

Ecological Elements And Environment Discourse In The Selected Works Of Arundhati Roy And Amitav Ghosh: A Comparative Literary Analysis

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Abstract:

*Eco-criticism has been a dominant term in post-colonial fiction. Many post-colonial writers of Indian origin tried to throw some light on environmental issues. It becomes very crucial to talk about ecological issues in the 21st century through literature; however, ecocriticism became popular in the year 1978 when William Rueckert wrote an essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism (1). Through the literature, we can portray environmental justice as a reflection of society's ambivalence towards environmental issues. Our efforts aim to give voice to the unexpressed feelings of plants and animals by using characters in selected works. Nature treats us equally, and she represents the soul and the power of unspoken words for plants, animals, and other animated things. They possess an innate instinct to express their strength, serving as a metaphor for the silenced voices of the modern era. This research paper examines the interrelationship between human activities and natural elements, which influence each other. Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh have depicted how natural habitat and human instinct bond for dominance over it, and subsequently, our paper investigates how natural resources have been exploited in the name of modernization in two of the famous works: *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide*.*

Keywords: Ecology, Literature, Ecocriticism, Nature, Human, Environment

INTRODUCTION

Ecological balance is essential for the development of a sound world. It is part of green studies (2), which is quite a vibrant term. The ecology of nature and our surroundings greatly represents society, culture, and life's struggle. The ecological study of the environment and literature comes under ecocriticism (3). Ecocriticism finds the relationship between literature and the environment. However, the sudden development of eco-friendly zones poses a threat to the environment. Globalization and industrialization have deeply challenged the environmental aspects, and these have been tempered and defied at a much greater scale (4). The advancement in the field of science and technology has paved the way to change the ecological balance between abiotic and biotic components in our surroundings. According to an essay by Arundhati Roy titled "Environment and Literary Activism", ecocriticism examines literary works to find connections between the state of the environment, ecology, or nature and culture. Many famous critics have addressed the issue in their works, as Glotfelty and Fromm have talked about awareness of the environment and the troubles caused by human activities in ecosystems. Human culture is related to the physical world; it affects it and is affected by it (3). In the name of progress, we have given back to nature issues such as overpopulation, pollution, the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and the loss of many precious species of animals and birds. Roy has highlighted the environmental issues that human actions have caused. She was one of the key figures who spoke out about the environmental hazards in Kerala. She openly criticized the problems created by factories and farming chemicals in the ecosystem. In our research article, we have taken two novels to develop relationships between humans and Mother Nature: Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*. She has portrayed an exploitative nature for the sake of development, progress and glory. Arundhati Roy has illustrated how the hidden desire for dominance can transform humans into animals, highlighting aspects of revolt against this dehumanization. Roy has portrayed rivers, lakes, and forest life so beautifully in her novel that it seems lively and quite animated when we study it. Due to the continuous turbulence from men to Nature, both can no longer coexist in

harmony. This is the outcome of the cruelty of men towards nature, rivers, plants, and animals, as we are being uncivilized and dominant for the sake of industrialization and development. Roy has shown the outlook of the river and nature towards us—that's unchangeable. "Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile." (6) The river has its existence in society, and it portrays the life tragedy through its appearance. The river illustrates the harsh tragedies that humans endure as a result of nature's exploitation. The intensity of the picture symbolizes the death and loss of human beings, just as Sophie Mol's death stunned everyone. It hunts Rahel and everyone who lives there. "Even though it was June and raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish." (7) The river's state has deteriorated, transforming into a barren wasteland filled solely with remnants. This situation illustrates the harsh and vivid loss of dead aquatic life. The hotels' buildings emitted a foul odour from the surrounding area. Moss covered the wall, indicating that nature had taken over. Even poisonous rattlesnakes, mongooses, and frogs take up homes in the natural habitat that humans have captured earlier. This illustration shows that everything belongs to nature. The condition of the river is very poor and distressing, as industrialization has destroyed the beauty of nature. The river symbolizes nature's lap, serves as a wonderful caretaker for the nearby earth's dwellers. The children throw trash directly into the river, causing it to become contaminated with faeces and pesticides.

"It smelt of shit and pesticides bought with World loans (7). The river's beauty lost its significance in the last 23 years, it is old and in tattered condition. Roy attempted to show a family struggle and an ecological struggle for life. On one hand, the Lopez family fights for their existence in society and struggles to maintain their lives. "Inside the curtain, Rahel closed her eyes and thought of the green river, of the quiet, deep-swimming fish, and the gossamer wings of the dragonflies." (7). Due to the increase in the tourism sector, many places were converted into hotels. Aquatic life had been completely devastated due to the death of river sites. Old, memorable places had been changed to hotels, and the name had been changed metaphorically to God's Country. Natural heritage and cultural values were lost to the new satirical names of the places: 'Heritage', 'Traditional Kerala Umbrella' and 'Traditional Bridal Dowry'. The hotel was beautifully covered like an air-tight box and features air-conditioning facilities. The hotel blocked the view of the outside slum by constructing a tall wall. However, they were unable to avoid the hotel's smell, which forced them to adjust to its presence. Roy depicted the irony of the place in such a way that it shows how lethal a human mind can be without the sensibility of the culture and ecosystem. They destroyed a river and constructed a swimming pool within the hotels, where they showcase traditional dances and performances. How ironic is it to showcase Kunti, Karna, Poothana, Dushasana, and Draupadi? They show religious acts while chopping goats, fish, and pigs. They lost emotion; they could smell the meat but not the animal's voice. Velutha (11) is the true companion of nature; he found solace on the lap of nature when he left home. Although electricity was a great invention, its harmful effects on animals often resulted in their death due to the moulding the geographical aspects of a river's front. Estha was indifferent to it. He was a serious, intelligent person about his surroundings. The Meenachal River has been exploited due to development, which has led farmers to increase rice production at the expense of the river's existence. Pappachi found a new species of moth after his retirement; he was upset not because of the death of the moth or because his drink was polluted. It is mocking to see an educated researcher who was worried about name and money; he ignored the atrocities against animals and plants in nature. All problems stem from the consumption of natural resources, which is driven by the sudden increase in population and encroachment on nature. Consumption has led to the exploitation of natural resources. Biodiversity has been destroyed in the name of progress and rapid growth in the world. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (12) illustrates the interplay between human activities and nature. We should not harm nature and its ecology because doing so will lead to an imbalance in biodiversity. Human life is insipid without flora and fauna because, without natural assets, we cannot survive in this world. Ecological hazards are the most significant theme in this novel, as studying the text through ecological criticism allows one to predict the outcomes of current activities. This novel raises questions about the existence of the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans are representative of the collaboration of earth, water, nature, life, and landscape. There are no borders to divide fresh water from salt, rivers from the sea, and even land from water (12).

Nature doesn't differentiate between the earth and its boundary; it serves its purpose to help out its inland dwellers. The title about tide is itself symbolic, which reshapes its surroundings at least twice a day and gives new prospects for consideration. This novel connects the theme of reshaping the Sundarbans, water and its elements are scattered all over the place; every day, land is submerged in tides, and it appears after some time, hence shaping the new land for humanity. We can show only struggle and fight for our lives on earth, but nature is the true master, claiming them, which can easily devastate the lives of every creature in its surroundings. Humans have always been dominant. Consistently taking over the habitats of other creatures and claiming them as their own. They have destroyed the lives of amphibians and aquatic animals for progress and development. In the novel, Amitav Ghosh talks about the loss of mangrove, home to many birds and animals; the destruction of the ecological garden has paved the way for natural calamities like hungry tides and earthquakes. In the Sundarbans, there is always a continuous struggle for survival, provided we understand how to satisfy our basic needs. Nature doesn't segregate pure water from salty water or the sea and ocean; we must use natural resources to survive without damaging the ecosystem of the Sundarbans. Amitav Ghosh has not only displayed the problem of man in nature but also the fish, dolphins, flora, and fauna of that particular place. Sundarbans is culturally rich and a place for lovers to share their time and latent feelings, as Piyali Roy and Fokir could be part of this mysterious land (13). Tigers are the primary dwellers of that place, and they hunt due to their instincts. But men are killing them to usurp the area and take it under their control. Piyali was unable to hear and bear the news of killing the tiger that was captured by the villagers, and she even closed her ears to show the unbearable pain she suffered from Fokir.

Research Methodology:

We collect data qualitatively for the current research paper, based on the field of interest and the demands of the present study. Phenomenological and Action research approaches are implemented to evaluate the environmental problem through the literature studies. We will use qualitative methods to analyze and process data from the two novels.

Literature Review:

In *The God of Small Things* (1997), we have seen political aspects, family failures, and exploitation of humanity and natural resources. In *The God of Small Things*, we find social problems, class struggles, and love throughout the novel. The natural habitat suffered significant damage. We could observe that the development of the riverside and forest into houses and buildings has devastated nature. Rahel and Estha were twins and the main souls of the novel. They both had a natural conscience about nature and the ecosystem. They returned from Calcutta to Kerala. The river Meenachal, which was considered a sacred river, was in a pathetic condition. Ammu and Velutha unite at the bank of the Meenachal River; hence, nature helped to break the social bondages of caste and status in the society. Memories of Estha and Rahel haunt both the characters, and even Estha was traumatized by the Orange drink Lemon drink man in Abhilash talkies. Sophie Mol's coffin showed the blue sky and clouds, which were symbols of freedom and nature love; she even talked about the bat baby, which was climbing on the funeral clothes of Baby Kochamma's sari. Baby Kochamma tried to kill the baby bat with a hymnbook; what a satire on the life of a dead girl. The depiction of the spider's web shows that nature is always there, even after the little girl's death. This is a satire on the funeral rituals in which Sophie dies because she cannot breathe. When Sophie Molis drowns in the river, she gets solace under the water. We can connect the problem of the family of Ayemenem in Kerala. This novel emphasises the value of small things, relate to the struggles faced by a family formation matters a lot. A well-known researcher of small insects, Pappachi, is not a good husband and exploits his wife, Mammachi. She was beaten and abused for being a small thing in her life. Ammu and Baba also failed in their relationship due to the habit of exploiting Ammu after drinking. Estha and Rahel were twins and had huge differences in their understanding of nature. Nature has a new sense for everyone; it doesn't belong to the cause of birth. The study suggested that the reading of *The God of Small Things* focused on the revolt from nature after the exploitation of the natural habitat, which needs a voice to reach out to human beings. Man and nature walk together in the lap of the earth, and we should find the balance between them. There is an emotional and physical attachment between nature and human beings. We cannot live without nature, and we cannot fight against its tyrannical power. We will be unable to distinguish the boundaries between nature's domain and human

territory. "The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily as the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas" (Gosh p. 7).

The Sunderbans reshaped themselves daily with the help of powerful currents and provided daily fights for survival for their residents. Nature is enormous and powerful compared to man. We can win it over for momentary satisfaction, but nature takes revenge for the destruction caused by man to nature ultimately. We try to use the benefits of natural resources within limits, but with the growing population and bookish knowledge, we have seen the exploitation of nature by humans. We can conceive that the relationship between humans and nature has existed since ancient times. Our Rishis and Gurus used to preach to us about the importance of ecological balance between trees and natural surroundings in their scriptures. German biologist Ernst Haeckel was the first to use the term "ecology" in the mid-19th century (15). The Hungry Tide (2004) is a book related to the ecological aspects of surroundings, and it takes us on the hidden journey of nature through the development and evolution of men in the lap of Morichjhapi. The novel starts to project the mismatch between humans and nature. It reflects the biotic life in the Sundarbans region. The balance of biodiversity has been tempered by humans, and it has paved the way for new problems of climate change. The place is covered by a mangrove forest, which houses many types of animals and birds. The tigers are becoming fewer in number due to encroachment by humans. The place has become polluted and is averse to living in water. We have overlooked the problems faced by aquatic animals, leaving them in a state of endangerment. Kanai Dutt and Piyali Roy are the two protagonists in the novel. Kanai was a translator who came to visit his aunt Nilima at Lusibari. Piya visited the place to study the behaviour of the Irrawaddy dolphin. Nilima and Nirmal arrived at the location long ago, surrounded by the natural habitat. Fokir, a poor fisherman, who acted as a guide to Piya. He died after being struck by a heavy object during the cyclone and Piya was impressed by his bravery, which led her to give him a place in her research work. There was a linguistic gap between them. Piya could not speak Bengali, and Fokir could not speak English. Despite their language barriers, they managed to communicate effectively, and Fokir made a concerted effort to help Piya feel comfortable in the remote area. He helped her to understand the behaviour of dolphins in the river; he had enough knowledge about nature and its environment. The Hungry Tide is a study comparing East and West ecological perspectives and awareness. It is a comparison between the plains and the sea in Bengal. "The new nylon nets, which they use to catch chingrimeen – the spawn of tiger prawns" (Gosh p.134) Moyna speaks out about Nilima's views on the condition of tigers and how the new nylon nets catch the spawn of tiger prawns. The net was able to catch the fish's fine eggs as well. Mahima wanted to dispose of the nylon net, which kills small fish trapped inside it, but she was unable to succeed in that effort. The island has its charm with many small streams of fresh water and saline water. This diversity contributes to the islands unique and varied aquatic life. These are refugees from other parts of the country who occupied the island.

"Some refugees have occupied one of the islands in the forest. There was a confrontation with the authorities that resulted in a lot of violence... and buses were taken away..." (Gosh p. 26) Amitav Ghosh has depicted the true picture of the island, and he has addressed the issues and problems of both refugees and nature. He elucidated the ongoing conflict between the authorities and the local population. However, the government had tried to help them shift to camp, but they were not ready to leave their place. There was a conflict of survival and overuse of natural resources on the island, which Ghosh had shown quite evidently in the novel. These refugees were killing some special species of fish that are only found on the island, as compared to the whole area of Europe. Piya explained that climate change on the island had endangered the species of crabs that were most effective for the sanitation department in the forest. They kept the mangroves alive by removing their leaves and litter; without them, the trees would choke on their debris. (THT p.142) The ecosystem of Morichjhapi Island is at a very critical stage due to the continuous consumption of natural resources without giving value. Nature provides us with water, food, and air at no cost, but we continue to pollute and overuse these resources. Kusum's life is also based on the food that she gets after selling fish at the market. Nature gives us food and wood; as in the novel, firewood was provided to the Kusum family. Kusum lost her father due to the anger of her father and nature. "But her father, for whom the shout of warning had been intended, didn't hear for the wind was blowing in the wrong direction... The animal was stalking her father." (Gosh p.108) The wind was so fast

that her father could not hear the warning and eventually met his end. The island is the same for all; it has some limitations for the boundary. If we cross the boundary, animals will retaliate in response to their instinct to protect their territory from intruders. Men have faced challenges from both animals and nature throughout history. Many people in the Sundarbans worship Bon Bibi as the goddess of the forest who rules over the island (16). Bon Bibi is very merciful and saves people from danger when they ask for help. However, Kusum does not believe it at all due to her cry for help; she was not saved by the goddess even though she called her name many times. This is the old belief of dwellers in Sundarbans. The population was increasing on the island, and it was alarming for animals and humans. The numbers of Bengal tigers and Gangetic dolphins were decreasing. Nobody cared about the lives of the natural dwellers of the region. Nature nurtures each of its dwellers and plays a role like a mother. However, men have tried to dominate and control nature, resulting in the loss of a mutual relationship with it. People are intellectual, and they should give some hope and room for other creatures to reside peacefully without disturbing the ecosystem. People thought they owned the mangrove forest and didn't repent why natural resources were overused. It was killing the balance of nature, and in returns, they were losing their lives in accidents caused by animals or natural calamities. Nature follows the cycle to repeat itself. There is an infinite cycle of processes that results from men's actions in nature. The novel has a satirical tone because Sundarbans stands for a beautiful forest, but it was devastated by refugees. Climate change has put the lives of animals under threat. It is often expressed that the government is happy as long as the tigers thrive, and that, in contrast, whether the islanders live or die, as with the refugees, make no difference because they are just "tiger's food". It was also said that earlier, both animals and humans lived in harmony, and the animals did not harm the human beings. But after the incident of Morichjhapi, the tigers became "man-eaters". (176). Piya was astonished to see that people were being ruthless to kill mute animals and burn them alive in the building. The sight was so disturbing and inhumane; we could see the curse of animals in the coming years through nature's hands. The tigers have killed many people in many incidents that took place in the forest. It was the mere response from nature. However, the government has shown interest in the preservation of animals' lives over local lives due to the involvement of 'funds' for animals but not for humans.

CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy (1997) has tried to depict the ecological issue. Many human activities have given inimical outcomes for the ecological balance. People have been brainless in the search for large-scale harvesting and using extra pesticides and insecticides to feed the large population. Because farming is decreasing and urbanization, population, and advancement are rising to meet daily comfort. We get more rice for the price of the river that lost its spirit – what a pity and dreadful scene of the decaying river. Roy talked about the power of the river; once it had power to evoke fear, but now it is latent and lost with time. Poor people and their children are defecating directly into the river and making it stinky, which hovers over Ayemenem. Gasoline from a boat floats over the water, making the rainbow shine on the surface of water. What a costly rainbow on the ground! The beautiful calligraphy points out the no-swimming sign in the dead and they say—toxic river. Roy lights out; the only things that were good; the trees were still green and the sky was blue; otherwise it could be covered as a heart, covered with darkness. The God of Small Things says that we should not ignore small things in nature. Every small detail matters for the benefit of nature and human beings. Nature cares for us, but we care for the benefits of nature. Whereas in *The Hungry Tide*, we have seen the continuous fight for survival and displacement of refugees in the name of wildlife protection. The natives were the protectors and caretakers of the ecosystem. However, due to the development of the famous site, the Sundarbans became a famous site as a national park at the expense of marginalized people. They lost their home and environment. The true essence of nature vs original dwellers was disturbed. When locals of the area were forced to leave the place, their environmental knowledge also went with them. Piya had only bookish knowledge, but the natives had real-life knowledge, as we can see in the novel; even Fokir and his son Tutul knew more than the books studied by Piya. The site was maintained and monitored by the cream of the country, leaving behind the exploitation of the poor people of the place. The novel illustrates that the elite in India have consistently marginalized the Dalit people. Differences were seen in their social status and marginal status in the Sundarbans.

According to Halder, Ghosh draws the line while talking about Morichjhapi in the novel. It talks about the incidents that took place in 1979; many refugees came here to settle down in the area. Somehow, it disturbed the ecological balance on that island due to continuous hassle from humans. Famous animals like the Royal Bengal Tiger and the Orca, which is a Gangetic dolphin (17), have no place in the survival background. Ecological disturbance and migration of people were disturbed altogether. Nature has power that cannot be tamed, like floods, bridges collapsing, and rivers changing shape. The advancement of the country has very inimical impacts on ecology and human lives. In other words, if we tamper with nature and try to tame it, we will have very drastic results. Both people and animals were at stake, the lives of dolphins and the Dalits were at stake, almost becoming extinct. The massacre took place on Blood Island amongst Dalit refugees due to class differences; they migrated from Bangladesh and took a halt on the island. The refugees became puppets in the hands of political parties and were betrayed again and again. Food had run out, and settlers had been reduced to eating grass (12) The tube wells were destroyed by police, and there was no potable water; they were starving – one could see that by observing Kusum. She could not stand up from the mat. Kusum was almost so skinny her bones were peeping out of her skin, but what a brave girl and irony that they were worried about the environment and how to save trees and animals. Somebody funded the project and let them kill human beings. Ghosh has described that the lives of these refugees and children were equal to dirt and dust. They were forcefully thrown out of the place or killed in the tussle with police or the state. The lives of humans were considered expendable in the effort to save tigers, and this approach was also leading to the destruction of the island's ecosystem, which the locals understood better than outsiders did. The killing of two men in a week is normal on the island. Life has become a pity gamble for the natives on the islands. The Adivasis were not living their lives peacefully, many of them have met untimely ends; meanwhile, the Save the Tiger project is progressing well, and they seem to have little concern for the lives of these individuals. According to John Muir, the conservation of natural habitat has paved the way for the compulsory deportation of native people from the place of their living (18). The analyses of both novels revealed our profound connection to nature and the unbreakable bond we share with Mother Nature. We have to take care of Mother Nature and Mother Earth as a whole Sphere. Everything in nature has a special purpose and goal: to help all creatures to live their lives happily. The mountains, rivers, and wild animals all have some specific purpose in our lives; but we are in our spurious glory of being the most advanced creatures and intelligent; we are the ones who are killing our nature and making it uninhabited by other creatures too. The quest for supremacy in the world should be stopped for the sake of environment and mutual peace.

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