## SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities

Print ISSN: 2773-7829; e-ISSN: 2773-7837 eJournal Site: www.cdetu.edu.np/ejournal/

- Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal
- Indexed in NepJOL; Star-Ranked in JPPS
- Permanently Archived in Portico



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URL: www.cdetu.edu.np

Research Article

# **Anthropocentrism and Environmental Apocalypse in** Svetlana Alexievich's Narrative

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Article History: Submitted 7 May 2023; Reviewed 8 Jul. 2023; Revised 23 Jul. 2023

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.3126/sjah.v5i2.57502

#### Abstract

Svetlana Alexievich's Voices from Chernobyl: An Oral History of Nuclear Disaster (1997) presents how the age of anthropocene is driving the earth towards an imminent peril. In this era, humans acknowledge they are capable of the technological fix, repair and enhancement of natural systems. For instance, the Chernobyl explosion which occurred in 1986 is a consequence of human centered and technocratic worldview. Its aftermath such as a series of apocalyptic events have appeared in the narrative one after the other, and each existence of this biotic community is deadly threatened. Hence, this paper argues that this oral narrative of Alexievich admonishes the humans of this present era to prevent the future catastrophes by unmasking the perilous consequences of the Chernobyl explosion based on the voices of its survivors. To address the issues raised in the paper, the relevant insights of Lawrence Buell, Lynn White, Val Plumwood and Vandana Shiva are taken as a theoretical framework to analyze how and why humans are wrecking nature, and summoning the end times. Finally, this paper concludes that human beings must learn lessons from past deeds and respect nature as a whole entity in order to save the planet.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism, environmental apocalypse, the Chernobyl explosion, technocentrism

### Introduction

In the novel Voices from Chernobyl: An Oral History of Nuclear Disaster, Svetlana Alexievich attempts to make human beings realize where their position is in the biotic community and further offers them a chance to rectify their human centered behavior. Human centeredness is usually comprehended as 'anthropocentrism' in the literary or academic field. Different philosophers and environmental thinkers have defined the term 'anthropocentrism.' Lawrence Buell, in his The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination, defines

SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities Volume 5, No. 2, August 2023 [pp. 84-95] anthropocentrism as the assumption that the interests of humans are of higher priority than those of nonhumans (134). Anthropocentrism places humanity at the center of everything and regards other forms of life as resources to be consumed (Kerridge 537). In recent decades, the technocratic worldview seems highly dominant in anthropocentrism. It is believed that whatever the problem may be, there are technological, mechanical and scientific solutions (Katz, "The Big Lie" 392). As regards to technology, Vandana Shiva, in her "Biotechnology Development and Conservation of Biotechnology," enunciates:

In the dominant paradigm, technology is seen as being above society both in its structure and its evolution, in its offering technological fixes, and in its technological determinism. It is seen as a source of solution to problems that lie in society, and is rarely perceived as a source of new social problems. In periods of rapid technological transformation, it is assumed that society and people must adjust to that change, instead of technological change adjusting to the social values of equity, sustaining and participation. (274)

As Shiva asserts, technology is enforced in this modern era as an indispensable part. To address this issue, this paper attempts to answer the two research questions: How are the theme of anthropocentrism and technocentrism incorporated in Alexievich's narrative? How may this narrative contribute to environmental consciousness?

In order to satisfy the human's unnatural aspiration and ego, humans are exerting to find an alternative to nature through the advancement of science and technology. The technology has been applied in different spheres of nature including air, water, soil, vegetation and different species by interrupting the secret of nature. Alexievich demonstrates the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as humans' exertion to find the substitution of natural energy. Moreover, nature seems to have been treated as an instrument for manipulation. Val Plumwood claims that nature is given an instrumental value in rationalist culture (Environmental Culture 190). The Soviet Union exhibits its rationalism by manipulating nature as a material for energy production and consumption. During the regime of the Soviet, it was the largest energy producer and the second largest energy consumer in the world (Sinyak 791). In this case, Plumwood further asserts: "Rationalism sees life as a march of progress which consists of reason subjugating the supposedly inferior and passive sphere of nature in the body and in nonhuman life" (Environmental Culture 190). Thus, nature is referred to as merely raw materials for human consumption. This oral narrative of Alexievich illuminates how rationalist culture is detrimental for the whole ecological system. As a result, the earth experienced a tremendous Chernobyl nuclear disaster on 26 April 1986 and still its suffering seems ceaseless and irremediable. Overall, this narrative attempts to make people aware of the forthcoming cataclysms by revealing the dreadful consequences of the Chernobyl explosion.

# Fear of Doomsday in the Narrative

Each particle of the earth is immensely imperiled in the narrative owing to the extravagant release of nuclear radiation from the Chernobyl explosion. When reading this oral narrative, one may tend to presume that the end of the world is possible. Moreover, the experience and trauma of each interviewee might make readers anguish and raise questions against anthropocentrism and technocentrism. Alexievich has interviewed the survivors of the Chernobyl explosion who come from different backgrounds like the liquidators, soldiers, teachers, farmers, scientists and family of deceased workers. According to them, they witnessed death up close and have confronted the different forms of ecological transformations derived by radiation. An old

lady named Alyosha Belskiy, one of the interviewees, senses the end time after seeing the disastrous changes in the natural environment. Alyosha informs her children as "Pray! It's the end of the world. It's God's punishment for sins" (Alexievich 217). In the similar way, another interviewee expresses, "Everything that's written in the Bible comes to pass. . . . And then the Judgment will come" (74). These expressions of interviewees reflect predominant apocalyptic beliefs. The term 'apocalypse' was first used by John in the *Book of Revelation*, which refers to revelation of what is going to happen in future. In *Apocalypse: A People's Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Paolo Richard articulates, "Apocalyptic arises when this world has been destroyed or is so deeply corrupted that God is going to destroy it" (8). In this sense, God seems to have created a state of doom in the Soviet state and nearby territories as a consequence of anthropogenic actions.

The impact of radiation has created tremendous panic among people in the narrative. People are yelling: "[W]e are all going to die! We are all going to die soon. . . . By the year 2000, there won't be any Belarussians left" (Alexievich 33). Through the expressions and memories of interviewees, the novelist could make readers visualize how awful the radiation was. The narrative reveals that 50 million Ci radionuclides were released into the atmosphere by the Chernobyl explosion (UNESCO). As a result, the whole biotic as well as abiotic community are equally threatened. The natural environment of Belarus and its surroundings seems no more natural. As per the narrative. 23% of Belarus land is contaminated. Similarly, 26% of forests are highly radioactive. As experienced by the interviewees, every component of the environment is radiant. The whole terrain is topped with radioactive foam (5-8) and water bodies are largely contaminated (26). Overall, the whole ecosystem is filled with poisonous substances and created as a state of end times. It demonstrates that the human-induced nuclear radiation has interrupted the inherent properties of nature. There seems to be a minimal chance to recover the natural environment soon. Regarding the retrieval of nature, Paul W. Taylor affirms:

Life communities in natural ecosystems would gradually return to their former healthy state. Tropical forests, for example, would again be able to make their full contribution to a life-sustaining atmosphere, for the whole planet. The rivers, lakes, and oceans of the world would (perhaps) eventually become clean again. Spilled oil, plastic trash, and even radioactive waste might finally, after many centuries, cease doing their terrible work. Ecosystems would return to their proper balance, suffering only the disruptions of natural events such as volcanic eruptions and glaciations. From these communities life could recover, as it has so often done in the past. But the ecological disasters now perpetrated on it by humans - disasters from which it might never recover - these it would no longer have to endure. (77)

The Chernobyl nuclear explosion is not a natural disaster; it is man-made. As Taylor asserts, the natural environment of radioactive areas of the former Soviet state has not been restored till date and it seems uncertain whether it will be healed or not in future.

Human induced radiation has proved to be a greater menace to the human community as well. Indeed, humans are digging their own graves. In this regard, Peter Singer holds: "When we humans change the environment in which we live, we often harm ourselves" (55). As enunciated by Singer, humans seem to be in the state of doom in the narrative because of their own deeds. As expressed by the interviewees, a number of people in the disaster area lost their lives horribly and the survivors are struggling with its consequences up to present. The narrative demonstrates how awful unnatural death is. The scenery of the hospital and the pain of injured workers obviously make readers

emotional and further lead them to think once over the technocentrism. Accordingly, people are absorbing excessive doses of nuclear radiation and the biological function of their body is severely disrupted (Alexievich 14-18). Furthermore, this narrative reveals the terrible fact that the impact of human generated radiation may pass on one after the next succeeding generations endlessly. As explained by the interviewees, acute radiation seems to have a long-run health impact on reproductive and genetic disorders of humans (6-19). The womb of women, which is the origin of human civilization, seems to be in a bigger threat. Due to an excessive absorption of radiation, a large number of women have lost their fertility (212). Moreover, a number of women have experienced abortion (120). In the same way, a huge number of children have got birth with physical defects such as congenital handicap, multiple complex pathologies like no vagina and no anus and other psychological problems (83). Correspondingly, the survivors and their children are battling with thyroid, leukemia, heart related diseases, cancer and other different incurable diseases. Here, humans are responsible for their own menace. Indeed, a blind confidence of humans in technology has induced humans unable to see the future.

The nuclear radiation has equally imperiled non-humans as well. The nonhumans are absorbing a huge amount of radio-nuclides enormously through air, water, soil and other bodies. The diverse lives rested on soil like bugs, worms, ants, etc. seem adversely threatened (Alexievich 31). Accordingly, the diverse lives associated with the forest have vanished (89). The wildlife and birds are disappearing and dving (61). Likewise, domestic animals are severely contaminated. In the same way, different species of vegetation and plants are disappearing (54). Overall, the whole ecosystem has become toxic. Indubitably, the existence of an entire organism counts on the sound food chain. Unfortunately, the human stimulated nuclear radiation has ruptured the order of the entire food chain and thrusted all forms of lives towards death. The narrative reflects Buell's insights about environmental apocalypticism and toxic discourse. Buell asserts that the web of life has turned into a web of death due to entering of chemicals into the bodies of fish, birds, reptiles, and domestic and wild animals ("Environmental Apocalypticism" 291). Toxic enters into the bodies through different means like air, water, soil, different vegetation and grains. As per the narrative, the nuclear radiation has assimilated into each food source and turned into inedible. In "Two paths to the Future Fake Food, Fake Farming Vs Real Food, Real Farming: Which Future of Food and Farming will we Sow," Shiva, et al. note: "Food is life. Food holds the contribution of all beings that make the food web and it holds the potential of maintaining and regenerating the web of life" (5). At the same point, Aldo Leopold holds that food chain as the lines of dependency for food and other services (43). From the same instance, Buell expresses: "Plants and animals are, after all, bound together; bodies and the world are caught in a network of dependence" ("Environmental Apocalypticism" 283). However, the interdependence among beings seems disrupted by the human created radiation in the narrative with a direct assault in the food chain.

The food chain begins with land. In other words, land is a prime food producer for all humans and non-humans. In this regard, Aldo Leopold states: "Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil" (43). The narrative manifests that plants, vegetation and grains in which the whole living organisms are depended upon, are greatly infected. Likewise, land is the food source for diverse varieties of soil fauna. Regarding the worth of soil, Shiva puts: "Living soil is a complex food web, teeming with earthworms, bacteria fungi" (*Stolen Harvest* 5). However, the nuclear radiation has interrupted the food web of the lives associated with soil. In the food chain, every species is interlinked. In other

words, one life depends on the other. At the same time, the food chain of humans is equally affected. The narrative discloses that humans' food products like grains, vegetables, fruits and dairy products are highly contaminated. In the same way, mothers are transferring radiation to their kids through breastfeeding. In this regard, Buell affirms that the web of life has turned into a web of death owing to toxic entering into the mother's milk and the tissue of the unborn child ("Environmental Apocalypticism" 291). Not just the milk of humans, milk of cattle has become equally toxic (Alexievich 161). Similarly, meat products are highly diseased. Most importantly, the food chain seems altered due to food crises; for instance, cats eat cucumbers, tomatoes, flowers, eggs and their own kittens; likewise, dogs eat rats (28-36). Indeed, human-induced nuclear radiation has turned the food chain unnatural. In short, anthropogenic nuclear radiation has adverse effects on the entire food system which has provoked an environmental apocalypse. Indeed, Buell's notion of environmental apocalypticism seems remarkably relevant in Alexievich's narrative.

#### **Humans-Animal Detachment in the Narrative**

The Chernobyl nuclear disaster has disrupted the bonding among humans and animals. In order to maintain the natural environment and create eco-friendly behavior, healthy interaction among humans and animals is fundamental. However, the human-generated nuclear radiation has disconnected animals from humans' communities. Alexievich's narrative manifests the humans' love and caring towards animals. Even during such deadly catastrophes, humans still think about their pets and cry for them. They treat pets like family members even if they are radioactive. According to the narrative, people seem to be trying not to leave their pets during evacuation (113). Moreover, they attempt to stop the extermination of their pets (97). The saddest event is that an elderly woman shot herself, when she was coerced to leave her pets (96). All in all, it demonstrates that the lives of humans and animals rely upon each other. However, humans are forced to be separated from animals in the post-apocalyptic world. Sad to relate, humans are evacuated from the radioactive sites and animals are left to die at the same place. Overall, the toxicity has disintegrated this biotic community.

The novel makes its readers aware that the anthropocentric worldview may provoke animal extinction. Though ordinary people seem compassionate towards nonhumans, the authorities are merciless. Moreover, it is disregarded that non-humans are also the members of this biotic community and they have their own independent value. As a result, non-humans are highly endangered in the post-Chernobyl world. On the one hand, non-humans are in the state of dying because of the direct absorption of high doses of human-induced radiation, whereas on the other hand, humans stimulate non-humans' extinction by exterminating. The worth of animals seems zero in the Soviet state. The contaminated animals like dogs, cats and horses are severely exterminated thinking these animals are no longer useful for humans and they can spread epidemic (94, 127). It demonstrates that the Soviet authorities have espoused a shallow ecology approach. According to Arne Naess, shallow ecology refers to an approach in which animals, plants and natural objects are valuable only as resources for humans and if no human use is known, they can be demolished (53). At the same point, Eric Katz expresses:

Indeed, there may be times when human action to improve the health of the ecosystemic community will require the death, destruction, or suffering of individual animals or animal species. Humans may have to eliminate disease organisms, insects, or even higher animals - rabbits, deer, or wolves, e.g. - which have overpopulated their natural communities and threaten ecosystemic stability. But an animal liberation ethic holds that the death and suffering of

animals is a moral evil, because it violates the moral worth of individual animals. When this death and suffering is a result of human action, even for the sake of ecosystemic well-being, it is a direct violation of the principles of an animal liberation ethic. ("Is There a Place" 82)

As Katz stated, the rights and intrinsic value of animals are violated in the Soviet state as a consequence of human action. To advocate the rights of non-humans, Vandana Shiva asserts: "No humans have the right to encroach on the ecological space of other species and other people or to treat them with cruelty and violence" (*Stolen Harvest 9*). However, humans, in particular authorities, have observed this planet as a habitat of merely humans. As a result, animals seem in the state of extinction in the narrative.

## **Human-Land Detachment in the Narrative**

The harmonious relationship between humans and land is indispensable for a healthy ecosystem. Hence, humans and land detachment is unquestionably a pace to disaster. Alexievich's novel demonstrates how human-generated radiation shatters the interrelationship among humans and land. More particularly, peasants have an intense attachment with land. One of the interviewees named Aleksandr Kudryagin acknowledges the farmer land relationship: "And the farmer's life flowed along very smoothly: they plant something, it grows, they harvest it, and the rest goes on without them. They don't have anything to do with the tsar, with the government – with space ships and nuclear power plants, with meetings in capital" (Alexievich 185). At the same point, Zoya Bruk adds: "Farmers didn't invent Chernobyl, they had their own relations with nature, trusting relations, not predatory ones, just like they had a hundred years ago, and a thousand years ago" (169). The farmers primarily concern themselves with the soil rather than the outer world. Indeed, they play a pivotal role in maintaining biodiversity. In this connection, Shiva, et al. argue:

Farmer's knowledge and technology have never been stagnant or static. They have always skillfully responded to the changing circumstances and have kept their system in a dynamic state advancing towards a higher degree of diversity, complexity, resilience, sustainability and security. In the process of achieving those goals, farmers have always based their livelihoods systems on natural biodiversity. (*Seeds of Hope 27*)

Unfortunately, the technocratic worldview has afflicted natural biodiversity by detaching the farmers from their land in the post-Chernobyl world. Though the entire environment seems in a state of devastation, the peasants are still endeavoring to maintain a harmony with nature in the narrative.

The peasants have strong faith in the natural environment and order of nature whatever the outer disaster occurs. Mainly in the older people, the love towards nature seems greater. These Chernobyl survivors have nothing to do with the radiation rather are worried about the yard where they have cultivated vegetables. Everyone is wishing to get back for harvesting (76). According to an interviewee, one a mother lost her son due to acute poisoning, but she feels gratified with working and harvesting vegetables. In this regard, Anatoly Shimanskiy share his experience with the narrator: "Faith in the land, in their ancient peasant experience-even the death of their son can't overturn the order of things" (124). Indeed, older generations have no faith in the modern world. It expounds that people wish eco-friendly human-nature relationships to order of nature. Moreover, people trying to take seeds with them during their evacuation illustrates that they wish to save indigenous biodiversity wherever they go. In this regard, an interviewee named Kudryagin expresses: "They took seeds with them, quietly, they took green tomatoes, wrapped them up. . . . We annulled their labor, the ancient meaning of their lives"

(Alexievich 185). This belief and love towards seed reflects Vandana Shiva's idea of Navdanya. Here, Vandana Shiva affirms: "The seed, for the farmer, is not merely the source of future plants and food; it is the storage place of culture and history. Seed is the first link in the food chain. Seed is the ultimate symbol of security" (*Stolen Harvest 8*). At the same point, Shiva puts: "Seed is the first link in the food chain. It is also the first step toward freedom from extinction" ("Ecological Balance" 472). Indeed, the soviet farmers seem to understand the value of organic seed and order of nature and seem to hope that seed may prevent further catastrophe.

# Anthropocentric Perspective in the Post-Chernobyl World

In his novel, Alexievich vindicates that the authorities retain the anthropocentric worldview significantly higher than the ordinary populace. In the post-apocalyptic world, common people seem to realize that humans are largely responsible for ecological disaster. A Cameraman, one of the interviewees, admits: "We're all-peddlers of the apocalypse. Big and small" (Alexievich 112). From the same instance, other two interviewees named Sergei Gurin and Valentin Borisevich put forward how humans are provoking ecological destruction:

Man is trying to tear himself away from the earth. He is trying to master different categories of time, different planets, not just this one. The apocalypsenuclear winter-has already all been described in Western literature, as if they were rehearsing it, preparing for the future. The explosion of a large number of nuclear warheads will result in enormous fires. The atmosphere will be saturated with smoke. Sunlight won't be able to reach the earth, and this will ignite a chain reaction-from cold to colder to colder still. This man-made version of the end of the world has been taught since the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. But atom bombs won't disappear even after they destroy the last warhead. There will still be the knowledge of atom bombs. (180)

The above statements of interviewees substantiate that the Soviet people are considerably cognizant about the man-made version of the doomsday. In addition, the statement of Gurin and Valentin Borisevich reveals that humans have been interrupting nature since the industrial revolution, which further indicates that before the industrial revolution, there was an eco-friendly society. Here, Lynn White's assertion seems relevant regarding the historical development of anthropocentrism. According to White, man was part of nature in the medieval period, now he has been the exploiter of nature along with the introduction of modern technologies since the latter part of the seventh century after Christ (42). However, a few Soviet people have acknowledged humans as the annihilator of nature.

The Soviet authorities sustain an anthropocentric perspective in the post-Chernobyl world. The narrative substantiates a reality that humans who are in power and politics never admit their fault nor do they learn lessons from their past deeds. The hubris of the Soviet authorities seems to stimulate further ecological destruction in the aftermath of the Chernobyl explosion. Hubris signifies a dangerous combination of overconfidence, over-ambition, arrogance and pride (Diamandis 2). Though the Chernobyl explosion appears as a big threat to the whole ecosystem and causes huge losses, the soviet authorities and political leaders take it normally and run after power and position as usual. The Soviet Union does not regret nor mourn; rather it celebrates the nuclear explosion as a technological triumph. As a consequence, the Soviet state faces more loss humanly and ecologically. In the novel, the authorities seem self-centered and overlook the rest of the world, both ordinary humans and non-humans. Though the anthropocentric worldview gives precedence to human value at first rank, the value of

ordinary people seems zero in the narrative. The hierarchy has been created not only among humans and nonhumans, but also among humans' group as well. The idea of 'hyperseperation' of Val Plumwood seems relevant to interpret this narrative. In *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood reckons that the western thought is grounded on a set of contrasting pairs like human/non-human, mind/body, subject/object, colonizer/colonized, universal/particular, civlized/primitive, male/female, rational/emotional and self/other (43). In the similar way, the Soviet authorities have treated the ordinary populace as subordinate parties. Indeed, the Soviet people seem highly dehumanized in the post-Chernobyl world, which has questioned the inherent worth and existence of so-called minors.

The Soviet authorities could prevent further disaster if they had acknowledged this earth as a common habitat for the entire entity. However, the authorities merely situate themselves at the center by othering and backgrounding the ordinary populace and non-humans. If people had got the right information about the disaster on time, the additional loss could be minimized. Nonetheless, the authorities conceal reality and hold citizens in illusion. It is the right of the public to get information from the state as well as the environmental right as well. With respect to the environmental information, the Stockholm Declaration 1972 declares that people have a fundamental right to an environment "of quality" that permits a life of dignity and wellbeing. In addition, the Rio Declaration 1992 states:

Environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided. (10)

Unfortunately, the Soviet people receive misinformation from the state. In fact, the Soviet Union seems to be afraid that it will be ashamed and the Soviet's power will be ruined amidst the international community if the fact about technological failure comes out. Hence, the Soviet authorities disseminate the false message that everything is normal. The workers, who are assigned in cleanup operations in the disaster areas, are not informed about the risk of radiation. One of the workers, a soldier, explains: "Where are we going? Why? There was no information at all. The authorities have not communicated about the level of radiation and kinds of doses the soldiers are getting" (40-41). Similarly, another interviewee named Lyudmila Polenkaya, recollects: "Everything had happened and there was no information: the government was silent; the doctors were silent. It was a long, long chain, and at the end of it a few people made the decisions. We turned out to be defenseless. That was the main feeling in those days. A few people were deciding our fate, the fate of millions" (181). It demonstrates that the Soviet authorities have situated the lives of millions of people and their coming generations to peril on the strength of their power.

For the sake of personal interest, the Soviet authority overlooks what is going on in the entire ecology. Due to the lack of right information about the nuclear explosion from the government, ordinary people keep absorbing acute doses of radiation from their daily routines like running, swimming, working, harvesting, selling, consuming, etc. Obviously, the invisible radiation cannot make people aware that it is more perilous. One of the interviewees named Vasily Nesterenko expresses: "People have set up tents,

they're camping out with their families. They're swimming, tanning. They don't know that for several weeks now they've been swimming and tanning underneath a nuclear cloud" (Alexievich 212). Likewise, another interviewee, Anna Badaeva, elaborates this situation: "The apples are hanging in the garden, the leaves are on the trees, and the potatoes are in the fields. I don't think there was any Chernobyl . . . " (52). It demonstrates the Soviet state's indifference towards its people. The media plays a pivotal role in communicating information to the public. However, the Soviet authorities control the media to broadcast false information. Hence, people keep trusting the media (212). The radio circulates that the situation is stabilizing (Alexievich 124). For instance, one of the news reports informs: "The air around the reactor is clean" "Our nuclear stations are absolutely safe. . . . The wind was blowing in the other direction, not toward the city, not toward Kiev" (187, 87, 110). Accordingly, television also presents fake documentaries where the natural world is usual and undisturbed (143, 106, 160-61). Similarly, the writers are highly prohibited to write about the fact of a nuclear explosion like how much radioactive fallout there is and how survivors are evacuated (86, 125-26). Moreover, the Soviet authorities seize and ruin the books related to radiation from the library, documentation of events, radiation-measuring equipment from the institutes and market (85, 133, 211). Correspondingly, the warning and advice from the experts is overlooked and unheard (207). Overall, it demonstrates that the Soviet authorities have kept its people away from ecological awareness. Indeed, ecological awareness is crucial in preventing ecological crises.

The Soviet people are extremely dehumanized as a result of its authorities' hubris in the narrative. The narrative substantiates that hubris leads nowhere beside destruction. Owing to power and position, the Soviet authorities seem brutal. Plumwood affirms that the dominant forms of rationalism like economic, political and scientific create the blind spots and it naturalizes domination of people by elite forms of power (Environmental Culture 16-17). In the same manner, Buell articulates that ordinary citizens are victims of corporate, government and military conceitedness ("Toxic Discourse" 652). As both Plumwood and Buell state, the Soviet authorities have created self-centrism and tyrannized the common populace on the strength of their power. The Soviet state does not seem worried about the loss from explosion, rather it exerts to maintain its leadership in the global community. Moreover, it intends to produce more heroes in the Soviet land and write the history of bravery. Here are some statements like "We'll show them Soviet heroism" and "[W]e'll show them what the Soviet character is made of" and "We'll show the whole world!" that illustrate the arrogance of the Soviet Union (Alexievich 215). To this end, the Soviet state acknowledges the lives of the ordinary people as a sacrifice for the state. It seems that the idea of Greek heroism is predominant in the Soviet state, which glorifies the bravery of a person since it is the means of immortalization (Nagy 12). Like Gregory Nagy, Franco, et al. state: "Heroism represents the ideal of citizens transforming civic virtue into the highest form of civic action, accepting either physical peril or social sacrifice" (99). Accordingly, the people are trained to be heroes, warriors, protectors and defenders in the name of patriotism as the narrator describes: "You have to serve the motherland! Serving – that's a big deal" (Alexievich 42). One of the interviewees named Segei Gurin, expresses his experience: "They, our parents, lived through a great catastrophe, and we needed to live through it too. Otherwise we'd never become real people" (109). Sentimentally, the love towards patriotism seems to be imposed within its people. Indeed, treating innocent people as objects, the Soviet authorities have attempted to satisfy their political interest. Moreover, the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics also highlights the heroism as "The strength of socialism was vividly demonstrated by the immortal feat of the Soviet

people and their armed forces in achieving their historic victory in the Great Patriotic war" (Preamble). It demonstrates that the state itself has legitimized the ordinary human's sacrifice.

In the materialistic world, it is believed that money can bargain everything. Assuredly, the materialistic worldview is one of the stimulators of ecological destruction. The ordinary people in the post-Chernobyl world seem highly exploited and thrusted to experience death closely. People are either forced or tempted to work in the contaminated sites (Alexievich 38, 42, 205). Literally, the state urges the sacrifice of the life of people with materialistic privileges and heroic awards. Indeed, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure environmental rights of its people and protect them from the environmental hazards. Unfortunately, people seem to force to consume radioactive food products, water, air and other stuff because of technological and mighty arrogance of leaders. Nikolai Zharkov, an interviewee, explains: "But the atom is everywhere. In the bread, in the salt. We breathe radiation, we eat it" (120). Regarding the right to environment in *Earth Democracy*, Shiva asserts:

All members of the earth community, including all humans, have the right to sustenance – to food and water, to a safe and clean habitat, to security of ecological space. . . . The right to sustenance is a natural right because it is the right to life. These rights are not given by states or corporations, nor can they be extinguished by state or corporation action. No state or corporation has the right to erode or undermine these natural rights or enclose the commons that sustain life. (9)

As Shiva proclaims, the environmental rights are unalienable rights. However, these inviolable rights of Soviet people seem encroached by its state. The workers are mobilized as machines at the radioactive sites without protection. Working in such contaminated areas is like a suicidal mission, for the reason that the radiation has even destroyed the robots and cranes (Alexievich 51). The workers including liquidators, hunters, firemen and soldiers are forced to work in such hazardous sites without any safety devices like masks, respirators, gloves, gear and other tools (6, 88, 94, 131-32). An interviewee, who worked as a hunter, discloses: "It's too bad they didn't give us any protection, didn't think about people" (94). At the same time, the authorities and political leaders seem significantly safe as compared to the ordinary populace. Gas masks and special robes are available to them. Similarly, they have special lands, special seedbeds and special oversight (206-10). They do not even touch contaminated things (125). Accordingly, they are doing regular health checkups while the common people are not getting even a single dose of iodine to prevent the radiation. Instead of providing the preventive measures, people are provoked to take Vodka so that they can actively work in the radioactive sites (109). Indeed, the people are given instrumental value and deliberately propel towards death, since death of an individual is necessary in the ancient Greek tradition, the story of the hero cannot be completed, if he lives on (Nagy 22).

#### Conclusion

Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl: An Oral History of Nuclear Disaster* can be taken as a warning to humans of this anthropocene age. Certainly, the novel prompts readers to contemplate over technocentrism since the consequence of the Chernobyl explosion is unspeakable and unendurable. Each Chernobyl survivor's expression may make readers feel the anguish of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion. It communicates a message that man-made disaster is irremediable or unhealable. Most significantly, this narrative may cultivate a new belief over the prevailing assumption about the end times that the end of the world is assuredly possible because of humans. Readers may figure

out their own position in the state and in the biotic community as well. They may also apprehend that the past actions of humans can have a perilous impact on the present and future. Hence, this narrative can contribute to mending the behavior of the present generation of humans and developing eco-friendly behavior as well. This narrative seems significantly successful to expose the anthropocentric hubris of authorities, which is a leading factor to inflame the ecological catastrophe in the post-Chernobyl world. In conclusion, human beings are required to learn the lesson from the past deeds and respect nature as a whole entity in order to save the planet.

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# To cite this article [MLA style]:

Adhikari, Rebati. "Anthropocentrism and Environmental Apocalypse in Svetlana Alexievich's Narrative." *SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, August 2023, pp. 84-95. *NepJOL*, doi:10.3126/sjah.v5i2.57502.

SCHOLARS: Journal of Arts & Humanities

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