

An Eco-critical approach in the story *Drought* by Sarath Chandra Chatterjee and *God is Near* by James Herriot

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Abstract

Humans and nature are inseparable elements in this world. They are interrelated to each other in various ways. Authentically, humans have always depended upon the aspects of nature---air, water, land, and many other species to sustain their livelihood. As to how a human requires food to safeguard the health and the body, the environment also requires its natural resources to maintain the life of all the other species. A human may protect one's body and act as a central figure. Now, why would a human behave so, despite the daily freshness and joy being received from nature? The solution to that would be the desire for luxurious life. The unsatisfied desire never ceases to finish or a thirst that never gets quenched. The paper aims to shed light upon the eco-critical elements in Sarath Chandra Chatterjee *Drought's* randomly selected story, and James Herriot's *God is Near*. Though the stories set are from different authors in different periods, with the help of textual references, the paper intends to approach eco criticism separately.

Keywords: Humans and nature, livelihood, desire, ecocriticism

Discussions

When a group of anthropocentric run behind the luxurious life, some try to make a living within the lap of nature. Sarath Chandra Chattopadhyay, also called Sarath Chandra Chatterjee, is a Bengali novelist and a short story writer. In his famous work *The Drought*, he talks about the life of the poor oppressed in rural Bengal. The main character in the story is Mahesh, the name of his domesticated bull. It is also a metaphor for the great God Shiva. But an eco-spiritual approach is not much seen here. Instead, we can see a Marxian policy where the landlord tries to dominate the poor. At the story's beginning, the character sketch of the *Zamindar* is revealed "yet his tenants dared not stand up to him. He was so ruthless" [Chandra Chatterjee 25]. One of the finest and the worst ways of brutality is presented here. The people

were scared of the *Zamindar* because of the feudal power he exercised among the villagers. People must be aware that nature is the only form of life where we can sustain ourselves. Hence, disturbing the serenity is not a great idea as the results can be catastrophic.

The narrator introduces the character Mahesh, who is seen to be tied to the old acacia. Mahesh is a bull in this story. We see an anthropocentric approach where the human exercises full power and domination. "Anthropocentrism means human-centered, but in its most relevant philosophical form, it is the ethical belief that humans alone possess intrinsic value." (Goralnik, Nelson). An animal is supposed to be let loose into the wild. The character Gafur is shivering, and he is down with Fever. The author metaphorically conveys to the readers how Fever has tied him down. This is known as Karma. "According to the law of *Karma*, our present and future are neither capricious nor unconditional, but are conditioned by our past and present." [Joseph V 42]. The narrator tries to tell us that the human forms will have to face the consequences of nature if it gets interrupted. At the same time, we can also find the impoliteness of the character Tarakaratra, who is considered to have higher status than the poor Gafur, "Fever! Call the scoundrel!" [Chandra Chatterjee 26]. Gafur is made to come out and meet Tarakaratra, despite his poor health condition. He is made to obey orders even in the worst situations. Apart from representing the depth of suppression of the wretched lives of the villagers in rural Bengal, Gafur compares to Mother Nature. In contrast, Tarakaratra represents the familiar humans exercising extreme harshness upon nature.

People who aspire to a luxurious life always captivate materialism as a prime concern. They are the emissary of the capitalistic insight; hence they ruin the poor and the environment to achieve their desires. Due to industrialization, pollution, etc., the climatic conditions are all altered. "And emissions continue to rise. As a result, the Earth is now about 1.1°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s. The last decade (2011-2020) was the warmest on record." (United Nations). The poor who do not have access to higher standards of living experience the effects. The cosmopolitan drinks like various beverages and cool drinks have all exploited the rivers and the water bodies. The farmers who depend on these water bodies find it difficult to gather enough water for their crops. Unlike Tamil Nadu, certain villages experience droughts, and the lives of the villagers are at stake. "In 2017, the Tamil Nadu region boycotted Coca-Cola and Pepsi – accusing the firms of taking so much water from rivers that farmers struggled to irrigate land at a time of severe drought." (Sugar Smart). With insufficient profit or any money from their crops, they find it very difficult to meet the daily requirements of their family. "There's no straw on my roof, and we have only one hut in which we two- father and daughter-live." [Chandra Chatterjee 27]. The author has well brought out such disastrous elements—the author talks of the cattle raised by the poor. Mahesh, the bulldozes not appear to be like an average muscular and energetic bull but is relatively weak and lean. "Gafur silently watched Mahesh, whose two deep, brown eyes were full of pain and hunger." [Chandra Chatterjee 28]. In addition to portraying anthropocentrism, the author also highlights the problems of the poor

and their environment, which is far from that of the rich, representing the concept of Marxian Ecocriticism.

Industrial injustices and the idea of capitalism have invaded the farmers and the tillers of the land. The industrialists trick the ignorant farmers lacking proper knowledge. They forego their land and soil to the industrialist and are forced to work in the cities. They become incompatible with the technically skilled and resourceful candidates from metropolitan cities. The author uses the relationship between Mahesh and Gafur to indicate this aspect when a group of people came to purchase Mahesh by offering him money. "Stretching his hand, Gafur took the money but remained silent" [Chandra Chatterjee 31].

Sarath Chandra Chatterjee emphasizes the importance of water and its elixir in life. The title "Drought" is very apt to the story as we come across the part where Gafur gets very angry with her daughter because they didn't have any water in their hut, and he becomes thirsty and tired. He then beats his daughter. "Give me some water to drink- I'm dying of thirst... So, you haven't any water, either?" [Chandra Chatterjee 32]. It is presented that water, an essential element, can alter human well-being. When many trees are cut down for commercial and industrial purposes by the capitalist industrialist, the food and shelter of animals get affected, and the number of oxygen decreases. Humans inhale the chemically mixed toxic oxygen.

Similarly is the case with water. "Water makes up about 71% of the Earth's surface, while the other 29% consists of continents and islands." [Williams 2014]. When the water bodies get polluted by industrial activities, the poor people who consume this infected water confront many water-borne diseases. Sometimes it leads to death. "Some 829 000 people are estimated to die each year from diarrhoea due to unsafe drinking water, sanitation, and hand hygiene." (World Health Organisation). For example, the Minamata disease occurred in Japan. Similarly, in this story, the poor people cannot retaliate as they lack confidence and believe it is useless too. "But in this world, it is not only futile for the small to appeal to authority, but also dangerous" [Chandra Chatterjee 34].

Towards the end of the story, we find Amina trying to collect the drinking bowl, and Gafur asks her to leave it back; she is not allowed to take it along. This represents the insults and the miserable conditions faced under the capitalist regime. After killing Mahesh one night, he decides to leave the village. The capitalist conviction has altered his life and led him to a diasporic situation. Introducing the concept of eco-diaspora where he had to move away from his land, despite paying the rent, he had lived on the soil for many years and faced the up and downs of his life. "Eco-diasporas have been known by other terms such as environmental migrants, eco-refugees, or climate migrants." (Wordpress.com). The drinking bowl acts as a symbol of agony in his life. "Leave them alone, darling" [Chandra Chatterjee 36].

Gafur goes in search of a new life. It is said that the place where he goes does not believe in religion, and there is no privacy for women. He is ready to accept it all. The hardship which awaits him in his new world, he believes, will not be as worst as he had faced under the

capitalist authorities. He believes that there will be some relief from the burdens and the sufferings he has undergone. He refuses his daughter to take the water bowl as he does not wish to carry the curse of his past to the next world, the scourge of killing Mahesh. It was not deliberate. But the excess of capitalist control over him has altered his mental behavior and made him take the path of human centrism. An allied reference to the famous poem *The Rhime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a romantic poet. The curse is laid upon the Mariner. "Water, water everywhere/ And all the boards did shrink; Water, water, everywhere,/ Nor any drop to drink." (Coleridge) Similarly, Gafur takes the curse of killing Mahesh and him to the next world. He sets out not full of hopes and expectations but still has faith in nature, as he proclaims to God not to forgive none who made him face such kind of situation in his life.

The Earth has been home to a variety of species for centuries. The humans failing to recognize this has deteriorated the environment and has caused all sorts of miseries and distress to the other species. The merciless deeds have caused problems like pollution, global warming, climate change, etc., which are to be considered very seriously. The immoral behavior of humans in considering one as superior to the other has resulted in exploiting resources. Exceptional cases exist where humans wish to be a part of and reconcile with nature. The love for nature and the love for animals go hand in hand. Flora and fauna are the two sides of the same coin. James Herriot is a British veterinary surgeon. He is an animal lover, and being a veteran, his stories are rich for animal lovers. *God is Near* is a moving story representing as realistically about animals, and it is very humorous, realistic, and touching. The title itself appears to be catchy as the story was set during a wartime period.

The story takes a spiritual approach. In a general frame, it talks about the relationship of humans with dogs and cats. The plot moves forward, signifying the dogs and their relationship with Miss Stubbs. The story teaches us of generosity, the anti-anthropocentric humans who do not disdain the animals once they are fed and concerned. Mrs. Brodwith is one such character who never lets off the animals and, even after the death of Miss Stubbs, took along with her the pets raised in the beautiful house of Miss Stubbs. The writer, James Herriot, however, tries to arouse the readers' emotions by sustaining the suspense of those animals' conditions until the end of the story. A clever technique adopted by the writer here is that the reader is made to wait for the suspense at the back, providing an estrangement effect.

The question lies, what has it got to do with nature and the role of humans in it? We can say that the dogs and cats introduced are acting here as metaphors for nature and the environment. The characters, Miss Stubbs and Mrs. Brod with symbolize how a human being is supposed to acquit wildlife and its species. Mr. Herriot, the writer himself, is a normal human being who witnesses the angelic roles and acts carried on by Miss Stubbs and Mrs. Brodwith till the end of the story. Hence the title, *God Is Near*, shows us that God is around us; here, it talks of the animals. The word 'Near' can also be considered as 'Here,' which signifies that God is within us, presenting a metaphysical approach.

Once the mind and soul have become reunited with nature, the outside interferences of the hectic world become neutral and will be of no concern. Similarly, those who get attached to pets forget their frustrations and pains and will be of significantly less importance. This is the true gift of nature. The species can produce a lasting effect on the emotions of humans. "But she never mentioned her illness and pain to me; all her concern was for her three dogs and two cats." [Herriot 65].

The readers experience the emotions of the dogs. A strange power or force is established between them and the writer Herriot. This is a divine process for Herriot, and he senses the divinity here. Even though it was not his first visit to the house of Miss Stubbs, these dogs often bark and wag their tails and approach him "his mouth wide, eyes dancing, seemed to be joining in the joke." [Herriot 65]. The generosity of the animals' is that they never forget the good deeds done to them. Herriot is a veterinarian. He consults these animals for Miss Stubbs. Hence, they express their love for him in their style. The writer Herriot, here satirically, mocks the human beings who act very pompous in front of others. He reminds those people that we, the humans are tiny creatures on this planet and that the sun and the moon will rise and set even though we are neither rich nor poor. The class divisions are not mentioned in this story, even though they are in wartime.

Herriot discusses the life of Miss Stubbs and the big house where she lived with her parents and how the foreign investment has caused ruins in their life, resulting in a significant downfall. "...the prosperous father and his family who lived in the big house many years ago. Then the foreign investments which crashed and the sudden change in circumstances" (Herriot 67). The writer indicates that foreign involvement in nature will have a drastic effect. Foreign involvement here is considered to be the artificial or machinery elements. The non-natural activities in nature are not satisfactory and worthy. Essence has got its way, and it will discover its path to adapt and survive. The character has got a rhythm based on which it functions. "Earth is an important factor, but it is not all; it is just a small dot in existence. To live here and conduct certain aspects of our life, it is important to be in rhythm with the earth." (Sadhguru 2016). Disrupting this rhythm may cause ruination in the life of the destroyer. Since we are not the Creators, we can never be the Destroyers.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship with pet animals is eternal. The situation of Miss Stubbs after the death of her pet animal Ben is portrayed here very emotionally. We discover that she is utterly broken down emotionally, and she proclaims to Herriot that she will be next. "It will be my turn next" (Herriot 70). The persistent connection between Miss Stubbs and Ben is presented here. Looking above, she finds the writing that states, "God is near." It means that Miss Stubbs's love and concern for these creatures and her heavenly heart have made her secure a spiritual bonding with them. When she looks at the writings on top of her, she feels that her duty toward nature has been finished, and it is now time for her to return to nature as it is where she finally belongs. She believes that she has done justice to heart, so the Almighty is near her to take her to heaven.

Towards the concluding area, James Herriot tries to establish curiosity in the readers about the dogs and cats of Miss Stubbs. The writer's writing technique successfully invokes the readers' fear and consciousness. The reader travels with the writer, which acts as a quest to find out the whereabouts of the dogs and cats. We find that Herriot has successfully tried to instill the heavenly sense in the readers. When Herriot blurted out to enquire about the animals as he sat with Mrs. Broad with, the readers were not physically present, but the writer tried to make them feel their presence in the scene- in absentia. This successful aspect has evoked the reader's consciousness. The writer shows that the ecosystem functions with the interaction among the species. The climatic alterations have caused various threats to many species. "Species are already being impacted by anthropogenic climate change, and its rapid onset is limiting the ability of many species to adapt to their environments."(IUCN).

Conclusion:

The stories scrutinized in this reflect that every human has to adopt conservation and preservation from an ecological lens. An individual should try to realize the preciousness of the environment and its species, not allow any outside interference to indulge in it, and not get fooled by any economic gain as it will degrade the environment and nature. They were leading to losing its value and the preciousness which can never be restored. There were situations where a large area of land was confiscated by the ruling class and destroyed for many unwanted reasons, and history failed to point it. The wars won had been the core subject and the areas of discussion by historians. But there was no source of information about the destruction caused by the war on the environment and the foreign invasions of the land. Great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, John Dewey, and Freire contributed to peace, education, and harmony. John Dewey advocated '*world patriotism*.' "The tragedies of wars made him examine the futility of the same and called for building a nonviolent world, using geography and history to understand other cultures, and incorporating the values of peace and global understanding." (Gullapalli 150-151). Sarath Chandra Chatterjee and James Herriot successfully presented the concerns of the environment and its species in a more sophisticated and sensitive manner.

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