



Subaquatic Wilderness and Wet Dwelling: An Ecocritical Re-Reading of Tara Menon's Under Water (2026)

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper explores Tara Menon's Under Water (2026) through the lens of Ecocritical Framework introduced by Greg Garrard in his book Ecocriticism (2004). This study analyzes the novel by examining the four Ecocritical tropes of Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling present in Ecocriticism (2004). The purpose of the study is to explore the themes of marine biodiversity, environmental deterioration, relationship between nature and humans, and ecological sensibility. A qualitative research technique is applied, utilizing thematic analysis and detailed reading to interpret specific passages from the novel. The research demonstrates that Under Water depicts nature as a dynamic and interdependent ecological framework rather than simply a geographical place. By vividly illustrating oceans, coral reefs, mangrove forests, islands, and marine biodiversity, the novel demonstrates the fundamental significance of nature and encourages an ecocentric viewpoint. The study further reveals that the depiction of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy underlines the destructive consequences of environmental catastrophes while stressing resilience, a sense of belonging, and ecological accountability. The analysis concludes that Tara Menon represents the connection between humans and the natural world by emphasizing the ecological value of underwater ecosystems and the unbreakable tie between people and their surroundings. Through the use of Greg Garrard's ecocritical paradigm, the study fills a recognized research gap and presents a thorough ecocritical reading of Under Water.

1. Introduction

Literature has traditionally been considered a representation of human life and communal interactions. It not only reflects human experiences, sentiments, beliefs, and social realities but also displays the interplay between humans and natural phenomena. Over time, writers have utilized the natural world to reflect beauty, harmony, conflict, and survival, revealing the deep interconnection between human life and the environment. Aiming to entertain and inform, literature motivates readers to perceive their surroundings and reflect on their societal and ecological responsibilities. In the current age, where environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity depletion, and natural disasters pose significant global challenges,

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literature has increasingly emphasized ecological concerns and the intricate relationship between humans and their environment.

The escalating concern for environmental sustainability has spurred the formation of ecocriticism, a literary perspective that evaluates how nature is represented in literature and examines the relationship between literary works and the physical environment. Ecocriticism asserts that humans are not apart from nature but are a vital aspect of an expansive ecological system. Garrard's (2004) fundamental ecocritical framework was mostly developed using terrestrial models, although this research intentionally broadens his environmental concepts to include a marine ecosystem. This study examines the operation of conventional motifs while immersed in the nonhuman interactions of the ocean by transitioning the analytical focus from stable terrestrial formations to dynamic aquatic settings. This intentional theoretical development fills a significant void in South Asian climate fiction studies, demonstrating that traditional ecocriticism can evolve with the "oceanic turn" while maintaining its analytical efficacy.

1.1. Introduction to the Novel

Tara Menon is a modern fiction writer, whose literary creations examine the multifaceted nature of human relationships, memory, identity, and belonging, concurrently engaging with critical environmental matters. Her composition is distinguished by its emotional richness, captivating imagery, and an incisive representation of the bond between individuals and the natural realm. Through her tales, Menon accentuates the ecological value of landscapes and inspires readers to ponder on how environmental variations affect both nature and human life.

Published in 2026, *Under Water* is a current environmental tale that delves into the dire outcomes of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy. Rather than treating these catastrophes as ordinary natural incidents, the novel delves into their emotional, communal, and ecological effects. Through comprehensive illustrations of oceans, coral reefs, mangrove forests, islands, and marine biodiversity, the story lauds the attractiveness of the natural environment while emphasizing its precariousness. In parallel, it conveys anguish, perseverance, displacement, nostalgia, and identity, highlighting how natural disasters redefine both physical spaces and human lives. These concerns position *Under Water* as particularly applicable to an ecocritical inquiry informed by Greg Garrard's approach.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Ecocriticism: Emergence and Evolution

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary domain that examines the connection between literature and the environment. It is a literary framework that emphasizes ecological and environmental concerns, elucidating the connection between humanity and nature, as well as the effects of human actions on the Earth (Glotfelty, 1996). Meeker (1974) first referred to ecocriticism as "literary ecology. The phrase "ecocriticism" was first used by Rueckert in 1978 in his groundbreaking paper, albeit it did not get widespread recognition until years thereafter. Scholars have long been examining natural motifs and ecological concerns in literature prior to this official definition (Slovic et al., 2015). The word *eco* derives from the Greek root *oikos*, which signifies home or Earth. *Logy* derives from the term *Logos*, which signifies rational dialogue. In his foundational text, Buell (1995) defines ecocriticism as the examination of the interplay between literature and the environment, dedicated to environmental initiatives.

Ecocriticism examines how we conceptualize and represent the connection between humanity and the environment across many forms of artistic expression. Ecocriticism has arisen from the realization that, without diligent environmental stewardship, there will soon be no beauty or safety in nature to discuss (Mambrol, 2016). The primary aim of this literary theory is to heighten consciousness regarding environmental issues and promote a more sustainable way of living for the future. Ecocriticism is best utilized in a piece where the landscape serves as a principal character, particularly when there is a notable interaction between the author and the setting, as well as between characters and the environment. Landscape, by its very nature, encompasses the non-human components of a location—such as rocks, soil, trees, flora, rivers, fauna, and atmosphere—alongside human interpretations and alterations (Scheese, 1994). Embracing Barry Commoner's inaugural principle of ecosystem ecology, which states that "everything is interconnected," eco-critics assert that human culture, particularly its literature, is intrinsically linked to the physical environment, influencing nature just as nature influences culture (Glotfelty).

Eco-critics are, in essence, specialists in literature and proponents of environmentalism. They concentrate on the intricate connection between the environment and the literary works that incorporate ecological themes. Glotfelty characterizes ecocriticism as a "neglected category of nature literature" (1996), thus a primary aim of this methodology is to enhance appreciation for this literary genre and advocate for ecology-oriented writing. Their creations underscore the aesthetic and importance of literature that addresses ecological motifs, advocating for its recognition within the broader literary landscape. These creations illustrate the detrimental attitude of human engagement with the environment, culminating in a deterioration of human compassion and sensitivity, which manifests in his brutal and hostile actions towards Mother Nature. Ecocritics

advocate for a deep contemplation of the human-nature interaction, the ethical and aesthetic challenges presented by the environmental crisis, and the ways in which language and literature convey values with significant ecological consequences (Cheryll Glotfelty, 1996). Adopting Barry Commoner's foundational tenet of ecosystem ecology, which posits that "everything is interconnected," eco-critics contend that human culture and its literary manifestations are fundamentally intertwined with the natural environment, affecting nature as much as nature actively moulds culture (Glotfelty, 1996). Thus, eco-critics operate concurrently as literary academics and environmental proponents who focus on the political and moral aspects of stories including ecological motifs.

The primary emphasis of modern ecocriticism has seen a notable geographical transformation, broadening from specific terrestrial deterioration to include global, dynamic ecosystems. Preliminary academic research in South Asian climate fiction often concentrated on the decline of river systems and civilizations, emphasizing the role of human actions in accelerating ecological disruptions, which result in severe droughts and cultural dislocation (Rahman et al., 2024). Nonetheless, contemporary movements within the discipline have progressively adopted the "oceanic turn" advocated by the Blue Humanities. Recent studies have redirected scholarly focus to aquatic terrains, examining how underwater realms and oceanic ecosystems function as unstable arenas for historical suffering and nonhuman influence (Rahman et al., 2026). This transition highlights an increasing scholarly acknowledgment that the planetary issue cannot be fully grasped from a solely terrestrial perspective.

2.2. Greg Garrard and his Ecocritical Framework

Greg Garrard is a notable individual who has endorsed and advanced the discipline of Ecocriticism, a branch of literary studies that examines environmental issues and their contemporary challenges, instigated by modern humanity and contemporary society. His concept of Ecocriticism serves as an extensive framework that examines the intricate interaction between humans and their surrounding environment through literary and ecological perspectives. His groundbreaking publication (Ecocriticism, 2004) offers a unique viewpoint and an innovative structure called Environmental Tropes. These tropes effectively represent significant elements of nature and the environment. Garrard identifies several major environmental tropes, including Pollution, Pastoral, Wilderness, Apocalypse, Dwelling, Animals, and Futures: The Earth. These tropes exemplify various methods through which literature conceptualizes and elucidates environmental concerns. Nonetheless, not all tropes are uniformly relevant to every literary piece. Given that *Under Water* predominantly investigates maritime habitats, environmental catastrophes, human dislocation, and ecological interrelations, this analysis centers on four motifs that are most pertinent to the narrative: Wilderness, Apocalypse, Animals, and Dwelling. These ideas offer a robust structure for analyzing how the novel depicts the connection between humanity and the natural world.

2.2.1. Wilderness

The notion of Wilderness holds a pivotal role in Garrard's ecocritical paradigm. He characterizes wilderness as an environment that remains largely untouched by human influence, embodying ecological integrity and autonomy (Garrard, 2004). Throughout literary history, the wilderness has frequently been envisioned as either a terrifying and wild expanse or as a realm of beauty, liberation, and spiritual rejuvenation. Contemporary ecocriticism predominantly highlights the latter viewpoint by seeing wildness as an ecological entity with inherent worth that transcends its utility to humanity.

Instead of perceiving wilderness solely as a resource for exploitation, ecocritics contend that forests, oceans, rivers, mountains, and other natural terrains warrant safeguarding due to their role in maintaining biodiversity and ecological equilibrium. Garrard thinks that literary depictions of wilderness inspire readers to value the independence of nature and challenge human-centered perspectives that prioritize human needs over ecological health.

The notion of wilderness has particular importance for this research as *Under Water* is profoundly anchored in the natural terrains of the Andaman Sea and its adjacent coastal ecosystems. The narrative depicts oceans, coral reefs, shorelines, and aquatic ecosystems not solely as geographical locations but as vibrant ecological realms that influence human experience and identity.

2.2.2. Apocalypse

Among Garrard's environmental motifs, Apocalypse has gained particular significance in modern ecocritical research due to escalating apprehensions regarding climate change and ecological catastrophes. Originating from the Greek term *apokalypsis*, signifying "revelation" or "unveiling," the term apocalypse encompasses more than merely the conclusion of the world. Garrard elucidates that apocalyptic tales illustrate the repercussions of ecological discord and highlight humanity's susceptibility to nature (Garrard, 2004).

Environmental cataclysms may encompass earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, droughts, pandemics, and various other disastrous occurrences that disturb human communities and ecological frameworks. Such calamities contest the anthropocentric notion that humanity has absolute dominion over the natural world. Conversely, they illustrate that natural phenomena can transform societies and highlight humanity's reliance on ecological equilibrium.

In literary works, cataclysmic occurrences frequently act as pivotal moments that reveal environmental vulnerability and prompt readers to contemplate ecological stewardship. *Under Water* centers on the catastrophic effects of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy, making Garrard's notion of apocalypse a significant lens for comprehending the alterations in both environments and human existence caused by ecological disasters.

2.2.3. Animals

The connection between humans and animals constitutes a significant element of Garrard's ecocritical framework. Conventional literary analysis frequently regarded animals as representations fulfilling human objectives. Ecocriticism, meanwhile, contests this human-centered viewpoint by acknowledging animals as sentient entities with inherent ecological worth (Garrard, 2004).

Garrard contends that literature has the capacity to transform human perceptions of non-human species by depicting animals as active members of ecological groups instead of mere objects. This viewpoint highlights the importance of biodiversity, ecological interconnectedness, and the moral obligation to safeguard wildlife and natural environments.

In aquatic tales like *Under Water*, creatures comprising fish, coral species, turtles, and various marine lives, are crucial in demonstrating the intricacies of oceanic ecosystems. Their existence underscores the interdependence of all life forms and strengthens the ecocritical perspective that human existence is fundamentally reliant on the vitality of the natural world.

2.2.4. Dwelling

The notion of Dwelling highlights the profound connection between individuals and their living environments. As per Garrard (2004), habitation transcends mere physical location; it includes emotional connections, cultural identity, recollections, and a sense of belonging tied to specific environments. Human life is consequently intertwined with the surroundings in which people reside and establish significant relationships.

Ecocritics contend that environmental degradation leads to displacement, thereby severing the connection between individuals and their surroundings. Natural calamities, climate alterations, and environmental deterioration frequently compel communities to forsake familiar terrains, leading to emotional bereavement in addition to physical relocation.

This notion is especially pertinent to *Under Water*, where ecological catastrophes alter both geographical terrains and individual identities. The narrative illustrates the impact of ecological disasters on individuals' perceptions of home, belonging, and memory, highlighting the profound relationship between habitation and environmental stability.

2.3. Research Gap

Despite current scholarly and critical interest in *Under Water*, little research has been done on the book. The first academic analysis of Tara Menon's *Under Water* was carried out by Rahman, Siddiqui, and Ajmal (2026) using Steve Mentz's hydrocritical framework of Blue Humanities. In order to show how water acts as an active ecological force that influences memory, identity, and ecological consciousness, their study explores the ideas of wet ontology, non-human agency, and planetary water. Apart from this academic study, the novel has been reviewed by Natasha Walter (2026), Adelina Zamboni (2026), and Muedano (2026), who have praised its depiction of friendship, bereavement, climate crisis, and marine habitats. Nevertheless, these assessments lack a systematic ecocritical interpretation and are descriptive rather than analytical. In a similar way, Rahman et al.'s research is limited to Blue Humanities and does not use Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework to analyze the book. As a result, the ecocritical themes of Apocalypse, Animals, Wilderness, and Dwelling are still uncovered. By using Garrard's framework to examine how *Under Water* depicts marine biodiversity, environmental disasters, human-nature relationships, and ecological consciousness, the current study fills this gap.

2.4. Research Questions

1. How are wilderness and aquatic biodiversity portrayed in Tara Menon's *Under Water* using Greg Garrard's ecocritical lens?
2. In what manner are tropes of apocalypse and dwelling depicted in the *Under Water* by Tara Menon?

2.5. Research Objectives

1. To explore the depiction of marine biodiversity and wilderness in Tara Menon's *Under Water* utilizing Greg Garrard's Ecocritical framework
2. To examine the portrayal of Apocalypse and dwelling in the novel *Under Water* by Tara Menon through Greg Garrard's Ecocritical theory

2.6. Delimitation of the Study

This research is confined to an ecocritical analysis of Tara Menon's *Under Water* (2026). It is restricted to the use of Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework as detailed in *Ecocriticism* (2004). The assessment concentrates exclusively on Garrard's ecocritical motifs: Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling. This deliberate limitation to these four motifs (excluding Pastoral, Pollution, and Futures) is fundamentally based on the narrative framework of the book. *Under Water* focuses more on the immediate impact and consequences of sudden maritime disasters (such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy) rather than ongoing industrial decline. The traditional separation between urban and rural areas is so overshadowed by the unrefined, non-human dominion of the ocean (Wilderness) and the sudden cosmic upheaval of human safety (Apocalypse). Furthermore, considering that the narrative is significantly influenced by the disruption of marine biodiversity and the subsequent displacement of coastal communities, Animals and Dwelling serve as evident thematic contrasts to this environmental destruction. This study excludes additional literary concepts such as postcolonialism, feminism, psychoanalysis, Blue Humanities, and material ecocriticism.

3. Research Methodology

The present research employs a qualitative research method to explore the ecological aspects of Tara Menon's *Under Water* (2026). As the study aims to present thematic significances and meanings inherent in the literary work, a qualitative methodology is deemed most suitable. It utilizes thematic textual analysis to discern and evaluate ecological motifs persistent throughout the story. In accordance with Belsey's (2013) focus on textual analysis as a means of analyzing literary works, a close reading technique is used to investigate the textual evidences which clearly represent the themes of marine biodiversity, environment disaster, human-nature interconnectedness and ecological affiliation.

3.1. Research Framework

The analysis is centered on Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004), which establishes the conceptual basis for the examination of the book. Focusing on Garrard's ecocritical concepts, this research highlights Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling, as these are crucial to the ecological matters shown in *Under Water*. These four archetypes serve as the analytical basis for investigating how Tara Menon represents the essential worth of nature, the multiplicity of aquatic life, ecological calamities, and the relationship between humans and their natural surroundings.

3.2. Data Analysis Technique

This research applies thematic textual analysis as its approach to data analysis. The initial data includes specific textual selections from Tara Menon's *Under Water* (2026), while the supplementary data is formed from books and scholarly articles on ecocriticism. Significant sections are extracted through detailed examination and structured based on the four chosen ecocritical themes. Each extract is then assessed in accordance with Greg Garrard's theoretical principles to investigate how the novel fosters ecological consciousness, critiques human-centered ideologies, and underscores the connection of humans and the environment.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1. Wilderness

Greg Garrard (2004) characterizes wilderness as an ecocritical emblem that represents nature in its relatively untouched and autonomous condition. Rather of seeing the natural world as a commodity for exploitation, the wilderness notion emphasizes its inherent value, ecological diversity, and autonomy independent of human intervention. In *Under Water*, Tara Menon depicts the maritime realm as a dynamic biological habitat where coral reefs, mangrove forests, and diverse marine creatures dwell in harmony, encouraging readers to value the splendour and significance of the undersea ecosystem.

"We head to the mangroves. The monkeys scatter into the forest, the heron flies away, and the hermit crabs retreat back into their shells." (Menon, 2026, p.135)

This segment delineates the mangrove forest as a dynamic ecological habitat abundant with diverse species. The mangroves evolve into a self-sustaining ecosystem where fauna respond instinctively to changes in their environment instead of just acting as a backdrop for human endeavours. Menon's syntax illustrates a chain reaction of non-human agency: the dispersal of monkeys, the soaring of the heron, and the withdrawal of the crabs depict a cohesive natural community responding to human interference. The passage emphasizes that the wilderness conforms to its own ecological frameworks. Human existence is characterized as a disruptive aberration, unsettling the natural cadence of the ecosystem and challenging the anthropocentric perspective that environments are designed for human benefit.

"The delicate orange branches of a fan coral wave in the current... Five mantas swim out of the ocean and into the shallow reef." (Menon, 2026, pp.75,76)

Menon use striking visual graphics to portray the aquatic environment as both visually appealing and ecologically essential. The graceful movements of coral and manta rays illustrate the balance inherent in marine ecosystems when undisturbed by human activity. By emphasizing the rhythmic, independent motion of the fan coral swaying in the current, the story removes the landscape's inert spatiality, converting it into a dynamic, living entity. The narrator observes this natural occurrence with admiration rather than attempting to control it, so cultivating a relationship of respect between humankind and nature. From an ecocritical perspective, the passage reinforces Garrard's claim that wilderness has intrinsic worth beyond its economic or material importance.

"The reef is humming with life: black-and-white angelfish, multicolour parrotfish, sunshine-yellow boxfish... A battery of barracuda patrols the shallows." (Menon, 2026, p. 211)

Menon's vivid portrayal of the coral reef as "humming with life" exemplifies Garrard's notion of wildness by depicting the ocean as a realm of complete biological independence. Through the documentation of the unique behaviours shown by angelfish, parrotfish, and boxfish, the account removes the marine ecosystem from its passive role, reconstituting it as an autonomous, vibrant organism that operates independently of human practicality. The use of the term "patrols" to characterize the barracudas further underscores that this underwater habitat imposes its own ecological limits. From an ecocritical perspective, its self-sustaining vitality challenges anthropocentric paradigms, compelling human observers to see the reef not only as an economic asset, but as a self-governing ecosystem entitled to its own existence.

In summary, the motif of wilderness in *Under Water* honors the splendor, variety, and ecological soundness of the marine ecosystem. The novel illustrates nature as a self-sustaining ecosystem that thrives independently of human influence through its vibrant depictions of mangrove forests, coral reefs, and plentiful marine life. Menon contests anthropocentric viewpoints by highlighting the inherent worth of these landscapes and the interdependence of their people, urging readers to cultivate a profound respect for the natural environment. According to Garrard's ecocritical paradigm, wilderness serves as a potent reminder that humanity constitutes merely a fragment of a broader ecological network.

4.2. Animals

Greg Garrard (2004) argues that the theme of animals encourages readers to see non-human organisms as vital components of ecological systems instead than simply resources for human benefit. Ecocriticism challenges anthropocentrism by recognizing the intrinsic value of animal life and emphasizing the interdependence of humans and other animals within the environment. In *Under Water*, Tara Menon illustrates aquatic organisms as active participants in the environment, highlighting their ecological significance and cultivating respect for biodiversity.

"There are officially five turtle species in Thailand. Green turtles, hawksbill turtles, olive ridley turtles, leatherback turtles and loggerhead turtles... Red-eared sliders rank among the world's hundred most destructive invasive species." (Menon, 2026, p. 98)

The text emphasizes the diversity of marine turtles while simultaneously addressing the threats posed by invasive species. Menon not only enumerates different turtles but also emphasizes the ecological consequences of bringing non-indigenous animals into delicate ecosystems. The use of accurate scientific and geographical classification compels the reader to see animals not just as poetic symbols or ornamental elements, but as specific ecological participants whose balance may be severely disrupted by human intrusions like the red-eared slider. The discussion reveals an ecocritical awareness about biodiversity and ecological stability, suggesting that the existence of a single species is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the whole ecosystem.

"Five mantas swim out of the ocean and into the shallow reef. The males match their speed to hers... We all stare, entranced, as they soar above us." (Menon, 2026, p. 76, 77)

Instead of portraying the fish as mere ornamental features, Menon illustrates them as dynamic contributors to the equilibrium of marine ecosystems. The dynamic verbs employed—the surgeonfish “plucking” algae and the barracudas “patrolling”—portray these beings as industrious contributors to their ecosystem, rather than mere exhibits for human observation. The consumption of algae by surgeonfish exemplifies a functional symbiotic relationship where the animal's welfare directly influences the health of the coral host. The novel's intricate depiction of biodiversity illustrates Garrard's assertion that literature ought to urge its audience to see the intricacies and value of non-human existence within ecological networks, thereby transforming people into legal and ethical contributors to the global ecosystem.

"The reef is humming with life: black-and-white angelfish, multicolour parrotfish, sunshine-yellow boxfish, lionfish, butterfly fish... A pufferfish floats past sedately. Two surgeonfish pluck algae from the coral." (Menon, 2026, p. 211,212)

Instead of seeing maritime biodiversity as simply decorative elements, Menon emphasizes the complex, dynamic roles of nonhuman species within their ecological systems. The particular behavioural decisions—like the surgeonfish "grooming" algae—demonstrate a functional symbiotic association in which the creature's existence directly supports the well-being of the coral host. This comprehensive illustration of interspecies collaboration strongly corresponds with Garrard's animal motif, showcasing that the vitality of the global environment depends on the actions of its nonhuman inhabitants. The narrative emphasizes these beings as essential participants in ecological balance, urging readers to transcend anthropocentric perspectives and acknowledge the ethical significance of marine organisms as important co-inhabitants of Earth.

4.3. Apocalypse

Greg Garrard (2004) describes apocalypse as an ecocritical theme that uncovers ecological crises through catastrophic incidents. Rather of only indicating the world's termination, apocalypse uncovers the tenuousness of human existence and exemplifies the overpowering might of nature. Apocalyptic narratives in literature interrogate anthropocentric perspectives by revealing that humans are at the mercy of ecological dynamics beyond their control.

"The sea is pulling swiftly away from us... In seconds, the bay is almost entirely drained. Fish of every shape and size flap on the wet sand. Pink and orange corals stand exposed on the seabed. The sea on the horizon lifts into the sky and slingshots back toward us as a black wall." (Menon, 2026, p.159)

This excerpt signifies the beginning of the tsunami and vividly depicts the ocean's transformation from a life-giving entity to a destructive power. The abrupt withdrawal of the ocean seems remarkable at first, but it signals an imminent disaster. The visible coral reefs and beached fish represent the disturbance of biological equilibrium prior to any human catastrophe. The depiction of the ocean morphing into "a black wall" highlights the formidable force and capriciousness of nature, contesting the human-centric notion that people can completely comprehend or dominate the natural world. From Garrard's viewpoint, this instance serves as an apocalyptic disclosure since it reveals the constraints of human dominion and illustrates that ecological mechanisms function autonomously from human anticipations.

"The wave overtakes me. I am plunged into darkness. The water corkscrews my body. It feels like a thousand nails are hitting me all over. I stop struggling and let the water have its way with me." (Menon, 2026, p. 169,170)

From the heroine Marissa's focused viewpoint, Menon converts the wide geopolitical catastrophe of the tsunami into a personal, experiential confrontation with ecological degradation. The transition from external observation to Marissa's abrupt physical suffering under the present conditions highlights the alarming disintegration of human autonomy when faced with an unstable biosphere. The graphic representations of shadow, bodily torment, and the loss of dominion express the ocean's catastrophic influence while simultaneously accentuating human weakness. Marissa's eventual submission to the current illustrates the utter breakdown of human resilience against the overpowering might of nature. Garrard (2004) posits that apocalyptic literature exposes the vulnerable position of humans in the natural world, and this paragraph serves as an illustration of that claim by indicating that survival relies not on human capability but on the unpredictable characteristics of the environment.

"Inside, it is chaos. People are screaming, shouting, crying, gasping, vomiting, bleeding. Children are catatonic, adults are hysterical... Uniformed nurses are trying to clean wounds, but they have run out of saline." (Menon, 2026, p. 193)

Menon further strengthens the apocalyptic perspective by illustrating its catastrophic repercussions for both individuals and society. The hospital transforms into an environment where environmental catastrophe is evident through bodily harm, mental distress, and systemic failure. The deficiency of medical resources and the excessive casualty figures demonstrate that environmental disasters impact both natural terrains and human societies. In Garrard's ecocritical perspective, apocalypse extends beyond the immediate disaster; it includes the lasting repercussions that transform human existence. This section illustrates that ecological catastrophes persist in causing distress even after the initial threat has subsided.

"The rain is coming down in heavy sheets and the roads have already started to flood. There is no electricity anywhere. The streets are dark and deserted. The storm is rampaging through the streets." (Menon, 2026, p. 199)

The representation of Hurricane Sandy enhances the novel's ecological lens by showing that environmental calamities cross geographical and cultural divides. Unlike the tsunami that obliterates a coastal region in Thailand, Hurricane Sandy affects one of the most technologically advanced urban centers worldwide, showcasing that modernization fails to mitigate humanity's exposure to natural disasters. The submerged highways, pervasive loss of electricity, and abandoned metropolitan environment epitomize the momentary downfall of civilization in response to environmental challenges. By contrasting these two catastrophes, Menon strengthens Garrard's claim that apocalyptic myths highlight the collective ecological fragility of all human cultures, regardless of their economic or technical progress.

To summarize, the apocalyptic concept in *Under Water* highlights the profound grandeur of nature and the boundaries of human authority over the natural world. Through the representation of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy, Menon articulates environmental disaster as a tangible devastation and an ecological epiphany. These situations illuminate the precariousness of human life, upset societal equilibrium, and interrogate anthropocentric perspectives of authority over nature. Consistent with Garrard's ecocritical approach, the story ultimately inspires readers to appreciate humanity's reliance on the natural world and to nurture a deeper understanding of the environmental elements that create human life.

4.4. Dwelling

Greg Garrard (2004) describes dwelling as an ecocritical theme that amplifies the deep relationship between people and the locations they occupy. Instead of regarding nature solely as a spatial context, dwelling delves into how identity, memory, culture, and belonging are formed via constant interaction with the environment. It champions a peaceful integration of humans with the natural environment, asserting that the idea of home reaches beyond physical dwellings to incorporate the surrounding ecological framework. In *Under Water*, Tara Memon portrays the ocean and coastal communities as areas of belonging, where human lives are significantly related to the marine environment, even in light of its devastating force.

"We volunteered at the temple morning till night for three weeks. We sorted donations, translated for foreign tourists, delivered food and supplies to hospitals and refugee camps, and searched for the missing." (Menon, 2026, p. 209)

This text indicates that dwelling is not confined to a specific geographical area but also entails maintaining emotional and social relationships within a community during crises. In spite of the significant ruin inflicted by the tsunami, the survivors persist in their resolve to assist one another and restore their community. Their altruistic contributions reveal a communal bond to their country and highlight that a feeling of belonging remains intact even in the face of environmental catastrophe. According to Garrard, dwelling embodies an ethical bond with one's surroundings, and the characters' resolve to assist their community reflects that human identity is fundamentally tied to the locales they reside in, notwithstanding ecological disturbances.

"We were all looking for someone." (Menon, 2026, p. 213)

This concise statement effectively encapsulates the emotional aspect of habitation. The communal quest for absent relatives and acquaintances demonstrates that the concept of home encompasses not merely physical location but also interpersonal connections, collective memory, and shared identity. The tsunami has transformed the environment, but it has not obliterated the characters' bond with their community. Their resolve to locate relatives illustrates the lasting relationship between individuals and their environment, indicating that environmental catastrophes may obliterate residences yet struggle to dismantle the emotional ties that signify a sense of belonging. This viewpoint corresponds with Garrard's interpretation of dwelling as a continuous interaction between individuals and their surroundings.

"The disaster specialists directed us to carry the coffins to the beach." (Menon, 2026, p. 207)

The conversion of the beach from a venue for enjoyment and livelihood into a place of sorrow demonstrates the impact of environmental calamities on individuals' relationships with their surroundings. The coast evolves into a collective environment where individuals honor their lost loved ones and assist each other in confronting ecological deterioration. Instead of abandoning their homeland, the community preserves its ties through memories and acts of compassion. Menon illustrates dwelling as an enduring emotional attachment between people and their surroundings that persists even following environmental loss. This demonstrates Garrard's belief that residence is rooted in memory, duty, and a persistent bond with the environment.

In a nutshell, the theme of dwelling in *Under Water* demonstrates that human ties to nature extend beyond the act of living in a place. It incorporates memories, identity, and a sense of community. Through the survivors' collaborative endeavors to assist each other, locate lost family members, and grieve collectively on the beach, Menon exemplifies that environmental calamities cannot entirely sever the ties between people and their native land. On the contrary, these encounters fortify their bond with

the area and amplify their duty to their community as well as the environment. Therefore, the book affirms Garrard's concept that dwelling involves a persistent bond rooted in coexistence, resilience, and concern for the realm of nature.

5. Conclusion and Findings

The current research analyzed Tara Menon's *Under Water* (2026) utilizing Greg Garrard's ecocritical lens by exploring the motifs of Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling. The results indicate that the narrative depicts nature as a dynamic and interrelated ecological network instead of a mere backdrop. The story highlights the intricate connection between humanity and the natural environment by illustrating marine ecosystems, ecological catastrophes, and human experiences.

The examination of Wilderness reveals that Menon promotes the natural beauty and ecological importance of oceans, coral reefs, islands, mangrove forests, and marine biodiversity. These natural environments are depicted as having inherent worth, promoting an ecocentric perspective on nature. The metaphor of Animals further stresses the necessity of marine creatures in keeping ecological equilibrium and reinforces the interdependence of human and non-human life.

The results concerning the Apocalypse suggest that the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Sandy serve as potent symbols of ecological disaster. These occurrences reveal the proneness of human societies and natural habitats, highlighting the necessity for ecological consciousness and conservation efforts. The examination of Dwelling indicates that the narrative depicts location as a reservoir of recollection, identity, and affiliation. Notwithstanding environmental destruction, the characters exhibit a profound emotional bond with their native area, embodying Garrard's notion of dwelling as a lasting connection between humanity and nature.

The research illustrates that *Under Water* adeptly embodies ecological awareness by depicting marine biodiversity, environmental disaster, and the persistent connection between humanity and nature. Utilizing Greg Garrard's ecocritical framework, the analysis offers an extensive interpretation of the novel's environmental issues and fills the current research gap by exploring the chosen ecocritical tropes of Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling.

6. Suggestions for Future Research

The current research is confined to Greg Garrard's ecocritical paradigm, focusing specifically on the metaphors of Wilderness, Animals, Apocalypse, and Dwelling in Tara Menon's *Under Water*. Subsequent studies might explore the novel through alternative ecocritical lenses, including Blue Humanities, Material Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, or Environmental Justice, to enhance comprehension of its ecological issues. Comparative analyses of *Under Water* and other modern South Asian climate fiction could provide significant understanding of the literary depiction of ecological emergencies, aquatic ecosystems, and human-nature interactions. Such research would enhance ecocritical discourse regarding modern environmental literature.

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