Reflections on the Ecological Concerns in Maggie Gee’s The Ice People

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Abstract:
Environmental studies deal with every issue that affects the living organisms. Its components include Physical and Life Sciences, Sociology, Humanities and others sciences. It is a multidisciplinary approach. It brings about the close relationship of the natural world and human impact on its integrity. The present paper attempts to focus on the reflections of the Nature in Maggie Gee’s The Ice People through an Ecological perspective. It shows how the Nature is important in human life and is the basis of functioning of our societies. The Nature provides the multiple resources to human beings. It is an attempt to highlight the influence of the Nature on literature and relationship of the Nature with human beings. It provides some of the concerns with relation to ecology. Ecological criticism is one of the postmodernist views and theories to discuss different environmental, ecological issues in literature in relation to human beings.

Key Words: Ecological concerns, Ecological criticism, the Nature, multiple resources, environment, literature.

Introduction: The Nature has a great influence on creative writers from the earliest developmental stages of human beings. The creative writers depicted its flora and fauna, beauty and charm, cyclical seasons of the year such as spring, summer, autumn and winter and the natural phenomena around them. The writers in English literature were also influenced by the magical power of the Nature. They were Theocrats, Plato, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Rousseau and many others. They portrayed the beauty and power of the Nature through their writings. There are various opinions on the Nature’s different forms. The natural world has provided large number of themes and subject for literature. The Nature has attracted the attention of the writers in almost all languages. These issues have given a rise to a new branch of knowledge namely, Ecocriticism. Man himself being the product of the Nature has to live in the company of the Nature. The cycle of seasons has the direct impact on human life. Man has experienced the beneficial as well as the destructive aspects of the Nature. Ecology is the branch of knowledge which deals with and studies of interactions between natural phenomenon and the human being. In other words, it is an understanding of how biodiversity affects ecological function. However, in recent years, critics are increasingly becoming aware of the relationship between literature and natural sciences and drawing insights from the study of this relationship between the man and the Nature. The literary critics try to study as to
how this close relationship between nature and human being has been textualized by the creative writers in their works.

Despite the broad scope of inquiry, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is always connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. It is a broad genre that is known by many names like green cultural studies, eco-poetics and environmental literary criticism, which are some popular names for this relatively new branch of literary criticism.

_The Ice People_ by Maggie Gee was first published in 1998. The scenes set in _The Ice People_, in the year 2020, are not so distant now. It seems that it deal with issues that are very much there in present world such as the effects of climatic changes, chaotic government, use of technology, ethnicity, sexuality and such others. All these developments have resulted in displacing people and the frequent human migrations in contemporary world.

Maggie Gee belongs to modern writing style. Her writings are innovative and appeal to the readers very much. Her style is often self-conscious, drawing attention to the process of construction. Her literary work seems to have been deeply influenced by the writings of Woolf, Nabokov and Beckett and 19th century writers such as Dickens and Thackeray. John Cotton rightly comments on Gee’s synchronization of 18th and 19th century styles, with modernist techniques that: ‘Gee can be seen, in spite of (or perhaps because of) her experimentation, to be in the tradition of Fielding and Dickens where the author is ever-present, ready to comment or intervene’. (Henderson: 45)

_The Ice People_ is set in a new ice age in 2050, which will push the affluent people of the north to migrate to south, where they will meet with a hostile reaction. Saul, the main character is at the centre of the discussions as he is seen to embrace multiple identities pertaining to both the centre and margins. At first, Saul is seen to occupy the space of privilege as opposed to the space of unprivileged. He lives in a highly industrialised England and leads a well-to-do life. With the Global Warming, England becomes a greater target for immigrations from hot Africa. Looking at this from his comfortable position, Saul sees immigrants as a threat to their well being.

This novel speculates about the survival of love between men and women in a frozen future world where children are rare and child-size robots run out of control. Civilisation has broken down in the face of the deepening cold. An old man, Saul, lives in a disused airport with a gang of wild boys, who spare his life only because of his skills as a storyteller. Saul tells stories of his youth days of fierce heat and dwindling fertility. Men and women live separately, the women cluster around the rare children, and men turn to each other or to robots, the pets. But Saul is different. He falls in love with Sarah. Saul and Sarah have a child, Luke. They were enjoying the life. However, the novel depicts:

‘…sea levels were rising, and the white cliffs of Dover had to be shored up after part of them toppled into the sea. Then the crumbling cliffs and the endless money
the government paid to underpin them grew confused in my mind with foreigners. People from even hotter countries were always trying to get into Britain. The screens showed pictures of the eroded white cliffs, then scenes of dark people, sweating and furious, bullying the immigration officers, shouting and swearing, their black mouths open. Often the army would be called in…” (Gee; 18)

The Ice People displays how cultural practices alter nature and how materially altered nature, in effect, influences culture by smashing the whole civilization and ethics by altering existential and physical ways of living. Referring to the highly industrialized status of the society and to the resulting domination of culture over the Nature through trespassing and decreasing natural boundaries, Saul states, ‘I felt on the brink of owning the world. I was a man, and human beings ran the planet. There were eight billions of us, though numbers were shrinking, but few other animals were left to compete’. (Gee; 24) All natural spaces were populated by cultural artefacts, and in order to protect ‘the last so called green spaces’ (Gee; 33) the government had ‘stopped all further building’. (Gee; 33) Nevertheless, the fly builders ‘slipped buildings into every tiny gap and garden’. (Gee; 33) Consequently, nature has become scarcity. The remaining scants of nature has become commodity and only the rich could afford living near it. In contrast to the dominance of culture, nature intervenes later in the form of environmental degradation and irreversibly changes the culture forcing it to decline. And, the new Ice Age comes. After the advancement of the Ice Age, the new Northern generation which replaces the old civilisation is illiterate and has only ‘roars and grunts for names’. (Gee; 13) It is an explicit end of civilisation and the past inheritance is at the dead end. The Nature is displayed in her full power of action or agency which results in acknowledging that ‘The belief that nature is mute and immutable and that all prospects for significance and change reside in culture is a reinscription of the nature/culture dualism’. (Barad: 145)

The Ice People present the ecological degradation as influencing and changing culture, thus, forcing to rethink the history as created by human rationality. However, they differ in treatment of their topics as The Ice People portrays the Nature as extremely powerful and exposes her material historicity which encompasses all other histories. High-tech and high-standard life in wealthy Northern countries leads to high carbon emission and unequal use of natural resources of the planet as wealthy countries claim most of the resources for themselves in order to be able to sustain such a luxuriant life. Global Warming arises from the high carbon emission and the subsequent Global Ice Age affects only the Northern Part of the globe which is the home for most developed countries. The Ice People stresses this global understanding once more by portraying how ecological trespassing bears effect not only on the regions outside of Eurocentric communities but on the whole world in one of its scenes where an Indonesian volcano has global consequences:
“The world took little notice at first, because everyone has so many worries of their own, so Sumatra got very little international aid, though half its population stifled or starved. But the world was shortsighted to ignore the eruption as purely of local interest. They soon had to be interested— they soon found out they had to be afraid. Because darkness crept across the globe from the thousands of tons of dust and mud. Sumatra rained in millions of pieces upon all the countries who’d refused to help it.” (Gee; 162)

As a result of the cloudy darkness, the Ice Age advances much quicker than predicted as the sun rays cannot reach the surface of the earth as it used to do before. Thus, this situation and all the others mentioned above forces the centre to consider how marginal ecologies eventually affect its own.

**Conclusion:** The most precious gift of the universe is the earth. It is the sustenance of nature i.e. a key to the development of the future of mankind. The understanding of the environment is an end result for the protection of nature. The degradation of our environment is mostly linked up with the development process and the ignorance of the people about retaining the ecological balance. Needless to say, no human being of the earth can remain aloof from the issues related to the environment since he himself is a product of environment.

Scientifically, the living community of plants and animals in any area, together with the nonliving components of the environment, such as soil, air and water, constitute the Ecosystem. Some Ecosystems are fairly robust and are less affected by certain level of human disturbances. Others are very fragile and are quickly destroyed by human activities.

To conclude, in the light of this scientific truth, *The Ice People*, dealing with environment on a global scale, represents the fragility of national borders by stressing the inevitable ecological connectedness, which entails risks such as the introduction of non-native organisms into local ecosystems, for example, the impact of global markets on local natural resources or framing practices, pollution of oceans, acid rain, radioactive fallout, or global warming.

**References:**


