

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN A DISRUPTED WORLD: ANALYZING AMITAV GHOSH'S NOVEL THE GUN ISLAND THROUGH THE FRAMEWORK OF SDGs

Myvizhi. A,^{*}
Dr. K. Sathyapriya^{**}

ABSTRACT

This research paper indulges in the exploration of Sustainable development goals in relation to Indian literature. Sustainable development goals, in recent days, has become the cynosure of qualitative research. Sustainable development goals substantially concentrate on global challenges such as environmental issues, destitution, inequality, and justice. Though sustainable development goals are extensively associated with Business Economics, Commerce, and MBA programs, it is a multidisciplinary approach, and has become an inexorable pivot in academic literature. It has become the burgeoning goal of the entire human race. In this paper, the prime focus is on the stifled environment, stagnating seas, and global solidarity. Preservation of environment, conservation of natural resources, and a healthy and relishing environment altogether aligns with sustainability. In this paper, an attempt is made to analyze how sustainable development, and the peril of environmental issues intersects with the Indian novel Gun Island by Amitav Ghosh. The paramount focus of the paper is on the environmental sustainability in the select novel. The novel intertwines climate change, migration, and jeopardized environmental dilapidation. It explores the convergence of global calamity and parochial experiences. The novel weaves in the gravity of sustainable development goals, unequivocally the climate change, life under water, and truncated inequalities. The novel accentuates the interconnectedness of people and the biosphere. The paper focalizes on how the novel evince the human's turbulence in adapting to the changing environment, and the need for a discreet sustainable future.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable Development Goals, Sustainability, Climate, Migration, Life under Water.

Introduction

Sustainability is the ability of the humans to make use of the environment, and the available resources without depleting, destroying, or polluting it. It is immanently a systematic process which can be succored forever only by proper means and methods. Sustainability makes it possible for the humans to live in harmony with the planet, people, and all the resources. In practice, it paves way to replenish resources, and to live in that fashion. It fosters eco-friendly living, ethical practices, conservation of the environment, and resilience in the global community. The practice of sustainability makes the natural resources available for by the future generation also, which is termed as intergenerational equity, the fairness between generations. Mahatma Gandhi's once

^{*} Research Scholar of English, Sri G. V. G Visalakshi College for Women, India.

^{**} Assistant Professor of English, Sri G. V. G Visalakshi College for Women, India.

stated that the world provides everything for everyone's needs but not for everyone's desire somehow shows the call for sustainability.

The idea of sustainability has constituted to sustainable development. Both the terms may look similar and are often used interchangeably, but they are a tad different. The one is the journey, and the other is the destination. Sustainability is the destination here, and sustainable development is the journey, that is, the policies, pathways, and actions, that one has to embark to pull off sustainability. So, Sustainability is the holy grail of sustainable development.

Sustainable development, in *Our Common Future* report, was explained as the kind of development that fulfills the need of the present without jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to meet their needs. The definition is very simple and avoids jargon. It withstood the test of time, and boils down the entire knowledge of sustainable development into a fine concept which could be easily understood. Though the definition may seem to be little bit incomprehensive of everything that comes under sustainable development, it expounds the idea of it.

The notion of sustainable development is much older than the term Sustainable development. The term gained popularity after getting the spotlight in the UN, but the concept of the term way predates that. The thought of sustainable development is very much the root and basis of indigenous cultures. It comes from the traditional knowledge and practices. Sustainable development may seem to be a paradox but with transformative solutions, it could be made possible. Sustainable Development is not just an environmental concept. It is about three major facets of society: the social (a society where all the people have access to the basic needs), the environmental (protecting, preserving, and ensuing sustainable use of the environment), and the economic (fostering economic growth with resource efficiency).

It was in a 1987 report titled 'Our Common Future', published by The Brundtland Commission that the sustainable development's definition came to prominence in a contemporary context. The United Nation assembled a group of 22 global experts under the leadership of Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was the Environment Minister of Norway, to explore the tactics to address several upheavals at once. They published their report in 1987 and the notion and description of sustainable development was appended in it. Nonetheless it started to gain steam at the 1992 Earth Summit which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. After this there was another one after 20 years called Rio +20.

Rio + 20 is a pivotal conference at which he groundwork for 2030 Agenda. 2030 Agenda is global initiative to address worldwide challenges from scarcity and discrimination to environmental issues and peace. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations, on September 25th 2015, universally by all the 193 UN member states. The agenda is the evolution of two previous processes. The first is 'Agenda 21', which laid out environmental primacies for the earth. The second is the 'Millennium Development Goals', which mapped out eight goals mainly focused on human development, targeted at developing countries. It included things like eliminating poverty, universal primary education, gender equality, child and maternal health, fighting against diseases, environmental sustainability, and global partnership for development. So, the evolution of Agenda 2030 was from an environmental process and a human development process.

In 2012, at the Rio plus 20 Earth Summit, the world leaders agreed to bring these two progressions together to create a withal panoptic outline that would be pertinent to every nation notwithstanding their level of development. Thus, this gave rise to the 2030 Agenda. The 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development is referred to as an encyclopedic action plan for '5 P's' (people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership), which concomitants directly to the three pillars of Sustainable Development: social, environmental, and economic. To boot, it also has four fundamental principles entrenched in it: Integration universality, inclusivity, and leaving no one behind. The agenda is reviewed every single year to corroborate the progression.

The 2030 Agenda is made up of 17 goals, 169 targets, and over 230 indicators for measuring progress. The seventeen goals of Sustainable Development are "no poverty(SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), reduced

inequality (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17)".

In the journey towards sustainability, literature plays a requisite role. Throughout the history it has brought changes to the society, and has shaped them. In Indian context, many writers such as Arundhati Roy, Ruskin Bond, Vikram Seth, and a few more have addressed the themes related to Sustainable Development. Amitav Ghosh one such renowned Indian author. He is known for his evocative blending of history, politics, globalization, colonialism, environmental issues, culture, and politics in his works. His work often explores environmental issues, historical themes, complexities of migration, and interconnectedness of societies. He is well-known for his works *The Shadow Lines*, *The Ibis Trilogy*, and *The Gun Island*. His novel *Gun Island* intertwines with several SDGs.

The title of the novel *Gun Island* itself symbolizes the climate induced disaster. In the novel themes of migration, climate change, and the human toll of environmental degradation are weaved together. The novel is set primarily in the Sundarbans and spans across different continents. The novel follows Deen, a Bengali-American rare books dealer, as he uncovers an ancient myth while navigating a world increasingly shaped by rising seas and climate-driven displacement. Through its characters and their engagement with both natural and socio-political environments, *Gun Island* reflects on humanity's struggle to adapt to environmental changes and our collective responsibility to ensure a sustainable future, underscoring the deep connections between people, places, and ecosystems.

The novel doesn't explicitly focus on the SDGs, but it intersects with them. It stresses the urgency of SDGs, especially those addressing climate action, life under water, and reduced inequalities. SDGs such as SDG 1, SDG 3, SDG 10, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15 which are no poverty, good health and well-being, reduced inequality, climate action, life below water, life on land simultaneously, are reflected in the novel. Though the novel intersects with several SDGs, the major focus in this research paper is on SDG 13, SDG 14, and SDG 10.

The novel features the effects of climate change on the Sundarbans, especially rising sea levels and environmental degradation are the direct reflection of SDG 13. The protagonist Deen's encounter with the characters in the novel represents the urgency for climate action. The novel portrays the vulnerable situations of the characters when they encounter the climate changes. For example, when Tipu, a fisherman, tells Deen about the climate change, especially the rising sea levels which have destroyed their livelihood, and forced them to migrate, they need or call for a climate action is clearly unfolded. The novel portrays the loss of biodiversity and destruction of the Sundarbans's wetlands, which are critical to understanding the vulnerabilities of populations in the face of environmental changes.

The novel highlights the importance of the oceans and their ecosystems, especially through the symbolism of the Gun Island and its connection to the sea. Overfishing, environmental conservation, and the impact of human activities on marine life resonates throughout the novel. The novel highlights the ecological collapse due to human activity and ecological changes. It portrays the fragile state of marine life in the Sundarbans. The marine resources, which supports the livelihood of the locals, are depleting. Deen witnesses this and the precariousness of the marine life. In the novel, Tipu explains how overfishing and climate change has caused ecological imbalance. The rising sea level destroys the Mangrove forests, affecting the marine life. Tidal surge, in the novel, causes a great destruction to the marine lives in the Sundarbans. It destroys several houses and aquatic organisms, portraying the reverberating issues of the ocean. All these incidents reflect the dangers waiting for the marine organisms, and the urgency to save the life under water.

Migration is a major theme in the novel, along with inequality, and displacement. The novel highlights the experiences of refugees and displaced individuals. Sundarbans is highly affected the rising sea levels. This makes the people to flee, causing displacement of communities, who are already marginalized. Deen is identified as a migrant in the novel. His experiences reveal how inequalities shape individuals. His struggles differ from that of others. He is a little privileged character, but still, he undergoes the consequences of climate change. The novel illustrates the inequalities in climate change. The novel emphasizes the socio-economic disparities that shape the global migration crisis.

Overall, In *Gun Island* novel SDGs 10, 13, and 14 are presented through the lucid depiction of Sundarbans. The novel weaves together ecological concerns, human displacement, and vulnerable communities. The novel explores the convulsion of environmental change, and its impact on humans and the marine lives. The novel proffers a powerful reflection on the call for sustainable living and global solidarity. In confronting the environmental challenges that disproportionately jolts the vulnerable communities around the world, the novel urges a sustainable, equitable, and climate action.

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