



THE INFLUENCE OF ECO-HUMANISM ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND BEHAVIOR IN *THE HUNGRY TIDE* AND *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

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ABSTRACT

*This research paper investigates the effect of literary eco-humanism on environmental consciousness and behavior through an analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Both novels are investigated for their eco-dystopian fundamentals, portrayal of governmental strategies, and the modes in which the authors align individual dispositions with collective perception to accentuate environmental and social issues. The aim of this premise is determining the narrative that current writers have been and can hypothetically incorporate eco-humanism themes and impact social perspectives and behaviors. The premises demonstrating the mutuality of humans and nature stimulate greater ecological consciousness and pre-emptive exertions to safeguard the environment. The increase in environmental degradation witnessed the emergence of eco-humanism in literature in the decade of the 1990s. Ecocritical studies focused on literary analysis of texts with an environmental lens, and how environment and human interactions are represented (Glotfelty, 1996). With the evolution of ecocritical studies, eco-humanism emerged to the forefront of literary criticism to establish human responsibility towards environment and promote sustainable existence (Buell, 2005). The paper aims to explore the narratives of environmental integration in literary texts like *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. The paper also aims to explore the importance of empathy, sustainability, and justice in addressing the complex challenges of the Anthropocene, making them essential contributions to eco-humanist literature. Through a comprehensive evaluation of both novels, this research emphasizes the role of literary eco-humanism in emphasizing anthropogenetic anxieties, fostering environmental governance, and tackling the entropic experiences of contemporaneous environmental emergencies.*

Keywords: Eco-Humanism, Environmental Consciousness, Ecocriticism, Anthropocene, Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

Eco-humanism, a branch of ecocriticism, in contemporary literature, exemplifies fostering of an innate considerations, responsiveness and empathy towards the environment; portraying the intrinsic connection between the well-being of human being alongside the ecological health; and emphasizing intertwined ethical and emphatic connections of humans and nature. In a way, literary engagement of writers, readers and the critiques are motivated to engage in sustainable practices and environmental advocacy. The contemporary writers, from around the world, have explored the dynamics of literature and have increasingly incorporated themes of eco-humanism to depict the complex relationships between humans and the natural environment. Global writers like Barbara Kingsolver for her book *Flight Behavior*, and Richard Power for *The Overstory*, have been lauded for their eco-humanist literature, their contributions for illustrating the copious network amongst individual lives, human beings and the natural world. The eclectic mélange of the narratives at the individual level with the broader umbrella of ecological and social themes has been experimented by the writers to accentuate the interrelation of individual and ecological welfare.

Conceptualization of the genre of eco-humanism

The conceptualization of the genre of eco-humanism in literature emerged in the decade of the 1990s to counter mounting environmental deprivation, and to influence readers' environmental consciousness and behavior. Lawrence Buell in his 1995 published book *The Environmental Imagination* and 2001 published critical treatise *Endangered World* vouched for the cultivation, enhancing their awareness and concerns for ecological issues and creating environmental consciousness, whereas Cheryll Glotfelty in his 1996 published book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* vouched for establishing the field of eco-criticism, and the function of literature in nurturing environmental awareness and to establish ethical accountability. Another critic Greg Garrard, in his book *Ecocriticism* (2004), explores the engagement of the readers with environmental issues, and influence environmental attitudes and behaviors through literary texts.

Frederick Buell in his book *Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* published in 2003, lucidly constructs the reasoning approach on generating environmental narratives with a logic of earnestness, concern and responsibility through literature and culture. The proponents of eco-humanists' literature explore that literary texts conjure touching responses to augmented environmental consciousness and activism. Frederick Buell hypothesizes that eco-humanist chronicles can promote a sagacious resolution and personal responsibility, motivating readers to adopt more sustainable practices (Buell, 2010). Ursula K. Heise, in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) advocates for creating environmental awareness globally with the sense of interconnectedness, understanding and responsibility. Just like Heise, Greg Garrard in *Ecocriticism* (2004) persist in being unconvinced about and caution against overrating literature's undeviating impact as these issues often necessitate more than just a modification in perception. These critics assumed that universal environmental problems demand multidimensional methodologies encompassing science, policy, and activism.

Literature can produce responsiveness and understanding, but transubstantiating these approaches into continuous behavioral transformation and policy activism is a substantial task. Timothy Morton's *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (2007) challenged the conventional perceptions of environment and nature, to debate literary texts' impact on ecological consideration, and conduct.

Amitav Ghosh in his work *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004 investigates the convoluted connections concerning human beings and the natural environment of the Sundarbans, tackling matters such as alteration in the climate at micro level and environmental degradation. Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997, highlight the influence of humanoid actions on the environment, interconnecting ecological anxieties, concerns, and collective righteousness. Relying on the critical theorists like Lawrence Buell debating that literature can encourage an "environmental imagination", facilitating booklovers to envisage alternative, sustainable ways of living (Buell, 2001) reverberate profoundly, furthering a countless appreciation for environmental concerns and a preparedness to participate in ecofriendly behaviors. Critics such as K. Srilata have underscored in what way Roy's illustration of the natural ecosystem in *The God of Small Things* enriches readers' responsiveness of environmental matters and inspires them to meditate analytically about human impacts on nature (Srilata, 2002).

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* subsists as an epoch-making text set in the dynamical panorama of the Sundarbans, an idiosyncratic and ecologically flimsy Indian territory acknowledged for its opulent biodiversity. This hypothesis reconnoiters the plotlines of *The Hungry Tide* and *The God of Small Things* and aligned these plotlines with the proposition that literary eco-humanism encourages a profounder consideration and compassion towards the environment, together with inspiring environmental perception, awareness and conduct of the readers. Arundhati Roy intertwines socio-political themes with environmental concerns, offering poignant exploration of human-nature relationship in the context of Kerala. The lives of the residents of Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide* and Velutha, an untouchable carpenter, and Estha, his twin brother in *The God of Small Things* is undistinguishably allied to natural cadences of the ecosystem, land and water. The tussles of the fisherman in Sundarbans or the Ayemenem, a small town in Kerala, the traditional knowledge of the residents, the perpetual perils of environmental hazards, and the natural cataclysms elucidate the interwoven matters of human existence with ecological wellbeing. The moral predicament of conservation vis-à-vis human survival and subsistence transpires as an underlying premise of eco-humanism in the text: "Who are we to decide that some must perish so that others might survive? We are but one of the world's creatures, and only recently have we lost our ways, believing that we are destined to hold domination over all others" (*The Hungry Tide*, p. 210).

Piya, a marine biologist, in *The Hungry Tide*, exemplifies systematic curiosity as a scientist and her perseverance for empathetically conserving the local dolphin from extinction, replicating her admiration for the natural marine ecosystem and her aspiration to channel scientific comprehension with indigenous parochial ethnicities, emphasizes an eco-humanist standpoint that values both prevailing scientific knowledge and indigenous ethnic acumen. Ghosh fosters serious ethical issues about determinations to conserve and the basic occupational prerequisites of the local people to sustain themselves accentuates the intricate ethical quandaries encountered in the process of making decision for environmental purposes. The burden is epitomized in Nirmal's struggles, in the repercussions of environmental crusading and its sway on human neighborhoods. Ghosh's representation of the conservational encounters in the Sundarbans proposes to conjure compassion and an urgency of awareness of urgency in readers.

The Influence of Eco-Humanism on Environmental Consciousness and Behavior in the Hungry Tide and the God of Small Things

The Hungry Tide's exhaustive and impassioned metaphors of the region's magnificence and friability encourages a profounder indebtedness for the surrounding ecosystem and the concerned moral deliberations in safeguarding it. The poignant and moral profundity of *The Hungry Tide* can be brought into line with the proposition that the eco-humanist fiction can enrich the environmental cognizance and consciousness. Another premise that comes to the fore is anthropomorphizing of the environmental concerns and reassure readers' deliberations on their own affiliation with nature and the wider repercussions of ecological instability.

Critics have extensively accredited Ghosh's knack to intermingling ecological and human anxieties, concerns in an approach that reverberates with readers. Scholars like Upamanyu Mukherjee (2010) have assessed how Ghosh's chronicles nurture consciousness and impact thoughts, and perspectives towards sustainability. However, the scope to which such literature stimulates distinct developmental transformation remains a matter of deliberation.

Ghosh's portrayal of Sundarbans as the 'land of ebb and tide', 'the tide country', as the protagonist, illustrating region's ecological significance leads to the conceptualization of the narrative, of exploring new possibilities. "At no moment can human beings be said to have conquered this land; they must always reckon with its elemental imperatives" (page 15).

Elucidating upon region's ecological implication and the subtle equilibrium that administrates it accentuates the complicated association between humans and their environment, underscoring the demand for veneration and cohabitation, expounds the natural world, its recurring cadences and integral authority that commands reverence and acclimatization from humans.

The dwellers of Sundarbans survive in their ecosystem, persistently negotiating that mutually underlines a liaison where subsistence depends on understanding and venerating natural forces. The depiction of the struggles, resilience of human and non-human dwellers of the Sundarbans, who "listen intently as the tide comes in, gently at first, lapping softly against the shore, then with the rush and the roar, covering the land. To them, it is a reminder of their place in the world, the power of nature, and their role as stewards, not conquerors" (page 67). The delicate balance that sustains this interconnectedness fosters empathy and a deeper ethical understanding that aligns with the eco-humanist perspective and encourages the readers to consider the ethical implications of human actions on the environment, respect interconnectedness of all life forms, establish the moral responsibility to protect and preserve the natural world and raise awareness of environmental stewardship.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* interweaves the personal with environmental questions, presenting eco-humanist account with a detailed plotline underscoring the affiliation between the characters, their socio-political milieu and their ecosystem, accentuating premises of environmental righteousness, integrity, and sustainability, and the consequences of human activities on wildlife, flora and fauna. The population survives in a complete state of isolation and alienation, both personal and social and permeating lack of social camaraderie. For example, the estrangement of character like Ammu, the mother of Estha and Rahel from her family, her return to her parental home after her failed marriage, confronting relentless embarrassment and loneliness within the domestic structure, and her romantic liaison with Velutha, a Dalit distances her from the conventional social framework of Ayemenem. The beginning of the novel with vibrant metaphors of Ayemenem, the Meenachal River, and the contiguous foliage is a taciturn spectator to the unfolding of the humanoid drama. The preternatural association of the characters with their milieus stipulating a asylum from their tempestuous life; the cyclical design of the Meenachal River as a emblem of life and death echoing the characters' innermost emotional states; the despotic societal edifices preponderant human collaborations correspondences with the established but mortifying human standards; in their personal tragedy; the ethical implications of their actions; and, how environmental dilapidation excessively disturbs the lives

of the marginalized communities like Velutha. Ammu faces unremitting humiliation and isolation within the family structure, Velutha is marginalized, ostracized and dehumanized by the society. This narrative intensifies the profundity of the eco-humanist themes, accentuating demand for compassion, benevolence, understanding and the relinking human world with their environs. Arundhati Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* validates the proposition that literature can promote abstruse environmental awareness and identification.

The natural environment serves as a glaring contrast to the characters' multidimensional alienation encircling private, societal, mental and emotional proportions.

Whereas, in the Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, the sense of estrangement is persuaded by innumerable considerations, comprising of personal experiences, socio-cultural dynamics, and environmental contexts. Reflecting on this state of absolute devastation of natural resources and of societal values, the rhetorical queries contest the awareness and the archetypes of comprehensive human grasp of the nonhuman facets of life. The sagacious third-person digressions disseminated throughout the narrative incorporates concerns that generalize regional and national territories. Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh's narrative deliberations on human-induced anthropogenetic modifications and terraforming reformations in the system of the Earth and its land acreages, and how these modifications have affected the environment and socio-occupational surroundings in the Sunderbans and Kerala, investigate the moral factor of these activities. The queries raised, the suppositional reactions, deliberate upon the ethical tenets of human authority, its self-proclaimed dominance, and the devastating repercussion of such postulations and activities

The corrosion of the social and political dominions of human life, the mainstream consumerist narrative of development, and the predacious usage of natural reserves prophesying the perilous impetus of commercial, party-political and ecological archetypal model where the inhabitants endure the penalties of environmental catastrophe spurned by the prevalent philosophy of expansion and progress. The dilapidation of the Meenachal River, in *The God of Small Things*, caused by severely contaminated industrial garbage and human behaviors, the decline of biodiversity by the pollution of the river, the damage produced to the marine life retroflexes corrosion of established ethics and the destruction of the dependent characters.

The intersecting of the lopsided time spans of environmental and anthropological chronicles, one of the defining elements of the Anthropocene model as introduced by Paul Crutzen, is specifically that can be grasped as the prevailing authority of human undertakings of industrialization, urbanization, deforestation and pollution and its influence on the environment, climate and ecology. Both, *The Hungry Tide* and *The God of Small Things* considerably expand the environmental and historical structure of the storyline's milieu of the 60s and the 70s and evoke the memory with the momentous nationwide and provincial historical occurrences that structure their storylines and intensify their thematic investigations. The allusion to the Morichjhāpi massacre in *The Hungry Tide* and the forceful dislodgment of the immigrants from East Bengal in the province of Sundarbans of West Bengal in 1978-79 is an prototypical historic account of violence, forcefulness, casualties, encounters, disputes of dislocation, human rights, conflict between environmental protection and human occupations and their means of livelihood and "not the hunger or the thirst"; or the allusion to The Communist movement, the socio-political and ideological encounters, the greater political conflicts, the unsympathetic "marchers' faces" against "Velutha's body fragile. Small. Colorless" during the decade of the 60s and the 70s, or the reference to the deep-rooted caste system and the collective societal discrimination in *The God of Small Things* augments novel's thematic complexities, focusing on matters of human rights, environmental preservation and insisting readers to meditate on the penalties and dictates the role of compassion and moral obligation.

The Influence of Eco-Humanism on Environmental Consciousness and Behavior in the *Hungry Tide* and the *God of Small Things*

While *The God of Small Things* discourses the socio-political perspectives, environmental degradation, wider collisions of industrialization and social discrimination does not straightforwardly report governmental of state strategies or policies pertaining to the cause of environmental conservation, but *The Hungry Tide* unambiguously discourses the tension concerning lawmaking policies concerning conservation and the entitlements of the parochial communities, emphasizing the human effect of these policies.

For example, regarding the expulsion of the immigrants from Morichjhāpi, the government policies preferred environmental protection over human rights. The horrific impact of government activities on sidelined communities have been exposed in the following narrative:

They had told the settlers that they could no longer live there, that they would have to return to where they had come from. But where was that? They had no place to go back to.” (page, 284)

In contrast to this narrative is the explanation of the government-led conservation efforts in the Sunderbans, which had a sole objective to safeguard the inimitable mangrove environment and threatened species like the Bengal Tiger. However, these governmental determinations often clash with the necessities and the birthrights of local inhabitants, supported for their livelihood by land and water, like “To the animals, it is always the same; if found they lose their homes, they move to another. But what of humans? They have nowhere to go.” (page, 217)

The Hungry Tide concludes with horrendously catastrophic and emotional conclusion, concentrating the novel’s investigation of human strength, resilience, sacrifice, and the complicated liaison between humans and nature. The appalling condition, without any hint of optimism, at the end functions to highlight the themes of defenselessness, weakness and the authoritatively powerful, and, often volatile forces of the natural world, leaving a long-lasting influence on the readers. While, *The God of Small Things* has an intricate and manifold culmination, which can undeniably be comprehended as horrifying in numerous aspects, predominantly in its depiction of the disastrous destinies of its personae and the persistent impact of sociopolitical prejudices and injustices. Both the narratives have often led the readers to the entropic state through ecological pandemonium, sociopolitical unpredictability, blood affiliations, individual fragmentation, dispositions, and identities. The ideological disenchantment of Nirmal, in *The Hungry Tide*, when “he had come to feel the world was crumbling around him, as if everything he had believed in was being swept away by the tide.” (page, 184) The collapse of social models and structural edifices and ensuing inhumane retort in *The God of Small Things* that summarizes the precipitous and irrevocable changes that lead to social disintegration in “Things can change in a day. And they did.” (page, 32) or surrounding serving as a metaphor for the emotional and moral decay of its inhabitants in “The History House...was once the pride of the family, now lay in ruins, covered in weeds and rotting slowly under the weight of its own memories” (page, 298)

Now, the question arises can *The Hungry Tide* and *The God of Small Things* can be analyzed as an eco-dystopian novel underscoring the novels’ broader themes of environmental vulnerability, social injustice, and the complex relationships between humans and their environment? *The Hungry Tide* portrays the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans constantly threatened by natural disasters like cyclone that “arrived like a slap, turning the landscape into the swirling mass of water and debris” (page, 282) and human activities such as deforestation and industrialization and the settlers are told to “return to where they have come from. But where was that? They had no place to go back to.” (page, 284); whereas, *The God of Small Things* showcases the degradation of the Meenachal River due to industrial pollution and neglect and “shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still dustgreen trees. The sky is clear but suffused with a peculiar incandescence.” (page, 3)

Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy have examined and incorporated eco-dystopian elements to address environmental degradation, social injustice, and human invulnerability. The depiction of the threatened ecosystem and sociopolitical dynamics that exacerbate these threats, highlighting the complex interplay between human activities, policies of development, and natural resources resonate deeply with contemporary environmental and social issues.

The depiction of Morichjhāpi massacre *The Hungry Tide*, the tragic consequences of governmental policies, prioritizing conservation over human rights, the constant threat of cyclones, everyday struggles of survival emphasize the entropic decay and unpredictability of nature. *The God of Small Things* exploration of familial disintegration and societal breakdown accentuates the entropic decay and social malaise. The environmental degradation depicted in these works serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for sustainable practices and ethical responsibility towards nature. The social injustices portrayed highlight the intersectionality of environmental and human rights issues, emphasizing the need for inclusive and equitable solutions.

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