

## **Survival through Ecological Concern in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* and Dhruv Bhatt's *Akoopar – the Infinite***

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### **Abstract**

With the advancement of industrialization and globalization, human being has started living concrete life. In the name of progress, somewhere man has neglected the importance and value of the environment. All the environmental resources from which man can survive have been inherited to us by God. Mankind has raced blindly towards the progress forgetting its roots from where he has evolved. Environmental degradation prevails in every corner of the world. The causes for it may vary, but the effect of the degradation on the human race is the same. Literature has always been the mirror of human life. The relationship of a human being with the nature is analyzed in the theory of 'ecocriticism'. Mankind's interaction with natural dwellings as well as with animals, wilderness and with the earth itself is shown in the works of a Canadian writer Margaret Atwood and an Indian writer Dhruv Bhatt. Both the writers have tried to build better ecological conditions through various characters. This paper will focus on man's response to the environment, nature and the city. Though having different cultural, geological background,

the writers portray the fact that when nature becomes united with the human actions, the identity of human race as well as other creatures on earth is not threatened. Hence, happiness prospers all around.

**Key Words:** Environment, Woman, Survival

## **Introduction**

“The more the economy grows, the faster nature dies. Ignoring the rules, laws and limits of the Mother Earth that sustains us, we pump pollution into the air and into the rivers, we mine every mineral from her body, we chop down every tree for flyovers and highways, we bulldoze every farm for concrete housing and malls. Dead rivers terminator seeds, toxic food, climate chaos is man’s inheritance from killing Mother Earth. We could, within our lifetime, experience the serious destruction of the conditions for human life on earth with disappearing glaciers, rising seas, vanishing biodiversity.”

These are the views of Vandana Shiva, an environmentalist and a writer strongly takes charge to save mother earth. With the advancement of industrialization and globalization, human being has started living concrete life. In the name of progress, somewhere man has neglected the importance and value of the environment. All the environmental resources from which man can survive have been inherited to us by God. Mankind has raced blindly towards the progress forgetting its roots from where he has evolved. Environmental degradation prevails in every corner of the world. Whenever man neglects the importance of his own roots, own belongings, his existence comes to danger. Human being has reached to the stage from where he needs to rethink about his existence, his survival through environment.

In the year 2011-2012, Canadian Government addressed key ecological integrity issues in targeted national parks. Examples of actions are: enhancements to improve the ability of wildlife

to move between watersheds in Gros Morne, Terra Nova and Kejimikujik National Parks: control of invasive species in Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve: and, improvement to water quality in aquatic ecosystems in Riding Mountain national Park. According to the survey done by Canadian Government, 616 species of animals and plants were recognized in at risk categories that are endangered, threatened or of special concern, which trigger government actions to promote recovery. India too faces similar kinds of ecological problems. Destruction of more forests for extension of land for agricultural purpose, for making buildings, roads and other constructions have led to the extinction of a number of plant and animal species and is also responsible for ecological imbalance. Both the governments implemented several rescue for the conservation of ecological aspects at various levels. As a result of these actions, in Canada, the protected area has been almost doubled as it was in 1990. Almost 10% of Canada's land is now under protection. Even marine protected areas have been doubled between 2002 and 2011. On the other hand, according to data collection and environment assessment studies of the World Bank experts, between 1995 through 2010, India has been one of the fastest progressive countries in the world, in addressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality.

Environmental issues have become alarming in India. Because of the effects of global warming people are experiencing several ecological disasters. Severe climate change, cyclones, floods, draught, earthquake are the result of man's negligence towards environment. Man has entered in the proximity to the environment and captured the habitat for animals. Extinct species like sparrow are result of the same. Industrialization has taken a very big toll of the natural and pure environment. Pollution has controlled over the purity. The air index of Delhi is quite alarming. In fact, the government has begun taking sincere actions to improve the quality of the

environmental issues like, purification of rivers, ban over usage of plastics, usage of anti-pollutant vehicles, etc. Development that has the concern for the environment only can be sustainable one. It becomes the moral duty of a mankind to gift pure environment to the coming generation as legacy.

Literature's prime aim is to sensitize the society towards the issues related to society, economics, gender, class, etc. Environmental awareness also is spread through literature aiming to make ecosphere worth living in which a human life can sustain easily. Literary production is always the mirror of the culture of human species. Thereby, literary study is cultural study as well. Different writers writing in different biodiversity, keeping in mind different ecological concepts, their different effects on the culture reflect the same differently in their works. They examine what insight the literature offers into human relationship with other species and with the world around. Meeker calls this study 'Literary Ecology'. The mankind is continuously surrounded by and influenced by several ecological aspects.

### **Ecological Concern in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing***

Majority of Margaret Atwood's novels are based on themes like cultural and individual survival. Atwood has been of the opinion that 'powerlessness and silence go together', hence women should break the chains of the society and find a new place to live happily. Atwood in her novel *Surfacing* focuses some prominent implications regarding human-nature relationships. The novel throws some light on the disruption in modern life styles and so the narrative in her work moves towards the journey to nature. As nature plays a major role in shaping the psychology of a human being, the character's actions and reactions are the responses to the environment in which he lives. By portraying these issues, Atwood has discussed ecological

imbalance created by the human being for the satisfaction of his greed. In one of an interview Atwood advocated environment,

“Our tools have become very powerful. Hate, not bombs, destroys cities. Desires, not bricks, build them”

Atwood has showed a pen picture of the nature which has already been destroyed for personal gains in the first chapter of the novel. It begins with the ‘weekend in the country’ idea. The protagonist goes on a journey that is not only a landscape of rocks, trees and water but also a landscape of mind, the heart and the soul. She identifies herself with the nature,

“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)

She identifies herself with each part of the nature and when she realizes its destruction, she could not resist herself to stand by it. With this idea, Atwood tries to portray that earth is considered as mother earth and the special power of production and reproduction is gifted to her by the God.

The protagonist stand by the nature opining that rejection of nature is rejection to the fundamental part of life. She raises her voice against the violence by powerful Americans, responsible for the destruction with 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 makes a clear distinction between the creator and destroyer of the earth. She wants to destroy enemies of the nature, without creating disturbances to anything. Her concerns for every ecological aspect are visible through her actions. She wants to move beyond

the will of power and come to nature not as a conqueror, but as a worshipper. As all the aspects of nature exist and coexist in the harmony of one another, human being's existence too lies in living with the harmony of all surrounded ecological aspects. She says, 'I am the thing in which trees and animals grow.' She stands against the system of the resort developers as well as the hunters who kill the Heron. Human has reached to the stage where a man needs to understand the coexistence of the environment in which he is nurtured, to attain sustainability.

At last, the protagonist acquires her identity with the natural world, being on an island - Quebec. She refuses to be in urban setting and decides to be free from the destructive effects of the technological world. The narrator wants to be free from all the burdens of the 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 finds her survival in returning to nature in order to experience harmony and peace. She raises her voice alone without any follower. She begins a fight without any army. She completely rejects everything associated 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)

### **Ecological Concern in Dhruv Bhatt's *Akoopar – The Infinite***

*Akoopar – The Infinite*, a novel written by Dhruv Bhatt, has depicted so many incidents woven with one another. The independent incidents are tied together by the writer's discovery of the ingrained wisdom of uncommonly common people of Sasan Gir whose way of life has sustained the cultural heritage over the ages. Dhruv Bhatt has depicted the wilderness of Gir, life of people over there from the experiences of a painter; hence the whole novel is a series of different incidents leading to the care and concern for animals (lions, cows), the mountain, the

crops and the mother Earth. The essential point discussed in the novel is that a painter, the city dweller who is an ‘outsider’ in Gir, acquires the concern for all aspects through small incidents. He has received some new insight and he is sometimes pleased at the same time confused, but ultimately at the end of the novel he becomes one with Gir like Sansai and Aima.

The story is told to us through the mouth of a painter. In spite of being an ‘outsider’ in the ‘Gir’, the painter is attached to all the aspects of it. The story begins with the words – “Khama Gayrne” (May the Gir be blessed.) spoken from the mouth of Aima and ends with the same words from the mouth of Mita, a character from urban life. The painter experienced and narrated a series of incidents to Mita and made her feel same kind of compassion for Gir. The Gir, here is not just a jungle – a habitat for lions, it is the celebration, rather a mission of all the people living there to keep intact the beauty and existence of the ‘Gir’.

The forest ‘Gir’ rises as one of the characters from the story. ‘Gir’ is the mother to all. Only a mother has the capacity to sustain in life, even after taking acute labour pain while giving birth to a child. A woman has cultivated the same capacity like the earth, bearing pain, still full of happiness, being capable to sustain and making the generations capable enough to sustain in their life. ‘Gir’ has stood still after all the natural calamities, nurtured the life living in it, just like a mother. And so ‘Gir’ is infinite.

Sansai, one of the major characters in the novel, has grown up in the lap of ‘Gir’, playing with ‘Ramzana’ – a lioness. She constantly talks to lions and whenever she observes anything wrong happening or harming the property of ‘Gir’, she promptly advocates for them. She dislikes Dorothy the lady who has come for the research on lions because her research causes disturbance for lions. The wilderness, lions and all the aspects are living characters for Sansai. Even the earth itself is like a member in her life. She raises her voice when she has found unwanted weed across

‘Gir’. If she is a teacher to the painter, then she is an elder sister to the girls who have come for the camp to ‘Gir’. If she scolds everyone like a mother, then sometimes she is very friendly to all. Each step taken by her is a proof of her concern for ‘Gir’; as if she is alive just because she bears the responsibility of taking care of her surroundings. Fearlessly she roams in the jungle, like a saint – pure by heart, brave by nature and caring as mother. Nature has given her confidence to sustain in her life, so she always thrives to sustain ‘Gir’.

The novel begins with the word ‘Khama Gayrne’ by Aima when a panther strikes a peacock or some beast. But instead of showing any compassion for either of the animals, Aima shows that towards ‘Gir’. Even the painter the painter could not understand this gesture. The mother earth bears all the justified and unjustified gestures of all the species on it. It has never turned her face, always stood there to protect all of us – animals, birds, humans, etc. Aima has showed her concern and literally scolded people as she has found weed, ‘Kuvadio’(cassia tora) in ‘Gir’. Aima in a very strict voice declares –

“It would be better if we refrain from such activities as the Gayr cannot withstand it.”

Sansai, too is with Aima in this concern. When a human being does not care for the mother earth, just like one amongst all female entities, which cannot be naked. Hence, this type of weeds start growing in ‘Gir’ and that is absolutely useless to the life in ‘Gir’.

Lajo, a friend of Sansai, too shows her compassion towards her cow. When a lion pounce upon her, she tells her husband not to save her, as she will suffer a lot and the lion too will remain hungry. Living among wild animals, and still showing compassion, care and love towards them only can be possible if they realize their survival in all condition and at the same time they have accepted the fact that if the earth is saved, their life will be sustained. They all believe in life in togetherness. Aima proudly says that the life in ‘Gir’ is safer than the life in city. She

firmly believes that the amount of people killed by vehicles is in larger amount, than by lions or leopard. This is another proof of a spokesperson of sustaining life.

## **Conclusion**

There are some similarities and some differences in the novels of both the writers, though they have talked about the survival of human being with the nature. Canada and India both have been colonial countries. Both are under the victimized effect of industrialization. Both the countries are facing ecological threats. And both the countries represent values and ethical actions of human being to worship nature, being one with it. Modernization and development through technology and science can never be the only parameters for the development. Development is an essential part of our life, but not at the cost of ecological destruction. The protagonist and the painter both have realized their survival being away from the urban life, being one with environment. Atwood and Bhatt, being in different environment settings, advocate similar ideas. The characters portrayed in both the novels share same concerns in spite of different genders. At last to sum up again I quote Vandana Shiva,

“We could turn things around if we remember we are children of Earth, and need to protect her future generations and ourselves.”

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