



Examining the text from the comprehensive lens of eco-criticism: An analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Dr. Tejas F. Shah
Associate Professor,
Department of English,
Uma Arts and Nathiba
Commerce Mahila College,
Gandhinagar

Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to analyze a literary text from the perspective of eco-criticism. Ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary method in literary studies that analyses texts portraying environmental matters and investigates how literature interacts with nature. Ecocritics explore the works of authors, scholars, and poets through the lens of environmental issues and the natural world. Although ecocritics may have different perspectives on the goals, methods, and scope of ecocriticism, they often contemplate possible ways to improve the current environmental situation. The present paper tries to analyse and evaluate the booker prize winner novel *The God of Small Things* in the context of eco-critical theory and thus establish a bond between the literary and ecological world.

Key words: Ecocriticism, environmental issues, ecocritic, ecological world

During the past few decades, the environment has significantly challenged human society and the planet. The widespread exploitation of natural resources is signaling a potential end for humanity. The destruction of rainforests, fast depletion of fossil fuels, disruption of seasonal patterns, and repeated ecological catastrophes worldwide all endanger our ecosystems. In response to these issues, a new approach to studying nature, known as "Ecocriticism," emerged during the final decade of the 20th century. This worldwide initiative began in response to the human-centered attitude of controlling the environment.



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In 1972, Joseph Meeker contributed to the field with his concept of "literary ecologies." Later, in 1996, William Rueckert coined the term "Ecocriticism" to describe this approach. Furthermore, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm played a crucial role in consolidating the field with the publication of *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996 (not 1886, as mentioned in the original text). These key figures have significantly influenced the growth and direction of ecocriticism as a literary and cultural theory.

In the 1970s, Meeker introduced the idea of "literary ecology," which focused on the connections between literary works and their environmental contexts. Later, in 1996, Rueckert coined the term "Ecocriticism" to describe this approach, as noted in various summaries. During the early 1990s, Ecocriticism emerged as a respected literary and cultural theory. The rise in prominence coincided with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) founding of the Western Literary Association in 1992 and the launch of the *ISLE* journal in 1993. In addition, the release of *The Ecocriticism Reader* in 1996, as highlighted in collections of essays, further broadened the scope of Ecocriticism. This interdisciplinary methodology provides scholars in literature and culture with a comprehensive framework to analyse the complex interactions between literary pieces, cultural factors, and the natural world in the context of the ongoing global ecological crisis.

In the contemporary landscape, ecocriticism is gaining momentum at a remarkable speed. This methodology stands apart from conventional literary approaches, representing an interdisciplinary fusion of perspectives. By incorporating environmental studies, natural sciences, cultural studies, and social studies, ecocriticism offers a comprehensive lens through which to examine texts.

Initially, the scope of the theory was quite limited, as it focused primarily on the genre of nature writing. However, over time, it expanded to encompass various approaches and topics. Environmental literature now boasts an array of facets beyond nature writing, including deep ecology, urban ecology, the literature of toxicity, environmental justice, bioregionalism, animal lives, the revaluation of places, and interdisciplinary eco theory.



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Arundhati Roy's masterpiece, *The God of Small things* is remarkable for its description of nature and its effects on the characters. The novel's setting is the Indian state of Kerala, famous for its lush and varied natural environment. Throughout the novel, Arundhati Roy has vividly presented the description of nature, giving a rich and sensory world that reflects life's beauty and brutality.

The riveting waterway winds through the story, providing a fantastic backdrop for the narrative and leaving an unforgettable impression on readers. The depiction of the river is truly remarkable! The river is presented as a powerful force that connects the novel's different characters and is described as a source of danger and violence. Roy's descriptions of the river are often sensual and evocative, conveying the river's fluidity, depth and power. However, this descriptions of the river are also laced with forbidding hints of the dark side of the river.

Roy has depicted nature to give a sense of contrast between the wealthy and poor worlds. The wealthy characters of the novel enjoy big houses covered by beautiful gardens and exotic flowers, whereas the poor characters are often shown living in squalor, surrounded by garbage and pollution. Roy highlights this difference of worlds through the description of nature. For example, she has described the garden of wealthy characters as "an artificial world of brightly coloured flowers, their fragile, cup-shaped petals brushing against each other," while the poor characters' world is filled with "piles of rotting garbage, stagnant pools of water and the stench of decay." Thus, she has nicely highlighted the social and economic inequalities by describing nature.

In the novel, Arundhati Roy has also used the elements of nature to explore the theme of love and loss. Many of the critical incidents of the novel take place against a backdrop of natural beauty. For example, Rahel, the novel's protagonist, is reunited with her lost childhood love, Estha; they meet at a secret place hidden among the mangroves and water hyacinths. The natural setting creates a sense of intimacy and tenderness in their conversation.

Arundhati Roy has also presented nature to highlight the fragility of life and the inevitable loss. The novel begins with the description of a vast, swollen river that is both beautiful and terrifying. This river description establishes the stage for the tragedy later in the story. Roy describes the



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natural world throughout the novel, suggesting its impermanence and vulnerability. Flowers are described as “bruised”, “fading”, and “fragile”, while animals are described as “slain”, “dead”, or “dying”. These descriptions of flowers and animals serve as a reminder that even the most beautiful and resilient aspects of life are ultimately subject to decay and destruction.

Thus, in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy has portrayed the various elements of nature to create a rich and textured world that reflects life's beauty and brutality. She has also highlighted the contrast between the lives of wealthy and poor people through the description of the river, gardens and other natural scenes. These descriptions of nature are used to explore the theme of love and underscore the fragility of life; because of the brilliant presentation of the natural world, the novel, which is both sensual and thought-provoking, provides the readers with a glimpse into a world that is both familiar and strange, enchanting and disturbing. Arundhati Roy is a human rights activist and an advocate for ecocritical causes. Her contributions to social campaigns and steadfast commitment to non-violence earned her the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004. Roy eloquently addresses the importance of ecocritical activism by stating:

Indeed, we find ourselves immersed in the Era of Sarcasm, when the essence of parody loses its significance, as reality surpasses any attempt at satirical expression (The Iraq Conflict).

Arundhati Roy was an exemplary student during her school years and carried her academic excellence through her professional life. In a statement made by her mother, she reflects on her daughter's achievements.

Arundhati has an innate talent for engaging in discourse and penning her thoughts. Throughout her education, it was difficult to discover a teacher who could quench her unrelenting thirst for eco-critical literature and composition; she was primarily self-educated. I remember our Assistant Principal, Sneha Zakaria, presenting Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as fitting content for the eager fourth-grade student.

Arundhati Roy pursued higher education at the Delhi School of Architecture. She faced numerous challenges to make ends meet, often selling empty beer bottles to earn some income. Arundhati



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Roy initially began her career as a screenplay writer, where she demonstrated her storytelling prowess by writing the script for *The Banyan Tree*, a television series, in 1987. She also acted in the acclaimed film *Massey Sahib* and penned screenplays for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* and *Electric Moon*. However, her 1997 Booker Prize win brought her to international prominence. As the recipient of the prestigious award, Roy became the twenty-ninth author to receive recognition for producing the best novel from the Commonwealth Nations. The Booker Committee showered Roy with praise, describing her as:

A trailblazer in the realm of eco-critical literature, Roy masterfully crafts language in unprecedented ways within the Indian literary scene (Surendran, p. 50). She aspired to both mirror and challenge the colonizer by employing the English language in her work. In her own words, "Language, to me, is a veil that cloaks my ideas, and I was pondering a mode of articulation. I constructed it as an architect would devise a building.

Roy seems to be eco critically iconoclastic in *The God of Small Things*.

The novel's stylistic innovations contribute to its distinctiveness, infusing it with energy and exuberance. It stands apart in various aspects, including linguistic experimentation, ecological setting, and utilization of the English language. The innovative techniques encompass the incorporation of vernacular words, phrases, and sentences with a local flair, the employment of italics and uppercase letters, sentences without subjects, unconventional spelling, topicalization, deviation from standard word order, single-word 'sentences,' shifting word classes, clustering of word classes, and an array of other methods.

Shomit Miller, a confidant of Roy and a fellow writer, observes that the book utilizes language in a genuinely extraordinary way. "It is quite uncommon to encounter someone who can deconstruct established norms and present something innovative and genuine in the eco-critical genre" (Surendran p. 51).

Arundhati Roy's book, *The God of Small Things*, prominently features themes of ecology and subalternity. This book signifies the beginning and the end of her ecocritical literary career. With



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the debut of *The God of Small Things*, readers witnessed the culmination of Roy's journey as an ecocritical fiction author.

The primary objective of literature is to raise awareness about various aspects of society, such as economics, gender, and class. In addition, by promoting environmental consciousness, literature aims to foster a habitable ecosphere where human life can thrive effortlessly.

Literary creations consistently serve as reflections of human culture, making literary studies an examination of culture as well. Authors writing within diverse ecosystems, considering various ecological concepts, depict the unique effects of these concepts on their respective cultures. In addition, they explore literature's insights into human relationships with other species and the surrounding world. Meeker refers to this investigation as 'Literary Ecology.' Humanity is perpetually influenced and shaped by numerous ecological factors, and many writers have portrayed these influences from their distinct perspectives.

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