a machine that could make them vanish, a button I could press that would evaporate them without disturbing anything else, the way there would be more rooms for animals, they would be rescued.”- Atwood, *Surfacing* (154)

The narrator in the novel seeks to differentiate between those who create and those who destroy the earth. She desires to combat the enemies of nature while avoiding disruption. Her actions reflect her concerns for every ecological aspect of life. She aspires to transcend the thirst for power and approach nature as a worshipper, rather than a conqueror. Just as all aspects of nature exist and coexist harmoniously, human existence also depends on living in harmony with the surrounding environment. She asserts, 'I am the thing in which trees and animals grow.' She stands against the resort developers and the hunters who harm the Heron. As humanity progresses, it is imperative for individuals to grasp the concept of coexistence with the environment in which they are nurtured in order to achieve sustainability.

In the end, the protagonist finds her true identity on a Quebec island, where she rejects urban settings and seeks freedom from the destructive effects of technology. She longs to be liberated from the burdens of civilization.

“It’s true, I am by myself; this is what I wanted, to stay here alone. From any rational point of view, I am absurd; but there are no longer any rational points of view.” -Atwood, *Surfacing* (173)

She seeks refuge in nature to find solace and balance. Standing alone, she raises her voice in protest, without any followers or an army by her side. She wholeheartedly denounces anything that contributes to the destruction of the earth.

“Her plunge in the ancient glacial lake ‘resurfaces’ with the power to refuse to be a victim,”- Atwood, *Surfacing* (191)

The life events of the protagonist are driven by the nature and its elements that play vital role for the sustainability of mankind. Human behaviour is responsible to protect the environment.

In the life of the protagonist, nature plays its role for the sustainability of mankind and it is the responsibility of mankind to protect the environment. Nature plays a pivotal role to survive in her life. Atwood compares nature with the protagonist. As both are feminine, both need tender approach to be protected. The ethical actions of mankind is accountable for the sustained life conditions and ultimately nature saves humans reciprocatively.

**Ecological Concern in Dhruv Bhatt’s Akoopar *– The Infinite***

The novel "Akoopar - The Infinite" by Dhruv Bhatt intricately weaves together various incidents, each connected by the author's exploration of the profound wisdom found among the seemingly ordinary people of Sasan Gir. Their way of life has upheld the rich cultural heritage throughout the ages. Through the perspective of a painter, Bhatt vividly portrays the untamed wilderness of Gir and the lives of its inhabitants. As a result, the novel becomes a tapestry of diverse occurrences, all leading to a profound reverence and safeguarding of animals such as lions and cows, the mountains, the crops, and ultimately, the Earth as a nurturing mother entity.

Dhruv Bhatt put emphasis on the idea that the characters act along with nature. These characters blend their life with the landscapes and with the environment in which they live. Their interconnection with their environment is used as a strategy to subvert the conceptual frameworks of today’s destructive perception of nature. Hence, the novels present nature as an active character of the story in an ecologically informed literary discourse. Throughout the plot water, mountain, sea, animals, fish, bird act as the eco-literary tool of postmodern writing. All the characters involved in plot directly or indirectly are ‘earthbound’ and so they establish interconnected relationship between culture and nature. Human emotions are merged with nature to create stories in the plot of the novels, thus the novel projects an ecological awareness. Greg Garrard has explained the same in ‘Ecocroticism’,

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The unconditional acceptance of the occurrences in which a man lives renders wisdom to him. Lions are considered to be one of the most dangerous animals, but people residing in the forest of Gir believe them to be the friendly animals. Lions do not attack without any reason. The grandeur is the trademark of the king jungle. Lions have learnt to live with people without doing any kind of harm to them. Man in Gir has learnt to adjust with lion respectfully. This reverence towards lions has enabled them in their synchronized life.

“The lion is quite different from other animals. Its status is unique and equally unique is its respect.”

(ATI 81)

The novel revolves around the transformation of a painter, an outsider in Gir, who develops a deep sense of care for every aspect of the place through small incidents. Initially, he experiences a mix of happiness and confusion as he gains new insights. However, by the end of the novel, he becomes fully immersed in the spirit of Gir, just like Sansai and Aima.

The story is narrated from the perspective of the painter, who despite being an outsider in Gir, forms strong attachments to all its elements. The narrative begins with the words "Khama Gayrne" (May the Gir be blessed), spoken by the character Aima, and ends with the same words uttered by Mita, a character from urban life. Through a series of incidents, the painter shares his experiences and evokes a similar sense of compassion for Gir in Mita. Gir is portrayed as more than just a jungle or lion habitat; it represents a collective effort and mission for the people living there to preserve its beauty and existence.

The forest called 'Gir' emerges as a prominent character in the story. Gir is depicted as the nurturing mother figure to all. Just like a mother enduring the pain of childbirth, Gir is resilient and provides sustenance. Women also possess the same capacity as the earth, enduring pain and finding happiness, while ensuring the survival and prosperity of future generations. Despite facing natural disasters, Gir remains steadfast, nurturing the living beings within it, like a caring mother. Thus, Gir is portrayed as infinite.

Raised amidst the embrace of Gir, Sansai grows up intimately acquainted with Ramzana, a lioness. She communicates with lions and vehemently defends them whenever she perceives harm being done to Gir's domain. Dorothy, a researcher studying lions, rubs her the wrong way as her presence disrupts the peace for the majestic creatures. The wilderness, lions, and every element become animate for Sansai. Earth itself is akin to a family member in her life. Swift to voice her concerns, she speaks out against unwanted intruders encroaching upon Gir's territory. As both a mentor to the painter and an older sister to the girls at the Gir camp, Sansai displays the breadth of her affiliations. Sometimes stern as a mother figure, she also exhibits remarkable warmth. Each of her actions attests to her dedication to Gir, as if her very existence depends on the stewardship she provides for her surroundings. Fearlessly traversing the jungle, Sansai embodies the virtues of a saint – pure-hearted, courageously resolute, and nurturing as a mother. Nature has endowed her with the resilience to navigate life, and she channels this strength to ensure Gir's continued thriving.

Animals, a river and mountains also speak about their existence. The painter could not distinguish the difference between lions. Sansai could very well identify them by their name and by their appearance, but the painter could not as he belongs to the city and not to the Gir. Aima blesses Gir – the place where they all live. Gir is their mother; the earth is the mother for all and man need to understand to value where he resides.

“I had seen both Ramjana and Saryu together and I had not been able to make any distinction between the two. These people can clearly see the difference between animals and hills. Why so? I did not know. If I can understand the reason perhaps, I may be able to go ahead on the track to understand why Aima used the term ‘Khama Gayrne’.” (ATI 62)

The novel opens with Aima's declaration of "Khama Gayrne" after a confrontation between a panther and a peacock, yet her empathy lies not with either animal, but with Gir itself. The painter fails to grasp this sentiment. Mother Earth bears witness to all the just and unjust actions of its inhabitants, never turning away, always serving as a protector for all creatures - be they animals, birds, or humans. Aima expresses her concerns and scolds those who allow the invasive weed, Kuvadio (cassia tora), to grow within Gir. She steadfastly declares the importance of preserving the original form of the species, the animals, and the earth - Gir. Sansai echoes Aima's sentiments, emphasizing the urgency of safeguarding the earth, a collective female entity that cannot be left exposed. Therefore, the growth of such useless weeds in Gir is detrimental.

Lajo, a close companion of Sansai, also exhibits her compassion towards her cow. When a lion attacks the cow, she advises her husband against intervening, knowing that the cow will suffer greatly while the lion will remain hungry. The ability to live among wild animals and still show care, compassion, and love for them is only possible when one realizes their own survival depends on the well-being of the earth. Aima proudly proclaims that life in Gir is actually safer than life in the city. She firmly believes that more people are killed by vehicles than by lions or leopards, serving as further evidence of her role as an advocate for sustainable life.

These ecological implications help readers to empathize as well as appreciate the philosophy of ecological concepts in their life. The readers also realize that through these kinds of stories they have adopted the religion called environment preservation unconsciously and that guides them in their thoughts and actions. The environment rejuvenates readers’ life. Thus, the writers like Dhruv Bhatt also regenerate and rejuvenate basic values of Hindu culture and advocate the same. Sharifa Vijaliwala comments in this regard,

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**Conclusion**

Although both writers address the theme of human survival in nature, there are some similarities and differences in their novels. Canada and India share a colonial past and both have felt the negative effects of industrialization. Both countries also face ecological threats and emphasize the importance of valuing and respecting nature. However, modernization and technological development should not be the sole measure of progress. Development is crucial, but not if it results in ecological destruction. In both novels, the protagonist and the painter acknowledge their survival depends on their connection with nature, leading them to move away from urban life. There are similarities and differences in the novels written by both authors, but they both explore the theme of human survival in nature. Both Canada and India have colonial histories and have been affected by industrialization. Ecological threats are a shared concern in both countries, and they emphasize the importance of valuing and respecting nature. The pursuit of modernization and technological development should not come at the expense of destroying the environment. The protagonist and the painter in both novels recognize the need to disconnect from urban life and embrace a harmonious relationship with their natural surroundings for their own survival.

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