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**Discourse: Nature/Man According to a Novel by E. Shafak**

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**Abstract**

For centuries, the intellectual world of humanity has been interested in the cardinal issues of the relationship or influence of nature and man. This has continued and has been shaped by different, opposing views in the last three centuries. Since the 80s of the XIX century, the Georgian writer Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915) has given this topic an amazing development. Although his thoughts could not be translated into European or Asian languages at that time. However, independently of him, in the XXI century, the excellent Turkish wr-

iter (Turkish and English-speaking) Elif Shafak (1971) begins to explore the issue of Adam's relationship with nature in a new way in her new novel "The Island of Missing Trees", which will be presented in this article. Using the existing literature on solid scientific research and using imagination, Elif Shafak tries to solve the current world problem using the example of one sacred tree, a fig tree, and the relationship between people - the conflict of inhabitants of one island of forced migration, the issues of death, love, father-son, friendship or alienation. The main characters of the work, which is included in the genre of the novel, are people, plants, insects, animals and, perhaps, all natural phenomena.

However, in the process of research, it turned out to be unknown to us how close the world of Elif Shafak's novel is to the ideas of the Georgian writer Vazha-Pshavela. We believe that the comparison of them and the common features that emerged (against the backdrop of animism, anthropomorphism, ancient polytheism, and fundamental religions prevalent in modern times) as they revealed the only truth about the necessity of the harmonious existence of the world and man, nature and man, would be important for the scientific society. This is also an expression of Elif Shafak's versatile writing talent and mastery.

**Keywords:** Shafak, Vazha-Pshavela, fig tree, withered beech, nature.

## **Introduction**

Even during his lifetime, the Georgian poet, thinker, and son of the Caucasus Mountains, Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915), dreamed of making his works known to Europe and the intellectual community through translations. However, until the restoration of Georgia's ind-

ependence, the dream remained a dream. Today, he has been translated into both European and Eastern languages (for example, we should mention the translations of his poems (most recently into Japanese). Through the translations, his thoughts on the relationship between the world and man, nature and man, and the attempt to disrupt harmony have appeared. There has been a long discussion among literary critics and philosophers about whether Vazha was a “pagan, pantheist, animist, etc. (K. Abashidze, S. Danelia, G. Kikodze, etc.)” (Chumburidze, 1974:199).

Critic Ipolite Vartagava wrote: “...every object and natural phenomenon that Vazha describes to us, he humanizes, or rather, humanizes, with human flesh, nerves, and soul. And the poet has taken this humanization of nature to such a degree that you are deluded and think that the image of a man of ancient times deifying and reviving nature, and not a child of the twentieth century is being unfolded in front of your eyes!” (Vartagava, 1958:35).

We would not be mistaken to repeat this about the novel “The Island of Missing Trees” by Turkish writer Elif Shafak (1971). Although she aims to use the story to illustrate the main problems (the pain of the island being divided into two, emigration, etc.), she actually turns a tree (whose biblical roots are also revealed) into the main character, a fig tree, which is itself a living being, with its own memory and the ability to communicate with people and other creatures of nature.

Many people write about Elif Shafak, her artistic style is unique. Here is one reviewer's opinion about the novel: This is a novel full of wisdom about love and separation, roots and branches, emigration and life in another country, hope and faith (David Mitchell).

Vazha-Pshavela also became famous in the XIX-XXI centuries. The English professor and Georgian scholar Donald Rayfield con-

sidered him to be outstanding among other Georgian writers and he himself translated his works into English (D. Rayfield, "Georgian Literature: A History" – 1981, 2000).

Naturally, this is not the only complete coincidence, similarity or mutual influence, especially since the fig tree reminds us of Vazha Pshavela's withered breech, but the warmth and love radiate from Elif Shafak's novel, involuntarily reminds a Georgian man of what he has heard, analyzed, and studied a thousand times. Shafak looks at nature with a strange magnifying glass, although her thoughts are saturated with the latest scientific research (publications or Internet resources) and her own assessments, she uses all means for this: through monologues and dialogues, to reveal their pain or blood, estrangement or rediscovery of a loved one.

That is why we focus our research on Shafak's extraordinary artistic mastery, and not on reviews published abroad or the opinions and assessments of literary critics. The goal is the same: to open up the in-depth world of Elif Shafak, based on comparisons with related topics and general conclusions.

### **Methods**

Comparatively - typological, as E. Shafak's novel corresponds to the theme of the relationship between nature and man. In literary texts, the same issues were presented in a typical way in the work of the Georgian writer Vazha-Pshavela a century ago.

### **Main part/Discussion**

Elif Shafak is a famous writer in Turkish and English-language literature, as evidenced by the awards that have been awarded to her since 2004, highlighting the uniqueness of her artistic style. Deep knowledge of philology and philosophy helps the writer analyze the painful issues of the Eastern and Western countries of her modern era, be the violation of women's rights, local wars with their consequen-

ces, relations between nations, or love and friendship. Her novel "The Island of Missing Tress", created in the 20s of the XXI century, concerns representatives of the divided world of the island (Cyprus), who are forced to emigrate to England during this difficult time.

The world has been oscillating between sin and grace since the time of Adam and Eve. That is why, instead of the biblical apple, which has become a symbol of sin, Elif Shafak chooses the fig tree, with the leaves of which men and women tried to escape from shame. Thus, the life of the fig tree in its native land (Cyprus) is distinguished from the joy of its young sapling in a foreign land (England), whose roots have retained the memory of the past.

The fig tree lived and flourished, delighting people with its fruit, but it dies, stained by the results of battles, although the only sign of life that will continue its existence is the sapling planted by a man, the Greek Kostas.

"...a strange apathy seized me, this condition was getting worse day by day, I was not feeling well, like all living things, the fig tree is also suffering from numerous diseases and infections, but this time I had no more courage to fight..." (Shafaqi, 2022:366-367), "Just as hope can sometimes suddenly spit out of the whirlpool of despair, and peace can sprout shoots on the ruins of war, a tree also has the ability to emerge from the depths of illness and decay and rejoice. In short, if a Cyprus willow were to take root in England, they would not get exactly the same tree, but they would certainly get a genetically identical one" (Shafaqi, 2022:378).

In one of Vazha's short stories, "The Withered Beech" (1888–1889), the condition of a withered beech is described as follows:

"The withered beech stands unperturbed, motionless, uttering nothing in praise or censure; it knows neither pity nor hatred; its heart boils neither with hostile nor with friendly feelings. The

withered beech thinks only of itself, the past, the present and future. It is as though sorrow has been hammered deep into its heart. Occasionally it glances at one small, hoped-for shoot that has sprung up at the far end of a root and which is waiting for the sun and rain in order to grow. This alone is its consolation...” (Pshavela, 2012:92).

And if the fig tree of Shafak often personifies itself, reasoning and sharing its thoughts with insects, animals, and birds, the hero of Vazha, the withered beech, though it does not speak, thinks, ponders and keeps memories in its heart, because it is the son of the “mother of the place”, a vibrant part of the universe.

Chiko the parrot, due to its separation from its fellow tribesmen, quenches its thirst in the human environment:

The mouse and the bee bring news from the human world to the plant world. Vazha’s, violet and Sasutela talk to each other, the wolf is worried, the little fawn trembles in fear of the hunter... And if the world of Elif is ruled by mythological gods, in Vazha, the owner of everything is the “mother of the place”, the Earth, and finally God, the creator and guide. In both writers, people still cannot separate themselves from other inhabitants of the planet, because, entrusted with love, they continue to live in the memory of that same love. As the writer herself notes at the end of the novel: “I wanted to pay tribute to local folklore and oral tradition, but here everything is still invented - a mixture of interest, dream, love, sadness and imagination.” (Shafaqi, 2022:434). Even with Vazha, even a single story can contain everything, but thanks to scientific research originating from the ancient world, it was only established in the XX-XXI centuries.

Elif Shafak received the Stanford Prize twice - in 2022 and 2025 - for her mastery of perceiving the environment while traveling. Vazha-Pshavela became famous in the XX-XXI centuries. Whether

his ideas are controversial or profound - the path to restoring harmony in the world remains a warning or a plea for people.

E. Shafak's novel was created before 2021. Part of the works of the Georgian Vazha, stories and poems, were translated into English by the Georgian scholar Donald Rayfield before 2018, and later (in 2022, 2025) by the publishing house "Artanuji".

It seems that the concurrence of thoughts of the two great writers was reflected in their works.

### **Conclusion/Results**

And although the plant world (especially sakura flowers) occupies a large place in the cognition of the Japanese (poets, philosophers, or other ordinary people) and no one will be surprised by the manifestation of their relationship with nature, the style of Shafak's novel itself indicates the harmony with nature encoded at different stages of human development, in the twenty-first century, even during the pandemic, it presents itself as a new manifestation of the intellectual writer's mastery. Nature and man have again become the theme of artistic creation through the novel "The Island of Missing Trees" by the Turkish writer Elif Shafak. Based on scientific research, with her intuition, E. Shafaq has deeply understood the issue, which echoes the idea expressed in the XIX century by the well-known Georgian writer Vazha-Pshavela that the world is one, nature and man, harmoniously existing in ancient times, must be restored in the same way, which humanity itself needs through the manifestations of wars, alienation in all its forms, and the pursuit of truth.

And, if Vazha's amazing poem "What Made Me a Man" (1913) expresses the poet's regret as a human being to come as rain to water the world, Elif Shafaq expresses the same in one sentence: "7." "With a few gentle words, welcome the tree that has returned to this world" (Shafaq, 2022:425).

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