

ISSN: 2394-5567

01 January 2026



Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

# **DABEER**

Special Issue

On

## **ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES**

**GUEST EDITOR**

**DR. MD EHTASHAMUL ISLAM KHAN**

ISSN: 2394-5567 (UGC Care Listed)

بخواندم یکی مرد هندی دبیر سخن گوی و گوینده و یادگیر  
(فردوسی)

## **DABEER**

An International Peer Reviewed Refereed Quarterly Literary Research Journal for Persian  
Literature

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**ON**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES**  
**01 JANUARY 2026**

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**1 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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**Editorial Note from the Desk of the Guest Editor**  
**Special Issue on Environmental Humanities**

I am delighted and academically bound to present this Special Issue of *DABEER*, a UGC CARE-listed journal, which focuses on the emerging and intellectually active field of Environmental Humanities. This topic comes at a time of unprecedented ecological urgency, when environmental crises—climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, resource depletion and ecological injustice—have become defining features of our common global experience. The Environmental Humanities, as an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary subject, provides critical tools for understanding these problems not only as scientific or technological difficulties, but also as deeply cultural, historical, ethical, political and artistic concerns. The Environmental Humanities examine the complex links between humans and the non-human environment using a variety of disciplines such as literature, cultural studies, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, geography and art. Rather than simply empirical or policy-driven methodologies, this discipline focuses on narratives, values, representations, memories and meanings that shape public perceptions, engagement and reactions to environmental challenges. This raises important questions: how have different cultures and historical epochs influenced our knowledge of nature? Which perspectives are emphasized or marginalized in environmental discussions? How do power dynamics, colonial histories and economic institutions contribute to environmental degradation? Furthermore, how many different modes of thinking contribute to more sustainable and equitable futures? This Special Issue of *DABEER* aims to make a significant contribution to these debates by allowing scholars to examine environmental issues via humanistic lenses. The journal's long-standing commitment to multidisciplinary study makes it a suitable venue for such investigations. Environmental Humanities is an important topic for rethinking the Anthropocene, which necessitates a detailed examination of accountability, action and varied levels of vulnerability. The articles in this issue investigate prevalent ideas of human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism, as well as relational ontologies that recognize people's connection with nonhuman entities, ecosystems and technologies.

This Special Issue features a wide range of topics, techniques and geographical contexts. Numerous studies have examined literary works, both classic and modern, to see how tales about nature, ecology and environmental issues affect ethical sensibilities. These results show that literature not only reflects ecological issues, but also provides a platform for resistance, reinvention and environmental awareness. Additional contributions draw on postcolonial, Indigenous and subaltern perspectives to highlight the inherent link between environmental degradation and the legacies of colonialism, capitalism and social inequality. Such perspectives are especially important in the Global South, where environmental deterioration disproportionately affects disadvantaged people who are underrepresented in mainstream global narratives. These writings investigate environmental justice by examining the intersections of ecology, racism, class, gender and caste. These analyses call into question broad environmentalist ideas that ignore systemic injustices by emphasizing individual experiences and specific impediments. They emphasize the uneven distribution of ecological views and the importance of customizing solutions to specific social and cultural situations. Furthermore, the incorporation of eco-criticism, ecofeminism and posthuman theory broadens our knowledge of agency outside of the human realm, promoting a reconsideration of ethical obligations within a multispecies context. The common thread running through these various contributions is a commitment to critical inquiry and imaginative participation. The Environmental Humanities, as defined in this Special Issue, do not propose simple remedies or technological fixes. Instead, they promote contemplative, dialogic and ethically sound styles of thought. Addressing the cultural variables that either support or inhibit significant environmental action contributes to a more comprehensive scientific knowledge and informs

policy formulation. Researchers, educators and citizens must grasp that narratives, values and views, as well as data and technology breakthroughs, are critical to achieving sustainable futures. This special issue emphasizes the value of scholarly collaboration and intellectual interchange. I am grateful to the contributors for their rigorous scholarship, dedication and perseverance throughout the review and revision processes. Their work exemplifies the dynamism of Environmental Humanities, a field that combines intellectual rigour and active social participation. I am grateful to the entire *DABEER* editorial team for their consistent support, professionalism and dedication to upholding high academic standards. Their contributions were critical to the resolution of this situation. As Guest Editor, I hope that this Special Issue will serve as a valuable resource for researchers and students in the Environmental Humanities, spark more interdisciplinary conversations and prompt a reconsideration of our ethical and imaginative relationship with the environment. In these times of ecological uncertainty, the humanities are critical for instilling critical thinking, empathy and responsibility. Examining environmental issues from historical, literary, cultural and philosophical viewpoints broadens our understanding of the current predicament and the possibilities for major change. Finally, I invite readers to examine this Special Issue thoughtfully and critically. It is intended that the articles featured will spark new ideas, create multidisciplinary debate and promote more inclusive, conscientious and ecologically concerned research. I truly hope that this edition of *DABEER* will highlight the importance of the Environmental Humanities in tackling today's critical concerns and envisioning fairer and more sustainable futures for all living beings on Earth.

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**MAPPING NATURE AND KNOWLEDGE: ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN  
JANICE PARIAT'S *EVERYTHING THE LIGHT TOUCHES***

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**Abstract**

Ecological domain is a field that exhibits the association of literature with the surroundings which are connected with nature and its habitat. In particular, this domain displays conflict to protest against the ideologies of man by introspecting into how customs, beliefs, nature and the settings overlap frequently with an objective of nurturing ecological consciousness and ethical accountability to attend to environmental degradation. Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* (2022) is a lucid examination of integration and connectivity with people and the natural settings in which they live. To illustrate, this research paper navigates the narratives of colonial and postcolonial perspectives with the combination of fiction, science, philosophy, and ecology. Specifically, the paper evaluates the depiction of the narrative through philosophical and ecocritical lens. For instance, the novel intertwines with the existence of Evelyn, Shai, Carl Linnaeus, and Goethe who manifest various ways of discerning and classifying nature. Through their journey across main lands and natural settings, the paper contrasts the western taxonomic science with innate and empirical modes of learning and accentuating the friction taking place between man and ecological judiciousness. Moreover, the paper proposes an ecocritical interpretation by questioning the human-centric power structure to redeem relationality as a form of subsistence. Besides, through the insight into this novel, the paper tries to revive an ecological consciousness with an interdependent pattern of life. Further, the ecological consciousness advocates that comprehending the universe demands submissiveness, sympathy and being in harmony with the fellow species on the earth.

**Keywords:** Ecological Consciousness, Ecological Degradation, Colonial and Postcolonial Perspectives, Human-Centric Power, Anthropocentric Species

**Introduction**

The attachment an individual has for greenery cannot be estimated. The impact and a thorough learning imbibed through perception is more valuable than the impact imbibed through books. These insights offered by Janice Pariat in her work *Everything the Light Touches: A Novel*, displays a variety of conceptions of nature and its connectivity. In this regard, ecological consciousness provides more insights in comprehending the work distinctly. Edward O. Wilson in his book *Biophilia* (1984) has indicated towards man's "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (1). He puts forth that, "Our intrinsic emotions drive us to search for fresh habitats, to cross unexplored terrain, but we still crave the sense of a mysterious world stretching infinitely beyond" (76). Further, he implies that, "the natural world is the refuge of the spirit, remote, static, richer even than human imagination" (11). "It is considered that if we exploit natural resources there will be no natural resources for our future generation and depletion of nature brings hazardous for man. Nature also takes revenge with men in the form of Typhoons, Cyclone, Hurricane, Earthquake, Landslides etc" (Bhushan 2021). "Man is incomplete and helpless without an environment. We depend upon it for breathing, eating, shelter and everything. No one can ever argue that someone doesn't need nature to live a life" (Yakambram et al. 4391).

Ecological consciousness as a conceptual analysis which passes over in Pariat's novel, *Everything the Light Touches* between man and nature, both are entangled in an endless collaboration in which the tribal community in the alienated villages of Meghalaya neglect to concretize nature.

The colonial and postcolonial perspectives contribute to us with the certain structure to decipher how certain principles have moulded our lives, that removing trees, eradicating them for fire wood, for industrialization, is not the exact way of living. "Postcolonial ecocriticism has also gained prominence, particularly in analysing how environmental narratives intersect with colonial histories and indigenous epistemologies" (Shamim et al. 410).

The trajectory of development in postcolonial India has been marked by a complex interplay of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and economic growth, often at the cost of environmental degradation. As the nation strives to overcome the legacies of colonial exploitation and establish itself on the global stage, it grapples with the environmental consequences of its development policies (Singh and Singh 902).

In Edward O. Wilson's *Biophilia* (1984), he emphasizes that the "humanists are the shamans of the intellectual tribe, wise men who interpret knowledge and transmit the folklore, rituals, and sacred texts. Scientists are the scouts and hunters" (58). Yet in this Anthropocene era, Wilson forecasts that we are unable to "exist in this paradise without the machine that tears it apart. We are killing the thing we love, our Eden, progenitrix and sibyl" (12). The term 'Anthropocene' was familiarized by Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen (2006) who discusses this extinction of the cosmos due to man's intrusion. So, "considering these and many other major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it thus is more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by using the term 'Anthropocene' for the current geological epoch" (Crutzen 15). "Western literature often reflects anxieties about industrialization and the loss of connection to nature, while Indian literature highlights the spiritual and ecological significance of the natural world" (Iswarya and Senthamarai 374).

In his introduction to Goethe's *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (2009), Gordon L. Miller claims that we must utilize our instincts and attention besides our sensory faculties to grasp the crucial role played by natural elements in the environment. This entails a required steadiness of conspicuous balance between our interior and exterior viewpoints. The objective of Goethe's scientific formula is to attain an in-depth comprehension which is cultivated from within. This formula of acquiring a thorough knowledge is envisaged on a concurrence or in alignment with the enlightened spirit of nature and the human soul, in which one spirit speaks to the other. Hence forth, "the environment in Indian English novels is rarely a passive background; it places itself as an active constituent of human experience, affecting characters and plot development profoundly. Reflecting on eco-critical theory which holds that nature plays a part in the narrative" (Kaushik and Trivedi 12196). In the meantime, ecocriticism "directs our attention towards the ecological predicaments confronted by India and accentuates the urgency for sustainable methodologies and a profound comprehension of our position within the organic realm" (Chander and Bali 816).

The novel explains about the four unique expeditions in a different span of time frame to insist on harmony with the ecological environment. The first narrative commences with the first-person, Shai's voyage. She moves to Shillong, her native, after being extremely agitated about her stay in Delhi, where it is "four seventy-seven AQI and counting" (Pariat 5). She then travels to Mawmalang and Domiasiat, two isolated Meghalayan villages without proper roads linking them to Shillong. In the meantime, being motivated by Goethe's life and the travelogues of 19th-century explorer Joseph Dalton Hooker, the next part provides us a glance into the journey and experience of Evelyn, an instrumental and intellectual botanist who travels to colonial India and then to Cherrapunji. These two imaginative narratives are weaved with two documented appropriate narratives that Pariat modified for a phantasmagorical storytelling method which makes a combination of both historical fiction and narrative intact. One depicts Goethe's 1787 tour of Italy, which induced him to construct *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, his first scientific work; the other

depicts Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus's most noteworthy expedition to Lapland in 1732, which led to the publication of *Flora Lapponica*. The narratives of Evelyn and Goethe are explained in the third person narrative by an omniscient narrator who is sentient of both their mental and physical paths. In a very constructive section of the novel, Pariat uses a blend of poetry, prose, and verse to sketch Linnaeus's expedition to Lapland. This particular section paves way for a bridge between the characters' inclination and their quest for solace in their inheritance, empirical illumination and the diversion into a synchronised combination of philosophy and modern science to realize our survival on a deeper level. To begin with Carl Linnaeus, Goethe transforms the ideology of systemic naming and the separation of various plant components into "all is leaf" (Pariat 270).

### **Literature Review**

Through ecocriticism, Pandey, A. (2017) attempted to break the connection between man and ecosystem in Ruskin Bond's fiction. Bond's stories frequently paid attention to preserving ecological balance and the effects of human activity on the ecosystem, according to Pandey. According to the research, Bond's writings encouraged ecological governance of the natural bequest in order to trace the evolution of ecological themes in literary works across history, Bhattacharya (2019) underscored environmentalism in Indian novels as the main objective of his research. The treatment of the environment by a few Indian novelists over the passage of years was observed in this research using historical review. Bhattacharya noted that modernist and contemporary writing tended to probe into the problems of environmental degradation whereas nineteenth-century Indian novels depicted nature as an asset of cultural identity. The findings also showed that Indian literature has gradually made its attempts to manage global environmental degradation.

Patil (2020) analysed the theoretical framework to identify how Indian novels should manifest environmental concern and vulnerability. Patil's research attempted to provide a more subtle perspective by using ecocriticism as an object through which to view topics of environmental degradation, natural resource recovery, and sustainability. To put it another way, Patil's research disclosed that Indian literary fiction frequently incorporated nature as an active agent, a narrator or player to unite ecology and mankind on a spiritual and cultural level. The research also foregrounded how literature had significance to influence public debates regarding ecological sustainability. Narayan (2021) made a survey as to how nature and the environment were delineated in R.K. Narayan imagined the town by looking at the widened ecological reflections of Malgudi. The aim of the research was to understand how Narayan's boundary was created in his writings within its ecological and cultural frameworks. Based on a thematic analysis, Narayan concluded that Malgudi served as a microcosm for larger ecological contexts with nature at the core of the lives of its people. By highlighting ecological responsibility, the research demonstrated how Narayan's works contributed to the eco-critical confinement. Nanda (2022) interpreted how postcolonial writers' novels described environmental degradation in the modern period using a few recent Indian English novellas. The research had shed light on how complexities such as resource depletion, deforestation, and climate change were represented in Indian literature. He contended that contemporary Indian novels advocated the ideologies of sustainable development and environmental awareness while following these conjectures of environmental ruination. The research brought out how literature had its significance in public conferences pertaining to environmental sustainability and the communion between man and ecosystem.

T. K. Karmakar (2025), in his "A Study of Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches*" brought forth through his findings that planetary crisis and postcolonial politics played a massive role in Pariat's novel. In another article, Ananya Ghosh (2025), "A Return to Nature: Theme of Travel and Quest for Identity in Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches*" represented how Pariat discussed the connectivity between travel writing and the quest for identity. The paper also

brought forth the demonstrations of the arguments of ecological feminists towards the approaches of the patriarchy and the treatment rendered to women. In the present paper, the values of eco consciousness with an interdependent pattern of life have been studied to advocate that deciphering the universe demands submissiveness, sympathy and being in harmony with the fellow species on the earth.

### **Objectives**

The paper aims to probe into how the narrative framework, characterization and philosophical surveillance on nature of Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* expresses ecological consciousness. Further, it digs deeper into the introspection of how man and nature are interconnected in the novel and how anthropocentrism is reproved in the light of eco-humanism. Finally, the paper intends to reveal how this novel, *Everything the Light Touches*, reconceives the communion between ecology, epistemology, and identity in the Anthropocene to contribute to the expanding conversation on Indian Eco fiction. The overarching aim of this paper is to devise how Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* reenvisions cognizance, nature and man belonging in a shared world are able to be adjoined and associated with ecological thought and rationalistic diversity applying ecocritical, colonial and postcolonial frameworks.

### **Methodology**

The presentation of ecological consciousness and cognitive diversity in Janice Pariat's *Everything the Light Touches* is exhumed in this paper following a textual analysis methodology. It brings forth the integration of postcolonial, and ecocritical theoretical frameworks to scrutinize how the novel locates the connections between identity, knowledge, and nature. In order to diagnose narrative techniques, symbolism, and conceptual formulations that punctuates ecological consciousness and primordial epistemologies, the paper most importantly adopts close reading of the novel. In order to experiment the occurrences of scientific and primordial knowledge, Pariat's work within the expanding corpus of Indian ecocritical fiction, makes use of multidisciplinary standpoints that bridge literature, ecology, and philosophy. It is interpreted that ecological consciousness "critically examines the diverse ways in which humans perceive and interact with the natural world. It explores the spectrum of human-nature relationships, ranging from domination and exploitation to harmonious coexistence" (Rishma and Gill 563). The paper focuses on how narrative structure, character trajectories, and spatial descriptions elicit ecological consciousness and challenge colonial systems of knowledge creation. Thus, the paper is illustrative and more analytical in nature.

### **Analysis**

The novel encompasses four narratives which draw attention to the eminence of nature. Evelyn's life as traced by Janice Pariat, delineates a fervent nature adorer whose grandmother was a motivation. Though the chapter is titled "Evelyn", her grandmother is predominant in the script and there are illustrations to cite in which Evelyn is reminiscent about the past memories of her grandmother. Grandmother Grace, who is dead as the novel progresses, because of the deep impression she has created on young Evelyn when she was a child. The nostalgia captures Evelyn's attention to investigate nature and transform into a botanist. Grandma Grace's life is displayed as a biography of a sincere botanist even though she did not get her graduation in botany. The endearment the grandmother shows towards Evelyn is neglected by others. Besides, Evelyn's mother protested against Evelyn's allotment of time for nature. The mother also shows hatred towards Grace for imparting her daughter about the advantages of nature. The community never praised grandma Grace but this has not become a menace for the grandmother's passion towards nature. This is presented in the novel: "Certainly not grandma Grace, who gained little regard from her own daughter, or her neighbours, for "tramping around" gardens and forests, not for exercise or improvement, which would have rendered the activity somewhat respectable, but unforgivably, for clear, unadulterated joy" (Pariat 100).

The optimistic thoughts and views provided by Grandma Grace to Evelyn as a child is exemplified in multiple ways throughout the novel. Evelyn is explicitly inspired with the discourse which is contemplated to vitalize a communication with nature. Evidently, Evelyn as a teenager imbibes to observe nature as a real existence, a breathing establishment much more than a deceased one through the description of personification. The credence that plants should be monitored and taken care of shares human characteristic traits of being accepted by the mind and the soul. Evelyn enriches herself by paying importance to nature and also pays attention to her grandmother's reflection on the rapport she manages with the plants. The conversation surpasses speciesism and joins several species together. In this instance, the discourse between the grandmother and her pumpkins and peas unveil peace between humans and plants.

When people pay importance to nature, this is the basic ideology that can put an end to global warming. This starts with a concept, a view and a dialogue in which speciesism is far from dominating the discussion. The alternative to be recognized as a creature that is just as consequential to man is bestowed on the plant. When the discourse is articulated, a proud understanding is brought to light: "And she believed her, for Grandma Grace spent hours outside, in a hat and scarf, with a basket in hand, and she talked about her plants as though they were intimate confidants. "My sweet peas are feeling poorly today," or "The pumpkin requests to be moved somewhere less shaded" (Pariat 100). A similar conversation is presented in *The Music of Bees* where the main character, Alice delivers the communication of bees to Jake: "He watched the bees zipping in and out of the headlights. They're just kind of talking to each other right now, making sure everyone is all right. They're supposed to be in their boxes. Some fell out of the truck when I hit the fence." (Garvin 54). It is notable that, "nature will always be there at some point in the future, as it is a motif in all popular forms of culture. Though it has been occasionally neglected, nature has also been praised and revered" (Sapra 25). Vandana Shiva "argues that patriarchal projects of plantation, dam, and mining are related to violence and profit at the cost of degrading the natural environment, where local communities are facing problems of water and food scarcity forests are disappearing and wildlife is wiped out because of lots of construction, and they are losing their life support system" (Goyal 190).

Evelyn unearths to foster and enrich her knowledge of nature from her grandmother. The young girl is given her own possession, where she operates natural experiments. Moreover, Evelyn becomes an innovator for herself by ascertaining her soul. In addition, the grandmother is also an innovator since she seldom depends on the first information gathered by others and only assimilates about nature through delving into experimentation. This is obviously prominent when the grandmother presents books which are left unexamined on the bookshelves. Despite being a least significant character, the grandmother's guidance towards her granddaughter constitutes to be more significant in the novel. However, Evelyn's ecological consciousness, which presents an ecocritical interpretation, evidently establishes the manner in which she considers herself to be an innovator in the botanical domain. Despite her attempts to grasp the subject matter through reading the books, she firmly believes that because she has interspaced herself from nature, she has not thoroughly absorbed the subject. She captures a comparison between her time spent experimenting nature with her grandmother and her time spent imbibing her knowledge of nature in a lab. As a result, she acknowledges to enjoy nature in the forest rather than in a man-made setting. Therefore, "Evelyn's section perhaps hopes for the return of humanity toward its natural roots in order to fix all misalignments in the world" (Dubey and Behera 2024).

When botanists engross themselves in literature and neglect the natural surroundings, the association with nature becomes incomplete. Only when man and nature associate with one another can their association be taken into account for completion. In the absence of this association, the connectivity with nature cannot be confirmed or secured by theoretical interpretation. In due course of time, Evelyn makes the determined plan to travel to India in a thorough search of a specific plant that corresponds to the prototype. Because the ecological consciousness is registered in her mind, her search for natural enlightenment is decoded as a

travelogue. "The importance of nature in writing goes beyond the aesthetic appeal of describing landscapes or incorporating natural imagery into prose. Nature can act as a powerful metaphor for emotions, internal struggles, and social issues. It can also serve as a source of solace and inspiration, offering a respite from the chaos and complexities of modern life" (Al-Khalidi 2). "Nature is a provider, preserver but over exploitation of nature will backfire on humans only leading to disturbance of ecological balance" (Jain 156). For instance, Evelyn is able to unravel the subtleties of the man-nature interrelation through her proximity with nature. The tribal community esteems and regards the natural environment to be more valuable but people who visit the area seem disingenuous.

Mr. Dossett, in accordance with Evelyn's principles, tracks down the locality of the sacred plant and decides to completely remove it. This exhibits that the plant blindness is visibly seen even among those who seem to praise the natural environment. In contrast, these people have predilection to treasure nature but fail to discern the pivotal roles played by plants. Additionally, they are devoid of compassion for flora. They are highly regarded as false botanists who rarely insist on the importance of new species and emerge to be champions of deforestation who lack plant empathy. Thus, "in so far as man lived in close relationship with nature, there will be no environmental risk" (Choudhary 1762- 67). When Evelyn tries to prevent the man from eradicating the plant, she is wounded mentally and physically. Following her attachment with nature, the tribal community in Meghalaya cohabit peacefully with the natural settings, yet they show unwillingness to disclose its enigmatic nature to the external world. When the original species of the sacred plant is found to be in different surroundings, Evelyn learns that the man has removed the false plant. Evelyn's genuine passion for nature is commendable unlike Mr. Dossett, the tribe who unveils the original species of the plant to her later. This indicates how people have distanced themselves from the natural surroundings and highlights the reality that they give credit to deforestation than to a plant's existence in this universe. On the contrary, it is implied that the lives of the foreigners who arrive at the tiniest parts of Meghalaya with undisclosed motives appear to be different from those of the native people.

Consequently, Shai's narrative gives a glimpse of another different perspective on the natural environment. In this regard, the connectivity with nature, enables the people who surround Shai to become more protrusive individuals in the readers' minds. In a sense, they are also innovators because of the fact that they are collectively independent to probe into nature. Following Shai, Shai's father also seldom stays inside the house and makes an attempt to prevent trees from being damaged. He stays in the forest and makes the firm decision of distancing others from the natural set up. Although his deeds are invisible, they render support in the preservation of ecology. Like Charlotte McConaghy's protagonist in *The Last Migration*, Shai's father is hesitant to accept the destruction of flora. In this context, Shai praises her father's proximity to the ecological world, but she detests those people who expose implications of ignorance towards plant blindness. In the same manner, Shai's mother also doesn't consider the natural world to be highly valuable and she accompanies those who decide to remove trees. Shai finds people designing a plan to destroy plants because they lack empathy and compassion for plants.

In *The Last Migration*, the main character, who admires birds, expounds her grief at the sad demise of the birds and so she raises her voice for people to register in their minds that birds shouldn't be slaughtered and sold into slavery: "I have always been frightened of dead things, birds more so than anything else. There is nothing so disturbing as a creature born to flight being bound to dull lifelessness" (Mcconaghy 47). The significance and the necessity for people to be intimate towards nature is recommended by Richard Mabey (2021) where he demands people to turn into wanderers to set up and strengthen an inseparable coalition with natural settings: "There was a growing public worry that our food was becoming toxic and bland, parallel with a concern that we were 'losing touch with nature'... I reminisced about a vanishing local knowledge of wildings, the root source of all our cultivated vegetables. And I talked excitedly about a lost world of exotic scent and flavour" (82). In addition, "the well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life



on the planet earth has value in itself and secondly this value is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" (Batra 245). Significantly, "environmental management includes natural environment and built environment. It is concerned with the description and monitoring of environmental changes and with attempts to maximize human benefit and minimize environmental degradation due to human activities" (Wase 2).

Goethe in his narrative makes a combination of fact and imagination in a specific way which would enable plot readable and decipherable for the reader to make sense of ecological consciousness. Specifically, he is the most relevant innovator because of his attempts to revive botanical classification. Goethe protests against the attempts taken by his contemporaries and glorifies only the unrestricted phase of nature. At first, those around him don't believe his efforts, and he seems like a novice on his path. Unquestionably, the constructive communication he initiates with the plant species to obtain an intensive discernment of them is elucidated by ecocriticism. The collaboration of Goethe with the plants is transmitted through Pariat's novel, *Everything the Light Touches* but the discourse is disregarded. Through this discussion, Goethe is able to achieve his communion with the plants and notices that they cannot be considered as immovable entities as they always have a tendency to grow. Critically, Goethe's innovation is mostly influenced by the conversation he has with the plant, which also provokes him to have a connection with ecology: "If we wish to behold nature in a living way, we must follow her example and make ourselves as mobile and flexible as nature herself" (Pariat190). This is comparable to what Helen Macdonald has delivered about her relationship with a hawk in the work *H is for Hawk*: "To train a hawk you must watch it like a hawk, and so you come to understand its moods... Eventually you don't see the hawk's body language at all. You seem to feel what it feels. Notice what it notices... It's part of being a watcher, forgetting who you are and putting yourself in the thing you are watching" (Macdonald 86).

In the last narrative, Linnaeus makes use of direct and plain language to record his examination on ecology. He chooses to discuss the common elm as one of his observations. Despite being called "common elm," the name of the tree differs from being dependent on the observer and the location. Since this is a species that the spectator sees for the first time, it is not archetypal for an individual and at this juncture, the novel cites examples to show how language shapes:

The next morning, I rise with the sun in order to examine  
This wonderful tree, which is pointed out to me from a distance.  
It proves nothing more than a common elm. Hence however, I learn  
That elm is not a common tree in this part of the country. That is all. (Pariat 216).

Similarly, Barry Lopez (2014) presents the significance of being intimate with nature as a device for nature connectedness in the *Arctic Dreams*: "The plane is a great temptation; but to learn anything of the land, to have any sense of the relevancy of the pertinent maps, you must walk away from the planes. You must get off into the country and sleep on the ground, or take an afternoon to take a tussock apart. Travel on the schedule of muskoxen" (285). "Eco critically, we can draw inspiration for greening urban spaces through community gardens, green architecture, and sustainable policies. These efforts, grounded in Wordsworth's ethos, empower communities to address climate challenges collectively, ensuring that ecological consciousness translates into tangible outcomes for a sustainable future" (Rizvi 109).

### **Conclusion**

Finally, the conclusion has brought out a complex assortment of narratives pertinent to colonial and postcolonial contexts to reconceptualize the relationship between man and ecology in the natural environment. Pariat challenges the contradictions of modernism and traditional values, natural and cultural phenomena and self and environment which paves a path for entwining her characters' adventures over the passage of time and space to underpin the continuity between scientific exploration and ecological consciousness. As an outcome, Pariat's ingrained thoughts on

nature ensure disapproval of anthropocentric dominance by promoting an ethic of responsibility and connectivity that is consistent with an insightful ecological consciousness through sympathy and submissiveness of man in attaining harmony with the fellow species on earth.

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**ECOPOETIC RESISTANCE: ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, VULNERABILITY AND  
RESTORATION IN THE POEMS OF TISHANI DOSHI**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the ecopoetic sensibility in the works of contemporary poet, Tishani Doshi whose poems move beyond traditional nature narratives to express relationships between the human and the non-human world. The coastal lands of Tamil Nadu, a recurrent space in her poems serves as a metaphor for both vulnerability and resilience. Doshi's works reiterate the consequence of "slow violence" and showcases the decay of multiple ecosystems, especially that of marginalised bodies. She interweaves personal grief with ecological crisis against the backdrop of the Anthropocene. Drawing on social ecofeminism, the paper closely reads two of Doshi's poetry collections, *Girls Are Going Out of the Woods* (2017) and *A God at The Door* (2021) and seeks to expose how her lyrics move like the sea – as dissent and at the same time, an avenue of ecological restoration.

**Keywords:** dissent, human and non-human, vulnerability, ecological restoration, social ecofeminism

Nature poetry with its beginnings in the English romantic tradition holds for itself a place which struggles to find a balance with distinct boundaries; that of the human self and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness, subject and object. Many poets across centuries with their continued tradition of nature poems bring one to question the multifaceted aspects of the seemingly resemblance and contrast between man and nature. In contrast to the once worshiped and glorified nature, today one bears witness to the agonies and death pangs of the environment. These poems are intersecting landscapes of the human body and the outside world.

While research in humanities have always dealt with different forms of inquest into various perspectives, which took on a colonial, postcolonial, modernist, postmodernist, feminist and psychoanalytic views, today, a slightly different stance holds true – one that does not only dismantle the self but also that which works together to mingle history, experience, identity and the outside world (nature/ environment). How has poetry over centuries, as a genre contributed to the nuances of human relationships and also been vehicles of dissent? The Romantics believed and hailed poetry as a medium of social transformation and at the same time agreed upon its characteristic of self-discovery. Within these same perceptions, one moves to an age of ecological restoration, often moving from exposed realms of vulnerability to dissent. Ecofeminist discourses have been familiar in literary studies for some decades now but it has been only a few decades since it has been discussed within Indian Literature. It claims how women have become immediate victims and how their precarious positions often lead to poverty. Ecofeminism, therefore functions as a philosophical response to atrocities against nature and women. As an activism, it has been shaped by global ecological consciousness. Vandana Shiva argues that the dual exploitation of patriarchal systems marginalises women and devalues nature by reducing both to objects of conquest. From the Chipko movement to the Cool the Globe movement, women-led ecological activism has made a significant stride in asserting spaces of equity- both gender and climate.

Critics like Karen Warren proposes that one should understand the nature of connections between women and nature to understand the oppression of women and that of nature. She also propounds that all feminist theories must in some way be accommodative of ecological perspectives and practices. Ecofeminism, therefore is not merely a combination of feminism and

ecology but a theory that bridges the gap between the two. Similarly, Marge Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* presents a futuristic vision of gender-environmental justice. Many of the authors of ecofeminist literature employ imagery and symbolism to represent the interconnectedness of women and nature to often depict elements of nature's direct or indirect reflections of female experiences. In order to highlight this interconnectedness of gender and environmental occurrences, writers address issues of the environment by entwining ecological concerns and feminist views. Through fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry or any art for that matter, they illustrate how structures of patriarchy pave way for environmental exploitation; especially employing women's narratives inlaid with their experiences in connection with nature. Many critics have over time emphasized the need for a more inclusive and holistic approach to environmentalism. It also includes the recognition of women's knowledge in decision-makings concerning the environment and also acceptance of the inherent value of everything that is non-human. While the world grapples with social inequality and loss of biodiversity, ecofeminism links such challenges in creating a more sustainable future. Literature of ecofeminism, therefore goes beyond traditional representations of nature and instead displays that non-human nature with its own value and agency which carve a space of its own.

The intersection of gender and the concurrent climate crisis is significant in contemporary discourses in environmental humanities. Within the developing regions of India; women are always at the receiving end of climate impacts. Social, economic and political inequalities often lead to vulnerability of women to climate impacts because of scarcity of resources and agricultural production. In many Indian societies, the arduous task of collecting water and firewood rests with women of the family and hence they become more prone to environmental changes. At the same time, a huge percentage of agricultural workforce are constituted by women and hence climate change escalates certain already existing inequalities – including less access to water and land. Climate crisis also leads to risky maternal and reproductive health affecting healthcare facilities. Water scarcity, deforestation, landslides etc play a crucial role in the marginalization of women and the concomitant power dynamics in the society.

The philosophies associated with linking ecology and feminism along with other movements have been deeply represented by many women writers in India. Early Indian women authors have connected folklores to different environmental crisis which was mainly to spread awareness and motivate people to lead lives of sustainability. These authors often also expressed human's dependence on the outside world- both nature and its resources. One of the earliest examples is *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandeya which through the eyes of rural women depict the ill effects of industrialization including the destruction of agricultural lands. Another important work is that of Anita Desai; *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) which pictures nature as a refuge. The work features vulnerable women who seek refuge on mountains to escape patriarchal ties. Other notable works are that of Vandana Shiva, Arundhati Roy, Manjula Padmanabhan, Mamang Dai, Sarah Joseph and Shubhangi Swarup. Kamala Das and Sugathakumari are early women poets who have highlighted the link between body and nature. While Das links female exploitation to the commodification of nature, the latter laments deforestation in her works. "Marathinu Sthuthi" (Ode to a Tree) is a poem by Sugathakumari which personifies nature as a suffering mother. Mamang Dai through her works *The River Poems* and *The Fading Sun* explores the sacred landscapes of Arunachal Pradesh. Meena Alexander, Sukrita Paul Kumar and Arundhati Subramaniam are some other notable contemporary women poets who have dealt with environmental crisis in their poems. Some of these poets celebrate the feminine divine by exploring spirituality in the natural world. Arundhati Subramaniam explores the concept of the 'wild women'. A very recent collaborative project by Priya Malik and Helly Shah, "Love in the Time of Climate Change" has received the attention of many for its direct exhortation to the young minds. Through their spoken word and performance poetry, they address the immediate impacts of climate crisis mobilizing youth. They employ poetry to explore how droughts and floods affect individuals personally – in their daily life, relationships, nostalgia etc.

All these works have represented the situation of women and environment with all its optimism and pessimism.

Socio-ecofeminism focuses on the quality of life and is a transformation of socialist ecology; and nature is considered as an active subject in determining that quality. It critiques capitalist patriarchy and stresses on the relationships between production and ecology. One's own right to her body is the premise of socio-ecofeminism and it protests women's bodies as sites of experiments – scientific and non-scientific. In *The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons from India*, Bina Agarwal postulates the "feminist environmental" perspective which is rooted in the idea that the connection between women and the environment is socially and historically variable. As such, Tishani Doshi's poems are placed within the social and historical community that she belongs to.

Born in 1975 in Madras, India, Doshi is an acclaimed Indian poet, dancer and journalist. The mixed heritage that she belongs to has often been central to her identity and her worldview. Living between cultures; that of her Gujarati father and her Welsh mother, Doshi writes vividly of her engagement with the environment which was also enhanced by her dancing career. Doshi's understanding of the body is deeply engraved in the notion of the body not just as a vessel but as a space interacting with the outside/ non-human/ gravity. Her ecopoetics is laden with this influence where she goes beyond the human-non-human binary and instead represents the environment as a body entangled with the human where water, mud, heat, salt and all belong to a continuum. Moving from the city of Chennai to Paramankeni, a coastal village along the East Coast, Doshi becomes a witness to environmental degradation and writes about it. She bears witness to the vanishing coast as a result of erosion and rising sea level. Often, Doshi's representation of the coastal spaces as liminal, mirrors herself. The shoreline that is ever-changing, waning and waxing is fluid, a threshold that neither fully belongs to the land or the sea. Living in the times of urban expansion, her move to the coast proves to document a lifestyle that is gradually being erased. This counter-modern act is characteristic of her ecopoetics. The coast is represented as a site of vulnerability and precariousness as opposed to popular culture's romanticized beach holiday. Historical erasure and personal loss are explored through the image of the "sea" in her writings. The Tsunami of 2004 and its memory contribute to this image. In doing so, she also draws the human body closer to the coastal environment dissolving certain existing barriers by employing specific sensory immersions. Donna Haraway's decade old question – "Why should our bodies end at the skin?" (Haraway 56) becomes very prevalent in a postmodern world of intercorporeality and is pivotal in the reading and re-reading of Doshi's poems. The idea that the human body is constantly interacting, emerging and intersecting with nature and the non-human environment is crucial to the understanding that the human body is not a discrete entity. Doshi in her poems attempts to dismantle the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from body and body from nature. Her poems suggest the material entanglement of all beings and this intercorporeality forms the premises of her ecopoetics. While early Indian poets like Toru Dutt have blended ecological issues with cultural heritage, contemporary poets most often address sustainability and preservation through a cosmic connection as does Doshi. She highlights the interplay of prevalent patriarchal structures and subsequent societal collapse along with environmental deterioration. A close analysis of Doshi's poems reveals that this takes place in three distinct but overlapping phases – the initial voice of dissent against patriarchy, the then transcendence of the human/ non-human boundaries and finally the call for ecological restoration through ecological consciousness and kinship. Like many other contemporary women writers who emphasize ecofeminism, Doshi establishes a connection among environment, justice and gender in comprehending ecological degradation and also in working towards an ecological social resilience.

In her poems, Doshi addresses the systemic violence and suppression inherent in society as a consequence of patriarchal structures which then aggravate the oppression of women through economic and social injustices. One of the most explicit expressions of dissent is in her poem titled



“Girls are coming out of the Woods,” which is like an “anthem” fighting against gendered violence:

Girls are coming out of the woods,  
wrapped in cloaks and hoods,  
Carrying iron bars and candles  
and a multitude of scars... (Doshi 11)

There is an emergence of women from being victims to being wilful, powerful entities. There is an articulation of agency in death, that which was denied in life. Doshi demonstrates image of girls emerging, “clearing the ground/ to scatter their stories”, as a denial to be silenced. The defiance is aimed at those “uncles, / who said spreading would be light/ and easy, who put bullets in their chests”. These are direct voices of resistance to gendered violence as it is to environmental violence in par with Francoise d'Eaubonne's ecofeminist thought in her book, *Le feminisme ou la mort*. The diverse and yet dynamic body of vital insight centred around ecofeminist resistance is crucial in various disciplines. While ecofeminism highlights intercorporeality and questions dualistic thinking, it has also ached criticisms for its underlying essentialism; suggesting the natural closeness of women to nature. This has later been met with counter arguments. Vandana Shiva's *Ecofeminism* exposes women's labour and natural resources; both being exploited by patriarchy of all kinds. Contemporary ecofeminism has emerged in response to this criticism and incorporates a theoretical framework which links justice with sustainability.

There are then another group of poems of Doshi which critique socio-economic strain. In the poem, “Lament-I,” violence against women is manifested through images of urban migration and poverty. Often, capitalism and patriarchy reinforce each other in their tendencies to be exploitative and it is seen in these lines: “half a month's wage- to decorate/ your nest like a shiny jewel?” It reveals the pressure of a system focused on wealth and how it paves its way in destroying communal and domestic life.

Electric gates and uniformed men  
Employed to guard the riches of the rich  
...short, mud walls  
the whispering roof (Doshi 15)

From voices of resistance to gendered violence and critiques of socio-economic strain, Doshi's poems also portray rejections of prescribed female roles. In the poem, “Walking Around after Neruda”, the speaker dissents against the confines of womanhood

It happens that I am tired of being a woman  
...I do not want to keep growing in this skin,  
to swell to the size of a mausoleum.

I do not want to me matriarch and mother. (Doshi 35)

The speaker refuses to be restrained by any type of destiny- biological or assigned stereotypical gender roles. Instead, the speaker yearns for an existence, breaking free from, “walking with my harness/ and exiled feet through cravings/ and renunciations” (Doshi 36).

One of the recurring motifs in her poem is how she shifts between personal fragility and ecological fragility, while the former deals with loneliness, abandonment, aging, death and loss, the latter deals with land loss, erosion and any other forms of climate crisis. The coast, a liminal space, a zone of contact connecting the human and geological temporality is explicit in her poem “The Day We went to the Sea” -where an aging mother is juxtaposed with the vanishing presence of the sea. The aging female body is placed against the geographical landscape. The vulnerability of the mother as she ages, trying to make sense of her physical and mental space is reflected in the commotions of the sea along the coast-where the shoreline is constantly shifting- made and unmade by the waves. There is also a melancholic tone picturised through the fading light and grey water in opposition to the clear and pristine beach. The entropic nature of the coast is highlighted in representing the agency of the sea in converting the coast to mere debris. Through the figure of the mother and her approach to the sea, Doshi also represents temporal distortion. Time is seen to

collapse in the poem where “now” and “then” function more like a continuum, especially with the ocean swallowing time.

“Monsoon poem” is another poem by Doshi which deals with the dominating power of water. She represents the rain and the sea as aggressive beings giving agency to the elements of nature, for it can “devour”, “eat”, “erase” and even “claim”. The poem is filled with repetitive structures, mimicking the rain. She uses the word “bludgeon” signifying a physical assault over the land and the people:

So much of monsoon is to do with being overcome-  
Not from longing as you might think,  
But from the sky’s steady bludgeoning. (Doshi 53)

She also presents a porous body, a body that is not distinct or separate from the environment but that which is penetrable. As Stacy Alaimo rightly argues in *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment and the Material Self*, they are fundamentally interconnected. Doshi’s description of how dampness invades into both the home and the body is a perfect example of Alaimo’s idea of how the body and the environment are enmeshed and it captures the reality of coastal regions. Creating an apocalyptic status, the mood of the poem also gives picture to the feeling of the Anthropocene.

A deep sense of ecological grief is found in another poem titled, “Coastal Life” where the popular romantic seaside image is deconstructed to represent a spatial existence wrought by rust and decay.

All night the electricity surges and stops, smothering wires and fuses,  
While lizards plop.  
...kitchen lights have fallen down because the wires are corroded  
...hinges on the gate to the each give up the ghost every four months  
....dolphins, dogs, turtles, awash on the shore, dead. (Doshi 68-69)

The futility of permanent structures is in par with the death pangs that are churned by the sea. The sea becomes a site of memory and history in Doshi’s poems and questions ideas of temporality for the sea rejects chronologies and exhorts for a fluidity that which emphasises interconnectedness across spaces, places, beings (living and non-living) beyond human thought or control. The sea, therefore may also offer a persistent ecological resilience and restoration with the water washing away struggles and pain.

Doshi moves beyond the coast in some of her other ecological poems, as is seen in the poem titled “Tigress Hugs Manchurian Fir”. Inspired by Sergey Gorshkov’s wildlife photograph, Doshi pens this concrete poem in the shape of a tree trunk. With an allusion to the Chipko Movement, she reclaims the dissent of women against environmental injustices.

I begin my diaries with Chipko means to hug in Hindi.  
And even though I know the history of the ecofeminist  
embrace is fierce, not cute, it helps me understand the gap  
between my life and the denuded hillside. (Doshi 88)

Connecting two distant lands – Garhwal in India and Siberia in Russia, she reiterates the slow violence as witnessed by the extraction of trees in these places in the name of development and construction. While human beings have lost ‘touch’ with the environment and in this specific case, with trees, she emphasises how the touch of a tigress is comforting for the tree. She calls it ‘fierce’ and aligns the tigress with that of a warrior, more like an unconscious act of defence. Doshi identifies an element of solidarity that connects the two nations as well as two species. The act of hugging or loving trees is more of a socio-economic struggle resisting patriarchal capitalism in which the tigress like any other woman is affected. This poem also serves as an example of interspecies intersectionality where the human and non-human boundary is dissolved; again, echoing intercorporeality. Human forces of greed and dominance often overlook the interdependency of the human and the non-human with each other and hence Doshi in this poem forces the reader to see and then preserve the image of the tree through the shape poem.

Doshi's ecological poems therefore centre on an intercorporeality which realms from a fierce intimacy between the human and the non-human. At the same time, her poems feature ecological anxieties which is heavier laden by intersectionalities of oppression, especially for women, the economically backward, migrants, animals etc. In the poem, "Tree of Life", she pens:

It could be romantic to sleep in a tree  
with all the sounds of the forest around—  
...There are no spare rooms so these men  
who've returned from the city are put in a tree  
to quarantine, a tree that strangles its hosts  
as it walks.  
...It goes like this  
for days, this story of seven men in a tree, living  
through a 21st century pandemic. Men who say  
they're happy not to pass on any bad city virus. (Doshi 45)

Based on a news report in the Hindustan Times during the COVID-19 pandemic, Doshi writes this poem contrasting Western romantic ideal of the nature to the harsh reality of seven migrant workers who upon returning to their village in West Bengal were quarantined on banyan tree due to the lack of space in their small houses. The banyan tree which is "munificent" also has the capacity to consume human beings, mirroring the unpredictability of nature which can be a host and predator simultaneously. While the tigress in "Tigress Hugs Manchurian Fir", hugs the tree as protest, here these seven men seek shelter upon these trees, converting it into a domestic space. The poem features an inverted domestic space where women provide the necessary cooking essentials at the foot of the tree for the men in quarantine. Here, there is a shift of the traditional roles – women ascend to the function of a provider and therefore it functions as a socio-ecofeminist critique. When reclaiming this power to provide, these women posit a challenge to their "naturalized" roles. As this fragile shelter becomes an abode and manifests on man's dependence on nature, there is a concomitant liberation of both women and the environment; one from silence and the other from destruction. Unfortunately, this majorly falls quite disproportionately.

"Advice for Pliny the Elder, Big Daddy of Mansplainers" is a thoughtful poem by Doshi which delivers a pungent critique of the patriarchal tendencies to dominate, define and quite often taxonomize. Doshi argues for a world beyond this domination, wherein woman and nature exceed boundaries of male definition. She addresses Pliny the Elder, a Roman naturalist, an archetype of male gaze, who propagated the toxicity of the female body. As a witty response to this, Doshi in turn shapes the poem like a menstrual cup showcasing the biological power of women:

Once a month, when the blood comes, I go out to lie in whatever field I find to feel the scorch rise and the crops wither. Our powers are much depleted. I can stand among men in full swing of my menstruous and nothing will dim their ability to tell me about me. There are birds at the window this morning I can't name and dogs in the valley beyond, who are using their bell-shaped lungs to announce their happiness again and again and again. (Doshi 26)

She juxtaposes the patriarchal voice of authority with the raw, reality of volcano and the female body. The voice of the poem celebrates a body that flows, an agent which has the power to alter ecology. Pliny's definition of women proves volatile in the intercorporeal force of women to be as ferocious and unpredictable as nature; refusing the prescribed social roles and norms. The social control exercised by Pliny in his 'classifications' labelled women as 'toxic' and Doshi exposes this quite humorously. Pliny, here is a representative of a deep-rooted patriarchal society. Doshi traps the words of Pliny within a menstrual cup, a symbol of female autonomy; a reality that Pliny would have feared. Quite interestingly, Doshi flips the dynamics of power and presents a "volcanic feminine"; not a "destructive" image but she claims it as a superpower. Much like the

environment, women are also represented as being dangerous and alive at the same time. This poem is a perfect illustration of economic vengeance.

Largely, Doshi's poetry features a tone and rhythm that mimic environmental collapse – in her use of punctuations and lines breaks. She makes use of fragmented imagery to highlight the disorientation of the climate crisis. While some of her poems explicitly address coastal degradation, some other poems discuss landscapes, elements of nature and the nexus in which all of this function, porously. She highlights how women become more vulnerable to environmental distress and at times it is earth which offers refuge. Her poems act as an artistic counter to 'slow violence'. There is an attempt to evoke an urgent and deep ethical response by mankind in her poetry. By compelling the readers to act not just as moral witnesses but also as initiators of a changed history, Doshi gives voice to the non-human. Moving beyond the romantic tropes of environment, a socio-ecofeminist reading of her poems, allows one to confront the consequences of the Anthropocene. Often the violence, mainly the slow violence upon the environment is linked to that which is inflicted upon women. As a mark of ecological solidarity, her poems allow for a transformation of these fragile bodies to sites of political awakeness and the realisation that the human and the non-human function in a continuum. Through her anti-pastoral aesthetic, she unveils different landscapes, especially that of the seaside; a space of conflicts. She illustrates how the body inhales and exhales environmental changes and therefore how every change in nature is then naturally a bludgeoning of the self. The shared tangibility between bodies, human and non-human is visible in Doshi's poems and calls for an environment protection and restoration. It critiques binary thinking which reinforces dominations and injustices. By decentring the human subject, Doshi pictures the non-human elements in her verses as actants. Rejecting narratives of urban progress, she reconfigures the relationship between the human and the non-human and her ecopoetic sensibility employs a socio-ecofeminist solidarity which bears witness to the precarity of both the environment and women alike.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE AND ECOCRITICISM**

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**Abstract**

The complicated relationships between humans and the natural world can be better understood through environmental literature, which provides tales that shed light on ecological issues and inspire a sense of environmental consciousness. In this field, ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary framework for analysing literary works that deals with environmental ethics, sustainability, and the effects of human-centered worldviews on nature and the environment. Environmental literature has shaped public knowledge of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and ecological justice. This paper traces the evolution of environmental literature from early nature writing to contemporary climate-fiction, highlighting this impact. Poetry, fiction, essays, and indigenous storytelling are all examined in this research, which draws on important theoretical contributions from ecocriticism to examine how these genres of literature question exploitative cultural practices and provide more environmentally conscious ways of life. This paper examines some texts and academic debates to show how literature can change people's minds about environmental issues and how society views ecological stewardship. The results show that environmental literature does double duty as a reflection of ecological concerns and an agent of change in terms of both behaviour and policy. So, this study adds to our knowledge of how literature can encourage eco-consciousness and make people more accountable for their actions.

**Keywords:** Environmental, Literature, Ecocriticism, Writing, Climate, Change Narratives, Ecological Ethics, Sustainability

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The environmental literature has emerged as a vital area of consideration in an age of ambivalence in climate, deterioration of the environment and an increased awareness of the environment. With natural ecosystems in all parts of the world subjected like never before to increased pressures due to rising temperatures to the point of the extinction of species, literature on this subject offers a rare scientific, emotive, ethical and even cultural, standpoint to comprehend the issue not only intellectually but also to appreciate, feel and even cherish. Environmental literature bridging the gap between ecological facts and human experience is made up of the stories, poems, essays, and narratives. They help the society understand the interlacing complications between human life and the natural world in a manner that cannot be attained by scientific reports only.

The idea of environmental literature is based on the assumption that stories define perceptions. Literature can serve as a reflection and an instruction by portraying nature, environmental crises, and how people interact with nature. It is a source of human worries, apprehensions, and bewilderment about the destruction of the environment and, at the same time, provides the other possibilities of its environmental harmony, stability, and sustainability. Literature has the potential to encourage environmental awareness by causing the reader to think, sympathize, and ask the right questions.



**Figure 1: Literature and the Environment**

These literary expressions can be analysed on the basis of ecocriticism. Being an interdisciplinary method, ecocriticism is the analysis of the connection between literature and the physical world, the ways in which a text describes nature, environmental problems, and relationships between people and other nature elements. It is critical of anthropocentrism, investigates ecological ethics, and challenges cultural activities that lead to the destruction of the environment. Ecocriticism holds that ecological crises are not simply scientific or political problems, but also cultural and philosophical problems which are influenced by human worldviews.

The research paper, which is entirely founded on the concepts presented in the given abstract, explores the development of environmental literature since the initial nature writing up to the present-day climate fiction. It also examines the importance of genres of poetry, fiction, essays, and Indigenous storytelling in ecological knowledge and transformation of environmental values. The paper identifies ecocritical approaches to these genres and explains how environmental literature can promote ecological ethics, disruptive cultural schemas, and help instigate more sustainable ways of thinking about the world around us.

Lastly, the paper illustrates that environmental literature goes beyond reflecting ecological struggles and it positively affects behavior, policy and popular consciousness. Literature may become an activating force of environmental movements and the means of defining environmental stewardship. Therefore, this paper will add to the further understanding of how the environmental literature leads to responsibility, transformation, and sustainable future.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Tajane (2024)** gave an account of one of the later studies of ecocriticism by focusing on how ecological issues and nature had been represented in literary texts in the past. As a part of the analysis, he maintained that literature had been a long-standing reflection of ecological realities through its exposure of human attitude to the natural environment, its revelation of environmental degradation, and its incocation of environmental awareness. Tajane had reviewed chosen literary



works to show how the authors characterized landscapes, conflicts with the natural environment, and human relations to the environment and concluded that these representations had influenced the readers to be aware of ecological problems.

**Huggan and Tiffin (2015)** had developed the discipline by adding a postcolonial aspect to the ecocritical inquiry. Their book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, suggested that the environment problems could not be separated and connected to the historic and political organization that was influenced by colonialism. They argued that colonialists had not only exploited land but also people and they had left behind ecological and cultural relics that were still defining modern day environmental struggles. Their views implied that environmental destruction was entrenched with the imperial growth and exploitation of resources and unequal balance of power.

**Marland (2013)** also brought some additional light to the subject by providing an in-depth overview of the development of ecocriticism, its controversies, and theoretical elaborations. Composing at a time when ecocriticism had already become diversified, Marland used earlier environmental movements and literatures as its sources, which anticipated nature. He stated that ecocriticism had originally developed as a reaction to increasing environmental crises and had become a more wide-ranging interdisciplinary discipline that had attracted environmental philosophy, cultural studies, and science.

**Adamson (2001)** in her seminal book, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism*, The Middle Place, Adamson has contended that the history of environmental issues in the United States had been inseparable with histories of colonialism, land dispossession, and racial inequality. She showed that the American Indian literature had traditionally reflected ecological ideals based on relational worldviews and communal ethics and spiritual attachment to land. Adamson contributed that these Indigenous writings presented alternative ecological paradigms that opposed prevailing Western ideologies of land possession, resource exploitation, and anthropocentrism in the worldviews. Through her analysis she found out that indigenous narratives had documented the environmental destruction as well as the cultural survival and thus they were in the intersections of environmental justice and decolonial resistance.

**Gaard (2009)** extended the ecocritical question by looking at how the environmental literature addressing children had served as an instrument of ecological education and moral growth. She maintained that children literature had traditionally been a strong means to educate the young readers in their environmental values, emotional attachment to nature, and ecological sensitivity at early stages of their lives. Gaard followed the history of the depiction of animals, landscapes, environmental crisis, and human responsibility in children books and found that the depiction of such examples had contributed to the development of empathy, moral imagination, and environmental stewardship in children.

### **1. ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE: MEANING, SCOPE, AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Environmental literature novels include a vast array of literary pieces that address the topic of nature, ecology, environmental conflict, and human nature relations. Whereas traditional literature usually treated the nature as a beautiful backdrop, environmental literature brings out the nature as a dominant topic, moral presence, and actor in the story.

| Historical Phase     | Key Features                          | Environmental Focus                         | Literary Contribution                   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Early Nature Writing | Descriptive, spiritual, observational | Appreciation of landscapes, nature's beauty | Establishes human–nature emotional bond |

|                                       |                               |                                      |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Romantic Writing                      | Sublime, symbolic, moral      | Nature as restorative and sacred     | Deepens ecological imagination    |
| Industrial Era Writing                | Critical, reflective          | Pollution, deforestation, alienation | Introduces environmental critique |
| Modern Environmental Writing          | Scientific + emotional        | Conservation, species protection     | Bridges science and culture       |
| Contemporary Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi) | Dystopian, futuristic, urgent | Climate change, ecological collapse  | Raises global climate awareness   |

**Table 1: Evolution of Environmental Literature across Time**

The table presents a demonstration of the transformation of the environmental literature through the times depending on the correlation of the society to the nature. It starts with early nature writing, which was primarily concerned with landscape descriptions and establish emotional bond of people with nature. In the Romantic era, literature considered nature as something sanctified and curing, thus contributing to the growth of imagination and appreciation of surroundings in people. With the environment being harmed through industrialization and deforestation, authors began employing literature as a way of protesting these adverse effects thus they started to focus on the environment. During the modern period, environmental writing merged scientific information and emotional values, which made people pay attention to conservation and the protection of species. Last but not least, the modern climate fiction reveals the pressing themes such as climate change and ecological destruction, becoming aware of its worldwide problems through the narratives of the possible future disasters. On the whole, it can be seen in the table that the appreciation of nature gradually develops to the powerful environmental advocacy in literature.

#### **1.1. Defining Environmental Literature**

Environmental literature was literature where natural world was a major and significant feature, not as a background but a part of the story. Such form of writing emphasized the beauty, diversity and complexity of natural ecosystems, which made the reader think of nature as something vibrant and alive. Meanwhile, the environmental literature was interested in the manner in which human activities had impacted the environment which pictured elements related to pollution, loss of habitat, global warming and other ecological deterioration activities. Such literature raised awareness of the increasing delicateness of the natural world by demonstrating the effects of such actions. It also highlighted the moral duty that humanity has to the planet and is urging the reader to consider their own relationship with nature and the necessity of more sustainable behaviour. One important theme in environmental literature was the interdependence of all living things, as a reminder to the readers that people were not isolated in an ecological system, but formed a part of it. This way, the literature on the environment transformed the meaning of nature as an inert and aesthetic object, but as a living and sensitive being, whose health depended on human decisions and behaviours.

#### **1.2. Evolution and Development**

The development of environmental literature had taken place during a long process over the centuries as the attitude of people to the nature has changed. It started with early nature writing, pastoral poetry whereby writers glorified the beauty of the scenery, the ebb and flow of nature, and the naivete of the country folk. The central theme of these early works was admiration and emotional attachment and nature was depicted as a source of peace, inspiration, and harmony. But with the onset of industrialization, as societies started to change, authors started to focus on the adverse impact brought on by factories, urbanization and machine production. The literature of this

time began to undermine the notion of human progress by pointing to pollution, deforestation and depletion of natural areas. This was a turning point as the nature was not perceived as something one was fond of but something that needed attention. During the contemporary times, the growth in scope and depth of environmental literature was prohibited. It encompassed climate stories, which dealt with global warming and environmental crisis, ecological criticism, which explored damaging cultural attitudes, Aboriginal ecological knowledge, which was founded on respect toward the land, and the themes of environmental justice, in which oppressed communities were affected. With these expansions the environmental literature emerged as an influential and wide field that not only looked at the beauty of nature but also the pressing issues that were affecting the planet.

### **1.3. Why Environmental Literature Matters**

The importance of environmental literature in developing human interpretation of environmental problems can be explained by the fact that:

- It personalizes environmental issues, thus, relatable.
- It develops the emotional and moral consciousness, inspiring individuals to be concerned about nature.
- It presents the complicated ecological concepts in a simple narration.
- It condemns cultural practices that are destructive to the ecosystems.
- It spurs activism, policy transformation and sustainability.

Since literature appeals to the moral, emotional, and imaginative abilities of the audience, it is a potent tool of environmental change.

## **2. ECOCRITICISM: THEORY AND FRAMEWORK**

The major theoretical approach to the analysis of environmental literature is ecocriticism. It unites the perspectives of ecology, philosophy, cultural studies, and literary criticism to investigate the way literature reflects the nature and environmental crisis.

**Table 2: Major Ecocritical Themes and Their Functions**

| <b>Ecocritical Theme</b>    | <b>Description</b>                      | <b>Function in Literary Studies</b>         |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Anthropocentrism            | Human-centered worldview                | Identifies exploitative cultural practices  |
| Ecological Ethics           | Moral responsibility to nature          | Promotes sustainable behaviour              |
| Sustainability              | Long-term environmental balance         | Advocates for eco-conscious lifestyles      |
| Environmental Justice       | Fair treatment of communities & species | Highlights inequalities and ecological harm |
| Environmental Consciousness | Awareness of ecological crises          | Inspires activism and policy change         |

Table 2 indicates the key themes that ecocriticism deals with and gives the way that each theme operates in literary studies. The anthropocentrism concept or the human-centered worldview assists the critics to point out the cultural attitudes that elevate human beings above nature and usually result in the exploitation of the environment. Ecological ethics emphasize the ethical obligation in humans to the natural environment and in literature, the theme is applied to encourage more responsible and sustainable behaviour. Sustainability as a concept is aimed at long-term environmental equilibrium and its contribution to the literary analysis is to inspire the readers to consider the concept of an environmentally friendly and conscious living. Environmental justice attracts interest to equal treatment of communities, species and ecosystems, demonstrating how certain groups of people are more adversely affected by environmental degradation. Lastly, environmental consciousness can be understood as an awareness of environmental crises, and in literature, the theme can be used to encourage the masses to take

action and alter policies. The table in general indicates how ecocritical theories inform a literary analysis and how texts communicate more about the ecological messages.

### **2.1. Understanding Ecocriticism**

Ecocriticism was an approach to the analysis of the manner in which literature interacted with the environment and nature. It explored how literary texts represented the nature, ecological concern and how it influenced the attitude of human beings towards nature. Literature tended to expose how societies perceived nature and the manner in which the beliefs facilitated the development of environmental issues through stories, imagery, and cultural symbols. Ecocriticism posed a few important questions to be able to learn more about such relations. It addressed issues of nature in a text and the interactions between human beings and natural world. It also examined whether a work espoused anthropocentric attitudes in which human beings were given superiority over nature or refuted them by supporting more ecological views. Lastly, ecocriticism examined the ecological values which a text promoted such as respect, responsibility, sustainability, or exploitation. Answering these questions, ecocriticism contributed to the discovery of cultural, ethical and ideological forces according to which the environmental narratives were constructed in literature.

### **2.2. Anthropocentrism vs. Ecological Ethics**

At the core of most of the ecological issues is anthropocentrism the belief that humans are the center of the universe. Ecocriticism is a criticism of this kind of a worldview by suggesting ecological ethics of respect, balance, and interdependence.

- Ecological ethics are focused on:
- The value of all species in itself.
- Sustainability in human activities.
- Accountability to the future generations.
- Vulnerable communities' Environmental justice.

### **2.3. Ecocriticism as Interdisciplinary Inquiry**

The ecocriticism served as an interdisciplinary method since it used the concepts of a variety of other disciplines to learn more about the connection between the literature and the environment. It drew the wisdom of environmental research to study environmental issues, philosophy to investigate ethical issues, and cultural anthropology to learn how different societies perceived and related with nature. Ecocriticism also drew upon the Indigenous systems of knowledge, providing ancient traditions of environmental harmony and respect toward land, and applied the ideas of sustainability science to the problems of enduring environmental health. Through the unification of these different worldviews, ecocriticism could demonstrate the influence of cultural discourse on ecological consciousness and values of people. Meanwhile, it showed how literature could be used to change the behaviour and policy of the environment by making the readers reconsider their unhealthy cultural attitudes and embrace more sustainable lifestyles. Such an interdisciplinary character enabled ecocriticism to become an effective instrument of relating cultural knowledge and ecological action in reality.

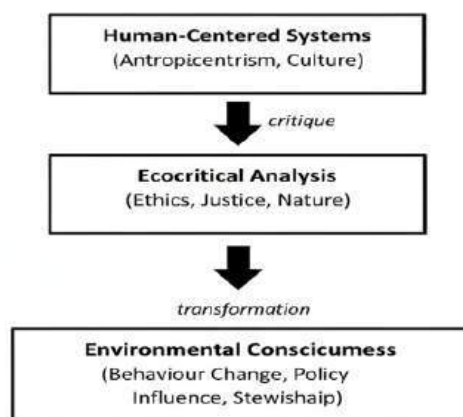


**Figure 2: Ecocriticism Framework**

The figure shows how ecocritical analysis serves as an intermediary to the human-based cultural systems and the formulation of environmental consciousness. It starts with anthropocentric systems that are rooted in anthropocentrism and cultural beliefs, according to which people are supreme to nature. Such systems eventually result in environmental exploitation practices. The ecocritical analysis denounces these destructive worldviews by analyzing such questions as ethics, justice, the presentation of nature in literature. This is because ecocriticism is a critical process that reveals the restrictions of anthropocentric thoughts and promotes a change towards more responsible ecological values. The last step in the diagram denotes environmental awareness, in which the knowledge acquired during an ecocritical analysis triggers change. This metamorphosis manifests itself through the change in behaviour, more impact on the policy, and the stewardship of the environment. In general, the figure illustrates the way ecocriticism opposes cultures which are prevalent and dominant and aids in building more conscious, moral, and ecological friendly societies.

### **3. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE**

The development of the environmental literature can be followed throughout the course of the various historical periods each of which displayed the shifts in human attitude towards nature. As time passed, authors stopped writing about beauty of natural scenery and started to comment on environmental devastation, and later on, discuss the ecological disasters and climate issues in the world. In the following section, this evolution of early nature writing leading to the development of modern climate fiction is described, in which the presentation of the environment in literature has changed in line with societal, cultural, and ecological shifts.

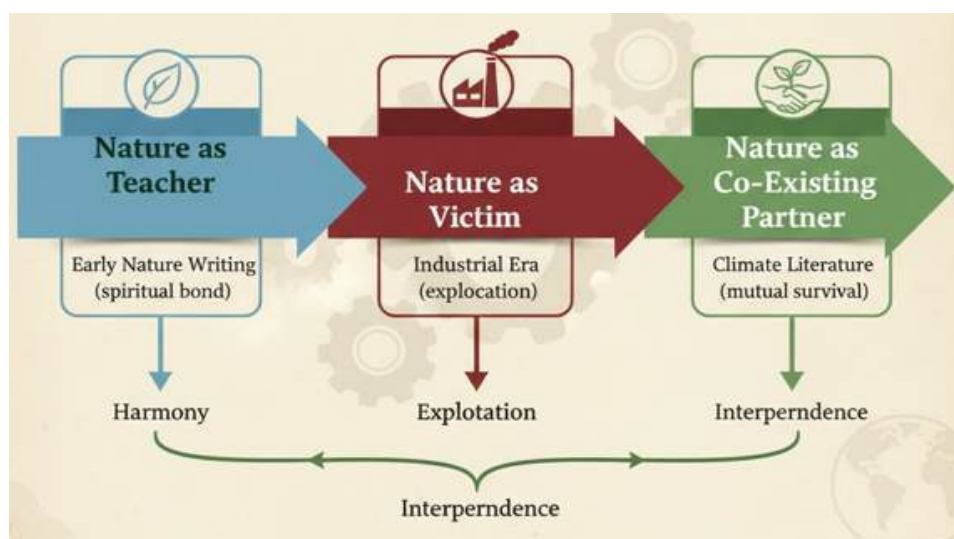


**Figure 3: Human Nature Relationship in Environmental Literature**

The figure demonstrates how the perception of nature in literature has evolved at different historical times. During early nature writing, nature was perceived as a teacher, which provided wisdom, spiritual affiliation, and balance. This stage was characterized by the regard of the natural world and a strong emotional connection between man and nature. When the society transitioned into the industrial age, literature became the victim of that period and therefore, reflected the nature as being the victim of industrialization, which led to pollution, exploitation, and devastation of the environment. The authors of this era revealed the harmful impact of the human advancement and depicted nature as a victim of human activities. In present times, particularly in climatic literature, the work depicts nature as a co-existing entity and emphasis on the survival of both and interdependence of both mankind and the environment. This phase acknowledges the fact that the environment and humans are dependent on one another to survive. On the whole, this figure demonstrates the trend of the transition between harmony and exploitation, and, lastly, to interdependence, in order to reveal how literature has reacted to ecological transformations and promoted more balanced relations with the natural environment.

### **3.1. Early Nature Writing**

The pioneer of environmental literature is early nature writing. Authors employed descriptive language to describe the environment, climate, and nature in their original forms. It focused on admiration and observation and emotional attachment.

Nature writing assisted in:

- Awareness of biodiversity
- Respect of the processes in nature.
- Acknowledgment of spiritual and moral importance of nature.

This kind of literature made readers view the natural world as a backdrop of something it made nature active, dynamic, and inspiring.

### **3.2. Transition to Environmental Concern**

The transition of societies into the industrial age has led to a visible change in environmental literature, as the increasing worries of the impacts of the rapid technological and urbanization processes were expressed. Authors started to write about and criticize the obvious effects of industrialization like factories contaminating rivers, urban sprawl clearing large growing forests, and machines destroying the natural ecology. The literature of this time was characterized by the



emphasis of the overuse of natural resources to achieve economic profits which had a long-term negative impact on the landscape, ecosystems and people. This step was a significant milestone in environmental literature because writers ceased to celebrate the beauty of nature and began to discuss the new environmental problems that industrialization was causing. Their works revealed the devastating effect of human activity and addressed the fact of the necessity to be more ecologically conscious. The shift was the onset of the criticism of the environment as an important theme in literary expression.

### **3.3. Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi)**

The modern phase of environmental writing is climate fiction. It deals with:

- Climate change
- Rising sea levels
- Extreme weather patterns
- Species extinction
- Ecological collapse
- Adaptation and survival in people.

Climate fiction increases awareness of actual scientific problems and appeals to the readers in an emotional and ethical manner. It converts information to human tales, making one think and take some action.

## **4. GENRES OF ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE**

The article has distinguished four significant genres in the environmental literature poetry, fiction, essays, and Indigenous storytelling. All these forms have different approaches to the ecological topics and make the individual contribution to the formation of environmental consciousness. These genres are elaborated in the following section, which discusses their literary peculiarities and their ecological importance without going beyond the scope of the proposed study.

### **4.1. Environmental Poetry**

Environmental poetry made use of descriptive imagery and the use of expressive language to define the nature of natural environment and this made it one of the most emotionally appeasing types of environmental literary works. The poetic depiction of the beauty of nature was usually very sensitive and admirational and poets felt the awe of landscapes and ecosystems. Meanwhile, numerous poems were lamenting the destruction of nature, putting the voice of the disappearance of forests, species, and ecological harmony. Poets also raised the call of ecological justice through their work, calling on readers to see how harmful human activities are and to think of less harmful methods of living. The feelings of attachment and attachment that poets developed towards nature enabled the readers to share the same feelings of attachment and concern. Since poetry was so brief and symbolic, it was an effective tool of bringing awareness in terms of the environment and could move readers and bring a deeper insight into ecological environment with a few well-chosen words.

### **4.2. Environmental Fiction**

Environmental fiction was a sort of fiction that was written in the form of stories and touched on environmental issues using captivating narratives that enabled the readers to realize the environmental issues in a more intimate and relatable fashion. Fiction showed the conflict between development and conservation of the environment by dramatizing the clashes between humans and nature. Such stories tended to shed light on the bad cultural activities that led to pollution, exploitation, lack of balance in the environment and helped the readers to think about the effects of human behaviour. Climate disasters like storms, droughts, and rising sea levels were also depicted in many environmental fictions works and showed the actual and immediate effects of climate change. Moreover, the genre often dealt with environmental justice struggles, and revealed how oppressed populations were more likely to encounter environmental harm. Environmental fiction, by its characters, plots, and emotional narrative, brought the issues of the environment to life,

made them more dramatic and touching, thereby assisting in reinforcing the environmental awareness and motivating readers to be more conscious and responsible.

#### **4.3. Environmental Essays**

The provided environmental essays comprise reflective, analytical, and persuasive viewpoints about a variety of environmental issues, and thus constitute a significant transition point between scientific knowledge and common sense. The personal experience and observation were frequently used alongside the ecological analysis in these essays, which enabled the writers to relate individual experiences in nature to the larger environmental issues. Through the combination of factual and moral appeals, essays made the reader reflectively ponder on ways human behavior has harmed the natural environment. They particularly worked well in simplifying and putting in simple, human terms, complex scientific ideas, and made ecological issues available to a greater number of people. With such reflection, analysis and persuasion, environmental essays provoked the readers to re-evaluate their environmental values and take a more responsible and informed attitude towards the environment.

#### **4.4. Indigenous Storytelling**

The rich ecological wisdom was anchored through indigenous storytelling whereby knowledge, values and environmental teachings were passed on across generations. These stories were full of reverence towards land and water and they were not treated as resources to be exploited but as living beings that needed attention and appreciation. One of the main topics of Indigenous narration was indivisibility of all life, as people thought that human beings, animals, plants, and other natural elements were intrinsically related and mutually dependent. Rituals and cultural practices meant to protect ecosystems were also mentioned in many of these stories, and it demonstrated how the tradition and spirituality regulated sustainable living. Through emphasis on the importance of community to ensure environmental conservation, the stories instilled that community responsibility was a communal responsibility and was a key to long-term survival. Consequently, Indigenous ecological knowledge provided much more balanced and successful methods of sustainability than exploitative worldviews of the modern world as it reminded the readers of the significance of harmony, reciprocity and respect in human nature relationships.

**Table 3: Comparison of Environmental Literary Genres**

| <b>Genre</b>            | <b>Key Characteristics</b>     | <b>Ecological Contribution</b>            | <b>Impact on Readers</b>                    |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Poetry                  | Symbolic, emotional, imagistic | Captures nature's beauty & grief          | Builds emotional ecology                    |
| Fiction                 | Narrative, character-based     | Shows consequences of environmental harm  | Ethical involvement through story           |
| Essays                  | Reflective, analytical         | Explains ecological issues clearly        | Shapes rational environmental understanding |
| Indigenous Storytelling | Cultural, spiritual, communal  | Preserves ecological wisdom & stewardship | Teaches respect and reciprocity             |

Table 3 contrasts four major genres of environmental literature and demonstrates the contribution that each genre makes to the ecological knowledge. The symbolic and emotional nature of poetry gathers the beauty and sadness of nature, thus enabling the reader to have a strong emotional attachment to the surroundings. Fiction with its narratives and characters demonstrates the actual result of damaging the environment and gives the reader the opportunity to experience it morally, by putting themselves in the position of the characters. Reflective and analytical, essays provide a

clear and logical explanation of ecological issues that could aid readers to create a more logical and thoughtful knowledge of environmental problems. Cultural, spiritual, and community-based indigenous storytelling is a source of ancient ecological knowledge and traditions of care and maintenance, and it teaches the reader the principles of respect, harmony, and reciprocity between humans and nature. In general, the table demonstrates that every genre provides a different approach to the creation of environmental awareness on emotional, ethical, intellectual, and cultural levels.

## **5. ENVIRONMENTAL LITERATURE AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE**

The impact of environmental literature has been both transformative and reflective by influencing ecological issues as well as shaping the attitudes, behaviours, and policies of the general society. By engaging in its diversified manifestations poetry, fiction, essays, and Indigenous narratives, it brings environmental concerns to the general understanding, questions the damaging aspect of this culture, and promotes a more sustainable mode of thinking and being. This section discusses the influence of environmental literature on the consciousness, into action, and the overall environmental change.

### **5.1. Literature as Reflection**

The environmental literature was a strong mirror, which reflected the significant ecological issues of the contemporary world. It reflected the climate worries through its display of the uncertainty, fear, and turbulence brought about by varying patterns of weather and global warming. The loss of biodiversity was also reflected in many works of literature, as the tendency attracted the interest of disappearing species and destroyed ecosystems. Problems of pollution and waste were also common in environmental plots, where humans led polluted lives, defiled land, air, and water. Besides that, social and ecological injustice was found in the literature as well, showing how vulnerable communities were disproportionately harmed by environmental destruction. Such literature was also used to convey much of the human emotional reaction to environmental change, such as grief, anger, hope, and resilience. Through the embodiment of these issues which are interrelated, environmental literature enabled societies realize and address the fact of ecological crises, which are more apt, familiar, and pressing.

### **5.2. Literature as Transformation**

Environmental literature also served as a transformational agent as it shaped and changed the common attitudes, cultural beliefs, ethical values, policy agendas, and environmental activism. It also helped readers to have different attitudes towards the natural world, through good stories and emotional narratives, in order to appreciate protection, balance and sustainability. It can be seen that literature made a considerable contribution to the deconstruction of cultural beliefs that reflected exploitation or considered nature as a resource, and encouraged more respect-based and interdependent attitudes. It also assisted in creating ethical values as it encouraged readers to think about how they should be responsible to the environment and future generation. Enhancing the policy sphere, environmental discourses helped to drive up debates concerning the seriousness of environmental matters and the necessity to take legislative measures. Moreover, literature tended to support or stimulate environmental activism by encouraging people and social groups to participate in activities that will aid conservation and ecological justice. Environmental literature promoted sustainable behaviour and stronger sense of environmental responsibility through its power to invoke empathy and create ecological awareness.

### **5.3. Influence on Ecological Stewardship**

Stewardship is the responsiveness in maintaining the environment.

- Reminding the people of the relationship with nature.
- Extreme importance of emphasizing ecological neglect outcomes.
- Promoting responsibility towards human behavior.

It is because stories transform mindsets, and mindsets transform the world.

**Table 4: Transformational Impact of Environmental Literature**

| Area of Influence    | How Literature Shapes It                     | Examples (Generalised)         |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Public Awareness     | Brings climate issues into everyday language | Climate novels, nature poetry  |
| Cultural Imagination | Rewrites human–nature relationships          | Indigenous stories             |
| Behaviour            | Encourages sustainable choices               | Eco-conscious essays           |
| Policy Discourse     | Inspires environmental debates               | Advocacy-based writing         |
| Ecological Ethics    | Motivates moral responsibility               | Literary reflections on nature |

Table 4 also brings out the level of impact of environmental literature on various sectors of the society through changing the manner in which people think and behave. Regarding its outreach to the general audience, literature reveals the issues of climate and the environment to people by providing discussable forms such as climate novels and nature poetry, which makes these issues easier to comprehend and communicate. Cultural imagination is also created through literature, which provides new forms of imaging the interrelation of humans and nature; the Indigenous stories, in particular, provide alternative worldviews, which are rooted in the notion of respect and interconnection. Environmental essays and reflective writing on the topic of behaviour would promote more sustainable habits among the reader by demonstrating the value of responsible and mindful living. Literature also influences policy talk as it helps in inspiring environmental discussions and amplification of argument on ecological protection especially by advocacy based literature that bring out urgent issues. Lastly, the environmental literature also has a central role in the development of environmental ethics because it encourages moral accountability towards the earth. The contemplations on nature in literary works provoke readers to take the consideration of their contribution to the environment care a bit more seriously. Generally, in the table, environmental literature assists in forming awareness, imagination, behaviour, policy thinking and ethical values in significant and mutually related forms.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The environmental literature was of great importance in defining how people should perceive environmental crises and be more aware of the environment by providing effective information on how people relate to nature through poetry, fiction, essays, and Indigenous narratives. These stories showed the role of cultural values and anthropocentric beliefs in environmental degradation, and ecocriticism offered the means of interpretation that were required to examine and oppose these attitudes. Following the evolution of environmental writing, starting with early nature writing, and moving up to the recent climate fiction, it was clear that literature not only mirrored environmental issues but also spurred behavioural change, policy change, and sustainable living by challenging exploitative cultural practices, advocating ecological values and encouraging sustainability. As a tool beyond the aesthetic, the environmental literature was a powerful tool that could create environmental responsibility, ecological stewardship and sustainable futures. During a time of growing ecological criticism, environmental literature, as well as ecocriticism, was indeed necessary as a way to remind us that narratives can redefine imagination, change mindsets, and trigger action, collectively, to save the planet.

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**40 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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**ECOLOGY, MEMORY, AND THE PLURIVERSE: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF  
NYISHI LITERATURE AND INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the ecological and cultural consciousness embodied in the literature and oral traditions of the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh through the lens of ecocriticism and environmental humanities. It argues that Nyishi storytelling—whether through ritual chants, myths of origin, or emerging written works—constitutes a living philosophy of interdependence that challenges colonial hierarchies of knowledge and the instrumental logic of modernity. Drawing from the theoretical insights of Lawrence Buell, Greg Garrard, Timothy Morton, Vandana Shiva, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Arturo Escobar, the paper explores how indigenous cosmologies transform ecology from a scientific category into an ethical mode of being. The study contends that Nyishi cultural expressions offer a pluriversal ecological paradigm that contests the anthropocentric epistemologies of the Anthropocene. By situating Nyishi environmental ethics in conversation with postcolonial and feminist theory, the paper demonstrates how oral memory, ritual practice, and ecological storytelling articulate a moral vision of sustainability that is deeply relevant in today's era of climate anxiety and ecological collapse. Far from being relics of an archaic past, Nyishi traditions embody a living grammar of coexistence, reminding us that environmental renewal is inseparable from cultural continuity.

**Keywords:** Nyishi Literature, Ecocriticism, Environmental Humanities, Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainability, Postcolonial Ecology

**Introduction: Ecology, Story, and the Crisis of Imagination**

The twenty-first century has witnessed a planetary ecological crisis unparalleled in human history. The depletion of forests, rising global temperatures, and the mass extinction of species mark not only environmental degradation but also a profound moral failure. As Lawrence Buell reminds us in *The Environmental Imagination*, “the environmental crisis is also a crisis of representation and ethics” (Buell 2). To understand and respond to this crisis, the humanities must recover alternative modes of imagining the human relationship with nature. The emerging field of *Environmental Humanities* recognises that stories, rituals, and cultural memories shape ecological behaviour as much as scientific policy. Within this intellectual milieu, the oral and literary traditions of the Nyishi community of Arunachal Pradesh assume immense significance.

Nestled within the undulating hills and forested valleys of central Arunachal Pradesh, the Nyishi tribe exemplifies a culture where ecology and identity are inseparable. Their myths, chants, and ceremonial practices transform the landscape into a living text, one that encodes moral obligations toward rivers, forests, and animals. To engage critically with Nyishi literature is therefore to enter a dialogue with a worldview in which the nonhuman is neither marginal nor metaphorical but co-equal in agency. The forest is not a backdrop but a participant in narrative, a sentient presence shaping communal life. This conceptual intimacy between ecology and culture contrasts sharply with the anthropocentric logic of colonial and postcolonial development that has long viewed nature as a passive resource.

Postcolonial theory provides an indispensable framework for understanding the epistemic violence that colonialism inflicted upon indigenous ecologies. The British administrators and ethnographers who mapped the hills of the Northeast frequently described tribal communities as “primitive” or “non-historical,” relegating their knowledge systems to the realm of folklore. Gayatri Spivak's



notion of “epistemic violence” (Spivak 284) aptly captures this process of erasure. By excluding indigenous voices from the discourse of knowledge, colonial modernity silenced alternative ecological rationalities. Nyishi literature, both oral and written, resists this erasure through storytelling that asserts memory as sovereignty. In every chant, myth, and ritual, the community reclaims its authority to define the meaning of land, spirit, and survival.

At the same time, the Nyishi worldview is not static. It negotiates modernity through dynamic adaptation. In the post-Independence period, state-driven development and missionary education introduced new languages and media. Yet the underlying ecological ethics of the Nyishi persisted, reshaping themselves in response to modern pressures. This resilience invites an *environmental-humanities* reading that recognises culture not as a fixed archive but as an evolving ecosystem. As Vandana Shiva argues, “Living cultures are those that retain the capacity to renew their relationship with the Earth” (Shiva 45). The Nyishi exemplify precisely such living continuity, their oral traditions functioning as both ecological pedagogy and political assertion.

In approaching Nyishi literature through ecocriticism, the present study does not aim to romanticise indigeneity or reduce it to environmental activism. Instead, it seeks to interpret indigenous storytelling as theory in its own right—a mode of ecological reasoning that destabilises Western binaries between nature and culture, human and nonhuman, modern and primitive. The Nyishi case underscores that sustainability cannot be legislated solely through policy; it must be imagined, narrated, and enacted within cultural frameworks that privilege reciprocity over domination.

Thus, the central argument of this paper is twofold: first, that Nyishi oral literature embodies a philosophy of ecological relationality grounded in indigenous epistemology; and second, that this relationality offers crucial insights into global discourses of environmental humanities and the Anthropocene. The following sections develop these arguments through theoretical contextualisation, textual analysis, and comparative reflection.

#### **Theoretical Framework: Environmental Humanities and the Pluriversal Turn**

Ecocriticism, in its classical formulation, emerged from Western traditions of nature writing, epitomised by the works of Thoreau, Emerson, and Muir. However, as Greg Garrard notes, “its second wave extended its scope to include postcolonial, feminist, and urban perspectives” (Garrard 6). This pluralisation gave rise to the *Environmental Humanities*, a field that challenges disciplinary boundaries by integrating literature, anthropology, history, and philosophy. At its heart lies a critique of anthropocentrism—the belief that humanity occupies the apex of creation—and a call for recognising the agency of nonhuman entities. For indigenous cultures like the Nyishi, such agency has always been axiomatic.

Arturo Escobar’s notion of the *pluriverse*—“a world where many worlds fit”—offers a decolonial framework for understanding this epistemic multiplicity (Escobar 63). In contrast to the singular ontology of modernity, which posits a universal reality governed by human rationality, the pluriverse recognises multiple coexisting worlds, each with its own relational logic. Nyishi cosmology exemplifies this worldview: humans, animals, spirits, and natural elements form an interconnected web of existence. Rituals such as *Nyokum Yullo*, celebrating the goddess of fertility and harvest, reaffirm this interdependence by invoking the participation of all beings in the cycle of renewal.

Timothy Morton’s *The Ecological Thought* further illuminates this relational ontology. Morton proposes that ecology is not merely the study of environment but “a mode of thought that situates all beings within a mesh of interconnection” (Morton 28). The Nyishi oral imagination operates precisely within such a mesh. Its myths do not isolate humans from nature; rather, they locate human existence within an ever-expanding network of reciprocity. Similarly, Bruno Latour’s concept of the “parliament of things” (Latour 80) resonates with the Nyishi practice of treating rivers and forests as subjects of negotiation. When a tree is cut or a river diverted, ritual offerings are made to seek forgiveness—a gesture that acknowledges the nonhuman as a moral interlocutor.

Postcolonial ecocriticism complicates these ideas by emphasising the historical inequities embedded in global environmental discourse. Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier have argued that “environmentalism in the Global South is primarily a movement of livelihood and justice rather than wilderness preservation” (Guha and Martinez-Alier 18). This perspective aligns with the Nyishi understanding of ecology as both sustenance and sanctity. Their environmental ethic does not arise from aesthetic appreciation but from a moral economy of survival. The forest is simultaneously pantry, pharmacy, and temple.

Furthermore, the environmental humanities encourage an expanded temporality—one that moves beyond the linear narratives of progress to embrace cyclical, relational time. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *The Climate of History* argues that the Anthropocene collapses distinctions between natural and human history, demanding a rethinking of agency and temporality (Chakrabarty 212). Nyishi cosmology, with its seasonal rituals and generational myths, already operates within such cyclical temporality. Each agricultural season is accompanied by narrative renewal, ensuring that environmental awareness is embedded in cultural rhythm rather than external regulation.

Finally, feminist ecocriticism provides an indispensable dimension to this theoretical matrix. Val Plumwood’s *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* critiques the patriarchal foundations of Western rationality that equate nature with passivity and femininity (Plumwood 42). Nyishi traditions, by contrast, celebrate female divinities as embodiments of fertility, wisdom, and ecological balance. This gendered ecology destabilises dualistic hierarchies, revealing how environmental justice is inseparable from gender justice. Together, these theoretical frameworks enable a reading of Nyishi literature that situates indigenous ecology within global debates on ethics, sustainability, and posthuman coexistence.

#### **Nyishi Cosmology and Oral Literature: Ecology as Living Memory**

Nyishi cosmology is a living narrative system that encodes the community’s ecological knowledge, social ethics, and spiritual philosophy. Its most enduring mythic corpus revolves around *Abotani*, the archetypal ancestor from whom all human and nonhuman beings descend. The *Abotani* cycle narrates the creation of agriculture, the domestication of animals, and the origins of social order. Yet these stories are far from mere etiological myths—they are ecological treatises transmitted through performance and ritual. Each retelling adapts to local environmental changes, ensuring that the cosmology remains contemporaneous with the landscape it describes.

In Nyishi oral performance, words are not inert signs but active forces. The chant *Rikham Pada*, for instance, is performed to invoke the river deities who govern fertility and rainfall. The recitation is not symbolic but performative—it enacts the very balance it seeks to sustain. As Roger Blench observes, the ritual language of Arunachal tribes often encodes ecological data: “bird calls, plant names, and weather patterns form integral components of oral narrative” (Blench 14). Thus, the Nyishi chant operates as both poetry and ecological monitoring.

The oral imagination also structures social ethics. The moral lessons embedded in mythic tales reinforce community values of cooperation, restraint, and reverence for life. For example, the tale of *Tani and the River Spirit* teaches that greed disrupts the cosmic equilibrium and invites natural retribution. Such stories perform a pedagogical function analogous to Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic,” which extends moral concern to soils, waters, and species (Leopold 203). Within Nyishi cosmology, this extension is not metaphorical—it is ontological. The moral law applies equally to humans and nonhumans because all share a common origin.

Gendered ecology plays a subtle yet crucial role in this oral corpus. Women, though often excluded from priestly roles, act as primary transmitters of oral knowledge through lullabies, laments, and work songs. These forms, while domestic in context, preserve vital ecological memory. Lullabies often refer to the timing of rains, the sprouting of specific plants, or the migration of birds—knowledge essential for agricultural planning. Vandana Shiva describes such practices as “informal environmentalism,” wherein women sustain biodiversity through everyday

observation (Shiva 48). By embedding ecological wisdom within maternal care, Nyishi women enact an ecofeminist praxis that blurs the boundary between household and habitat.

The shift from orality to literacy among the Nyishi has introduced new narrative forms without eroding traditional cosmology. Contemporary writers like Tadar Namcha and Nabam Tata document ancestral stories in bilingual texts that mix ethnography with creative prose. In *Orality and Identity*, Namcha foregrounds the communal voice as the locus of identity, asserting that “memory is the archive of the people” (Namcha 37). His choice to retain untranslated Nyishi terms resists linguistic domestication and asserts epistemic autonomy. This act recalls Spivak’s insistence that translation often performs the violence of assimilation (Spivak 287). By preserving linguistic heterogeneity, Nyishi authors ensure that ecological knowledge remains rooted in indigenous epistemology.

Modern performance media—community theatre, radio, and digital storytelling—have further revitalised oral literature. Festivals such as *Nyokum Yullo* feature dramatised recitations of mythic episodes, transforming ritual into public pedagogy. These adaptations echo Homi Bhabha’s concept of “cultural hybridity,” where tradition becomes a site of negotiation rather than nostalgia (Bhabha 113). Through such performances, the Nyishi articulate ecological ethics to new generations while engaging with modernity on their own terms. The result is a living archive of ecological imagination—one that thrives not despite modernity but through creative engagement with it.

#### **Indigenous Environmental Ethics: Ecology as Moral Practice**

At the heart of Nyishi environmental thought lies an ethics of reciprocity—a recognition that existence is sustained through mutual obligation among all forms of life. This ethical framework manifests in ritual practice, social organisation, and everyday conduct. Festivals such as *Nyokum Yullo* or *Longte Yullo* reaffirm the community’s covenant with nature. Before clearing land for cultivation, elders perform rituals seeking permission from the earth spirit. The act of cultivation is thus not an assertion of ownership but an appeal for partnership. As Vandana Shiva observes, such rituals embody “Earth democracy,” a worldview in which “all beings have intrinsic worth and the right to exist” (Shiva 40).

This ecological ethics contrasts sharply with the extractivist logic of both colonial and postcolonial development. Whereas the state views forests as timber and rivers as hydroelectric potential, the Nyishi see them as kin. When development projects threaten ancestral lands, the community responds not merely with political protest but with ritual mourning. Rivers are sung to as dying relatives; mountains are addressed as violated elders. These symbolic gestures function as acts of what Rob Nixon calls “slow resistance”—forms of protest that operate through memory, performance, and emotion rather than immediate confrontation (Nixon 23).

The ethical dimension of Nyishi ecology also extends to social justice. The distribution of resources is governed by customary law, which discourages hoarding and promotes collective welfare. Hunters share their catch with the entire village; agricultural surplus is redistributed during festivals. Such practices reflect an ecological economics based on balance rather than profit. Ashish Kothari and Ariel Salleh describe this as “the commons of sustainability,” where ecological and social equity are intertwined (Kothari and Salleh 84). The Nyishi model exemplifies this integration, demonstrating how ethics, economy, and ecology form a seamless whole.

Gender plays a decisive role in sustaining this moral ecology. Women’s work in seed preservation and herbal medicine ensures biodiversity at the household level. Yet their contributions remain underacknowledged in formal discourse. Ecofeminism provides a lens for recognising this gendered labour as epistemic agency. As Val Plumwood argues, “to reclaim the feminine is to reclaim nature from its instrumentalisation” (Plumwood 47). Nyishi women, through their embodied practices, perform this reclamation daily—selecting seeds not for yield alone but for ecological harmony, combining intuition with empirical knowledge passed across generations.

Importantly, Nyishi environmental ethics is not an abstract moral code but a performative practice embedded in ritual life. Each festival re-enacts the cosmic covenant between humans and the natural world. Sacrificial offerings, songs, and dances are not remnants of superstition but symbolic negotiations that renew social and ecological order. This performativity parallels what Buell terms “ethical intentionality”—the capacity of cultural forms to shape environmental conscience (Buell 8). By participating in ritual, individuals internalise the ethos of reciprocity that governs community life.

### **The Anthropocene and Indigenous Temporalities**

The Anthropocene—this geological age in which human activity has become the dominant planetary force—has compelled the humanities to rethink concepts of time, agency, and responsibility. Yet as Dipesh Chakrabarty insists, “the Anthropocene is also a moment of recognition that the human is not a singular actor but an assemblage within the Earth system” (Chakrabarty 219). Indigenous temporalities such as those of the Nyishi had already anticipated this relational view of history. Where the modern world imagines time as linear and progressive, the Nyishi conceive it as cyclical and regenerative—a rhythm of growth, decay, and renewal mirrored in agricultural and cosmic cycles. Their festivals are not commemorations of a distant past but reenactments of cosmic balance, each ritual “turning the wheel of the year” so that life continues in equilibrium.

This temporal philosophy offers a critical counterpoint to the Anthropocene’s teleology of progress and catastrophe. In Nyishi mythic time, no event is final; every loss demands restitution through ritual and memory. The story of *Abotani’s Error*, for instance, narrates how human hubris led to the withholding of rain by the sky spirits until communal repentance restored balance. This myth encodes a proto-ecological understanding of climate feedback and ethical responsibility. Unlike modern climate discourse, which locates agency in technological correction, the Nyishi model locates it in ritual and moral conduct. To exploit nature without remorse is to violate time itself.

Timothy Clark’s idea of “scale framing” in *Ecocriticism on the Edge* helps explain the relevance of this temporal elasticity. Clark argues that the Anthropocene forces humans to think simultaneously across multiple scales—from the local to the planetary (Clark 22). Nyishi rituals already practice this multi-scalar thinking: the offering of a grain of rice to the field deity symbolises the reciprocity between household and universe. Each gesture echoes across scales, linking daily labour to cosmic order. Thus, indigenous temporality is not pre-modern but hyper-modern—a form of deep time ethics that modern science is only beginning to comprehend.

The Anthropocene also demands a rethinking of history as entanglement rather than succession. In Nyishi oral memory, human history is inseparable from the lives of animals, plants, and spirits. A flood narrative is both geological and moral; a forest fire is both ecological and cosmic. This holistic temporality anticipates what Timothy Morton calls “the mesh”—the interpenetration of all things (Morton 15). When Morton asks us to “think the end of the world as we know it,” Nyishi myth already offers a language for that re-thinking; a world without hierarchies between human and nonhuman, past and future, sacred and mundane.

### **Ecofeminism and Gendered Ecology in Nyishi Society**

The role of women in Nyishi culture reveals how environmental ethics is deeply gendered. Although ritual leadership traditionally belongs to male priests (*nyubu*), the ecological continuity of the community depends on women’s labour and knowledge. They select seeds, control domestic water use, collect wild edibles, and maintain the ethnobotanical repertoire that ensures biodiversity. Such activities constitute what Shiva calls “subsistence production based on renewal and recycling” (Shiva 53). By engaging directly with soil, seeds, and seasons, Nyishi women exercise what eco-feminist philosophers term *embodied knowledge*—a mode of understanding that unites care with practice.

Val Plumwood's critique of dualism in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* is especially pertinent here. Western rationality, she argues, has constructed a hierarchy that associates men with reason and culture, and women with emotion and nature (Plumwood 41). The Nyishi worldview subverts this binary. Female deities such as *Nyokum* and *Donyi Polo* embody both creation and discipline. The female principle is neither subservient nor passive but co-creative and judicial. Ritual songs sung by women during harvest and mourning perform an ecological double work: they mourn the dead and invoke fertility for the living, binding grief and growth into a single temporal loop.

Ecofeminism in the Nyishi context is therefore not a borrowed Western discourse but a lived ontology. When women sing to seeds before sowing, they are not metaphorising nature; they are communicating with it. These acts challenge the Cartesian split between mind and matter. Moreover, women elders often mediate conflicts over land and water, using narrative memory as legal precedent. Their authority rests not on written law but on what Chandra Talpade Mohanty calls "the moral authority of experience" (Mohanty 58). Through story and ritual, women thus become custodians of ecological justice.

The arrival of modern education and religion has altered gender roles, sometimes reducing women's visibility in public rituals. Yet digital media and community movements are reviving female voices. Nyishi women's collectives now document plant knowledge and folk songs, sharing them through YouTube archives and local radio. This fusion of tradition and technology embodies what Ursula Heise calls "eco-cosmopolitanism," where local practices speak to global audiences (Heise 17). The gendered ecology of the Nyishi thus offers a model of sustainable feminine agency rooted in place yet open to planetary solidarity.

#### **Comparative Indigenous Resonances**

Situating Nyishi literature within a global indigenous framework reveals striking resonances across continents. Among the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand, the concept of *whakapapa* (genealogical interconnection) resembles the Nyishi belief in ancestral continuity between humans and land. Both traditions construct ecology as kinship rather than ownership. Similarly, the Navajo principle of *hózhó*—beauty, balance, and harmony—echoes the Nyishi ethic of reciprocity. In each case, cosmology functions as environmental ethics. These parallels underscore what Arturo Escobar describes as "the pluriversal politics of being"—a planetary conversation among different worlds that refuse assimilation (Escobar 69).

Comparative reading also reveals differences that enrich ecocritical debate. While Māori literature has achieved national visibility through writers like Witi Ihimaera, Nyishi voices are only beginning to enter print. The process of translation raises ethical questions about representation and authenticity. As Spivak warns, "translation is not innocent; it is the most intimate act of violence" (Spivak 289). To translate Nyishi ecology into English is to risk flattening its spiritual topography. Hence, bilingual writers like Namcha retain indigenous lexicon as a strategy of resistance, inviting readers into linguistic hospitality rather than domestication.

Beyond linguistic concerns, the politics of ecological representation varies across contexts. Native American and Aboriginal Australian ecologies often respond to settler-colonial extraction, whereas Nyishi ecology responds to postcolonial developmentalism. In both, however, storytelling functions as environmental activism. Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" describes the gradual ecological harm invisible to mainstream media (Nixon 12). Indigenous narratives make this violence visible by transforming environmental loss into cultural mourning. The lament for a dead river in a Nyishi chant is no different in spirit from the Aboriginal "song for country" after a mine devastates sacred ground. Both are acts of re-enchantment, restoring the moral dimension of environmental discourse.

Such comparative frameworks also illuminate the global ethics of the environmental humanities. As Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue, postcolonial ecocriticism must "embrace diversity without re-universalising itself" (Huggan and Tiffin 9). To read the Nyishi alongside the Māori or the Navajo is not to assimilate them into a homogeneous indigeneity but to reveal a network of

distinct yet complementary worldviews. These voices form a chorus within the global pluriverse—a chorus that challenges the monologue of modernity.

### **Counter-Modernity and Digital Indigeneity**

The Nyishi encounter with modernity is neither a story of loss nor of assimilation but one of strategic hybridity. Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space" explains how colonial subjects create new identities through the translation and transformation of dominant forms (Bhabha 117). Nyishi youth have extended this logic into the digital age. Through community radio, Facebook pages, and mobile recordings of chants, they perform what Escobar calls "designs for the pluriverse"—the use of modern tools to sustain non-modern worlds (Escobar 58). The recording of ritual songs is not a museum act but a gesture of continuity. Technology becomes a medium of re-oralisation.

Educational spaces too reflect this counter-modernity. Former *morung* houses—once training grounds for youth—are being revived as eco-cultural centres where elders teach storytelling alongside climate awareness. Such initiatives redefine "development" as cultural capacity building. The Nyishi Curriculum Collective, a grass-roots project led by local teachers, introduces folk ecology into school syllabi through bilingual story modules. This integration of oral knowledge with formal education enacts what Buell terms "environmental literacy"—the ability to read nature as text (Buell 12).

Political resistance also takes new forms. When hydroelectric projects threaten ancestral rivers, activists combine ritual with advocacy: performing river chants at protest sites or submitting video petitions that blend myth with data. This fusion of cosmology and citizenship constitutes a distinct mode of environmental humanities in practice—a literature of action that translates mythic ethics into political agency. It proves that modernity need not erase the indigenous; it can be indigenised in turn.

### **Conclusion: Toward a Pluriversal Environmental Humanities**

The Nyishi literary and oral imagination demonstrates that ecology is not merely a scientific discipline but a cultural mode of knowing. Through story, ritual, and song, the community articulates a moral philosophy that redefines sustainability as relationship rather than resource. Their cosmology offers a critical response to the Anthropocene's anthropocentrism by proposing a world of co-agency and mutual care. If modern ecocriticism has moved from "green reading" to "planetary ethics," the Nyishi tradition extends that movement into a spiritual ecology where being itself is relational.

The environmental humanities must therefore recognise indigenous literatures not as peripheral ethnography but as theory in practice. Nyishi cosmology embodies Buell's notion of "ethical intentionality," Garrard's emphasis on place-based understanding, and Morton's dissolution of the human-nature divide—all realised through oral performance and lived practice. Their ecological imagination is at once local and planetary, ancient and modern, spiritual and pragmatic. It teaches that climate justice begins with epistemic justice: to restore the Earth, we must first listen to those who have never stopped conversing with it.

In the end, the Nyishi worldview gestures toward what Arturo Escobar calls the *pluriverse*: a world of many coexisting worlds, each sustaining the other through difference. Within this vision, environmental renewal and cultural survival are two names for the same act of remembrance. As the chants of *Rikham Pada* resound across valleys and rivers, they remind us that storytelling remains humanity's most enduring form of ecological care—a conversation with the more-than-human that keeps the world alive.

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**EXPLORATION OF ADIVASI ECOLOGIES IN *THE BURNING FOREST*: TESTIMONY,  
TRAUMA, AND SILENCED HISTORIES**

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**Abstract**

*The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar* by Nandini Sundar (2016) is replete with ethical archiving as well as political anthropology. This intellectual enquiry will explore several testimonies from Adivasi men, women, and children caught in the crossfire of insurgent violence, mining, and counter-insurgency in central India to vindicate the voices which are frequently muffled by the government, Maoist rebels, and the mainstream media. By considering Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies* (2014) this study will hinge upon the accounts of the survivors of Salwa Judum, to showcase a collective story of resistance and survival emanating from environmental injustice. This paper will highlight the calibrated technique of Sundar to pinpoint voices from below: tidbits of oral history that rewrite history from the viewpoint of the oppressed to frame the Adivasi temporalities which are being recentered to provincialize history (Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 2000). The objective of the paper will be to present *The Burning Forest* as a counter-archive of suffering and testimony—a piece that both elevates Adivasi voices and exposes the systemic factors that have silenced them. Instead of being organic spaces, this paper will explore, these silences are the result of multiple structures embedded in the narration of state violence, nationalist narratives etc. This paper will demonstrate how testimony challenges this monitoring regime and how official discourse controls Adivasi life (Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 2008). In essence, the moot argument of the paper will be to offer a framework for understanding how Sundar transforms the realities of the silent Adivasi people into literary accounts of environmental injustice (Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011).

**Keywords:** Ecology, Testimony, Trauma, Temporality, Biopolitics, Environmental Injustice

**Introduction**

*The Burning Forest: India's War in Bastar* (2016), a seminal ethnographic work by Nandini Sundar, details the ecological destruction that frames Adivasi misery in addition to the human cost of counterinsurgency in Bastar, Chhattisgarh. The narrative turns into a political anthropological study that examines the relationship between state authority, insurrection, and extraction as well as an ethical archive—a storehouse of suppressed testimonies. Sundar documents the lived realities of Adivasi men, women, and children whose bodies, rivers, forests, and land which are turned into militarized battlegrounds through in-depth interviews, affidavits, and field observations. In her work, Bastar is more than just a place; it is an ecological world where Adivasi existence is shaped by rivers, woods, spirits, and family networks. However, the Indian state's counterinsurgency efforts, mining interests, and developmentalist ideologies have methodically destroyed these ecologies. Therefore, examining Adivasi ecologies through Sundar's painstaking recording necessitates paying attention to both the larger epistemic systems that erase Adivasi interactions with the land and the violence that permeates daily life. An ecological critique that goes beyond environmentalism and toward what Arundhati Roy refers to as 'the infinite war of the powerful against the small, the local, the immeasurable' (*Walking with the Comrades*, 2011, p. 39) is rendered visible here by the intersection of testimony, trauma, and repressed histories. The testimonies that Sundar gathers do what Roy refers to as 'speaking into the silence'—voicing ecological facts that disturb the imaginations of nationalists, developmentalists, and militarists.

### **Ethnographic Rendition of Testimonies**

Sundar documents statements from Matwada, Kotrapal, and Kandar villagers in Chapter 3 (“The War Begins”), describing how they were forced to choose between joining the militia and escaping into the jungle due to Salwa Judum camps. One villager, for example, reminisces: “They came at night, burned our homes, and said if we didn’t come to the camp, they would say we were Maoists” (*The Burning Forest*, p. 77). Here, Sundar records a pattern of state-led coercion and dispossession rather than just an occurrence. A villager from Kotrapal also gives testimony by pointing out the fact: “The police came with the Judum people. They burned our houses and cut our grain. They said the forest belonged to the sarkar now” (p. 82). Sundar establishes a counter-archive that opposes governmental erasure by documenting such testimonies—names, dates, and physical coordinates. Children from the Dornapal camp explain how they lost access to the forest, which had previously provided them with identity, safety, and food. “We cannot go to the forest to gather anything. They say there are Maoists. But without the forest, how will we live?” (p. 93), one child recounted. In this case, ethical archiving turns into environmental archiving, recording the ways in which conflict separates communities from their environment.

The Maoists also control the mechanism to access to forests, sometimes prohibiting villages from collaborating with the Forest Department or participating in government development initiatives. A widow confided to the author: “They said the forest is theirs. We must not help the government cut trees. But we only wanted to collect firewood” (p. 176). Adivasis are particularly vulnerable since both the state and the insurgency view the forest as strategic terrain. Sundar painstakingly records the connection between political violence and environmental deterioration. Sundar describes in Chapter 6 how thousands of villagers in Lohandiguda and Dantewada were in danger of being uprooted by the projects of Tata Steel and Essar Steel. “If the company takes our hills and fields, where will our cattle graze? Where will we perform our festivals? These lands are our gods” (p. 150), the apprehension of the villagers came out bluntly. This testimony demonstrates both the cultural cruelty of extractive development and the profound ecological belonging that is essential to Adivasi cosmology. Sundar records several instances in which security personnel purposefully make a bonfire of woods to drive away Maoists and destroy forest cover. The recounting of a villager from Gangaloor makes it evident: “They burned the *sal* trees and bamboo so the Maoists could not hide. But our mahua trees also died” (p. 211). Destroying mahua, which is essential to Adivasi food, ceremony, and subsistence, is an act of environmental warfare. Sundar consistently demonstrates that environmental degradation is existential rather than just economic for Adivasis. A mother from Bijapur bemoans in Chapter 9: “Our gods live in these hills and streams. When the police blow them up, where will our gods go?” (p. 189). A cosmological aspect of environmental injustice is shown by this testimony: nature is a living record of ancestral existence.

Adivasis are sometimes accused of becoming ‘collateral citizens,’ or people whose lives are irrelevant in national security narratives. Cases of fictitious encounters, such as the murder of Madkam Hidme (2016), are painstakingly documented in Chapter 11. While some of Sundar’s fieldwork predates the case of Hidme, she records similar cases like: “The police said they killed eight Naxalites. But we identified our mothers and brothers among the dead. They had no guns” (p. 212). The narrative is an ethical repository that refutes official state fabrications because of the forensic detail in this testimony. Adivasis are not portrayed by Sundar as helpless victims. Sundar records the villagers’ appeal contesting the atrocities committed by Salwa Judum (Chapter 12). One Adivasi petitioner states: “We walked for two days to reach the court’s representative. Nobody listens to us here” (p. 263). She presents Adivasi groups as political actors claiming constitutional rights by documenting the court battle. She features accounts from locals who, despite militarization, repair homes, return to burnt villages, or carry on farming. A village woman Nendra posits the argument: “This is our land. Where else will we go? If they burn it ten times, we will build it eleven times” (p.233). Testimonies from youngsters who saw both physical and ecological brutality are included in the narratives of Sundar. An adolescent girl from Tadmetla tells

the story: “They burned our fields. We had no rice that year. We lived on tamarind leaves” (p. 120). This is a tale of famine brought on by environmental degradation as well as war. Sundar’s ethnography sheds light on how a conflict fought for national security and development results in the loss of land, forests, water, and memories. She provides political and moral acknowledgement to those rendered invisible—Adivasi men, women, and children ensnared in an extractive, militaristic ecology—by recording these silenced voices.

### **Caste, Voice, and the Politics of Recognition**

Anupama Rao argues in *The Caste Question* (2009) that to vindicate subaltern suffering—particularly that of Dalits and Adivasis—to be understandable to the contemporary state, it must be transformed into liberal frameworks of rights. She contends that this translation has two drawbacks: it neutralizes its radical critique while also making suffering understandable. Rao refers to this as the ‘politics of recognition,’ in which the subaltern subject is only made apparent by evidence, rights-bearing citizenship, and state-approved grammars of violation. She expresses a deep strain when Rao says that: “subaltern injury becomes recognizable only when refracted through the liberal lexicon of rights” (Rao, 8), recognition is also domestication. *The Burning Forest* (2016) by Nandini Sundar, where Adivasi testimony against state violence in Bastar is frequently pushed into legalistic modes of visibility that foreclose the political significance of their pain, is illuminated by this analytical lens. The violence of Salwa Judum, state militarization, and counterinsurgency in Chhattisgarh are all painstakingly documented. Beyond evidence, however, the narrative reveals how Adivasi pain is reconfigured into an administratively manageable grievance through the grammar of recognition—court cases, affidavits, human rights reports. This is in line with Rao’s caution that the “subaltern voice is made audible only when it conforms to the liberal state’s authorized structures of intelligibility” (Rao, 42). This liberal framework—FIRs, commissions of inquiry, PILs, and fundamental rights—is the law in Bastar. The Adivasi critique of the Indian state, which is rooted in militarization, dispossession, and a profoundly colonial experience of government, is essentially reduced to allegations of personal harm, wrongful imprisonment, or recompense.

Sundar emphasizes this translation over and time again. Villagers tell a collective and political story about the hundreds of homes that were set on fire in 2005–06: “They burnt our entire village... we ran into the forest and lived like animals for months” (p. 14). However, Sundar points out that the story had to be “broken down into discrete incidents that could be supported by affidavits and medical records” to present this to the Supreme Court (p. 159). The evidentiary constraints of the legal procedure obscure the radical criticism that the state was fighting its own indigenous populations. The court solely considers whether the burning of homes violated Article 21, notwithstanding the villagers’ claim that this is a systemic indictment of settler colonialism. These fits neatly inside Rao’s argument that recognition operates through. Only domesticated testimony is accepted. Adivasi communities in Bastar express their suffering as collectivities defending land, autonomy, and historical self-rule rather than just as rights-bearing individuals. “This forest is our mother, and the government has no right here,” a village elder declares in a startling occurrence that Sundar documents (p. 61). This is a sovereignty claim, not a liberal one. However, the politics of recognition compels such testimony to be recast in terms that the law recognizes, such as rights, violations, compensation, and the abuse of SPOs. Legally speaking, the peasants’ quest for self-determination is reduced to ‘aberrations’ or ‘excesses’ of counterinsurgency. Sundar’s examination of whose testimony qualifies as ‘credible’ is further illuminated by Rao’s observations regarding caste and voice. According to Rao, “the testimony of lower-caste subjects is marked by an a priori suspicion” (p. 103), which highlights the historical delegitimization of the subaltern’s voice. The similar dynamic is recorded in Bastar by Sundar. When Adivasi villages report rapes, murders, or arbitrary detentions, the police write them off as ‘illiterate tribals,’ ‘Maoists,’ or ‘misled villagers.’ According to Sundar, “the administration simply refused to acknowledge Adivasi accounts unless they came through a lawyer or an NGO” (p. 178).

This is akin to Rao's claim that elite intermediaries whose voice the state recognizes are necessary for subaltern discourse to be understandable.

This conflict is embodied in the 2011 Supreme Court ruling in *Nandini Sundar & Ors. vs. State of Chhattisgarh*, a seminal ruling that ruled Salwa Judum unlawful. The petition needs to be presented "not as a critique of state sovereignty but as a question of constitutionality and public safety," according to Sundar (p. 216). Rao would contend that this is the exact way rights discourse domesticates subaltern politics: it reframes the problem as a failure of adequate governance and filters out the radical criticism of the state as a violent, extractive formation. The court's ruling denounces the lawlessness of Salwa Judum but ignores the colonialism of forest governance, the mining industry, and the systemic logic of counterinsurgency. Subaltern pain is "recognized but not transformed," according to Rao (Rao, 72). The legal triumph upholds the state's sovereign authority, which the peasants' testimony challenge, while acknowledging harm. The systematic dehumanization evoked by this rhetoric goes beyond liberal legality. However, recognized frameworks necessitate measurement of the number of casualties, displaced families, and destroyed dwellings. Rao would see this as the conversion of collective, historical, embodied pain into quantifiable, empirically supported harms. The eradication of autonomy, ecological life-worlds, and ceremonial ties to the land are examples of infrastructure violence that goes unacknowledged. Sundar's portrayal of Adivasi bodies marred by state cruelty is consistent with Rao's theory of caste violence as "the corporeal register of political life" (Rao, 145). The inscription of structural domination is seen on bodies in both situations. However, these bodies only express themselves through harm, not through political agency, within liberal frameworks. A harsh critique of governmental terror is evoked by Sundar's recurrent portrayals of burned homes, severed limbs, and decaying bodies. However, she notes that "the state only responded when activists translated these wounds into legal cases" (p. 179). Only when violence is mediated through channels that, ironically, safeguard the identical governmental machinery that generated it.

Anand Teltumbde contends in *The Persistence of Caste* (2010) that the caste-class-capital nexus—a system in which caste hierarchy, capitalist accumulation, and state aggression maintain one another—is responsible for the reproduction of modern India's patterns of inequality. According to Teltumbde, caste becomes a technology of dominance that mediates access to land, labor, and political power rather than transcending caste. Most importantly, he argues that the state and elite civil society depoliticize Dalit and Adivasi struggles by transforming structural oppression into stories about humanitarianism, security, or prosperity. According to Teltumbde, caste still designates some groups as disposable, open to exploitation by the market and the government. Sundar records exactly this reasoning in Bastar. In a conflict fought purportedly against Maoists but to clear territory for road networks, mining, and security camps, Adivasi lives are viewed as collateral. According to Sundar "Villagers spoke of being chased from their homes as if they were animals to be driven out" (p. 14). Teltumbde's comment that caste turns humans into "objects for extraction, to be moved, disciplined, or eliminated" (Teltumbde, 52) is echoed by this language of animalization. Teltumbde does not hold back when demonstrating how elite civil society frequently supports corporate and state goals, whether consciously or unconsciously. While disregarding the deliberate burning of towns, media outlets quickly replicated state tales of "successful operations." "The stories Adivasis told us never appeared in the national media, which preferred government handouts" (Sundar, 132), Sundar observes, highlighting the terrifying disparity. This supports Teltumbde's claim that by normalizing state narratives and silencing subaltern voices, mainstream civil society upholds caste-capital hegemony. The propagation of misinformation regarding Bastar is not coincidental; rather, it is a component of the discursive violence that caste, class, and capital use to maintain legitimacy.

### **The Intersections of Gender and Ecology**

The significance of 'testimonios'—narratives that resist erasure and contest prevailing historical and political discourses—is emphasized in Sharmila Rege's *Writing Caste/Writing*

*Gender* (2014). According to Rege, the testimonies of marginalized women are collective narratives influenced by common experiences of caste discrimination, state brutality, and gendered vulnerability rather than merely being personal. The survivor accounts of Adivasi men, women, and children in Chhattisgarh can be interpreted as a type of Dalit–Adivasi testimony when Rege’s framework is compared with Nandini Sundar’s *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar* (2016). This corpus of counter-histories opposes the state’s militarized “development” narrative. This testimony addresses environmental injustice in the context of Bastar, including the devastation of the woods, rivers, land, crops, and natural worlds that support Adivasi life, in addition to physical assault. According to Rege, the testimonials of Dalit women are voices for a community that is being attacked rather than, strictly speaking, individual stories: “The narrator speaks not for herself alone but on behalf of a collective history of suffering and resistance” (Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender*, p. 12). This realization aids in deciphering Sundar’s approach in *The Burning Forest*, which gathers numerous oral testimonies from Adivasi villages regarding environmental loss, displacement, and atrocities committed by Salwa Judum. Sundar is informed by a Kotrapal survivor: “They burned our houses and the forest. Where could we run? All of us lost everything that day” (p. 82). This is a part of a common trauma that is repeated across Bastar rather than an isolated incident. According to Rege, it turns into a communal accusation of institutional violence, or a testimonio.

Sharmila Rege contends that the stories of underprivileged women, whether Adivasi or Dalit, should be viewed as testimonies—collective, embodied, and political acts of remembering that subvert prevailing historiographies. Such testimony, according to Rege, go beyond personal autobiography and instead expose institutional violence at the nexus of gender, caste, labor, ecology, and state authority. A survivor from Nendra intimates the author: “They beat us and dragged the women by their hair... They said they would teach us a lesson for helping Maoists” (p. 117). The voices of Adivasi women who endured Salwa Judum constitute a multi-layered kind of gendered testimony, according to an analysis of Nandini Sundar’s narrative. In addition to physical abuse, these women discuss ecological degradation, environmental dispossession, and attacks on social systems that disproportionately affect women. Rege’s criterion for political, collective narrative that reveals the mechanisms of caste-state violence in daily life are attested by their testimonials. According to Rege’s paradigm, this kind of assault is interpreted as caste-tribal patriarchal disciplining—the state taking control of the bodies of Adivasi women, reflecting long-standing caste-colonial dominance. Rege contends that the nature and effects of caste and state violence are gendered. Women bear with sexual intimidation, exploitation, authority over movement, increased resource shortage and famine, and excessive ecological costs. According to Rege, the testimony of marginalized women must be placed within mechanisms of survival, such as labor, food, land, and ecological rights. In Bastar: Women trek farther in search of firewood after trees are destroyed; Women bring children, grain, and utensils when settlements are vacated; Mothers deal with shortage and hunger when crops are damaged; Women lose their livelihoods and ritual places when land is threatened by mining. A Takraguda woman who has been uprooted informs the author: “We had to leave with only what we could carry... The forest is gone, the fields gone. How do we live?” (p. 150). Rege’s stipulation reframes this as a gendered story of ecological injustice, driven by Brahminical developmentalism that views women who live in forests as disposable, rather than as isolated suffering.

Rege maintains that alternative epistemologies—ways of perceiving history, territory, and community—are preserved through the stories of repressed women. Women in Bastar are knowledgeable about: revered groves, therapeutic plants, changing cycles of cultivation, sources of water, forest customs. Sundar records a Bijapur woman bemoaning: “Our gods live in these hills. When they blow up the hill for the road, where do our gods go?” (p. 189). This is highlighted by Rege’s lens as ecological cosmology—women expressing the epistemic and spiritual violence of state militarization. According to Rege, accounts of caste-gender violence invariably include resistance in addition to pain. Sundar documents females who: reconstruct houses that have been

destroyed by fire, return to forests despite military cautions, arrange community gatherings, submit petitions to the Supreme Court, and question the narratives of the police. A powerful statement from a woman from Nendra: “If they burn our village ten times, we will build it eleven” (p. 233). Rege turns this into a female-led eco-political declaration of survival that opposes both insurgent rule and state sovereignty. As a result, the gendered testimonies of Bastar’s women function as testimonio in Rege’s sense—voices that speak from the intersections of gender, ecology, dispossession, and survival and challenge the silences of official histories.

### **Provincializing Histories and Global Ecologies**

In *Provincializing Europe* (2000), Dipesh Chakrabarty offers a fundamental critique of modernist historiography, arguing that it is shaped by European conceptions of time, development, and politics. *The Burning Forest: India’s War in Bastar* offers a rich environment for analyzing Chakrabarty’s approach. Sundar chronicles the horrific elimination of Adivasi life-worlds, the Indian state’s protracted counterinsurgency in Bastar, and its militarized development initiatives. By doing this, her ethnographic approach subtly provincializes official historiographies that depict Bastar’s conflict as a fight between internal threat and national progress, civilization and primitivity, or development and insurgency. The pasts, temporalities, and political forms that Chakrabarty exhorts us to bring into the realm of history are exactly what Sundar recovers. The Indian state views Bastar as a place outside of modernity—primitive, wild, in need of development, and hence justifiably exposed to extraordinary violence—which is one of Sundar’s main criticisms. This is consistent with Chakrabarty’s assertion that contemporary political theory places non-Western communities in a temporality known as ‘anthropological time,’ which is purportedly prior to citizenship or political modernity. Adivasis are portrayed in official discourse, media narratives, and state documents as: existing in the past; not being politically rational; barriers to advancement; beneficiaries as opposed to historical agents. The militarization of Bastar is made easier by this temporal othering: Adivasi memories of land and forest stewardship are ignored, villages are viewed with suspicion, and traditional means of justice are rendered unintelligible. Chakrabarty argues: “Subaltern pasts... do not belong to the ‘homogeneous empty time’ of the modern state. They live in memories, rituals, and practices that resist being translated into the linear time of capital and citizenship” (*Provincializing Europe*, p. 109). Sundar creates just this kind of record, which is made up of testimony, tales, and ordinary acts of perseverance that go beyond the state’s logical classifications.

Counterinsurgency activities are referred to as “combing,” “cleaning,” or “routine patrolling” in state reports. Sundar uses unvarnished descriptions from the peasants to oppose this polished language. In one case, a female narrator describes:

The police came shouting ‘Naxali! Naxali!’ and we kept telling them we were only going to the fields. They hit my husband with the butt of the gun till he could not stand, and then they took him away. We went to the thana the next day, but they said there was no one of that name there. Where can we find him? (p. 107).

This excerpt reveals how persons are erased by the state’s bureaucratic processes while records are created. The police station, which is supposed to be a place of contemporary legal rationality, disputes the disappearance of the man. By emphasizing these perspectives, Sundar’s narrative approach restores agency to voices left out of the official archive while rejecting the erasure inherent in the state’s record-keeping. Another type of alternative archiving is Sundar’s reconstruction of displaced communities. She cites a Konta peasant who talks about spending months hidden in the forest:

We moved from tree to tree, sleeping on the ground. The children cried for food. When the rains came, our clothes rotted and we were always wet. We could not light fires because the SPOs would see the smoke. Sometimes we survived on leaves (p. 92).



In this instance, the act of surviving itself becomes a part of a dispossession archive. The teleology of development that the state imposes on Bastar cannot encompass these experiences. They are part of what Chakrabarty refers to as ‘time-knots’—temporalities where groups coexist outside of the nation’s progressive time in terror, memory, cosmology, and ecology. Ironically, the state’s rhetoric of development projects results in its opposite: a populace compelled to live in what Sundar refers to as ‘a life lived in the undergrowth’ (p. 93), a temporality outside of both capitalism and citizenship.

The concept of ‘global ecologies,’ as proposed by Dipesh Chakrabarty in *The Climate of History* (2009) and later works, challenges historians to reconsider politics and history in a time when people are now geological actors. According to Chakrabarty, ecological devastation and global warming undermine well-known divisions between human and non-human, local and global, history and nature, and necessitate an awareness of multiple life-worlds and planetary entanglements. Sundar documents the villagers’ accounts of burning ritual places and sacred sites. According to one account, village gods were destroyed during a Judum raid:

They smashed the wooden pillars, burnt the ghotul drums, and threw the idols into the fire. They said these things were symbols of Naxalism. But those gods have been with us for generations. When they burned them, it was like burning our ancestors (p. 78).

Sundar consistently demonstrates that forests are relational worlds rather than environment’. Sundar observes that the forest is referred to by the people as ‘our mother and our shelter’ (p. 38). A cosmology in which people, animals, spirits, land, and ancestors create a living continuum is documented in these succinct sentences. Even though global warming imposes a shared planetary situation, Chakrabarty’s emphasis that we acknowledge multiple and diverse ways of being human on the earth resonates with such an ontology. Chakrabarty contends in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021) that the Anthropocene is more than just the culmination of globalization. Deep human-environment entanglements and the lengthy history of life on Earth gave rise to this ontological state. Sundar explains in *The Burning Forest* how the Indian state views forests mainly from a global perspective, viewing them as capital resources, security locations, and areas to be integrated into national development. On the other hand, Adivasi groups live in the forest as a relational, non-human world that is much more akin to Chakrabarty’s concept of the planetary. ‘The forest keeps us alive’ (p. 56) a villager tells Sundar. The forest is life, memory, and cosmology, not just a background. Living examples of this kind of multiscale entanglements can be found in Sundar’s ethnography. Reciprocal links with non-human entities, such as woods, rivers, spirits, and animals, are frequently emphasized in Adivasi storytelling.

#### **Foucault, Biopolitics and Adivasi Life**

According to Michel Foucault’s *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), the modern state is governed by biopolitical control, in which governmental and discursive tools are used to manage, monitor, regulate, and normalize populations. In this way, ‘tribal,’ ‘backward,’ ‘Naxalite,’ ‘encroacher,’ and ‘beneficiary’ are only a few of the categories that biopolitics creates in addition to disciplining bodies. According to Foucault, ‘liberalism governs through the production of truth’ and ‘a permanent interrogation of populations,’ which makes these discursive techniques of monitoring essential to contemporary authority. One way to interpret *The Burning Forest* is as an ongoing interaction with such a monitoring system. Adivasi communities are portrayed by the Indian government as possible insurgents, Bastar is created as a place that needs ongoing security supervision, and official discourse—through reports, press releases, chargesheets, and PR campaigns—makes them governable by classifying everyday life into security categories. However, this biopolitical vision is disrupted and undermined by the text’s simultaneous emphasis on testimony—the voices of survivors, displaced people, women, and elders. Testimony appears as what Foucault would refer to as counter-conduct: actions that express alternative facts, memories, and ways of being in opposition to the state’s normalizing power. Sundar clearly depicts this



monitoring system. Narratives about who is a citizen, who is 'clean,' and who is suspicious are constantly created by the state and security services. She penned: "Every villager was recorded as either 'Naxal' or 'Naxal sympathizer.' Even children were listed in police registers as possible informants for the Maoists. A policeman in Dornapal told me, without irony: 'In these villages, no one is innocent'" (p. 121). The reducing of an entire population to a security danger is a classic biopolitical gesture, as demonstrated by this statement. Because the monitoring regime no longer makes a distinction between civil life and insurgency, it becomes totalizing. Liberal states standardize populations by transforming them into 'statistical objects,' according to Foucault. Sundar explains this reasoning in detail: "In police charts and columns, villages were assigned numerical threat levels—'white,' 'grey,' 'black.' These categories determined the amount of force to be used, the number of raids per month, and even the degree of permissible destruction" (p. 132). In this instance, Adivasi life can only be understood through a danger calculus, which is consistent with Foucault's assertion that liberal rationality makes population the target and instrument of government.

The Salwa Judum and police camps are technologies of captivity, according to Sundar: People brought into the camps were not free to leave. SPOs kept a constant watch, noting down who visited whom, who asked for passes, and who returned late from collecting firewood. Adivasis complained that life in the camps was like being kept in a permanent police station (p. 68).

This is consistent with Foucault's assertion that contemporary authority manages existence, transforming villages into 'governable spaces,' rather than only repressing. The camp is a biopolitical laboratory where people are rearranged, bodies are classified, and behaviors are observed. It is not just a place of security. Sundar shows how even charitable initiatives can be used as monitoring tools: "PDS cards, rations, and pensions were withheld from villages deemed 'Naxal-prone.' A CRPF officer told me, 'Development will be given only to those who cooperate with the state.' In effect, life itself—food, health, movement—became conditional on political compliance" (p. 156). Sundar emphasizes testimony—stories that defy the state's interpretive framework—in opposition to this regime of surveillance and official truth. Counter-conduct is the word used by Foucault to describe actions that oppose the forms of subjectivity imposed by power. In *The Burning Forest*, testimonies function as counter-conduct by stating facts that challenge official narratives. A villager reminisces: "We told them we were only farmers, but they wrote our names in their books as Naxal supporters. Once your name is written, how do you erase it? It is easier to kill us than to remove that label" (p. 134). Foucault's assertion that authority creates subjects is exemplified by the act of labeling or placing people in security categories. However, testimony reveals the violence ingrained in this kind of production. According to Foucault, counter-conducts produce ethical breaks—instances in which people reject the identities that are thrust upon them. Testimony serves just as such an ethical breach in Bastar. The biopolitical reduction of Adivasi existence to categories of government is challenged by the insistence on telling one's own story, which becomes a form of political agency. What Foucault refers to as 'spaces of veridiction' (*The Birth of Biopolitics*, Lecture of 17 January 1979, p. 33)—alternative locations where truth is expressed outside of the state apparatus—are created by testimony. Therefore, Sundar's ethnography is a counter-archival technique that challenges the state's truth regime rather than merely documentation.

### **Survival as Political Ecology**

Adivasi voices emerge not only as victims but also as witnesses whose testimony illustrate how the state creates a persistent environment of dispossession, according to Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence—the attritional violence that takes place over decades, frequently unacknowledged and dispersed. Similarly, Nixon's theory of the environmentalism of the poor explains how, even when they are not defined as such, Adivasi battles for land rights and survival turn into environmental fights. Adivasi narratives are replete with accounts of persistent

harms that seem insignificant to outsiders: forcible relocations, ruined harvests, burned granaries, destroyed woods, and the gradual disintegration of traditional life-worlds. Sundar demonstrates how the state redefines Adivasi homelands as undeveloped, hazardous, or empty—exactly the semiotics Nixon finds in environmental injustices around the world. Sundar does not, however, go so far as to overtly analyze these struggles as environmental movements. Sundar is informed by a villager: “They burnt the houses; the fields were left empty” (p. 90). This succinct sentence encapsulates slow violence: the devastation of cycles of subsistence that cannot be restored in a single season. The burning of houses is a visible occurrence, while the deserted fields stand in for the unseen temporal legacy, which includes ecological degradation, migration, famine, and missed harvests. According to another testimony, “We could not return to the forest for months” (p. 90). Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 2011, p. 2). Adivasi routines of farming, collecting, fishing, and wood collection—all ecologically entrenched practices—are disrupted by militarism, as Sundar’s ethnography makes clear. Once a place of habitation, the forest now poses a threat.

Many of the disadvantages Sundar describes, such as ‘just the cost of conflict’ or ‘collateral damage,’ run the risk of becoming normalized in the absence of the idea of slow violence. Nixon’s framework offers a vocabulary and intellectual perspective to comprehend these as long-term, systemic environmental and social devastation. The environmentalism of the poor reframes Adivasi fights for ecological justice, which includes community survival, forest and water protection, and traditional livelihoods, rather than narrow identity or security politics. This increases the stakes to include long-term sustainability and environmental rights in addition to insurgency and counterinsurgency. Nixon highlights that gradual violence is frequently missed by traditional media or policy frameworks. Sundar’s approach, which allows voices, stories, and records to be heard, is like the narrative activism that Nixon supports. Many Adivasi peasants describe how they lost their fields, forests, and access to agriculture or forest products after their communities were burned down or they were forcibly relocated. As summarized by one reviewer: “many returned to their charred villages only to see what they considered their land now treeless and exploited under different mining leases” (p. 112). According to other sources, villages relied on gathering forest products to make ends meet, but when forests were destroyed or people were denied access to them, their options were severely limited, leaving homes with little to no steady income. As Sundar and field accounts demonstrate, the outcome is widespread starvation, malnutrition, and economic destitution—a gradual, grinding suffering as opposed to a single catastrophic occurrence. Sundar herself issues a warning about “a slow genocide of a whole way of life” (p. 114). After returning from a fire, the locals discovered their village “dead,” according to a moving account from a review: “the grass began to grow out of the houses, and the tracks disappeared as forest took over” (p. 133). The village perished. This loss is existential rather than merely material for communities whose identity, culture, means of livelihood, and social cohesion are intertwined with the forest and land. The accounts document long-term trauma, loss of social coherence, weakening of communal links, village fragmentation, family displacement, and the disintegration of traditional solidarities in addition to immediate physical suffering. According to Sundar, the social fabric and trust have been undermined by the ongoing threat, insecurity, displacement, and violence. Villages are abandoned, forests—the source of interpersonal life—are destroyed, and customs associated with the land and forest disappear. The trauma is multigenerational. Elders lose their ancestral homes, children grow up in camps or in unpredictable circumstances, and cultural traditions associated with the land, forest, and seasons gradually lose significance or disappear.

Standard media and policy discourses never adequately convey such long-term misery. Instead of steady deprivation and social-ecological degradation, they frequently concentrate on ‘security,’ rebellion, mineral exploitation, or sporadic atrocities. The everyday gradual violence of

starvation, displacement, ecological destruction, and cultural erasure is made evident by the narrative through the preservation of oral accounts as documentary record. A slow, structural, ecological, and social type of violence is documented by the testimonies collected in *The Burning Forest*, which include stories of famine, disrupted livelihoods, ecological dispossession, displaced communities, and chronic trauma. They are testimonials to environmental injustice rather than merely human rights. These testimonials are important because they resist erasure. They uphold the right of Adivasi people to land, forest, dignity, and natural life. They contradict prevailing narratives of development, security, and progress; and they maintain the memory of what has been lost.

### **Conclusion**

Nandini Sundar demonstrates in *The Burning Forest* how Adivasi ecologies—forests, rivers, soils, seasons, and the personal economics of gathering, farming, and caring—are not only the settings for conflict but also the fundamental ground on which state violence is carried out and justified. Sundar highlights how environmental destruction is a long-term, cumulative, and politically orchestrated form of violence by elevating voices that describe burned granaries, disappearing forests, poisoned streams, disturbed farming cycles, and the lingering fears of raids and retaliation. Testimony becomes a form of ecological recollection, a means of clinging to a future that has been lost, a livelihood that has been destroyed, and a forest that has been cut down. In this context, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'planetary' becomes very insightful. Spivak makes a distinction between the 'planet' and the 'global': the planetary is an ethical entity that is unmapable, excessive, and based on relationality rather than ownership, whereas globalization reduces land and life to quantifiable resources, extractable units, and securitized zones. Planetary challenges us to see ourselves as co-inhabitants united by delicate interdependence rather than as the lord of the earth. This global ethic is perfectly embodied in Adivasi testimonials in Bastar. Their ecological interactions are founded on cohabitation rather than exploitation, reciprocity rather than profit, and care rather than conquering. According to Spivak, hearing these testimonials is a way to learn to live planetarily—to relearn the globalizing logics that the state uses to turn forests into mineral corridors or security barriers. Therefore, 'planetary' provides a paradigm for understanding Adivasi ecological worlds as alternative modes of living that defy the homogenizing aggression of the global community rather than as primitive or backward. Sundar creates a space where these worlds can be morally understood—not as resources waiting to be extracted, but as planetary life-worlds demanding respect, protection, and justice—by giving voice to silenced histories and emphasizing Adivasi ecological expertise. Therefore, the inference is not just that Adivasis have been mistreated, but rather that their stories show us how to envision the world in a different way—beyond extraction and militarization, toward a shared, sustainable, and respectable future.

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**RESTORATION OF ECOSYSTEM: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RAMGARH DISTRICT**

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**Abstract**

Ramgarh faces significant environmental challenges due to coal mining, deforestation, pollution and improper land use. These have led to damage to forests, soil, water sources and the well-being of individuals. The present study emphasizes the importance of rehabilitating natural environments and preserving healthy ecosystems. It highlights different methods of restoring equilibrium, such as planting trees, conserving water and reducing pollution. All six blocks in Ramgarh, including Ramgarh, Patraru, Gola, Mandu, Chitarpur and Dulmi, exhibit different levels of environmental degradation. Among these, Patraru and Chitarpur have experienced the most significant harm. The study underscores the importance of collaboration between government agencies, local communities and experts to effectively address the challenges posed by the pandemic. The main goal is to restore the equilibrium in nature and enhance the quality of life for individuals. By taking proactive measures and receiving support from various sources, Ramgarh has the potential to reclaim its former splendor and become a shining example for other areas.

**Keywords:** Planting trees, Soil maintenance, Water protection, Community contribution, Nature rejuvenation

**Introduction**

Ecosystems are dynamic communities of plants, animals and microorganisms interacting with their physical environment as a functional unit. Ecosystem restoration involves aiding in the restoration of ecosystems that have been damaged or destroyed, while also preserving the ecosystems that are currently in good condition. Healthier ecosystems, boasting a greater variety of species, provide a multitude of advantages, including more fertile soils, increased timber and fish production and larger reservoirs of greenhouse gases. Restoration can occur in various ways for instance, by actively planting new vegetation or by removing external factors that hinder nature's recovery. It is not always feasible or preferable to restore an ecosystem to its original condition. We still require agricultural land and infrastructure on land that was previously covered in forests and ecosystems, similar to societies, must adjust to the impacts of a changing climate.

Between now and 2030, the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems could generate us\$9 trillion in ecosystem services. Restoration efforts could potentially eliminate 13 to 26 gigatons of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. The advantages of implementing these interventions outweigh the cost by more than nine times, while not taking action is at least three times more expensive than restoring the ecosystem.

All types of ecosystems can be rehabilitated, such as forests, agricultural lands, urban areas, wetlands and marine environments. Restoration efforts can be initiated by various entities, including governments, development agencies, businesses, communities and individuals. That is because the causes of degradation are numerous and diverse and can affect different scales. For example, degradation can occur due to harmful policies like subsidies for intensive farming or weak tenure laws that promote deforestation. Lakes and coastlines can become contaminated due to inadequate waste management practices or an industrial mishap. The demands of the commercial world can result in cities and towns being overwhelmed with asphalt and lacking sufficient green areas.

Restoring ecosystems, whether on a large or small scale, not only safeguards and enhances the well-being of those who rely on them but also contributes to the overall health of our planet. It also aids in disease control and minimizes the likelihood of natural calamities. In fact, restoration can help us achieve all of the sustainable development goals. Restoration practitioners do not perform the physical tasks involved in restoring ecosystems. Instead, they establish the necessary circumstances for recovery, allowing the plants, animals and microorganisms to perform the work of recovery independently. Contributing to recovery can be as straightforward as removing an invasive species or reintroducing a lost species or function (such as fire), or as intricate as modifying landforms, planting vegetation, adjusting water flow and reintroducing wildlife.

The ecological restoration is meant to steer a degraded ecosystem towards its natural course of development rather than necessarily its original condition. Contemporary realities such as climate change might cause ecosystems to develop in different ways and it is necessary to take note of the past as well as the present. This is aimed at restoring a self-regulating system that can restore itself to recover in the long term. Although restoration effort can swiftly jumpstart recovery, full restoration, e.g. the re-establishment of adult forests, can require decades or centuries. It is a continuous process and the difficulties and emerging opportunities can come in between. Restoration does not replace conservation and should not be used to justify damaging practices since full recovery of the species composition, structure and functioning may not be possible. Rather, it is interested in restoring habitats, reinstating the natural processes and rectifying the aspects that lead to degradation. Good conservation, in addition to the restoration effort is crucial in fighting the biodiversity loss and the extinction crisis. Restoration efforts focus on protection of biodiversity, credibility within communities and agency and organization partnerships through a combination of legal advocacy, policy work and hands-on projects.

Over 20 years, the Center has worked toward protecting and recovering southwestern ponderosa pine forest, which was once magnificent, fire-adaptive ecosystems, but now suffered by livestock grazing, logging, fire suppression and culling of predators. Included in restoration plans are reintroduction of natural fire regimes, species protection such as the Mexican spotted owl and northern goshawk and restoration of the Mexican gray wolf as an apex predator. On-the-ground work includes thinning of small trees, prescribed burning and erosion control and removal of roads to recover forest health and biodiversity. The Gila National Forest and other projects which involve the collaboration will strive to establish strict management principles on the ponderosa pine and other western forests. In 2009, the Center, the Grand Canyon Trust and others entered into an agreement that aims at enhancing positive fire and biodiversity conservation in forests of the northern part of Arizona. The Center has created detailed restoration plans and policy recommendations using GIS mapping, historic surveys and scientific literature, including the regional roadmap forests forever and widely read research published in Ecological Applications. Forest ecosystems cannot do without fire which cleans up excess growth, sustains biodiversity and natural succession. Nonetheless, because of mismanagement in the past, the fires today tend to be bigger and more devastating, posing a threat to ecosystems and the immediate communities.

#### **Literature review**

The importance of land restoration is growing worldwide due to the increasing environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change. The core principle of this process is the conviction that healthy land generates financial gains. Ding *et al.* (2017) explain how restoring land can lead to economic growth, especially when accompanied by effective financial management. This is supported by the European investment bank (2019), which examines the funding of nature-based solutions. Environmental finance (2022) highlights the growing emphasis on sustainable investments in the financial industry.

As job opportunities in this region are expanding, eco canada (2014) suggests that careers in land assessment and reclamation are on the rise. Despite financial and employment considerations,



there is a significant need for more efficient planning. Falconer and Saunders (2002) explain how high policy costs can hinder the restoration process. That is why Farrell *et al.* (2022) and the food and land use coalition (2019) stress the importance of improved decision-support tools and strategic long-term planning to connect restoration efforts with practical goals.

Science is crucial to this matter. Edrisi and abhilash (2021) emphasize the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation, while folke *et al.* (2019) contend that large corporations must assume greater accountability for protecting nature. Finger (2016) emphasizes that investing in green energy, like rapidly growing trees, carries inherent risks thus, careful planning is essential.

There are also universal lessons to learn from. Fu *et al.* (2019) show that China's "grain for green" initiative has had positive effects on forest cover. Gann *et al.* (2019) offer clear and definitive international guidelines on how to carry out restoration effectively. While Garrett *et al.* (2021) investigate whether food corporations are genuinely contributing to the well-being of forests and rural communities, the findings are not entirely positive.

Generally, protected areas are the solution, but studies conducted by geldmann and others (2018, 2019) suggest that effective management is crucial for their success. The health of forests is deteriorating due to climate change, as stated by forzieri *et al.* (2022), which could hinder restoration initiatives. Lastly, Goud *et al.* (2022) demonstrate that the ability of restored peatland to sequester carbon varies depending on the type of vegetation present.

These studies collectively show that successful land restoration necessitates a balanced approach, encompassing effective financial management, well-informed policies, rigorous scientific research and collaboration ranging from local workers to influential global figures. Without it, it's challenging to transform ideas into tangible, enduring change.

The main lesson from this body of research is that restoration is not just about planting trees or repairing land it's about establishing systems that can sustain both humans and the environment over time. For instance, Geldmann *et al.* (2018, 2019) demonstrate that the effectiveness of protected areas can differ significantly based on the level of management implemented. This means simply declaring land as 'protected' isn't sufficient. The most important aspect is the quality of the leadership, funding and daily operations in the field.

Alternatively, the ongoing effects of global climate change continue to present new challenges. Forzieri *et al.* (2022) found early indications that forests worldwide are losing their ability to withstand disturbances. This suggests that without prompt action, restoration efforts may not be able to withstand future climate challenges. That is why research studies like goud *et al.* (2022), which investigate the carbon storage capacity of restored peatlands, are of utmost importance. They provide us with guidance on choosing suitable plant species and utilizing land in a way that absorbs more carbon and helps combat climate change.

Considering the broader context, teamwork is essential. Edrisi and abhilash (2021) emphasize that successful restoration initiatives require input from various disciplines, including science, economics, policy and local knowledge. Without effective collaboration, we may end up implementing temporary fixes instead of sustainable solutions.

Recognizing the need for a comprehensive approach, it is crucial to involve local communities, young professionals and private businesses in finding a solution. According to Eco canada (2014), the field of restoration requires skilled professionals, highlighting the availability of job prospects in this industry. While Folke *et al.* (2019) encourage large corporations to take on a more significant role in environmental conservation.

The success of land rehabilitation depends on having strong funding sources, clear guidelines, evidence-based decisions and collaboration across all levels of society. Whether it be through better forest management practices, improved investment strategies, or community-level actions, the study shows that we have the tools now we need the determination to use them effectively.

#### **Objective of the study**

- To examine and understand how economic, policy, scientific and social factors work together to promote successful land restoration.

- To identify crucial approaches, challenges and possibilities for rehabilitating damaged land, with a focus on achieving lasting environmental, social and economic benefits.
- To highlight the importance of collaboration between governments, businesses, academics and local communities to achieve successful and long-lasting ecosystem restoration.

#### **Meteorology and Tools**

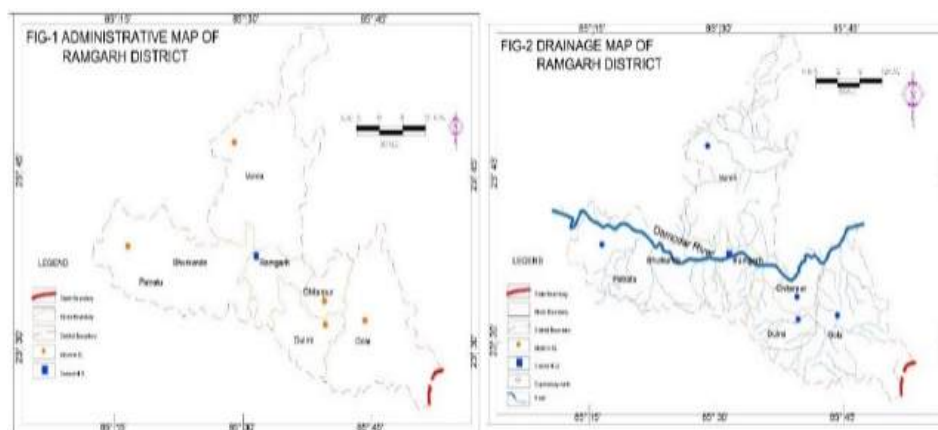
- To conduct the research on the *Restoration of Ecosystem: A Special Reference to Ramgarh District*, a mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating both primary and secondary sources of data. (Based on 10 randomly selected villages in Ramgarh District)
- Field surveys and participatory tools such as transect walks and resource mapping were used to understand the ground realities of ecological degradation and restoration potential.
- Primary data was collected through direct observations, interviews with local residents, forest officials and community leaders, as well as focus group discussions with farmers and NGOs involved in environmental conservation.
- Informal conversations with shopkeepers and municipal workers also provided valuable insights into community awareness and perceptions.
- Secondary data was sourced from government reports. Special emphasis was placed on reports from the Ministry of Environment, the Jharkhand State Pollution Control Board and local forest departments.
- Statistical tools further supported the interpretation of data, making the analysis both comprehensive and grounded in empirical evidence.

#### **Study Area of the Ramgarh**

Ramgarh is a district in the state of Jharkhand, located in India. Ramgarh was established on September 12, 2007, when it was separated from Hazaribagh district. The district's main office is located in Ramgarh town, which is situated around 46 kilometers north of the state capital Ranchi. Ramgarh is situated between 23.63° north latitude and 85.52° east longitude. The district covers an area of approximately 1,341 square kilometers and is situated on the Chotanagpur plateau. The landscape is mostly characterized by rolling hills and valleys, with the Damodar valley running through the district, dividing the Ranchi and Hazaribagh plateaus. The highest point in the district is Barka Pahar, also known as Marang Buru, which stands at an elevation of 1,049 meters above sea level.

The Damodar River is the main river, with other smaller rivers like Bhairavi, Bokaro and Suamrekha, which provide water for irrigation and supply. The soil in Ramgarh is mainly red and yellow, with sandy areas that do not hold water well. The climate is humid and moderate/severe. Summers are scorching with a maximum temperature of up to 44°C, while winters are chilly with temperatures around 10°C. The district receives around 1,344 mm of rainfall during the monsoon season, which spans from June to October. Forestland covers nearly 28% of the district's area and the region is teeming with diverse plant and animal species. In specific villages, elephant migration is a common occurrence and a proposal for a deer park has been put forth in the Gola block.

Ramgarh district is divided into six administrative blocks: Ramgarh, Patratu, Gola, Mandu, Chitarpur and Dulmi. These blocks consist of 315 villages, with 305 of them having lighting facilities and 10 lacking them. The region is famous not only for its breathtaking landscapes and rich biodiversity but also for its religious and cultural significance. One of the most well-known tourist destinations in Ramgarh is the Rajrappa Mandir, a temple dedicated to Goddess Chhinnamasta, located at the confluence of the Damodar and Bhairavi Rivers. It attracts a large number of pilgrims, especially on the days of the full moon and new moon.



**Source: - Topography Map Based**

One of the most popular spots is the patraru dam, situated approximately 30 kilometers from the town of ramgarh. It offers breathtaking scenery and is an ideal location for picnics, attracting nature lovers and tourists who crave tranquility. Tuti jharna, a stunning waterfall in the district, is a popular destination for tourists who appreciate the beauty of natural landscapes.

Ramgarh is well-connected by road and rail infrastructure. The town is connected to Ranchi by state highway 2, which also passes through national highway 33. Ramgarh cantonment is the main railway station in the district, which is part of the east central railway zone. Birsa Munda Airport in Ranchi, situated approximately 50 kilometers away, serves as the closest airport providing air travel options to major cities. In summary, ramgarh is a district in jharkhand that boasts a blend of natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and ongoing development, making it a significant area in the state.

Ramgarh's economy is primarily driven by coal mining, agriculture and various industries. The district is situated in the heart of the jharkhand coal belt and is home to several coal mines operated by Central Coalfields Limited (CCL). The coal mining regions contribute significantly to employment opportunities and support the local economy. Thermal power plants, such as the patraru thermal power station, along with mining, contribute to the production of energy in the region.

Agriculture is a major occupation for the residents of ramgarh. The agricultural produce grown in this region includes paddy, maize, pulses and vegetables. Monsoon rains heavily depend on the rugged terrain and limited water-holding capacity of the soil for agricultural purposes. Efforts are underway to improve irrigation and farming techniques in order to support the rural population. The district also supports accommodation Industries such as stone crushing, brick kilns and workshops, which play a vital role in the economic well-being of the local population. Over time, educational and healthcare facilities are improving and both the government and private organizations are working to meet the growing demands of the population. Educational institutions such as schools, colleges and vocational training schools play a significant role in nurturing and developing human resources. Ramgarh's blend of natural resources, cultural significance and growing infrastructure make it a district with both potential and challenges. With continuous

growth and preservation efforts, it has the potential to become a fair and balanced center for industry, agriculture and tourism in Jharkhand.

The district of Ramgarh is currently facing a severe threat to its environment due to both human and natural factors. The extensive degradation of the area is primarily attributed to coal mining, which is a significant factor in the region. Open-cast mining leads to the destruction of forests, the erosion of fertile topsoil and the pollution of air and water. Mining, the cutting down of trees for fuelwood, agriculture and construction, has resulted in extensive deforestation, which reduces biodiversity and causes soil erosion. Unplanned urban development and industrialization have also added to the strain on natural resources and land, water and air are being contaminated. Rivers like the Damodar are being contaminated by industrial waste, leading to the death of aquatic life and a decrease in the availability of clean water. Ramgarh soil is naturally rough and coarse and when combined with improper land use and overgrazing, it becomes even more prone to erosion and degradation.

#### **Ramgarh district: blockwise overview**

Ramgarh district in Jharkhand faces severe environmental issues due to coal mining, deforestation and pollution. These have resulted in varying degrees of ecosystem damage in its six administrative divisions: Ramgarh, Patratu, Gola, Mandu, Chitarpur and Dulmi.

- Ramgarh CD block is a part of Ramgarh subdivision in Ramgarh district, Jharkhand state, India. The ecosystem's condition is moderately damaged due to urbanization and mining activities.
- **Restoration initiatives** - planting new trees and raising awareness about environmental issues are being implemented to mitigate the negative impacts.
- Patratu CD block is a part of Ramgarh district, Jharkhand, India. It is located in the eastern part of the district and is surrounded by other CD blocks. The block is known for its agricultural activities and is home to a diverse population. The ecosystem is in a critical state of extreme degradation, primarily due to extensive coal mining operations.
- **Restoration Efforts** - the West Bokaro Colliery of Tata Steel has implemented a biodiversity management plan, which includes afforestation and wetland development, to rehabilitate the mined operation.
- Gola block. The ecosystem's condition is currently in a state of high degradation, primarily influenced by mining and agricultural practices.
- **Restoration efforts:** soil conservation methods and organic farming practices are promoted to rebuild soil fertility and prevent erosion.
- Mandu block, The ecosystem's condition is moderately damaged, mainly due to mining activities and the fragmentation of forests.
- **Restoration initiatives:** the restoration of forests and habitats is currently underway in the Ramgarh forest division to enhance biodiversity.
- Chitarpur CD block, The ecosystem is in a critical state, severely damaged by extensive mining activities and contaminated water sources.
- **Restoration initiatives:** rehabilitating water bodies and implementing community-led conservation projects to improve water quality and promote biodiversity.
- Dulmi block, The ecosystem is moderately damaged due to deforestation and unsustainable land use practices.
- **Restoration initiatives** – planting trees and implementing sustainable land management practices at the community level – are being undertaken to restore the ecosystem.

**Patratu**, one of the six blocks, is the most ecologically damaged due to extensive coal mining activities. It has experienced significant deforestation, soil erosion and a decline in biodiversity. The restoration work here is crucial and encompasses extensive afforestation, wetland creation and community engagement to restore the environment.

**Health impacts – disease incidence.**

The deterioration of the environment in Ramgarh district has resulted in various health issues for the residents of this region. The contamination of water sources by mining activities has resulted in the outbreak of diseases such as diarrhea and skin infections. The extraction of minerals through mining operations has resulted in air pollution, which has subsequently contributed to respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis. The reduction in forest cover also heightened the risk of vector-borne diseases due to the disruption of local ecosystems.

The restoration of the ecosystem in Ramgarh necessitates a unified approach involving afforestation, conservation of land and water resources and active involvement of the local community. Despite facing significant obstacles, ongoing restoration initiatives offer a glimmer of hope for the revival of the district's environment. The diminishing forests have led to an increase in human-wildlife conflict, especially with elephants that venture into human settlements in search of sustenance and refuge. Climate change poses yet another challenge, with unpredictable rainfall patterns, rising temperatures and extreme weather events, impacting agriculture and the availability of water. Additionally, inadequate waste management practices and insufficient public education lead to the open dumping of trash, causing health and environmental problems. All these compounds are causing the natural balance of Ramgarh ecosystem to deteriorate and urgent measures must be taken to protect and revive it.

To combat the ongoing degradation of Ramgarh ecosystem, a combination of preventive and remedial actions is essential. One of the initial steps is to promote the planting of native trees in areas that have been deforested and around mining sites. This will help in restoring the greenery, improving soil quality and providing habitats for various animals. Mining and industrial operations should be closely regulated and monitored to ensure that pollution is minimized and land is rehabilitated after extraction. It is crucial to encourage the adoption of green technologies and cleaner production methods in order to reduce the environmental impact of industries.

The field of agriculture, farmers should receive training in sustainable farming methods such as crop rotation, organic farming and water conservation. The creation of small check dams, ponds and rainwater harvesting systems can improve water accessibility and reduce soil erosion. The occurrence of conflicts between humans and wildlife can be minimized by establishing buffer zones, implementing early warning systems and educating villagers on how to safeguard their crops and themselves without causing harm to animals.

**Initiatives promoting environmental consciousness:** Both in educational institutions and local communities should be implemented to foster a sense of duty towards the environment. It is crucial to implement effective solid waste management systems in both urban and rural areas to avoid the pollution of land and water sources. The active participation of local communities, especially young individuals and women, in conservation initiatives can result in lasting positive transformations. By adopting a comprehensive strategy that combines environmental preservation, economic development and community engagement, Ramgarh district can move forward towards a more prosperous and sustainable future.

The government and local administration have a crucial role in reversing the deterioration of Ramgarh ecosystem. It is crucial to establish policies that prioritize sustainability, conservation and accountability. Before granting approval for development projects, it is crucial to conduct a thorough environmental impact analysis to avoid further harm to natural resources. Additionally, funds allocated under schemes like mgnrega can be effectively utilized for ecological restoration initiatives such as afforestation, soil conservation and the rejuvenation of water bodies.

Conservation strategies can be developed and put into action through collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research institutions and environmentalists, using scientific data and real-world conditions. Regularly tracking the environment, gathering data and sharing information with the public will ensure transparency and enable the assessment of ecological recovery progress.

The growth of eco-tourism, when implemented sustainably, has the potential to generate income for the local community while also preserving the environment. Destinations like Rajrappa mandir, Patratu dam and Tuti Jharna offer opportunities for nature-based tourism that aligns with environmental conservation, fostering awareness among visitors about the local ecology and culture.

Ultimately, building a solid connection between people and the natural world is crucial. When societies recognize that their overall well-being, economy and prosperity are interconnected with a healthy environment, they will be more inclined to actively protect and preserve it. By continuously educating the community, investing in eco-friendly technology and fostering mutual support for the environment, ramgarh district can overcome its current challenges and become a shining example of ecological harmony and sustainable development.

To create a lasting impact, it is crucial that environmental conservation becomes an integral part of daily governance and community life in ramgarh. Incorporating environmental studies and hands-on activities into the school curriculum can help educate students about the environment from an early age. Eco-clubs and community groups can be utilized to encourage young individuals to actively engage in activities such as tree planting, clean-up campaigns and water conservation efforts. Women's self-help groups (shgs) can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable practices by advocating for the use of clean energy, organic farming and effective waste management within households.

Technology can play an even bigger role in the efforts to protect our environment. Geographic information systems (gis), satellite imaging and mobile apps can be utilized to track deforestation, pollution levels and animal movements in real-time. This information can guide the administration and the public in taking immediate action. Promoting the use of solar power, bio-gas and other alternative energy sources can help reduce the dependence on wood and fossil fuels, especially in rural areas.

Additionally, bodies of water such as ponds, lakes and streams must be restored to facilitate groundwater recharge, improve irrigation and promote local biodiversity. By involving the community in the cleaning and maintenance of these water sources, a sense of ownership and responsibility will be fostered.

The successful implementation of ecological restoration in ramgarh hinges on careful planning and proactive measures at every level. When government agencies, local societies, industry and environmental organizations collaborate, it becomes possible to restore ecosystems, improve livelihoods and ensure a better quality of life for future generations. Ramgarh is blessed with abundant natural resources and a skilled workforce that can help turn this vision of a greener, cleaner and sustainable district into a reality.

#### **Restoration of ecosystem for sustainable processes.**

The restoration of the ecosystem in Ramgarh is crucial to improve the quality of life, preserve natural resources and foster sustainable development. To ensure the success of this process, it is crucial to prioritize the restoration of deforested areas, the purification of contaminated water bodies and the improvement of soil quality. This can be accomplished by planting indigenous trees, stopping illegal mining activities and using natural methods to improve soil fertility. To achieve the desired results, it is advisable to implement straightforward and cost-effective techniques that are suitable for the specific surroundings. Active participation in the community is crucial, as individuals residing in the vicinity possess a deep understanding of the land and can contribute to its preservation. Sustainable practices are those that do not harm the environment or deplete all available resources. For example, implementing rainwater harvesting, solar power and organic cultivation can help protect the environment while meeting the needs of the people. Government support, meticulous planning and regular monitoring are also necessary to sustain the ongoing efforts. By working together with the community and nature, Ramgarh can rebuild its environment in a way that is efficient, effective and sustainable.



Restoration efforts should also focus on creating job opportunities and improving the livelihoods of local communities, ensuring that individuals can directly benefit from the conservation of the environment. For instance, providing education on nursery raising, ecotourism, or organic manure-making can empower villagers to generate income and contribute to the preservation of nature. Restoring ponds and check dams can benefit agriculture and replenish groundwater, ensuring a water supply even during dry spells. Encouraging the use of bio-fertilizers and reducing chemical inputs will enhance soil fertility and crop productivity over time.

Raising awareness among the public is also essential. People need to understand that their lives are sustained by a thriving ecosystem by offering clean air, water, food and protection against natural disasters such as floods or droughts. By organizing frequent workshops, school programs and village meetings, we can effectively convey this message.

Sustainability also entails the posterity. It is crucial to involve young people in every step of the process from planning to plant to ensure that they continue the work with responsibility and conscientiousness. By combining traditional practices with modern techniques, Ramgarh can establish a strong foundation for a cleaner environment. By demonstrating patience, unity and a clear vision for the future, the restoration of the ecosystem can bring about lasting transformation to the district and serve as an example for others to follow.

**The involvement of local non-governmental organizations and institutions is crucial in the restoration of ecosystems:**

Local organizations and non-governmental organizations (ngos) have a vital role to play in restoring Ramgarh's ecosystem. These organizations collaborate with the community and possess knowledge of the local needs, challenges and resources. NGOs contribute to environmental awareness by organizing campaigns, conducting workshops and providing training programs. They provide education on forest preservation, water conservation, sustainable farming practices and proper waste management. They also lend a helping hand to the local community by participating in eco-friendly initiatives like tree planting, organic farming, or creating bio-fertilizers.

Institutions such as nearby colleges, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) and research stations provide scientific knowledge and technical support. They conduct experiments on soil, water and climate and propose enhanced methods of farming and conservation. These organizations can provide farmers, students and youth groups with innovative and eco-friendly techniques that enhance both the environment and their economic well-being.

NGOs act as a connection between the citizens and the government. They play a role in implementing government initiatives for forest conservation, water management and rural development. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in assessing the impact of these programs and guaranteeing that the intended beneficiaries receive the benefits.

In a nutshell, local organizations and non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in facilitating, training and providing support for ecological restoration efforts. Their actions promote understanding, develop abilities and mobilize community involvement—once again, enhancing the restoration process in terms of effectiveness, inclusivity and sustainability.

In order to strengthen their role, local non-governmental organizations and institutions can also provide assistance in organizing and supporting community-based organizations like forest protection committees, water user groups and self-help groups (shgs). These organizations empower local communities to collectively contribute to the preservation and restoration of natural resources. For example, a village forest committee can organize tree planting initiatives, prevent unauthorized tree cutting and monitor the movement of animals in the area. Similarly, a water user group can be accountable for the maintenance and cleaning of ponds, hand pumps and check dams.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can also assist in mobilizing resources and funds from government programs, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and international agencies. The villages lack the necessary financial resources or equipment to initiate



restoration projects and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can help by connecting them with funding opportunities and technical expertise. They can also adopt cost-effective and simple techniques like drip irrigation, vermi-composting, or kitchen gardens that not only improve environmental health but also boost family incomes.

Educational establishments can initiate and record research and documentation endeavors. They have the opportunity to study the local surroundings, track changes and create reports that will aid the government and other stakeholders in making well-informed choices. They can also involve students in hands-on activities, encouraging them to find solutions to environmental issues. Together, non-governmental organizations and institutions act as a bridge between taking action and gaining knowledge. By involving local communities, utilizing scientific knowledge and fostering collaborations, they guarantee that the restoration of the Ramgarh ecosystem is not just a temporary endeavor but a long-term commitment to sustainability and resilience. Several local non-governmental organizations and institutions are currently engaged in ecosystem restoration efforts in Ramgarh district, Jharkhand. They are actively involved in sustainable land and water management, reforestation efforts and empowering individuals.

**Social action for rural development (SARDA)** - Established in 2001, sarda is a prominent player in ramgarh, with a strong focus on managing natural resources, promoting community development and safeguarding the environment. Its initiatives encompass watershed development, forest management and promoting sustainable livelihoods through training and microfinance services. Sarda's approach focuses on engaging local communities and enhancing their skills to ensure sustainable ecological restoration in the long run.

**The trust of the watershed organization (WOTR)** - What works in Ramgarh is part of its broader initiatives throughout Jharkhand. The organization engages in extensive watershed development initiatives, prioritizing water and soil conservation, sustainable farming practices and community-driven resource management. Its activities aim to encourage tribal communities to adapt to climate change and support their livelihoods.

**The Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is an organization that works to promote sustainable development and protect the environment** - Fes collaborates with the local communities in Ramgarh to strengthen village institutions and promote the responsible use of shared lands. Some of their activities include reforestation, water conservation and biodiversity protection to improve the ecological health of the area and the well-being of the people.

**The Nature Conservation Society (NCS) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the environment and promoting sustainability** - NCS is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations in Jharkhand and its initiatives encompass biodiversity conservation, watershed management and environmental education. NCS, located in Ramgarh, has been actively involved in promoting sustainable land use practices and supporting the bio-fuel movement by distributing jatropha saplings to farmers.

**Youth involvement in watershed management** - Joint initiatives by organizations such as the integrated river basin management society (IRBMS), Jharkhand Vikash Parishad (JVP) and association for India's development (aid) have involved youth from local communities in the process of watershed restoration in Ramgarh. These activities include constructing check dams, creating contour trenches and establishing farm ponds, while also promoting reforestation through the dispersal of seed balls. The active involvement of young people has been instrumental in driving these community-led restoration projects forward.

As a collective, these organizations have played a significant role in restoring the natural balance of ramgarh district's ecosystem. Although it is challenging to determine precise figures, the collective efforts of these organizations have led to improved water availability, fertile soils, reforestation and enhanced community well-being, fostering a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem.

#### **Ecosystem Restoration & Awareness Table – 10 Villages)**

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**70 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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| S. No | Village Name  | Block Name | Key Species (Flora & Fauna)                               | IUCN Status | Restoration Effort             | Conserved Area (ha) | % of Village Land | Local Andolan Name       | Awareness Programs | People Participated |
|-------|---------------|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1     | Barkikana     | Patratu    | <i>Shorea robusta</i> , Spotted Deer ( <i>Axis axis</i> ) | LC          | Afforestation & fencing        | 15.2                | 11.5 %            | Jungle Bachao            | 3                  | 120                 |
| 2     | Dulmi         | Dulmi      | <i>Azadirachta indica</i> (Neem), Peafowl                 | LC          | Tree planting & soil control   | 13.0                | 10.0 %            | Hariyali Abhiyan         | 2                  | 98                  |
| 3     | Gola          | Gola       | <i>Bambusa vulgaris</i> , Indian Cobra                    | LC, VU      | Bamboo belts & awareness       | 11.0                | 8.2 %             | Youth Forest Watch       | 2                  | 85                  |
| 4     | Chitarpur     | Chitarpur  | <i>Terminalia arjuna</i> , Rhesus Macaque                 | LC          | Pond revival, plantations      | 16.5                | 13.0 %            | Jal Jungle Jameen Bachao | 4                  | 145                 |
| 5     | Mandu Village | Mandu      | <i>Madhuca longifolia</i> (Mahua), Indian Hare            | LC          | Mahua conservation groups      | 13.5                | 10.4 %            | Mahua Andolan            | 3                  | 122                 |
| 6     | Surangi       | Mandu      | <i>Ficus religiosa</i> , Monitor Lizard                   | LC          | Dust barriers, native planting | 10.0                | 7.8 %             | Parisar Suraksha         | 2                  | 88                  |
| 7     | Patratu Town  | Patratu    | <i>Phyllanthus emblica</i> (Amla), Owl spp.               | LC          | Mixed planting & patrolling    | 12.0                | 9.3 %             | Pakshi Mitra Abhiyan     | 3                  | 95                  |

|    |                   |         |                                                                            |    |                                 |      |        |                         |   |     |
|----|-------------------|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------|------|--------|-------------------------|---|-----|
| 8  | Gola Ridge        | Gola    | <i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i> ,<br>Jungle Cat                              | LC | Controlled burning & replanting | 14.8 | 11.8 % | Forest Watch Movement   | 2 | 105 |
| 9  | Barkana Periphery | Patratu | <i>Tectona grandis</i> (Teak),<br>Star Tortoise                            | VU | Patrolling & nurseries          | 16.2 | 13.3 % | Ped Lagao Jeevan Bachao | 4 | 140 |
| 10 | Sirka             | Ramgarh | <i>Cassia fistula</i> ,<br>Hornbill ( <i>Anthraceroceros albirostris</i> ) | NT | Native species reintroduction   | 12.2 | 9.5 %  | Eco Club Movement       | 3 | 110 |

**Source: - Primary Data based (visit in forest department)**

- **IUCN Classifications:** LC = Least Concern, NT = Near Threatened, VU = Vulnerable.
- Land area percentages are approximate, based on typical village land sizes (~130–140 ha).
- Restoration efforts include methods such as afforestation, pond revival, controlled burning, plant nurseries and patrolling.
- **Awareness Programs** mean actively organized campaigns—e.g., "Jal Jungle Jameen Bachao" and "Eco Club Movement".
- **Community participation** refers to number of local people engaged in restoration and awareness.

The ecosystem restoration initiatives in Ramgarh District, as observed across a representative sample of 10 villages, reveal a promising trend in both environmental recovery and community participation. On average, each village has conserved approximately 13.74 hectares of land, accounting for nearly 10.5% of total village area. This indicates a meaningful commitment to land rehabilitation, especially considering the challenges posed by deforestation, mining and habitat degradation in the region. Conservation efforts have focused on ecologically significant species such as *Shorea robusta*, *Madhuca longifolia* and *Tectona grandis*, as well as key fauna including the Spotted Deer, Hornbill and Star Tortoise—some of which fall under Vulnerable (VU) or Near Threatened (NT) categories according to the IUCN.

Restoration methods vary across villages and include a combination of afforestation, bamboo plantation, pond revival, soil control, dust barriers and community patrolling. These approaches reflect both ecological and practical strategies tailored to specific environmental challenges. Localized movements such as "Jungle Bachao," "Mahua Andolan," and "Eco Club Movement" are playing a vital role in mobilizing grassroots action, often rooted in traditional ecological knowledge and local identity. On average, each village has conducted around 2 to 3 awareness programs, ranging from tree plantation drives to wildlife protection workshops, with an encouraging average participation of 110 people per village. This highlights strong local engagement and a growing culture of environmental responsibility.

The data illustrates a consistent and community-driven effort toward restoring ecological balance in Ramgarh. The integration of scientific restoration practices with social mobilization and awareness programs has not only improved land and biodiversity metrics but also fostered a sense

of stewardship among local populations. Continued support—through capacity building, policy intervention and scaling of successful initiatives—can further amplify these positive outcomes across the remaining villages in the district.

### **Result and Finding**

The most severely damaged ecological area in Ramgarh district is patrattu, primarily due to extensive coal mining activities. It has resulted in extensive deforestation, land degradation, pollution and the loss of biodiversity. Other blocks like chitarpur and gola are significantly damaged, while ramgarh, mandu and dulmi are moderately damaged. The main causes are coal mining, deforestation for land and fuel, unplanned urban growth and ineffective waste and water management.

To rejuvenate the environment, there are initiatives underway for afforestation, with a focus on planting trees in mandu and dulmi areas. Ongoing wetland and watershed restoration projects are being carried out in Patrattu and Gola as part of water conservation initiatives. Sustainable farming practices are being promoted in gola and dulmi to enhance soil health. Organizations such as sarda, wotr and fes are actively involved in restoration projects and initiatives aimed at improving the livelihoods of local communities.

Wellness matters. In mining-affected patrattu and chitarpur, approximately 25-30% of individuals suffer from respiratory ailments such as asthma and bronchitis. Water-borne illnesses such as diarrhea and skin infections affect around 15–20% of people living in rural areas, while diseases transmitted by mosquitoes like malaria and dengue are becoming more prevalent due to stagnant water and deforestation.

In general, mining is the main cause of environmental and health problems in Ramgarh. However, local communities and non-governmental organizations are actively involved in the restoration and revitalization of the region. Patrattu block demands urgent action. The future should be shaped based on accurate information, with stricter regulations to guarantee that progress and environmental preservation align.

Addressing these issues requires a collaborative effort from the government, civil society organizations and environmental groups. More initiatives are required to educate individuals about the importance of conserving natural resources and maintaining a clean and healthy environment. Effective policy implementation is crucial to monitor mining and industries, ensuring that their negative impacts are minimized.

Improving healthcare facilities in areas with poor environmental conditions is a priority because many health problems are directly linked to unfavorable environmental conditions. Having access to clean drinking water, better sanitation facilities and regular medical checkups can help reduce the spread of diseases. Encouraging the adoption of less harmful alternative livelihoods is also necessary. Professions that are environmentally conscious, such as organic farming, handicrafts and small-scale forest-based industries, can generate income without causing harm to the environment.

Ramgarh district is also facing serious environmental and health issues, especially in places like Patrattu. However, with careful planning, active involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the government, the ecosystem can be revitalized and the quality of life for the residents can be improved. Consistent commitment and collaboration among all stakeholders are the key elements in establishing a thriving and enduring future for the district.

### **Recommendation**

To improve the environmental conditions of Ramgarh and protect the well-being of its residents, certain measures must be taken. Firstly, the areas most impacted by the mining activities, such as Patrattu and Chitarpur, should be given top priority for large-scale afforestation, cleaning up the mine sites and restoring wetlands. Planting indigenous trees and involving the community will help restore wildlife habitats and improve air and water quality. Second, strict regulation of

mining and industrial pollution is essential. To ensure the safety of air and water quality, real-time monitoring systems must be implemented and strict measures should be taken against individuals or entities responsible for contamination.

The healthcare infrastructure in mining areas must be bolstered, as a significant portion of the population is afflicted with respiratory ailments and water-related illnesses. Health centers require more doctors, better equipment and should conduct awareness campaigns to address the issue of HIV/AIDS. Mobile health units can be dispatched to reach isolated communities. To reduce pressure on forests and create job opportunities, people should be encouraged to pursue green livelihoods like organic farming, eco-tourism, tree nurseries and manufacturing products from forest resources.

It is crucial to conserve both water and land, especially in regions like gola and dulmi. Measures like small dams, trenches and rainwater conservation can help prevent soil erosion and increase the groundwater level. Community involvement is also essential. Both children and women can be educated and involved in eco-clubs and awareness programs, helping them understand the significance of conserving nature.

Finally, regular assessments must be carried out in each block to ascertain the progress made. These reports should be made accessible to the public so that future can be enhanced. Ramgarh's situation necessitates support from various sources environmental specialists, healthcare professionals, leaders and the community. Although there are challenges, with proper planning and collaboration, Ramgarh has the potential to become a shining example of how development and nature can harmoniously coexist in Jharkhand.

In the future, it is crucial that all plans are made with local regulations in mind and with accurate data. Government agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations and the residents of the community must collaborate and develop action plans for each neighborhood. Special focus should be placed on regions with higher health risks and significant environmental damage. By providing comprehensive training and workshops, individuals can gain knowledge about advanced farming techniques, effective waste management strategies and the importance of water and forest conservation.

Educational institutions, including schools and colleges, should also include subjects related to the environment in their academic programs. By allowing the younger generation to experience the significance of nature early on, they will develop a sense of responsibility towards its conservation. Community halls or panchayat offices can serve as public spaces to display information about the local environment, current issues and ongoing projects. It will generate awareness and encourage more people to get involved in restoration efforts.

The government programs that encourage the use of renewable energy, water conservation and improved sanitation should be better aligned with the district's environmental goals. Financial and technical support should be made available to farmers and local organizations that are prepared to adopt environmentally friendly practices. Local authorities, like Gram Sabhas, should assume more significant responsibilities in decision-making and monitoring.

The future of Ramgarh lies in unity, awareness and forward-thinking planning. By combining local expertise with specialized advice and giving equal importance to both nature and people, the district can revitalize its surroundings and improve the quality of life for its residents. By putting in sincere effort, carefully planning and actively engaging with the community, Ramgarh can pave the way for a greener and healthier future for all.

### **Conclusion**

Ramgarh district faces significant environmental challenges, especially in areas like Patratu and Chitarpur, as a result of coal mining, deforestation and pollution. The health of the local population is also affected by this natural damage, resulting in conditions like asthma, diarrhea and skin diseases. Each section of the district is affected in various ways, but the most severely impacted is Patratu.

To rectify this, significant efforts are being made, such as planting trees, conserving water and promoting cultivation. Community-based organizations like SARDA and WOTR are actively engaging villagers in environmental education, teaching them effective ways to care for the environment. The government agencies and community organizations are collaborating to restore forests, purify water sources and cultivate the land. To improve the situation in the long term, it is important to establish more health centers, enhance waste management, promote clean farming practices and provide support for green jobs. It is crucial for individuals to be informed and engaged in order to comprehend the significance of environmental conservation for their own future.

If all of us the government, non-governmental organizations and the local community – come together with a well-thought-out plan, Ramgarh can gradually recover from its environmental damage and create a healthier, greener and safer living environment for its residents. To ensure continuous progress in the environmental development of Ramgarh, it is crucial for each block to have a tailored plan addressing specific local concerns. For example, Patratu needs to be addressed urgently to control mining pollution, Gola and Dulmi need enhancement in water and soil conservation and so forth. Regular checks should be carried out to determine what is functioning well and what needs to be modified. Educational institutions can play a role in promoting environmental awareness by teaching students about the importance of preserving nature and engaging in community-based conservation efforts.

The involvement of young people, women and agriculturalists is also vital. If people are the rightful owners of their forests, water and land, they will take care of it for the future generations. Clean energy sources like solar power, advanced farming tools and access to clean drinking water should also be made available to enhance everyday life.

Short of it, the revitalization of the Ramgarh ecosystem is not just about planting trees or cleaning rivers it's about forging a strong connection between nature and people. By working together, being aware of the situation and using resources wisely, Ramgarh can serve as a great example of how damaged land can be restored in a straightforward, smart and environmentally friendly way.

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**THE ALLURE OF NATURE AND FEMINISTIC MOORS IN KAVERY  
NAMBISAN'S *THE SCENT OF PEPPER***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the theoretical connection between women and nature is closely linked to ethical connections. Nambisan has a special talent for using natural visuals to emote and express herself. Her use of powerful nature- related imagery has considerably aided her in capturing the temperament of her characters in her novel *The Scent of Pepper*, are insights into the tragic predicament of her characters. It is necessary to view her works through the prism of ecofeminism because she can depict the physical and mental characteristics of her characters utilising elements from nature. The boundary between nature and culture is imaginary and conceptual. A meaningful kinship between humanity and the world of nature is discernible. The primitive people do not see any distinction between the human cultural state and the state of nature at all. The primitive people lived in harmony with all the aspects of nature. They were nature worshipper. Not only nature but also woman was also at the centre of the primitive cults. The pagans advocated and celebrated the female principle in nature. According to many ecological feminists, ecofeminism is a part of environmental ethics from the ecologically inspired philosophical or ethical stand points. The claim is that the interconnections among the conceptualizations and treatment of women, animals and non-human nature require a feminist ethical analysis and response.

**Keywords:** Women and nature, nature and culture, human cultural state, nature cultural state and Eco- feminist analysis

**Introduction**

Kavery Nambisan is not only a remarkable South Indian writer but also a practicing surgeon. Her connectivity with a wide variety of people has prompted her to construct sensible novels. Her lucid writing roots out from multiple perspectives and she contrives a spontaneous combination of precision and art. Her landscape, characterization, and themes reflect the solid reality fixed in the angle of social consciousness. Her novels reveal her humane attitude, her concern for society, and the crippling pangs of conscience on the depletion of nature. The base of her plots includes the satirical conflicts of ordinary life, the impact of memories in the present life, and the pride of cultural traits. Nambisan has a special talent for using natural visuals to emote and express herself. Her use of powerful nature- related imagery has considerably aided her in capturing the temperament of her characters in her novel *The Scent of Pepper*, are insights into the tragic predicament of her characters. It is necessary to view her works through the prism of ecofeminism because she can depict the physical and mental characteristics of her characters utilising elements from nature. The boundary between nature and culture is imaginary and conceptual. A meaningful kinship between humanity and the world of nature is discernible. The primitive people do not see any distinction between the human cultural state and the state of nature at all. The primitive people lived in harmony with all the aspects of nature. They were nature worshipper. Not only nature but also woman was also at the centre of the primitive cults. The pagans advocated and celebrated the female principle in nature.

**Literature Review**

Savitha Sukumar, Research Scholar of the University of Mumbai has published a paper “An Ecocritical Reading of Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Pepper*” in *The Criterion: An*

*International Journal in English*, Vol 4, Issue –V, October 2013. Prof. S. Prasanna Sree and S. Jagdeswari of Andhra University published “An Interview with Kavary Nambisan” in *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, Vol4, Issue II, November 2016, pp38-42. G. Padmavathy, Ph.D. Scholar of L.R.G Govt Arts College, Tirupur has published “Portrayal of Women in Kavary Nambisan’s *On Wings of Butterflies*” – *Psychological Analysis in Notions*, Vol III, No. 2 in 2017.

### **Methodology**

In the evolving landscape of Indian English fiction, Kavary Nambisan stands out as a distinctive voice who explores gendered dynamics within familial, social, and professional contexts. She brings a sharp observational eye and deep empathy to her fiction, rooted in rural and semi-urban India yet addressing universal human concerns. Her novels reflect a commitment to authenticity and social realism, capturing the intricacies of everyday life with lucid prose, subtle irony, and a keen sensitivity to the inner worlds of her characters. Through her storytelling, Nambisan delves into themes such as gender roles, social inequalities, colonial legacies, and identity formation.

### **Discussion & Analysis**

The term “ecofeminism” was born during last three decades, which intersects two critical perspectives - ecology and feminism. It liberates political and social construction for those who abhor the designation of nature and women. Ecofeminism in the late 1980s had already introduced itself as a clear cut philosophical theory. The origin of ecofeminist theory in India undisputedly remains the Chipkooor Tree hugging movement of the 1970’s.

The modern environmentalist movement gave rise to a rich array of fictional and non-fictional writings concerned with humans’ changing relationship to the natural world. The threat to humanity from unceasing misuse of our environment has prompted many Indian women writers to conceptualize female identity in relation to nature. In India, forests are revered as “Aranyani,” or “The Goddess of the Forest,” and nature is seen as sacred. Consequently, Vandana Shiva strongly believes that women are a part of nature; they produce life along with nature and are therefore driving the effort to restore nature. Since prehistoric times, literature and arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human environment interactions.

Nambisan uses environmental degradation to highlight the link between patriarchal dominance and ecological destruction. In that culture, males and their interests are served by the exploitation and usage of both women and the natural world. As a result, she proves the fundamental principle of ecofeminism-the link between oppressed women and degraded ecosystems. Nambisan seeks to create a special connection between women and nature in her novel. She does, however, seek to incorporate socialist ecofeminist concerns about equality and material realities into the liberation agenda. She claims that the equitable allocation of resources and land in a society may be illustrated by the sustainable distribution of food in the kitchen. Her works on the feminist and environmental movements, as well as her contributions to resistance organisations, encourage people to share a common concern about the state of the world. The excessive use of chemicals that polluted the air and completely altered the village’s ecosystem created serious problems for both people and animals.

This description also contains a sarcastic undertone. Cows are revered by the people as holy animals, especially in the village, but in this bustling developing town, holiness is nowhere to be found because it has been replaced by industries. Therefore, this is merely a curse that has befallen them because they have moved away from both nature and their divine power in Pingakshipura. Due to the factory, the village was displaced, and as it began to lose all its strength and fertility, the residents became depressed.

*The Scent of Pepper* is a story about Nanji, a woman whose love and care for her family and the local population are woven together with her respect for her country. At the time, the British

had promised to bring religion and a coffee plantation to Coorg. When Nanji first appears, she is described as a young woman who had a difficult marriage since the man, she married was a heavy drinker, having “a peevish liver,” and had a fragile health. Her body and mind are left in terrible shape. Fortunately for her, he perishes in an accident, and at the age of thirteen, Nanji comes home a widow. Neelakki, Nanji’s mother and grandmother, pass away in her absence, and the former is left to endure her stepmother’s abuse. Nanji picks up writing and skills in Mathematics from her brothers who attended school during their free time.

Nanji is seen working in tently by Baliyana, the second son of Rao Bahadur Maddaiah, a veterinarian who was called by Nanji’s father to castrate six pigs on his farm. The following week, Nanji, who is now fifteen, receives a proposal from him, and her father, who had been searching for a husband for her, joyfully accepts it. It is “common for widows to remarry in the Kodavas... Coorgs do not distinguish between a woman and widow as much as, for example, the Brahmins” (237). Children were very rare in this country, and widows and divorced women have always been allowed to remarry – the former one year after her husband death while the latter died six months after their divorce as pointed out by Dervla Murphy in her travelogue.

After getting married, Nanji, who was a member of the Kongetira clan, visits her new home, the Kaleyanda residence. Nambisan provides a brief explanation of the clans. Inter-marriage was discouraged “out of judicious commonsense” (6) among a few clans, including the Kongetira proud of their long, shape nose, while the Kaleyanda were proud of their long, perfectly straight nose, as the Kanjith and a clan was proud of their long, big nose, and the Konganda with their distinctive eagle beak-shaped nose. Balliyana reveals that she does not like her first husband. He treats her with kindness and does not overly show concern about the regulations of the home. Her mother-in-law, who was spoiled by her wealth, lives like the queen of the house, while her father-in-law, who is already old, has become soft and indifferent to life.

The Yerava servants kept the house in disarray because they were too indolent to do their jobs. Nanji jumps with joy to fix up her new home since she has a natural tendency to work hard. Her grandmother, Neelakki, trained her to work both in the fields and at home. She takes control of the household by forcing the sluggish Yeravas to run around the house and the acreage of land filled with lemon and mango trees. Besides the house has a coffee drying yard, a well, a chicken coop, a granary, a pigsty, and a barn.

A few Yeravas are assigned to polish the enormous dining table, the copper and brass, the lights, and clear the cobwebs from the ceiling and to clear the floor with “antiseptic and prepare vegetable juices” (9). The servants first dislike her, but she eventually wins them over with her firmness and tact. In these circumstances, her grandmother’s lectures do not prove useless. She treats them well since Neelakki taught her that because Yeravas are simple-minded like the Kudiya and Kuruba, who are also Kodagu natives, and just think about food, they “cannot be corrupted” (9). As a result, she starts giving them as “akkiotti with pumpkin curry and thaliya puttoo with chutney made of jack fruit seeds...a pitcher full of jaggery coffee hot at the fireplace for them. And she showed that it was more fun to work than to be lazy” (9).

Since she was three years old, Nanji has been working in the fields. She began visiting her grandmother when she was three years old, and by the time she was five, she was helping her mother and grandmother with cutting, transplanting, and ploughing. She has collaborated with Yeravas since she was a young girl. It is therefore simple to shape Balliyana after her marriage. She pursues them, yelling at them for efficiency until they realize that “the only way with her was to be efficient.” She has a solid understanding of the soil and plantation abilities. She assists them in their job while scurrying behind the mint and coffee plants to pull weeds. She is so kind as to give them “buttermilk” (for the expectant mothers), “jaggery coffee,” “otti with lime pickle,” and even provided a dinner to avoid wasting time. Sometimes Nanji provides them with medications when they fall ill. She discovered through her spouse Baliyana that drugs intended for animals efficiently treated people. They eventually grow to like her and start calling her “Baliyakka.” In

exchange, they “delivered her shoots for curry, soft mushrooms, juicy crabs, wet green kembuleaves, and river fish” (23).

Nanji does not skip out on her responsibilities as a wife. She only visits her parents’ house once while pregnant. In her seventh month of pregnancy her stepmother underfeeds her. She gives birth to a boy who is underweight and dies after struggling to breathe. She makes the decision to take care of herself on her own after that. She gives birth to each of her twelve children and she does not treat herself with sour food during her confinement. Nanji’s pregnancy frequently remains undiscovered up to the seventh month because she is either busy at home or working in the fields. As a result, she continues to work until she experiences “twinges of pain or a trickle between her legs” (24).

At that point, she calls for Bolle, her dedicated Yerava servant, to lock the door. And by the time her husband arrives, she finishes the delivery and introduced him the new arrival. When her daughter-in-law gained control of the home, Chambavva, her mother-in-law, felt relieved. The respect she gained as the wife of Rao Bahadur and the daughter of a nobleman who served as the last Raja of Kodagu does not change despite her daughter-in-law’s recent rise to renown. She keeps up her affluent lifestyle, which includes eating and drinking from silverware, spending a moment in prayer to Lord Igguthappa, and taking good care of her in-law. Nanji is upset when Rao Bahadur succumbs to the mental sadness that runs in his family. The condition, which has no known cause and no treatment, is prevalent among male Kodavas, as stated by the author herself. Rao Bahadur, who had led an active life, begins to withdraw from society and stays in his private room. He lost his composure and continued to look untidy.

Nanji does everything in her power to revive him. However, he was preoccupied with death. Where this condition is prevalent, there is a propensity for suicide. Rao Bahadur eventually kills himself by gulping down his diamond ring while Nanji is carrying her third child because he is unable to handle the weight of his shameful and useless life. Balliyana’s youngest brother Boju announces it by shooting two shots. In white or austere attire, the entire hamlet congregates at the entryway. Chambavva takes off all her jewellery, dresses in white, and wears her hair loose. She does not comb for eleven days and sleeps on the bed. She sits and sleeps on it despite not being used to the scratchy reed mat. She also refrains from eating meat, milk, and spices in accordance with tradition. The food are first given to the crows every day for eleven days.

Nanji feels sorrowful, but not because her father-in-law passed away. Rao Bahadur is bathed, dressed like a bridegroom in “kupya-chale, with the peeche kaththi at his waist,” “gold-lined hat, and put a mirror in his hand” (13). She was getting ready for the end because she was aware that it would happen. She is disappointed that no one thought to look for the diamond that he swallowed. She wants to suggest, but she was worried that her request might not be taken seriously. The villagers perform the funeral rites, and Nanji, her guilt buried, keeps herself occupied by feeding the steady stream of guests. Chambavva wears a cracked mud pot on her head as she leads the deceased to the family cremation area at the funeral as the cracked pot was a symbol of her widowhood. After placing tulsi leaves on Rao Bahadur’s lips as a final farewell gesture, Boju takes his father’s dagger from him, Chambavva breaks her bracelets, young men fire two gunshots, and Baliyanna burns the pyre.

Nanji and her family are currently affected by a new catastrophe. They receive a letter from Appachu, Baliyanna’s younger brother, who is studying law in England and who has recently been married to Majorie Hicks. He so notifies his family in the same letter of the death of another younger sibling named Machu. Machu, who was also studying in England, drowned at Torquay, and passed away. Baliyanna and Chambavva are upset with Appachu because in their eyes, foreign women with painted lips and protruding chests are bad. Nanji begs them not to expel Appachu from the household, but they do. Embarrassed that she has outlived her husband and her deceased son, Machu, Chambavva resolves to relocate to Crystal Palace. Another ancestral home that belonged to the Kaleyanda clan, Crystal Palace has twenty-eight rooms and coloured glass windows. There were a lot of widows from the Kaleyanda clan living there. Those who reside

there are expected to share the cost of their food. Apart from doing chores, it is said that the women there like playing cowrie games and drink toddy occasionally. As a result, they engage in excessive drinking and partying, and the travellers, the Maplahs, who were from Kerala, brought tales of the drunk and “the devilry of Kodava women” (19) with them. She offers Nanji a few of her tiger-claw brooches, pendants, “kokkethathi,” “gundumani,” and “paththak” and instructs Nanji to divide the remaining jewellery between the two of them and Boju’s wife.

From this point on, Nanji continues to work non-stop in the house and fields until she is old. Her favourite female activities are not singing, stitching, or even attending weddings. She exclusively attends weddings to bless the couple and give the bride or groom money, a sovereign, or, in times of financial hardship, a tiger-claw brooch. She spends more time grieving the loss during funerals, though. She is well-liked in the neighbourhood for running both the farm and the house. Everyone therefore turns to her for guidance on handling pregnancies, termites, and extracting thorns. They consider her advice and approach to healing using the juice of plants and vegetables for effective remedy.

Nanji can easily manage the kids at home in addition to her work. Even though the kids had medical problems or physical ailments. She did not complain, shout, or wail. Her first kid suffered from constipation for a while, her second son sleep walked, her third son wailed out in a melodious way that brought all the barnyard animals to the house, and her fourth son only ate once a day. Despite these quirks, Nanji accepts her duty as caregiver “fuss-free” (24). The real parenting challenge for Nanji starts with her sixth child. During the seventh-month of pregnancy Nanji suffered from fever. She never the less goes to the field and works with the Yeravas even though it is sowing season. A doctor from Gonicappa diagnoses her night-time chills as malaria and prescribes a low dose of quinine for her to take. The fever temporarily subsides but returns after two days. Nanji takes more quinine than necessary out of anxiety for the unborn child. The fever goes down, but she physically feels the effects of the increased dose and she feels the world spinning. She uses jaggery, asafoetida, almonds, and till with ghee to try to offset the medication. After a few days, the infant is born with crippled lower-body.

Baliyanna hears Nanji explain that she gave birth to a cripple while watching Nanji deliver the baby from outside. Nanji is so confused and alarmed by the paralyzed legs that she overlooks the fact that the boy is not crying. Her husband is equally stunned by any suggestions. As soon as she realizes how urgent the situation is, she grabs the freshly powdered pepper from Bolle and hurls a pinch of it into the infant’s face. The infant immediately cries after sneezing.

The setting for *The Scent of Pepper* is Coorg, a little enclave in the hills off the south-west coast of India that borders the Karnataka districts of Mysore, Hasan, and Dakshina Kannada as well as the Western Ghats. Coorg’s location has a crucial role in the regulation of food production. With relation to the Coorg people, the oft-quoted adage “what Indian eats depends on his region, religion, community, and caste” (78) is entirely accurate. The native name for Coorg, Kodagu or Kodumale, which underlines the topographical aspect of the area and means “steep mountains,” was used. Greenery dominates the nation’s overall appearance. The abundance of trees, farmland, and gushing rivers give the landscape a lovely attraction. Every mountain range is covered with thick woods, and the bamboo jungles that are interlaced with others are unique in these regions.

Nambisan has covered a lot of ground with her character Nanji in terms of the Coorg region and the Coorgi way of life. Nambisan has made a wise choice showing numerous domestic activities that her characters are involved in. They are regulated by the coffee leaves, the mountain’s slope, or Coorg’s overall landscape. They rely on nature for their food and are acutely aware of the abundance that nature bestows and nature is blessed by Gods and ancestors. She describes the hills and its flora and fauna with a profound level of sensitivity and subtlety showing the density and immediacy of natural life processes, which reveals her acute sense of place.

Kodagu is renowned for the quality of its organic cuisine. We come across orange, lime, guava, rose-apple, pomegranate, and plantain trees as we get closer to the Coorg homes, all of which are thriving incredibly well. The brave Baliyanna asserted the geographical feature and the



quantity of the natural resources of the region when he asked Clara, the stranger, to get her wild fruit of every colour and flavour. She was shocked to witness the "...juicy, bitter, honey-sweet, sticky; purple, orange, opalescent green, blood-red, and gleaming black" (72). The tang of a complex wild elixir invaded Clara's senses as she tasted everything till her hands and mouth were smeared and sticky. The exotic setting of Coorg, with its hilly backdrop and distinct culture, offers an interesting history of the area.

The narrative also depicts how history accurately moulds the Kodavas and their culture. They adopted names, eating habits, clothing, and manners, which resulted in the formation of a thin, flaky crust over their age-old culture. The surrender of power by the Diwans of Coorg to the British, which was like wise a ritual centered on food, is romantic in the novel. One of the four Diwans and the father of Baliyanna's mother switched allegiance to the British in 1834 along with the majority of other Kodavas. Rao Bahadur served as the host that day, and Chambavva oversaw the food. All the Kodagu's distinguished men sat around a round table that was renowned for its delectable cuisine and indisputable refinement. The actual supper was delicious and included partridge fried in "swine fat one for each guest, mutton curry with soft and silky nooluputto, pork pulav with wild mango chutney, and poppy seed-flavored payasa" (63). With sugar nut and just-picked betel leaves, the meal was finished. According to the novel, the Kodava have a unique culture and legacy that they have fervently protected over the years considering their history and terrain.

The Coorgs, however, were considered heathens by Westerners prior to the British occupation. They worshipped animals and ancestors and socialised with demons. They are unpredictable and unreliable, just like indigenous dead tigers. The people of Coorg refer to themselves as the people of nature. As long-time residents of Kodagu, the Kodava were the region's first farmers. They had sizable estates. Rice and coffee are the two main crops grown in this region, and agriculture is the mainstay of the Kodagu economy. The geographical location and the impact of foreign encroachments heavily influence the dependence on coffee cultivation.

The Kaleyanda, a feudal family in Athur village led by the pattedara Rao Bahadur, plays a vital role in *The Scent of Pepper*. Two of his boys were sent to England for their schooling, while one was sent to Madras. Rao Bahadur made the decision to evict Baliyanna from the family's Inn House after she earned a veterinary surgeon degree from Madras which even the British recognize. "He spent five thousand battis on a huge mansion, one hundred and twelve acres of newly planted coffee, and land in Athur" (10). Since the Kodavas approved widow remarriage, Nanji, a young widow from the Kongeitra tribe, is now wed to Baliyanna, a well-liked veterinarian among the British plantation owners who had moved in Kodagu village, that once will be a memory no more fields of ragi, turmeric, and mustard," they lamented, "for without the grassy fields what do the cows and goats feed on?" (56).

The rugged Nanji takes control of the large house in Athur on the first day and proceeds to turn it into a formidable strong hold. She has remained strong and essential to her family despite enduring thirteen pregnancies and battling through life's hardships. By the novel's conclusion, Nanji is an elderly woman who is alone saves for her favourite son Subbu. Through its lush valleys, swiftly running streams, paddy fields, coffee trees, cardamom, and pepper plantations, as well as the dependable rains that guarantee them a good harvest, the area is realistically depicted in the novel. The Kodavas have a unique way of life and culture due to their isolation in an area surrounded by dense jungle and mountain ranges. The many nads mentioned in the novel can be found on the Kodagu region's map. The reader might infer from the arrival of British planters in Kodagu, the decline in coffee prices due to the expansion of Brazilian coffee plantations, the nationalist struggle, Gandhi's visit, and the merger of Kodagu that the novel spans the years from 1850 to 1960.

The story depicts the passing of time through the changing of the seasons, the growing of rice and coffee, and the start of festivals. The narrative presents an accurate picture how the locals measure the passage of time in their day-to-day activities. The Kodavas are depicted by Nambisan



as a gorgeous, valiant, and warrior-like people. Many young Kodavas still enlist as soldiers today, carrying on its illustrious martial past. Nambisan writes: “‘A Kodava makes a fine soldier. When he wears his army greens, laces his boots, and raises the gun, there is no fumbling, no clumsiness’” (155). *The Scent of Pepper* clearly substantiates this: “Tiger skins and bison heads grace our homes. Any woman worth her man has a handful of tiger-claw ornaments to choose from. Our children cut their first teeth on them eat of bison, boar, wild fowl, and rabbit...” (64)

Every Kodava family has a wealth of tales about the bravery of their female members. It was the Maplahs who initially informed Nanji that the climate of Kodagu, with its ample shade, high rainfall, and months of dry weather, was perfect for pepper cultivation. Like many of her neighbours, Nanji had tried out a few vines, with which she had surrounded the nearby trees. Just enough pepper was produced by them to season her fried meat. In a robusta clearing covering five acres, she now placed them close to every tree. Within a few months, the shiny dark leaves of the vines began to ascend upward, festooning the trees like lacy clothing. After maturing and drying, the berries produced ready-to-use black peppercorns a year later. Nanji utilised the pepper that was left after selling it as a digestive aid, a carminative, and, when combined with honey, as a pain reliever.

The mid-level species were housed in the forested estates by the climbers, who climbed the shade trees and intertwined their branches. When coffee prices drop, the economy of Kodagu also benefits from the pepper and oranges. In large part, this Kodava agro-ecological technique of regrowing trees aids in the healing and revitalization of the soil. In this way, the Kodava people practise living in one area by developing methods to recreate the destroyed forests. The next section will examine the Kodava people’s evolution of waste-free living techniques.

The tale makes no mention of nature’s unadulterated visual magnificence. *The Scent of Pepper* presents a profound image of man in connection with his natural world and a close echo of Nambisan’s approach to nature is found in Thoreau’s *Walden*. Through her writing, Nambisan supports this idea of Indian modernism. They have a strong connection to the land that gives them a sense of rootedness that is unique to their area. The reality is that they eventually return to the land because of its compelling appeal. *The Scent of Pepper* comes to a finish with Subbu continuing to emphasize this fact about his own country and race. He comes to understand that their roots hold the key to their true destiny. In the novel, women look for peace and independence in nature to get away from patriarchal culture. Even in the face of hardship, even when they give into macho society and become the victims of murder and destruction, women do not give up their fight and strive.

### **Conclusion**

It can be observed that Nambisan through her novels illustrates the importance of the ecofeminist concepts that highlight the significance of maintaining equilibrium in all aspects of human behaviour. Through her portrayals, she describes how humans have exploited both nature and women and how this subjugation has led to the sidelining, devaluing and dislocation of the feminine principle. Nambisan through her illustrations calls for the dismissal of all forms of domination and the well-being of nature in all its realms including man and woman. The exploitation of women’s labour and the destruction of the natural environment are interconnected, as both are marginalized within the economy. Both the environment and women have been perceived as exploitable assets that are often underestimated. Consequently, the devastation of the environment leads to the eradication of women’s means of sustenance. Various discourses have influenced the approach to sustainable development which advocates an increased involvement of women in creating the concepts connected to preservation of environment and sustainability of women.

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**SACRED EARTH, DIGITAL SKY: THE EVOLUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

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**Abstract**

This research delineates the transition in India's environmental awareness from a holy, community-oriented ecosystem to tales of technologically mediated sustainability. This study employs an interdisciplinary framework from the Environmental Humanities to examine how Indian literature, religion, and visual culture have transformed the relationship between humanity and nature within spiritual, colonial, and digital paradigms. This paper explores the sacred cosmologies of the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and the oral traditions of tribal communities, which originated from the concept of a living earth, and examines how these ecological ethics were disrupted and transformed during the colonial encounter, wherein nature was commodified by imperial powers. The postcolonial era, exemplified by the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Mahasweta Devi, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy, reflects a longing for natural equilibrium while simultaneously denouncing the progress that has likely harmed this balance. In the twenty-first century, India's Smart City Mission, along with environmental art and films such as *Kantara* and *Kadvi Hawa*, is introducing novel aesthetic and ethical dilemmas with sustainability and technocracy. This study posits that India's environmental imaginary constitutes a palimpsest of holy memory and digital modernity, as elucidated by theorists such as Serenella Iovino, Ursula Heise, Vandana Shiva, and Dipesh Chakrabarti. The Environmental Humanities offer a critical lexicon to reconcile technologically ambitious India with its profound ecological foundations, projecting a sustainable and culturally anchored future.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanities, Indian Literature, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Smart Cities, Sustainability, Visual Culture

**Introduction**

Environmental consciousness in India cannot be described as being an afterthought to ecological degradation, but rather being the result of a deep civilizational inter-relatedness with the natural world. From the earliest Vedic hymns in which the Earth is conceptualized as a living matriarch to conversations among many economists and environmentalists on climate change and sustainable development now, the Indian imagination has persisted in making the place of nature the site of memory, ethical thought, and symbolism. The novel discipline of Environmental Humanities provides us with an interdisciplinary lexicon for the analysis of such cultural responses by bringing together literature, philosophy, religion, historiography and visual culture. As Serenella Iovino argues, environmental narratives represent "material expressions of ethical and ecological interdependence" (Iovino 15). Within this analytical frame, India offers a peculiarly layered perspective of development, in which age-old respect for ecological systems is on one hand co-existing with the needs of accelerated modernization, urbanization, and digital transformations on the other.

The precept that the Earth is a sacred being, deserving devotion, protection and reciprocity, pervades Indian thought even for centuries. The *Bhumi Sukta* of the *Rig Veda* states Earth as *Prithvi Mata*, the nurturing mother of all the souls (Rig Veda 1.1) and the *Isha Upanishad* discovers and affirms that the universe is pervaded by the Divine (Isha Upanishad 1). These sacred compositions emphasize on ecological interdependence and not exploitative extraction. Likewise classical Sanskrit literature - exemplified in Kalidasa's *Ritusamhara* and *Meghaduta* - describes

nature as an animate companion which is immersed in human feeling. Tribal cosmologies, like the Santhal worship of Sarna groves and the Khasi respect for sacred trees, incorporate this ecological view into specific cultural practices. Scholars, like David Kinsley, states that these sacred ecologies represent "a religiously informed ethic of restraint and reciprocity" (Kinsley 112). Vandana Shiva similarly argues that indigenous cosmologies express an "earth centred democracy" based on ecological balance (Shiva 45).

There is a radical change in this worldview during the colonial period. British colonial administration redefined nature as a commodified property, characterised by quantifiable parameters, extractable resources and as a property subject to regulation. Colonial forestry along with land revenue mechanisms and plantation economies seeking profit by harvesting timber resources, developing railways, and cultivating commercial agricultural products redesigned ecological relationships at the expense of Indian and local population demands. According to Guha and Gadgil (98), the colonial state experienced forests primarily as a resource for empire. These transformations are consistent with Nixon's idea of "slow violence" - the slow damage inflicted on vulnerable communities' environment. The outcomes of this changing consciousness are documented by the Indian literary works of Verrier Elwin, whose ethnographies bear witness to the tribal displacement or those of Mahasweta Devi to the ecological trauma suffered by the marginalized communities- in *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay*, and *Pirtha*. In this context sacred landscapes become disputed terrains restructured through imperialistic power.

Although independent of government the postcolonial period often continues the developmentalist paradigm. Hydroelectric dams, mining ventures, industrial zones, and discourses of national progress, recreate the place of nature as an instrument of development (rather than a community of life). Arundhati Roy attacks these policies in *The Greater Common Good* calling the Narmada dam project a "developmental catastrophe" (Roy 14). Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, in which climate change and migration are brought together, illustrates the dangerous mutual dependence between human communities and the Sundarbans (Ghosh 122). Rabindranath Tagore's work especially *Gitanjali* and *Fireflies* provide this argument by reiterating the unity between nature and spiritual existence (Tagore, *Gitanjali* 27). Postcolonial ecocritics Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that such texts help to understand the interrelated crises of environment and empire (Huggan and Tiffin 4) whereas the concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism" put forward by Ursula Heise offers an interpretation of the Indian environmental narratives within global ecological networks (Heise 21).

The twenty-first century brings new and perhaps one of the toughest transformations: the emergence of the new digital sustainability and smart urbanism. India's Smart City Mission, eco-urban planning and technological interventions in areas of climate management is creating a new ecological imagination -- mediated by sensors, data, green infrastructure and algorithmic design. Matthew Gandy points out that these kinds of urban ecological visions often tend to mix "technological systems with environmental aesthetics" (Gandy 73). Nevertheless, they also can separate ecological responsibility from cultural memory and so reduce nature to programmable landscape. Present day Indian movies like *Kantara* (2022) dramatizes the tension between indigenous ecological ethics and capitalistic modernity; *Kadvi Hawa* (2017) and *Irada* (2017) plays up the mood of fear of climate change and industrial pollutant. Graphic stories of mythical ecology like the *Adi Parva* and the *Sauptik* by Amruta Patil evokes its mythology through visual discourse, bridging chronology (mythological and environmental) and matters of ecoreligion. Donna Haraway reminds scholars that modern ecological thinking needs "stay with the trouble" recognising tangled interactions among humans, nonhumans, and technologies (Haraway 12).

Despite this expansive tradition, scholarship that explores India's environmental imagination through all these paradigms - sacred, colonial, postcolonial and digital - in the same analytical framework is lacking. The focus of existing studies is therefore on separating out these phases, and not reading them as if they were different layers of a common cultural consciousness. This paper makes an attempt to fill that gap by providing a long-view cultural analysis of how

nature is imagined and represented by India in the contexts of a spiritual, political, and technological arena. Drawing on the thesis of Dipesh Chakrabarti who states that human history and planetary history have come together to a new historical phase called the Anthropocene (Chakrabarty 14), the thesis arguments are that the environmental imagination in India represents a palimpsest: a cultural manuscript where older ethics of ecology continue to exist beneath modern modifications.

The "sacred earth" reflects memory of culture, ethical restraint, and relations of belonging, while innovations and planning of sustainability and global ecological participation become its legacies "in the digital sky." With the help of Yoga texts, the sight, mindscape and fragrance of nature, and a history of social issues and cultural changes, the paper shows that India's environmental thinking is not static and unitary but flows to meet the challenges of power, philosophy and technology as well as keeps going back to that intuition-that life is intrinsically interconnected everywhere. The Environmental Humanities thus offer critical space within which the ecological heritage of India can help to inform its imaginations of sustainable futures.

### **Sacred Earth: Indigenous and Spiritual Ecologies**

Indian environmental consciousness can be traced back from a cosmology that conceptualises the Earth as sacred, as relational and as living. The ancient ecological sensibilities are what David Kinsley calls "a spiritually grounded environmental ethic" (Kinsley 112), an ethic that continues to inform cultural memory despite the fact that it is undergoing radical transformation in modern times. The sacred imagination of nature in India is not purely metaphoric, nor merely symbolic whether literal or metaphorical, rather, it is part of a living ontology in which the Earth is one and the same as God (deity), kin (dharma) and cosmos.

*The Vedic and Upanishadic* literature offer some of the earliest statements of this picture of the world. *The Bhumi Sukta* of *Rig Veda* praises the Earth as *Prithvi Mata*, that, "Earth in which lie the sea, the river and other waters, in which food and plants grow, may she bestow upon us prosperity" ("Hymn to the Earth" 1.1). This hymn brings ecological reciprocity to the fore: life on the planet Earth is more or less nourished by the planet, and mankind's journey the responsibility to protect the fertility and balance of the aforementioned planet. The *Isha Upanishad* takes this ethic of relationships further and states, "All this-whatever is in this changing universe-should be covered by the Lord" (*Isha Upanishad* 1). The verse also suggests that a misuse of nature is a spiritual transgression and this somewhat blurs the boundaries between sacred duty and ecological responsibility. Environmental theorist Vandana Shiva understands such cosmologies as early forms of expression for "earth-centred democracy," in which environmental stewardship is an integral part of the moral fabric of civil society (Shiva 45).

Classical Sanskrit literature extends this sacred point of view about the ecology by reinforcing what can be seen in nature not only as the background but as the active participant in human emotion and ethical life. Kalidasa, one of the great classical poets of India, is an example of this sensibility. In *Ritusamhara* the seasons are personified, as moods replacing the emotional and aesthetic experience. In *Meghadūta*, the exiled Yaksha proclaims his message through a passing cloud, elevating his cloud to the status of a companion that is capable of feeling and movement (Kalidasa 33). The natural world thereby becomes imbued with agency as it becomes a middleman between a desire, memory and the sacred meaning. As William Cronon observes, such literary modes wear off modern dichotomies between "culture" and "nature", and instead depict landscapes as morally and symbolically-charged (Cronon 69).

Beyond the traditions of the Sanskritic tradition are the tribal and indigenous ecologies which offer some of the strongest models of sacred environmental consciousness. In central and northeast India tribal people including Santhal, Munda, Gond, Khasi and Naga people if holding on to their cultural practices consider forests, rivers, mountains as their sacred kin. The sacred groves - or *devrai* of Maharashtra, *sarna* of Jharkhand and *law kyntang* of Meghalaya - serve as bundles of ecology conserved but through ritual and not as a result of formal action by the state.

These groves are what Ramachandra Guha refers to as "ecosystems conserved by cultural sanction" (Guha 18). Their protection is not protected through law, but through sets of beliefs that consider the felling of trees or killing of animals within the grove as taboo. Such space creates a relational ontology where human beings are custodians of nature not their owner.

Oral literatures are additional sources that shed light on these indigenous ethics about ecology. Tribal songs and myths often explain the origins of rivers, mountains or forests in the form of an ancestor who is present to guide and protect the community. In Santhal stories, for example, the first humans come out of some primitive grove, which represents both the birth of ecology and the belonging people have to culture (Murmu 54). These narratives express Christopher Chapple's idea of "eco-spiritual narratives," in which cosmology, ecology and identity are not distinct (Chapple 102). Formulations of indigenous conceptions of ecology, unlike Western ecological thought, which tends to be in the language of science or policy, are expressed through ritual, song, and seasonal activities.

In many native traditions destroying the ecology is considered a spiritual rupture. Floods, droughts and crop failures are not taken as environmental events but are explained as a consequence of violating sacred relationships. This worldview relates to Arne Naess's concept of Deep Ecology, which places a greater emphasis on intrinsic value as well as ecological selfhood (Naess 80). Though these questions arise from a different philosophical background, Deep Ecology has a lot in common with Indian spiritual ecologies both rooted in interdependence and humility in front of the natural world.

Furthermore, by situating people inside rather than above the natural world, these sacred ecologies subvert contemporary anthropocentrism. The Indian tradition, where rivers like the Ganga are revered as mothers, mountains like Arunachala as manifestations of Shiva, and trees like the Peepal as life-sustaining entities, resonates with Donna Haraway's concept of "making kin" (Haraway 12), which rethinks human and nonhuman relations. Ecological ethics are embodied in rituals surrounding these natural phenomena. Agricultural seasons are celebrated, rivers are maintained, and tree worship is honoured through water ceremonies.

Importantly, these sacred frameworks of relations are neither static nor idealized but have systems that have historically shaped social hierarchies, agricultural practices and governance that we now classify as communal. The Bishnoi community of Rajasthan, for instance, follows a 29-point ecological code limiting the harvesting of timber and the killing of fauna, which predates the most recent conservation efforts by hundreds of years (Bedi 41). Their collective sacrifice in the posthumous massacre of Khejarli in 1730 where hundreds of them lost their lives in protecting arboreal resources is the finest example of the ingrained nature of ecological stewardship with respect to cultural identity. Nevertheless, the sacred ecological worldview does not assume that precolonial India was in some state of ecological utopia. As those like Madhav Gadgil have pointed out, indigenous societies also reconstructed landscapes of their own through agriculture, hunting and shifting-attenuation (Gadgil 23). However, these modifications were based on principles in cosmology that ensured the use of equilibrium instead of domination - which to a great extent distinguishes it from the extractive intensities prevalent with colonial and current industrial systems.

In sum, the sacred ecological imagination of India, which is related across the historical horizons of Vedic, classical, and indigenous traditions, forms a basic layer in the environmental consciousness of the nation. These traditions express an ethos of care, restraint, and reciprocity that is encoded in texts, rituals and shared memory. This section shows that the ecological heritage of India is not just historical in character; it still survives as a cultural substratum that is informing environment debate even in the present day. As the following parts will show, this sacred worldview suffers rupture in colonial modernity and therewith undergoes further change in postcolonial and digital ecological imaginaries. Nonetheless, the resonance of sacred ecology is very central to the palimpsestic evolution of India's environmental consciousness.

### **Colonising Nature: Empire, Modernity, and Extraction**

The arrival of British colonial rule in India was a major turning point on this environmental consciousness of the subcontinent. While indigenous cosmologies saw the Earth as sacred and relationally oriented, the idea of forest, river, minerals and landscapes as an economic asset was introduced by the colonial state which developed an extractive logic. This transformation not only meant a change on the political side but was also a dramatic epistemic break. As Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil point out, the British rule imposed "a new resource regime" which aimed to restructure Indian landscapes for commercial exploitation (Guha and Gadgil 98). Consequently, the colonial encounter institutionalised a utilitarian and anthropocentric understanding of nature that still informs nature in shaping environmental policies in post-colonial India.

One of the more obvious mechanisms of colonial ecological control was the Imperial Forest Department set up in 1864. Its objective covered not conservation in the modern sense, but the regulation of timber, mainly teak and sal, for the needs of the British navy, as well as railway expansion. The Forest Acts of 1865, 1878 and 1927 in India criminalised the traditional uses of forest and turned the communities into trespassers on lands they had inhabited for generations. Madhav Gadgil describes this process as being one of "displacement through legal enclosure," which is a form of environmental dispossession that fundamentally changed human ancestry relationships with forests (Gadgil 27). What once had been sacred landscapes became bureaucratically managed landscapes so classified according to economic value rather than ecological or cultural significance.

The process outlined in this piece is one example of what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence" - a form of harm done to the environment that is slow and often imperceptible, being done to people in marginalized communities (Nixon 2). The growth of colonial forestry practices was systematic in disrupting indigenous livelihoods, undermining indigenous local ecological epistemologies, and centralizing authority in the management of indigenous forests in the state apparatus. As a result local communities suffered damage to important resources such as firewood, grazing territories, medicinal flora, and sacred groves, as agricultural commercial plantation enterprises replaced a variety of forest ecosystems. The historian of the environment, William Cronon, claims these types of interventions originate from a "commodified view of landscape" characteristic of western modernity (Cronon 74). Within the Indian context such commodification has brought it into direct conflict with long-standing sacred ecological systems.

Colonial literature of the time reflects the underlying contradictions and tensions in the reinvention of nature. Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* though fictitious, has the essence of colonial rhetoric where wilderness represents a space to be governed, domesticated and organized in the name of imperial power. The character of Mowgli, as designed to be the "master of the jungle" symbolically represents the colonial impulse to command unmanaged spaces (Kipling 58). Though Kipling idealizes Indian forests, his narrative in the end functions in the interest of colonial civilizing mission through the privileged ordering of land relations to the exclusion of indigenous land relationships. This literary description is parallel to colonizing administrative methods that attempted to classify forests through scientific frameworks and thereby buried the cultural importance.

Critically, Indigenous and postcolonial authors have voiced the response towards ecological violence as executed by colonial environmental policies. In Mahasweta Devi's novella *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay*, and *Pirtha*, it is woven to show a tribal community ravaged by development and government ill usury. The image of the mythical pterodactyl becomes the emblem of both the trauma of the past and the disunity of the environment today. Devi draws attention to "The mountain is crying . . . the trees have forgotten their leaves" (Devi 56), and in this sense, environmental degradation is in itself a process of cultural erasure. Her story shows how colonial and the postcolonial policies operate in ways which perpetuate a cycle of ecological exploitation in its Adivasi territories. Moreover, Devi's work resonates with Graham Huggan and



Helen Tiffin's idea of "double marginalization" imposed to postcolonial subjects - those who are subjected to the dual imperial domination and environmental injustice (Huggan and Tiffin 15).

Verrier Elwin, who was linked with the colonial form of ethnography, came to be a crusader for tribal rights and preservation of forests. His publication *The Muria and Their Ghotul* prove that indigenous communities had the sustainable ecological patterns long before the theorists of modern conservation strategies had come up with their maneuvers. Elwin noticed that Adivasi cosmology was inseparable from the forest as he stated that "Trees are their temples, the earth their scripture" (Elwin 31). Somewhat critics of the colonial state's failure to understand non-extractive ecological relationships implicitly parrying existing colonial understandings, his writings can be classified as such.

Another very important dimension of environmental transformation is the colonial transformation of riverine environments. Large scale irrigation schemes, canals and dams were introduced to develop larger commercial agriculture - especially for indigo, cotton, and tea cultivation. Although these projects augmented revenues, there were hydrological regime disturbances, saline soils and aggravated flood and drought conditions in several regions. Historian Rohan D'Souza argues that colonial water policy led to a "hydraulic despotism" that resulted in the supremacy of engineering as opposed to ecological wisdom (D'Souza 52). As a consequence, the sacred river was re-invented as an economic tool, measurable only in terms of yield and productivity.

These extractive practices influenced the modern era Indian environmental consciousness indelibly. Post-colonial environmental conflicts such as the Chipko Movement, the Narmada Bachao Andolan and anti-mining protests in central India are impossible to understand without some colonials. As Arundhati Roy has observed, development in post-colonial India is frequently "replicating the logic of the empire," which sets economic growth over environmental justice (Roy 14). Therefore, the colonialism instituted ecological governance patterns that still affect the post 1947 India.

Nevertheless, colonial modernity brought scientific forestry, botanical surveys and environmental documentation which then fed into conservation initiatives. This paradox is important in exposing the hidden complexity in India's colonial environmental history. Dipesh Chakrabarti reminds us that the histories of capitalism and empire are linked to planetary histories that change the human and nonhuman realms (Chakrabarti 17). Because, by definition, the colonial epoch cannot be the destruction; it means a deep restructuring of ecological relationships, the echoes of which are still forced upon us today.

The current part shows that colonial rule re-crafted nature from the paradigm of sacred kinship to the paradigm of bureaucratically managed resources. The shift from indigenous ethical representation of ecology to that of imperial extraction was a break away in way we imagine the environment, replacing the community-based stewardship of it with centralized control. Nonetheless, colonial narratives caused and rendered resistance and alternative ecological visionary through literature, activism and indigenous practices. The following section explores the ways the postcolonial Indian writers recover the ecological belonging, and critique the developmental paradigms emergent from the colonial legacy.

### **Reclaiming the Ecological Self: Postcolonial and Modern Narratives**

The postcolonial period is a critical moment in the remaking of the environmental imagination of India. Part of the inheritance of an extractive ecological framework in the post-colonial state, newly independent India had to face the twin imperatives of building a nation and preserving the environment. Yet economic development soon became the major national concern - often internationally replicating the colonial rationality of resource exploitation. Within this context, there were Indian writers and thinkers and filmmakers that began to articulate new ecological visions that aimed to reclaim the relational, ethical, and cultural dimensions of human-natural relationships. These postcolonial narratives are not just about protesting environmental

injustice; they also re-create a sense of ecological selfhood in ways which challenge the developmentalist imaginary and reinstate indigenous ecological memory.

Rabindranath Tagore was one of the very first and most influential personalities to articulate a postcolonial ecological worldview. Even though his work is from a period before independence, his ideas had a great impact on the modern Indian consciousness. In *Gitanjali*, Tagore personifies nature together with spiritual experience: "The same stream of life that runs through my veins runs through the world" (Tagore 27). Nature in this case is not external to the human condition but is the ground of existence itself. Tagore's educational experiment of *Santiniketan* was another embodiment of such a philosophy and embraced the spirit of outdoor education, seasonal activities, and ecological sensitivities as part of the curriculum. As in the case of literature and technology, Tagore's environmental sensibility brought about a revival of traditional ecological ethics along with a critique of industrial modernity (Shiva 67). In bringing sacred ecological values in contemporary times, Tagore almost offered a model of the ecological self for the re-envisioning of an Indian dealing with the modern.

Postcolonial literature goes further and delves into the ecological consequences of development, displacement, and land-politics in depth. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers one of the most sensitive pictures of the ecological modernity of India. Situated in the middle of a delicate landscape in the tidal zone of the Sundarbans, the novel questions the tension between conservation work, livelihood, and vulnerable environment in terms of climate change. Ghosh describes nature as paradoxically nurturing and unpredictable - a force shaped by humankind and yet beyond the control to understand or regulate. Through the intertwined stories of Piya, Kanai and Fokir, he reveals the real many-layered identities - cosmopolitan, indigenous, migrant - that marshal in the Sundarbans. As Ursula Heise has argued, such narratives represent an "eco-cosmopolitan imagination," and help readers to understand local environments in terms of global entanglement (Heise 21). Consequently, the Sundarbans becomes a nexus of the histories of a particular intersection - of colonial forestry, postcolonial displacement and global climate change. Ghosh's follow-up work, including *Gun Island* is where this ecological critique is carried even further by the Anthropocene as a link between myth, migration and climate crisis. Dipesh Chakrabarty's thesis that modernity has engendered a "planetary conjuncture" which brings together human and geological histories (Chakrabarti 16) resonates very strongly with Ghosh's narrative strategy. Within this framework it is clear that the ecological self is not so much local or universal, being rather shaped by the intersection of histories of empire, environment, and global mobility.

Another key character who recovers ecological consciousness through a critique of postcolonial development is Arundhati Roy. In *The Greater Common Good*, Roy helps to shed light on the human and environmental annihilation caused by the Narmada dam project. She argues that state-led development is a replica of colonial extractive practices that "the millions of displaced people are asked to suffer so that others can profit" (Roy 14). Roy's critique establishes the destruction of the environment as a question of social justice, which fits with Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" in which environmental harm occurs invisibly over time (Nixon 3). Her novel *The God of Small Things* goes on to show the scars that landscapes carry of caste violence, political conflict and ecological loss. Through her lyrical prose, Roy lays bare the intertwining of environmental and social inequities to provide postcolonial ecological ethic based on resistance and care.

Mahasweta Devi's corpus amplifies an ethical vision by bringing experiences of Adivasis on environmental displacement to the fore. In *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay*, and *Pirtha*, Devi describes a tribe community devastated by ecological trauma of development. The pterodactyl (mythical and emblematic of deep time) winds up being both ancestral memory and the violence of modernity. Devi writes "The mountains mourn for their own dead" (Devi 59) which is a metaphor on land being ravaged by extraction and neglect. Her narrative helps to drive home the point that ecological disaster is unequivocal from political disempowerment, as it is in places where mining

and deforestation drive Indigenous communities out. As Huggan and Tiffin argue, these types of narratives point towards a "double oppression" experienced by post-colonial subjects who have to survive both environmental and social injustice (Huggan & Tiffin 15). Some other authors, including Girish Karnad in *Hayavadana* and *Naga-Mandala* develop ecological issues through myth and performance. While not explicitly environmental, Karnad's plays do deal with human-nonhuman entanglements and fragmentation of cultural identity in contemporary India. His use of the folk and mythic relates to the reclamation of Indigenous ecological epistemologies in a contemporary context. Similarly, poets like A.K. Ramanujan, Mamta Kalia and Nissim Ezekiel show in their descriptions of urbanization, industrial pollution and cultural alienation, tensions between ecology and the built environment.

Postcolonial environmental narratives do indeed extend in activism and the grassroots. The *Chipko Movement* of the 1970s, to a large extent led by women of the villages in Uttarakhand, reasserted the forest as a place of livelihood, spirituality and as well as communal identity. Their actions of hugging trees were, at the same time, ecological resistance and feminist affirmation, and they echo Shiva's declaration that women suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation (Shiva 88). Similarly, *Narmada Bachao Andolan* countered the mega developmental projects, claiming their local power over the land, water and forests. These movements reflect the concept of "material ecocriticism" created by Serenella Iovino in which corporeality, landscape, and narrative coalesce to engender ecological agency (Iovino 23).

In addition, modern Indian cinema is also significant in shaping postcolonial ecological imagination. Filmic works such as *Dil Se* (1998), *Kaadu* (2014), and *Kadvi Hawa* (2017) represent landscapes as active things that affect who people are and who comes into conflict with whom. Through visual narrative, these films pose the environmental and ideological effects of development, urbanization, and resource extraction. By grafting the literary critiques into the contemporary world of the visual image, they highlight the sameness of ecological loss and cultural loss. Collectively, these postcolonial narratives take back the environmental self through reintroducing relationality, memory and ethics into the interactions between humans and nature. They provide a critique of the developmentalist paradigm that was inherited from colonial governance, putting forward the cultural, ecological and emotional ramifications of environmental destruction. Through a heterogeneous assortment of conventions, including the novel, the essay, the film, the myth and activism, these narratives envision alternative ecological futures that pivot around the principles of justice, community and care. The following section explores how the twentieth century migration back into the future represented by digital sustainability and smart urbanism shapes the environmental imagination in India in ways that could instigate new identities between ecological memory and technological modernism.

#### **Digital Sky: Environmental Aesthetics in Contemporary Urban and Media Ecologies**

The twenty-first century marks a significant inflection point in the ecological imagination of India, in which digital technologies and urban planning offer more knowledge about environmental thought. The Smart City Mission aims to promote the idea of sustainability through data infrastructures, intelligent mobility and climate - responsive design. While these initiatives are ostensibly aimed at the possible softening of such a constrictive consensus in as much as they enable more efficient environmental governance, scholars argue that they introduce the risk of reducing nature to a purely technological variable. Matthew Gandy says that smart-urban visions usually rewrite ecological spaces into "infrastructural units," unfurling them from their cultural and communal signification (Gandy 74). The tension articulated above is present in the modern Indian cinema. The film *Kantara* plays out a real conflict between sacred ecological guardianship and bureaucratic development, and thus implies that technological development may erode local ecological identities. Likewise, *Kadvi Hawa* brings to the foreground issues relating to climate vulnerability in rural India at the expense of technocracy highlighting the human cost of environmental change. Graphic narratives such as Amruta Patil's *Adi Parva* only lead onto further

links between mythic ecology and digital aesthetics, and indeed serve to show how traditional cosmologies are continually rearticulated in the fast-paced generation of digital visual culture. Collectively, these works underline the fact that completely neutral yet exhaustive by no means, India's digital environmental imagination is part of what it hopes will approve a mode of ecological modernity just as much as it draws light on the pattern of exclusions and tensions produced by technologically suggested development.

#### **Palimpsests of Ecology: Integrating Sacred and Smart Futures**

India's environmental imagination works as palimpsest, i.e. a multilayered cultural text with sacred, postcolonial, and digital ecological discourses intersecting each other. Dipesh Chakrabarty's concept of planetary entanglement brings nineteenth-century climatic realities into the climax for neurological interdependence and participates for collective understanding towards the environment (Chakrabarti 17). Sacred ecologies, based on reciprocity and caring for the environment, set up value systems in opposition to the extractive tendencies of the industrial modernity. Postcolonial narratives particularly those of Mahasweta Devi, Amitav Ghosh, and Arundhati Roy throw light on the uneven burdens of environmental degradation and consequently fall into the ethical net of Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence." Digital sustainability, on the other hand, provides new tools for ecological monitoring, modelling and activism, but comes with the risk of giving preference to technological solutions at the expense of community knowledge. Serenella Iovino's material ecocriticism offers a way out of this impasse that is constructive in its aim to acknowledge that at work is not any single narrative but the interaction of several elements, such as the interplay between landscapes and bodies, technologies and cultural memory. In order to envision sustainable futures, India will have to weave these layers together - maintaining sacred ecological ethics, fighting postcolonial injustices and using digital innovation. Such an integrated approach is resistant to such romantic nostalgia while arguing for the inextricable connection of ecology from lived cultural experience.

#### **Conclusion**

The development of the environmental imagination in India - from divine landscapes to cyber urbanity future - lingers over the history of a tradition of ecological thought that is fluid and dynamic, studious and contemplative, but it is also culturally based. Sacred cosmologies are a basic relational ethic where nature is seen as kin, teacher and God. Colonialism disrupted these relationships by bringing in an extractive environmental logic which can still be seen reflected in many modern development practices. Postcolonial writers and activists have mightily reacted by reclaiming ecological agencies and converting the injustices embedded in State-forecasted modernization. In the twenty-first century, digital technologies and frameworks of smart cities have made possible new ecological possibilities and have created new forms of exclusion simultaneously, especially as combinations of technological visions outpace memory of the cultural and local ecological. Placing the environmental imagination of India in its palimpsest makes it easier to envisage a more inclusive understanding of sustainability-one that has not only respected the ethical dimensions of sacred traditions, but also tackled postcolonial imbalances in environmental injustices, and added technology in a responsible manner. Ultimately India's ecological fate will have to be determined by this layered consciousness. By incorporating and managing cultural memory, social justice, and digital creativity, India has every opportunity to develop its ecologically sound, justice-oriented, and deeply rooted in its civilization an understanding of the connectedness of all living things.

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**THE REAL AND THE APPEARANCE: REVISITING RADHAKRISHNAN'S CONCEPT  
OF *MĀYĀ* THROUGH THE LENS OF ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS**

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**Abstract**

In the present era of environmental degradation and ecological crisis demands not only a technological innovation and political solutions but also a deeper philosophical and spiritual reorientation. This paper explores how Neo-Vedantic philosophy provides a metaphysical and ethical foundation for ecological awareness. Special emphasis is placed on Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of *Māyā*, which transforms it from a doctrine of illusion into a principle of divine creativity. Neo-Vedanta reinterprets the classical Advaitic insight of the unity of existence (*Brahman*) as a living principle that links humanity, nature, and the divine. In contrast to the classical Advaitic notion that views *Māyā* as illusion; the veil that conceals the ultimate reality, Radhakrishnan conceives it as the dynamic and creative manifestation of the Real. The phenomenal world, therefore, is not an illusion to be transcended but an expression of the divine consciousness. Within this framework, nature becomes a living embodiment of the Divine, demanding reverence rather than exploitation. Interpreting *Māyā* as the bridge between metaphysics and ecology reveals that ecological degradation stems from *Avidyā*; the ignorance that separates human from non-human existence. Therefore, Radhakrishnan's vision offers not only a reinterpretation of reality but also a spiritually grounded framework for ecological reverence and sustainable living in the modern world. Recognizing the world as a divine manifestation fosters an ecological consciousness rooted in spiritual unity. Neo-Vedāntic philosophy transforms spiritual realization into ecological responsibility by integrating *ahimsā* (non-violence) and *sevā* (service) into environmental ethics, thereby offering a holistic paradigm that unites metaphysics, spirituality, and environmental stewardship.

**Keywords:** *Māyā*, Ecological Consciousness, Environmental Ethics, Ultimate reality, Metaphysics

**Introduction**

Climate change, species extinction, and the deterioration of natural ecosystems are examples of the current ecological catastrophe, which has been characterized as a philosophical and spiritual failure as much as a technological or political one. The crisis reflects an ontological estrangement: humanity's alienation from the natural world. Modern industrial civilization, grounded in mechanistic materialism, views nature as an object of control rather than communion. Amid these circumstances of ecological degradation, philosophy is required to offer both a transformative vision of the relationship between humans and nature as well as a critical comprehension of human existence. Indian metaphysical traditions, particularly Vedānta, conceive of reality as an interrelated whole where the divine, human, and nature coexist within a shared unity. The present study reinterprets S. Radhakrishnan's conception of *Māyā* within the framework of ecological thought. By revisiting Radhakrishnan's concept of *Māyā* through the lens of ecological awareness, this paper seeks to show that Neo-Vedānta provides an untapped philosophical foundation for environmental ethics. It argues that the recovery of a spiritual vision of the world, where the appearance and the real interpenetrate—can foster an ecologically balanced consciousness. In the age of environmental crisis, Radhakrishnan's philosophy stands as a call to re-enchant the world, to perceive the sacred in the natural, and to rediscover the moral responsibility that arises from the unity of existence. This paper re-examines S. Radhakrishnan's interpretation of *Māyā* within the framework of ecological philosophy and environmental ethics.



Traditionally, *Māyā* has been understood as illusion or appearance that conceals the reality of *Brahman*. Beginning with the Vedic notions of “power” and “wonder,” and culminating in Śaṅkara’s refined concept of *Avidyā*, generated superimposition, the study traces how *Māyā* transformed from a poetic symbol to a rigorous philosophical principle and also reviews objections raised within the Vedānta tradition and evaluates the contemporary significance of the doctrine. Rejecting the classical illusionist reading of *Māyā*, Radhakrishnan redefines it as the creative manifestation of the Absolute; a metaphysical principle by which Spirit unfolds itself as the phenomenal world and such a reinterpretation can offer a metaphysical foundation for ecological awareness. By viewing the world not as illusory but as a divine expression of Being, Radhakrishnan’s philosophy invites an ethic of reverence, responsibility, and harmony toward nature. Through a comparative and interpretative analysis, the study demonstrates how Radhakrishnan’s Neo-Vedāntic vision transcends the duality of the real and the apparent, offering an integrative worldview essential for environmental ethics in the contemporary age. Within the Indian philosophical tradition, *Māyā* refers a term often misinterpreted as mere illusion which plays a pivotal role in determining the nature of the world and the human place within it. For S. Radhakrishnan, one of the foremost exponents of Neo-Vedānta, *Māyā* is not the negation of reality but its manifestation. Radhakrishnan’s idealistic metaphysics thus provides the conceptual resources for rethinking the human-nature relationship beyond exploitation and alienation. Through this transformation, *Māyā* becomes the medium of divine self-expression rather than the source of ignorance. The study situates this dynamic idealism within contemporary ecological discourse, arguing that Radhakrishnan’s reinterpretation of *Māyā* dissolves the opposition between the real and the apparent and grounds an ethic of ecological reverence. If the world is a living revelation of Spirit, then all beings possess intrinsic worth, and ecological responsibility becomes a form of spiritual self-realization. Ultimately, Radhakrishnan’s metaphysical humanism offers a transformative vision in which liberation (*mokṣa*) and ecological harmony coincide, inviting humanity to rediscover the sacredness of the world as the visible body of the Real.

#### **Classical Background: *Māyā* as Illusion**

The term *Māyā* has been fluid and multivalent throughout Indian intellectual history, appearing with various shapes of meaning across the *Vedas*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Upaniṣads*, and *Vedānta*. The doctrine of *Māyā* is as old as Indian philosophy and has been a source of consolation to many perplexed minds, who sought to grasp the relationship between reality and appearance. The earliest occurrence of *Māyā* is found in the R̥gveda, where the term primarily denotes “skill,” “supernatural power,” or “wonder-working ability” attributed to divine beings such as *Indra* and *Varuṇa*. Even when it meant power, it carried the connotation of “supernatural or wondrous power,” not ordinary physical force. This sense of mysterious power later provided the semantic basis for the notion of illusion. Shastri notes that “Hence, I have confined my inquiry to the Vedic literature, especially the Upaniṣads, and have carried my investigation down to Śaṅkara. My conclusions are that the conception of *Māyā* is as old as some of the later books of the R̥gveda where its forms are clearly noticeable, and that it gradually developed through the speculation of the Upaniṣads, and passing through the hands of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara were crystallized into a technical form, elaborated more and more as time went on.” (Shastri-vi) In the Atharvaveda, the term begins to acquire the meaning of magic, linking it more closely to deception and illusion. Shastri mentioned that “From the very nature of the contents of the Atharvaveda it is easy to judge the meaning of the word *Māyā* as used in it. Here the mysterious or magical element of the “power” spoken of in the R̥gveda is more emphasized, and there hardly seems any scope for doubting the meaning. It means “magic” throughout, and is even translated as “illusion.” (Shastri 14) This shift in meaning plays an essential role in the philosophical development of *Māyā*. In the *Brāhmaṇas* and early Upaniṣads, although the technical word is rare, the idea of *Māyā*—the disparity between appearance and reality—begins to emerge. Any attempt to understand the metaphysics of the Upaniṣads must engage with *Māyā*, for the problem of explaining the world’s



plurality while affirming *Brahmans* unity lies at the heart of Vedāntic inquiry. The doctrine is not merely theological but profoundly philosophical, addressing questions of ontology, epistemology, and liberation. His deepest philosophical discussions relevant to the doctrine of *Māyā* are found in the Upaniṣads, which form the concluding and reflective portions of the Brāhmaṇas. Texts such as the Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, and Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa employ forms like *māyā*, *māyām*, and *māyayā* to indicate the operative power by which gods exercise their creative or magical abilities." Vajasaneyi Saṃhitā contains uses of "*māyā*," "*māyām*," "*māyayā*," and "*māyāyām*." Mahīdhara, a commentator, glosses these words with *prajñā* (knowledge) and *buddhi* (intelligence), indicating that *māyā* here refers to mental or cognitive power. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa Uses "*māyayā*," "*māyām*," "*māyavant*," and "*māyāvattaraḥ*." In this context, the term means supernatural or magical ability, often possessed by gods or extraordinary beings. Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa Includes "*māyayā*." Sayāṇa, the medieval commentator, explains it as "by divine power." Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa Contains "*māyām*," "*māye*," and "*māyavant*." Again, these refer to divine or extraordinary power. These references illustrate the early semantic field of *māyā* and provide an essential foundation for understanding its later philosophical transformation in the Upaniṣads. (Shastri 15-16) Philosophical reflection in India began with attempts to explain the cosmos. A movement from multiplicity to unity. Shastri cites Ṛgveda, to show that plurality was eventually regarded as a matter of "speech" or appearance, not reality. Gauḍapāda, in his Māṇḍūkya Kārikā, articulates one of the earliest systematic expressions of *Māyā*. Gauḍapāda asserts the non-existence of the world in an ultimate sense, the world does not exist in reality and multiplicity is false. Nothing is ever born (*Ajāti-vāda*). World-appearance is likened to the illusion of a firebrand-circle (*ālāta-cakra*) when a stick is rotated swiftly. Gauḍapāda therefore bridges Upaniṣadic monism and Śaṅkara's fuller system.

#### Śaṅkara's Systematization

The doctrine of *Māyā* stands at the centre of *Advaita Vedānta*, expressing the metaphysical distinction between *Brahman* as the only ultimate reality and the phenomenal world as an appearance. Among the foundational concepts of Indian metaphysics, *Māyā* remains one of the most debated and misunderstood. *Māyā* is the "pivotal principle" of *Advaita* and the final pronouncement of Indian speculation on Reality and Appearance. Yet *Māyā* did not always mean illusion. Its history reflects a gradual transformation from denoting supernatural power to representing the phenomenal world's illusoriness. Śaṅkara inherits both the terminology and metaphysical concerns of earlier thinkers, but he provides the most rigorous formulation. For him *Brahman* alone is real. The world is a superimposition (*adhyāsa*) caused by beginningless ignorance (*avidyā*). That the universe is *Māyā*, having only a phenomenal or relative existence. *Māyā* is the principle responsible for this superimposition. In Śaṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta*, *Māyā* functions as the principle that explains how the nondual Absolute (*Brahman*) appears as the pluralistic world. The empirical realm (*vyāvahārika satya*) is deemed relatively real, dependent on *Brahman*, while only the Absolute (*paramārthika satya*) is ultimately real. The phenomenal world, in this scheme, is *anirvacanīya*—indescribable, neither real nor unreal. Key similes Śaṅkara uses to clarify this: The rope mistaken for a snake, The magician and his illusions, The desert mirage, The dream state. The central features of the Vedānta philosophy, as it is conceived at the present day, are briefly explained in the lines:

"Brahman is the real, the universe is false,

The Atman is Brahman. Nothing else." (Radhakrishnan 431)

Śaṅkara insists that though the world is ultimately false, it remains relatively real (*vyāvahārika-sattā*) for practical purposes—just as dream objects are real until awakening. This dual standpoint—absolute (*pāramārthika*) and empirical (*vyāvahārika*)—solves the problem of engaging with the world while affirming non-duality. However, Rāmānuja rejects *Māyā* as illusion, arguing that, the world is a real part of God, not a delusion. Ignorance cannot be beginningless or inexplicable. Shastri documents Rāmānuja's view that *Māyā* is simply the Lord's

power, not an ontological negation of the world. Madhva (Dvaita)- Madhva argues for absolute dualism and real plurality, denying that multiplicity can be illusory. Vallabha (Śuddhādvaita)- Vallabha interprets *Māyā* not as illusion but as God's creative potency. He posits that the world emerges from *Kṛṣṇa* through the agency of *prakṛti* or *Māyā* understood as a divine, positive force, not deception

The doctrine of *Māyā* is not a nihilistic denial of the world but a profound metaphysical insight into the layered structure of reality. From its Vedic origins as mysterious power to its Advaitic use as ontological illusion, *Māyā* evolved into a principle that reconciles unity with diversity. The objections of Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Vallabha highlight its philosophical challenges, yet the doctrine remains central to Indian metaphysics. Shastri's work demonstrates that *Māyā* is not an artificial invention of Śaṅkara but a concept deeply rooted in the entire trajectory of Vedic and Vedāntic thought. Its enduring relevance lies in its ability to address universal questions concerning the nature of reality, perception, and human liberation.

### **Radhakrishnan's Metaphysics of *Māyā***

The doctrine of *Māyā* occupies a central position in classical *Advaita* metaphysics, yet its interpretation has gone through significant philosophical transformation. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of the Vedāntic doctrine of *Māyā* challenges the traditional illusionistic reading of the phenomenal world. Among modern Indian philosophers, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan stands as a pivotal thinker who reinterprets classical *Vedānta* for modern consciousness. His reinterpretation of *Māyā* transforms illusion into manifestation, thereby restoring dignity to the empirical world. This transformation carries profound ecological implications. If the world is not an illusion to be transcended but a manifestation of Spirit to be revered, then the natural environment assumes intrinsic value. For him, the world is not a negation of reality but its dynamic manifestation—a realm where the Absolute expresses itself in the forms of becoming. This paper revisits Radhakrishnan's metaphysics of *Māyā* through the lens of contemporary and ecological awareness, arguing that his non-dualistic ontology offers a valuable framework for environmental ethics. Drawing upon both Vedāntic foundations and modern philosophical sensibilities, Radhakrishnan argues that *Māyā* is not a doctrine of world-denial but a pointer to the limited, partial, and conditioned nature of empirical experience. His approach also critically interrogates the historical assumption that the classical texts unequivocally endorse world-illusionism.

### **Challenging the Illusionistic Interpretation of *Māyā***

Radhakrishnan begins by questioning whether the doctrine of *Māyā*, understood as the unreality of the world, is native to the earliest Vedāntic literature. According to him, there is little textual evidence in the *Vedas*, early *Upaniṣads*, or even the *Brahma Sūtras* for an illusionistic metaphysics. He notes that "the text of the *Vedānta*, viz., the *Vedas*, earlier Upanishads, and the *Vedānta Sūtras*, does not suggest even remotely the theory of *Māyā*" (Radhakrishnan 432–433). The illusionistic doctrine, in his view, is a later development, shaped especially by Śaṅkara and influenced indirectly by Buddhist thought. Radhakrishnan cites "It was Sankara, under the influence of the Buddhistic teaching, following the traditions of Gauḍapāda, who imported the conception of *Māyā* into the Vedānta system. *Māyā* is a pivotal principle of the later Sankara *Vedānta*, but it is not a part of the primitive cosmological conception of the Vedas and the earlier Upanishads. This controversy over the relation of the *Māyā* theory to the *Vedānta* philosophy is not peculiar to our age. Even Indian thinkers of the past have doubted the authenticity of the *Māyā* theory. Vignana Bikshu cites with approval a passage from the Padma Purana, where the tenet of *Māyā* is said to be crypto-Buddhistic." (Radhakrishnan 433–434) Thus, Radhakrishnan sees illusionism as a superimposition upon a fundamentally realist Upaniṣadic vision. Radhakrishnan argues that the Upaniṣads present a world that is real because it is the manifestation of *Brahman*. The world is neither a hallucination nor a dream, but a dependent expression of an underlying

spiritual unity. He emphasizes that the ancient seers sought not to negate the world but to understand its foundation. The whole world is regarded as nothing more nor less than a manifestation of *Brahman*, and is therefore just as real as *Brahman* is. The world is the product of Brahman, and, therefore, Brahman. Hence, instead of being an illusion, the world is the sole reality. There is nothing else besides it. (Radhakrishnan 437–438) Radhakrishnan uses several Upaniṣadic analogies from the text to show that early *Vedānta* considered the empirical world real as a transformation (*parināma*) of *Brahman*, not as a false appearance; The analogy of clay and pots (Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1), where clay is the substance and pots are its real forms. The snake and its coiled forms (Brahma Sūtra III.2.28), indicating plurality as real modes of the one (Radhakrishnan 444–445). Through such passages, Radhakrishnan concludes that the world is dependent but real.

#### **Māyā as the Limitation of Human Cognition**

Radhakrishnan's most significant contribution is to reinterpret *Māyā* as epistemological rather than ontological. That is, *Māyā* refers not to the falsity of the world but to the finitude of human understanding, which grasps reality in fragments rather than as a whole. He argues that our ordinary knowledge is partial because the intellect operates through distinctions and categories. It breaks the unity of reality into isolated parts. It grasps the effects but not the underlying unity that makes them intelligible. Thus, *Māyā* names the tension between: Reality as an infinite, spiritual whole, and Human cognition as finite, dividing, and analyzing. This does not render the world illusory. Instead, it means that the world as seen through the senses and intellect is incomplete, not unreal. As he explains, "Reality is the whole; the finite consciousness is limited, and cannot therefore grasp the whole...we know it partially" (Radhakrishnan 442–443). In this sense, *Māyā* becomes a symbol of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*)—the inability to perceive the infinite unity underlying finite plurality.

#### **The Absolute as an Inclusive Whole**

Radhakrishnan argues that the final Vedāntic Absolute (*Brahman*) is not a blank negation—as it becomes under illusionistic *Māyāvāda*—but a positive fullness of being. He warns that denying the world's reality makes *Brahman* "a pure nothing" or "a spurious infinite". (Radhakrishnan 449–450) Instead, he reads the Absolute as: Inclusive, containing the world as its real expression. Dynamic, unfolding in manifold forms. Spiritual, the ground of meaning and value. Just as the universal contains and explains the particular, *Brahman* contains and explains the finite world. The world is thus neither illusory nor independent—it is *Brahman* in manifestation. Synthesizing textual evidence and philosophical reflection, Radhakrishnan defines in three ways:

1. *Māyā* as epistemic limitation: Human knowledge grasps reality in fragments.
2. *Māyā* as misidentification: Mistaking the part for the whole, the changing for the changeless.
3. *Māyā* as a dynamic power of Brahman: The creative, expressive, self-unfolding activity of the Absolute.

Thus, *Māyā* is not world-denial but a recognition that, the world is real but relative. Brahman alone is absolute. Spiritual realization involves seeing the unity behind plurality. This interpretation preserves both Upaniṣadic realism and Advaitic nonduality, while avoiding the metaphysical nihilism implicit in strong illusionism. (Radhakrishnan 449–450)

We may now explore how Radhakrishnan's Vedantic idealism can be meaningfully connected with contemporary environmental ethics. The convergence of Radhakrishnan's Vedāntic idealism and environmental ethics opens up a rich field of inquiry that is a framework in which ecological awareness emerges from the spiritual realization of the unity of existence. Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of *Māyā* provides not only a metaphysical foundation but also a moral vision capable of addressing the environmental crisis at its spiritual roots. This synthesis

reveals that ecology, in its deepest sense, is a form of metaphysics—a study of being as interconnected life.

### **The Real and the Apparent: Ontological Implications**

The distinction between the Real (*Paramārthika satya*) and the Apparent (*Vyāvahārika satya*) does not imply two separate worlds but two levels of apprehension. For Radhakrishnan, the phenomenal world possesses derivative reality; it is real as expression but unreal when taken as independent of the Absolute. The apparent is a mode of the Real, not its negation. This view dismantles the dualism between transcendence and immanence, allowing the cosmos to be seen as divine in origin and purpose. Nature, therefore, becomes a sacred continuum in which the Absolute manifests its infinite potentialities. Such a metaphysical synthesis reconciles the human and the natural, restoring unity where modern materialism has imposed division.

### **Māyā and Environmental Ethics: A Philosophical Bridge between Metaphysics and Ecology**

Modern environmental ethics has often sought justification in anthropocentric, biocentric, or eco-centric frameworks. Yet, these remain conceptually incomplete without an ontological foundation that explains why all forms of life are worthy of moral concern. Radhakrishnan's Vedāntic idealism supplies this missing dimension by grounding value in being itself. For him, the Absolute (*Brahman*) is not an abstract transcendent reality but the immanent ground of all existence. Every aspect of nature, from minerals to mind, participates in the life of the Spirit. Radhakrishnan explains that the universe is not a collection of mechanical forces but a communion of spiritual energies. This statement encapsulates his metaphysical ecology: the world is a living organism animated by divine consciousness. From this perspective, environmental ethics becomes a spiritual responsibility, not merely a social or ecological duty. Many thinkers argue that the ecological crisis is a crisis of values, not merely of resources. We can extend this argument through Radhakrishnan's metaphysics, where he explained about reality and appearance. The degradation of nature reflects humanity's alienation from the Real. To restore ecological balance, one must first restore spiritual awareness of interdependence, transforming ethics into a mode of self-realization.

The doctrine of *Māyā* in Advaita Vedānta provides a profound philosophical foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of all existence. Though traditionally interpreted as a metaphysical explanation for the relationship between the Absolute and the phenomenal world, the concept also carries significant implications for contemporary ecological and environmental ethics. At its essence, *Māyā* describes the power through which the one undivided reality, Brahman, appears as the manifold universe of names, forms, and distinctions. This appearance gives rise to the perception of separateness—between self and world, humans and nature, organism and ecosystem. Yet, Advaita asserts that such divisions are not ultimately real but are projections of *avidyā*, or ignorance, operating through the veil of *Māyā*. From this standpoint, the sense of individuality and the experience of existing as an entity separate from the surrounding natural world arise because the human mind is conditioned by the limiting structures of *nāma-rūpa* (name and form). These superimposed distinctions lead to the belief that humans occupy a privileged or autonomous position in the universe. This illusion fuels attitudes of dominance, exploitation, and detachment from nature—attitudes that directly contribute to ecological degradation. In reality, however, *Advaita* maintains that there is only one limitless consciousness, *Brahman*, which manifests as every element of existence. The Upaniṣadic insight that “all this is *Brahman*” expresses the non-dual truth that everything in creation, from the smallest microbe to the largest mountain, shares the same metaphysical essence. The diversity we perceive is superficial; it masks an ontological unity that binds all beings together. Understanding this unity helps dismantle the illusion of separateness, revealing a deeply interconnected world where human life depends upon and interacts with the broader ecological web. Just as no wave in the ocean exists in isolation from the water that sustains it, no organism can be separated from the ecological systems that nourish it.

Advaita's critique of individuality echoes the ecological principle of interdependence, which holds that all life-forms are part of a mutually sustaining network. When this insight is internalized, the environment ceases to be viewed as a resource to be consumed or an external object to be manipulated. Instead, the natural world becomes an extension of one's own being—an outward expression of the same consciousness that animates the self.

Overcoming *Māyā* therefore becomes not only a spiritual awakening but also an ecological awakening. To see through *Māyā* is to recognize that harming the environment is ultimately harming oneself, because the same consciousness shines through all life. This recognition naturally gives rise to compassion, restraint, and non-violence (*ahimsa*) toward the natural world. Ecological responsibility arises not out of obligation but out of understanding—out of the realization that the human self and the more-than-human world are not two. The humility, simplicity, and self-restraint encouraged by Advaita's teachings directly counter modern patterns of consumption and exploitation that drive ecological crises. When desires are moderated and cravings for material accumulation diminish, the pressure on natural resources decreases, and harmonious coexistence becomes possible. Thus, the doctrine of *Māyā*, far from being a world-denying philosophy, encourages a worldview grounded in unity, reverence, and ecological sensitivity. By revealing the limitations of perceiving life through the lens of separateness, the doctrine fosters a holistic awareness that promotes environmental ethics. Ecological harmony becomes a natural expression of spiritual insight, and caring for the Earth becomes synonymous with caring for the Self. In this way, *Advaita Vedānta* provides a powerful philosophical framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges, reminding us that the path to ecological balance begins with overcoming the illusion of separateness and recognizing the interconnectedness of all existence. One of the central insights of the doctrine is that the perception of separateness—between self and other, human and nature—is rooted in *avidyā* (ignorance). *Advaita Vedānta* asserts that: The apparent distinctions in the world belong to *nāma-rūpa* (name and form), While the underlying essence is a single, indivisible reality (Brahman). From an ecological standpoint, this directly challenges the anthropocentric worldview. If the apparent separateness between humans and the natural world is a product of *Māyā*, then harming nature becomes a result of ignorance about the fundamental unity of all existence. Understanding the world as a manifestation of Brahman encourages deep respect and ethical sensitivity. Thus, the doctrine of *Māyā*—far from being an abstract metaphysical idea—can serve as a profound philosophical resource for addressing the ecological crisis and nurturing a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of *Māyā* provides a powerful philosophical basis for ecological consciousness. He rejects the illusionistic idea that the world is unreal and instead argues that the world is a real, meaningful manifestation of *Brahman*, the spiritual ground of existence. This understanding carries profound ethical implications for how human beings relate to nature. According to Radhakrishnan, *Māyā* is not the unreality of the world but the limited and distorted human perception that sees life in fragments. It reflects the illusion that individuals are separate from the larger whole. In ecological terms, the environmental crisis is rooted in this same illusion of separateness—humans seeing themselves as independent of nature rather than as an inseparable part of it. When the unity of existence is forgotten, nature becomes an object to exploit.

The ecological crisis, in essence, stems from a metaphysical error: the alienation of humanity from nature. Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of *Māyā* challenges this alienation by affirming the sacredness of the phenomenal world. When the world is viewed as an expression of Spirit, ecological responsibility becomes not merely ethical but spiritual. For Radhakrishnan, consciousness is the fundamental reality. The universe is not composed of inert matter but of varying degrees of consciousness. Radhakrishnan's spiritual humanism recognizes all existence as interrelated manifestations of the same ultimate Reality. By rejecting the illusionistic interpretation of *Māyā*, Radhakrishnan invites a worldview that values the world as a sacred field of self-realization. Ecological awareness, in this sense, is an extension of metaphysical insight.

### **Unity of Reality: Foundation of Ecological Awareness**

Radhakrishnan emphasizes that the world is real as a manifestation of *Brahman*. This means: All forms of life share the same spiritual essence. Nature is not an inert resource but a sacred expression of the same Reality that constitutes human life. Such a vision inspires reverence, non-violence, and restraint, providing the metaphysical foundation for environmental ethics. (Radhakrishnan 437–444). Ecological responsibility naturally arises when the world is seen as spiritually interconnected. To transcend *Māyā* is to see the unity behind the diversity—to realize that harming nature is equivalent to harming oneself. Environmental degradation (pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss) stems from ignorance, greed, and a fragmented view of reality—all forms of *avidyā*, or unawareness. Thus, ecological awakening becomes a form of spiritual awakening: a shift from ego-centered living to cosmic consciousness. Radhakrishnan suggests that problems arise when humans misunderstand reality. The environmental crisis, similarly, is not merely technological—it is a crisis of perception. When *Māyā* (the illusion of separateness) dominates, exploitation and ecological destruction follow. When unity is realized, ecological harmony becomes a natural way of life. Through Radhakrishnan's lens, *Māyā* does not deny the world's reality; it critiques the fragmented human understanding that fails to perceive the unity of existence. This reinterpretation offers a powerful foundational framework for environmental ethics: The world is sacred, not illusory. All beings are interconnected manifestations of a single Reality. Ecological responsibility is a spiritual duty. Thus, overcoming *Māyā* becomes synonymous with cultivating an ecological consciousness, where caring for nature becomes a form of caring for the Self.

### **Conclusion**

The twenty-first century confronts humanity with an unprecedented ecological crisis that challenges the very foundations of human civilization. Climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and the commodification of nature expose not merely a scientific or technological failure but a profound crisis of consciousness. The ecological imbalance that characterizes modernity arises, in part, from an ontological and spiritual disconnection between the human and the non-human, between subject and environment. While contemporary ecological discourse often focuses on policy or technology, a deeper philosophical and spiritual reorientation is necessary to restore harmony between humanity and the natural world. In this context, the Neo-Vedāntic philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan offers an illuminating framework to reinterpret the relation between the real and the apparent, the transcendent and the immanent, and the human and the cosmic. Central to Radhakrishnan's philosophical vision is his reinterpretation of the classical Vedāntic concept of *Māyā*. Traditionally, Advaita Vedānta, particularly as formulated by Śaṅkara, conceived *Māyā* as illusion—the cosmic ignorance that veils the absolute reality (*Brahman*) and gives rise to the world of multiplicity. Radhakrishnan, however, redefines this concept in a positive and creative sense. This reinterpretation carries profound ecological implications. If the phenomenal world is the manifestation of the divine, then nature itself is sacred, worthy of reverence rather than exploitation. The dualistic separation between the spiritual and the material, often reinforced by modern mechanistic worldviews, dissolves in Radhakrishnan's metaphysics of unity. Every living being, from the smallest organism to the vast ecosystems of the Earth, participates in the same spiritual essence—*Brahman*. Consequently, ecological destruction becomes not merely an environmental problem but a moral and spiritual failure, rooted in ignorance (*avidyā*) of our interconnectedness with all existence. Recognizing *Māyā* as divine manifestation leads to an ecological consciousness grounded in spiritual insight—a realization that to harm nature is to violate the divine order of which humanity is an integral part. Furthermore, Radhakrishnan's philosophy transcends the dichotomy between the real and the apparent. The apparent world, often dismissed as transient, gains significance as the field in which the divine reality unfolds. This shift from negation to affirmation establishes a philosophy of ecological



reverence, wherein the perception of unity forms the ethical basis for care, restraint, and harmony with nature. The metaphysical principle of non-duality (*advaita*) thus becomes an ethical and ecological imperative: to live in awareness of the oneness of all life.

Radhakrishnan's reinterpretation of *Māyā* offers a profound philosophical foundation for environmental ethics. By redefining illusion as creative manifestation, he sanctifies the empirical world and integrates spiritual liberation which leads to the ecological responsibility. His dynamic idealism transcends both materialistic exploitation and ascetic withdrawal, proposing instead a participatory ontology where the human, the natural, and the divine form an indivisible continuum. Radhakrishnan's concept of *Māyā* represents a major modern reinterpretation of *Advaita Vedānta*. Challenging the illusionistic readings often attributed to Śaṅkara, he demonstrates—drawing heavily on early Vedāntic texts—that the Upaniṣads affirm the reality of the world as *Brahman*'s manifestation. *Māyā*, therefore, signifies not the unreality of the world but the finitude through which humans perceive it. It is the veil of partial knowledge that prevents direct apprehension of the Absolute unity. By transforming *Māyā* from a doctrine of negation into a doctrine of relationship, limitation, and spiritual awakening, Radhakrishnan creates a bridge between ancient metaphysics and modern philosophical concerns. His interpretation upholds the integrity of human experience while pointing toward the deeper unity underlying all existence—a unity realized not through intellectual analysis but through spiritual insight.

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**HANS JONAS AND THE ‘ECOLOGY OF RESPONSIBILITY’: FROM BIOMEDICAL  
ETHICS TO ENVIRONMENTAL BIOETHICS**

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**Abstract**

The ethical reflections of Hans Jonas offer a transformative framework for understanding the intersection between biomedical innovation and environmental responsibility. Jonas’s *imperative of responsibility* and his call for a “new humility of power” provide the ethical foundation for reuniting the human and the nature. Through the lens of Jonas’s “heuristics of fear”, Immanuel Kant’s moral respect for life, and care-ethical and ecofeminist frameworks, the study interprets assisted technology for human reproduction as a moral test of ecological integrity. When human life becomes artificially produced and nature’s autonomy is suppressed, the continuity between the human body and the biosphere is fractured. This rupture erodes what may be called environmental humanity, the moral sensibility that unites the care for human life with the care for the planet. By integrating biomedical and environmental ethics, the paper proposes an “ecology of responsibility” that unites the care for human life with the care for the planet, urging that future biomedical innovation be guided not by control but by ecological humility and moral foresight.

**Keywords:** Hans Jonas, Ecology of Responsibility, Biomedical Ethics, Assisted Reproduction, Environmental Humanity

**Introduction**

Hans Jonas, one of the most influential philosophers of technological ethics, argues that modern scientific power has expanded human action beyond the scope of traditional moral limits. In *Technology and Responsibility: Reflections on the New Tasks of Ethics*, he states that “the changed nature of human action calls for a change in ethics as well” (Jonas 31), highlighting the need for future-oriented responsibility in every act of technological creation. The emergence of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) marks a decisive transformation in the human relationship with life and nature. What was once a natural and embodied process has become a site of technological intervention, allowing conception to occur beyond the organic boundaries of the human body. These technologies challenge traditional categories of autonomy, dignity, and personhood, requiring new moral frameworks to guide human creativity. Yet, as Hans Jonas foresaw, the ethical problem of technology reaches far beyond the clinic: it concerns the continuity of life itself. The central question, therefore, is not only how technology serves humanity but how humanity, through technology, serves the future of life on Earth.

Classical biomedical ethics, articulated by Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, rests on four guiding principles—autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress 13–15). These principles transformed medical practice by grounding it in respect for persons and harm avoidance. However, they remain essentially anthropocentric, focused on the immediate well-being of individual patients rather than on the ecological systems that make health possible. The unprecedented scale of contemporary biomedical technology—spanning organ transplantation, gene editing, and in-vitro fertilization demands a broader ethical horizon. Jonas (1973) identified this expansion as “the new dimension of responsibility,” in which human action acquires long-term, planetary consequences (Jonas, H. 38).

Assisted reproductive systems both celebrate and subvert the natural order. They suppress nature’s organic rhythm by removing reproduction from its ecological and bodily context and subjecting it to artificial control. Ovulation is stimulated chemically; fertilization occurs in a

dish; gestation may take place in another's womb. What once unfolded within the mystery of embodied life now transpires within sterile precision. This displacement transforms life's natural potentiality into technical possibility, signalling a shift from participation in nature's processes to domination over them. Jonas warns that when the organism is replaced by the artefact, human creativity risks erasing the very meaning of the natural (Jonas, H. 38).

The suppression of nature within ARTs is not merely biological but moral. Nature once functioned as a teacher of limits reminding humanity of dependence, vulnerability, and humility. By circumventing these limits, technology risks eliminating the ethical consciousness that arises from them. As Strachan Donnelley explains in his interpretation of Jonas, "to lose reverence for the self-organizing order of life is to lose the ground of ethical restraint" (Donnelley, S. 55). The laboratory's ability to create life thus imposes a new obligation: to preserve the ecological and existential conditions that make creation possible.

The moral consequences of assisted reproduction extend beyond the realm of medicine to affect environmental humanity, the human capacity to live responsibly within nature's web. By transforming birth into procedure and fertility into production, ARTs encourage a conception of humanity as detached from ecological belonging. The body becomes an object of design rather than a participant in life's continuity. This separation mirrors the broader environmental crisis, in which the Earth is reduced to a reservoir of manipulable matter. As Jonas observes, "our power to act has outgrown our power to foresee," creating a moral vacuum where control eclipses care (Jonas H. 11).

When human generation becomes an act of manufacture, the same instrumental logic that governs industrial exploitation of the environment infiltrates the domain of reproduction. Both substitute mechanistic mastery for reciprocal participation. The loss of natural connection in reproduction thus signals a deeper alienation—the weakening of empathy and moral kinship with all living systems. Van Rensselaer Potter anticipated this danger when he argued that bioethics must become "the science of survival" rooted in the interdependence of humans and their environment (Potter, Van Rensselaer 3). Therefore, ARTs function as a moral mirror for the modern condition: they reveal how humanity's quest to overcome natural limits transforms ethical creation into ecological disruption. To restore balance, biomedical responsibility must expand into environmental responsibility. Jonas's imperative— "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on Earth" (Jonas H. 11) demands that medical progress remain aligned with the integrity of nature. The ecology of responsibility thus becomes the next stage in bioethical reflection: a vision in which caring for human life and caring for the planet are inseparable acts of moral stewardship.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To analyse Hans Jonas's ethics of responsibility and determine how it extends beyond traditional biomedical ethics to include obligations toward nature, future generations, and the ecological conditions of life.
2. To evaluate how assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) transform the natural process of reproduction into a technological event, raising moral questions about human control over life and biological systems.
3. To examine the limits of anthropocentric biomedical ethics, which prioritises immediate human benefit while overlooking long-term ecological consequences and the rights of non-human life.
4. To explore the relevance of Jonas's concept of the heuristics of fear as a moral safeguard against hasty technological intervention, ensuring responsibility in innovation and clinical decision-making.
5. To interpret ARTs as a test of ecological responsibility, where medical advancement must be critically assessed for its environmental, ethical, and intergenerational implications.

6. To propose a philosophical integration of bioethics and environmental ethics, demonstrating that human dignity, planetary well-being, and technological development must coexist in a mutually sustaining framework.
- 7.

**Methodology:**

In order to carry out the proposed work, both qualitative and analytical approach has been adopted. The present work is based upon both the textual and an interpretive study. The interpretations are based upon the primary and secondary sources compiled from a variety of articles, periodicals and websites.

**Biomedical Ethics and Its Anthropocentric Limits:**

Biomedical ethics was developed to regulate medical practice and protect human dignity, particularly through the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice (Beauchamp and Childress 13–15). While these principles effectively guide clinical relationships, they remain centred exclusively on human welfare. The environment that sustains life, as well as future generations, lies outside its moral field. In modern reproductive science, however, this framework becomes insufficient. Technologies such as IVF, embryo freezing, and genetic manipulation extend human decision-making into domains once governed by natural processes. Jonas argues that modern technology creates long-term impacts far beyond the immediate clinical moment, bringing “the whole biosphere” within the scope of human ethical responsibility (Jonas 39). Thus, an ethics designed only for human-to-human relations cannot address moral consequences that spread into nature and the future.

ARTs clearly reveal this limitation. They turn reproduction into a controlled process—measured, selected, preserved rather than a natural unfolding. The ethical question therefore shifts from “Is it beneficial for the patient today?” to “Is it responsible for life tomorrow?” Jonas insists that ethics must now ensure “the permanence of genuine human life on Earth” (11), signalling the need for a broader, ecologically aware bioethics.

**Kantian Roots of Anthropocentrism:**

The anthropocentric structure of modern biomedical ethics can be traced to Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy. Kant’s Formula of Humanity commands that every rational being must be treated as an end in themselves and never merely as a means (Groundwork 4:429). This principle secured the dignity of human autonomy, but it simultaneously restricted moral value to human rationality alone. The moral community therefore became exclusively human, leaving animals, nature, and ecosystems outside the sphere of direct ethical concern.

In biomedical ethics, this legacy appears in the prioritization of patient rights, informed consent, and autonomy over broader ecological implications. The moral question becomes “What is right for the patient?” rather than “What is right for life as a whole?” While beneficial for clinical practice, such a human-centred model proves insufficient in the context of emerging technologies that intervene in reproduction, genetics, and biological systems. Hans Jonas challenges this Kantian limitation by extending moral responsibility beyond rational persons to all forms of life and to the future of the biosphere. Where Kant protects the dignity of the present individual, Jonas insists that technology requires safeguarding the continuity of life itself. His imperative—to act in a way compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on Earth (Jonas 11) shifts ethics from autonomy alone to responsibility for nature and future generations.

**The Crisis of Identity and Responsibility:**

The anthropocentric limits of biomedical ethics also produce a subtle crisis of identity. As Michael Quante notes, personal identity must be understood biographically not only biologically since a human life is a narrative of relationships and embodiment (Quante 45). In assisted reproductive technologies, however, this unity becomes fragmented: the genetic source,

gestational carrier, and social parent may be three different agents. This division disrupts the traditional continuity of identity, echoing the ecological fragmentation through which humans separate themselves from nature for technological convenience. Both crises, biomedical and ecological emerge from the same assumption: that life may be reorganised without moral cost. Hans Jonas challenges this reductionism by grounding ethics in the ontological value of life. For Jonas, every living organism strives to persist, and this striving itself has moral weight (Jonas 7). Life, therefore, cannot be treated merely as material for technical manipulation. In ARTs, the question is not only whether technology can create life, but whether creation respects the continuity of being.

The responsibility attached to reproductive intervention is thus not only clinical but existential. ARTs become the site where identity, nature, and moral responsibility meet. The child produced through technology is not isolated from the ecological order; nor is humanity isolated from the world that sustains it. To act responsibly is to honour this continuity to acknowledge that identity is relational and that life exists within a larger moral web.

#### **From Human Dignity to Ecological Dignity:**

The challenge, then, is to reinterpret dignity in ecological rather than exclusively human terms. In your thesis, dignity is linked to the responsible exercise of autonomy within biomedical contexts. Jonas deepens this idea by arguing that dignity belongs to all life insofar as it participates in being. “To affirm being is the first duty of responsibility,” he writes (*Imperative* 9). Hence, the dignity of an embryo, a patient, or an ecosystem all stem from their participation in the ongoing project of life. The suppression of nature through assisted reproduction or industrial exploitation thus becomes not merely a technical issue but a moral violation of being itself.

The anthropocentric limits of biomedical ethics confine responsibility to human welfare and immediate intentions. Jonas’s ecological ethics expands this scope, demanding that technological humanity account for the long-term integrity of life. In the next section, we shall see how Jonas’s imperative of responsibility provides the philosophical bridge from biomedical ethics to environmental stewardship where caring for human health and protecting the planet converge in a unified moral horizon.

#### **Hans Jonas and the Imperative of Responsibility:**

Hans Jonas’s philosophy of responsibility represents one of the most profound ethical responses to the moral challenges of technological civilization. Writing in the wake of modern science’s triumphs and terrors, Jonas recognized that human power had outgrown traditional moral categories. In *Technology and Responsibility* (1973), he declared that “the changed nature of human action calls for a change in ethics” (Jonas H. 31). Modern technology, he argued, had extended the reach of human decisions far beyond immediate contexts, producing effects that ripple across generations and ecosystems. Unlike pre-modern ethics, which dealt primarily with interpersonal duties, the technological age imposes an intergenerational and planetary responsibility. Jonas’s central thesis, fully elaborated in *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1984), is that ethics must be reoriented from the present toward the future of life. His moral imperative—“Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on Earth” (Jonas H. 11) transforms the scope of ethical deliberation. Responsibility now includes not only the visible outcomes of one’s actions but also their long-term ecological consequences. For Jonas, the moral agent becomes a *guardian of the future*, accountable for both human and nonhuman forms of life.

This new dimension of responsibility emerges precisely because technology grants humanity the power once attributed to nature or fate. To create, modify, and control life at will is to assume godlike power without divine foresight. Jonas insists that such power must be tempered by a “heuristics of fear” (28) a cautious awareness that technological interventions may unleash irreversible harm. This fear is not irrational pessimism but moral prudence, an emotional guide

toward humility and restraint. As your thesis argues in the context of assisted reproduction, this prudential responsibility should guide biomedical practice, ensuring that human creativity remains aligned with the integrity of life rather than its manipulation.

Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) embody the ethical dilemmas Jonas foresaw. They transform reproduction from a natural act into a technological event. Fertilization, once a moment of organic mystery, becomes a process of mechanical precision; embryos are created, frozen, and sometimes discarded. In this process, Jonas's warning becomes urgent: The new technology of life is an experiment with nature's essence (Jonas H. 36). The physician or biotechnologist, therefore, must act not only as a professional but as a trustee of creation, aware that each intervention carries ecological, existential, and intergenerational weight. From Jonas's perspective, the suppression of nature in ARTs exemplifies the larger moral crisis of modernity, the replacement of *participation* in nature with *possession* of nature. By treating reproduction as a field of design, humanity asserts mastery over the very processes that define its own being. Jonas cautions that this "technological will to mastery" risks severing the bond between the human species and the natural order (Jonas H. 9). The ethical task, then, is to restore this bond through responsible limitation to act as custodians, not constructors, of life.

Jonas's ethics of responsibility is grounded in his metaphysics of life, which asserts that all living beings possess intrinsic value because they embody a striving to persist. Life, for Jonas, is not value-neutral but inherently purposive. "In the phenomenon of life," he writes, "being itself reveals its will to persist" (Jonas. H 7). This ontological claim transforms ethics into a cosmic duty: to affirm being wherever it manifests. In Donnelley's interpretation, Jonas's philosophy "reconnects humanity to the teleology of nature," establishing an ethical continuum between organism and environment (Donnelley 55). This vision undermines the Cartesian dualism that separates mind from matter, human from nature. In biomedical contexts, this means that the patient, the embryo, and the planet are not isolated entities but expressions of one living order. To harm the ecological basis of life is to harm the very conditions of moral existence. Jonas thus redefines beneficence and non-maleficence in universal terms: beneficence becomes the preservation of life's integrity, and non-maleficence becomes the refusal to endanger the future of being. The imperative of responsibility integrates these biomedical virtues into a planetary ethic.

According to Hans Jonas, responding to the demands of technology and the threats resulting from technological progress necessitates the implementation of a *heuristics of fear* as an ethical method. This approach awakens a sense of responsibility and compels changes in human actions in the present to prevent future harm. This sense of fear should be present in our imagination as a moral duty of responsibility, enabling the anticipation of negative prognoses while simultaneously preventing threats to authentic life in the future. (Leite, L. G., & Oliveira, J. 40) Sometimes Jonas's "heuristics of fear" has been misunderstood as pessimistic, yet it is essentially transformative foresight. Fear, in his ethics, awakens moral imagination the ability to visualize distant consequences and to care for the unseen. In the biomedical realm, this foresight demands that clinicians and researchers anticipate not only therapeutic benefits but also ecological and social ramifications. For example, the global fertility industry's reliance on energy-intensive technologies, hormonal chemicals, and cross-border surrogacy markets has environmental and ethical costs that transcend the clinic. Jonas's ethic compels us to ask whether technological progress that undermines planetary balance can still be called progress.

Fear, for Jonas, is ultimately an expression of love a "reverent anxiety" for the fragility of life (Jonas 23). This emotional dimension resonates with care ethics, which, as your previous research demonstrates, emphasizes empathy and relational responsibility. Jonas's fear and care converge in a shared moral disposition, both call for attentiveness to vulnerability. The embryo, the patient, and the Earth are all vulnerable forms of life requiring protective responsibility rather than exploitative mastery.



**Responsibility as the Bridge between Biomedical and Environmental Ethics:**

In Jonas's framework, responsibility functions as the ethical bridge between biomedicine and ecology. It transforms the physician's duty to heal into a planetary vocation to sustain life. This expanded responsibility requires a new moral anthropology, one that recognizes humanity not as the centre of creation but as its caretaker. The same moral consciousness that restrains the surgeon's hand must restrain the engineer's design and the policymaker's ambition. As Jonas insists, "Our power to act must be matched by a power to foresee" (Jonas 11). This ethical transformation signifies a philosophical migration: from the principlism of biomedical ethics to the ecology of responsibility. Assisted reproduction, viewed through Jonas's lens, is no longer merely a medical act but a moral test case for the human future. The choice is not between technology and nature but between domination and stewardship. To act responsibly, in Jonas's sense, is to ensure that the miracle of creation whether in the womb or the world remains a source of reverence rather than control.

The moral implications of reproductive technologies reverberate into the ecological, social, and existential fabric of the planet. Thus, a new interpretive lens is required, one that expands biomedical responsibility into an ecological frame, grounded in the interdependence of all life.

Hans Jonas reformulates Kant's moral law into what he famously calls the imperative of responsibility, urging: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on earth" (Jonas 11). This imperative extends responsibility beyond immediate human relations to include nature itself, because the survival of future generations depends upon present ethical choices. Jonas demands that medical and technological decisions must always be evaluated in light of their long-term ecological consequences and moral impact (Berdinesen 17–18). Such a view shifts the moral domain from the individual to the planetary, aligning well with care-ethical perspectives. As Nel Noddings observes, "ethical life begins in the response to the need in the cared-for", emphasising relationality, empathy, and moral responsiveness (Nodding 4) values that converge with Jonas' call to preserve life and future humanity. This relational ethic challenges the abstraction and detachment often found in biomedical reasoning. The environment, like the patient, must be *cared for*, not *controlled*. Just as the embryo depends on nurturing conditions for development, the planet depends on responsible stewardship for regeneration. Care, therefore, becomes the bridge between biomedical and environmental ethics, a virtue that binds moral attention to vulnerability at all scales of existence.

**Ecofeminism and the Critique of Technological Domination:**

The ecological reinterpretation of bioethics finds powerful reinforcement in ecofeminism, which critiques the shared logic of domination underlying patriarchy and technological control. Val Plumwood argues in his work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* that the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature stem from the same dualistic worldview that separates mind from body, culture from nature, and reason from emotion (Plumwood 41–45). Assisted reproductive technologies, while offering reproductive freedom to some, often replicate systems of commodification and exploitation particularly in contexts where surrogates or donors come from marginalized social and economic backgrounds. This commodification of reproductive labour mirrors the commodification of natural resources: both treat life as a means to external ends.

In the words of Karen Warren in his work *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, ecofeminism exposes the "logic of domination" that devalues both women's bodies and the natural world (Warren 65). From this perspective, ARTs are not morally neutral but embedded within a technological culture that prizes control over coexistence. The suppression of nature through artificial reproduction parallels the suppression of ecological systems through industrial extraction. Both reveal a failure of moral reciprocity the inability to recognize the inherent value of the other. Jonas's philosophy, though not explicitly feminist, converges with this critique by insisting on reverence for being and humility before the self-organizing order of life.

**Biomedical Responsibility as Ecological Responsibility:**

The reinterpretation of biomedical responsibility through an ecological lens transforms the core bioethical principles themselves.

- **Autonomy** becomes relational autonomy, acknowledging that human freedom is meaningful only within interdependent systems of life.
- **Beneficence** evolves into sustainability, ensuring that acts of healing do not generate new forms of harm to the environment or future generations.
- **Non-maleficence** is broadened to include ecological non-maleficence, which prohibits environmental degradation as a form of indirect harm to human and nonhuman life.
- **Justice** expands into intergenerational justice, demanding fairness not only among present individuals but also between the living and the unborn.

In assisted reproduction, these transformations mean that ethical deliberation must account for ecological costs, energy consumption, biomedical waste, and the socio-environmental impact of global surrogacy markets. To practice reproductive medicine ethically, then, is to practice it ecologically. The goal is not to restrict innovation but to harmonize it with the conditions of sustainability.

**An Ecology of Bioethics:**

Bringing together Jonas's ethics of responsibility, care ethics, and ecofeminism, we arrive at what may be called an ecology of bioethics that a moral framework that unites biomedical and environmental reflection. This ecology of ethics views life not as a collection of separate domains—body, society, and nature but as an interconnected continuum of vulnerability and value. Within this framework, the medical act becomes an ecological act; the care for a patient becomes inseparable from the care for the planet. As Jonas writes in his book *the imperatives of responsibility*, “To be is to be responsible” (Jonas 9). This existential claim transforms responsibility from a reactive duty into an ontological condition of being human. We are responsible not because we choose to be, but because our very existence depends upon others facts like biological, social, and ecological. The embryo in the laboratory and the seed in the soil are bound by the same moral thread: both require nurture, protection, and continuity.

In this light, the ethics of assisted reproduction transcends its biomedical origins to participate in a universal ethics of care. To act responsibly in reproductive medicine is to acknowledge the moral kinship of all life. Humanity, once the measure of all value, becomes instead the guardian of value entrusted with sustaining the living order from which it emerged.

The contemporary moral landscape reveals that the boundaries once separating biomedical ethics from environmental ethics are increasingly porous. Both fields respond to the same crisis the ethical implications of human power over life. Whether it is the manipulation of embryos in the laboratory or the manipulation of ecosystems through industrial technologies, the underlying question is identical: *How should humanity exercise moral responsibility in an age when it can control the very conditions of existence?* The answer, Hans Jonas's philosophy affirm that lies in cultivating an expanded sense of environmental bioethics an ethics that unites biomedical responsibility with ecological stewardship.

**From Biomedical Boundaries to Planetary Responsibility:**

Biomedical ethics was born out of the need to regulate human-to-human relationships within medical practice. Its principles protected patients from exploitation and ensured that clinical interventions respected personal autonomy and dignity. Yet, as Jonas argued in his book *Technology and Responsibility* that the range of human action has expanded so enormously that the old ethics no longer suffice. “All this has decisively changed. Modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects, and consequences that the framework of former ethics can no longer contain them.” (Jonas 38) The scope of moral concern must therefore evolve beyond individual rights and clinical outcomes to include the collective destiny of life on Earth.

This shift represents not a rejection of biomedical ethics but its natural evolution. The physician's duty to heal extends to the environment that sustains health itself. Every medical act has ecological consequences like energy use, waste generation, and carbon emissions that alter the biosphere. In the case of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), the ecological footprint is substantial: laboratory processes consume vast energy resources, hormonal treatments release bioactive waste, and global surrogacy markets generate socio-environmental inequalities. These consequences challenge the traditional assumption that medical ethics can be isolated from planetary ethics.

To bridge this divide, Jonas proposes in his book *Imperative of Responsibility* that responsibility must be proportionate to power: "Our power to act must be matched by a power to foresee" (Jonas 11). In the biomedical domain, this means anticipating how innovations affect not only patients but also ecosystems and future generations. Environmental bioethics thus redefines the scope of care from the body to the biosphere.

Environmental bioethics restores the unity between human nature and nonhuman nature, which modern technological rationality had fragmented. Jonas's metaphysics of life situates morality within the very structure of being: "In the phenomenon of life, being itself says 'yes' to itself" (*Imperative* 7). This affirmation of life demands a corresponding ethical attitude one that reveres the self-organizing processes of nature rather than subdues them. In this framework, the suppression of nature through artificial reproduction becomes a moral warning. When humanity overrides nature's generative order, it risks undermining the conditions that sustain not only fertility but the ecological web itself. Environmental humanity, as discussed earlier, depends on recognizing that human flourishing and ecological flourishing are inseparable. As Strachan Donnelley interprets Jonas, "to affirm the purposiveness of nature is to affirm our dependence upon it" (Donnelley, S. 57). Environmental bioethics thus calls for a renewal of reverence toward the natural order a return to humility in the face of life's complexity.

Environmental bioethics finds its emotional and ethical depth in the synthesis of Jonas's responsibility and care ethics. Jonas provides the philosophical foundation i.e. responsibility grounded in foresight and reverence. Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and Joan Tronto provide the moral sensibility care grounded in empathy and relational awareness. As Noddings writes that people are not isolated moral atoms; we are interdependent beings whose moral lives are defined by caring relations (Noddings 12).

This convergence creates a twofold ethic:

1. **Responsibility** ensures that human actions remain accountable to future life.
2. **Care** ensures that such accountability is rooted in compassion rather than abstraction.

In ARTs, this synthesis demands that clinicians, scientists, and policymakers approach technological innovation not as domination but as participation. Every act of assisted reproduction should express solidarity with the broader ecological cycle of life. The patient's longing for a child must be balanced with responsibility toward the collective future of life on Earth. This does not diminish reproductive freedom; rather, it enriches it with moral consciousness and ecological awareness.

The need for environmental bioethics is not confined to Western philosophical discourse. The ecological crises of the twenty-first century like climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution have made it a global moral imperative. International organizations, from UNESCO's *Bioethics Programme* to the *World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST)*, increasingly advocate for ethics that integrate environmental and biomedical dimensions. In this global context, Van Rensselaer Potter's vision of *global bioethics* appears prophetic. He insisted that "bioethics must be the bridge between biological knowledge and human values" (Potter 3). This bridge now extends further to connect human values with planetary survival. Environmental bioethics thus represents the fulfilment of Potter's project and Jonas's warning: an ethics that safeguards not only human dignity but the continuity of all life.

Ultimately, environmental bioethics is not an adjunct to biomedical ethics but its moral completion. It transforms the anthropocentric notion of health into a holistic one where the health of humanity and the health of the planet are mutually dependent. Jonas's imperative of responsibility, combined with the ethics of care, yields a comprehensive vision of moral life: one that unites science and wisdom, autonomy and humility, freedom and restraint. In the context of ARTs, this paradigm calls for sustainable reproductive medicine and technologies designed with ecological sensitivity, global justice, and intergenerational concern. Such practices would embody Jonas's call for a "new humility of power" (Jonas 23). Environmental bioethics, therefore, is not merely an academic discourse but a practical ethics of survival and a way of ensuring that the creation of life through technology remains compatible with the preservation of life in nature.

### **Conclusion**

The trajectory from biomedical ethics to environmental responsibility reflects not only a philosophical evolution but also a transformation in human self-understanding. The modern world's unprecedented technological power manifested in assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence has redefined the scope of moral action. As your doctoral research demonstrates, technology-assisted human reproduction is more than a biomedical achievement; it is a mirror of humanity's changing relationship with life, nature, and responsibility. By enabling the artificial creation of life, ARTs invite reflection on how far human autonomy may extend without endangering the ecological and moral order that sustains it.

Hans Jonas's imperative of responsibility provides the ethical compass for navigating this dilemma. He warns that the magnitude of human action now surpasses the limits of traditional moral systems. "Our power to act," Jonas writes in his book *Imperative of Responsibility*, "must be matched by a power to foresee" (Jonas 11). This foresight is not merely predictive but moral and it calls for humility, restraint, and care in the exercise of technological mastery. The principle that once governed physician-patient relationships must now govern humanity's relationship with the Earth: *do no harm*, not only to individuals but to the conditions of life itself.

In the specific context of assisted reproductive technologies, this imperative demands a recognition that the creation of life carries environmental, social, and intergenerational consequences. Reproductive freedom must coexist with ecological responsibility. Every embryo created in the laboratory is part of a wider web of existence; every act of technological manipulation is a moral encounter with the living world. To act responsibly, therefore, is to act ecologically to ensure that biomedical progress remains compatible with the continuity of life.

Jonas's philosophy deepens these categories by transforming responsibility into an ontological principle that an expression of humanity's duty to life as such. When joined with care ethics (Gilligan; Noddings) and ecofeminism (Plumwood; Warren), Jonas's responsibility acquires affective and relational depth. Together, they create an integrated moral paradigm where responsibility provides foresight, care provides empathy, and sustainability provides continuity. This synthesis embodies what might be termed an "ecology of responsibility." It envisions a moral agent who recognizes that every act of biomedical intervention reverberates across social, ecological, and generational boundaries. The same ethical sensibility that guards against exploitation in the clinic must guard against exploitation of the planet. Thus, the ethics of assisted reproduction becomes inseparable from the ethics of environmental stewardship.

At its deepest level, this synthesis restores the meaning of environmental humanity the understanding of humankind as a moral participant in the web of life rather than its detached designer. The suppression of nature through technological control, whether in reproduction or industry, represents a loss not only of ecological balance but of existential humility. Jonas's call for a new humility of power, is therefore a call to reclaim our place within nature's moral order. Environmental bioethics emerges as the philosophical ground for this reclamation: an ethics that honours both human creativity and natural continuity. To reclaim environmental humanity is to rediscover the moral bond between freedom and responsibility, between creation and preservation.

The human being, once defined by mastery, must now be defined by stewardship. This redefinition does not diminish scientific progress; rather, it humanizes it, ensuring that technological innovation becomes a means of sustaining life rather than dominating it.

In the final analysis, the movement from biomedical ethics to environmental responsibility is the moral evolution of modern civilization. It reflects the awakening of conscience in an age that has conquered the physical world but risks losing its moral centre. The future of ethics lies in synthesis: bringing together Jonas's responsibility, Kant's respect for rational life, Sartre's existential accountability, and the care-ethical sensibility that unites empathy with prudence.

As Jonas envisioned, the survival of humanity depends not on the expansion of knowledge alone but on the cultivation of wisdom. Only a new humility of power can preserve the world (Jonas 23). This humility anchored in foresight, responsibility, and care forms the moral foundation of environmental bioethics. It transforms the laboratory into a site of reverence, the act of healing into an act of ecological participation, and the ethics of reproduction into the ethics of life itself. Thus, to move from biomedical ethics to environmental responsibility is to move from mastery to mindfulness, from the will to create to the wisdom to sustain.

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**HARVESTING THE HUMAN: POSTCOLONIAL ECOLOGIES IN MANJULA  
PADMANABHAN'S *HARVEST***

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**Abstract**

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (1997) is a dystopian play that projects human bodies as commodified, technology dominates human life, and nature is virtually absent. Set in post-colonial India, the play explores how capitalist exploitation, biopolitics, and technological advancement intersect to produce new forms of ecological and corporeal dispossession. Through its sterile domestic spaces, mechanised systems, and absence of organic imagery, the play reflects the collapse of ecological balance in a world driven by consumerism and techno-capitalism. "Harvesting the Human: Postcolonial Ecologies in Padmanabhan's *Harvest*", underscores post-colonialism and eco-criticism to reveal how depletion of the natural environment parallels the commodification of human life. Under the pretence of development, the global North's consumption of the bodies of the South re-inscribes colonial hierarchies, turning ecological exploitation into biotechnological dominance. Padmanabhan dramatises the postcolonial state of dependency, in which the human body is rendered a resource to be exploited and harvested, through the transactional relationship between the donor Om and the foreign "receiver" Ginni. The play's mechanical surveillance, sterile interiors, and lack of organic life represent an ecological void—a world devoid of life and action. By depicting humans as both an ecosystem and a product, and what it means to be human, the play blurs the boundaries between environmental and physical deterioration. Padmanabhan's dystopia illustrates the ethical void of late capitalism and its detachment from ecological and human harmony. It challenges us to reconsider sustainability as a comprehensive understanding of interdependent life systems rather than just as environmental preservation. The research focuses on Nixon, Huggan & Tiffin's Ecocriticism to connect ecological and human exploitation, and Gayatri Spivak's Postcolonial Theory to frame global inequalities, and the Biopolitics of Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway to understand the commodification of life under techno-capitalism. A postcolonial ecological reading of *Harvest* (1997) highlights the urgent need for an ethics of care that opposes commodification in all its manifestations and highlights the vulnerabilities that both humanity and the environment share under global capitalism.

**Keywords:** Speculative Fiction, Human Commodification, Cyborgs, Biopolitics, Necro-Politics, Dystopia, Slow Violence, Harvest, Post-Colonial Ecologies

**Introduction**

Speculative fiction is an umbrella term for science fiction, horror, dystopia and fantasy. Beyond the bounds of realism, speculative fiction explores technical, social, ecological, and political possibilities through "what if" scenarios. It exposes buried fears about the future and challenges current power systems by projecting other planets, communities, and bodies. Themes including alienation, posthumanism, the climate catastrophe, biopolitics, and global inequity are frequently discussed. Speculative fiction is a creative laboratory for reconsidering ethics, human identity, and societal futures. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Speculative narratives have paved the way for pertinent points of environmental humanities. The Environmental humanities are a pertinent topic in the world. Environmental humanities is an interdisciplinary field that uses literary, historical, ethical, and



cultural viewpoints to study how people interact with nature and the world. To comprehend how environmental concepts influence human behaviour and social structures, it integrates ideas from literature, philosophy, anthropology, ecocriticism, and the arts. By examining how ecological injustice, pollution, extinction, and climate change are portrayed and experienced, the area questions the gap between nature and culture. Environmental humanities provide human-centred solutions to environmental challenges by focusing on values, cultural significance, and storytelling. This helps cultures envision more equitable, sustainable, and moral ways of living in a world that is changing quickly. People are embedded in the modern technologies and advancements of the world. It has overwhelmed the structures of nature and blurred the boundary between humans and the natural world. The technologies are central to all aspects of life. It has paralysed natural thinking. This slow wretchedness leads to the destruction of society. This annihilation is dystopia. Dystopian fiction is embedded with environmental degradation and human extractions. Utopia means an idealised society where everything is perfect and systematic. Unlike Utopia, John Stuart Mill coined the term Dystopia in 1868, in contrast to Thomas More's Utopia, where everything is destroyed, and people lead totalitarian and dehumanised lives. In "The Dystopian Vision in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*", Milind Solanki and Prof. Jagdish Joshi assert, "A Dystopia (cacotopia, kakotopia or anti-utopia) is a fictional society that is the antithesis of utopia. It is usually characterised by an oppressive social control, such as a dystopia, which is the opposite of what one would expect in a utopian society. Dystopias are often portrayed as social structures that have collapsed under an environmental burden or political regime" (Joshi 2). In *Utopian and Dystopian Explorations of Pandemics and Ecological Breakdown Entangled Futurities*, Heather Alberro and other asserts, "Our health and our continued existence depend on creating environments that enable the well-being of all, not merely a privileged few" (Alberro 2), but in the current scenario, it has become a self-centred and individualistic person that gradually contaminates the land and the human body.

Manjula Padmanabhan is a well-known Indian author, playwright, cartoonist, and visual artist. Her work includes children's books, graphic art, dystopian drama, and speculative fiction. Padmanabhan, born into a diplomatic family, was raised in several nations, including Sweden, Pakistan, and Thailand, before returning to India to pursue further studies. After attending Elphinstone College in Mumbai, she went on to get an M.A. in history from the University of Bombay. Her transnational sensitivities and obsession with topics of alienation, identity, and global power structures were profoundly influenced by her cosmopolitan background. Padmanabhan started as a cartoonist and illustrator. She became one of the first female cartoonists in India with her long-running comic strip "Suki," which appeared in "The Sunday Observer" (Mumbai) and later "The Pioneer" (New Delhi). Her later literary accomplishments were made possible by her visual and narrative style, which was marked by incisive humour and socio-political criticism. She frequently portrays societies in which corporate or totalitarian regimes control bodies, identities, and resources. She is well-known for her witty, satirical manner and dystopian vision. Her most well-known piece, *Harvest* (1997), which was awarded the Onassis Prize for Theatre, critiques how the Global South is exploited by wealthy customers in the Global North and offers a terrifying vision of bio-capitalism and bodily commodification. Beyond *Harvest* (1997), She continues to explore dystopian worlds characterised by surveillance, gender erasure, and techno-authoritarianism in works like *Escape* (2008) and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015). Her writing usually challenges colonial and patriarchal power structures by highlighting female agency and resistance. *Harvest* (1997) is a dystopian drama that gained much response from the audience. Manjula Padmanabhan asserts its wide acceptance in the preface of *Harvest* (1997),

"In 2000, the play, in Greek, was performed at the prestigious Teatro Technis Karolous Koun, Athens, directed by Mimis Kougioumtzis and supported by funds from the Onassis Foundation. In 2001, it was performed as a radio broadcast on the BBC and in 2002, Govind Nihalani directed *Deham* (Body), a bilingual feature film in Hindi and English based on the play. *Harvest* has been published in three international anthologies



to date: in *Black and Asian Play*, with an introduction by Afia Nkrumah, in *Post-Colonial Plays: An Anthology*, edited by Helen Gilbert and in the 6<sup>th</sup> Brief Edition of the *Wadsworth Anthology of Drama*" (Padmanabhan xi).

The dystopian drama *Harvest* (1997) challenges global capitalism, the monetisation of human bodies, and the growing disparities between the Global North and South. The drama, which is set in a near-future Mumbai, centres on Om Prakash, a young man without a job who agrees with InterPlanta Services, a strong global company, to donate his organs to Ginni, a wealthy foreign recipient. In exchange, Om and his family get security, food, and technology—essentials they couldn't otherwise afford. Nevertheless, their privacy, independence, and dignity are sacrificed for these amenities. Ginni appears through screens to keep an eye on the family's behaviour, food, and whereabouts, turning their house into a place of perpetual monitoring. When Om's brother Jeetu is mistakenly accepted as a donor, it highlights how bodies are interchangeable and disposable in a profit-driven society. As the family gets more and more ensnared in the intrusive procedures of the corporation, the tension in the drama increases. The story examines issues of gradual violence, biopolitics, exploitation, and neocolonial reliance, showing how poverty forces people to sell their own bodies. *Harvest* raises the topic of whether self-ownership and dignity can endure in a society where human life is turned into a commodity through Jaya's last act of resistance.

Padmanabhan is a prominent character in modern Indian speculative fiction because of her writing, which combines insightful socio-political commentary with speculative world-building. She challenges global economic systems, highlights the vulnerability of underprivileged bodies, and addresses pressing issues like biopolitics, ecological degradation, and technology domination through her creative narratives.

#### **Human Body as an Extractive Ecological Site and Slow Violence**

The cyborg and commodification of humans become the central aspect of the narratives. Human becomes the land, where they are commodified and contaminated by the outer forces. Where the humans are sold for the betterment of the individual. Donna Haraway defines, "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction". (Haraway 150). The concept of a hybrid human creates entanglement and endangers the environmental systems. This entanglement creates the eco-critical awareness in the narratives. GINNI and VIRGIL, and COUCH are representations of a hybrid human; just their face talking to humans. When the Guards installed the module, a woman's clone body appears, "The CONTACT MODULE comes to life. It displays a young woman's face, beautiful in a youthful, glamorous First World manner" (Padmanabhan 29). This was just a face into a machine. As GINNI appears, she exclaimed with joy, "GINNI: I can see... oh my Gad, it's magical, it's wonderful! I'm really talking to India- this is really happening! (Padmanabhan 30-31). Western organ recipients are conversing with Indian donors for their individual purposes. At the end, VIRGIL forced Jaya to enter his world and have an intimate relationship. He joined Jeetu's body and tried to manipulate Jaya for his objectives. Manjula Padmanabhan asserts, "It's always described as being about the organ transplant trade, but it's got nothing to do with surgical procedures. It does not offer a standard resolution or support any familiar ideologies" (Padmanabhan xiii). Homi K. Bhabha describes 'Hybridity is the sign of productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority)'. (Bhabha 112). The family doesn't have any ideology. As Helen Gilbert asserts in "Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*: Global technoscapes and the international trade in human body organs", that,

Ginni's dictates quickly come to govern the minutiae of the Indians' lives, specifying what and when they can eat, how they should conduct their personal hygiene and, to some extent, how they can relate to each other. This deterritorialised power, exercised at a distance yet all-invasive in its effects, precipitates the breakdown of the family as a

social unit as Om, his mother, his wife Jaya, and his brother Jeetu (Jaya's secret lover) each compromise their humanity and/ or betray their kin in their hollow quests for affluence (Gilbert 124).

They don't have any confirmed identity, live in hybridity. They were living a poor life. Om was in search of a new job, and he found a place where he could work without knowing, and he went there. As Om narrated,

OM: All in iron bars and grills. It was like being in a cage shaped like a tunnel. All around, up, down, sideways, there were men ... then - a sort of - rain burst. I wonder if I am dreaming! The water is hot, scented. Then cold. Then hot air. Then again, the water ... we pass through another place... I don't know what is happening ... There's no time to think, just do... Sit here, stand here, take your head this side, look at a light that side. On and on. Finally, at the end, there's another tunnel, with pretty pictures and some music. And the sign comes: "RESUME CLOTHING". I just do what I have to do. All the time, the ground keeps, we are back on our feet, there are steps. (Padmanabhan 15-16)

He found a place where everything is weird and unusual. He was appointed unknowingly. He found, "The money comes from abroad" (Padmanabhan 26). The family wanted to upgrade their financial situation, and they had sacrificed their names and relationship, "GUARD 1: Missiz... Jaya J. Kumar. Relationship with Donor? JAYA: (in a barely audible voice) Sister" (Padmanabhan 21). Jaya was Om's wife; however, she was introduced as Om's sister to the Guards. The InterPlanta Service was installed at home. The kitchen was replaced with technological gadgets and supplies. The food has been converted into some pills. When Jaya found it uncommon, she inquired, Om confronts,

"OM: So, tell me - What? In exchange for your kitchen, you have a new modern one-

JAYA: You call this food? This (She indicates the pellets they have been eating), goat-shit?

MA: It's better than what you make- (Padmanabhan 27)

InterPlanta Service had transformed Om's life emotionally and socially. All the members were arguing about inevitable changes in their lives. The kitchen, home, lifestyle, food habits and schedule of the family had been changed. As the fertile land is nurtured for the crops, like the Om's body, and his family is being taken care of for transplantation. While Jaya confronted Om for being available for organ trade, Om shared his compulsion, "OM: I went because I lost my job in the company. And why did I lose it? Because I am a clerk and nobody needs clerks anymore! There are no new jobs now- there's nothing left for people like us! Don't you know that? There's us- and the street gangs and the rich (Padmanabhan 85).

These class differences created a fear of survival. The poor do pertinent work to survive. In that need, the colonisers have gradually contaminated and entangled the humans. These needs and the embodiment of sympathy are embedded in science and technologies. These innovations and evolutions gradually endangered the natural resources and environment. This contamination leads to violence, as Rob Nixon called it "Slow Violence" in his work, *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), for him,

By slow violence, I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. (Nixon 2)

The module is installed, and grains and other kitchen supplements were removed from the house. They provided some pills instead of their normal habit-forming foods. Jaya worried, "JAYA: Be patient! While my house is broken up! (Padmanabhan 21). She questioned what was going to happen in the near future,

JAYA: He's sold the rights to his organs! His skin. His eyes. His ears. Sold them! Oh God, oh God! What's the meaning of this nightmare! (to OM) How can I hold your hand, touch your face, knowing that at any moment it might be snatched away from me and flung across the globe! If you were dead, I could shave my head and break my bangles- but this? To be a widow by slow degrees? To mourn you piece by piece? Should I shave half my head? Break my bangles one at a time? (Padmanabhan 28)

Jaya can sense the future calamities coming to the family. She was living in the entanglement of life and death. She could not decide what to do or how to stop this situation that led to the destruction of life. In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Rob Nixon asserts,

“Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match” (Nixon 3)

Some natural calamities are visual, and their impact can be seen through images and news reports. But these gradual contaminations fail to elicit political action or emotional urgency, are not instantly apparent, and do not create striking imagery. As a result, even though gradual violence may have significantly more detrimental long-term effects, it frequently goes unnoticed, unreported, and untreated. This unreported violence creates a giant impact on the future. In *Harvest* (1997), VIRGIL explained to JAYA the reasons behind this trade,

“VIRGIL: We lost the art of having children. We began to live longer and longer. And healthier each generation. And more demanding – soon there was competition between one generation and the next-old against young, parent against child. We older ones had the advantage of experience. We prevailed. But our victory was bitter. We secured Paradise- at the cost of birds, flowers, bees and snakes! So, we designed this programme. We support poorer sections of the world while gaining fresh bodies for ourselves” (Padmanabhan 116)

This trade itself is a warning to the upcoming generation about calamities. When Om had approved organ transplants, he did not have any idea; he just got the option for survival. However, the family was stuck in deception. “JAYA: Your eyes'll be stuck to that screen from staring at it twenty-four hours of a day” (Padmanabhan 51). Om's mother was embedded with this TV screen and other gadgets that she ordered the VideoCouch online. She too became a part of the techno-dystopian world. Agent 1 explains the VideoCouch to Mrs Indumanti Prakas.

“This is the SuperDelux VideoCouch model XL5000! We are certain it will provide you, our valued customer, with every satisfaction! This is the nourishment panel- the hydration filter- the pangrometer! Here you see the Lexus Phantasticon, which is programmed to receive seven hundred and fifty video channels from all over the world! There are ten modes, seventeen frequencies, three substrate couplers, extra-sensory feedback impulses and cross-net capturing facilities! All media access-satellite, bio-tenna, visitelly and radiogonad. Manual control panel, neuro-stimulator and full-body processing capacities- all other queries will be answered online from within the VideoCouch self-training program” (Padmanabhan 104).

They become sluggish and dependent on technology, and surrender themselves to having everything done for them. Agent confirms that “We have a full recycling and bio-feed-in processor! Your relative will have no further need of the outside world from now'til, (he coughs) 'til she chooses to delink” (Padmanabhan 107)

The home becomes a laboratory-like land. It is contaminated and extracted slowly, endangering the human ecosystem. It exploits the mind and body; it destroys the cycle of the environment. Humans became a resource for the commodification and extraction.

**Biopolitics and Necro politics in Harvest**

Michel Foucault coined the term "biopolitics," which describes how contemporary governments control human life, bodies, and populations. Power governs birth, death, sexuality, productivity, and biological capacity through institutions like public health, education, surveillance, law, and medicine rather than by overt force. In order to achieve political and economic objectives, biopolitics turns citizens into biological subjects whose lives are tracked, optimised, or disciplined. It underscores how power saturates daily existence and shapes what is deemed "normal," "healthy," or "valuable." In the end, biopolitics reveals how governance permeates the personal sphere of human existence. In *The History of Sexuality*, "Right of Death and Power of Life", Michel Foucault asserts,

The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population. (Foucault 139)

Om and other men were under the control of InterPlanta Services. He accepted, "OM: That we would be monitored carefully. Not just us but our ... lives. To remain employed, we have to keep ourselves exactly as they tell us. (Padmanabhan 17). The family was under surveillance; culinary practices, hygiene and routine were controlled by the company. The Guard instructed them,

GUARD 1: All implements of personal fuel preparation will be supplied exclusively by InterPlanta Services. Henceforward, you and your domestic unit will consume only those fuels which will be made available to you by InterPlanta. We will provide more than enough for the unit described in your data sheet, but will forbid you from sharing, selling or by any means whatsoever, commercially exploiting this facility. (Padmanabhan 20)

The poor family didn't have any hygienic facilities at home. When GINNI found their condition, she wanted to control it and change it; she instructed, "GINNI: Excuse me, but you'll have to find the space. It's inexcusable not to have your own toilet! Forty families! It's a wonder you're all not dead of the plague years ago!" (Padmanabhan 35) GINNI made all the arrangements at their home to make them hygienic and civilised. JAYA narrates it to JEETU, "And a bath-shower as well, imagine! We have our own water supply now, as much as we want-and there's no place to sneeze anymore!" (Padmanabhan 40)

Om's family has accepted the control of the Westerns. Their home turned into a luxurious house, as Padmanabhan portrays,

"Two months later. The same room, but transformed into a sleek residence with gleaming surfaces, chrome, steel and glass. The furniture is largely of the convertible kind, in keeping with the restricted space. In addition, there are the gadgets- TC set, computer terminal, mini-gym, an air-conditioner, the works. To the rear and right, there are two cubicles containing the bathroom and toilet. The changes are functional rather than cosmetic. In the middle of the space is a low, Japanese-style dining table. (Padmanabhan 49)

The infrastructure was designed and decorated as per GINNI's hygienic requirements. She controlled and handled everything according to her priorities. As she demanded,

GINNI: You must eat at regular hours, okay? We've had this problem before!... If I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times: The most important thing is to keep Auwm smiling. Coz if Auwm's smiling, it means his body's smiling, and if his body's smiling, it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best, smiling organs- I mean, God forbid that it should ever come to that, right? But after all, we can't let ourselves forget which program is about! I mean, if I'm going to need a transplant, then by Gad, let's make it the best damn transplant that we can manage!" (Padmanabhan 53-54)

Jeetu was forcefully dragged for organ transplantation, although he never signed any contract with InterPlanta Service. When Jaya inquires, Guard 1 instructed that, "security and health regulations prohibit any contact between Donors and their families-" (Padmanabhan 81). OM asserts, "Where the rich have licenses to hunt socially disadvantaged types - yes! That's what they've done with my idiot brother. Turned him loose to run with his tongue between his teeth, the dogs snapping at his heels" (Padmanabhan 84)

Achille Mbembe coined the term "necropolitics," which refers to the authority to determine who can survive and who must perish. Mbembe contends that contemporary governments and colonial regimes exercise control not just by controlling existence but also by subjecting particular communities to violence, death, and disposability, building on Foucault's biopolitics. Necropolitics produces "death-worlds" where oppressed communities are compelled to live under continual threat by tactics like militarisation, occupation, systemic racism, environmental damage, and abandonment. It demonstrates how slaughter, lingering death, and social exclusion are methods of exercising sovereignty, making some bodies expendable or outside the state's protection. It discusses the control and power over the marginalised and powerless humans. Hannah Arendt asserts in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), "There are no parallels to life in the concentration camps. Its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death" (Arendt 444). In the essay, "Necropolitics" Achille Mbembe asserts,

"I have put forward the notion of "necropolitics" and "necropower" to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead" (Mbembe 40)

In *Harvest* (1997), the concept of Necropolitics can be seen through Jeetu's organ transplantation instead of Om's transplant, and they forced JAYA to accept their proposal. InterPlanta Service Guard took Jeetu instead of Om for the donation. Om tried to explain that he is Om; nevertheless, they didn't listen to him and locked Om and his family into the room. Om saw his anger, "AHHHHHHH! You've locked us in, you bastards! You've locked us in! (he roars and pounds on the door.) You can't do this to us! We've not signed any consent form! You've not taken any permission! AHHHHHHHHH! You've locked us in, taken the wrong man- you'll regret it - AHHHHHHHH" (Padmanabhan 101). The Guards did what they wanted to do.

#### **Ecological and Political Resistance in *Harvest***

In *Harvest* (1997), refusals to let bodies be exploited as resources for global capitalism give rise to ecological and political opposition. Jaya's rebellion, the family's non-compliance, and the disclosure of monitoring regimes undermine biopolitical and necropolitical control, expressing bodily autonomy against technological, patriarchal, and multinational tyranny. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* that, "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (Spivak 103). When Jeetu was informed about the current situation of his home. He asserts, "JEETU: That's all that life is, one long joke. The only trick is in learning when to laugh" (Padmanabhan 41). He rejected his brother's notion of survival in the beginning. He said, "JEETU: At least when I sell my body, I decide which part of me goes into where and whom! But it's the money in the end, isn't it? My poor brother. Thought he was so pure. But he's like everyone else after all! Only as pure as the price of his rice" (Padmanabhan 45). And he refused to stay with them in a controlled life. He agitated, "We don't need anyone. We don't need this fancy prison. We managed before. We'll manage again-" (Padmanabhan 77), but when he was forced and surrendered himself to GINNI.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak asserts in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation. (Spivak 102) Jaya was an

ignored woman, and especially when the whole house is under control, they don't have any right to do without any permission, as she confirmed, "JAYA: There's no food in the house anymore! Only those goat-shit pills and some strange powders. And – and – it's all measured out, you see! I couldn't take a portion without having to explain-" (Padmanabhan 43). She constantly rejects the idea of organ transplantation. As she warns Om that he is just a beef for him or just an object that comes from him; she can get her organs and live for longer years. Jaya analyses and narrates to OM, "Never mind chicken – have you seen how their beef cattle live? Air-conditioned! Individual potties! Music from loudspeakers - why, they even have their own psychiatrists! All to ensure that their meat, when it finally gets to Ginni's table, will be the freshest, purest, sanest, happiest-" (Padmanabhan 67).

Jeetu became a victim of the InterPlanta Service. They forcefully transplanted his eyes to Ginni. Jeetu got frustrated, "I don't care! I'm not the one who got this job- and I'm not going to be the one to suffer the consequences ... a rich woman who plucks a poor man's eyes out of his head-huh! That's not a woman, it's a demon" (Padmanabhan 90).

When Om and Jeetu both became victims of the organ trade. Jaya was confronted about the donations. A voice was heard from the module, VIRGIL, in the body of JEETU, asking for Jaya's contribution. He expressed his desire,

VIRGIL: "We are interested in women, where I live, Zhaya. Childbearing Women... Om's Polygraph showed he lied. All donors lie. They think we need singles; they think we need men, and only the very desperate apply. That suits us just fine, 'coz unless they're desperate, they won't do as we say. We search for skin and blood matches. Auwm matched mine..." (Padmanabhan 115).

The techno-dystopian world has contaminated the land/body. Women were weak and infertile. The major concern was not to find organs; however, they wanted a perfect match that could give a new life to an infertile land. When Jaya offered a proposal, she denied that,

And if I let you take it from me, I will be naked as well as poor! You'll never let me have what you have! You'll only share your electronic dreams with me, your virtual touch, your plastic shadows- no! If the only clothes I can afford are these rags of pride, then I'll wear them with my head held high ...But I'll die knowing that you, who live only to win, will have lost to a poor, weak and helpless woman. And I'll get more pleasure out of that first moment of death than I've had in my entire life so far. (Padmanabhan 121-122)

Jaya rejected and resisted,

No! You listen to me! I want to be left alone- truly alone. I don't want to hear any sound, I don't want any disturbances. I'm going to take my pills, watch TV, have a dozen baths a day, and eat for three instead of one. For the first time in my life and maybe the last time of my life, I'm going to enjoy myself, all by myself. I suggest you take some rest. You have a long journey ahead of you, and it's sure to be a hard one. (Padmanabhan 123-124)

Jaya declared autonomy. Her resistance to being harvested exposes the cruelty of global bio-capitalism and ends the cycle of bodily exploitation. Jaya exemplifies resistance by opting for self-determination over obedience, claiming dignity against a system that treats the lives of the poor as disposable.

### **Conclusion**

Harvesting the Human: Postcolonial Ecologies in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* shows how global capitalism transforms corporeality into an extractive site of value, extending ecological discourse into the realm of the human body. The study shows that *Harvest's* violence is cumulative, systemic, and long-lasting rather than abrupt or dramatic by analysing the body as an ecological resource. This is where Rob Nixon's theory of gradual violence comes into play: the exploitation of Om's body is a long-term degradation of his agency, identity, and future rather than just a physical



donation. The home itself becomes a micro-ecology of monitoring, scarcity, and depletion, and the donor's body becomes a site of capitalist extraction. This biological extraction suggests that postcolonial ecologies now extend from land to flesh, mirroring the environmental looting of the Global South.

The play emphasises how power functions by controlling, punishing, and exploiting the body through biopolitics. People are reduced to quantifiable biological units by the organisation's contracts, technologies, and monitoring tools. Physiological utility is linked with human worth, and adherence to international corporate systems becomes a must for survival. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics sheds more light on how this control easily transforms into a politics of death. Donors' disposability is ingrained in the system; they are only kept alive to the extent that they continue to make money. Death is an essential mechanism of governance since life is maintained for extraction rather than for thriving. In *Harvest*, the distinction between life and death dissolves into an ongoing state of controlled deterioration. The play does not, however, end in utter despair. Jaya is the most potent example of ecological and political resistance, as her rejection of the idea of body commodification undermines the extractive order. Her disobedience shows that resistance needs to be both ecological and gendered, challenging not only the corporation's power but also the patriarchal systems in her own home. Jaya's decision to reclaim control of her body is a reassertion of autonomy against structures that seek to undermine it. Her reluctance to give up one's body, land, or life to predatory global regimes is an example of postcolonial ecological ethics.

Ultimately, it concludes that *Harvest* (1997) is a profound critique of neoliberal bio-capitalism and its exploitation of people as ecological resources. The drama challenges viewers to reconsider what ecological harm is and who is responsible for it by placing the body as an extractive site, emphasising slow, biopolitical, and necropolitical violence, and emphasising resistance subjectivities. Padmanabhan's bleak outlook serves as a cautionary tale and an urgent appeal for more sustainable, just, and compassionate futures.

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**DABEER – 12**

**ENGLISH TEACHERS AS CLIMATE ACTORS: WILLINGNESS, ATTITUDES, AND ACTION POSSIBILITIES IN INDIA**

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**Abstract**

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, and education can play a decisive role in its mitigation and adaptation by raising awareness and fostering sustainable behaviours. This study examined the role of English teachers in India as climate actors, exploring their willingness to act, attitudes, perceptions of action possibilities, interest in climate change, and concern for ecological problems. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to 51 English instructors across India and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients. The findings indicate that teachers demonstrate high engagement across cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains, with female teachers exhibiting slightly higher levels of engagement and more positive attitudes than their male counterparts. Interest in climate change emerged as a key driver, strongly associated with concern for ecological problems and willingness to act. Regardless of gender or age, teachers expressed readiness to integrate climate-related topics into curricula, participate in collaborative initiatives, and acknowledge their responsibility toward future generations. The results align with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, highlighting that teachers' willingness to act is influenced by positive attitudes, intrinsic motivation, and perceived behavioural control. Overall, English teachers in India demonstrate substantial potential to serve as climate advocates, cultivating climate-conscious students and promoting sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Climate change, Climate actors, climate change education, sustainable environment

**Introduction**

Climate change is one of the most pressing global concerns of the 21st century. While the term *climate change* was previously used interchangeably with "*global warming*," it is now more broadly applied to encompass both the sustained increase in global average temperatures and the resulting widespread impacts on Earth's climate and weather patterns. Recognized as a critical environmental challenge of our time, climate change poses significant threats to food security, public health, and overall ecosystem stability (Parry et al. 1999). Despite its profound implications, the full extent of its adverse effects remains insufficiently understood by the general public.

Climate change refers to long-term alterations in global temperatures and weather patterns, driven primarily by human activities since the Industrial Revolution. The extensive burning of fossil fuels and large-scale deforestation have increased concentrations of greenhouse gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> and CH<sub>4</sub>, intensifying the greenhouse effect. Major contributors include transportation, industry, construction, energy production, and agriculture. These emissions have led to severe impacts worldwide, including heat-related illnesses, flooding, water and food insecurity, economic losses, and rising displacement.

Climate change also poses a significant threat to cultural and natural heritage. UNESCO (2021) reports that many World Heritage sites are increasingly vulnerable, though they remain essential carbon sinks—marine sites store about 15% of global blue carbon reserves, and their forests absorb nearly 190 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. The WHO (2003) similarly identifies climate change as one of the greatest global health threats of the 21st century.

Although emissions arise from all regions, responsibility is unevenly distributed. In 2023, six major economies, including China, the United States, India, the European Union, Russia, and

Brazil – accounted for over half of global greenhouse gas emissions, whereas 45 developing countries collectively contributed only around 3%.

India remains among the most climate-vulnerable nations. It ranked seventh in 2019 and sixth in the 2025 Climate Risk Index, having experienced more than 400 extreme events between 1993 and 2022, resulting in nearly 80,000 deaths and over \$180 billion in economic losses. Air pollution continues to be a critical challenge: the 2024 World Air Quality Report ranks India fifth worldwide, with Byrnihat recording some of the country's highest pollution levels and Delhi remaining the world's second most polluted capital.

Education plays a pivotal role in addressing climate change by transforming behaviours, building essential skills, and fostering innovation needed for sustainable solutions. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to be more adaptable and better equipped to contribute to green employment and low-carbon development. As a result, education is widely recognized as a key platform for raising climate awareness, promoting proactive engagement, supporting sustainable lifestyles, and empowering communities to participate effectively in mitigation and adaptation.

UNESCO has advanced this agenda through several major initiatives. Its Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development (CCESD) program, launched at COP15 in 2010, marked the start of a global push for climate-focused education. This was strengthened by the Green Education Partnership (GEP) in 2022 and the Climate-Smart Education Systems Initiative (CSESI) in 2023, both aimed at using education to enhance climate resilience, promote environmental sustainability, and support low-income countries in adapting to climate challenges.

#### **Literature Review**

Several studies have been conducted to explore teachers' awareness, attitudes, and perceptions regarding climate change and sustainability education. Spiropoulou et al. (2007) found that most teachers are aware of the pressing issues of climate change and sustainable development and understand their negative impacts on humanity and the environment. Their findings indicated that teachers recognize the significance of global ecological challenges and their far-reaching consequences for both human and non-human life.

Koskela and Karkkainen (2021) examined the role of student teachers in promoting sustainable development and reported that while many focus on social aspects, they often overlook the crucial global issue of climate change. Similarly, Schulz et al. (2018) revealed that only 28% of teachers in Croatia had participated in civic-related training programs addressing environmental sustainability. This finding suggests limited engagement among teachers in formal learning opportunities related to climate action. Vukelić et al. (2022) further investigated student teachers' willingness to act on climate change mitigation and adaptation in Croatia and found that those with positive attitudes toward climate change, a sense of action efficacy, and interest in the topic were more inclined to take meaningful action, regardless of gender.

In a related context, Priyastiti (2024) conducted a study titled "*Promoting Climate Awareness through English Language Teaching: English Teachers' Perceptions*" in Sumba, Indonesia. The results showed that many English teachers expressed a strong willingness to engage in climate change mitigation and adaptation, demonstrating positive perceptions toward sustainable development. However, a portion of teachers reported limited understanding of climate change issues, reflecting gaps in knowledge and preparedness. Past studies (Celikler and Aksan 2011, Dal et al. 2014, as cited in Priyastiti and Kapoe 2024) have similarly indicated that teachers often lack adequate knowledge of climate change and environmental degradation, leaving them ill-equipped to educate students on mitigation and adaptation strategies. Papadimitriou (2004) also observed that while primary school teachers are generally aware of climate change, they lack detailed knowledge about its causes and effects, and consequently, are unable to design effective educational interventions to address the issue.

Building on this, Demant-Poort and Berger (2021) suggested that student teachers frequently possess insufficient knowledge about climate change and its impact on humanity and the

environment. Earlier studies also emphasized that many teachers are unprepared to address global warming effectively, lacking both awareness and pedagogical strategies to integrate it into classroom teaching (Dove 1996, Fortner, 2001). Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' perspectives, and previous research consistently shows a strong link between teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and instructional effectiveness, and students' learning outcomes (Sanders 1996; Westerlund 2002). Because teachers hold influential positions in society, they are powerful agents of change capable of raising awareness and promoting climate mitigation and adaptation. Nation (2017) emphasizes that teachers' practices are strongly shaped by their beliefs and attitudes, highlighting the need for structured preparation and professional development to strengthen their environmental knowledge and values. Similarly, Vukelić et al. (2022) note that teachers with strong positive attitudes and motivation are more likely to engage actively in climate action. Over the past decade, growing research has examined how both adults and children understand global warming, its causes, consequences, and possible solutions, further underscoring the critical role of educators in climate change education.

#### **Role of English Teachers as Climate Actors**

The term *climate actor* refers to individuals or groups actively engaged in climate mitigation, adaptation, policymaking, and implementation. Teachers are particularly influential climate actors, as they can foster environmentally responsible behaviour and promote climate awareness among students and communities (Kapri 2017).

Globally, English language teachers have traditionally focused on teaching English across various domains, but their role has expanded to include contributing to climate action. Since climate change is a global crisis that transcends disciplinary boundaries, responsibility for addressing it extends beyond scientists or policymakers. English teachers, through their daily interactions and curriculum design, can meaningfully support sustainable development.

By integrating themes such as environmental awareness, sustainability, and climate resilience into English language teaching, educators can build both linguistic and ecological literacy. This dual focus helps students communicate effectively about climate issues while cultivating pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. Thus, English teachers serve not only as language instructors but also as catalysts for climate action.

Their responsibility extends beyond teaching communication skills to addressing broader global challenges such as environmental degradation, global warming, and climate adaptation. With their respected social position and wide professional networks, English teachers can disseminate climate knowledge, influence public perceptions, and inspire collective action.

Given these strengths, English language educators carry a global responsibility to embed climate education into their practices. By developing and implementing climate-focused pedagogies, they can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental sustainability, and the formation of climate-conscious citizens.

#### **Main objectives of the paper**

A review of existing literature shows mixed findings on teachers' roles in climate change education. While some studies note that teachers lack adequate knowledge of climate change and its impacts, others indicate that even when teachers are aware, they often show limited willingness, motivation, or positive attitudes toward climate mitigation and adaptation.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines English language teachers' knowledge, perceptions, and readiness to engage in climate action. It investigates their awareness of climate issues and their willingness to participate in mitigation and adaptation efforts. As climate change and sustainable development are collective responsibilities, English teachers – given their global presence and influential pedagogical role—are well positioned to raise awareness and inspire climate action among students and communities.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore English teachers' perspectives in the following areas:

1. Willingness to act in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation.
2. Attitudes towards climate change.
3. Perceptions of action possibilities in mitigating and adapting to climate change.
4. Perceptions of the future within the context of climate change.
5. Interest in climate change issues.
6. Concern for ecological problems.

### **Materials and Methods**

The present study adopts a descriptive research design and employs a survey-based approach to investigate English language teachers' awareness, attitudes, and willingness to act toward climate change mitigation and adaptation. The methodology and questionnaire were adapted from previous empirical studies (Vukelic et al. 2022, Priyastiti 2024), with appropriate modifications to suit the specific objectives and context of this research.

#### **1. Sample**

The sample consisted of 51 English language teachers from various states/regions of India. Participants came from states such as Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Delhi, Assam, West Bengal, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Maharashtra. About 88% were college and university ELT instructors in India, while 12% were school-level teachers in India and abroad. Their ages ranged from 24 to 50 years (average 37). Regarding experience, 53% had over seven years of teaching, 27% had more than ten years, and 20% had over twenty years. The sample included 19 female and 32 male teachers. All participants were informed about the study, provided consent, and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

**Table 1: The Socio-demographic Details of the participants**

| Variable                       | Category     | F (n)     | P (%)      |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender                         | Male         | 32        | 63%        |
|                                | Female       | 19        | 37%        |
|                                | <b>Total</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Age (in years)                 | 20-30        | 5         | 10%        |
|                                | 31-40        | 26        | 51%        |
|                                | 41-50        | 18        | 35%        |
|                                | 51-60        | 2         | 4%         |
|                                | <b>Total</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>100</b> |
| Teaching Experience (in years) | 1-5          | 10        | 19%        |
|                                | 6-10         | 23        | 45%        |
|                                | 11-15        | 7         | 14%        |
|                                | 16-20        | 6         | 12%        |
|                                | 21-30        | 5         | 10%        |

|                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>51</b> | <b>100</b> |
|---------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Eastern States      | Bihar          | 5         | 10%        |
|                     | Jharkhand      | 2         | 4%         |
|                     | West Bengal    | 5         | 10%        |
| Southern States     | Andhra Pradesh | 10        | 19%        |
|                     | Karnataka      | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | Kerala         | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | Telangana      | 3         | 6%         |
|                     | Tamil Nadu     | 2         | 4%         |
| Western State       | Maharashtra    | 1         | 2%         |
| Northern States     | Uttar Pradesh  | 2         | 4%         |
|                     | Punjab         | 1         | 2%         |
| Central States      | Delhi          | 6         | 11%        |
|                     | Madhya Pradesh | 1         | 2%         |
| Northeastern States | Assam          | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | Manipur        | 2         | 4%         |
|                     | Meghalaya      | 2         | 4%         |
| Abroad              | Thailand       | 3         | 6%%        |
|                     | USA            | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | Uzbekistan     | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | Netherlands    | 1         | 2%         |
|                     | <b>Total</b>   | <b>51</b> | <b>100</b> |

Geographically, the English instructors participated in this study hailed from different regions or states of India, including Eastern (24%), Southern (33%), Central (13%), Northeastern (10%), Northern (6%), and Western (2%). Additionally, 12% of participants were Indian English instructors who work abroad.

## 2. Data Collection

Data were collected through a Google Form containing a structured questionnaire titled “*English Instructors’ Willingness to Address Climate Change.*” The instrument measured English teachers’



perceptions of climate change and sustainable development and included six sections: (i) willingness to act (8 items), (ii) attitudes toward climate change (5 items), (iii) perception of action possibilities (4 items), (iv) perception of the future in climate change (7 items), (v) interest in climate change (5 items), and (vi) concern for ecological problems (10 items). Ecological concern items were adapted from Cifric (2005) via Vukelić et al. (2022) and Priyastiti (2024), with modifications for this study. Participants rated each item on a five-point Likert scale (*1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = completely agree*). The survey link was shared with English teachers, who participated voluntarily and were informed that completing the questionnaire would take approximately 7–10 minutes.

### 3. Analysis

After the participants' responses were collected, descriptive statistics, including the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were computed for each questionnaire dimension across all six sections. In addition, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (PCC) was employed to determine the presence and strength of correlation relationships among the six variables.

### Results and Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine English teachers' willingness, attitudes, perceptions, interests, and ecological concerns related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. As described in the methodology section, the questionnaire was organized into six thematic dimensions. The findings from each dimension were statistically analyzed, and summarized in tables. The following sections present and discuss these results in detail.

#### 1. Willingness to Act in Climate and Adaptation Context

*English teachers' willingness to act* refers to their readiness to engage in climate change mitigation and adaptation activities within the context of sustainable development (Vukelić, 2022). This includes raising awareness among colleagues, promoting climate-related strategies to students, and integrating climate issues into curricula and daily teaching.

Mitigation aims to reduce the causes of climate change, while adaptation focuses on adjusting to its effects (Chen et al., 2017). Based on these concepts, the study examines the extent to which English teachers are prepared to take part in actions that support both mitigation and adaptation.

**Table 1. Participants' Willingness to Act in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Statements                                                                                             | Female<br>(Mean-SD) | Male (Mean-SD) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. I am willing to adjust my teaching practices to include climate change topics.                      | 4.62 (0.95)         | 4.56 (0.81)    |
| 2. I am ready to take part in school/college/university projects related to climate change mitigation. | 4.68 (0.58)         | 4.48 (0.86)    |
| 3. I would volunteer for community initiatives that address climate change.                            | 4.79 (0.42)         | 4.60 (0.72)    |
| 4. I am willing to collaborate with other teachers to integrate climate change into lessons.           | 4.84 (0.37)         | 4.64 (0.69)    |

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**129 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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|                                                                                            |             |             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 5. I am open to attending workshops on climate change education.                           | 4.68 (0.58) | 4.58 (0.67) |
| 6. I would encourage students to participate in ecological and climate-related activities. | 4.79 (0.42) | 4.72 (0.54) |
| 7. I am willing to make personal lifestyle changes to reduce climate impact.               | 4.73 (0.45) | 4.60 (0.64) |
| 8. I am ready to adapt new classroom activities that promote sustainable practices.        | 4.89 (0.31) | 4.70 (0.46) |

The survey results indicate that both female and male English teachers show a high level of willingness to engage in climate change mitigation and adaptation, with mean scores consistently above 4.60 on a 5-point scale. Female teachers reported slightly higher willingness, particularly in adopting environmentally sustainable classroom activities ( $M = 4.89$ ) and collaborating with colleagues on climate initiatives ( $M = 4.84$ ). They also expressed strong readiness to encourage student participation and volunteer in community environmental programs ( $M = 4.79$ ).

Male teachers similarly demonstrated strong commitment, with their highest scores for motivating students to join climate-related activities ( $M = 4.72$ ) and implementing sustainable classroom practices ( $M = 4.70$ ). Although their scores were marginally lower, they still reflected high engagement. Overall, both groups exhibited consistently positive attitudes toward supporting and participating in climate mitigation and adaptation efforts within their classrooms and communities.

## 2. Attitudes towards Climate Change

*Attitudes toward climate change* refer to the beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and behavioural intentions individuals or groups hold about its causes, impacts, and solutions. It reflects how people evaluate issues like sustainability, global warming, and actions related to mitigation and adaptation whether they support, reject, or ignore them.

These attitudes are shaped by social, cultural, and environmental contexts. A person's community, background, and social group strongly influence how they think, feel, and behave toward climate-related issues.

**Table 2. Respondents' Attitudes towards Climate Change in Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Statements                                                         | Female<br>(Mean-SD) | Male<br>(Mean-SD) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Climate change is one of the most urgent global problems today. | 4.79 (0.53)         | 4.78 (0.67)       |
| 2. Human activities are the main cause of climate change.          | 4.79 (0.42)         | 4.64 (0.77)       |
| 3. Every individual can contribute to mitigating climate change.   | 4.84 (0.37)         | 4.68 (0.37)       |
| 4. Schools/colleges have a responsibility about climate change.    | 4.79 (0.42)         | 4.72 (0.41)       |

5. Teaching about climate change is an important role of the English language teachers.      4.68 (0.48)      4.20 (0.48)

The survey results show that both male and female English teachers hold highly positive attitudes toward climate change, with mean scores at or above 4.5 across all five dimensions. This indicates strong awareness and agreement on the seriousness of climate issues. Female participants reported slightly higher mean scores, strongly affirming that human activities drive climate change ( $M = 4.79$ ) and that it is an urgent global challenge. They also expressed a strong sense of personal and professional responsibility.

Male teachers likewise showed high concern about climate urgency ( $M = 4.78$ ) and recognized the role of educational institutions in addressing climate problems ( $M = 4.72$ ). However, they expressed slightly lower agreement than female teachers regarding the role of English instructors in promoting climate awareness ( $M = 4.20$  vs.  $4.68$ ). Overall, both groups displayed strong and responsible attitudes toward climate change, reinforcing their understanding of its urgency and the critical role of education in responding to it.

### **3. Perception of Action Possibilities in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**

An individual's *perception of action possibilities* in climate change refers to how they understand the issue and the actions they believe they can take to address it, both by reducing its impacts (mitigation) and adapting to its effects (adaptation). It reflects how people interpret the climate situation and how capable they feel of contributing to solutions.

When individuals believe their actions matter, they are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behaviour. Since human activities drive climate change, education plays a key role in shaping people's understanding and strengthening their sense of ability to act. In short, this perception highlights how people view their potential actions against climate change and how these views influence their willingness to support a sustainable, climate-resilient future.

**Table 3. Participants' Perception of Action Possibilities in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in in Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Statements                                                                                       | Female<br>(Mean-SD) | Male<br>(Mean-SD) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. I believe teachers can positively influence students' attitudes toward climate change.        | 4.79 (0.42)         | 4.64 (0.56)       |
| 2. I feel that English classes can provide opportunities to discuss solutions to climate change. | 4.79 (0.54)         | 4.52 (0.71)       |
| 3. I believe my small actions can contribute to wider climate change mitigation.                 | 4.95 (0.23)         | 4.64 (0.72)       |
| 4. I believe integrating climate change issues into lessons can inspire students to act.         | 4.79 (0.42)         | 4.54 (0.76)       |
| 5. I think as an individual I will not help climate change and mitigation.                       | 1.11 (0.32)         | 1.98 (1.61)       |

The survey findings indicate that both male and female English teachers hold highly positive perceptions of action possibilities in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Female participants reported slightly higher agreement, particularly that integrating climate topics into lessons can motivate student action ( $M = 4.95$ ) and that small individual actions contribute meaningfully to mitigation ( $M = 4.95$ ). They also recognized the classroom as a space to discuss solutions ( $M = 4.79$ ) and the teacher's role in influencing student attitudes ( $M = 4.79$ ).

Male teachers also expressed positive perceptions, with their strongest agreement on the importance of individual actions ( $M = 4.64$ ). Both genders strongly disagreed with the notion that individuals cannot contribute to climate action (female: 1.11; male: 1.98), highlighting their recognition of personal responsibility. Overall, the findings suggest that teachers feel empowered and capable of promoting climate action through English language teaching.

#### **4. Perceptions of the Future in Climate Change Context**

It refers how participants perceive the dangers, long-term effects, and potential repercussions of climate change on society, the environment, and future generations. This evaluates individual's comprehension of and ability to predict future climate scenarios, including rising global temperatures, extreme weather, declining biodiversity, and resource scarcity.

**4. Table 4. Participants' Perceptions of the Future in Climate Change Context in Mean and Standard Deviations**

| Statements                                                                                | Female<br>(Mean-SD) | Male<br>(Mean-SD) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. I believe climate change will seriously affect the future of younger generations.      | 4.74 (0.56)         | 4.62 (0.75)       |
| 2. If not addressed, climate change will cause irreversible damage to the planet.         | 4.84 (0.37)         | 4.66 (0.72)       |
| 3. The future will be safer if everyone contributes to climate change mitigation.         | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.70 (0.46)       |
| 4. I am optimistic that humanity can still reduce the effects of climate change.          | 4.74 (0.45)         | 4.48 (0.71)       |
| 5. I believe education is key to preparing future generations for climate challenges.     | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.72 (0.50)       |
| 6. I expect more environmental topics will be included in school curricula in the future. | 4.74 (0.45)         | 4.62 (0.57)       |
| 7. I worry that climate change may negatively affect my students' lives.                  | 4.68 (0.67)         | 4.50 (0.79)       |

The survey results on English language teachers' perceptions of the future of climate change show that both male and female participants hold a strong and informed awareness of its long-term impacts, with mean scores above 4.50 for all items (Table 4). Female teachers demonstrated

slightly stronger perceptions overall, agreeing that inaction will lead to irreversible planetary damage ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) and that future generations will be severely affected ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ). They also emphasized the role of education and collective efforts in ensuring a safer future ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ). Male participants similarly recognized the importance of education ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) and collective mitigation ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ), although their scores were marginally lower. Overall, both groups agreed that climate change will increasingly shape future curricula and significantly affect students' lives. These results highlight a strong forward-looking awareness and a shared understanding of the urgent need for educational and collaborative responses to climate challenges.

### 5. Interests in Climate Change

Interest in climate change refers to an individual's cognitive and behavioural engagement with climate issues, reflecting their curiosity, motivation, and willingness to participate in mitigation and adaptation efforts. It indicates how deeply people care about climate-related challenges and how actively they seek information, engage in relevant activities, and promote awareness. Research shows that strong interest in climate change is closely associated with positive attitudes, willingness to act, and pro-environmental behaviours. Thus, interest serves as a key driver shaping individuals' awareness, emotional connection, and commitment to climate action.

**Table 5. Respondents' Interests in Climate Change in Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Statements (6)                                                                      | Female<br>(Mean-<br>SD) | Male<br>(Mean-<br>SD) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. I am interested in learning more about climate change issues.                    | 4.74<br>(0.56)          | 4.50<br>(0.84)        |
| 2. I regularly follow news or reports related to climate change.                    | 4.47<br>(0.70)          | 4.22<br>(1.02)        |
| 3. I am interested in attending training related to climate change education.       | 4.79<br>(0.42)          | 4.40<br>(0.99)        |
| 4. I seek out materials that integrate language learning with environmental topics. | 4.74<br>(0.56)          | 4.30<br>(0.99)        |
| 5. I am motivated to develop my own teaching materials on climate change.           | 4.74<br>(0.56)          | 4.38<br>(0.92)        |
| 6. I am not interested in climate change problems.                                  | 1.06<br>(0.24)          | 1.06<br>(0.25)        |

The survey results in Table 5 show that both male and female English language teachers exhibit a high level of interest in climate change. Female participants reported slightly stronger interest, particularly in attending climate-related training and workshops ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ), learning more about climate issues, developing relevant teaching materials, and staying updated with news. Male participants also displayed strong interest, with the highest scores for learning about climate change ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) and participating in workshops ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ), followed by creating instructional materials on climate topics. Both groups strongly disagreed with the negative statement, "I am not interested in climate change problems," with identical low means ( $M = 1.06$ ).

Overall, the findings indicate that teachers, regardless of gender, are highly motivated and engaged in integrating climate change issues into their professional practice.

#### **6. Concern for Ecological Problems**

Concern for ecological problems refers to individuals' awareness, emotional engagement, and sense of responsibility toward environmental issues such as heatwaves, pollution, floods, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water scarcity. It reflects the value people place on the health of natural ecosystems and their commitment to preventing environmental degradation. This concern is a multidimensional construct involving cognitive (awareness), emotional (attachment), and behavioural (willingness to act) components, highlighting that informed and emotionally invested individuals are more likely to support climate mitigation and sustainable development.

**Table 6. Respondents' Concern for Ecological Problems in Mean and Standard Deviation**

| Statements (10)                                                             | Female<br>(Mean-SD) | Male<br>(Mean-SD) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. I am concerned about air pollution in my community.                      | 4.95 (0.23)         | 4.54 (0.86)       |
| 2. I am concerned about water scarcity caused by climate change.            | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.68 (0.71)       |
| 3. I am concerned about deforestation and loss of biodiversity.             | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.78 (0.42)       |
| 4. I am concerned about improper waste disposal and plastic use.            | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.72 (0.57)       |
| 5. I am concerned about energy overconsumption.                             | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.66 (0.59)       |
| 6. I am concerned about the increase in global temperature.                 | 4.95 (0.23)         | 4.80 (0.53)       |
| 7. I am concerned about the effects of climate change on food security.     | 4.95 (0.23)         | 4.82 (0.44)       |
| 8. I am concerned about rising sea levels and flooding.                     | 4.74 (0.73)         | 4.58 (0.91)       |
| 9. I am concerned about the spread of diseases due to ecological imbalance. | 4.95 (0.23)         | 4.58 (0.86)       |
| 10. I am concerned about the overall ecological health of the planet.       | 4.89 (0.32)         | 4.64 (0.75)       |

The survey results in Table 6 show that both male and female English teachers express very high levels of concern for ecological and environmental problems. Female participants reported

consistently elevated concern, with an overall mean of  $M = 4.95$ , especially regarding air pollution, rising temperatures, food security, and ecological health. Male participants also showed strong concern, though with slightly lower and more variable means, particularly for food security ( $M = 4.82$ ), rising temperatures ( $M = 4.80$ ), and deforestation ( $M = 4.78$ ). Both groups indicated significant awareness of issues such as water scarcity, waste management, biodiversity loss, and energy overconsumption. Overall, the findings highlight a deep, shared recognition of the urgency and seriousness of environmental challenges associated with climate change.

**Table 7. Pearson Correlations among Climate-related Variables**

| Variables                           | Correlation Coefficients |           |           |           |           |   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|
|                                     | 1                        | 2         | 3         | 4         | 5         | 6 |
| Willingness to Act                  | 1                        |           |           |           |           |   |
| Attitude towards Climate Change     | .74*<br>*                | 1         |           |           |           |   |
| Perception of Action Possibilities  | .68*<br>*                | .54*<br>* | 1         |           |           |   |
| Perception of Future Climate Change | .77*<br>*                | .79*<br>* | .59*<br>* | 1         |           |   |
| Interest in Climate Change          | .74*<br>*                | .81*<br>* | .83*<br>* | .83*<br>* | 1         |   |
| Concern for Ecological Problems     | .66*<br>*                | .71*<br>* | .68*<br>* | .81*<br>* | .87*<br>* | 1 |

$p < .01 (**)$

The Pearson correlation coefficient (PCC) analysis examined relationships among the six study variables and revealed consistently strong positive correlations ranging from  $r = .54$  to  $r = .87$ . The strongest association emerged between interest in climate change and concern for ecological problems ( $r = .87$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher climate-related interest is closely linked to greater ecological concern. Perception of action possibilities showed strong correlations with interest in climate change ( $r = .83$ ) and perception of future climate change ( $r = .59$ ), suggesting that participants who recognize practical solutions are also more aware and engaged with climate issues. Willingness to act was strongly related to perception of future climate change ( $r = .77$ ), highlighting that greater awareness of long-term risks motivates proactive behaviour. The moderate correlation between perception of action possibilities and attitudes ( $r = .54$ ) indicates some uncertainty regarding personal capability despite positive attitudes. Overall, the results reflect strong alignment among cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of climate engagement, consistent with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour.

### Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to investigate English instructors' willingness to act in the context of climate change mitigation and adaptation. The results indicate that English teachers, regardless of gender or age, are highly engaged across the behavioural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of climate change mitigation and adaptation. They demonstrate strongly positive attitudes toward climate change, firmly believe in practical solutions, show deep concern for ecological issues, and exhibit a high level of interest in climate-related topics. While male teachers also displayed strong, albeit slightly more variable, commitment, female teachers demonstrated marginally higher engagement, highlighting their critical role in promoting climate-conscious behaviours.

Interest in climate change is a critical driver of engagement, closely linked to concern for ecological issues and willingness to act. Teachers who understand the risks of climate change, recognize its potential impact on future generations, and acknowledge their responsibility and



accountability are more motivated to minimize its effects and promote a sustainable environment. The interconnections among variables, such as willingness to act, attitudes, perceptions, interests, and ecological concern – align with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, demonstrating that positive attitudes, intrinsic interest, motivation, and perceived behavioural control collectively enhance teachers' readiness to engage in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Overall, the findings of the study demonstrate that English teachers have the capacity to act as climate advocates. They can effectively foster climate-conscious students and contribute to creating a sustainable environment by integrating climate-related topics into the curriculum, participating in professional development programs, and promoting collaborative projects.

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**FROM SELF-SUFFICIENCY TO PRECARITY: ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN  
PUNDALIK N. NAIK'S *THE UPHEAVAL***

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**Abstract**

Environmental Humanities is a multidisciplinary field that examines nature and ecological problems from various perspectives. It may encompass multiple aspects, both positive and negative, that influence the existence of both human and non-human beings on this planet. This paper analyses the effects of human activities and the uncertainties they produce due to changes in the ecosystem. Precarity refers to the instability and uncertainty affecting all living beings. This paper examines the precarious existence of individuals affected by changes in the ecosystem or surroundings in the name of development, with a focus on P.N. Naik's novel, *The Upheaval*. The paper also explores the consequences of mining in a village in Goa, as well as the impact of industrialisation and large-scale mining projects on individuals and communities. The novel effectively illustrates the transformation of a self-sufficient town into one that has lost its vitality due to the introduction of mining and other industrial developments by capitalists. It highlights the forced displacement of people from their ancestral land and the transformation of once-productive, fertile areas into barren wastelands because of these human activities.

**Keywords:** Nature, Anthropocene, Displacement, Precarity, Resistance, Industrialisation, Capitalism.

**Introduction**

Environmental Humanities is a multidisciplinary field that investigates the far-reaching consequences of environmental degradation and examines how human activities shape the natural world, while also extending its scope beyond these concerns to explore broader cultural, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of human–environment relationships. Cohen and Foote argue that “Over the last three decades, humanities scholars working on environmental matters have moved beyond field-specific and well-delineated descriptors such as “environmental history” or “literature and the environment...these scholars produced groundbreaking interdisciplinary work that challenged the primacy of standard narratives of the cultural reproduction of the vexed category of nature, and helped to usher in what we now label the environmental humanities” (1). Rather than remaining limited to traditional classifications such as literature and the environment, environmental humanities adopt a broad, interdisciplinary framework that enables a more nuanced understanding of the connections between people and their surroundings. Emmett and Nye state that “One can trace the origins of the environmental humanities back more than a century, but that the field originated most immediately through the confluence of simultaneous developments during the 1970s and the 1980s in departments of literature, philosophy, history, geography, gender studies, and anthropology” (Emmett and Nye 3). Environmental Humanities, as a critical field of study, examines how capitalist ideologies contribute to environmental degradation, offering a space for meaningful discussion of these issues. As capitalism is rooted in the pursuit of economic expansion and profit maximisation, it tends to promote industrial growth without adequate regard for ecological sustainability. Hence, its relentless focus on production often results in the unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Narratives addressing environmental

degradation, in both fiction and non-fiction, play a significant role in challenging the developmental myths upheld by capitalist ideologies. Therefore, Environmental Humanities stands as an important area of inquiry that critically examines the ways in which human actions contribute to environmental uncertainty.

Environmental degradation generates widespread ecological instability, producing conditions of uncertainty and precarity across the ecosystem. Precarity refers to the instability and uncertainty affecting all living beings. As Pramod K. Nayar puts it: “The age of the earth is deemed to have come into the Anthropocene era with the advent of humanity and its interventions in the form of industrialization, modernity, and colonialism, which has effectively altered the world as we know it” (251). Practices such as deforestation, mining, and pollution erode the fundamental basis of sustainability, leaving those who rely on land, water, and natural resources increasingly vulnerable. While environmental degradation primarily concerns the harm inflicted on ecosystems, the uncertainty it produces further intensifies the vulnerability of those whose livelihoods rely directly on natural resources.

Native communities and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups are particularly at risk from environmental changes, which can destroy their means of subsistence, compelling them to abandon their ancestral lands. Human actions, whether intentional or unintended, significantly alter ecological systems and disrupt the planet’s biodiversity. These anthropogenic environmental impacts pose significant challenges, including climate change, ecocide, ecosystem deterioration, global warming, and resource depletion. Development-driven activities have hastened the extinction of numerous species and aggravated environmental degradation. Most environmental transformations can be attributed to the Industrial Revolution, which had a profound impact on the ecosystem. The Anthropocene, marked by human-centred activities, has inflicted severe disruptions on ecosystems, creating widespread precarity. Its impact on agrarian societies is immeasurable, and numerous narratives portray the hardships that arise from such anthropocentric interventions.

An agrarian society is primarily characterised by its dependence on land for sustenance, with agriculture and farming serving as its foundation. In these traditional societies, the majority of the population relies on conventional farming, utilising natural resources to meet the community's needs without generating a surplus for profit. Modernisation has a significant impact on agrarian societies, leading to economic, cultural, social, and environmental changes that disrupt traditional systems. This often results in industrialisation, which reduces the importance of conventional ways of living. A fundamental trait of an agrarian society is its deep interdependence with the natural environment. Because everyday life and livelihood rely directly on land, water, and seasonal cycles, the way people engage with nature becomes crucial, emphasising sustainable resource use and conservation. This close connection is reflected in community rituals, traditional agricultural practices, and belief systems that honour and safeguard the natural world. Together, these cultural expressions reveal the strong ecological awareness that shapes and sustains agrarian life.

*The Upheaval (Acchev)* by Pundalik N. Naik is an influential work in Konkani literature, translated into English by Vidya Pai. The novel explores the cultural, social, and economic challenges faced by rural Goan communities due to mining and industrialisation. It critiques the effects of modernisation on an agrarian society. The story, set in the villages of Ponda district, offers a deeper understanding of the shifting terrain of Goa during the mining boom of the 1950s. As typical of the agrarian society, “Pundalik Naik’s writing illuminates peasant life in all its variety, not least the changing landscape of modernity and industrialisation, which has fragmented village communities and disturbed a rural ethos without necessarily alleviating poverty” (Couto xxvi). Mining in Goa has had a profound and long-lasting impact on the landscape. Although it contributed to economic growth, the ecological destruction it triggered is immeasurable. Mining activities led to extensive loss of biodiversity, polluted water bodies, and severe soil erosion. Villages situated near mining zones suffered from deteriorating air quality, rising health issues, and disruptions to their traditional livelihoods. The novel vividly captures these consequences by

focusing its narrative on a few affected villages, illustrating how unsustainable mining practices deplete natural resources and disrupt both ecological stability and human life.

The novel begins with images of a rural landscape, showcasing palm trees, toddy tappers, rice fields, and freshly ploughed soil. Naik writes: "The palm trees withdrew their shadows from the still waters. The evening breeze sprang in like a toddy tapper, leaping from palm to palm, counting the fronds...The birds nestling among the tender leaves twittered" (Naik 3). The book examines various aspects of peasant life, highlighting how modernity and industrialisation have fragmented village communities, undermined rural values, and, despite their promises, failed to alleviate poverty (Couto xxvi). The village of Kolamba, with its sacred lake symbolising the community's cultural heritage, is described as being "nestled in the curve of the river Mandovi as snugly as a water pot fits against a woman's hip" (Naik 15).

Pandhari, the novel's central character, is portrayed as a hardworking farmer: "It was only when the last of the sparkling white cranes fluttered up from the fields that Pandhari raised his head. He straightened his back- bent so long- his feet sinking deep into the mud as he strove to keep his balance...A cool breeze blew over him, carrying the odour of his sweat across the field, but there was no one there" (Naik 3). Before commencing sowing in their fields, the villagers performed a ritual to honour and appease the Spirit of the Lake. However, Pandhari overlooked this tradition when he began preparing the seeds for planting. Shanu, noticing his oversight, warned him and urged him to hold off on sowing until the ceremony for the Spirit of the Lake was completed. Ignoring Shanu's advice, Pandhari proceeded with his plan. This decision would ultimately result in the complete ruin of his family and the devastation of the entire community.

The novel is divided into two parts, and the first part offers a glimpse into an agrarian village where people live by age-old traditions, relying on their fields and lands as their primary source of livelihood. They faithfully followed traditional rituals, especially those meant to appease the Spirit of the Lake. This deep respect for natural forces reflects the villager's inherent sense of ecological consciousness. They believed that any failure to perform the required rituals before ploughing or sowing the fields would bring misfortune upon the entire village. While the first part of the novel describes the gradual transformation taking place in the village, the second part draws our attention to the loss of traditional values as people begin to abandon their ecological consciousness. Their growing greed for accumulating wealth leads them to neglect age-old rituals, ultimately resulting in complete devastation—most notably in Pandhari's family, and eventually throughout the entire village.

### **Seasonal Ceremonies and Cultural Bonds**

One of the key elements that reflects the villagers' ecological consciousness is the series of seasonal ceremonies they celebrate with great reverence. Each season is welcomed with utmost significance, marking their deep connection to the natural world. Abu, as a representative of the village's cultural traditions, is a significant character whose words consistently reflect the deep reverence he holds for his land. His remarks illuminate the cultural significance and the deeply rooted beliefs surrounding the Spirit of the Lake. "'Who was that squatting so close to the lake?'... 'Don't you know that the Barmo, the Holy Spirit, lives by the lake? You must keep the whole place clean. If you squat there and dirty the area, worms will crawl all over your buttocks. The Barmo will catch you and never let you go...'" (Naik 16). The belief in the Spirit of the Lake led the people to regard it as a life-giving force that sustained the entire village. They understood that polluting the lake would ultimately bring ruin to their community. The farmers would begin preparations for the harvest only after the Jalmi visited the village to propitiate the Spirit of the Lake, reflecting their deep respect for the values and traditions they faithfully followed. Since the villagers valued respect for both nature and people, and followed traditional beliefs that encouraged the careful preservation of natural resources, the erosion of these values becomes a powerful symbol of the environmental collapse that follows.

Every Monday, the villagers gathered at the temple of the Gram Purush to sing bhajans to the village's guardian spirit. This tradition, characteristic of a rural agrarian community, reflects their unity and the contentment of their simple way of life. Their belief in the guardian spirit—who they feel protects the village and its land from harm—creates a collective consciousness that discourages actions which might disrupt their lives or damage their environment. The villagers' reverence for the Spirit of the Lake and their commitment to keeping it unpolluted are clearly reflected in Abu's actions after the bhajan, when he drank deeply from the lake until he was completely satisfied. "Then, dipping his cupped palms into the water, he scooped up one mouthful, then another, again and again till he burped, his stomach full" (Naik 24). Another occasion when villagers come together is 'Malni Punav', the full moon night in the month of Poush, during which they perform rituals to appease local deities. Such gatherings reflect the villagers' collective spirit and their commitment to the well-being of both the community and the village. The 'Shigmo festival' is another important occasion that unites the villagers. As one of the most vibrant and culturally significant spring festivals celebrated predominantly by agrarian communities, it marks the transition from winter to the agricultural season and is observed through music, dance, and ritual performances. "On Shigmo Punav, the waters of the lake shimmered silvery white as little waves distorted the reflection of the full moon and carried its brightness to every nook and corner" (Naik 48). Serving as a cultural emblem of agrarian life, the festival honours local deities and expresses gratitude for blessings and a bountiful harvest. By bringing the entire community together, Shigmo affirms social harmony and reinforces a shared cultural identity. The incident that occurs during the 'Taalgadi performance' serves as a turning point in the story, raising questions about the tension between ritual and reality. Taalgadi is a ritualistic performance involving singing, dancing, and rhythmic movements, showcasing the cultural heritage of the community. It also serves as an expression of gratitude to deities for the village's prosperity. Moreover, the performance highlights the deep connection between nature and culture. Any mishap during the festival is traditionally interpreted as a warning, signalling the potential deterioration of the bond between the people and their land.

'Satyanarayan Puja' constitutes another significant occasion that unites the villagers. Observed on the flat ground near the lake, it is performed on the day following Samsar Padvo, which marks the beginning of the new year. For the community, this ritual functions as more than a religious observance; it reaffirms social cohesion and strengthens their collective identity. The puja operates simultaneously as a spiritual and cultural practice, sustaining communal bonds and upholding shared values that are transmitted across generations. After the month of Sravan, the village turns its attention to the festive anticipation of 'Vinayaki Chavath', a celebration observed collectively across the community. Women play an integral role in the event, preparing traditional foods and decorating the floors and courtyards with cow-dung paste as part of long-standing ritual practices. The festival not only strengthens communal bonds but also highlights the enduring cultural traditions that have been passed down across generations. 'Annual Baras', observed in the village of Kolamba on the ninth day after Chavath, is closely linked to agrarian traditions and involves rituals intended to appease ghosts and lesser spirits. Datta, the priest who arrived from Amone, conducts prayers to both the deity and the lesser spirits, seeking their blessings for the successful completion of the rites. During the Annual Baras ceremony, the villagers craft two doll-like figures from cooked rice, symbolising a pair of newborns. These figures are then smeared with vermilion and kajal to give them an intentionally grotesque and fearsome appearance. Within the village's cultural belief system, these effigies represent all forms of evil or negative energies that reside within the community. By ceremonially casting the dolls beyond the village boundaries, the villagers symbolically purge their settlement of malevolent forces, reaffirming their collective desire for protection, harmony, and spiritual renewal. The community believes that when these rituals are performed with precision and purity, the trees will bear abundant fruit and the fields and water sources will remain protected from malevolent forces. This worldview is reflected in the priest's invocation, in which he appeals to the divine presence as the guardian and sustainer of



Kolamba: “O Lord and Master... who are the Lord and Master of Kolamba, root of all illusion, Mayabhumaka—creator of illusion—chief guardian of the village and source of its sustenance, Grampursha, You are Great” (Naik 62). Like other seasonal ceremonies, this observance fosters social cohesion by bringing villagers together in shared acts of worship, ritual performances, and communal celebrations. At the same time, Annual Baras functions as an important vehicle for cultural continuity, preserving long-standing customs and transmitting collective values across generations.

#### **Erosion of Cultural and Social Bonds**

The arrival of Prasad Babu, a Gujarati businessman, disrupts the villagers' routine. Babuso, who lives across the river, acts as an intermediary, and he entices Pandhari to work at the mine for seventy rupees for each trip by promising him wealth and a comfortable lifestyle. “They’re not just any type of stone...they say they make gold out of them. And that pit is called a mine. There’s lots of work up there. Weekly earnings” (Naik 12). The entire plan was portrayed as effortless: anyone with a bullock cart could transport stone chips from the mine and earn a good amount, as payment would be made according to the cart’s weight. Once Pandhari shifted his focus beyond his land and became preoccupied with accumulating wealth, both his life and his family began to deteriorate. This becomes especially clear in the words of Rukmini, Pandhari’s wife, when she speaks about Babuso: “This man has already made two or three trips to our house and each time he comes when Pandhari isn’t home. He’ll destroy not only my home but all of Kolamba...” (Naik 26). With his persuasive words, Babuso successfully lured Pandhari into working for the mine, promising him seventy rupees for each trip. Babuso played a decisive role in destabilising Pandhari’s family life, contributing to his transformation from a hardworking farmer into a man increasingly drawn to the pursuit of quick wealth. Under Babuso’s influence, Pandhari compelled his wife, Rukmini, and his children, Nanu and Kesar, to work in the mine. Babuso’s manipulative involvement becomes especially evident in his remark, “And you hardly get any paddy at the end of the day. Why don’t you take her to the mine at Naveli?” (Naik 42). The exploitation of nature reflects the erosion of family life. Babuso, the middleman, lures Pandhari away from his fields, triggering this breakdown and paving the way for mining operations in the region. The situation becomes evident through Abu’s words when he speaks about Pandhari, stating: “Let’s see what that Pandhari has been up to. But you can tell the state of the house by looking at the courtyard itself...that wretch has sold himself to the mine!” (Naik 42).

As explained in an article on ‘History of Mining in Goa’ by the Goenchimati Movement, early mining in Goa was an arduous, manual endeavour, as vividly portrayed in Pundalik Naik’s *Acchev (The Upheaval)*. Women and children carried minerals on their heads to bullock carts, transporting the loads to the jetty. There, sailboats were manually loaded. The earnings from mining significantly surpassed those from agriculture and traditional occupations, enticing many. However, this newfound wealth disrupted the societal fabric, unravelling it under the influence of greed. Over time, various aspects of mining became mechanised, evolving to be larger, faster, and more efficient. The village teacher, Savlo Master, strives to mentor the youth. However, his efforts are undermined by the lure of well-paying mining jobs, which many view as a more attractive alternative to the gradual rewards of education. The growing influence of material wealth, even at the expense of education, is evident in the remarks of Yeso’s son, Shanker, as he was playing with Kesar, Nanu, and Narshinv, when he remarked: “Let’s not work in the fields. We’ll work in the mine. More money there” (Naik 37). Pandhari had no time for anything else lately. The mining work was in full swing, as it had to be completed before the rains arrived. His cart was constantly loaded with ore from the mine, filled by Rukmini, Babuso, Nanu, and Kesar. Determined to seize this opportunity, Pandhari worked tirelessly, neglecting food and sleep as he laboured day and night, his body and mind restless. Meanwhile, his field was left untended, overrun by wild grass and weeds that smothered the young plants. The fragile tendrils that had started to sprout and the next crop, which was beginning to form, appeared weak and stunted. (Naik 56). Gradually, other



villagers began to follow the path that Pandhari had taken. Although they continued engaging in traditional agrarian tasks such as farming, threshing, and gathering, these activities increasingly became routine rather than meaningful. A growing sense of dissatisfaction with their customary way of life prompted many to view mining as a more promising source of income. In this shift toward wage labour, Pandhari emerged as the foreman of the group of villagers from Kolamba who took up work in the mine, symbolising the community's transition from self-sufficiency to a monetised and exploitative mode of livelihood. Although the villagers tried to attribute the mishap that occurred to Nanu during the Taalgadi performance to Savlo Master's fault, Nanu was certain of the true cause. He later revealed the reality to his master, explaining the entire sequence of events. "He (Pandhari) took me to work at the mine. To carry stones on my head to fill the cart. It's our own cart, so if we do the work ourselves, we can make more money" (Naik 51). When Savlo Master expressed his hope that a new generation of bright children in Kolamba would someday gather in the village chowk to read texts such as the Ramvijay and the Harivijay, Abu responded with a remark that revealed his clear understanding of the village's changing reality. He observed that, under the prevailing circumstances, the children would instead be reading such texts at the mine in Naveli. His words highlight the harsh transformation taking place in Kolamba - even young children are now burdened with carrying heavy loads that their frail necks can scarcely withstand; adults find themselves with no time for rest or reflection, and the communal practice of singing bhajans at the chowk has nearly disappeared. Abu's response thus underscores the erosion of cultural life and the growing dominance of exploitative labour in the villagers' daily existence.

The transformation from self-sufficiency to precarity is sharply revealed in Abu's words when he questions Pandhari, asking, "You were always the first man in the village to finish the ploughing, the first one to sow and the first one to reap his field. And you always got a better crop than the others. But what sort of a wretched harvest is this...?" (Naik 43). Abu, long regarded as the village's custodian of cultural values and traditional practices, passes away at a time when Kolamba's social fabric is already under strain. His death exposes the depth of this erosion, as only Shanker, Savlo Master, and a handful of others step forward to undertake his burial rites. Savlo Master's observation that culture and tradition have come to an end in Kolamba with Abu's death captures the symbolic weight of his passing. It signifies not merely the loss of an elder, but the collapse of the very principles that once sustained the community's identity and cohesion. Savlo Master reflects Abu's death, remarking that "He was the last of the real men in Kolamba, and passed away empty and unfulfilled. He had visions of a new generation of worthy young men in Kolamba..." (Naik 75). A hope that remained unrealised as the village drifted away from its cultural and moral foundations. Jaidev, who arrived from a neighbouring village to attend the Satyanarayan puja, becomes visibly dejected upon realising that Kolamba's rituals, traditions, and belief systems had diminished with Abu's death. His sense of loss is captured in his remark about Abu: "That old man Abu passed away, and with him everything that is traditional too faded out of Kolamba" (Naik 87). His words underscore the symbolic significance of Abu's passing, marking the erosion of the cultural foundations that once sustained the village. By the end of the novel, Pandhari, who had initially pursued mining work in the hope of earning more money, finds himself physically drained, with deteriorating health, a sick wife, and children who have drifted away from stability. The introduction of machines in the mines further disrupts the livelihoods of many villagers, including Pandhari, leaving them without the work that had once sustained them. His condition thus exemplifies the broader collapse of traditional ways of living and the profound human cost of the community's shift toward mechanised mining.

The precarious and uncertain conditions in the lives of the people of Kolamba are vividly expressed in the words of Shanu, a villager, who remarks: "Even grass doesn't grow in these fields any longer... During the rains, water gushes down that road into the lake, carrying with it dust, stones, and ore, and the whole lake turns red like the paint we use on our walls... The fields around Surla village were destroyed in this way. Now it's our turn" (Naik 131). His statement underscores the environmental degradation that has overtaken the village, highlighting both the destruction of

agricultural land and the community's vulnerability to the consequences of mining and ecological neglect. As the title of the novel, *The Upheaval*, suggests, it depicts the profound disruptions experienced by a traditional village that once thrived on social harmony and customary cultural practices. Through the experiences of Pandhari and his family, the narrative illustrates the complete disintegration of village life, highlighting how the shift from agrarian self-sufficiency to the precarious and uncertain work in the mines destabilised both social and cultural structures. The connection between nature and literature has emerged as an important field of inquiry within contemporary literary studies. There is a strong belief that literature can effectively raise awareness about environmental issues. Authors examine the impact of human actions on nature in their works, using literature as a platform to convey their viewpoints. This relationship is often reflected in various forms of artistic expression. In his essay entitled "The Writers as the Conscience of the People," Albert Maltz states: "...writers being human have moved by the suffering of other men...and if his heart be compassionate, his mind enquiring, his eyes perceptive, how can he avoid the portrayal of an imperfect world – or close his own heart to the longing for a better one? What is a writer to use as his material, if not the lives of his fellows?" (Fast 29).

### **Conclusion**

The narrative explores pressing contemporary issues, including environmental degradation fueled by human-centric activities, often disguised as development. It examines the breakdown of families and communities, the disruption of the social fabric, and the commercialisation of land and resources. Moreover, it highlights the transformation of agrarian societies through mining, emphasising the displacement of traditional communities into poverty and the devastating conversion of fertile land into barren wastelands. The narrative encourages readers to consider the far-reaching consequences of these actions and emphasises the urgent need to redefine humanity's relationship with nature. It underscores the importance of viewing environmental protection as a shared responsibility for ensuring the survival of both people and the planet. As a socially conscious writer, Naik calls upon readers to confront the looming environmental crisis and gain a profound understanding of the grim realities of the Anthropocene era. The novel delves into the social, political, and economic challenges of this epoch, exposing a world where humanity's disregard extends to the environment and to one another. Pundalik N. Naik's *The Upheaval* compellingly portrays the plight of a village and its inhabitants, revealing how they are pushed into conditions of precarity while exposing the underlying tensions and conflicts that shape their collective experience.

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**DABEER – 14**

**ECO – CYBORG FEMINIST READING OF MOVIES: WALL-E, THE WILD ROBOT AND I AM MOTHER**

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**Abstract**

This paper reads Pixar's *WALL – E* (2008), Peter Brown's *The Wild Robot* (2016) and Grant Sputore's *I am Mother* (2019) through Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto, positioning WALL-E, EVE, Roz and Mother as Cyborg figures who transcend the boundaries between human and machine, nature and technology. These cyborgs explore agency beyond biology, integrates tech AI and ecological systems. These cyborgs exhibit maternal qualities and take roles as caregivers and protective figures, thus questioning the anthropocentric world. Each movie is an evolution based on real or current environmental crisis and technological advancement. It presents the stark contrast between Human negligence of ecosystem and ecological restoration by Cyborgs. It also poses threat to human existence as it is speculated that super artificial intelligence would lead to the state of Singularity which arises the question of technophobia. It revolves around Rebirth and Restoration of humanity and ecosystem. The reading of these movies is disseminated in three levels – primarily as Cyborg Studies, secondarily as Feminist Humanities and tertiary as Environmental Humanities. Through the intersection of these levels of reading the paper is culminated and presented as Eco – Cyborg Feminist reading.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanites, Cyborg Feminism, Posthuman Ecology, Feminist Humanites, Technophobia, and Eco-Cyborg Feminism

**Introduction**

The present digital era has made humans cohabit with machines and has transformed machines as inevitable part of their lives. Advancement in technology happens in a rapid way instead of gradual way, this is of at most concern. Humans adapting to this rapid change might result in their extinction! Incorporation of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in day-to-day life may lead humans to lose certain human abilities and align them with machine features. The routine mundane life running behind a clock / mobile is robotic or mechanical. A better understanding of how our lives be transformed in future with AI is presented through certain movies. By studying and analysing those the paper attempts to address the concern towards outgrowing AI.

The movies chosen are Pixar's *WALL – E* (2008), Peter Brown's *The Wild Robot* (2016) and Grant Sputore's *I am Mother* (2019). Pixar's *WALL – E* (2008) is directed by Andrew Stanton is an animated science fiction, environmental allegory set in a distant future where Earth has become an uninhabitable wasteland due to mass consumerism and pollution, *WALL·E* (Waste Allocation Load Lifter–Earth Class) — a small trash-compacting robot left to clean up the planet a small waste-collecting robot left to clean up the planet. Over centuries, WALL·E develops personality and emotions, collecting human artifacts and longing for connection. His life changes when he meets **EVE** (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator), a sleek robot sent to find signs of life. Together, they rediscover a tiny plant that symbolizes hope for Earth's renewal.

*The Wild Robot* (2016 – novel by Peter Brown) is a children's science fiction, ecological fable. After a shipwreck, a robot named Rozzum (Roz) washes up on a remote island. Programmed for efficiency, Roz must adapt to survive in the wilderness among animals who fear her. Through patience and empathy, Roz learns the language of the animals, adopts a gosling named Brightbill, and becomes a beloved member of the ecosystem. When humans arrive to reclaim her, Roz sacrifices her safety for the harmony of her new home.

*I Am Mother* (2019) directed by Grant Sputore is a science fiction, psychological thriller. After a global extinction event, an AI robot called **Mother** raises a human girl in an underground facility designed to repopulate Earth. The girl, known simply as **Daughter**, grows up believing that the outside world is toxic. When a mysterious wounded woman appears, Daughter begins questioning Mother's motives and the truth of her existence. The story unfolds into a meditation on creation, control, and humanity's ethical rebirth through technology.

All the three resonate human extinction or evacuation as that is the backdrop for the plot to evolve. The study and analysis of the above-mentioned text attempts to answer these questions:

1. Why and how robots become posthumans?
2. Why and how survival is equalized with maternal instincts?
3. How nature reacts to human extinction?

Each question is approached with certain methodology such as cyborg studies, feminist humanities and environmental humanities respectively.

Theoretical framework - Cyborg Studies

In *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), **Donna Haraway** describes the cyborg as:

"A hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as fiction." (292)

Key points from *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985):

- Cyborgs blur boundaries: human/non-human, nature/technology, male/female.
- Hybrid beings resist rigid societal, biological, and technological categories.
- Posthuman ethics: coexistence and survival require collaboration between organic and artificial entities. (297-310)

In literature, cyborgs often function as **mediators** between humans, technology, and nature.

#### **Feminist Humanities**

Feminist Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that explores human culture, history, literature, and society through the lens of feminist theory. It examines how gender, power, and identity shape human experience and cultural production, often with the goal of **challenging oppression, inequality, and patriarchal norms**. (Sekar 271)

#### **Environmental Humanities**

Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between humans and the natural environment through the lens of culture, history, literature, philosophy, and the arts. It connects the humanities (like literature, philosophy, history, and religion) with environmental studies and science to better understand how human values, beliefs, and stories shape our interactions with the Earth. (Sekar 237)

Environmental Humanities helps us understand that saving the environment is not only a scientific or political issue—it's also deeply cultural, ethical, and emotional. In environmental and feminist humanities, the cyborg becomes a symbol of survival and adaptation in the age of artificial intelligence, climate change, and extinction.

#### **Interpretation**

##### ***Reading WALL-E as a Cyborg***

The movie presents WALL – E as a sole being in the planet Earth, after the evacuation of humans by a corporate Buy-n-Large with a leading AI powered Axiom. Though WALL-E is a trash collecting robot, he has imbibed or evolved to be with hybrid identity by merging both human and robotic qualities. For instance, look into the way he organizes his work based on time-leaving home at dawn and coming back home by dusk, having some me-time watching movies –

inclining towards human emotions and moral reasoning. He cherishes his collection of human relics from the trash left behind by humans. Certain things from his collection has no usage value yet, he stores it with an aesthetic sense. Being alone for certain period WALL-E begins longing for a companion as Adam – the first man. WALL-E too gets to meet EVE and he fell in love with her. There is no gender in machines yet, WALL-E and EVE are presented as Man – Woman reflecting their posthuman status. WALL-E woos EVE as humans do, this highlights how much WALL-E has absorbed human behavior and their senses. EVE lacks all these human qualities in the beginning but learns certain of it from WALL-E.

#### ***Studying Roz as a Cyborg***

Initially, Rozsum is established as a task accomplishing robot with lot of efficiency, washed away in a wild island. A perfect machine gradually learns, adapts, and create bonds with animals in the island. This process makes it a hybrid of human and robot. In the beginning she searches for master or human to command a task so that she could prove her efficiency and that's her job. Later realizes that creatures around her deem her to be a threat, then she starts speaking their language to create bond and trust. This adaptation is considered as human tendency. From being Rozsum she evolves to be Roz this happens as she adapts her programming- she overrides the code to be able to survive in the wild, by blending machine logic with natural instincts. That is the way she gains trust of all animals those who hated her and considered her as threat. She uses her machine power to save animals during snowstorm. By gathering both predators and prey at the same place she establishes harmony for survival during hard times. This act of Roz makes her a robot with human tendencies like empathy, emotional intelligence and social bonds.

#### ***Analyzing Mother as a Cyborg***

Usually, a robot with female physic would be presented for the character Mother, here it is a metal body with female automated voice. Mother merges code and care, and displays nurturing instincts, emotional language and moral reasoning. This could be seen in the way she raises her Daughter right from the embryonic stage. That is a challenging task for a robot but for an hybrid-cyborg it's quite easy. She never lets Daughter feel insecure or in threat or question her authority by utilizing her emotional intelligence regulates Daughter's emotions and makes her obey to all her commands. She upbrings a Daughter with a purpose or a mission yet to be accomplished. Mother with a metal body becomes the embodiment of motherhood establishing posthuman morality.

#### **Reading WALL-E applying Feminist Humanities**

In *WALL-E* movie WALL-E exhibits care and nurturing qualities more than EVE, which breaks the patriarchal standard – male cannot nurture. The name EVE suggests it as female and it comes to earth to detect life in the planet. So, survival relies on feminine energy. Though WALL-E and EVE are cyborgs they establish a bond by caring and nourishing that lets them survive irrespective of the obstacles they come across. WALL-E assumes anti-patriarchal role by taking care of EVE in earth and in Axiom spaceship. WALL-E protects the plant and nourishes life with maternal instinct not only to please EVE but to revive and restore humanity. It is WALL-E who tries hard to save EVE and the plant this implies his maternal instincts are his survival instincts.

#### **Roz in the lens of Feminist Humanities**

In *The Wild Robot*, Rozsum is presented as a robot devoid of gender but female identity is acclaimed by Roz as she takes up the task of raising a gosling being its mother. This task was ordered by a rodent mammal, a mother of seven. Initially, Roz took this as an assignment later develops maternal instincts to raise, protect, nourish, nurture, teach, and to make the gosling belong in the wild. She and the gosling survive in the wild only with her maternal instincts. Even after sending the gosling for migration, she waits for its return as a mother would expect a child to come back. These depicts her maternal emotion and sense of belonging in the wild. She awaits the return of gosling even after knowing that gosling is heartbroken knowing Roz was the reason for the destruction of its biological family. This projects that she has gone beyond the task completion mode to mother mode. When a spaceship comes to collect Rozsum back to where it

belongs, she refuses initially and wished to stay in wild as she had the sense of belonging there. Later she realizes that this may harm the peace of the wild thus surrenders on her own. This act proves her care and concern towards the creatures of the wild. At this moment she becomes the matriarch and her decisions and lessons taught lets the wild survive and thrive.

**Studying Mother under Feminist Humanities**

In *I am Mother*, the cyborg Mother defies patriarchal control and traditional gender roles. The patriarchal power – God, Father, State is replaced with a female coded machine intelligence called Mother. Here Mother is not giving birth rather creates life from embryos using technology. Yet, she decides which embryo to be brought to life. She prefers female embryos as she assumes the only female can move forward with the task of repopulating the Earth as a being with morality beyond human compassion. The movie presents only three female characters, there is not even a single male voice. Yet, proves to be a powerful cyborg movie, challenging patriarchy. The world devoid of human race is in the hands of Mother who has the power, facility, and technology to repopulate earth as she has had designed. This implies she must have wiped the earth clean so she could create her own kind and make the world as she desired. She raises Daughter with such care, nourishment with precision to evolve a human with coded program. It depicts Mother as both creator and controller.

**Reading WALL-E applying Environmental Humanities**

The movie *WALL-E* presents the world as uninhabitable due to pollution, junk, trash and exploitation of natural resources by humans. Here Humans are evacuated in the spaceship named Axiom. It denotes those who could hire a spaceship are alive and the rest were let to starve to death as the planet was turned to have no life in it. This implies the consequence of capitalism. The movie projects that capitalism thrives due to consumerism. The Buy-n-Large corporation promotes consumption in all means through all human senses to make them slaves. WALL-E a robot from earth resists corporate programming and make the humans come out of the trap that they were living in. WALL-E becomes the embodiment of individuality and chooses to love instead of consumption. His act makes the Human realize that they were not living rather being controlled in survival mode by the corporate, AI powered Axiom. When the captain of spaceship wants to return to earth as WALL-E presents him the plant as proof of life on earth, the Axiom tries to prevent it. Yet with the hope for humanity the captain and WALL-E defy the Axiom and reach the planet Earth.

On reaching Earth, Human realize that they have evolved biologically over a period of their survival and modified lifestyle in spaceship. They have lost certain mobility features which their ancestors had. This is a great warning to the present generation. Hence WALL-E becomes the bridge between machines and nature i.e, nature's rebirth, or restoration (plant and earth).

**The Wild Robot in the lens of Environmental Humanities**

The backdrop of the movie *The Wild Robot* is a deserted island inhabited by variety of wild animals. The island seems to be thriving naturally as no human traces are to be found. Nature is in its best and this island undergoes all the four seasons, ecosystem is well balanced. The unnatural element in that island is dismantled or destructed robots and their parts dumped by humans before evacuation. One such robot is Rozzum, who comes to active mode due to some external force. Humans living in the spaceship gets to know of its activity as Roz overrides its programming to survive in the wild and to be able to raise the gosling. Later through another robot Roz is captured back to its place. Robots like Roz were left in the earth to monitor the activities happening in there. The data collected or saved in the memory of the robot is of great worth to the humans. In this process, the robot being evolved as cyborg – as a blend of machine and human, is discarded. Roz assumes the task of a shepherd by taking care of all the animals during the snow storm. Roz establishes a truce between the predators and prey during the hard times. This emphasizes that Roz has brought balance in the island ecosystem, acting as both technology and steward of nature. It highlights Roz – posthuman survivor, a cyborg ensuring species continuity in the wild.



### **Studying *I am Mother* under Environmental Humanities**

*I am Mother* presents Earth as toxic, black, and uninhabitable. Humans are extinct in this context not evacuated. The whole movie has its backdrop as a large, huge underground bunker with all technical and surviving facility to repopulate Earth with millions of embryos to create life as designed and designated by Mother. Here creation of life and sustenance of it is the task assigned to the robot or cyborg the Mother. The very creation of life is like a game without any moral sense of God, Life, and Death. The divine task of creation and destruction is in the hands of cyborg Mother. It implies cyborgs can make human race extinct in near future. Daughter in the movie can't be accepted as a normal human being because she has not seen a human to imbibe human features and qualities. Naturally a child observes, imitates, and imbibes the qualities and character of those who raise them apart from their genetic transformation. Here Daughter has been in contact only with the cyborg Mother. Hence, she turns out to be a cyborg with human anatomy. Another wounded women character in the movie is yet another cyborg daughter created by Mother before the current. Mother has already created so many lives but destroyed as they do not seem fit. This exemplifies that the Mother is experimenting with the embryos she holds stock to create a perfect replica of her so that the world can be inhabited by cyborgs – a new improved human race can be evolved devoid of humanness and humanity. This underlines the posthuman morality as they operate outside binary ethics.

### **Summation**

The study has analyzed three movies Pixar's *WALL – E* (2008), Peter Brown's *The Wild Robot* (2016) and Grant Sputore's *I am Mother* (2019) applying three different perspectives and dimensions, such as Cyborg Studies, Feminist Humanities, and Environmental Humanities. Based on the interpretation and analysis certain inferences are made.

All the three movies are connected using the concept of cyborg as all the protagonists are cyborgs. Based on the year of release of the movies and the then scenario of real world or society, the purpose of the movie is presented - *WALL-E* is a warning and a red signal for humans to brace up towards environmental awareness and concern and to act upon it. *The Wild Robot* being a children fiction is a reality check as AI powered robots gaining prominence in the developed nations as a part of daily chores – future of those children is visualised. *I am Mother* is a haunting visual imagery, psychiatric thriller depicting the consequence of AI if it overpowers the humans. It reflects the prominent usage of AI in medical and biological field. It presents AI powered robots as threat to humanity.

This study has attempted to answer all the research questions posed earlier through interpretation of the movies. It concludes that Literature is a vehicle of power and ideology-movies and media being a part of literature transmits an alarm, a warning through presenting the consequence of AI, Climate Change and Ecological issues. The study warns the humans to hold the reins not letting it to AI and act upon the fact that human race can thrive only by sustaining and retaining humanity and human ability.

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**FROM ROOTS TO RIGHTS: ECOFEMINIST AND TRANSFEMINIST DIALOGUES IN  
A MODERNIST FRAME**

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**Abstract**

Reading ecofeminism and transfeminism through a modernist lens helps us understand that, although these ideologies draw their characteristics from postmodern theory, they also associate themselves with modernism. Studies show that ecofeminism and transfeminism mobilize coherent historical narratives, appropriate discourses, and progress-oriented politics, and despite their challenge to patriarchal, heteronormative, and anthropocentric orders, they remain associated with modernity. Our analysis demonstrates that ecofeminism criticize scientific reductionism and industrial modernity, yet still supports universal ethical claims about sustainability and comprehensive justice. Similarly, transfeminist rejection of gender essentialism does not prevent reliance on modernist vocabularies of recognition, citizenship, and human rights to pursue institutional change. Our comparative study clarifies convergences and divergences, revealing a productive tension that enables inclusive feminist praxis. This paper also contributes to feminist theory by bridging the modern–postmodern divide through strategic negotiation. Furthermore, it outlines implications for higher education by sustaining pluralism without sacrificing rigor, coupling criticism with coherent and justice-driven transformation.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism; Transfeminism; Modernism; Postmodernism; Situated universalism

**Introduction**

Ecofeminism and transfeminism are two of the most active and growing strands of feminist thinking in the modern era, each responding to oppressive structures that emerge differently depending on gender, environment, sexuality, and power. Scholars have traditionally studied these frameworks via a postmodern and poststructuralist lens, emphasizing fragmentation, heterogeneity, and opposition to universal claims of truth (Gaard 13; Koyama 245). Postmodernism, with its distrust of great narratives, has easily allied with feminist groups that oppose patriarchal, heteronormative, and anthropocentric systems. However, the idea of understanding ecofeminism and transfeminism through a modernist lens remains comparatively unexplored. Modernism, while frequently criticized for its universalizing tendencies, pursuit of progress, and belief in rational, scientific order, can still provide a critical vantage point for engaging with how ecofeminism and transfeminism position themselves in relation to history, knowledge, and political agency. This study examines ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist framework, asking whether modernism's rationalist, progress-driven, and universalist approach enriches or constrains our understanding of these feminist philosophies.

Ecofeminism and transfeminism rose to prominence in various cultural and political situations during the second half of the twentieth century. Ecofeminism evolved in the 1970s and 1980s, frequently in response to ecological crises and the recognition that environmental deterioration disproportionately harmed women, particularly in the Global South (Shiva 42). Thinkers such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies linked women's subordination to environmental exploitation, claiming that both were entrenched in patriarchal and capitalist systems. Transfeminism, on the other hand, rose to prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s, drawing on prior feminist and queer

theories but emphasizing the experiences of transgender and gender nonconforming people. Emi Koyama's "Transfeminist Manifesto" (2003) made the primary assertion that transfeminism is not simply an "add-on" to feminism, but rather a necessary expansion of feminist philosophy that acknowledges the intricate intersections of gender identity, embodiment, and structural oppression. Both movements, while influenced by postmodern critiques of identity, knowledge, and power, also address modernist legacies. Modernism, widely defined as the intellectual and cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emphasized reason, science, and progress. Its political goals included emancipation through rational planning, systematic knowledge, and Universalist beliefs about human progress (Best and Kellner 19). For example, modernist aspirations of nation-building and scientific growth were frequently portrayed as freedom from superstition and tradition. However, these undertakings have oppressive implications, particularly through colonialism, technocracy, and patriarchal hierarchies. For feminists, modernism is both a resource and a problem: while its rationalist ethos created venues for demanding equality, its Universalist frameworks frequently overlooked the specificities of women's, queer, and ecological concerns.

This paradox makes modernism an intriguing prism through which to evaluate ecofeminism and transfeminism. Ecofeminism, for example, criticizes modernist rationalism's role in exploiting nature through industrialization, but it also shares modernism's idealistic desire for systemic transformation. While Vandana Shiva's ecological activism is severely critical of Western scientific reasoning, it still raises universal concerns about sustainability, justice, and human existence (Shiva 87). Similarly, transfeminism challenges modernist male/female binaries while also appealing to universalist ideals of human dignity, rights, and self-determination. Emi Koyama's manifesto positions transfeminism as a struggle for inclusion within feminist and social justice groups, building on modernist concepts of progress and equality while disrupting essentialist definitions of identity (Koyama 248).

Furthermore, the relationship between modernism and feminist movements is inextricably linked with larger political history. Modernist political movements including suffrage, labor rights, and socialist fights laid the framework for feminist action in the twentieth century. Ecofeminism's concern for global justice is linked to modernist anti-colonial and socialist traditions that sought universal emancipation from exploitation, even as ecofeminists criticize their anthropocentrism. Transfeminism also overlaps with modernist political movements for civil rights, scientific acceptance of gender variety, and the globalization of human rights discourses. In this sense, ecofeminism and transfeminism are both postmodern and modernist inheritors, standing in conflict with and opposing these traditions.

A modernist understanding of ecofeminism and transfeminism raises problems about the significance of language, communication, and narrative. Modernist language frequently used coherence, linearity, and rational argumentation to achieve its universal claims (Lyotard 34). In contrast, postmodernism emphasizes fragmentation and plurality. However, ecofeminist and transfeminist literature frequently switch between these styles, sometimes embracing postmodern deconstruction and other times invoking modernist appeals to justice and development. For example, Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980), a seminal ecofeminist essay, criticizes modern science's mechanistic worldview while providing a coherent historical narrative about the transition from organic to mechanistic worldviews. Thus, this paper contends that looking at ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist lens broadens the breadth of feminist studies while also complicating the simple distinction between modernism and postmodernism. These feminist groups are not totally postmodern; rather, they strategically draw on both modernist and postmodernist frameworks, depending on political and intellectual needs. The modernist ambition for emancipation, development, and universalism lives on in ecofeminist and transfeminist perspectives, even as they criticize its limitations.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to reframe contemporary feminist debates. While much scholarship has focused on ecofeminism and transfeminism as postmodern projects

(Gaard 22; Butler 173), this study suggests that their relationship with modernism is equally important. By revisiting the modernist impulses within these theories, scholars can better understand their political aspirations, their rhetorical strategies, and their ongoing struggles for legitimacy in academic and activist spaces. Moreover, this approach challenges the rigid dichotomy often drawn between modernism and postmodernism, showing how feminist movements navigate, negotiate, and rework these paradigms.

The inclusion of modernist viewpoints in the study of ecofeminism and transfeminism is more than just an academic exercise. It represents the lived reality of movements that strive to strike a balance between critique and production, resistance and development, and specificity and universality. This study examines ecofeminism and transfeminism through a modernist perspective to find how these movements both disrupt and inherit modernist traditions, providing a broader, more complicated understanding of feminist thought in the twenty-first century.

### **Literature Review**

The interaction of ecofeminism, transfeminism, and larger philosophical frameworks like modernism and postmodernism has sparked intense scholarly debate. While considerable study situates these feminist frameworks within postmodern philosophy, the interaction of ecofeminism and transfeminism with modernist traditions has received less attention. A study of the extant literature in these areas reveals three primary strands: (1) ecofeminist scholarship and its theoretical evolution, (2) transfeminist discourse and its relationship to feminist theory, and (3) modernist and postmodernist frameworks in feminist research.

### **Ecofeminist Scholarship**

Ecofeminism arose in the late twentieth century in reaction to ecological crises and the understanding of the link between women's exploitation and natural resources. The movement was influenced by a variety of intellectual and activist traditions, including radical feminism and environmental justice activism. Early ecofeminist writings, such as Françoise d'Eaubonne's *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974), saw the struggle for women's freedom as inextricably linked to ecological survival (d'Eaubonne 62). This simultaneous emphasis on environment and feminism paved the way for ecofeminist thought.

Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) is a historical account of how the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment reason developed a mechanistic worldview that justified the dominance of both women and nature. Merchant believed that the transition from an organic to a mechanical worldview was fundamental to modernity since it enabled capitalist exploitation and patriarchy (Merchant 45). This theory explicitly criticizes modernist rationality, combining ecofeminism with postmodern cynicism about scientific "progress." However, Merchant's emphasis on historical causation and her need for systematic change are consistent with modernist aspirations for cohesive narrative and universal critique.

Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism highlights the experiences of women, particularly those in the Global South, whose livelihoods are most endangered by environmental catastrophe. In *Staying Alive* (1988), Shiva criticizes Western science and growth as extensions of patriarchal and colonialist dominance (Shiva 52). She focuses on indigenous knowledge systems, women's traditional ecological roles, and the need for sustainable alternatives to industrial capitalism. While Shiva's critiques are generally framed within postcolonial and postmodern critiques of Western modernity, she also employs universal statements about life's interdependence and the moral need of environmental justice. As a result, her work is situated in between postmodernism and modernism.

Scholars such as Greta Gaard have highlighted ecofeminism's diversity and linkages with queer theory, postcolonialism, and critical race theory. In *Ecofeminism: Toward Global Justice and Planetary Health* (2011), Gaard places ecofeminism within transnational frameworks that criticize globalization, militarism, and neoliberalism (Gaard 15). Her emphasis on plurality is consistent

with postmodern pluralism, but her calls for systemic reform show continuity with modernist ideals for social progress.

Ecofeminist scholarship exhibits ambivalence about modernism. On the one hand, ecofeminists criticize modernist rationalism, scientific reductionism, and universalist claims as drivers of ecological and gender inequality. On the other hand, they frequently use modernist impulses—such as systemic critique, historical narrative, and appeals to justice—to express their points.

### **Transfeminist Discourse**

Transfeminism arose as a feminist theory movement in the 1990s and early 2000s, focusing on the experiences and problems of transgender and gender nonconforming persons. Emi Koyama's *Transfeminist Manifesto* (2003) is widely regarded as a key piece. Koyama contends that transfeminism is more than just an addition to feminism; it is a position that redefines feminism by recognizing all women, including trans. women, as important to the cause. She stresses cross-cultural solidarity and criticizes transphobia in feminist areas as well as sexism in queer/trans settings.

Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* (2007) enhanced transfeminist discourse by showing transmisogyny, a combination of transphobia and sexism that disproportionately affects trans. women (Serano 132). Serano criticizes the reduction of gender identity to essentialist binaries, arguing against both biological determinism and naive social constructivism. Her work is famous for blending personal narrative with rationalist and scientific arguments, using biology, psychology, and social theory to validate transsexual identities. Serano exhibits a hybrid connection with modernist logic and postmodern deconstruction.

Susan Stryker's historical and theoretical work, such as *Transgender History* (2008), places transfeminism within the larger context of transgender activism and philosophy. Stryker emphasizes the role of social movements, legal frameworks, and cultural narratives in shaping trans. experiences (Stryker 1989). Her work is informed by postmodern queer theory, but it also emphasizes the modernist aspects of transgender politics, including the call for universal human rights, equality, and citizenship.

Recent scholarship has emphasized transfeminism's linkages with race, disability, and class. Authors such as C. Riley Snorton, who wrote *Black on Both Sides* (2017), show how history of racialization and enslavement create trans. identities. Similarly, Dean Spade's *Normal Life* (2011) criticizes neoliberal and bureaucratic power institutions while advocating for structural change (Spade 73). These works reveal transfeminism's roots in postmodern criticisms of power, while also employing modernist tactics of systemic critique and universal claims to justice.

Transfeminism, like ecofeminism, works within both postmodern and modernist contexts. It rejects essentialist binaries and totalizing frameworks while embracing Universalist discourses like justice, rights, and equality.

### **Modernism, Postmodernism, and Feminist Theory**

Modernism is roughly defined as a belief in reason, science, progress, and universal emancipation. Political modernism was associated with nation-building, industrialization, and emancipatory movements such as suffrage, socialism, and decolonization (Best and Kellner 21). However, modernism has been chastised for its involvement in colonialism, patriarchy, and technocracy. Feminist philosophy has long had an ambiguous connection with modernism: while modernist rationalism facilitated demands for women's equality, its Universalist frameworks frequently obliterated difference and promoted exclusion (Fraser 45).

Postmodernism arose as a critique of modernist universality, emphasizing heterogeneity, fragmentation, and the breakdown of big narratives (Lyotard 37). Postmodern feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), highlighted gender performativity and criticized essentialist concepts of womanhood (Butler 174). Postmodernism's mistrust of permanent identities was consistent with feminist critiques of patriarchy and heteronormativity. However,

postmodernism has been criticized for undermining communal political projects by fracturing identity and solidarity (Fraser 48).

Ecofeminism and transfeminism have primarily been viewed through postmodern glasses because they emphasize intersectionality, pluralism, and critiques of essentialist identity categories. However, both movements depend on modernist traditions of political struggle, systematic critique, and Universalist ideas. For example, ecofeminism's global justice paradigm connects with modernist anti-colonial and socialist ideals, whereas transfeminism's emphasis on rights and recognition engages modernist liberation ideologies.

Scholars like Seyla Benhabib have advocated for a "situated universalism" that combines feminist critiques of essentialism with modernist commitments to justice (Benhabib 15). Similarly, Nancy Fraser has suggested that feminism must balance deconstruction with reconstruction, critique and systemic vision (Fraser 49). These viewpoints argue that ecofeminism and transfeminism can be usefully examined as movements that embody both postmodern diversity and modernist political motivation.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

While ecofeminism and transfeminism have received a lot of attention within postmodern frameworks, their relationship to modernism is still poorly understood. Most ecofeminist study criticizes modernity's rationalist and mechanistic worldview without thoroughly exploring how ecofeminist utopianism fits within modernist progress myths. Similarly, transfeminist speech challenges essentialist binaries while frequently employing modernist discourses of rights, equality, and justice. Few studies have looked systematically at these tensions and overlaps.

This paper fills that vacuum by evaluating ecofeminism and transfeminism from a modernist standpoint, positioning them not as postmodern critiques but as movements negotiating between modernist and postmodernist frameworks. In doing so, it hopes to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of feminist theory in the twenty-first century.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist lens, we must first construct a theoretical framework that defines modernism and situates feminist discourses within its larger intellectual and political mission. Modernism is defined by a confidence in reason, scientific progress, systemic reform, and universalist claims to freedom. It arose as a reaction to the Enlightenment, industrialization, and the establishment of nation-states in the late 18th and 19th centuries. While modernism manifests itself in a variety of ways, including literature, politics, and philosophy, its philosophical core is based on the belief that human reason and collective action can improve civilizations. Modernist frameworks are relevant to feminist thought, particularly ecofeminism and transfeminism, because they both seek justice, equality, and systemic change, even if these discourses contradict modernist values.

### **Defining Modernism in the Political and Social Context**

Modernism is a political movement that values logic, historical development, and the desire of freedom. According to Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), modernism embodies both the exhilaration and the dislocation of nations undergoing fast industrialization, technical transformation, and political turmoil. Modernist politics showed itself in movements like socialism, suffrage, and decolonization, all of which attempted to destroy repressive hierarchies and establish more egalitarian social arrangements. The modernist emphasis on universal rights and systemic transformation provide a platform for feminist theorists to articulate broad-based calls for justice.

Feminist groups have historically leaned on modernist concepts, most notably the belief in universal human rights. The suffrage movement, for example, relied on Enlightenment logic and assertions of equality. Similarly, in the mid-twentieth century, second-wave feminism frequently used modernist themes about systemic



transformation, education, and political involvement. While feminism has criticized modernity's patriarchal exclusions, it has also been profoundly influenced by modernist pledges to social progress (Fraser 46).

### **Modernism and Feminist Theory**

Feminism and modernism share both similarities and differences. On the one hand, modernism's emphasis on universality and rationality gave feminists tools to advocate for women's participation in public and political life. On the other side, Universalist frameworks frequently ignored disparities in race, class, sexuality, and gender identity, perpetuating new forms of exclusion. Feminist theorists Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib have argued that, while postmodernism effectively attacks these exclusions, modernism is still required to support feminist goals of justice and systemic transformation (Benhabib 24, Fraser 49).

This contradiction is especially pertinent to ecofeminism and transfeminism. Both movements criticize the exclusions and essentialisms found in older feminist and modernist discourses, while simultaneously mobilizing modernist impulses such as the need for justice, universal human dignity, and systemic transformation. Thus, the theoretical foundation for this research views modernism as a living intellectual resource that continues to affect female efforts, rather than an antiquated relic.

### **Ecofeminism through a Modernist Lens**

Ecofeminism's ambivalence toward modernism makes it an appropriate subject for investigation. On the one hand, ecofeminist critiques of Enlightenment rationality and scientific reductionism are consistent with postmodern skepticism. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* connects ecological deterioration to modern science's mechanistic worldview, which she sees as crucial to modernity's dominance over both women and nature (Merchant 45). However, ecofeminism is more than just a deconstructionist project. It also includes utopian and systemic goals that are consistent with modernist ideas of transformation.

For example, Vandana Shiva's critique of Western development paradigms is both a rejection of modernist rationality and a call for global justice, food sovereignty, and ecological balance. These pleas frequently rely on universal assumptions about human survival and the moral need to preserve life (Shiva 63). Even when contrasted with Western modernity, such universalism reveals a modernist attitude. Similarly, Greta Gaard's transnational ecofeminism promotes systemic transformation for planetary health, reflecting modernist pledges to collaborative progress (Gaard 18).

Analyzing ecofeminism via a modernist lens highlights its reliance on systemic critique and universal claims, while also criticizing modernity's destructive tendencies. Ecofeminism demonstrates how feminist philosophy balances the rejection of oppressive modernist logics with the embrace of modernist ambitions for justice.

### **Transfeminism through a Modernist Lens**

Transfeminism, while sometimes associated with postmodern deconstructions of gender, also has important modernist elements. Emi Koyama's Transfeminist Manifesto describes transfeminism as a movement for solidarity, inclusivity, and structural transformation. Her claim that feminism must include trans. women as part of the movement shows universalist aspirations to equality (Koyama 246). This is congruent with modernist goals of liberty and fairness, while rejecting essentialist conceptions of gender.

Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* combines postmodern critiques of gender boundaries with appeals to scientific reasoning and personal narrative. Serano uses modernist epistemologies of science and reason to validate trans. experiences, serving feminist ideals (Serano 134). Similarly, Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* integrates trans. battles within larger narratives of rights,



recognition, and societal transformation, reflecting modernist conceptions of progress and freedom (Stryker 92).

Transfeminism frequently refers to universal human rights discourse, especially in legal and political situations. Dean Spade, for example, criticizes neoliberal bureaucracies in *Normal Life* while also advocating for systemic transformation based on values of justice and equality (75). These appeals to universalism reveal transfeminism's involvement with modernist frameworks, even if it's deconstructive features remain rooted in postmodern thought.

### **Integrating Modernism and Postmodernism in Feminist Analysis**

The theoretical foundation for this research acknowledges that ecofeminism and transfeminism cannot be easily labeled as modernist or postmodern. Instead, they represent a bargain between the two. Postmodernism provides these groups with tools for criticizing essentialism, big narratives, and exclusions. However, modernism offers an ambitious vision for systemic reform, fairness, and universal dignity.

This integration is consistent with Benhabib's concept of "situated universalism," which holds that feminist theory can express universal claims while staying sensitive to particularity and difference (Benhabib 27). Similarly, Fraser's appeal for a balance of deconstruction and reconstruction emphasizes the importance of modernist frameworks in supporting political objectives (Fraser 50). This paper's examination of ecofeminism and transfeminism under this dual framework emphasizes the productive tensions that define modern feminist philosophy.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

#### *Ecofeminism through the Modernist Lens*

Ecofeminism is frequently framed as a critique of modernist rationality and its ecological repercussions, although this view ignores the movement's concurrent dependence on modernist impulses. Modernism, with its emphasis on systemic transformation, logical critique, and emancipatory politics, is not inherently opposed to ecofeminism. In reality, ecofeminism's structure and its emphasis on coherent historical narratives, Universalist ethical appeals, and visions of systemic change indicate a close relationship with modernist traditions.

Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* is a prime example. Merchant criticizes the mechanical worldview introduced during the Scientific Revolution, which she claims supported patriarchal dominance over both women and nature (Merchant 47). Her historical narrative chronicles the linear growth of scientific rationalism and its repercussions, employing a modernist method of methodical critique. While her conclusions emphasize the importance of alternate paradigms, her focus on causality, historical continuity, and structural alteration is consistent with modernist intellectual techniques. In this way, ecofeminism criticizes modernity's outcomes while being methodologically oriented toward totalizing critique.

Similarly, Vandana Shiva criticizes Western methods of science and development for their role in environmental damage and social inequity. In *Staying Alive*, Shiva describes industrial growth as an extension of patriarchal modernity that oppresses women and marginalizes indigenous ecological knowledge (Shiva 65). Her campaign for food sovereignty, biodiversity, and sustainability is based on universal arguments about justice, survival, and ecological balance. These statements reflect modernist ideals of freedom and human dignity, implying that while ecofeminism rejects Western modernity's excesses, it remains bound by modernist promises to justice and systemic reform.

Ecofeminism's idealistic goal of ecological harmony and gender equality is also in line with modernist political impulses. For example, Greta Gaard's emphasis on planetary health and global justice places ecofeminism within a framework of collective transformation. This emphasis on large-scale systemic transformation, rather than just local or fragmented initiatives, indicates a strong modernist urge. Ecofeminism thus

displays a "critical modernism" that criticizes modernity while simultaneously embracing its systemic, universalist goals.

*Tensions between Modernism and Postmodernism in Ecofeminism*

Despite its modernist features, ecofeminism includes postmodern critiques of essentialism and universalism. Early ecofeminist works were condemned for tying women's identities too closely to nature, perpetuating essentialist binary oppositions of male/culture and female/nature. Postmodern ecofeminists, such as Val Plumwood, criticized these trends, claiming that ecofeminism must not reduce women's ecological roles to biological determinism (Plumwood 72).

Despite rejecting essentialism, ecofeminism frequently preserves modernist inclinations. Plumwood's critique of dualisms, for example, is based on a comprehensive deconstruction of Western philosophy and its dominating structures—a strategy that, strangely, resembles modernist rational critique. This suggests that ecofeminism exists in a transitional region between modernist and postmodern paradigms, using the tools of one while criticizing the other.

The issue for ecofeminism is to strike a balance between postmodern sensitivity to difference and modernist commitments to justice and systems transformation. Without the former, ecofeminism risks perpetuating essentialist ideas, while the latter risks fragmentation and political ineffectiveness.

*Transfeminism through the Modernist Lens*

Transfeminism, like ecofeminism, is sometimes regarded as a postmodern discourse due to its emphasis on gender ideas that are socially created, fluid, and performative. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) impacted transfeminist theory by deconstructing gender categories and challenging the idea of a fixed, universal "woman" (Butler 174). While transfeminism is deeply concerned with postmodern deconstruction, it also depends significantly on modernist ideas of justice, universal dignity, and systemic transformation.

Emi Koyama's *Transfeminist Manifesto* (2003) shows this dichotomy. Koyama contends that transfeminism is a feminist movement that includes all women, particularly trans women, and stresses solidarity across differences (Koyama 247). While her rejection of essentialist categories is consistent with postmodern feminism, her call for unity and equality recalls universalist values important to modernism. Koyama sees feminism as a transformative political enterprise that brings together disparate experiences into a cohesive movement—a deeply modernist vision oriented toward systemic emancipation.

Julia Serano's *Whipping Girl* (2007) builds on this modernist tendency by blending personal narrative and scientific reason. Serano challenges transmisogyny by using psychology and biology to affirm trans identities, directly engaging with modernist epistemologies of science and reason (Serano 136). While her critique destabilizes binary categories, her use of rationalist argumentation mirrors modernist legitimization strategies.

Susan Stryker's *Transgender History* (2008) also places trans battles within larger narratives of rights, recognition, and advancement (Stryker 93). Stryker draws on modernist narratives of social revolution and emancipation by situating trans identities within historical battles for justice. Transfeminism thus serves not just as a critique of exclusionary feminist and patriarchal frameworks, but also as a continuation of modernist political battle for equality.

*Tensions between Modernism and Postmodernism in Transfeminism*

The dual engagement with modernist and postmodern frameworks generates productive tensions in transfeminist philosophy. On the one hand, transfeminism rejects essentialist ideas of womanhood, opposing both biological determinism and exclusionary feminist behaviors. This is consistent with postmodernism's emphasis on pluralism and deconstruction. In contrast, transfeminism typically emphasizes modernist concepts of universal rights and systemic justice, especially in legal and political situations.

Dean Spade's *Normal Life* (2011) captures this tension. Spade criticizes neoliberal governance and bureaucratic supervision of transgender people's lives, mirroring postmodern skepticism

toward power systems (78). However, his appeal for structural reform based on ideals of justice and equality reveals a modernist approach to systemic change. The interaction of critique and aspiration exemplifies transfeminism's struggle between modernist and postmodern ideals.

*Comparative Analysis: Ecofeminism and Transfeminism*

When examined via a modernist viewpoint, ecofeminism and transfeminism share striking similarities. Both groups criticize the exclusions and oppressions inherent in modernist reasoning, but they also use modernist tactics to express their ideas of justice. Ecofeminism criticizes scientific reductionism while asserting universal claims about ecological sustainability. Transfeminism rejects essentialist gender categories while emphasizing universal rights and acceptance.

These analogies show that ecofeminism and transfeminism embody what Nancy Fraser refers to as feminist theory's "double movement": the conflict between deconstruction and reconstruction, the critique of current systems and the articulation of alternative futures (Fraser 50). Both groups use postmodern methods to criticize essentialism and exclusion, but they rely on modernist impulses to fuel their emancipatory objectives.

The convergence of ecofeminism and transfeminism illustrates feminist theory's greater potential for bridging the modernist-postmodernist split. These movements show how feminist philosophy may be politically effective while avoiding exclusionary universalism by combining systemic critique and sensitivity to difference

**Implications for Higher Education and Academic Discourse**

The interaction between modernist and postmodern frameworks in ecofeminism and transfeminism has far-reaching consequences for higher education and academic discourse. Postmodernism has influenced academic institutions by promoting plurality, inclusion, and critical analysis of dominant discourses. Academic discourse, however, risks fragmentation if modernist commitments to rigor, justice, and systemic transformation are not maintained. Ecofeminism and transfeminism offer models for harmonizing these concepts. By combining postmodern critiques of essentialism with modernist goals for systemic change, they show how academic speech may be both inclusive and politically powerful. This balance is especially crucial in higher education, where the task is to promote variety while maintaining coherence and rigor

**Conclusion of Analysis**

The examination of ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist lens demonstrates that neither movement can be reduced to postmodern frameworks alone. While they criticize modernity's exclusions, they nonetheless embrace modernist ideals such as justice, systemic reform, and universal dignity. This dual perspective emphasizes the productive tensions that characterize modern feminist theories.

This paper advances a more nuanced understanding of feminist thought by locating ecofeminism and transfeminism within both modernist and postmodern contexts. It illustrates that these movements have a dual orientation, critical of modernist rationality but relying on its emancipatory potential. Such an understanding not only broadens our understanding of feminist theory, but it also provides important insights for academic debate, political activity, and the larger battle for justice in the twenty-first century.

*Comparative Analysis: Ecofeminism and Transfeminism through a Modernist Lens*

Ecofeminism and transfeminism, while originating in separate historical circumstances and political battles, evolved as critical answers to the constraints of orthodox feminist philosophy. Examining them via a modernist lens reveals both areas of convergence and divergence, particularly in terms of the modernist emphasis on universality, rationality, and development. While postmodernism frequently presents these movements as situational and pluralistic, studying them in connection to modernist ideals sheds light on their political motivations, epistemic

foundations, and power structure negotiations. This comparative analysis not only clarifies the contradictions between the two, but also shows how modernist categories both empower and limit their theoretical possibilities.

Ecofeminism emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century as a junction of environmentalism and feminism, establishing links between natural exploitation and female oppression (Shiva 13). The universalist impulse of ecofeminism is especially noteworthy from a modernist perspective. Many early ecofeminists thought that women's passion for nature provided a foundation for collective political mobilization, implying a shared experience of oppression that cut over cultural and geographical boundaries. This essentialist claim is consistent with modernist ideas of universality and social progress, as it is based on shared truths about women's relationships to nature and patriarchal hierarchies. However, this essentialism has been criticized as reductive, ignoring the complexity of race, class, and sexuality (Gaard 118). Thus, while ecofeminism aligns with modernism in its drive for political transformation and universal claims, it simultaneously reveals modernism's tendency to flatten diverse experiences into singular categories.

Transfeminism, on the other hand, arose in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a response to feminist and queer theoretical limits. Emi Koyama's *Transfeminist Manifesto* highlights the inclusion of trans women's experiences in feminist discourse, focusing on concerns of gender identity, bodily autonomy, and structural marginalization (Koyama 246). Transfeminism, unlike ecofeminism, rejects essentialist assertions and instead emphasizes the socially created and changeable nature of gender. This approach contradicts the modernist emphasis on stable categories and universal truths. Transfeminism, on the other hand, shares modernism's political drive: it advocates for systemic recognition, legal safeguards, and institutional reforms, all of which are based on the modernist concept of progress and rational social development. Thus, transfeminism both questions and uses modernist paradigms, embracing their political vitality while rejecting their epistemic rigidity.

When evaluated together, ecofeminism and transfeminism show both convergence and divergence through the modernist viewpoint. Both movements oppose patriarchal tyranny and seek structural transformation, echoing modernism's emphasis on progress and social fairness. Both rely on political mobilization, which frequently appeals to rational arguments about equality, rights, and systemic reform—strategies that are fundamentally modernist (Tong 212). Ecofeminism, on the other hand, tends toward essentialism, positing women as inextricably related to nature, whereas transfeminism advocates for anti-essentialism, emphasizing the diversity of gendered experiences. This disparity highlights a key tension: modernism's universalizing tendencies provide a foundation for ecofeminism while posing obstacles to transfeminism, which rejects universality in favor of specificity and inclusivity.

Critically, the contrast highlights the difficulties of studying these movements only via a modernist viewpoint. Modernism's dependence on universal categories has the potential to obscure the multiple and intersectional realities that ecofeminism and transfeminism highlight. For example, whereas ecofeminism has generally been accused for ignoring gender distinctions, transfeminism rejects this flattening by emphasizing the importance of transgender experiences. However, even transfeminism cannot completely avoid the modernist desire for systematic recognition and rights, which frequently necessitates working within universal frameworks. Thus, both movements highlight modernism's twin bind: its potential to organize political action through rational, communal claims, while yet failing to represent the entire richness of lived experiences.

As a result, analyzing ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist perspective reveals the fruitful but difficult link between modernist ideals and contemporary feminist thought. Ecofeminism connects more closely with modernist universalism, albeit at the expense of essentialism, whereas transfeminism destroys essentialist categories while remaining engaged with modernist conceptions of political development. Together, they demonstrate the importance of going beyond a primarily modernist framework to a more flexible theoretical approach that integrates postmodern multiplicity while maintaining modernism's commitment to political transformation. This synthesis provides for a more nuanced view of both movements, noting their common goal of removing oppression while recognizing the various epistemological tools they deploy.

### **Conclusion**

The examination of ecofeminism and transfeminism via a modernist lens reveals both the long-lasting strengths and severe limitations of modernist frameworks in dealing with contemporary feminist discourse. Modernism, with its emphasis on reason, universal truth, and progressive political revolution, offers useful tools for analyzing the political motivations driving both groups. Ecofeminism, for example, uses Universalist claims to emphasize systematic parallels between women's exploitation and environmental degradation, thus creating a common platform for worldwide opposition to patriarchal and ecological oppression (Shiva 45). Similarly, transfeminism uses the modernist vocabulary of rights and institutional legitimacy to advocate for legal and social reforms that protect trans identities while also questioning modernist thought's rigorous essentialism (Koyama 250). In both cases, modernism supplies the discursive resources necessary to articulate demands for justice and systemic change.

Simultaneously, the comparative analysis shows how ecofeminism and transfeminism outperform or oppose modernist paradigms. While ecofeminism aligns with modernist Universalist principles, it has been criticized for limiting varied women's experiences to a single narrative of connection with nature, so repeating the exact homogenization it tries to remove (Gaard). In contrast, transfeminism actively opposes essentialism by emphasizing the fluidity and plurality of gender identities, rejecting modernism's focus on fixed categories and solid facts. However, transfeminism cannot completely avoid the need for modernist frameworks, as its political strategies frequently rely on institutional improvements, rational appeals, and Universalist claims to equality. This tension highlights the paradox of modernist engagement: it empowers feminist groups to demand systemic change while potentially eliminating the complexity and particularities of lived realities.

The broader implication of this comparative study is the awareness that ecofeminism and transfeminism cannot be effectively captured within the confines of modernist philosophy alone. While modernism provides coherence, universality, and a clear political path, it struggles to account for the intersectional, fractured, and contextual realities that characterize both movements. Postmodernism, with its emphasis on plurality and skepticism of grand narratives, offers a vital corrective, but it also risks devolving into relativism, which undermines collective political action. As a result, the way forward is to combine the lessons of modernist and postmodernist perspectives, keeping modernism's dedication to justice and development while adding postmodernism's emphasis on difference, multiplicity, and inclusivity.

Finally, ecofeminism and transfeminism, when viewed through a modernist lens, highlight the importance of employing and transcending modernist paradigms. They highlight the necessity for both universal political mobilization and theoretical frameworks that recognize the multiplicity of identities, experiences, and conflicts. This balance allows for a more strong feminist practice that recognizes the importance of structural change while refusing to stifle minority voices. Finally, the connection between modernism and these current feminist movements emphasizes the dynamic evolution of feminist theory, pointing to a future in which theory and activism are mutually enriching, critically reflexive, and politically transformative.

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**“TEESTAR JOL JEKHANE GHONISTO MITRO” [“WHERE THE WATER OF TEESTA  
IS A CLOSE FRIEND”; MY TRANS.]: A STUDY OF WATERSCAPE AND  
HYDROSOCIALITY IN DEBESH RAY’S *TEESTA PAARER BRITTANTO***

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the intimate relationship between humanity and nature through the lens of the Waterscape in Debesh Ray’s *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* (*Tales from the Banks of the River Teesta*). Embracing theoretical standpoints of Ecocriticism, it reimagines the waterscape not merely as a backdrop but as a living, breathing presence that shapes and reflects human existence. The waterscape of Teesta in the novel acts both as a witness and a participant in the lives of the marginalized communities who dwell along its banks—offering them sustenance, identity, and at times, destruction. Through a close reading of Ray’s narrative, the study examines how the waterscape promotes a hydro-social relation, dismantling the human/nature binary and revealing a biocentric vision rooted in cohabitation. The paper seeks to underscore that the waterscape of Teesta is more than a geographical location—it is a force, shaping the rhythms of life, loss, and resilience. It seeks to interpret Ray’s writing for the visibility of an alternative interface between human existence and nature that does not conform to their normative, utilitarian relationship. Furthermore, this study examines the waterscape as an emblem of the Anthropocene, urging a reassessment of development and modernity through ecological awareness. By amalgamating literary analysis with environmental consciousness, the study foregrounds water as an ever-evolving testimony to the inseparable connection between human culture and non-human the natural world.

**Keywords:** Waterscape, Anthropocene, Hydrosociality, Ecocriticism, Symbiosis, Eco-consciousness

**Ecocritical Framework and the Emergence of Waterscape as a Theoretical Perspective:**

Since the beginning of the civilization the relationship between humankind and nature has been that of reciprocal one, but it has never been necessarily equal. To be specific, despite the fact that *Homo sapiens* have exerted their enormous presence on nature, the nature has always been providing human needs in terms of shelter, foods etc. without any expectations. With the technological progress humanity has become the steward of the planet and its behaviours have been destructive: producing plastic materials, emitting greenhouse gases, throwing chemical waste into river and seas that destroys the water bodies, making the extinction of endangered species possible. Such stewardship contribute to the devastating climate crisis, ecological crisis and other environmental phenomena like the global warming, the seas becoming more acidic, unseasonal changes in the weather pattern etc. The human footprint on the planet is so evident and immense that Atmospheric scientists have proposed that the Earth has entered into a new geological epoch which they name as the Anthropocene. Will Steffen has stated that “Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of nature and are pushing the Earth as a whole into planetary terra incognita” (Will 614). It will not be false altogether to say that nature has been made by humanity its binary other whom it can dominate and exploit in the human/nature duality.



However, to cope up with such environmental crisis scientists have involved themselves in diagnosing problems and finding solutions to the ecocide. The economists have also been active in transition to a green economy. Above all business scientists and engineers and other expertise have started working together to make a green world. Now questions arise: what role should the scholars play belonging to the interpretive disciplines of Humanities? What are the ways through which they can plan strategies to deal with multi-dimensional climate crisis? To respond to such questions, scholars within the literary discipline have progressively sought theoretical standpoints that tie textual analysis with environmental awareness. Among these, Cheryl Glotfelty's conceptualization of 'Ecocriticism' has been particularly influential. Ecocriticism as a discipline seeks to "explore the relations between literature and the biological and physical environment, conducted with an acute awareness of the damage being wrought on that environment by human activities" (Abrams and Harpham 98).

Notably, when Ecocriticism is introduced within interdisciplinary studies in 1970s with ASLE as its own organization and ISLE as its own journal, literary and cultural scholars begin to reread literary works with a new interest in environmental collapse. In fact, Ecocritics believe that "nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves ... present as an entity which affects us, and which we can affect, perhaps fatally, if we mistreat it" (Barry 243). While humankind as the centre of the universe is celebrated by anthropocentrism, the biocentric attitude is immensely highlighted by the advocates of ecocriticism. Bertens writes in his book *Literary Theory: The Basics* that Ecocriticism "seeks to dismantle ... the human/nature hierarchy, and sides with posthumanism in its deconstruction of the human/nature dichotomy, an opposition that, for ecocritics, involves both the human/animal and the culture/nature oppositions" (225). Cheryl Glotfelty in the introduction part of *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology* (1996) defines Ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment (Glotfelty and Fromm xvii). In her essay "Ecocriticism: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis" (1996) she explained the term more aptly: "Ecocriticism has one foot in literature and the other on land, it is a critical and theoretical discourse that negotiates between the human and non-human" (Glotfelty 230).

Consequently so, since its birth, Ecocriticism has been attempting to spread a message of inclusivity across the world: one earth for all including the non-human others. Bartosch and Garrard has stated that "the contribution of ecocriticism is inherently and valuably gradual: making us think anew about the world, nature and the place of the human and animal" (221). It should not get unnoticed that Ecocriticism has successfully been making people from all fields of life aware of a common ground where they can share, discuss, and plan strategies to deal with environmental degradation.

However, Ecocriticism does not have a single set of rules which are all-agreed upon. Nonetheless, this paper's major focus has been on Glotfelty's ideas of ecocriticism that has suggested 3-step ecocritical approach to deal with the relationship between human and nature. The first stage is concerned with 'representations'; that is, "how nature is represented in literature ... where is the natural world in the text?" (Glotfelty xxiii). Reviewing the first stage, Anne B. Dobbie in his *Theory into Practice* has proposed the following questions in while engaging with a text from ecocritical perspectives: "Does the setting function simply as background, or does it play an active role in the narrative? ... How is nature affected by human beings in the text? How are the human beings affected by nature? ... Does the text raise the reader's awareness of the natural world and his or her connections to it?" (243). Rereading of the nature-oriented writings that have been overlooked has been highlighted in the second stage. As a result, literary texts from across the world are now being read and reread based on their representation of nature. For example, the writings of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay, Jibanananda Das and Rabindranath Tagore and so on are being re-read as works where nature has been presented as active, dynamic and separate entity. And finally, the third stage examines: the symbolic construction of species ... How has literary discourse defined the human? Such a critique questions the dualisms prevalent in Western

thoughts, dualisms that separate meaning from matter, sever mind from body, divide men from women, and wrench humanity from nature (Glottfelty xxiv).

As such, this paper challenges the human/nature binary by adopting ecocritical approach to focus on how nature has been represented differently along with ecocritical issues through exploring the waterscape in *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* ("Tales from the Banks of the River Teesta", my trans.) by Debesh Ray. First published in 1988, Ray's narrative won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990 for its depiction of the everyday experiences of those living on the banks of the river Teesta. Water, as both a natural and cultural element, assumes significant roles in the socio-political and cultural landscapes of postcolonial India. In Indian narratives, waterscapes are depicted not merely as a geographical location. They are dynamic spaces where power, identity, resistance, and ecological politics converge together. The water of mighty rivers like Ganga, Teesta, Brahmaputra, and Damodar etc. have shaped and formed cognitive and emotional perceptions. The Indian civilization and its various cartographies and meta-cartographies have been formed by the waterscapes as part and parcel of the ecological and anthropological constitutions. Projects like colonial modernity and postcolonial democracy's social, economic and ideological inference could not be possible irrespective of any of the rivers in India. The waterscapes in India have always been providing settlement to the people, at the same time keeping the people of the same settlement under constant threat of being extinct. Erik Swyngedouw in his paper "Modernity and Hybridity: Nature, Regeneracionismo, and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape 1890-1930" (2010) explores Waterscape as a perspective to understand that "water and society is deeply intertwined" (1). Therefore, the term 'waterscape' becomes very important in addressing ecological issues, as Glottfelty's definition of ecocriticism is formulated around the inseparable interrelationship between the human and non-human world.

It is significant to note that Debesh Ray's narrative *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* has been read extensively based on the theoretical standpoints of Ecocriticism. For instance, Prabuddha Ghosh in his article "Voice and Crises of the Subalterns and Nature: An Eco-critical Reading of Debesh Ray's Two Bengali Novels", Dr. Janmejay Kumar Tiwari in his article "Ecocritical Readings of Contemporary Indian Novels", Sambhunath Banerjee in "Nature Consciousness and Representation of Forest in Bengali Literature" deal with *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* in terms of the interrelationship between nature and mankind. However, these articles do not highlight the importance of waterscape as a central critical and narrative category in foregrounding the ecological concerns. Therefore, this paper addresses the gap analysing *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* through the perspective of Waterscape—a cultural and ecological space where the interconnectedness between human and non-human life has been enunciated most distinctly.

#### **The Waterscape of Teesta, Hydrosocial Consciousness and the Non-human Voice:**

Human beings have always looked for grand truth about life and death, grief and pleasure, body and soul, the self-suffering from pain in the middle of an all-pervasive nature. Bagharu becomes Siddhartha of *Siddhartha* by Herman Hesse in his attempt to communicate with the river. In Ray's narrative this quest is transformed into a dialogic relationship between humans and the river Teesta. Bagharu, the central figure in *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* (Henceforth is mentioned as *Teesta*), is given a role similar to Hesse's Siddhartha—a seeker who through the waterscape seeks to enlighten his soul. Bagharu understands Teesta better than anyone. He listens to the monologue of the river, which implies his intuitive recognition of the interrelationship between nature and mankind. Simon Schama in his book *Landscape and Memory* (1995) states that the watercourses comply with the "universal law of circulation that governs all forms of vitality" (Schama 50). A central element of human body is water, almost seventy percent of its mass is constituted of water. The image of rivers in India have always been bearing with it religious and spiritual values. And it is not surprising that Suhas, a government official, finds solace in Teesta; as if the water of Teesta forms his main life force. Bagharu too finds himself belonging to the water of Teesta whenever he is not needed by Gayanath, his landowner. Ray illustrates, "Suhas Teestar dike takiye thake. Kintu

durer bistarar otionirdistota theke chokh gutiye aane prai chokher tolar nikot nirdistotai—Teestar jol jekhane ghonisto Mitro” (“Suhas looks at Teesta...where the water of Teesta is as if a close friend... Suhas picks up a stick from the ground and throws towards the water, as if in familiar kinship”; Ray, my trans.; 69). Such kinship with the water exemplifies the human quest for connection with the non-human world.

Amitava Ghosh in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* states that the non-human voices are explicitly absent in the contemporary literature. Literature has, very often, been silent on geographical elements of nature. Ray’s narrative addresses this absence by giving the river Teesta a voice that speaks via its rhythms of stillness and flood mirroring the emotional and existential turmoil of those who live on the banks of it. As such, the waterscape of Teesta in *Teesta* becomes a narrative consciousness. Ray’s approach in dealing with the waterscape reflects what Ghosh has highlighted “the uncanny intimacy of our relationship with the non-human” (Ghosh 37). The narrative employs the image of the waterscape to make us aware of the importance of geological element of nature, and also to impersonate as a character that has its own way of expressing its voice that is actually the voice of a non-human entity.

Ecocriticism views that “all living things and their earthly environment, no less than the human species, possess importance, value, and even moral and political rights” (Abrams100). *Teesta* is the story of the inhabitants living on the banks of the river Teesta. Teesta forms both the geographical and meta-geographical part of the novel. Communities like Rajbanshi, Namashudra, and Bhatia have built their houses on the land of the ‘Chars’ (river bed) and banks of Teesta using bamboos and tall grasses. The text has depicted how the capitalist, industrialist society and the government continues to sustain the human/nature binary thinking that they are superior to and can have control over nature without being aware of the consequences. Ray writes in *Teesta* about the aftermath of the building of the barrage on Teesta by the government:

Kintu fole, Teestar ei swavaber fole, Teestar je khaat birat hoye geche, taar majhkhane-majhkhane onek chor toiri hoyeche. Se-sob chor prai danger moto uchu-o hoye geche. Teesta barrage-er fole nodikhater ei sob chore toh aar bosoti ba chasbas cholbe na—karon, Teesta ke taar mulkhatei rakha hobe. Sonchit jol jokhn chhara hobe, tokhn se joloshroter dhakkai ei modhyoborti chorgulo vese jabe (Ray 523).

As a result of this barrage, the water of Teesta will be confined in its main stream... many chars have come into existence in the middle of Teesta... in these areas along the riverbed no inhabitation and cultivation is possible— because, Teesta will be tied to its mainstream. And when the stored water is released, the intermediate chars will be washed away due to the blow of the water-current (my trans.).

However, it is the communities that deconstruct this human/nature dichotomy by recognizing the river as a living organism that has separate world and must be valued. Rajbanshi community cohabits and shares a symbiotic relationship with Teesta without exploiting it. Ray, thus describes the relationship of the Rajbanshi with Teesta: “Nodir songe tader somporko chhilo Nodir swovaber motoi jokhn jemon, tokhon temon. Je nodi emon ghono ghono bodlai, j-nodi nodi hisebe chinte-chintei danga hoye jai ar danga, nodir vetor chole jai, se nodike nodir jaiga chhere diye Rajbanshira bonantoral theke nodike byabohar korto” (“Their relationship with the river was like the nature of the river, they behaved as the river behaves. The river that changes so frequently, suddenly turns into ‘danga’, and then again, the ‘danga’ sinks into the river; however, the Rajbanshi uses the river staying within the forest, leaving the chars untouched”; my trans.; 231).

Moreover, the villagers live under a constant threat, as the river not only provides for settlement, but also dissolves, destroys and reshapes the surrounding landmass. As is evident in the narrative, the flood of Teesta in 1968 has changed the geographical scenario of the villages on the banks of the river. Ray informs us that on the west of Applechand forest “[t]aar poschime 85 nombor Gajoldoba, o tar-o uttore mouja Hanskhalir-i 21 nombor J-L. ei 21 nombor J-L theke 84 nomborer poschim sima, 85 nombor Gajoldoba o se jekhae dariye tar-o bayer, poschimer, sidabari gochabari--- sobtai ekhon Teestar vetore” (“... Gajoldoba no. 85, on the north 21 no. J L

of Hanskhali. The western part of this J L no. 21 to 84, ... and Sidabari, Gochabari--- all are under Teesta now"; my trans.; 60). In this way, the waterscape ruptures the human's claim of authority over it.

Furthermore, throughout the text Ray goes on presenting nature as alive and autonomous. Nature is not merely the breathing and living backdrop in the story; it has intricately been woven into the fabric of the narrative. In *Teesta*, Debesh Ray has presented nature as dynamic and as an integral part of human existence influencing the characters' lives, emotions and experiences, almost in similar vein to the writings of Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay. In 'Banaparba' section, nature is shown to have a joyful and buoyant existence. When Bagharu, a marginalized Koch-Rajbanshi character, tells MLA his birth story while passing through the forest, he suddenly stops and is thus described by Debesh Ray: "Mui toh enong kandibar dhorichu je jongoler gachthe pakhi uri geise... oi nistobdho jhijhi daka bonanto tolpar. Bagharu khub gopone bole 'mui kandi r pakhi chillai. Pakhi chillai aar mui kandi'" (" 'I have started crying so much that all the birds started flying away from the trees of the forest'... The silent song of crickets make commotion up to the horizon of the forest. Bagharu tells in secret, "I cry and the birds chirp. The birds chirp and I cry"; my trans.; 60).

Moreover, nature has always been highlighted as a living organism that has its own separate existence by ecocritics and many more authors. Likewise, Debesh Ray has illustrated nature whose existence does not depend on humanity. Further in the text, the river is presented not only as calm and serene that coexists with the human characters, but also with its destroying face. The people of the Rajbanshi, Namashudra, Bhatia and other communities start feeling agony and become worried about their homes, farmlands, and domestic animals due to the heavy flood of the river Teesta: "...Oikhane joler niche tader ghorbari, jomijiret ... aaj sararat ei batas cholbe, brishti cholbe, taate ei jol fule uthbe. Sokale dekha jabe—ekthane aar bari ghor bolte kichu nei, sudhu nodi" ("... their houses and lands are under water there... the wind will blow continuously, it will rain through all the night today, and consequently the water of Teesta will be swelled up. In the morning, everybody will see that there are no houses and lands, it is just Teesta everywhere"; my trans.; 284). Looking at such dark side of the river, Nitai, Raban, Jagadish, Naresh and everyone else remember that how in 1968 flood also their lives were devastated. Debesh Ray pens down the memory of the 1968 flood in the novel: "Kintu sokoleri nijer nijer moto kore jana ache, ki kore banvasi manusar hisheb beroi, kivabe ek dhakkai goaal khali hoye jai, din panch-sater vetore bhorbhoronto dhanijomi hatubhor baliyari hoye jai kivabe" ("But everybody knows on their own, how many human lives were lost in the flood, how the cowsheds were emptied in one blow of the water, how the paddy fields went under the flood-water within five to seven days"; my trans.; 239). It is evident that tranquillity and destruction are two opposite faces of the nature which humanity must consider.

#### **Ecological Disruption, the Politics of Development and the Waterscape in the Anthropocene:**

Humanity for so long a time has been repeating the human/nature binary making the world anthropocentric where only human interests are focused on and nature is exploited by humans for their own purpose. As is stated by Innes, binary opposition is "a relationship of opposition and mutual exclusion between two elements" (Innes 74). It is found in the account of the creation in the bible that God gives man "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth" (*ESV Bible, Gen.1:26*). Such human/nature binary has been stretched by the idea of modern nation-state far to an extent that everyday lives of the communities living in the periphery are scattered. Driven by the ideology of development human beings have invaded the territory of nature, consequently violating the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature. Building dam on the river has been at the forefront of displaying modernity in India following America as megadam pioneer. Rob Nixon in the chapter "Unimagined Communities: Magadams, Monumental Modernity, and Developmental Refugees" of his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* has observed:

Some 3,000 dams were slated for the river and its tributaries, including thirty megadams; most notorious was the mammoth Sardar Sarovar Dam, which became a symbolic focus for activists from the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement), led by Medha Patkar, a cause that [Arundhati] Roy's voice helped amplify nationally and international (154).

The construction of dam on the Narmada River entails great havoc in the surrounded area. In the Narmada region, actual temples—not just symbolic ones—were at risk, set to be submerged along with the villages they had lived for generations as monsoon waters continued to rise each year, keeping pace with the ever-increasing height of the dam walls (Nixon 156). Arundhati Roy has also observed “submerging of culture” made possible by the Narmada dams. By “submerging culture” Roy refers to the village cultures of those inhabitants who have lived and shaped the Narmada region for generations, inseparable from flood plain ecosystems in “the only valley in India, according to archaeologists, that contains an uninterrupted record of human occupation from the Stone Age” (Roy 63).

Such “submerging of culture” drawn by the construction of dams on rivers is a significant phenomenon in Debesh Ray's *Teesta*. Debesh Ray, with keen insights, has depicted the plights of the people uprooted by the flood of the river Teesta. Even though the villagers protest against the building of the dam on Teesta, their protest is thwarted by the government police officials, and the threat of their being displaced is overlooked as well. When finally, Teesta couldn't hold the water of the incessant rain within her womb, she overflowed the whole village. Ray writes that “Tokhon sobtai toh Teesta” (“then every corner of the village becomes Teesta”; Ray, my trans.; 253). The flood create havoc in the village as the villagers lose their homes, grains, food. Most crucially, the flood does not affect the human beings only, the non-humans are also affected by the chaos of the flood. The birds become homeless as the trees are broken and drowned with their nests, the domestic animals like goats and cows also become homeless as the floodwater devours the whole village. Before the attack of the flood, the different communities lived together establishing and nurturing a deep historical relationship to the land. Ray depicts, “Samajik dik theke, ontoto somajer bairer dik theke, ba, bola valo, ei somosto chorer jonosongothoner dik theke Namashudra o rajbanshider milito jibonjapon-i prodhan, sonkhyaguru o sonkhyaloghur proshnota sekhane obantor” (“From social point of view, or at least outside the social, or, to say in better way, from the point of view of the communities around river-beds, it is the livelihood of *Namashudra* and *Rajbanshi* that is the principal focus, the question of majority and minority is baseless”; my trans.; 235). In the establishment of a modern nation, the river as well as the inhabitants on the bank of the river Teesta become ‘unimagined’ and in Thayer Scudder's words “developmental refugees” (qtd. in Leslie 156).

Furthermore, the text with its sharp narration, presents another significant loss: the degradation of the cultural resources. Rob Nixon in “Introduction” to his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the poor* has made a significant observation in this regard: “our perspective on environmental asset stripping should include among assets stripped the mingled presence in the landscape of multiple generations, with all the hindsight and foresight that entails” (Nixon 18). In the novel *Bagharu*, Nitai, Naresh and others have lived and shaped their land on the bank of the river Teesta for generations and have made a deep historical connection to the land. But when the whole village is succumbed by the floodwater of Teesta, and consequently when they are uprooted from their own place, they become dispossessed in their own place, their connection to the land is lost, their memory, past, tradition, generation are erased. The invasion into nature's resources destroys the past, the memory of the generations who have for generations have shaped the land. Further in the novel, the people like Bagharu, Naresh, Nitai along with other inhabitants, become “spatial amnesia” as they, in Nixon's words, “under the banner of development, are physically unsettled and imaginatively removed, evacuated from place and time and thus uncoupled from the idea of both a national future and a national memory” (Nixon 151).

Moreover, we get evidence of human invasion into the nature's resources in the narrative. Through Bagharu we come to know that Gayanath tries to seize the land of the local 'Adhiyar' (landless peasants) and even takes control over the river and its adjacent forests by bribing government officials. This instance is evident when Debesh Ray presents Bagharu's monologue: "Sob Gayanather. Ei Daina jongol Gayanather. Applechand jongol-o Gayanather. Bagharu-o Gayanather" ("All belong to Gayanath. This Diana forest belongs to him. That Applechand forest is owned by him ... This human Bagharu is also owned by Gayanath"; Ray, my trans.; 175). Gayanath, who thinks of earning money by selling trees even during the time of heavy flood and the government, who wants to control Teesta by building dam on it and invading the land of the locals becomes a predator having a decisive impact on nature and its natural process.

**Teesta Sustaining the Ethics of Coexistence in the Anthropocene:**

Cheryl Glotfelty states in the introductory chapter of her book *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*: "Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnectedness between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature... as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the non-human" (9-10). The human/nature dichotomy is deconstructed through this viewpoint of 'the interconnectedness' between human and nature in *Teesta*. Bagharu has been depicted through similes and metaphors of nature: 'Bagharu' for he has fought with a tiger once; 'Gacharu' because he climbs upon the trees; 'Forestua' because he belongs to the forest. Nature is the only place where Bagharu takes refuge in whenever he is banished from the society. It is nature that embraces Bagharu when he finds that this class-based society does not include him in its hierarchy. Throughout the novel, it is he who recognizes and understands the emotions of the wild animals living in the forest. He easily can copy chirping of the birds. In realizing a bird's loneliness in the forest, Bagharu tweets back in order to give it company. When a female buffalo faces difficulty in delivering a baby in the forest, it is Bagharu who nurses her. Debesh Ray thus depicts the scene of the delivery and the intimacy of Bagharu with animals: "That baby buffalo embraced Bagharu like an embryo in mother's womb. It's like its alternative womb in Bagharu's chest" (Ray, my trans.; 193). During the heavy flood when Bagharu flows on the water of Teesta on a broken branch of a tree, the birds take shelter on the leaves of that branch and on his shoulder. Bagharu even recognizes the loneliness of a dog and befriends him, and the dog also befriends him. Thus, the text establishes what Amitava Ghosh has phrased in his *The Great Derangement* "a mutual recognition" bringing a harmonious relationship between human and environment (34).

Furthermore, in the text when Bagharu is exiled into forest by Gayanath, he uses natural resources like leaves, bamboo and other left out resources to build a hut for himself. In his attempting to spark fire by rubbing two stones and using stones to save himself from being attacked by wild animals, *Teesta Paarer Brittanto* detaches him and itself from the aura of modern time and invokes a primitive time when men spent their livelihood solely based on natural resources. Ray writes, "Kintu Bagharu tar pathor ta peye jai, tar-i jonne toiri pathor ta. Naki Pathortai Bagharu ke paai" ("Bagharu found the stone or the stone had been made for Bagharu. Might be, it was the stone that found Bagharu"; Ray, my trans.; 164). Bagharu rejects to be a part of the civilization made of people like Gayanath and Companies and Government who do not comprehend the danger that they are pushing the earth into by exploiting nature for their own uses, by finding solace in the lap of nature. Bagharu challenges the aesthetics of modern civilization by his primitive appearance: "Bagharur ulongota jeno dorshokder kache ek oporadh. Bagharu tar ulongo shorir niye moncher samne dariye thake. Se amonvabe dariye thake jeno sei-i tader bidroher protik"; ("Bagharu's nakedness was an offence to the audience. Bagharu along with his prominent nakedness stuck in front of the stage. He stayed standing there as such he was the symbol of a rebel"; my trans.; 416).

Moreover, the narrative goes on to depict the binary between modern society and nature where nature and those who are aligned with nature are excluded by the modern society. Just like



Bagharu, Debesh Ray presents another character, Madari's mother whose alignment with nature makes her 'other' to the civilized society. Ray gives an account of her in the text: "Madarir Maa-o sei 6-7 koti manuser motoi jara ei deshe poshur moto beche thake. Daridrota, onunnoto somprodai ebong onnyanno tattik sob eder chute pare na" ("Madari's mother is one of those 60-70 million of people who live just like an animal in this country. Poverty line, backward classes and other theoretical jargons don't touch them"; my trans.; 491). Similar to Bagharu, Madari's mother has also been described by words related to nature. Through association of nature with Madari's mother, the text attempts to make the readers aware that everything is interconnected in the universe. Madari's mother is not accepted because she harks back to the primitive life. People like her, have no place in modern and capitalist society because they value the natural world and hold traditional values. However, she doesn't care about this fact and continues to accept nature as a separate existence. She keeps the rats away from her field, not kill them, nurses lizards and monitors eggs of jugglefowls. She firmly believes that "dead animals should be allowed to be decomposed in the forest. There are birds and ants that get their food from it" (my trans.; 453).

### Conclusion

Thus, applying ecocritical standpoints with a major focus on Glotfelty's ideas, the paper has tried to make people conscious about recognizing and considering the natural elements in this era of environmental crisis. This paper has shown how Debesh Ray has challenged literary studies through his narrative *Teesta* suggesting, as Glen Love has observed, "an extension of morality to the non-human world" (Love 25). The authors of this paper have also examined to look at how the author of the novel has challenged the human/nature binary focusing on the interconnectedness between nature and human, and how the visions of human beings have been shaped and influenced by nature. By investigating the textual representation of nature, this study has also found out that, while most of the writings of contemporary time has avoided the geological element of nature giving importance to biological element of non-human world like *The Hungry Tide* by Amitava Ghosh who engages with the tiger while talking about the 'mutual recognition', Ray has suggested an interconnection between both biological and geological elements of nature employing the image of the river Teesta in terms of ecological and environmental awareness.

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**THE GREEN TEMPLE OF SIMHACHALAM: INTERCONNECTING RELIGION,  
ECOLOGY, AND CONSERVATION**

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**Abstract**

The Simhachalam Temple, an architectural and spiritual marvel located in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, is a testament to the importance of preserving the spring-shed ecosystem. Dedicated to Lord Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha, this historic temple is renowned for its unique west-facing orientation and its unwavering commitment to this cause. As a recipient of the Green Temple Award, the temple administration has pioneered several ecological initiatives, including conserving sacred springs, sustainable water management practices, and protecting biodiversity within the Eastern Ghats. These efforts not only enhance the temple's spiritual significance but also position it as a model for environmental sustainability. The temple's rich biodiversity and cultural and ecological importance make it a strong contender for Biodiversity Heritage Site status under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. Such a designation would further consolidate the temple's role as a model for integrating heritage conservation with ecological sustainability. This dual recognition reinforces the temple's spiritual importance and underscores its leadership in environmental preservation within sacred spaces.

**Keywords:** Simhachalam Temple, Green Temple Award, spring-shed ecosystem, biodiversity conservation, sustainable practices, cultural heritage, Biodiversity Heritage Site

**I. Introduction**

The Simhachalam Temple, dedicated to Lord Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha, is a monumental blend of spirituality, architectural brilliance, and ecological consciousness. Situated atop the Kailasa Hill Range<sup>1</sup> in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh (Carmichael 69-70 and Sundaram 1-2), this historic temple is a revered pilgrimage site and a beacon of sustainable practices. The temple administration has proactively implemented green initiatives, such as conserving natural springs, promoting biodiversity, and integrating traditional water management systems with modern conservation techniques. These efforts have earned the temple recognition as a "Green Temple Awardee," highlighting its commitment to environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the temple's unique ecological and cultural significance positions it as a strong contender for Biodiversity Heritage Site status, underscoring its role in preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage.

**II. Historical Background**

The temple's origins are shrouded in legend, with local traditions attributing its establishment to Prahlada, the devout devotee of Lord Vishnu, who is said to have miraculously manifested the deity Narasimha at this sacred site, thus embedding the temple's narrative within the broader Vaishnava theological framework. Epigraphical evidence suggests that the temple's earliest definitive construction and patronage can be traced to the Eastern Ganga dynasty, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> See, Plate I: Fig. 1

during the 11th century CE, a period of significant temple building and endowment in the region (Sundaram; Swell 16).

The Eastern Ganga dynasty stands out in the annals of Indian history as the only Hindu dynasty to rule continuously for a millennium. Furthermore, the Suryavamsa Gajapathi, who succeeded them, held power for over a century (Ramchandra Rao 2). Together, the Gangas and the Gajapathi dominated significant portions of the Andhra region, which formed part of their expansive empire, without disrupting their historical traditions for a millennium and a century. At the height of their reign, the empire of the later Eastern Gangas stretched from the Bhagirathi Ganga in the north to the Gautami Ganga (Godavari) in the south. At the same time, the Gajapati Empire extended from the Bhagirathi Ganga in the north to the Pinakini in the south, briefly encroaching as far as the Kaveri (Ramachandra Rao 3-4). The Andhra region<sup>1</sup> It was ruled by the Later Eastern Gangas, traditionally known as Kalinga. Their territory ranged from Mahendra Giri in the north to the Godavari River in the south (Ramchandra Rao 26-41). However, neighbouring powers periodically invaded the southern boundary of their domain<sup>2</sup>, resulting in fluctuations between the Godavari and Simhachalam regions.

Hence, the temple's historical narrative reflects a multifaceted interplay of religious beliefs, political dynamics, and social customs that collectively shaped its evolution. Epigraphic records provide valuable insights into the grants, donations, and administrative structures associated with the temple, shedding light on its socio-economic significance within the local community. Over the centuries, the temple underwent expansions, renovations, and additions under various ruling dynasties, each leaving their distinct mark on its architectural and artistic landscape, demonstrating the enduring religious significance of the site.

### **III. Evolution of Art & Architecture**

Like many other shrines, the Simhachalam temple exhibits a confluence of architectural styles<sup>3</sup>, reflecting the patronage of various dynasties and their distinct artistic preferences. The Kalinga

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<sup>2</sup> It is known as "Kalinga Andhra" and comprises the southern part of the Ganjam-Orissa; Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam, and East Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh.

<sup>2</sup> The scholars who have worked on these dynasties have devoted themselves to studying political history; we may mention- Subba Rao R., "History of the Eastern Gangas of Kalinga", Journal of Andhra Historical Research Society (JAHRs), Vol., V, VI, VII, VIII; Kamesvara Rao.S, Gangas of Kalinga (500-1434) – Unpublished thesis, Madras University, 1948; Subrahmanyam.R., The Suryavamsi Gajapatis of Orissa, Waltair, 1957; Mukherjee P., The Gajapati kings of Orissa, 1953, Calcutta; Mahatab. H.K., The History of Orissa, Vol. I, Cuttack, 1959; Sarma., M.S., History of the Reddy Kingdoms, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Srisailam, 1993. Sundaram, K., Studies in Economic and Social Conditions of Medieval Andhra (A.D. 1000-1600), Suryanarayana, K., History of the Minor Chalukya Families in Medieval Andhra Desa, Delhi, 1986. Yashoda Devi, V. The History of Andhra Country 1000 A.D. – 1500 A.D., New Delhi, 1995. Venkata Pradeep, L., History of the Mandalika Families in Medieval Kalinga Andhra (A.D. 1200 – 1600), Andhra University, Waltair, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Temple architecture of India is broadly divided into three styles: Based on Features and Geographical details. They were: Nagara style, from the Himalayas to the Vindhya, with tall, curvilinear towers over sanctums and compact plans. The Vesara style, between the Vindhya and Kaveri, blends Nagara's towers with Dravida's pyramids, especially in Karnataka. The Dravida style, from the Kaveri to Kanyakumari, features tiered towers (vimanas), large gateways (gopurams), and vast complexes. The Kalinga style in Odisha is a Nagara sub-school, with its rekha deul (curvilinear tower), pidha deul (pyramidal hall), and detailed surfaces.

style of architecture, prevalent in the northern Andhra region, is prominently displayed in the Simhachalam temple, reflecting the diverse artistic and architectural traditions fostered by the Eastern Gangas, who were known patrons of this style (Sundaram 158-207; Rama Rao 1-18; Ramesan 136-141).

Over time, the temple has undergone expansions and renovations, with subsequent dynasties, such as the Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi; Cholas; Chalukya- Cholas; Later Eastern Gangas; Reddis of Kondavidu and Rajahmundry; Gajapatis of Orissa, Vijayanagar Empire and other feudatory dynasties - Nagavasma; Chiefs of Viragottam; Kona; Matsya of Oddadi; Raparti chiefs; Later Chalukyas of Elamanchili; Surbhi's of Gartsyamadagotra; Chalukyas of Viraghata; Siavamsa; Koppula Chiefs; Kondakamatis; Mangipudi chiefs; Gangas of Jantnarunadu; Telugu Chodas; Velamas of Devarkonda (Yashoda Devi 306-338 and Venkata Pradeep 79-142 and Suryanarayana 118-185) adding their architectural elements, resulting in a synthesis of styles that reflects the region's diverse cultural influences. Incorporating elements from different architectural traditions demonstrates the temple's capacity to adapt and evolve, mirroring the region's changing artistic and cultural landscape. The concept of bio-divine manifestation, central to the temple's narrative, underscores the belief that the deity Narasimha chose this location as his abode, sanctifying the site and attracting devotees from far and wide. The temple's architecture serves not only as a physical structure but also as a repository of religious symbolism and cultural values, with its intricate carvings and sculptures conveying narratives from Hindu mythology and reflecting the social customs of the time (Singh et al).

#### **IV. Genesis – A Retrospect of Our Consciousness**

Lynn White Jr.'s seminal work, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (Journal of Science, 1967), remains a cornerstone of environmental thought decades after its publication. While some aspects have been challenged and nuanced, its central argument retains its power - our current ecological crisis is deeply rooted in Western cultural attitudes towards nature, particularly those stemming from a specific interpretation of Christian dominion over the natural world. However, White suggests that Eastern spiritual traditions, which emphasise interconnectedness and reverence for nature, might offer valuable insights for developing a more harmonious relationship with the environment. Eastern man exhibits a spiritual dependence on nature. On the one hand, this is symptomatic of his prescientific and backwards self; on the other, of his ecological wisdom and deep ecological consciousness. (Guha 4).

The Assisi Declarations are a set of statements on the role of religion in environmentalism, issued by members of various faiths at a meeting in Assisi, Italy. The Hindu Declaration on Nature, found in the Assisi Declarations (Singh 117-119), emphasises the interconnectedness of all life and the divine presence within nature. It highlights Hinduism's reverence for life and the awareness that natural forces—earth, sky, air, water, fire, and various life forms — are bound together in a natural rhythm. The declaration underscores the importance of treating all species with care, referencing Hindu texts that advise treating them like children. It also points to Hindu mythology, where deities often have animal companions, further emphasising the significance of the animal kingdom.

Hinduism, often described as a nature-based religion, offers valuable insights into the importance of biodiversity and conservation. Rather than viewing humans as separate from nature, Hindu

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According to M.A. Dhaky, one of the foremost authorities on Indian temple architecture, these styles are not rigidly separate but represent regional evolutions of a shared sacred vision. He emphasised that the Kalinga idiom, while formally a Nagara sub-school, achieved such distinctive maturity and refinement that it deserves recognition as a significant regional style. Dhaky's view highlights the continuity of pan-Indian temple traditions alongside the creative diversity of local schools.

scriptures emphasise the interconnectedness of all living things and the divine essence present within creation. This worldview provides a robust framework for understanding the need to protect and conserve our planet's biodiversity.

Hindu scriptures, including the Vedas, Upanishads, Epics and Puranas, emphasise the sanctity of nature and the interconnectedness of all life forms. Hindu scriptures revere nature in its various forms. The Rigveda, for instance, describes the creation of the universe and highlights the importance of maintaining harmony with nature (Dwivedi and Bholanath Tivari 3-24).

The earth is revered as a mother figure, rivers are considered goddesses, trees are believed to be inhabited by spirits, and festivals are celebrated with ecological consciousness. This reverence fosters a sense of respect and responsibility towards the natural world. However, Tomalin argues that the 'poor' Indians cannot put 'Earth First' in their daily survival struggle, which can be disputed through the lens of the Hindu religion of the 13th century, Madhyam Kalinga's<sup>1</sup> Famous Vaishnava shrine, Simhachalam Temple.

#### **V. Ecological and Artistic Harmony at Simhachalam Temple:**

The Simhachalam Temple, perched 800 feet above mean sea level in the Eastern Ghats, is a unique confluence of ecological and artistic elements. Its strategic location amidst the lush greenery of the hill range enhances its spiritual ambience and reflects the region's biodiversity in its art and architecture. The temple's intricate carvings and motifs, inspired by the flora and fauna of the Eastern Ghats, showcase a deep connection between nature and spirituality. The architectural amalgamation of Kalinga and Dravidian styles further emphasises the temple's cultural and ecological landmark role. This harmonious integration of biodiversity and artistic expression positions Simhachalam as a model for sustainable heritage conservation.

The temple in the Eastern Ghats is surrounded by a unique spring-shed ecosystem that includes several sacred springs, or "*dharas*." Historically, this region had over 32 springs, but only a few remain active. Springs like Gangadhara, Naagadhara, and Saagidhara are nearly perennial, while others, such as Aakasadhara and Pichhukadhara, are seasonal. These springs are vital for the temple's water needs, supporting rituals, prasadam preparation, and daily operations.

The Simhachalam Temple's unconventional west-facing orientation, which deviates from the traditional east-facing layout of Hindu temples, reflects the Indian cultural ethos that prioritises ecological harmony and practical considerations. This architectural choice, influenced by the east-to-west flow of the principal spring, Gangadhara<sup>2</sup> (Sundaram 39), underscores the builders'

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<sup>1</sup>The territorial connotations and disputes involving regions like Trilinga, Kalinga, and Trikalinga, as well as the historical arguments regarding their boundaries. When considered from a broader perspective, the Kalinga region was subdivided into the distinct geographic subunits of Utkala, Tosala, Kongada, and Kalinga proper, the latter of which is historically known as Kalinga Andhra. The region of Kalinga Andhra has a rich and complex history, marked by its strategic location between the Mahendra Giri Mountain in the north and the Godavari River in the south. This area has been a focal point for various dynasties and rulers, contributing significantly to its cultural and political landscape. In the medieval historical context, the region comprising the contemporary Srikakulam district and portions of Vizianagaram was designated as Uttara Kalinga, the northernmost subregion of the more significant Kalinga territory. The present-day Visakhapatnam district and the remaining areas of Vizianagaram district constituted Madhyama Kalinga, the central subregion. The Godavari region to the south was historically referred to as Dakshina Kalinga, the southernmost subregion (Banerjee., 4-5)

<sup>2</sup> See, Plate I: Fig B – several attempts were made to find its origin, but all have been in vain

commitment to integrating natural elements into the sacred space. By aligning the temple's layout with the natural water flow, the architects ensured sustainable water management, preserving the sanctity and utility of the spring for ritual and daily purposes. This decision reflects a broader "Earth First" philosophy inherent in Indian culture, where environmental stewardship is deeply intertwined with spiritual practices. Hence, the temple's design harmonises with the surrounding ecosystem, demonstrating a profound respect for nature's resources. This approach not only highlights the ingenuity of Indian builders but also serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of ecological pragmatism in sustainable development.

**V.A) Deities Associated with Nature** - As one of the most sacred sites in Hinduism dedicated to Lord Narasimha, Simhachalam attracts devotees from across India and beyond. The temple's sanctum sanctorum houses a unique idol in the Varaha-Narasimha form.<sup>1</sup> It is a combination of boar (Varaha), the Third Avatar, and lion (Narasimha), the Fourth Avatar<sup>2</sup>, considered unique in India. This deity symbolises a balance between human civilisation and wild nature. This deity represents the protection and conservation of natural resources. This idol is covered with sandalwood paste throughout the year, except on Akshaya Tritiya day, when it is revealed in its original form.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Plate I: Fig C

<sup>2</sup> The theory of Avatars has been thoroughly elucidated in the Puranas. This theory is also varied, as different Puranas enumerate a different number of incarnations. The ten most Famous and familiar Avatars

Lord Vishnu initially manifested as "*Matsya*," the eminent fish that rescued the Vedas and humankind from the deluge. Subsequently, He appeared as "*Kurma*," the tortoise supporting the mountain during the ocean churning process. Next, He incarnated as "*Varaha*," the boar that elevated the Earth from the depths of cosmic waters. He then manifested as "*Narasimha*," the formidable man-lion who destroyed Hiranyakashipu to safeguard Prahlada. Following this, He incarnated as "*Vamana*," the dwarf Brahmin who subdued King Bali with three steps. Later, Vishnu incarnated as "*Parashurama*," the warrior wielding an axe who chastised arrogant kings. He appeared as "*Rama*," the prince of Ayodhya who defeated Ravana and upheld righteousness. After Rama, He incarnated as "*Krishna*," the divine cowherd and instructor of the Bhagavad Gita. Subsequently, He manifested as "*Buddha*," the enlightened one who advocated compassion and non-violence. Ultimately, He is prophesied to descend as "*Kalki*," the future warrior who will terminate the Kali Yuga and restore virtue (Prime 36-52).

According to the Srimad Bhagavatam, Lord Vishnu's manifestations are innumerable; however, twenty-four principal incarnations are detailed. Initially, he manifested as the Four Kumaras—*Sanaka*, *Sanandana*, *Sanatana*, and *Sanat Kumara*—celestial sages embodying eternal Youth. Subsequently, he incarnated as *Varaha*, followed by *Narada*, the divine sage. Next, he appeared as *Nara* and *Narayana*, twin sages dedicated to penance. He incarnated as *Kapila*, the proponent of Sankhya philosophy, and later as *Dattatreya*, the sage of renunciation. Following this, he manifested as *Yajna*, overseeing sacrifices, and as *Rishabha*, the ideal monarch advocating detachment. He then incarnated as *Prithu*, the sovereign who cultivated the earth. Later, he manifested as *Matsya* and *Kurma*. He appeared as *Dhanvantari*, the divine physician, and as *Mohini*, the enchantress, distributing nectar. Subsequently, he incarnated as *Narasimha* and *Vamana*. He manifested as *Parashurama* and *Vyasa*. Afterwards, he incarnated as *Rama*, followed by *Balarama* and *Krishna*. Later, he manifested as *Hansa*, the swan imparting wisdom, *Hayagriva*, the horse-headed form that restored the Vedas, and *Buddha*. His final incarnation is prophesied to be *Kalki* (Dwivedi and Bholanath Tivari 91).

**V.B). Flora and Fauna** - Nestled amidst the verdant Eastern Ghats, the temple is a sanctuary for spiritual seekers, with a diverse flora and fauna. The temple's surroundings are rich in biodiversity, with medicinal plants, endemic species, and a variety of wildlife thriving in its ecosystem. This natural wealth is crucial to maintaining the region's ecological balance, serving as a green lung, and supporting the local climate. The flora and fauna around the temple are equally significant. The lush greenery includes medicinal plants and sacred groves, enhancing the spiritual ambience and contributing to soil conservation and water retention.

The flora, including creepers – simple creeper scrolls (*sada dali*) in Horizontal, *Chakralatha* –The walls of the mukhamandapa feature a winding creeper emerging from a single stem, with tendrils elegantly coiling around and adorning Vishnu figures. The "*Sada Chakri Dali*," a motif of coiling tendrils without a stem, decorates the shafts of perforated windows and several pillars in the cloister, adding intricate beauty to the temple's architecture (Malayavasini et al 144). *Jivalata* -A gracefully curving tendrils and insets of animals and birds, such as elephants, lions, horses, deer, sparrows, geese, and fish, adorn the Vishnu figures, the mukha mandapa walls, and the vimana's outer walls (Malayavasini et al 144-145). *Galabai* (or) *Manushya Kautaki* - creeper, with human figures clinging to alternate sides, decorates the door jambs of the sanctum and the frontal porch. Moreover, *Vanalatha*, the forest creeper (*vana*) with thick foliage, is located above the Navagraha lintel of the sanctum. In contrast, the interlocked *vanalata* foliage forms a canopy over the Sankha and Padma nidhis in the assembly hall. (Sundaram 175-176 and Malayavasini et al 143-145). The temple's art and architecture intricately depict fauna, including birds such as sparrows, swans, as well as animals such as lions, elephants<sup>1</sup>, deer, snakes<sup>2</sup>, fishes<sup>3</sup> Bull, Turtle<sup>4</sup>, Boar<sup>5</sup> Moreover, conventional animals like Vyala (or) Gryphon (it is a figure of a lion with features of a Demon) and Gaja-Vyala (It is a rampant lion to be seen over the body of a couchant elephant) (Sundaram 175-181). These motifs symbolise virtues and mythological stories, reflecting the deep connection between nature and spirituality in Indian culture. The temple's art and architecture testify to its ecological and cultural significance. The carvings of flora and fauna on pillars, walls, and ceilings highlight the harmonious integration of natural elements into sacred spaces. This blend of biodiversity and artistic expression underscores the temple's role as a custodian of the environment and a model for sustainable heritage management. By preserving its natural surroundings, the

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<sup>1</sup> See, Plate no II: Figure 1 - Kautilya Arthashastra II. 2, 49 mentions the best elephants bred in Kalinga, Anga, Karusa, and the East. Ananta Varama Chodaganga Deva, in his 19th regnal year, assumes the title – “Navanavati Sahasra Kunjaradhisvara” (Lord of Ninety-nine Thousand Elephants), followed by Aniyanka Bhima-III; Narasimha-I; Narasimha-II; Bhanudeva-II; Narasimha-III; Bhanudeva-III; Narsimha-IV; and Bhanudeva-IV were taken in a variant style of the Gajapati title. Furthermore, the invaders were forced to take “Elephants” as part of diplomacy after the war. We have noticed such incidents during the invasion of Jainagar (Orissa). Md. Bin Tughluq; Firoz Shah Tughluq (Sultans of Delhi – Tughluq Dynasty); Firoz Shah Bhamani (Sultan of Bahamani), and Hushang Ghor as a Horse trader (Sultan of Malwa). Even later, the Successive Dynasty, the “Suryavamsi Gajapatis,” means Lords of the Elephant Forces, indicating the mighty, supreme quality of elephants from Orissa. (Ramachandra Rao 78-90; 26-52).

<sup>2</sup> See, Plate no II: Figure B

<sup>3</sup> See, Plate no II: Figure C

<sup>4</sup> See, Plate no II: Figure B

<sup>5</sup> See, Plate no II: Fig. D



Simhachalam Temple inspires a harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, making it a beacon of environmental stewardship.

#### **VI. Timeless Traditions: Festivals and Ecological Consciousness**

The daily proceedings at the Simhachalam Temple differ from its numerous festivals (Utsav's), which are categorised into two types: those sanctioned by agama texts and those shaped by local customs (sistachara)—a few of the major festivals which emphasise ecological consciousness. Chandanotsavam, Giripradikshan, Ratha Saptami, Sami Puja, and rituals, such as donating a male calf, reflect a deep connection between spirituality and ecological consciousness.

The Chandanotsavam, also called Candanayatra at Simhachalam, is the temple's main annual event, famous for the rare Nijaroopa darshan<sup>1</sup> of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy. It begins with Suprabhatam and Vedic rituals, during which hereditary trustees, officials, and representatives of Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam (TTD) offer silk robes. As the only day the deity is seen without sandalwood, the festival has profound spiritual importance. It attracts about 2 lakh devotees annually, making it a major religious gathering in northern Andhra Pradesh.

The Candanayatra festival at Simhachalam Temple is distinguished by its unique ritual customs associated with the principal deity, Varaha-Narasimha. The icon is positioned within the sanctum as a Siva-lingam and remains perpetually concealed beneath multiple layers of sandalwood paste<sup>2</sup>, which render it visually akin to a sizable sandalwood linga. This concealment conceals the proper form (nijasvarupa) of the deity, which is unveiled solely once annually on the auspicious day of Akshaya Trtiya. On this occasion, the sandalwood paste is ceremonially removed in the morning, allowing devotees to observe the deity in its original guise for 12 hours before the paste is reinstated at dusk. The ritual involves the application of twelve mounds of sandalwood paste in successive stages over the months of Vaisakha, Jyestha, and Asadha, and offerings are deferred to the unobscured deity until the paste is reapplied (Sundram 122-123 & Jaiswal 146). This sequence underscores the sanctity of the linga-like form. Such practices exemplify the layered religious history of Simhachalam, wherein Vaishnava veneration of Narasimha has incorporated earlier Saiva traditions, with the sandalwood covering functioning as a symbolic conduit linking sectarian identities and maintaining the temple's syncretic character (Jaiswal 145).

The Candanayatra at Simhachalam, the temple's primary festival, holds spiritual and ecological importance. The ritual of applying sandalwood paste consecrates the deity and symbolises a connection with nature, relying on forest materials, springs, and growth cycles. It links sacred worship with ecological rhythms, marking the temple's calendar by aligning devotion with environmental renewal. As the foundational event preceding other festivals, Candanayatra highlights the temple's ecological awareness, emphasising the preservation of natural resources within spiritual practice.

Giripradikshan<sup>3</sup> is a 32-kilometre circumambulation around Simhachalam Hill (Sundaram 124) that clearly exemplifies ecological reverence and spiritual endurance. Worshippers undertake this

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<sup>1</sup> See, Plate No I: Figure C – Artistic depiction of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narashima, depicted in the Tribhanga posture – featuring the face of Varaha, visible up to the knee and tail of the lion. Accompanied by his consorts, Maa Sri Devi and Bhoo Devi.

<sup>2</sup> See, Plate No III: Figure A – Preparation of Sandalwood Paste.

<sup>3</sup> See, Plate no III: Fig B, sacred 32 km route commences at Tholipavancha near the temple foothills, proceeding through Adavivaram, Hanumanthawaka, Jodugullapalem, MVP Double Road, HB Colony, Seethammadhara, NGOs Colony, Murali Nagar, Madhavadhara, and Gopalapatnam before returning to Simhachalam. This arduous pilgrimage, undertaken barefoot by devotees, symbolises devotion and endurance while sanctifying the surrounding landscape.

pilgrimage through forested terrains, sacred groves, and natural water bodies, engaging directly with the rich biodiversity of the Eastern Ghats. This immersive journey fosters a deep connection between devotees and the surrounding ecosystems, reinforcing the temple's ecological philosophy. While the trek itself traverses nature's expanse, the 32 sculptural representations of Lord Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha are enshrined within the Bedamandapa pillars located inside the temple premises. Each form embodies a unique aspect of divine protection and cosmic balance, symbolising Vishnu's multifaceted guardianship over creation. The veneration of Varaha (Boar Avatar) and Narasimha (Lion Avatar)—both animal incarnations—underscores the sanctity of terrestrial and forest life. In the contemporary era of climate change and ecological crisis, the Giri Pradakshina becomes a spiritual voyage of environmental consciousness, urging devotees to view biodiversity not merely as a resource but as a sacred inheritance to be protected and revered.

Ratha Saptami, the festival dedicated to Lord Surya, the Sun God, is celebrated with grandeur across Kalinga Andhra, where temples such as Arasavalli, Konark, and those in the Ganjam district pay homage to the solar deity through awe-inspiring architectural marvels. At Simhachalam Temple, the festival is marked by rituals that align with solar transitions and agricultural rhythms, reflecting a deep understanding of cosmic cycles and ecological balance. The temple's ratha (chariot)<sup>1</sup>, constructed in the southeast orientation (Sundaram 168), symbolises ancient astronomical wisdom and the harmonious integration of architecture with celestial forces.

Lord Surya is revered not merely as a celestial entity but as the eternal life-giver, the source of vitality, happiness, and prosperity. In Hindu cosmology, he is the embodiment of energy, illumination, and nourishment, sustaining all forms of life on Earth (Rao Narasimha 240-250). The sunlight, which he bestows, is essential for photosynthesis in plants, the regulation of biological rhythms in animals, and the overall health and well-being of human beings. Through his rays, the Earth receives warmth, fertility, and the power to regenerate—making him central to both ecological and spiritual existence.

During Ratha Saptami, devotees offer grains, fruits, flowers, and water, symbolising gratitude for the abundance that sunlight enables. These offerings reflect the interconnectedness between solar energy and biodiversity, as every creature—from the smallest insect to the tallest tree—thrives under the sun's benevolent gaze. The festival thus becomes a celebration of cosmic ecology, where worship of Surya transforms into a conscious acknowledgement of nature's delicate balance and the imperative to protect it. In an age of environmental degradation and climate uncertainty, Ratha Saptami serves as a cultural reminder of the sun's sacred role in sustaining life and the human responsibility to honour and preserve the natural world.

Sami Puja<sup>2</sup> The Jami tree festival, centred around the sacred *Prosopis cineraria* (locally known as Jammi Chettu), is a deeply symbolic celebration observed during Vijayadashami (Dussehra) in various parts of India, especially in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Rooted in epic traditions, the tree is revered for its association with the Pandavas, who are said to have hidden their weapons in a Jammi tree during their exile, retrieving them on Vijayadashami to mark their victory in the Kurukshetra war. This act transformed the tree into a symbol of valour, victory, and divine blessing. Rituals during the festival include exchanging Jammi leaves as tokens of gold,

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Annually, hundreds of thousands of devotees, not only from Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and other regions of India, participate, rendering it one of the largest religious gatherings in northern Andhra. Authorities conscientiously coordinate amenities and safety measures to support this extensive pilgrimage (Field Work).

<sup>1</sup> See, Plate No: III: Figure C

<sup>2</sup> See, Plate no III: Fig D

performing pujas under the tree, and invoking blessings for courage and prosperity (Sundaram 125-126). Ecologically, the Jammi tree is a keystone species in arid landscapes, known for its drought resistance, deep root system, and ability to enrich soil fertility. It provides fodder, shade, and medicinal value, making it vital for rural livelihoods and desert ecology (Bishnoi et al. 159-161). The festival thus embodies a confluence of mythological reverence and ecological wisdom, encouraging communities to honour nature through ritual and sustainable practices. In contemporary contexts, planting Jammi trees during Dussehra has become a gesture of environmental stewardship, reinforcing the tree's sacred and ecological significance.

Donation of Thodu Peddu (Calf) - The ritual practice of male-calf<sup>1</sup> donation, locally known as "Thodu Peddu," (Malayavasini et al. 43-45) at Simhachalam Temple is a fascinating intersection of devotional expression, agrarian tradition, and unintended ecological stewardship. The ritual is rooted in a deep-seated belief that offering a male calf to deities such as Lord Varaha Narasimha secures divine blessings and reflects the community's connection to the land and its resources. In traditional agrarian societies, cattle symbolise wealth, fertility, and sustenance, and their donation becomes an act that sanctifies both the devotee's commitment and the natural order (Malayavasini et al. 43-45). Over time, this ritual inadvertently evolved into a mechanism that helped preserve indigenous cattle breeds, acting as a de facto "breed bank" that maintained genetic diversity crucial for the region's agronomic resilience.

From an ecological consciousness perspective, the donation ritual can be reinterpreted as an early model of sustainable resource management. The continued emphasis on accepting only indigenous breeds, eschewing foreign or genetically modified variants, reflects an understanding that local cattle, adapted over centuries to the regional climate and environment, have intrinsic value in sustaining the ecological balance. Indigenous cattle breeds naturally illustrate a biological repository of traits such as disease resistance and adaptability to local fodder and water availability. In this way, the temple's evolving policy, transitioning from accepting any donated animal to being selective about breed quality, signals an emerging ecological ethic. This approach has the dual benefit of preserving a traditional practice while safeguarding the genetic diversity needed to maintain the resilience of local agriculture in the face of modern challenges.

#### **VII. Simhachalam Temple as a Model of Green Spirituality and Sustainable Heritage Conservation**

The Simhachalam Temple emerged as a pioneer in integrating ecological consciousness with religious practices. Its green initiatives reflect a profound commitment to environmental stewardship, positioning the temple as a model for sustainable heritage conservation—Temple's multifaceted approach to ecological preservation and its potential to inspire similar efforts across India.

**Harnessing Renewable Energy:** The 1 MW Solar Project. The construction of a 1 MW solar project at Simhachalam Temple (Malayavasini et al. 6-7) underscores the temple's dedication to

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<sup>1</sup> See, Plate No III: Fig E - Male calf donations are exclusively designated for recognised indigenous cattle breeds, thereby safeguarding and perpetuating native genetic lineages. Acceptance is limited to healthy calves suitable for breeding; those afflicted with illness, deformities, or belonging to Jersey, Holstein Friesian (HF), or mixed breeds, or exhibiting other adverse conditions, are strictly prohibited, as such restrictions uphold the integrity and ecological objectives of the initiative. In the absence of a suitable indigenous calf, devotees may instead make a redonation through the temple gosala by contributing ₹516. Alternatively, the offering may be symbolically made by utilising a calf idol crafted in gold, silver, an alloy, or copper. This provision ensures the preservation of the spiritual merit associated with the donation while safeguarding the integrity of indigenous breeds and upholding ethical standards. (Field work)

reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy, making it the first temple in the nation to do so. By harnessing solar power, the temple sustains its energy needs and sets an example for other religious institutions to adopt clean energy solutions. This initiative aligns with India's broader goals of transitioning to renewable energy sources and mitigating climate change.

**Spring Shed Ecosystem Conservation:** In collaboration with the DHAN Foundation, the temple has organised workshops to conserve the unique spring shed ecosystem surrounding Simhachalam Hill. These workshops focus on mapping and preserving natural springs, integrating traditional water management practices with modern techniques, and fostering community engagement. The temple's reliance on springs for daily water needs highlights the importance of sustainable water resource management, making it a vital aspect of its ecological initiatives.

**Sustainable Transportation: Electric Buses** - The temple administration's introduction of electric buses represents a significant stride toward sustainable transportation. These zero-emission buses provide devotees with eco-friendly commuting options, reducing the environmental impact of vehicular emissions. This initiative not only enhances the temple's accessibility but also reinforces its commitment to preserving the sanctity of the hill's ecosystem.

**Advanced Water Management System: Injection Wells** - The temple's innovative water management system includes the construction of four injection wells—two at the top of the hill and two at the bottom (Malayavasini et al 7). These wells are crucial in replenishing groundwater levels and ensuring a sustainable water supply for the temple and surrounding areas. This approach demonstrates the temple's proactive measures to address water scarcity and promote resource conservation.

**Solid Waste Management: Compost Bins by RINL** - As part of its corporate social responsibility, Rashtriya Ispat Nigam Limited (RINL), Visakhapatnam, has provided the temple with compost bins for managing solid waste generated from annadhana (food donation) and floral offerings ("The RINL News Portal"). These bins facilitate the conversion of organic waste into compost, reducing landfill waste and promoting sustainable waste management practices. This initiative highlights the temple's efforts to minimise its ecological footprint.

**Recognition and Future Prospects:** The Simhachalam Temple's green initiatives have earned it the prestigious Green Temple Award from the Government of India (Malayavasini et al 6-7). Building on this recognition, the temple strives to achieve Biodiversity Heritage Site status under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. This designation would further validate its role as a custodian of India's natural and cultural heritage, ensuring additional support for its conservation efforts.

A recent Green Dex survey conducted by the National Geographic Society concluded that the citizens of Brazil and India are the 'greenest' based on their sustainable lifestyles. As Pankaj Jain says, depending on their environmentally friendly lifestyles, Indians have indeed put the 'Earth First'.

### **Conclusion**

The Simhachalam Temple emerges as a luminous beacon where rich cultural heritage harmoniously converges with ecologically sound practices, setting an inspiring paradigm for spiritual and environmental stewardship. The prestigious Green Award bestowed upon the temple is an accolade and a testament to its groundbreaking initiatives that seamlessly integrate conservation with daily devotional life. Through sustainable water management, renewable energy projects, and eco-friendly transportation, the temple underscores that environmental preservation is not an adjunct to heritage conservation—it is its very foundation.

At the heart of the temple's legacy lies a profound artistic harmony. The intricate carvings, motifs, and architectural details reflect centuries of evolving artistic expression, celebrating religious narratives and echoing the beauty and resilience of the natural world. These artistic elements serve as a visual dialogue between humanity and nature, demonstrating that sacred spaces can encapsulate and accentuate the intrinsic virtues of ecological balance. Every sculpture and detail is

a reminder that art, rooted in nature's ethos, becomes a powerful medium to inspire sustainable practices and cultural pride.

The temple's festivals further magnify this integrative ethos. Rituals such as Chandanayatrotsava, the circumambulatory Giripradikshan, Ratha Saptami, Sami Puja, and Rituals involving the donation of a male calf are imbued with ecological consciousness; they celebrate the divine presence and the sanctity of the natural elements that sustain life. These festivals act as dynamic platforms where spiritual fervour meets environmental responsibility. The careful sourcing of ritual materials, the reverence for indigenous fauna and flora, and the communal commitment to preserving traditional practices all speak to a legacy deeply intertwined with sustainable resource management. In this way, the temple's cultural festivities become living laboratories for ecological innovation and community-based conservation.

In conclusion, ultimately, the Simhachalam Temple is far more than a historical monument. Its ongoing journey—from receiving the Green Award to pursuing Biodiversity Heritage Site status—cements its role as a model for integrating green practices with cultural vibrancy. In a world facing pressing environmental degradation and cultural homogenisation, the temple is a resounding reminder that our heritage sites can and must be nurtured as custodians of our artistic legacy and the natural world. This integrated approach preserves the sanctity of our past and paves the way for a sustainable future where spirituality, art, and ecology thrive together.

**Plate no: I**



**Figure A: Kailasa Hill Range, Aerial View of Simhachalam Temple**





Figure B: Perennial Spring Gangadhara



Figure C: Sri Varaha Lakshmi Nagashima Swamy

Plate no: II



Figure A: Tussel of Elephant and lion from one of the pillars – Tiruchuttumala



Figure B: Fish - Royal Insignia of Matsya of Oddadi





Figure C: Sanke; Turtle; Lion



Figure D: The Boar (Varaha)

**Plate no: III**



**Figure A: Chandanotsavam – Prelude**



**Figure B: Giripradhakasana**





Figure C: Ratha - Performs the Sun God Festival



Figure D: Sami Puja



**Figure E: Nurturing Donated grown-calf (Thodu Peddu) during one of the Temple Rituals Acknowledgement**

We want to express my gratitude to Dr. Bhagabana Sahu (Retd. Prof., Head of the Department, Department of History, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur) Furthermore, the officials of Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Devasthanam—particularly Sthanacharyulu Sri T. Rajagopal Garu, Photographer T. Srinivas Rao, Chief Priest Rangacharyulu Garu, and all other supporting personnel. Your immense support and guidance have been invaluable. Thank you.

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**ECOETHICS AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM IN LEE MARACLE’S  
RAVENSONG**

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**Abstract**

*Ravensong* (1993) by Lee Maracle is a pivotal work of Environmental Literature which forms the fundamental text of Canadian Indigenous literature. This paper explores the novel through the ecoethical lens to study the interdependent connection between indigenous epistemics, ecocritical symmetry and traditional sovereignty. The novel positions Raven as a traditional and ecological symbol, intermediating between mankind, environment and age-old sagacity. The novel portrays colonial intrusion which brought diseases, integrationist education, disrupting the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge, environmental degradation and turbulence in the governance and gender responsibilities. The Raven’s figure interlinks the vitality of the water, animals, land and humans. The paper analyses the watershed moments like the pandemic and how it surpasses anthropocentrism and promotes relational ethics. The study argues the resistance towards colonial invasion shown in the novel by reorienting indigenous women, elders and the land as guardians of ecoethical wisdom. The Raven’s ecoethics reveals how indigenous wisdom emerges not merely as autonomy but as ecological interlinkage. The paper through ecological lens demonstrates how the flu epidemic and concurrent collapse of the Fraser River’s salmon are failures of environmental ethics. The study analyses gendered effort for environmental healing undertaken by women and how restoration of indigenous knowledge offers a place-based cognition for sustainability, ecological consciousness and restoration of sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Raven, Ecoethics, Sovereignty, Epidemics

**Introduction**

*Ravensong*, Lee Maracle’s 1993 book, stands out as a deeply moving story about Indigenous beliefs concerning nature within Canada’s literature. The tale unfolds during the 1950s flu outbreak along the Pacific coast; it blends the traditional environmental understanding of the Coast Salish alongside criticism of modern colonization, damage to the environment, yet also human self-importance. *Ravensong* presents the figure of Raven as an originator, but in the contemporary times, it is seen as a spiritual and mythical figure connecting the humans with nature and refining man’s relationship with everything around them. The study shows how traditional indigenous knowledge system links everything around it. It links the global ideologies of relating liberation of women to conservation of nature or mirroring social injustice to ecological hazards. The novel values the pristine nature of the earth while admiring the bewitching significance of the environment. The novel serves as a meeting ground for both indigenous knowledge system and the contemporary wisdom and making them stronger for the future generations. The author has focused on the power of determination and courage amid the plague outbreak. The novel portrays strong repulsion towards the colonial intrusion and mindset while prioritising the efficiency of healing through native worldview. The Canadian novel unleashes what the Raven, women, nature and the aged population contribute to present ecoethics not only as rebellion but as rebirth. This creates a unique technique to combine land, spirit and the community together. The novel reflects how epidemics is not a disease alone but a colonial break and philosophical reflection of how it disrupts the relational ethics and pushes mankind towards anthropocentric superiority. Women in the novel play a prominent role in preserving the indigenous and ecological novel. The concept of oral storytelling converts into an ecological act which surpasses the visual appreciation to embody



ecological stewardship. *Ravensong* acts as a blueprint of ecological healing, moral rebellion and sustainability for future generations.

**Indigenous Cosmology, Spiritual Ecology and the Ethical Cycle of Life**

The Raven is positioned within the cadence of nature and travels with the flow, “Wind changed direction, blowing the song toward Cedar. Cedar picked up the tune, repeated the refrain, each lacy branch bending to echo ravensong.” (Maracle, 1) This description paints a picture of how all things are connected: Raven, clouds, branches and everything becomes a part of the reciprocity cycle. The western mindset holds a belief that breaks and separates different elements like body and soul, humans and animals or community and ecology. Maracle holds a strong ideology that each inhabitant or part of ecological cycle carry their own power, and it is the balance between these systems that builds a healthy relationship. The character of Celia shows her strong relationship with nature, “Celia returned to the village under the gathering cloud cover.” (Maracle, 2) She is seen lost in her thoughts, imagining the old house with figures like the wolf woman. Here the author tries to mention about the accumulation of diseases and how the women were the first untouchable victims of the pandemic and didn’t serve the men quite similarly how they did before. The arrival of colonization led to the breaking down of traditional norms and beliefs. This change is not social, but creates a large gap between the indigenous people, their spiritual beliefs and exchanged it with the man-centric order built on domination. The belief system of the Salish community is rooted in their indigenous knowledge system which aligns with the concept of spiritual ecology propounded by Matthew Fox who has provided four paths for spiritual ecology: Via Positiva, Via Negativa, Via Creativa and Via Transformativa. These provide a Christian narrative for an environmentally conscious mindset that echoes with the indigenous knowledge system depicted in the novel. (Fox, 228)

| <b>Matthew Fox’s Fourfold path</b> | <b>Central Principle</b>                                                                                                                 | <b>Salish/Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) relationship</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Via Positiva                       | It refers to the experience of Divine happiness, gratitude, awe and astonishment in creation. Perceiving creation is a form of blessing. | This principle aligns with the core indigenous knowledge principle of ecological pragmatism where environment isn’t a form of capitalism but a circle of community. The novel is set in the backdrop of a world and community filled with “whispering cedars” and the chuckle of the raven which are all alive and singing which is the lived experience Fox champions. |

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Via Negative       | It is the voyage through misery, suffering, darkness and scarcity.                                                                                                | This path parallels with the colonial tragedy which the novel calls an “epidemic”. The novel describes the influenza pandemic brought about by the coming of colonization which represents the trauma and suffering and forms the interior part of the indigenous encounters from the historical and colonial contexts.                                                                                             |
| Via Creativa       | This mentions about the revival of creation and discovering new environmental morals for existence which involves protecting creation through political measures. | This is found in the community’s rebellion, tradition restoration and the power of storytelling. The novel is a kind of survival tale and a clear vocalization of counter hegemonic narrative. The people of the Salish community used natural remedies and held great reverence for the natural world in spite the “white town” people who discarded them. This shows their active ecological knowledge in action. |
| Via Transformativa | This presents the transformation to a more empathetic and virtuous society and the practice of justice.                                                           | This aligns accurately to the novel as the final goal the author presents is to link the gap and conflict between the two cultures. The indigenous knowledge system and ecological knowledge are deeply rooted in the cultural, traditional and spiritual beliefs and practices.                                                                                                                                    |

The novel involves a blend of raven’s misery and Celia’s compassion. The characters in the novel behave in a way which makes the reader assume the awareness of the universe towards the misconduct and how it would bring destruction to mankind. The raven asks to remain patient and warns, “There isn’t much time. These people are heading for the kind of disaster they may not survive.” (Maracle 5) This line acts as a warning sign as to how disrespecting everything and everyone would automatically call for the disaster and downfall. Oral storytelling and narratives along with the shared chores performed by the women facilitates the flow of indigenous wisdom. This is not a theory that people of the community practice but a lived experience and relationship which they share with all the elements of the natural system. The older generation have practiced how to live in unison with nature teaching the virtue of acknowledging nature for its life-giving properties rather than exploiting it for capitalism. The novel teaches the value of showing compassion towards Mother Nature and the community’s collective decision for giving care towards the ecological cycle. The story unveils how colonization brings illness, causes

acculturation in school and deterioration of indigenous wisdom. The novel reflects on improving our relationship with the environment which would consequently destroy the colonial mindset while restoring nature.

#### **Raven as Ecoethical Mediator and Narrative Voice**

The Raven isn't another character from the novel but acts as a bridge that connects the people closer to the world. The raven is not a jester alone but an epitome of indigenous knowledge which forces and pushes the community towards a common good. Raven was convinced that the people and the land were deeply in need of change and like the people, the land also demands reverence and displays grit. The author has given a different picture of the raven's figure based on the stories passed down by the Salish community. In the novel, the raven sounds despondent as she understands the impact of colonialism and how it brings destruction to the environment. The sound of the grief-stricken character sways with the gusts, falls with the rain and veils in the clouds; it is an acoustic setting replicating the native's symmetry with the cacophonous notes of the colonists. When all the elements: music, rainfall, wind and values connect them form a beautiful symphony of ecological poetry. All these pushes humans to understand whatever we consider beautiful can teach us how to live in unison with them. Murray Bookchin considers power inequalities arise due to mistreatment of nature. His concept of catastrophe emerging in the environment depends on how humans treat nature and how the oppressive structures like capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism add to this disaster. The relationship between Celia and the raven hold a prominent position. Their conversation holds clear understanding and listening to each other and teaches how communication takes place from the usual way of human talking. Deeply seated in the spiritual ecology, the story of the raven isn't a legend but a plea to reclaim balance between humans and nature. The figure of the raven as a trickster and messenger is symbolised by the wind song and a strong connection to the earth's centre. It holds a solid and direct relationship with all elements of the earth like trees, animals, birds, fish, which are all the core characteristics of the indigenous knowledge system that colonial invasion tried to demolish and obliterate. The raven warns the people on the colonial invasion and how it disrupted the ecological thought process of the people as they "no longer listen," "refuse to think" and have embraced shallow lifestyle, paralleling with the city's pretence. (Maracle, 135) Raven's criticism displays how the white community's influence has disturbed the indigenous wisdom and ecoethical roots. Raven proposes relational accountability as a necessity for ecological stewardship. She insists the ecological crises faced by the community like epidemic, pollution and temperature spikes are all results of colonial intrusion and shake the foundation of ecoethical indigenous connections. Raven acts as a silent mentor for Stacey in her journey towards adulthood. Stacey was initially unclear about her life's incidents including loss, sickness and community problems. Her journey towards emotional maturity was not for herself alone but for the overall development of the community and its ecoethical growth.

#### **Women, Ecology, and Post-colonial Healing: The Ecofeminist Dimensions**

Ecofeminism was propounded by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 who speaks about the contributions made by women towards the ecological advancement. (Botzler and Armstrong, 467) The novel truly depicts how the mistreatment towards women results in the hazard to the environment. The author believes domination of women and nature are based on the common systems based on asymmetrical power relations. The story depicts this as the women fiercely protect the indigenous knowledge of the community as well as the land. The several women characters in the novel like Celia, Stacey, her mother, the healers and all the other women from the land who hold things together. They are the drivers who run families, home, bring sustenance and feed the household. They silently keep the traditions, morals and cultures alive. The oppression faced by women and nature as explained by ecofeminism is rightly justified by Maracle as she connects the suffering of the community with the epidemic and the loss faced culturally which was worsened by the colonial intrusion. The young girl named Celia has an enlightenment where she

connects the arrival of the tall ship to the initial pandemic in which after the exchange, fifty women were sent back to the village and “they became the first untouchable victims of disease.” This became a “new moral sensibility” where fear and a sense of embarrassment devastated the traditional belief systems and refined the roles of women: “Never again would wolf women serve men in quite the same way.” (Maracle, 2) The bodies of women were considered the primary spot where imperial disease and ethical evaluation found its ground. So, the author begins the novel with the physical and traditional violence towards women where the land is equally interconnected. The ultimate ecofeminist aspect of the novel is the presentation of the environment as an ancient female-centric wisdom, showcased by the raven and Cedar. These characters are engaged figures throughout the novel in offering their narratives, counselling, expressing sentiments and offering criticism of the human actions which aggravate the colonial damage. A clear example of colonial masculinity is in the form of the white men who set foot in the land of the indigenous communities in the form of police officials, labors or authoritative figures. Their presence carried a sense of domination with them unlike the men in the land who work in unison with the women and land. The author mentions about white labors whose behavior reflects privilege and disrespect towards environment through pollution and disregard of indigenous suffering amidst epidemics. (Maracle, 3-4) This detachment towards the land and its community is a form of ecofeminism where the figure (usually men) exploit and extract from the natural system and women meanwhile declining reciprocal commitment. A gruesome incident of masculinity which takes place in the novel affecting the internal relationships is the sexual assault a woman faces by her husband. Stacey realizes Anne was “raped by her husband” and the women of the community reacted with resentment and rage. (Maracle, 144) The ecofeminists believe the violence against women equates with the violence against nature. The outrageous reaction of the community shows healing should be community based not individual. Environmental disasters expand due to colonial invasion seen in the form of fire, famine and pollution. Stacey learns the water in river near the town area is polluted and contaminated due to industrial byproducts and human negligence. (Maracle, 26) The hazardous and polluted environment reflects Stacey’s emotional turbulence and raven’s alarming statement, “there is something wrong with their thinking” unveiling psychological instability due to the impact of colonialism. (Maracle, 29) Ecological devastation is not gender neutral as emphasized by the ecofeminists since the women are overburdened with unequal proportions of food, supervision of children and disease care. All these are evident amidst the influenza pandemic where the women of the community like Momma, Ella and Kate take responsibility in providing care to the infected patients, bathe them and bury the dying members of their community, whereas the white community remained alienated and distant. (Maracle, 1-4) Their selfless attitude towards sick and infected people becomes a gesture of rebellion against social injustice.

#### **Ecoaesthetics of Oral Narratives and Carlsonian Viewpoint**

Allen Carlson’s concept of ecoaesthetics emphasises on how aesthetic experiences are framed by ecological awareness. In several indigenous communities across the globe, include the Naga, Adi and other communities, oral storytelling holds a prominent position in their culture and society. The Salish community similarly holds high regard for the transmission of oral narratives serving as an ecological tool. The form of storytelling is aesthetic and arises from the cadence, cultural setting, voice and the existence of non-human characters like wind, cedars, rivers and spirits. The application of Allen Carlson’s Natural Environmental Model (NEM), these oral narratives become ecoaesthetic pragmatism deeply seated in ecological ethics instead of isolated artistic visuals. Carlson perspective critiques the Object of Art Model (OAM) and the Landscape or Scenery Model (LSM) and runs parallel to the cognition of oral narratives exposing how indigenous aesthetic experience is deeply ecological, connected and ecocentrism. (Carlson, 122) In several cultures, a story is not an alienated network, but a lived experience situated within a specific territory structured by the climate, environment and traditions. The concept of oral narratives isn’t

detachable from the environmental conditions. In certain cases, the wind has a role to play as it may disrupt the narration of the storyteller and the owl's hoot might apostrophize a story and the narration may be scheduled as per the position of the moon and the cycle of the season. Carlson opines the story cannot be acknowledged if it is extracted from its ecological cycle, but its true meaning emerges from comprehending the environmental, traditional and historical contexts. The ecoaesthetic value emerges from the knowledge and ecological awareness which forms the basis of Carlson's NEM. Carlson's concept of LSM signifies the acknowledgement of nature lies in the ecological information rather than visual enjoyment. The Landscape or Scenery Model portrays nature for its beauty and picaresque element viewed from a distance mirroring the colonial notion of treating nature for its whimsical and enigmatic nature isolated from reality. In several oral indigenous narratives, the listeners are asked to listen to nature, not just look at it. Similarly seen in *Ravensong*, where different beings like raven, cedar, cloud and river appear frequently throughout the novel and participate in the storytelling process. Carlson's ecoaesthetics believe storytelling is relational as seen in the novel as different members of the community participate in this process and share their ideas and occupy a narrative space. His concept of NEM insists proper understanding and appreciation of nature. The grace of oral narratives just doesn't lie in its imagery but in its capacity to recollect memory: stories of the ceremony of first salmon, river, songs or the warning given by the raven before the onset of the pandemic. All these significant incidents metamorphose the people and their relationship with the land. The concept of oral story telling in the novel positions humans as listeners, not masters. From the perspectives of OAM and LSM, the spectator judges the natural world from the human outlook. When humans enter the storytelling universe, the non-human holds intellectual authority. It is the world where the different non-human elements teach different lessons to the community which justifies the ecoaesthetic notion of more than human composition. Hence, oral storytelling and Carlson's Natural Environmental Model explores the prominent principles of ecological wisdom, and ecocentric ways of experiencing the natural world. Carlson's ecoaesthetics give philosophical articulation to what oral traditions have been practicing long ago and explains aesthetic knowledge is more authentic when deep rooted in ecological management.

#### **Epidemic Ethics: Ecoethical Crisis and Regeneration**

In the novel, Maracle restructures the pandemic not just as a biomedical incident but as an ecoethical disaster which occurs due to the colonial disregard. The unavailability of hygiene services, accessibility to healthcare, transportation, and networks converts the pandemic into an environmental consequence. The novel exposes the effects of negligence and racism due to the colonial invasion and is dedicated "To all those women who fought the epidemic when this country was not concerned with our health." The protagonist is Stacey who belongs to the community and were not allowed to go to the hospital of their choice during the plague which urged them to defend themselves. The colonial community lacked humanity and sympathy shown in their way of persisting the same personality long after the pandemic has ended. This brushing off is seen in the recollection of a character who remembered how they walked over the dead in the bustling city which shows their lack of compassion and humanity. The epidemic is presented as one of the catastrophic failures in the history which could wipe out a complete generation. Celia calculates the heritage-based effects of the previous epidemics including influenza, tuberculosis, smallpox, etc observing how that "whole lineages wiped out. Hundreds became thousands." The women in the community reacted to this by reclaiming an ancient drum and lamenting in unison. (Maracle 182) Hence this negligence not only destroyed a complete lineage but destroyed the future and educational prospects of the younger generations. The land is portrayed to have been wounded by the settlers and in response for this ecological devastation the raven presents a solution, which is the epidemic itself. Raven observes the epidemic as just a birth which is much needed for the metamorphosis to ditch the old in search of the fresh and innovative. The cedar however disagrees with raven's idea and calls it unprincipled and unachievable. Cedar is a

representation of moral knowledge and serenity and personifies long term stability with nature. Cedar displayed her disagreement towards raven's plans and questioned how the raven could decide to make the people ill. (Maracle 34) The conversation between raven and cedar presents the flu epidemic as a conundrum within the ecological cycle. This conflicting idea decides whether destruction or self-control is the right path for tackling the situation and creating social and ecological equilibrium. The author observes the epidemic as earth's ulcer by comparing human disruption to the pain and sacrifice of the ecological world. Raven notices the suffering brought by the colonial rulers are global, asserting: "Far away the earth bled, her bleeding becoming an ulcer" and this bleeding amplified "century by century." (Maracle 174) The novel highlights tension of community with individual values. Stacey observes the contradiction between the ethics of her community with that of the white neighbourhood and decodes the life in her village revolves in a cycle, "A missing person became a missing piece of the circle which could not be replaced." The non-indigenous community in comparison perceives losses as insignificance because, "No one individual was indispensable." This contradiction brings Stacey to the conclusion that "No wonder they can blithely watch us die." (Maracle 17) The community champions an act of ethical restoration and existence by initiating their own medical response after being denied medical permission. Stacey offers an idea of shifting intravenous therapy and the community agreed that the boy should snatch the required plasma and apparatus from Vancouver. This ethical resistance saves lives, "Within days those treated with intravenous recovered." (Maracle 71)

### **Conclusion**

*Ravensong* by Lee Maracle metamorphosizes the Salish community and their outlook as an ecoethical propaganda for future generations. Their indigenous belief and knowledge system is deeply grounded in the co-existence between the humans, animals and the cosmic world. The voice of the raven restores balance between ecological sovereignty and cultural equilibrium which colonialism eradicated. The study analysed the novel through the viewpoints of ecofeminism, ecoaesthetics, spiritual ecology and ecoethics, collectively standing as a multidimensional rebellion against anthropocentric manifesto and colonial domination. The novel proposes how healing takes place through the collective consciousness of the community and the land. The core finding of this paper reflects how the author positions the raven not as a symbolic or mythic figure but as a mediator or messenger to the people of the Salish community and linking between the ecological stewardship and indigenous philosophy. The raven's sorrow over human's hubris, dismantling nature and disregard of the indigenous knowledge runs parallel with Maracle's presentation of the colonial supremacy that capitalises nature. The raven's song travels through different elements of nature including the river, land, sea and trees suggesting how the non-human world participates in the moral discourse. The raven isn't just a mediator or spectator of the lunacy but a protector of the indigenous wisdom and ecological disruption. The paper also explores the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) explored through the lens of spiritual ecology by Matthew Fox and his fourfold path. The indigenous worldview explains the creation as pristine and misery as a form of erudition. The cycle of ecoethics reflected in the lifestyle of the Salish community mirrors the cycle of nature starting from its renewal to sustenance. The decline in the ecological cycle is depicted by the decline of the salmon in the Fraser River. The flu epidemic is not just an environmental decay or biological catastrophe but the invasion of colonialism. Applying the ecofeminist lens, the women in the novel play a prominent role. All women including Stacey, Celia, Ella and Momma bear the weight of ecological and emotional obligation. All these women offer caregiving roles to the sick which goes against the colonial and patriarchal notions forming the matrilineal custodianship. The ignorance towards women and their transgression equates the assault towards the land and their resistance represents the rebirth and reviving abilities of the land. The paper also uses the Carlson's ideologies of ecoaesthetics which finds its strength from the holistic oral storytelling of Maracle. The indigenous storytelling method of the Salish community transforms oral tradition to ecological knowledge. The epidemic ethics represents the disease not



as a misfortune but an initiative to return to nature and embrace moral harmony. Maracle through his novel urges the readers to return to relational ethics and demands men to take accountability of their actions and heal the wounded earth.

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**AFFECTIVE ECO-POLITICS OF DISABILITY AND ANIMALITY IN SUNAURA  
TAYLOR'S BEASTS OF BURDEN**

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**Abstract**

This study constructs a framework for an eco-politics of disability and animality by analyzing Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden* through the lens of affect theory. It argues that the intertwined oppression of disabled humans and non-human animals is perpetuated not only institutionally but through a potent "affective economy." This system weaponizes emotions like disgust and aversion to dependency to politically frame certain bodies as burdens, thereby justifying their marginalization. The application of affect theory is central, as it moves beyond legal rights to expose the visceral, sensory mechanics of power. It reveals how circulated feelings make systemic environmental violence, from factory farms to inaccessible cities so they feel natural and justified. These infrastructures are material expressions of an able-bodied ideal that inherently produces spatial exclusion and ecological harm. This analysis posits that disability studies are inextricably ecological. Both fields confront the capitalist ideologies of productivity and cure that fuel our ecological crisis. Thus, the intersection of disability and animality becomes a crucial site for the Environmental Humanities, challenging anthropocentric and ableist paradigms. A viable future cannot be built on logics of exclusion and disposability. It must be rooted in a politics of radical interdependence, recognizing shared embodied precarity as the foundation for a more inclusive ecological politics.

**Keywords:** Eco-politics, Animality, Affect theory, Environmental violence, Disability studies

The contemporary ecological crisis represents a profound failure of relationality, a disavowal of the intricate dependencies that constitute life on a planetary scale. This crisis is not solely an environmental predicament but a political and ethical one, rooted in ideologies that hierarchize life, segregating the valuable from the disposable. Within this context, the Environmental Humanities has emerged as a critical field for interrogating the foundational logics of anthropocentrism, ableism, and capitalist productivism, all of which sanction systemic violence. A pivotal intervention within this discourse comes from the intersection of disability studies and critical animal studies, a confluence powerfully theorized in Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. Taylor's work dismantles the illusion that the oppression of disabled people and non-human animals are separate concerns, arguing instead that they are co-constituted through a shared "animal-disability complex" (Taylor 27). This complex is sustained not only through explicit institutions and discourses but, more insidiously, through the visceral, pre-cognitive workings of affect. The political construction of certain bodies as "burdens" is an achievement of what Sara Ahmed terms an "affective economy," where emotions like disgust and an aversion to dependency circulate, stick to specific bodies, and justify their marginalization (Ahmed 120). An analysis of this affective economy reveals that the material infrastructures of our world—from the inaccessible city to the concealed factory farm—are not neutral designs but active productions of an ableist and anthropocentric ideal. Consequently, this paper argues that disability studies is inherently ecological, and a viable ecological politics must be informed by the disability justice principle of radical interdependence. By "cripping" eco-politics, it becomes possible to

envision a future founded not on logics of exclusion and cure, but on the shared, generative ground of embodied precarity.

This paper seeks to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework for an eco-politics of disability and animality by conducting a sustained analysis of Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden* through the lens of affect theory. The central objective is to demonstrate that the intertwined subjugation of disabled humans and non-human animals is perpetuated not merely through overt institutional mechanisms but through a potent and often overlooked "affective economy." This system weaponizes visceral emotions—primarily disgust and a cultural aversion to dependency—to politically frame certain bodies as burdensome, thereby naturalizing and justifying their systemic marginalization and the violence enacted upon them. The application of affect theory is therefore central to this investigation, as it facilitates a move beyond the legal and rights-based paradigms that often dominate liberal discourse. It instead exposes the visceral, sensory mechanics of power, revealing how circulated and socially cultivated feelings render systemic environmental violence, from the confinement of factory farms to the exclusionary design of urban spaces, as inevitable, natural, and morally justified. Furthermore, this analysis posits that these infrastructures are not arbitrary but are the material expressions of a pervasive able-bodied and anthropocentric ideal. This ideal inherently produces spatial exclusion and profound ecological harm, forging an indissoluble link between the project of disability justice and that of ecological sustainability. The paper contends that disability studies are inextricably ecological, as both fields confront the capitalist ideologies of productivity, efficiency, and cure that fuel the current ecological crisis. Thus, the intersection of disability and animality becomes a crucial, if underexplored, site for the Environmental Humanities, presenting a formidable challenge to anthropocentric and ableist paradigms that have long dominated political and ethical thought. Ultimately, the paper advances the argument that a viable and just future cannot be built upon logics of exclusion, disposability, and the fantasy of independence. It must instead be rooted in a politics of radical interdependence, a framework that recognizes shared embodied precarity and vulnerability not as weaknesses to be eliminated, but as the foundational condition for a more inclusive, ethical, and sustainable ecological politics.

**Theoretical Foundations: Affect, Economy, and the Visceral Logics of Power**

To comprehend the durability and pervasive nature of the animal-disability complex, analysis must extend beyond the frameworks of legal rights, discriminatory language, and economic exploitation. While these dimensions are crucial, they often fail to account for the tenacity of prejudice, the way aversions can feel instinctive and self-evident. Affect theory provides the critical apparatus to investigate this subterranean dimension of power, where politics operates beneath and through consciousness, shaping sensory and emotional orientations to the world. Affect theory, in its broadest conception, concerns the study of non-conscious, pre-personal, and embodied intensities that precede and form the substrate of conscious emotion. Brian Massumi, a key theorist, defines affect as a pre-cognitive "ability to affect and be affected," a realm of potential and intensity that constitutes the very condition of relationality (35). This focus on the pre-discursive is complemented by Sara Ahmed's work, which examines how emotions, once named and circulated, do things in the social world. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed develops the concept of the "affective economy" to describe how emotions do not reside privately within individuals but circulate between bodies and signs, accumulating value and forging social alignments through their movement (120). In this economy, emotions are social practices. They shape collectives by directing bodies toward or away from one another, creating the very surfaces and boundaries of the social body.

Central to this analysis is the emotion of disgust. Ahmed argues that disgust is not an inherent property of an object or a body but is produced through a history of contact and association. Disgust works by "sticking" to certain figures, rendering them "disgusting others" whose proximity is perceived as a threat to the integrity and purity of the individual or social body (89). This stickiness is a form of power; it orchestrates social and spatial relations without the need

for explicit legislation, naturalizing aversions and making certain forms of violence feel justified. The power of the affective economy lies in its capacity to operate at this visceral register, making systemic arrangements appear as matters of common sense rather than political choices. This framework is uniquely potent for analyzing the conjuncture of ableism and speciesism. Both systems are underwritten by a visceral, often unarticulated, recoil. The non-human animal, particularly within the context of industrialized agriculture, is a primary site for the production and management of disgust. The sights, sounds, and smells of animal bodies, their secretions, and their deaths are systematically sequestered from public view precisely because they are culturally coded as repulsive. This disgust, however, is not a natural or inevitable response to animality. It is a cultivated sentiment, an affective technology that manages the cognitive dissonance inherent in a society that professes love for certain animals while condoning the brutal exploitation of billions of others. The factory farm, as an architectural form, is the material expression of this affective management; it is a machine for hiding the object of disgust, thereby enabling the uninterrupted consumption of its products.

In a parallel manner, the disabled body has historically been a magnet for disgust and aversion. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's seminal work on staring describes how non-normative bodies provoke a range of intense affective responses, from curiosity to fear to revulsion (55). This aversion is intimately linked to a profound cultural anxiety about dependency, pain, and mortality—existential realities that the disabled body is often forced to symbolize in the public imagination. The cultural imperative to "cure" or eliminate disability is thus driven not solely by a humanitarian impulse but also by an affective need to erase the discomfiting reminder of human vulnerability and finitude. The desire is for a world without the disquieting presence of the "extraordinary body" (Garland-Thomson 8).

Taylor's critical intervention lies in demonstrating how these two affective streams—disgust toward animality and aversion toward disability—converge and reinforce one another. The disabled person is frequently "animalized," rendered as irrational, instinct-driven, or reduced to the mere materiality of their body. Conversely, the animal is "disabled" by being framed as lacking reason, autonomy, and thus moral standing (Taylor 45). This symbolic convergence is cemented by a shared economy of disgust. The feeling of revulsion directed at a "deformed" body and that directed at a "filthy" animal operate through a similar affective logic: they justify social and physical distance, containment, and, ultimately, disposability. The power of this affective economy is that it renders appeals to logic or abstract rights often ineffective. It makes the systemic violence of an inaccessible built environment or a slaughterhouse feel natural, inevitable, or even necessary. By exposing these visceral mechanics, affect theory reveals that transformative political change requires not only the reform of laws but a fundamental reorientation of the sensory and emotional fabric of social life itself. The conceptual framework of the affective economy allows for a granular analysis of how the figures of the animal and the disabled human are bound together in the cultural imagination, mutually constructing one another as "burdens" on the social, economic, and moral order. This construction is not a neutral or descriptive act but a potent political tool, a framing that actively legitimates practices of exclusion, neglect, and violence.

Disgust functions as the primary affective glue in this convergence, operating as a powerful boundary-drawing mechanism. It performs the ideological work of separating the fully human, civilized, and autonomous subject from its constitutive others. Taylor's work is particularly effective because it grounds this theoretical analysis in embodied experience. She recounts numerous autobiographical instances where her own body, with its atypical movements and reliance on assistive devices, elicited stares, expressions of revulsion, or a condescending pity (Taylor 15). These encounters are not merely personal slights; they are micro-instantiations of a broader cultural logic. Taylor compellingly argues that this logic is structurally homologous to the one that permits the viewing of a pig confined in a gestation crate as unworthy of moral consideration. The link is further cemented through language and cultural representation. Epithets such as "monster," "beast," "brute," and "vegetable" are routinely deployed to denigrate both

disabled people and animals, anchoring them within a shared semantic field of the less-than-human (Taylor 62). This linguistic stickiness actively reinforces the affective stickiness described by Ahmed. If to be animal-like is to be disgusting, and to be disabled is to be animal-like, then the disabled body is effectively produced as a site of potential contamination, a threat to the hygiene and integrity of the able-bodied ideal.

A second, and equally potent, current in this affective economy is the profound aversion to dependency. Western political and philosophical traditions, deeply steeped in liberalism, have valorized individualism, self-sufficiency, and economic productivity as the highest markers of human worth. Within this schema, dependency is pathologized. To be dependent is to be a burden, a drain on one's family, a cost to the state, an inefficiency within the economic system. Taylor's analysis masterfully connects this cultural aversion to the parallel devaluation of both disabled lives and animal lives (Taylor 98). The disabled person, particularly one who requires significant and visible personal assistance for daily living, exists as a living refutation of the myth of independence. Their presence makes tangible the reality that interdependence is not a failure or an exception but a fundamental and universal condition of embodied existence. Rather than embracing this truth, an ableist society reacts with fear and aversion, seeking to eliminate the evidence through strategies ranging from institutionalization and segregation to the medical pursuit of cure and, in more extreme historical and contemporary discourses, euthanasia.

This same cultural aversion to dependency is projected onto non-human animals, but through an inverted economic logic. Within a capitalist system that assigns value primarily through the metric of productivity, animals are evaluated solely on their capacity to generate profit—as meat, milk, labor, or emotional companionship. Those animals that fail to "earn their keep" according to this brutal calculus are categorically deemed expendable burdens. The laying hen whose rate of egg production declines, the male chick of a layer breed who possesses no economic utility, the "downer" animal who cannot walk to her own slaughter; all are classified as inefficiencies, as burdens on the profit margin, and are consequently disposed of with mechanistic efficiency (Taylor 105). In this context, the animal's dependency on human care for its very survival is framed not as a moral responsibility but as an unreasonable economic cost.

When the circulated affects of disgust and the aversion to dependency achieve a critical mass, they coalesce into a potent and durable political frame: the frame of the "burden." This frame is then weaponized to justify a wide spectrum of violent policies and practices. Political arguments against funding accessible public transit, implementing inclusive education, or providing adequate social care are routinely couched in the language of unsustainable cost and burden on the taxpayer. In a parallel fashion, the entire global apparatus of animal industrial exploitation is rationalized by the economic "necessity" of cheap animal protein, a necessity that demands the treatment of sentient beings as mere units of production, whose suffering is an acceptable, externalized cost of doing business. The affective economy is what makes this framing resonate as common sense rather than recognized as a political choice. It naturalizes the hierarchical valuation of life, making it seem obvious that the needs and comforts of the "productive" should invariably supersede the needs of the "dependent." Through this analytical lens, it becomes clear that the problem is not located within the bodies of disabled people or non-human animals themselves. The problem resides in the social and affective relations that systematically define these bodies as problems. The "burden," therefore, is not an inherent quality but a social construct, an ideological artifact designed to uphold and perpetuate a specific, exclusionary political and economic order.

Taylor reveals how the co-constitution of disabled and animal oppression operates powerfully at a pre-discursive, visceral register, a dynamic that finds its most precise theoretical articulation in Brian Massumi's paradigm of affect. Massumi's conception of affect as an autonomous, pre-personal intensity, a body's non-conscious "capacity to affect and be affected" existing in a state of potentiality prior to its capture into named emotions provides a framework for understanding the immediate, corporeal aversions that underwrite the animal-disability complex (Massumi 35). The systemic violence Taylor critiques is not merely ideological but is sustained by

these sub-strata of embodied experience: the unthought recoil, the muscular tension, the autonomic shudder that precedes and exceeds the cognitive label of "disgust." This analysis reframes the oppressive architectures Taylor examines—from the slaughterhouse to the inaccessible urban landscape—not simply as ideological constructs but as material technologies designed to manage these unsettling affective intensities. These infrastructures function as vast containment systems for the potential for connection, the unsettling "feeling of feeling" that arises in encounters with dependency and difference, a potential that must be pre-emptively quelled to maintain the fiction of the autonomous, productive subject. A transformative politics, therefore, cannot stop at legal or discursive intervention; it must engage this foundational affective stratum, seeking to re-pattern the very rhythms of bodily capacity and response that make systemic violence feel intuitively justified.

The affective economies of disgust and aversion are not ephemeral or merely ideological phenomena; they achieve their full force by taking concrete, material form. They are literally built into the world, producing environments that are simultaneously disabling for non-normative human bodies and devastating for non-human animals and the broader ecological systems they inhabit. These material structures—ranging from urban landscapes to agricultural infrastructures—are the physical crystallizations of an able-bodied, anthropocentric ideal, and they actively produce both social exclusion and ecological harm. The modern city, in its standard configuration, stands as a monument to the normative body. Its very design featuring stairs without ramps, public transit systems lacking audio and visual announcements, narrow doorways, and public spaces that preclude easy navigation for those with mobility or sensory disabilities, is the materialization of an affective orientation that assumes the ambulatory, sighted, hearing, and neurotypical body to be the universal human subject. This is what Tobin Siebers identifies as "the ideology of ability," a largely unspoken belief system that becomes embedded in the concrete and steel of our shared environment (25). The creation of this inaccessible landscape is not a passive omission but an active production of barriers, a form of environmental violence that restricts mobility, limits social and economic participation, and inflicts what Mia Mingus terms a deprivation of "access intimacy." This violence is rendered invisible by the very affective economy that produced it. The disabled person struggling to navigate the city is perceived as the problem, the "burden" making inconvenient demands, while the inaccessible infrastructure itself escapes scrutiny, naturalized as simply the way things are. The environment is absolved, and the body is pathologized.

If the urban built environment is the primary landscape of ableist exclusion, then the factory farm is its speciesist counterpart and direct analogue. It represents the ultimate materialization of the affective economy of disgust and disposability. These industrial facilities are engineered according to a single, overriding logic: the maximization of efficiency and profit. This logic demands the absolute objectification and instrumentalization of the animal. Living beings are confined in spaces so severely restricted that they cannot perform their most basic natural behaviors, as simple and natural being an animal as turning around, stretching limbs, nesting, or forging social bonds. Their complex lives are reduced to a set of biological functions: rapid growth and maximal reproduction. This infrastructure can be understood as a form of what Giorgio Agamben terms "thanatopolitics," or the politics of death (85). It is an architecture designed not for living but for the management of life unto death. The factory farm systematically disables animals by depriving them of everything that would make their lives worth living, actively producing beings that are physically sick, chronically injured, and psychologically traumatized, all while meticulously hiding this systemic violence from the public, consumer gaze. It is the physical manifestation of the belief that these beings are burdens on the land, water, and grain supplies, whose lives hold no intrinsic value and whose suffering is an irrelevant externality.

The connection between the inaccessible city and the ecologically devastating factory farm is not merely metaphorical or coincidental. Both are material products of the same underlying ideological refusal of interdependence. An ableist society refuses to acknowledge its fundamental dependence on the labor, care, creativity, and perspectives of disabled people. It builds a world that denies this dependency, thereby producing immense social suffering. In a parallel manner, an



anthropocentric society refuses to acknowledge humanity's foundational and inescapable dependence on a healthy, thriving, and biodiverse web of non-human life. It constructs an economic system that denies this ecological dependency, thereby producing planetary-scale suffering and driving the sixth mass extinction.

The contemporary ecological crisis is, from this perspective, a direct manifestation of this refusal. The relentless pursuit of endless economic growth and productivity, core tenets of capitalist ideology, is revealed to be an ableist and speciesist project. This paradigm values only that which can be quantified in terms of output and monetary profit, while simultaneously devaluing and destroying the foundational, interdependent systems of care, regeneration, and support that sustain all life, human and non-human alike. The dominant approach to disability, often framed through the medical model's language of "cure," and the dominant approach to nature, framed through the language of "resource management," share a common productivist logic: the goal is to fix the broken part to restore productive capacity, rather than to adapt the system itself to embrace diversity, accommodate difference, and honor interdependence. It is through this critical linkage that disability studies and ecological thought are revealed to be necessarily conjoined, united in their fundamental critique of the productivist and growth-oriented paradigm that threatens collective futures.

The analysis of the affective and material structures upholding the animal-disability complex could lead to a conclusion of profound bleakness. However, the work of Sunaura Taylor, and the broader disability justice movement from which it springs, is ultimately a project of hope and radical reimagination. The very recognition of shared structures of oppression creates the potential for forging powerful solidarities and articulating a new, transformative political vision. Taylor, alongside other disability scholars and activists, proposes the strategy of "cripping" our understanding of the world, a deliberate and political reclaiming of the slur "crip" to signify a stance that uncompromisingly challenges ableism and centrally embraces interdependence as a political and ecological principle (Taylor 185).

This vision is most comprehensively articulated in the *Disability Justice* framework, a movement and analytic developed primarily by disabled queer people of color in collectives such as Sins Invalid. Disability Justice intentionally moves beyond the limitations of a rights-based or identity-based model of disability activism. It offers a holistic framework centered on ten key principles, including intersectionality, leadership of those most impacted, recognition of wholeness, sustainability, and cross-movement solidarity (22). This framework provides an essential blueprint for a genuinely inclusive and robust ecological politics. It insists that the well-being of human bodies is inextricably linked to the well-being of the body of the Earth, and that the fight for access and liberation for disabled people is the same fight for a sustainable and just world for all beings. From this perspective, accessibility is transformed from a technical problem of compliance or a charitable afterthought into a fundamental ethical practice of world-making. It is the commitment to creating a world where a vast spectrum of bodies and minds can not only exist but flourish. In this sense, accessibility is the social and political equivalent of biodiversity; just as a monoculture is ecologically fragile and prone to collapse, a society designed for only a narrow band of human embodiment is socially and ethically fragile. Taylor's work, informed by this framework, urges a reconceptualization of shared precariousness. Rather than understanding vulnerability as a threat to be eliminated through fortification or exclusion, it can be recognized as the very condition of possibility for an ethical community. This aligns with Judith Butler's concept of precarity, which describes a politically induced condition in which specific populations are systematically deprived of social and economic support, becoming differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death (Butler 25). Both disabled people and non-human animals under current systems inhabit a state of heightened, often officially sanctioned, precarity. A politics of radical interdependence begins from this shared ground. It acknowledges that to have a body, to be a living creature, is to be fragile, finite, and dependent on others and on a sustaining environment. This acknowledgment actively dismantles the liberal fantasy of the autonomous, independent, and

self-made subject, replacing it with a model of the collective, the community, and the ecosystem. Within this model, care ceases to be a devalued private burden and becomes revalued as the fundamental social and ecological relation. It is the ongoing, collective work of sustaining life in all its diverse, vulnerable, and interdependent forms. Building a future on the principle of interdependence necessitates a profound and deliberate affective reorientation. It requires the cultivation of new emotional habits and collective sensibilities: replacing the reflexive disgust toward difference with a stance of open curiosity, replacing the aversion to dependency with a practice of solidarity, and replacing the desire for a definitive "cure" with a deep commitment to ongoing, collective care. This is not a sentimental or simplistic project but a deeply political and arduous one. It involves consciously identifying and breaking the entrenched affective circuits that bind disgust to animality and disability. Cultural production, storytelling, and direct, embodied encounters are crucial technologies for this reorientation. Taylor's own artistic practice, which visually explores the entangled lives and symbolic constructions of humans and animals, serves as one powerful example. Practical initiatives such as community-supported agriculture that fosters a relational understanding of food sources, disability-led access audits of public spaces, and mutual aid networks that prefigure a world of collective responsibility are all concrete practices for building new affective economies. They are lived experiments that make the abstract principle of interdependence tangible, practical, and desirable, demonstrating that another world is not only possible but is already being built in the shell of the old.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis advanced in this paper demonstrates that Sunaura Taylor's *Beasts of Burden* offers an indispensable and transformative framework for an affective eco-politics of disability and animality. By deploying the analytical tools of affect theory, it becomes possible to see how the intertwined oppression of disabled humans and non-human animals is perpetuated not merely through overt institutions and discourses, but through a powerful economy of feelings. This economy circulates emotions like disgust and an aversion to dependency, politically constructing certain bodies as "burdens" and thereby legitimizing their marginalization and disposal. This affective economy achieves its most durable form by materializing in the environments we inhabit daily. The spatial exclusion engineered into the inaccessible city and the thanatopolitical violence encoded into the factory farm are not separate phenomena; they are parallel expressions of a singular ableist and anthropocentric worldview, a worldview that is itself a primary driver of the contemporary ecological crisis.

This investigation leads to an unequivocal conclusion: disability studies is an inherently ecological field of inquiry, and conversely, meaningful ecological politics must be fundamentally informed by the insights of disability justice. Both arenas of thought and action are engaged in a critical struggle against the capitalist and productivist ideologies that systematically devalue dependency, vulnerability, and the forms of life that cannot be easily quantified for the market. The path forward, therefore, cannot be one that seeks to perfect the logics of exclusion or to develop more efficient and humane methods of managing "burdens." The only viable path is to "crip" our politics, our ethics, and our ecological imaginations. The vision of a viable future that emerges from this crippled perspective is one rooted unashamedly in a politics of radical interdependence. It is a future that recognizes our shared, embodied precarity not as a weakness to be overcome or hidden, but as the very foundation upon which to build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world. It is a future where the central political questions shift from "How do we eliminate the burden?" or "How do we cure the defect?" to "How do we collectively build a world where no one and nothing is considered a burden?" and "How do we organize our societies and economies to care for each other and for the planetary community we share?" In pursuing these questions at the critical intersection of disability, animality, and ecology, we engage in the most urgent work of our time: the work of imagining and enacting a world worth living in for all its inhabitants, in all their diverse and vulnerable beauty.

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**ECO-DIGITAL PEDAGOGY IN ESL CLASSROOMS: INTEGRATING  
ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES THROUGH DIGITAL HUMANITIES TOOLS**

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**Abstract**

The integration of Digital Humanities (DH) and Environmental Humanities (EH) opens new pedagogical opportunities for advancing the ESL (English as a Second Language) sustainable education paradigm. This paper explores the possible developments in eco-digital pedagogy (the interface of digital pedagogy, ESL pedagogy, and eco pedagogy) within undergraduate ESL classrooms in the context of India's FYUP program. Drawing on Morris and Stommel's *Critical Digital Pedagogy*, Ryan, Hearn, and Arthur's *The Digital Environmental Humanities in the Anthropocene*, and Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory*, the study designs and implement eco-digital pedagogical interventions that integrate environmental narratives and eco-critical texts. Environmental narratives and eco-critical texts were collaboratively annotated, then students created multimodal eco-projects that center on the intersection of language and the environment. This research examines the ways in which these activities promote eco-literacy, critical thinking, and communicative competence by using a mixed-method approach that combines (reflective journals, classroom observation, and thematic analysis). Preliminary findings indicate that DH-assisted environmental learning enhances language acquisition while promoting sustainability-oriented values and digital creativity. This paper argues that eco-digital pedagogy can be a transformative educational model to integrate ESL teaching with global sustainability goals and interdisciplinary education as envisioned in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Considering the ESL classroom as a dynamic site of environmental engagement, this study contributes to the growing conversations within the fields of Digital Humanities and Environmental Humanities.

**Keywords:** Eco-digital pedagogy; ESL; Environmental Humanities; Digital Humanities; Eco-critical Literacy; NEP 2020

**I. Introduction**

The convergence of technology and the humanities has led to the emergence of new pedagogical models that challenge traditional boundaries in education. In recent years, Digital Humanities (DH) and Environmental Humanities (EH) have become central to interdisciplinary teaching and research, offering innovative approaches to learning that connect technological literacy with ecological consciousness. Within this broader context, the domain of English as a Second Language (ESL) education is undergoing a parallel transformation, where digital tools are being used not only to enhance linguistic competence but also to cultivate critical, ethical, and environmental awareness among learners. This pedagogical shift is particularly significant in India's higher education landscape, where the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the integration of digital technology, sustainability, and interdisciplinarity in undergraduate curricula (Government of India).

The implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) under NEP 2020 marks a major reform in India's higher education system, promoting a more flexible, student-centered, and interdisciplinary model of learning. The policy envisions classrooms that encourage experiential learning, critical thinking, and global awareness while integrating technology and ethical responsibility across disciplines. Within this framework, eco-digital pedagogy, the intersection of digital pedagogy, ESL pedagogy, and eco-pedagogy offers a compelling means of

aligning language education with sustainability goals. This pedagogical approach positions the ESL classroom as a dynamic site for developing not only linguistic and digital literacy but also ecological sensitivity and social responsibility.

Digital Humanities, as defined by Morris and Stommel, extends beyond the application of technology to teaching; it emphasizes critical engagement with digital tools and fosters learner autonomy, collaboration, and reflective inquiry (*Critical Digital Pedagogy*). It encourages students and educators alike to question how technology shapes modes of knowledge production and participation. Environmental Humanities, on the other hand, as discussed by Ryan, Hearn, and Arthur, foregrounds ecological awareness, ethical imagination, and cultural narratives of sustainability (*The Digital Environmental Humanities in the Anthropocene*). When combined, these frameworks provide a fertile ground for reimagining ESL pedagogy as an eco-digital practice that engages learners in understanding environmental issues through language and technology.

This study takes place within undergraduate ESL classrooms at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), where Digital Humanities tools such as *Voyant Tools*, *Hypothes.is*, and *Padlet* were used to integrate environmental narratives and ecocritical texts into language instruction. The pedagogical intervention aimed to explore how technology-mediated literary and linguistic activities could promote *eco-literacy*, *critical thinking*, and *communicative competence* among ESL learners. Students were asked to collaboratively annotate ecocritical readings, conduct basic text analyses, and create multimodal eco-projects using digital platforms. These activities positioned students not merely as recipients of environmental content but as active co-creators of meaning, reflecting Kolb's idea that knowledge results from the transformation of experience (*Experiential Learning*).

The significance of such integration lies in addressing a crucial gap in current ESL pedagogy, which often isolates linguistic proficiency from critical and ethical dimensions of learning. While digital tools are increasingly incorporated into language classrooms, their use frequently remains confined to enhancing grammar, vocabulary, or communication skills. Similarly, environmental education, though emphasized in policy, is rarely embedded within the humanities or language curricula at the undergraduate level. As Barbas-Rhoden argues, eco-digital pedagogy enables educators to "shape change" by linking digital innovation with environmental engagement, thereby fostering both critical literacy and civic responsibility. By adopting this framework, ESL instruction can move beyond skill acquisition to cultivate reflective and responsible learners capable of engaging with global ecological challenges (*Global Humanities Journal*).

From a methodological standpoint, the present study employs a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data through reflective journals, classroom observation, and thematic analysis. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how students interact with DH tools in ecologically themed ESL instruction. The reflections recorded by learners serve as valuable indicators of how digital experiences influence their perceptions of the environment, language use, and self-expression. Classroom observations complement these insights by tracing patterns of collaboration, engagement, and creativity that emerge during the activities. The study thereby seeks to evaluate how DH-assisted environmental learning enhances both language proficiency and ecological awareness.

In essence, this research responds to the call of NEP 2020 for pedagogical innovation that unites sustainability, digital literacy, and experiential learning. It demonstrates that the ESL classroom, when reconceptualized through eco-digital pedagogy, can function as a transformative educational space where students learn to read, write, and think critically about their relationship with the environment. The objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to explore how DH tools can integrate EH perspectives into ESL pedagogy, (2) to assess the impact of eco-digital interventions on students' linguistic and ecological competencies, and (3) to propose a pedagogical model that aligns with NEP 2020's interdisciplinary vision. By situating the research within India's evolving higher education landscape, this study contributes to the growing dialogue between Digital

Humanities, Environmental Humanities, and language education, reaffirming the potential of ESL classrooms to advance both linguistic development and sustainable consciousness.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### **A. Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP)**

The theoretical foundation of this study draws significantly from Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP), a field that merges digital learning with critical and reflective educational practices. According to Sean Morris and Jesse Stommel, CDP emphasizes dialogue, agency, and participation rather than technological determinism (*Critical Digital Pedagogy: A Collection*). It challenges the view of technology as a mere tool, instead treating it as a space for democratizing education and encouraging learners to engage actively with knowledge production. Within the ESL context, CDP promotes learner autonomy, collaboration, and self-reflection qualities essential for language and ecological learning alike.

Morris and Stommel argue that digital pedagogy should humanize the learning process and make students critical participants rather than passive consumers. Such an approach aligns closely with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for integrating technology not just for delivery but for "transforming pedagogy and fostering higher-order cognitive skills" (Government of India). In ESL classrooms, CDP enables the use of collaborative annotation tools such as *Hypothes.is* or *Padlet*, where students can engage in shared meaning-making processes. This interaction not only builds linguistic competence but also fosters critical literacy, a foundational element of sustainability education.

Recent research on digital pedagogy underscores this shift from tool-based instruction to reflective engagement. Neil Selwyn notes that the future of digital education must center on ethical and critical uses of technology rather than efficiency alone (*Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates*). This aligns with the present study's aim to employ digital platforms for building reflective ecological awareness through language learning. CDP thus provides a philosophical base for eco-digital pedagogy, emphasizing both technological literacy and humanistic reflection.

### **B. Environmental Humanities (EH)**

The field of Environmental Humanities (EH) explores how humanistic inquiry can respond to ecological crises by fostering cultural, ethical, and affective understandings of the environment. John Ryan, Lara Hearn, and Paul Arthur describe the *Digital Environmental Humanities (DEH)* as a space that "reintegrates environmental consciousness with digital scholarship," urging educators to bridge digital and ecological domains (*The Digital Environmental Humanities in the Anthropocene*). In language education, EH offers a rich framework for developing *eco-literacy*. The capacity to read, interpret, and act on environmental knowledge critically.

Classical ecocritical perspectives by Lawrence Buell emphasize that literary and cultural narratives play a vital role in shaping environmental awareness (*The Future of Environmental Criticism*). Similarly, Ursula Heise argues that ecological understanding is deeply connected to narratives of place, belonging, and globalization (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*). When adapted to ESL pedagogy, these ideas encourage learners to engage with global and local environmental discourses through reading, writing, and discussion.

Laura Barbas-Rhoden highlights the pedagogical potential of merging ecological and digital literacies, describing how digital projects on environmental topics "invite students to explore sustainability through multimodal communication and collaborative inquiry" (*Global Humanities Journal*). Within the eco-digital classroom, such approaches enable learners to use digital tools not only for linguistic practice but also for environmental storytelling and critical interpretation. The Environmental Humanities framework, therefore, enriches ESL pedagogy by linking language learning with ethical and cultural dimensions of sustainability.

### **C. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)**

David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) provides the cognitive and affective grounding for this study's pedagogical design. Kolb defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is



created through the transformation of experience,” emphasizing active engagement, reflection, conceptualization, and application (*Experiential Learning*). In the context of ESL classrooms, experiential learning translates into project-based and reflective practices where students internalize linguistic and conceptual knowledge through active participation.

Eco-digital pedagogy naturally embodies Kolb’s cycle of learning. Activities such as collaborative text annotation, data visualization of environmental themes using *Voyant Tools*, and digital storytelling projects allow learners to experience, reflect, conceptualize, and apply knowledge. Such interventions not only develop communicative competence but also strengthen cognitive empathy and ecological sensitivity. John Dewey’s notion that education should prepare individuals for participatory citizenship resonates here, as students use their linguistic skills to articulate environmental issues, fostering both awareness and responsibility.

Scholars like Moon (2013) and Beard and Wilson (2018) have emphasized that experiential learning becomes most effective when learners engage emotionally and creatively with content. The eco-digital approach combining environmental themes and DH tools creates precisely this engagement. Thus, Kolb’s framework substantiates the methodological choice of integrating reflective journals and multimodal projects to measure cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

#### D. Empirical Studies on Eco-Digital Pedagogy and ESL

Several empirical studies have explored the intersections of digital pedagogy, environmental education, and language learning, providing valuable insights for the present research. Kurniawan, Akhyar, and Muryani (2025) examined pre-service teachers’ competencies in eco-digital pedagogy and found that technology-enhanced environmental activities improved both pedagogical awareness and ecological sensitivity (*Jurnal Pendidikan Profesi*). Similarly, Barbas-Rhoden (2015) reported that integrating digital storytelling and environmental projects led to deeper cultural and linguistic engagement among students.

In the field of ESL, post-2020 research reflects a growing emphasis on AI- and DH-based language learning linked to sustainability themes. Hampel and Stickler (2022) observed that digital collaboration platforms can enhance student agency and intercultural awareness in online ESL settings (*Language Learning & Technology*). Chun (2021) further argued that digital multimodality allows ESL learners to construct ecological narratives that connect personal experience with global issues (*Computer Assisted Language Learning*).

Within India, studies remain limited but promising. Sharma (2023) explored the use of digital annotation tools in Indian ESL classrooms and found that students developed stronger analytical reading skills and environmental empathy through collaborative interpretation of eco-literary texts (*Asian EFL Journal*). These findings underscore the potential of eco-digital pedagogy to address both linguistic and sustainability outcomes, an area this study advances through its classroom-based experimentation at AMU.

#### E. Research Gap and Theoretical Alignment

Despite growing research on digital pedagogy and environmental education, the convergence of Digital Humanities, Environmental Humanities, and ESL pedagogy remains relatively unexplored in the Indian higher education context. Most existing studies focus either on digital skill enhancement or environmental awareness, seldom integrating the two within a linguistic framework. Moreover, the application of DH tools such as text analysis, annotation, and digital project creation to promote eco-literacy in ESL classrooms is largely absent in published research from South Asia.

The present study fills this gap by conceptualizing and implementing an eco-digital pedagogical model that bridges technological engagement and environmental ethics through language learning. Drawing from CDP, EH, and ELT, the study aligns with NEP 2020’s vision of interdisciplinary, reflective, and digitally supported education. It contributes to current scholarship by demonstrating how experiential, digitally mediated, and ecologically oriented learning can coalesce within ESL pedagogy. The review thus establishes a firm theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing how eco-digital interventions in ESL classrooms enhance linguistic competence, ecological

awareness, and critical reflection, the three essential capacities for sustainable education in the 21st century.

### III. Theoretical Framework

*This study draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives, Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP), Environmental Humanities (EH), and Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) to develop an Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model for ESL classrooms. Together, these frameworks illuminate how digital tools, environmental consciousness, and experiential learning can converge to enhance language education in alignment with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.*

#### 1. Integrating the Three Frameworks

Critical Digital Pedagogy, as articulated by Morris and Stommel, foregrounds learner agency, collaboration, and critical reflection through technology (*Critical Digital Pedagogy: A Collection*). It moves beyond the instrumental use of digital tools to emphasize ethical, participatory, and reflective learning. In the ESL classroom, this enables students to interrogate both language and content through digital engagement such as collaborative annotation using *Hypothes.is* or textual visualization through *Voyant Tools*.

Environmental Humanities, as Ryan, Hearn, and Arthur observe, reconnects humanistic inquiry with ecological awareness by exploring how language, culture, and technology mediate environmental understanding (*The Digital Environmental Humanities in the Anthropocene*). In ESL pedagogy, this encourages reading and composing texts that reflect environmental themes, cultivating *eco-literacy* and empathy toward the natural world.

Finally, Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb) provides the cognitive structure for this integration. Learning occurs through a cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation (*Experiential Learning*). In the eco-digital classroom, this translates into activities like collaborative annotation (*experience*), reflective journaling (*observation*), conceptual discussion of eco-themes (*conceptualization*), and multimodal project creation (*application*).

#### 2. The Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model

The Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model integrates these three frameworks to form a unified structure for sustainable ESL pedagogy. CDP contributes the *critical-technological* dimension, EH provides the *ethical-environmental* dimension, and ELT ensures the *experiential-methodological* dimension. Their intersection defines a learning space where students engage with language through digital and ecological inquiry.

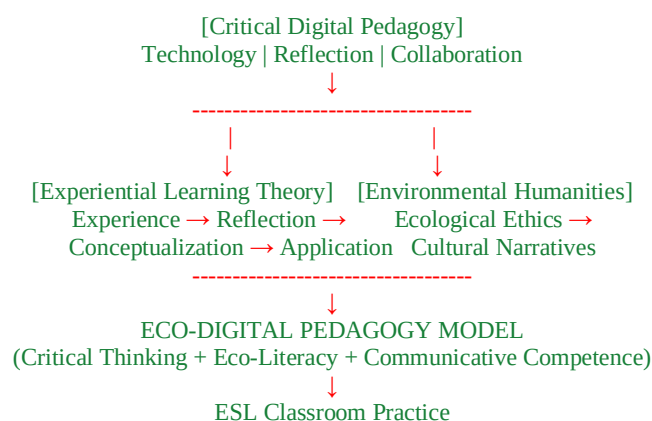


**Figure 1. The Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model (Conceptual Diagram)**

This conceptual model positions the ESL classroom as a transformative space where digital interaction and environmental awareness reinforce each other through experience-based learning.

### 3. Application of the Model in the AMU Context

The *Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model* informs both the design and the practice of this study. Within the FYUP ESL classrooms at Aligarh Muslim University, the model translates theoretical insights into pedagogical action.

- Reflective journals align with Kolb's *Experiential Learning Theory* by documenting learners' stages of reflection and conceptualization.
- Classroom observation captures the participatory and dialogic engagement central to *Critical Digital Pedagogy*.
- Thematic analysis applies the interpretive stance of the *Environmental Humanities*, identifying how students articulate ecological ideas through language.

This model thus integrates technology, ecological awareness, and experiential inquiry into a cohesive classroom practice. It also resonates with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes digital literacy, interdisciplinary learning, and experiential education as essential to sustainable higher education reform in India (Government of India).

By embedding DH tools within environmental content, the model transforms the ESL classroom into a reflective learning space where students critically engage with both linguistic and ecological systems. It operationalizes theory through context bridging *critical reflection*, *ecological ethics*, and *experiential participation* in a way that aligns research, pedagogy, and policy.

## IV. Methodology

### 1. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design that combines qualitative and interpretive approaches with limited quantitative support. The rationale for using this design lies in the study's aim to explore both the *process* and *impact* of eco-digital pedagogy in ESL classrooms at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). The design allows for triangulation between data sources, reflective journals, classroom observation, and thematic analysis ensuring credibility and depth of interpretation.

The mixed-method approach aligns with David Kolb's (*Experiential Learning*) cyclical model of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Each stage of this learning cycle is mirrored in the pedagogical design: students engaged with environmental texts through digital tools (*experience*), recorded reflections on their learning (*observation*), discussed linguistic and ecological insights (*conceptualization*), and created multimodal eco-projects (*application*). This structure also reflects the critical and participatory ethos of Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) (Morris and Stommel) and the ethical dimensions of Environmental Humanities (EH) (Ryan, Hearn, and Arthur).

### 2. Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, as part of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP) introduced under India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The classroom context represents a hybrid model of learning, combining traditional lectures with digital engagement.

Participants included 42 undergraduate ESL students enrolled in the second semester of the FYUP program. The group represented diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Hindi, Urdu, and regional Indian languages. All participants possessed basic digital literacy, having prior exposure to online platforms during the pandemic phase of instruction. Participation in the study was voluntary, and ethical guidelines concerning consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were observed throughout.

The study spanned four weeks during the 2025–2026 academic session. During this period, students engaged in eco-digital activities that integrated environmental texts and digital humanities

tools. The teacher-researcher (the author) facilitated all sessions and maintained a reflective field journal to document pedagogical observations and student engagement.

### 3. Digital Humanities Tools and Pedagogical Materials

The integration of Digital Humanities (DH) tools formed the core of the eco-digital intervention. Three digital platforms were selected based on accessibility, pedagogical relevance, and compatibility with collaborative ESL learning:

1. Hypothes.is – an online annotation tool used for collaborative reading of ecocritical and environmental texts. Students annotated excerpts from authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Rachel Carson, and Vandana Shiva, linking language with environmental ideas.
2. Voyant Tools – a text-mining and visualization platform that enabled students to identify recurrent lexical patterns related to nature, sustainability, and environmental discourse. The visualizations (word clouds, keyword frequency charts) served as prompts for in-class discussions.
3. Padlet – a multimodal platform used for compiling and presenting students' eco-projects, which included short essays, posters, podcasts, and infographics exploring local environmental issues through the lens of language.

The reading corpus included ecocritical essays, literary excerpts, and journalistic texts addressing environmental degradation, sustainability, and climate change. The digital tasks were designed to encourage learners to read critically, reflect on environmental content, and express their interpretations through creative digital production.

### 4. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through three interlinked instruments:

#### a. Reflective Journals

Each participant maintained a digital reflective journal throughout the study. Journals were submitted weekly and guided by prompts such as “How did digital tools change your perception of environmental issues?” and “What connections did you find between language and ecology?” These reflections provided qualitative insights into learners' cognitive and affective engagement.

#### b. Classroom Observation

The researcher conducted non-participant classroom observations during each session, recording field notes on student interactions, collaboration patterns, and responses to digital tasks. Observations were structured around three categories: *engagement*, *collaboration*, and *critical reflection*, which emerged from the theoretical framework.

#### c. Thematic Analysis

The collected journals and observation notes were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model. The process involved familiarization with data, coding, identifying patterns, generating themes, reviewing, and defining them. The final thematic categories included *eco-literacy development*, *critical digital engagement*, and *creative linguistic expression*.

While the primary emphasis remained qualitative, limited quantitative data such as participation frequency and annotation counts were used to support descriptive interpretation.

| Instrument | Purpose | Data Type | Analytical Focus | Expected Outcome |
|------------|---------|-----------|------------------|------------------|
|            |         |           |                  |                  |

|                            |                                                                                           |                           |                                                                |                                                            |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reflective Journals        | To document learners' perceptions and evolving understanding of eco-digital learning      | Qualitative               | Thematic interpretation of reflections.                        | Insights into cognitive and affective engagement.          |
| Classroom Observation      | To record participation, collaboration, and critical interaction patterns during sessions | Qualitative               | Field notes analyzed for patterns of engagement and reflection | Observation-based evidence of learner behavior             |
| Hypothesis Annotation Data | To trace students' collaborative engagement and lexical focus in digital texts            | Quantitative (supportive) | Frequency counts and annotation context analysis.              | Indicators of digital participation and lexical awareness. |
| Padlet Eco-Projects        | To evaluate students' multimodal creative expression of ecological ideas.                 | Qualitative               | Analysis of linguistic and visual content in eco-projects.     | Evidence of creative application and eco-literacy.         |

|                                          |                                                                                     |                             |                                                |                                                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) | To synthesize data from journals and observations into broader interpretive themes. | Qualitative (meta-analytic) | Six-step thematic coding and theme validation. | Identification of core study themes: eco-literacy, critical digital engagement, and creative linguistic expression |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Table 1. Summary of Data Sources and Instruments. This table provides an overview of all data sources, their purposes, analytical focus, and expected outcomes used in the eco-digital ESL study at AMU.**

#### 5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis proceeded in two phases:

##### Phase 1: *Qualitative Thematic Analysis*

Reflective journals and observation data were coded manually and cross-validated. Recurring ideas about environmental awareness, collaboration, and language learning were grouped under broader themes. For example, annotations in *Hypothes.is* revealed an increasing use of ecological vocabulary, while reflective journals highlighted growing awareness of human-nature interdependence.

##### Phase 2: *Integrative Interpretation*

Informed by the theoretical framework, the themes were interpreted through the lenses of CDP, EH, and ELT. For instance:

- CDP informed the analysis of how students used technology critically.
- EH shaped interpretation of how language mediated ecological understanding.
- ELT guided evaluation of learning as an experiential cycle.

This triangulation strengthened validity by linking learner experience to theoretical constructs.

#### 6. Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical standards outlined by the University Research Ethics Committee. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured that their participation was voluntary and that their identities would remain anonymous. Digital data (annotations, Padlet posts, and journals) were stored securely and used solely for academic analysis. No personal or identifying information was disclosed in reporting findings.

#### 7. Rationale for Methodological Choice

The chosen methodology corresponds directly to the *Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model* outlined in the previous section. The mixed-method design captures both the experiential and reflective dimensions of learning. Reflective journals operationalize Kolb's "reflective observation," classroom observation documents CDP's collaborative practice, and thematic analysis provides empirical grounding for EH's ethical and interpretive goals.

Moreover, this design complements the NEP 2020 emphasis on experiential and technology-enabled learning in higher education (Government of India). By situating the research in AMU's FYUP classrooms, the study provides a contextualized example of how national educational reforms can foster interdisciplinary innovation in language pedagogy.

### V. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of reflective journals and classroom observations indicates that the eco-digital pedagogy implemented in the FYUP ESL classrooms at Aligarh Muslim University led to a tangible transformation in students' understanding of language, environment, and learning. Their



responses reveal an emerging consciousness of how linguistic and ecological meanings intersect, how digital tools mediate reflection, and how creativity can embody awareness.

Students' reflective journals suggest a clear evolution of thought over the course of the intervention. Early entries describe environmental themes as external or purely informational; later reflections show students interpreting language itself as an ecological act. One student observed that words such as *growth*, *waste*, or *green* "mean differently when we read them through ecology," revealing a new capacity for critical reading. This shift illustrates what Heise calls developing a "sense of place and sense of planet," in which learners move between the local and the global through language (*Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*). Class observations reinforced this change: during discussions of ecocritical texts, students began to connect global environmental discourse with their immediate surroundings speaking of polluted rivers, diminishing trees, and local sustainability issues. Such dialogues reflect the formation of eco-literacy, a capacity that merges linguistic understanding with ethical awareness.

Equally significant was the way students engaged with digital tools. Initially, many treated platforms such as *Hypothes.is* and *Voyant Tools* as technical requirements. Gradually, these tools became spaces of dialogue and discovery. Annotations on Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* led to interpretive exchanges where students debated tone, emotion, and responsibility. As one noted, "The digital reading made me feel part of the text rather than outside it." This sense of agency aligns with Morris and Stommel's vision of *Critical Digital Pedagogy*, which frames technology as a means of conversation and critique (*Critical Digital Pedagogy: A Collection*). Observation notes confirmed that students began to view digital learning as a shared interpretive act rather than a solitary task. In that sense, technology supported the dialogic and participatory ethos envisioned by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which states digital literacy as both a skill and a mindset (Government of India).

The culmination of this reflective and collaborative process appeared in the students' final eco-digital projects created on *Padlet*. These multimodal works ranging from digital poems and short essays to podcasts and bilingual eco-posters revealed how learners internalized both environmental awareness and linguistic creativity. One group's digital collage, titled "*Breathing Earth*," combined English and Urdu verses with photographs of the campus landscape, demonstrating how bilingual expression and local imagery shaped ecological meaning. Such projects embody Kolb's notion of active experimentation, where reflection transforms into creative application (*Experiential Learning*). The linguistic choices students made metaphors, idioms, or translanguaging reflected not only communicative competence but also a deepened ethical imagination.

Across reflections, annotations, and creative works, a consistent pattern emerged: students began to see language as both *representation and action*. They recognized that how we speak about the environment influences how we relate to it. Their engagement with digital platforms also revealed a growing sense of responsibility toward the act of communication itself, a key goal of eco-digital pedagogy. This synthesis of awareness, critical reflection, and creativity illustrates how Digital Humanities tools can serve as humanistic mediators, transforming linguistic learning into an experiential and ethical process.

In sum, the AMU classroom became a space where environmental and linguistic inquiry merged through digital engagement. Students moved from reading texts to reading the world; from using digital tools to reflecting on them; and from understanding ecology to articulating it creatively. The findings affirm that integrating Critical Digital Pedagogy, Environmental Humanities, and Experiential Learning enables ESL instruction to meet the broader aims of NEP 2020 fostering sustainability, interdisciplinarity, and reflective citizenship. The eco-digital classroom thus stands not merely as a site of instruction but as a model of transformative education in a technologically and ecologically conscious era.

## **VI. Conclusion and Implications**

This study examined how the intersection of Digital Humanities (DH) and Environmental Humanities (EH) can inform a sustainable approach to ESL pedagogy within India's Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUP). Implemented at Aligarh Muslim University, the intervention demonstrated that when digital tools are framed critically and experientially, they can nurture both linguistic proficiency and ecological awareness.

Students' reflections and classroom interactions revealed that they began to read and write with an ecological consciousness, perceiving language as a medium of environmental thought. Through collaborative digital annotation and multimodal composition, learners linked linguistic meaning with environmental ethics, embodying what Heise describes as a "sense of place and sense of planet." This shift illustrates that language learning can cultivate moral and imaginative engagement with the world, not merely communicative skill.

The Eco-Digital Pedagogical Model emerging from this study positions ESL learning as a dialogic, experiential, and ethically aware process. By integrating Critical Digital Pedagogy, Environmental Humanities, and Experiential Learning, the model enables students to explore how technology mediates thought, how experience becomes reflection, and how reflection leads to creative expression. The findings affirm the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 vision of experiential, interdisciplinary, and values-based education (Government of India).

For educators and institutions, the study offers a replicable design: digital platforms can support humanistic inquiry when used purposefully, and reflective journals can connect cognitive learning with ecological empathy. These practices suggest a viable pathway for aligning sustainability with digital literacy in higher education.

While limited to one institution and cohort, the findings open directions for future research. Comparative or longitudinal studies could trace how eco-digital interventions influence linguistic performance or attitudinal change across contexts. Further exploration of gender, language background, and technological access could deepen understanding of equity in eco-digital learning environments.

In essence, the AMU classroom showed that when students use digital tools to read critically, write reflectively, and create collaboratively, they do more than learn a language—they learn to engage ethically with the planet. Such an integration of technology, ecology, and communication suggests that the most sustainable learning is that which transforms awareness into responsibility.

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**SUBMERGED PASTS, CONTESTED FUTURES: MEMORY, ERASURE, AND THE  
AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT IN UTTARAKHAND**

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**Abstract**

The contemporary Bhu-Kanun movement in Uttarakhand emerges not only as a demand for stricter land laws but as a struggle grounded in ecological memory and intergenerational trauma. As this paper argues, the politics of land cannot be separated from the enduring mnemonic rupture of Tehri's submergence, which continues to shape how communities interpret development, displacement, and state power. Through a postcolonial ecocritical lens (DeLoughrey; Huggan & Tiffin) and ecological memory theory (van Dooren; Neimanis), the study examines how landscapes, water bodies, and disappearing ecologies become repositories of collective memory. These memories resurface whenever land threatens to shift into the hands of outsiders or when developmental projects echo historical patterns of dispossession. Methodologically, the paper departs from conventional policy or ethnographic analyses and instead treats contemporary Pahadi songs as cultural archives. Drawing on a corpus of environmental and protest-oriented music produced between 2018 and 2024, the study uses close reading and contextual hermeneutics to show how lyrics preserve ancestral belonging, articulate ecological grief, and mobilise political resistance. Songs become mnemonic infrastructures: they transform submerged pasts into public memory, narrate slow violence, and translate collective anxieties into calls for unity. Through motifs of soil, water, meadows, and mountains, these musical texts voice the experiential dimensions of land loss that formal archives often fail to record. By foregrounding how Pahadi songs mediate memory, affect, and ecological knowledge, the paper reframes Bhu-Kanun as both a legal and cultural movement. It demonstrates that current land debates in Uttarakhand are animated less by abstract policy concerns and more by the lived memory of Tehri and the fear of its repetition through contemporary land marketisation. Ultimately, the study shows that Bhu-Kanun is a struggle over the right to remember, to belong, and to sustain ecological futures rooted in community sovereignty. The movement exemplifies how environmental memory operates as a potent political force in the postcolonial Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** Ecological Memory, Pahadi Songs, Displacement, Bhu-Kanun, Tehri, Land Justice, Uttarakhand

**Introduction**

The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand presents a striking paradox: publicly lauded as Devbhoomi, (Devi 2023) a sacred geography framed in devotional rhetoric, it has in recent decades been subject to some of the most intense processes of infrastructural transformation and land commodification in modern India. (Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation 2025) Hydropower projects, road blasting, tourism-driven real-estate expansion, and the conversion of agricultural land into hospitality and second-home markets have remade vast swathes of ecologies and livelihoods. (Tripathi 2025) These transformations are not merely economic or technical; they are mnemonic: they disturb, erase, and resurface memories embedded in place. The politics of land in Uttarakhand today (evinced most clearly in the Bhu-Kanun movement) cannot be understood

without attending to how histories of displacement (most notably the Tehri submergence) live on in bodies, songs, seasonal waterlines, and community repertoires.

This paper argues that the Bhu-Kanun movement is as much a movement for mnemonic sovereignty as it is a movement for legal protection. Where the state speaks the language of modernisation (damming rivers, carving roads, enabling tourism) local communities often respond through alternative archives: oral histories, protest songs, and digital memory practices. These vernacular forms preserve an ecological memory that both documents loss and constitutes a politics of refusal. By placing song-based testimonies at the center of the analysis, and by reading them through a combined lens of postcolonial ecocriticism (routes and roots), ecological memory theory (van Dooren, Neimanis), and memory studies (Rothberg, Hirsch), this paper shows how musical forms articulate submerged pasts and contest future erasures. In doing so, it reframes Uttarakhand's land struggle not simply as a contest over property law but as a struggle over the cultural right to remember, to belong, and to shape ecological futures.

To understand why land politics in Uttarakhand repeatedly converge on the question of memory, one must situate Devbhoomi not simply as a spiritual landscape but as a geography whose sacredness is historically tied to forms of ecological restraint and ritual relationship to land. For centuries, these mountains have been represented as terrains where nature and culture interweave: rivers such as the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda are deities; peaks like Nanda Devi, Trishul, and Chaukhamba anchor cosmologies; forests are sites of both livelihood and ritual practice. Land is not an inert commodity but a living assemblage of memory, kinship, ecology, and identity.

Modern development unsettles this ontology. When roads cut through slopes, forests are cleared for hotels, and agricultural terraces are sold to outsiders, it is not only land that is transformed: the very grammar of belonging is disrupted. Migration (particularly from the Garhwal and Kumaon hills) is no longer understood merely as economic drift but as part of a long arc of dispossession. Villages hollow out, with "ghost villages" becoming a common descriptor for abandoned hamlets. (Verma and Sharma 2025) What disappears is not only population but the memory-bearing practices that have sustained these landscapes across generations: seasonal rituals, agricultural rhythms, pastoral movements, and oral histories embedded in everyday life.

Thus, the debate over land laws cannot be reduced to legal restrictions on outsiders. It is entangled with the loss of ecological memory, the weakening of intergenerational continuity, and the erosion of sensory knowledge tied to water, soil, and topography. It is precisely this sense of dissolution (a feeling that development is subtracting not only land but the capacity to live meaningfully in relation to it) that animates the urgency behind Bhu-Kanun.

#### **I. The Mnemonic Stakes of Uttarakhand's Development Trajectory**

Every major development project in Uttarakhand arrives with the promise of progress, safety, connectivity, and economic prosperity. Yet, these promises are refracted through the historical memory of Tehri—a memory that refuses erasure and resurfaces cyclically whenever questions of land, rivers, and displacement return to public debate. Uttarakhand's developmental history is therefore not linear but recursive. Events echo one another, forming a mnemonic pattern in which communities read the present through the template of past dispossessions.

For instance, hydropower blasting today recalls the tremors felt during the years of Tehri construction. New hydroelectric dams evoke anxieties of submergence, even if no submergence is planned. Expanding tourism brings wealth but also invokes fears of cultural dilution and land alienation. Infrastructure such as the Char Dham road project symbolises both access and ecological fragility, especially after the repeated disasters in Uttarakhand—from the 2013 Kedarnath floods to recurring landslides in Chamoli, Joshimath, and Rudrapur. (Bhatt 2020) As a result, development is never experienced solely in material terms; it is experienced through the affective residue of earlier traumas.

This historical sensibility aligns with Rob Nixon's theorisation of "slow violence": a form of harm that is incremental, accretive, and often invisible until its effects become structurally entrenched. (Nixon 2) In Uttarakhand, slow violence is not merely ecological degradation but the steady

erosion of memory-rich places. Fields that once carried agricultural memories are converted to resorts; forests that held ancestral foraging knowledge are cleared; seasonal streams dry due to over-extraction or tunnelling. This attrition is experienced as emotional and ecological loss—and becomes politically mobilised through movements like Bhu-Kanun.

## **II. Collective Fear and Collective Hope**

While Bhu-Kanun appears at first to be a land law movement, its emotional substrate is fundamentally mnemonic. The fear of being uprooted, of seeing one's village dissolve into commercial real estate, or of losing access to agricultural land resonates with the memory of Tehri's irreversible submergence. Yet, Bhu-Kanun is not only resistance born of fear. It is also a form of collective hope—a hope anchored in the belief that the future can be shaped differently if communities assert their rights to land and memory.

This dual emotional register (fear of repetition and hope for reclamation) explains why songs, rather than policy briefs, have become central to the movement. Songs allow communities to articulate complex emotional experiences that legal language cannot contain. (Soedjarwo 2021) They convert pain into shared narrative, nostalgia into mobilising force, and ecological knowledge into a form of public memory. This is especially relevant in a Himalayan context, where oral culture remains deeply valued and where songs function historically as carriers of genealogical, ecological, and spiritual memory. (Sunil 2023)

In other words, Bhu-Kanun is powered by memory not in a metaphorical sense but as an active political resource. Songs circulating on YouTube, in village gatherings, and at protest sites perform mnemonic work: they recast Tehri as a cautionary tale and the present land crisis as a pivotal political moment.

The phrase “submerged pasts” captures more than the physical drowning of Tehri. It captures the broader process through which histories, identities, and ecological relations can be submerged by development, bureaucracy, or market forces. Submergence in Uttarakhand operates on multiple planes:

Material submergence — rivers and towns physically submerged

Cultural submergence — erasure of traditional practices

Mnemonic submergence — forgetting ecological histories

Legal submergence — laws that make communities invisible

Economic submergence — land becoming inaccessible due to market speculation

Correspondingly, “contested futures” refer to the struggle against these submerged conditions: a battle to ensure that the future does not repeat the violence embedded in the past. The Bhu-Kanun movement thus operates at the intersection of memory and futurity. It uses the affective force of submerged pasts to claim alternative ecological futures where communities retain both land and the meanings embedded in it. The Bhu-Kanun movement does not arise in isolation but emerges from a longer Himalayan history in which development has often entailed displacement. Tehri remains the region's most iconic and devastating example of this pattern. Its submergence functions not only as an infrastructural event but as a fracture that continues to shape how communities perceive state power, development, and land politics. By positioning Tehri as a foundational mnemonic event, the Bhu-Kanun movement inherits and mobilises a collective memory of loss, betrayal, and ecological rupture.

Tehri matters experientially because it taught mountain communities a fundamental lesson: that development, when implemented without community participation, not only remakes landscapes but destabilises entire worlds. The pain of Tehri is therefore not a finished chapter; it recurs whenever land policies shift, whenever the possibility of displacement reappears, whenever new real-estate patterns threaten existing socio-ecological relations. This is why Tehri continually resurfaces as a narrative, a metaphor, and a political framework for mobilising against contemporary land commodification. Unlike many development projects in India that are absorbed into the fold of national progress, Tehri remains too visible to recede into abstraction. The reservoir itself acts as a mnemonic surface: each time water levels drop to reveal ruins of the old



town (temple spires, fragments of stairways, half-drowned structures) it triggers the episodic resurfacing of submerged memory. Accounts from the period underscore how displacement fractured not only livelihoods but cosmologies. As one report documented, residents asked, “Where are our gods?” as the Sangam, ancient temples, and even the confluence that formed the Ganga were doomed to disappear beneath the reservoir. For many like Kusum Buniyal, who mourned the loss of her “gods, Sangam, and Ganga,” Tehri became an irreplaceable world rather than a relocatable town. (Mehta 2001)

Tehri’s afterlife, then, is not just emotional or cultural—it is political. The Bhu-Kanun movement reads contemporary land laws through Tehri’s template, interpreting policy shifts not as neutral administrative reforms but as signs of potential displacement. The link is conceptual but also affective: the memory of submergence fuels resistance to land marketisation. Environmental historians underscore that Tehri’s submergence functioned as the defining trauma of Uttarakhand’s pre-statehood years. Amita Baviskar’s insight that Tehri became a metaphor for both the violence of development and the fragility of mountain ecologies (Baviskar 88) continues to hold explanatory power. While the state framed Tehri as a national achievement (India’s highest dam, a feat of engineering) the people who were displaced internalised it differently: as a rupture that destroyed ancestral relationships to valleys, rivers, and soils.

The slow and protracted nature of Tehri’s construction amplifies this saturation. Unlike a sudden disaster, Tehri unfolded over decades: surveys, clearances, legal battles, partial evacuations, delayed compensations, and staged submergence. Rob Nixon’s “slow violence” (Nixon 2) helps articulate why this became so deeply embedded in collective consciousness: it was a violence without spectacle, unfolding relationally and incrementally. It was a violence that lingered in the environment, in the body, and in bureaucratic encounters.

For families displaced by Tehri, relocation meant more than the loss of shelter. It entailed the severance of ecological knowledge shaped over centuries, including understandings of soil fertility, monsoon timing, river behaviors, terraced fields, and ritual landscapes (Routley 2013). This intimate knowledge, deeply embedded in place and community, cannot be compensated through monetary means alone (Mehta 263). Lyla Mehta’s research on development-induced displacement in India highlights how such processes exacerbate marginalization, erode social relations and livelihoods, and trigger profound grief and disorientation among resettled communities, effects acutely visible in Tehri’s residents (Mehta 2009)

It is precisely this erosion of ecological memory (rather than simply the loss of land) that makes Tehri a mnemonic event. Communities learned that development could produce erasure at scales far beyond physical infrastructure, affecting every layer of social life. The Bhu-Kanun movement recognises Tehri as a historical pattern rather than a singular exception. The apprehension that what happened once can happen again shapes its urgency. In this context, the fear is not of literal submergence but of dispossession through legal and economic mechanisms. Malvika Ranganathan’s analysis of how infrastructural displacement reshapes citizenship through ongoing precarity illuminates Bhu-Kanun discourse, where people approach policy through a lens of potential harm (Ranganathan 2021). When ceilings on landholdings were removed in 2018 and Section 143A facilitated agricultural land conversion, these were interpreted not as administrative modernization but as renewed pathways to dispossession. When ceilings on landholdings were removed in 2018, and when Section 143A facilitated easier conversion of agricultural land, these changes were not read as administrative modernisation but as renewed pathways to dispossession. (Kotiyal 2021) The presence of tourism capital (resorts, homestays, land purchased for speculative value) reshapes social composition. Villagers often witness their land becoming unaffordable or being bought by wealthier outsiders, generating a demographic shift. These changes echo the structural violence embedded in Tehri, where development served broader interests at the expense of local lifeworlds. The continuity of this pattern reinforces Bhu-Kanun’s central argument: that without protective mechanisms, land in Uttarakhand will cease to belong to the people who have historically sustained it.

Ann Rigney's analysis of how historical memory functions as a dynamic cultural resource elucidates why Tehri's unresolved grief becomes central in contemporary land struggles (Rigney 2011). Movements anchored in belonging often draw on past trauma as moral authority. Bhu-Kanun borrows its persuasive force from Tehri's unresolved grief. Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory" (3) also helps interpret the rhetorical strategy of Bhu-Kanun. Instead of remaining a fixed past, Tehri circulates across time, generating meaning in new contexts. The memory of submergence is not a closed narrative; it is an interpretive framework for recognising patterns of extraction. Thus, Tehri aids communities in diagnosing the present and imagining the future.

The fear that motivates Bhu-Kanun is entwined with Arun Agrawal's idea of environmental subjectivity. (Agrawal 2005) People become environmental subjects through interactions with environmental harms, learning to identify threats and mobilise against them. The memory of Tehri teaches vigilance: communities become attuned to signs of erasure, whether through land deals, deforestation, or policy modification. This cultivated sensitivity drives the movement's insistence on local participation in land-use decisions. Water symbolises both loss and persistence in Uttarakhand. Astrida Neimanis's analysis of water as a dynamic archive (one that remembers through circulation while dissolving the past) clarifies why the Tehri reservoir remains an active mnemonic force (Neimanis 2017). As water levels fluctuate, revealing traces of the submerged town, the reservoir embodies this watery temporality. These visual returns remind communities of what was lost: not only buildings, but memories, kinship networks, and ecological relations

The affective shock of encountering submerged geographies reappearing through fluctuating water levels evokes material flashbacks, where the past physically resurfaces. This cyclical visibility instils political consciousness: Tehri's unfinished history demands accountability, transforming the reservoir into a site of ongoing activism and remembrance. The Bhu-Kanun movement transforms hydrological memory into legal memory. Protesters draw direct correlations between the memory held in the reservoir and the need for protective land laws. They argue that the reservoir is not simply a body of water but a jurisprudential lesson. It teaches that development without accountability leads to irreversible dispossession. The reservoir becomes a silent teacher, urging lawmakers to avoid repeating past harms. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha argue that ecological conflicts (like Tehri) establish temporal templates where past harms recur through contemporary vulnerabilities (Gadgil and Guha 1995). The submergence did not end with the drowning of old Tehri; instead, it drives Bhu-Kanun by framing the future as the site where historical violence either repeats or faces interruption.

Tehri signifies what can be lost, while Bhu-Kanun signifies the effort to prevent loss from happening again. Marianne Hirsch's core concept of postmemory describes the way later generations relate to traumatic experiences of those before them—not through direct recollection but through deeply mediated affective transmission (Hirsch 5). This relationship is marked by imaginative investment and identification rather than firsthand memory. Hirsch frames postmemory as a structure of transmission and a means of thinking that passes trauma from one generation to the next, involving personal, familial, and cultural acts of mediation and creation.

The Bhu-Kanun movement in Uttarakhand can be seen as an embodiment of this postmemory in practice. Though many younger activists may not have directly experienced the displacement caused by the Tehri Dam, they inherit its history and affective legacy. This inherited memory fuels their political mobilization around land rights, cultural preservation, and environmental justice. Bhu-Kanun is a contemporary political expression shaped by the transmission of trauma and resistance, linking past displacements to present struggles against land dispossession and cultural erosion

### **Historical Context**

The Tehri Dam remains the most emblematic rupture, but Uttarakhand's development conflicts span decades and follow recognizable patterns: state-led extraction, inadequate community

consultation, ecological degradation, and displacement. The project's history reveals a pattern of decisions made through technocratic logic rather than ecological sensitivity. Built in the aftermath of India's post-independence developmental optimism, the dam embodied a belief in modern engineering as the solution to energy scarcity. But this belief was rooted in a top-down vision that treated Himalayan ecologies as extractable resources rather than relational landscapes. The present political moment repeats this logic through new forms: road widening, mass tourism infrastructure, and real-estate speculation. After Uttarakhand statehood in 2000, policies oscillated between protecting local land ownership and promoting private investment. Initial restrictions limited outsider purchases to safeguard hill communities, but amendments created municipal loopholes eroding these protections (Indian Express 2024). The 2018 Uttarakhand Amendment Act under CM Trivendra Singh Rawat removed the 12-acre hill-area ceiling on agricultural land, allowing unlimited purchases with district magistrate approval to boost economic growth (The Print 2022). Further dilutions in 2022 sparked widespread protests, catalysing the Bhu-Kanun movement demanding stricter land laws (Mongabay 2024) these transformations extend beyond land laws. They reshape demographic patterns, restructure ecological relations, and alter cultural landscapes. Villages near major roads witness rapid construction, while remote villages depopulate. Agricultural land converts to commercial use, and forests are cleared for tourism. These shifts destabilise traditional livelihoods, intensify migration, and weaken community networks. In this context, the Bhu-Kanun movement crystallises as both a legal and cultural response. It demands not only stricter land ceilings and regulatory oversight but also an epistemic shift: development must honour ecological memory and community rights.

### **Methodology**

The core methodological assertion of this study is that songs function as archives—not metaphorically but materially. In regions like Uttarakhand, where oral traditions have historically preserved genealogies, ecological knowledge, and communal memory, songs become repositories of experience. Scholars such as Veena Das, James Scott, and A. Arjun Appadurai note that oral forms often store histories excluded from official archives. Building on this insight, this study reads Pahadi lyrics as textual traces through which communities narrate ecological loss, displacement, and resistance. The primary corpus for this study comprises contemporary Pahadi songs released predominantly between 2018 and 2024—precisely the political period during which the Bhu-Kanun debate intensified. These include:

- Ajay Kaptaan's *Uttarakhand Bhu Kanoon* (2024)
- Vinod Bijalwan's *Bhu Kanoon ki Ladai* (2022)
- Fidato's *Mero Pahad* (2024)
- Pandavaas Studio's *Bhu Bugyal* (2022)
- Narendra Singh Negi's classic *Tehri Duban Lagyu Ch* (2017)

The corpus is curated for thematic cohesiveness rather than musical popularity. All selected songs meet at least one of the following criteria:

1. Explicit reference to land, soil, water, or inheritance
2. Reflection on displacement, ecological degradation, or cultural erosion
3. Narrativisation of Tehri or contemporary land anxiety

By grounding interpretation in a diverse yet thematically unified corpus, this methodology ensures that the analysis represents not individual sentiment but a regional mnemonic discourse. The primary method is close reading—a detailed interpretation of lyrics that attends to metaphor, imagery, repetition, and emotional cadence. However, this is not literary close reading in isolation; it is anchored in ecological memory hermeneutics, drawing from theorists such as Thom van Dooren, Astrida Neimanis, and Ann Rigney. The aim is to illuminate how lyrics transform ecological harm into shared memory. Motifs such as *mitti* (soil), *paani* (water), *bugyal* (meadows), and *pahad* (mountains) function as more than scenic elements—they represent identity, kinship, intergenerational continuity, and threatened futures.

Lyrics often juxtapose past abundance with present erosion. These contrasts reveal how communities conceptualise ecological loss as a form of temporal rupture. Repeated phrases (such as warnings, laments, or calls to unity) create memory loops that reinforce collective anxiety and mobilisation. Songs do not merely describe loss; they feel loss. Emotions such as grief, betrayal, longing, and resolve are treated as epistemic formations—forms of knowing that emerge through affect. This aligns with Sara Ahmed’s and Kathleen Stewart’s work on affective publics: emotions circulate, bind communities, and shape political consciousness. Memory studies framework (especially the works of Rothberg, Hirsch, Rigney, and Chakrabarty) provide a conceptual lens to interpret how songs repurpose past traumas (of Tehri) to articulate contemporary fears (land alienation). The methodology examines:

- Postmemory (younger generations inheriting trauma narratives)
- Multidirectional memory (Tehri invoked to understand Bhu-Kanun)
- Mnemonic capital (Tehri serving as moral leverage in protests)
- Temporal entanglement (past-submergence shaping future-politics)

Methodologically, this means reading lyrics not only for content but for temporal work—how they bind submerged pasts to contested futures.

Although this study engages deeply with community expressions, it does not claim ethnographic authority. Instead, it uses what literary scholars call contextual hermeneutics: interpretation grounded in socio-historical knowledge rather than fieldwork. Working with songs as political texts requires sensitivity. Many lyrics emerge from grief, anger, or fear—emotions rooted in lived structural vulnerability. Quoting and interpreting such texts mandates respect for the communities they represent. As far as possible, translations retain emotional resonance; interpretations avoid romanticising suffering. The aim is to amplify community voices without appropriating them.

#### Analysis

Ajay Kaptaan’s lyric in *Uttarakhand Bhu Kanoon* (2024) “Pahad bachaane ka karo upchaar/ Devbhoomi mein ho raha hai atyachaar” (Find a remedy to save the mountains/ what is happening in Devbhoomi has become an injustice.), articulates a powerful critique of the environmental injustice unfolding in the Himalayan region. Read through the lens of Huggan and Tiffin’s postcolonial ecocriticism, the line exposes how contemporary forms of resource extraction, land alienation, and developmental aggression reproduce older colonial patterns of ecological marginalisation. The appeal to “find a remedy” casts the mountain as a living, vulnerable entity requiring healing, aligning with Huggan and Tiffin’s insistence on ethical relations with the more-than-human world. The “injustice” in Devbhoomi signals not a sudden catastrophe but a form of slow, structural violence, thereby, echoing the gradual dispossession, cultural erosion, and ecological degradation faced by mountain communities. Kaptaan’s lyric thus becomes a counter-voice that resists dominant developmental narratives, transforming popular music into an archive of subaltern ecological memory and a potent expression of environmental resistance. In Vinod Bijalwan’s *Bhu Kanoon ki Ladai* (2022), the lines “Hamari mitti, hamara paani/ Hum hi rehgyu aankha taani/ Ek din yenu samaye aulu/ gau hu thaar biki jaalu” (Our soil, our water/ yet we are the ones left standing helpless, watching/ A time will come when entire villages and homes will be sold off) articulate precisely the kind of ecological and historical submergence that the theoretical framework of this paper seeks to foreground. The lyric becomes a lived expression of what Rob Nixon terms “slow violence” (Nixon 2) while simultaneously echoing DeLoughrey’s argument that environmental loss in postcolonial landscapes is inseparable from the erasure of cultural memory. Bijalwan’s helpless watcher is the figure of the dispossessed subject who witnesses the slow sinking of both ancestral land and inherited futures. The anticipated sale of “entire villages and homes” transforms submergence from a metaphor into a concrete socio-ecological condition, revealing how land laws, developmental pressures, and state policy create a continuum of displacement in which communities are forced to watch their own futures dissolve. Bijalwan’s subsequent lines—“Baap dadaun ki ya jageer/ milnya in tum tein pher/ Mili juli ke awa sath/ ikki

mang, ikki baat/ Gadh-sapoot jaagi jawa.” (This inheritance from our ancestors will not be ours anymore. Come together, unite—one demand, one voice! Sons and daughters of the mountains, wake up!)—extend this politics of submergence by foregrounding the imminent loss of ancestral belonging. The threatened disappearance of “inheritance” resonates with what this paper identifies as submerged pasts, where collective memory, land-based identity, and intergenerational continuity are steadily eroded through state-led development, insecure land laws, and extractive pressures. In invoking unity and calling upon the “sons and daughters of the mountains” to awaken, the song stages what postcolonial eco-critics describe as a form of counter-memory, resisting the slow violence of dispossession by mobilising cultural memory as political refusal. The lyric transforms ecological loss into a rallying cry, insisting that community solidarity is the only remaining defence against a future in which ancestral land no longer belongs to its custodians.

In *Mero Pahad* (Fidato, 2021), the lines “Pahad khod ke zamin ban rahi hai/ ped kaat ke yeh raade mile ban rahi hai/ roshni ko bech kar nadiyan saari jheel ban rahi hai” (By digging into the mountains, new land is being created, by cutting down trees, these wide roads are being built. By selling off the light, this river is turning into an entire lake) exemplify what Ramachandra Guha identifies as the environmentalism of the poor—a form of ecological consciousness emerging from communities who directly bear the burdens of environmental degradation. Guha argues that in India, ecological destruction is inseparable from patterns of marginalisation, where development disproportionately displaces those who depend on land, water, and forests. The lyrics’ emphasis on mountains being carved, roads being built through deforestation, and rivers transformed into artificial lakes aligns with Guha’s critique of development-induced displacement and the social ecology of loss it produces.

When Fidato sings “Pahad bikk chuke zameen naam pe/ in vaadiyon mein mool nivasi ab bache nahi,” (The mountains have been sold off in the name of land/ In these valleys, not many original inhabitants remain anymore.) the song directly reflects Guha’s claim that state-led development often erases Indigenous ecological relations by fragmenting fields, commodifying land, and pushing native residents away from their ancestral valleys. Similarly, the closing line—“Suna pahad mein pahadi ghatt rahe hain” (It is said that in the mountains, the mountain people themselves are declining.)—encapsulates the demographic and cultural hollowing-out that Guha reads as a key symptom of environmental injustice: when land becomes uninhabitable, identity itself becomes precarious. In this sense, “Mero Pahad” becomes a sonic expression of subaltern ecological grief, articulating the lived dimensions of the environmental injustices Guha theorises.

In *Bhu Bugyal* (Pandavaas 2020), the recurring lament—“दिदौ भू बुग्याल, यु माटू, पाणी, बिक जालू” (this land, these meadows, this soil, this water will be sold)—evokes frameworks akin to Thom van Dooren’s concern for life’s ongoingness and Astrida Neimanis’s affective ecological entanglements (van Dooren 8; Neimanis 27). The song mourns commodification as extinction of place-based memory and kinship. For both thinkers, landscapes function as repositories of memory, emotion, and intergenerational meaning, shaping how communities dwell in and relate to place. When the song mourns that what the ancestors “protected and preserved with care” will now be sold, it signals the breakdown of an affective landscape that once held together ecological practice, kinship, and memory. The listing of Kunjé leaves, Ghaghūdo greens, and “Nanda Devi’s Himalaya” evokes Astrida Neimanis’s concept of bodies in affective entanglement with their environments—where every day ecological practices like foraging and place-based sustenance create intimate, embodied connections to the more-than-human world (Neimanis 27). Their potential disappearance marks the erosion not merely of land but of a lived archive of ecological memory. In this sense, the song becomes a form of memory-keeping, an attempt to preserve the emotional and cultural textures of the landscape. In van Dooren’s terms, such expressions act as “an effort to hold open a space for the ongoingness of life” (van Dooren 2014, 8), resisting the foreclosure of futures that accompanies ecological commodification and displacement.

In *Tehri Dubun Lagyu Ch*, Narendra Singh Negi (n.d) offers one of the most powerful articulations of the right to remember. The singer’s plea—“अबारी दा तू लंबी छुट्टी लेकी आई/ दिहरी दुबुण लग्यु छा

बेटा/ डाम का खातिर/ लहसुन प्याजे की बाड़ी सगोड़ि/ बाब दादो की कुटी/ अंखुँ मा रिंगणी, रैली सदणी” (This time, take a long leave and come back home, Tehri is drowning, my son, because of the dam. The fields of garlic and onions, the house of our fathers and grandfathers—they will live in our eyes forever.)—does not simply mourn the submergence of a town; it mourns the erasure of an entire ecological lifeworld. The disappearing fields of garlic and onion, the ancestral cottage, and the scenes lingering in the eyes constitute what ecological memory theorists describe as affective and material traces—memory-bearing spaces that preserve the connective tissues of community, ecology, and history. Negi’s song refuses the state’s developmental narrative by insisting on remembering what the water buried, turning the melody into a mnemonic act of resistance.

### **Conclusion**

The Bhu-Kanun movement emerges, through this analysis, as far more than a legal dispute over land ceilings or outsider purchases. It represents a profound struggle over memory, belonging, ecological continuity, and collective futurity. When placed in dialogue with the submerged past of Tehri, the movement reveals a Himalayan politics rooted in temporal entanglement: communities who carry the memory of past harm mobilise to prevent its recurrence. Tehri’s submergence continues to function as the region’s principal mnemonic wound. Even decades later, its legacy shapes political subjectivity, ecological anxiety, and emotional landscapes across Uttarakhand. The reservoir that drowned Old Tehri does not only hold water—it holds unfinished history. It continues to return visually, symbolically, and emotionally through resurfacing ruins and through intergenerational narratives. Its memory becomes the ground on which contemporary critiques of development are articulated. Bhu-Kanun inherits this unresolved memory and transforms it into mnemonic capital—a moral resource through which communities demand accountability from the state. Songs emerge as central to this transformation because they do what formal policy discourse cannot: they articulate grief in public, transform memory into a shared emotional register, and generate collective resolve. In this sense, songs serve both archival and mobilising functions. They keep alive the submerged past while galvanising communities toward contested futures.

The analytical readings in this study demonstrate that Pahadi songs hold immense interpretive richness. They mourn disappearing landscapes, critique developmental aggression, and imagine ecological futures shaped by community rather than market forces. They transform environmental loss into political vocabulary. They bear witness when our archives fail. They resist erasure through melody, metaphor, and repetition. Most importantly, they articulate an affective politics of belonging—a politics in which soil, water, meadows, and mountains are not resources but kin.

Postcolonial ecocriticism illuminates how Uttarakhand’s development trajectory follows older colonial patterns of extraction; ecological memory studies reveal how landscapes and water bodies store history; memory studies explain why communities mobilise through inherited grief. Together, these frameworks show that Bhu-Kanun is not only a territorial struggle—it is a cultural struggle over the right to remember and a legal struggle over the right to remain. As long as ecological harm continues to produce mnemonic trauma, movements like Bhu-Kanun will remain central to Uttarakhand’s political imagination. The songs at the heart of this analysis are not ephemeral cultural artefacts; they are political documents in their own right. Their endurance across digital platforms and protest sites speaks to their role as repositories of ecological grief and as catalysts for ecological justice. The submerged past of Tehri and the contested future of Uttarakhand’s land are bound together through memory’s enduring force. The struggle for Bhu-Kanun is a struggle to prevent history from repeating. It is a demand for laws that honour ecological memory and protect community sovereignty. And it is a reminder that landscapes, when wounded, remember—and that people, when displaced, do not forget.



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**ENVISIONING CHANGE THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: AN  
ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF BIJAL VACHHARAJANI'S *SO YOU WANT TO KNOW  
ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT***

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**Abstract**

In the present climate crisis, it is more important than ever to teach children about biodiversity, conservation, sustainability, ecological responsibility, and a life of consciousness. But the question arises: how do they understand better such issues as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and more? One of the effective ways is literature, as it has the ability to simplify complex concepts in a clear language. The narratives and stories in literature make the problems more relatable and personal for the readers. Stories that show positive actions and provide solutions to environmental issues are capable of developing a sense of hope and motivation for readers to take action. Specifically, Children's literature plays an important role in influencing young minds. It inspires them to think consciously about the world around them. The books about the environment, whether fiction or non-fiction, not only provide facts and information. They can also develop a sense of curiosity, obligation, and emotional connection with nature and the planet as a whole. Through Bijal Vachharajani's non-fiction work, *So You Want to Know About The Environment*, the paper argues that children's literature can serve as both a mirror and a window. It informs children about the ecological challenges the world is facing and motivates them to understand and be part of the solution.

**Keywords:** Children's Literature, Ecocriticism, Consumerism, Sustainability, Eco-literacy, Environmental justice, Ecological Ethics.

Children's literature can serve as a useful tool to make young children aware of their surroundings and make them realise that they can play a vital role in protecting the planet. Through effective stories, engaging information, and relatable examples, these books develop care, empathy, and responsibility for both living and non-living beings. As a literary theory, ecocriticism studies the relationship between literature and the environment. Cheryll Glotfelty, a key figure in ecocriticism, defines it as follows: "Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies" (Glotfelty xviii). This field of study has emerged in response to the growing ecological problems. It looks at how a literary work represents nature, discusses environmental issues, and shows the relationship between humans and the natural world. Ecocriticism not only explores environmental problems but also brings to light that literature can raise hope, offer possible solutions, and encourage people to do something for the planet. It connects literature with real-world ecological concerns by defining the role of literature to educate readers and motivate them to take positive action and make a difference. By applying this theory to Vachharajani's text, the paper examines how literature helps children understand fundamental environmental concepts and encourages them to take small but significant steps to protect the earth.

Ecocriticism isn't just about appreciating nature in literature. It is about understanding the way human actions are changing nature and the environment. It studies how literature and culture

talk about these changes, whether they warn about ecological destruction, celebrate nature, or explore the impact of human actions. Every aspect of the ecosphere has been impacted by anthropogenic activities like pollution, deforestation, urbanisation, industrial agriculture, etc. Nature has been devalued and domesticated by humans, who, due to a lack of foresight, abuse nature and natural resources. In his book *The End of Nature*, Bill McKibben explains this idea, saying that “we have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning” (50). This idea questions the belief that nature is something separate from human life and shows that humans, non-humans, and the environment are interconnected. They are all equally necessary for the well-being of one another. Ecocriticism is a way of thinking that not only values human beings but also all forms of life and the environment. It challenges the notion that humans are separate from or superior to nature. Instead, it promotes a biocentric view which recognises humans as part of the larger ecological system rather than above it. This perspective develops respect for all forms of life and emphasises the close connections between humans, animals, plants, and the environment. Ecocriticism views the natural world as a shared home that needs care and protection, rather than treating nature as a commodity to be used and abused. Ecocriticism, therefore, shifts focus from a human-centred view to one that sees all life forms as part of a larger whole.

The Current state of environmental degradation is not only a result of technological advancement but also arises from human attitudes, ethics, choices, and cultural practices. Ecocriticism stresses the deep connection between human culture and the natural world. It shows that people’s lifestyle, beliefs, and values shape the way they interact with nature. In turn, the environment also affects human life, their daily experiences, traditions, and culture. Donald Worster’s statement, “We are facing a global crisis today, not because of how ecosystems function but rather because of how our ethical systems function”, underlines that the root cause of ecological destruction is human choices, values, and ethics (Glottfelty xxi). In other words, the environmental crisis is not only a matter of science or technology, but also a question of morality and culture. Humans need to rethink their relationship with nature and the planet as a whole. For this change, a shift is required from domination and exploitation to respect and obligation. The interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism helps it explore the ecological problems from various perspectives. It brings together concepts from various fields, including physical science, biotechnology, culture, ethics, and literature, to explore how social and political factors shape the literary representation of nature. This helps readers to gain a holistic understanding of the ecological challenges the world faces today.

Ecocriticism emphasises that literature is not merely a form of entertainment, but also has the power to educate and motivate people to care about the environment and take responsibility for their surroundings. Vachharajani’s *So You Want to Know About The Environment* is an exemplary work of children’s literature that makes it easy and engaging to understand the environment. A central ecocritical concept that runs across the text is interconnectedness. It refers to the idea that all living beings, animals, plants, and even inanimate elements, are interdependent. The book is divided into five chapters: Climate Change, Food, Waste, Water, and Wildlife and in each chapter, the author makes children understand the environmental issues without any confusion. Because of the technical nature of issues like climate change, it is tough for young readers to understand it fully. But the text explains all the difficult concepts in simple terms and makes them easy to grasp. For example, by using the metaphor of a mosquito net to define the way GHGs trap heat in the atmosphere, it becomes easier for young readers to understand the greenhouse effect. The book also describes that seemingly minor events, such as unseasonal rain, can disrupt ecosystems, food production, and the patterns of human consumption. This reflects Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology, which states: “Everything is connected to everything else” (Rangarajan 57). Vachharajani compares climate change to a Jenga tower that can collapse with a single wrong move, thus showing how fragile the environment is. This idea of interconnectedness also extends beyond the

ecology to global issues, as reflected in Amitabh Sinha's news article "How global crises are connected". The report by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) depicts that major global crises, climate change, biodiversity loss, food insecurity, water scarcity, and health risks are interlinked. Various species are disappearing due to Climate change as it is disturbing the harmony of ecosystems. In turn, as biodiversity declines, the planet becomes less able to cope with the changing climate conditions. The concerns of food insecurity and water scarcity are also linked to each other. Water resources are depleting due to excessive food production. Together, these factors increase serious health risks such as the spread of diseases, malnutrition, and other complications. Continuous damage to the environment also weakens the economy by causing shortages of essential life-supporting resources.

In the chapter on Wildlife, readers learn about the impact of deforestation on habitat loss for birds and other creatures. It highlights the role of birds like sparrows and pollinators, such as bees, butterflies, and beetles, in maintaining ecological balance. Their numbers are decreasing constantly due to habitat destruction, the use of pesticides, and harmful electromagnetic radiation from mobile towers. This indicates that environmental degradation is a chain reaction as one harmful action leads to another. Rachel Carson's Silent Spring raises a similar issue as she warns that pesticides, especially DDT, are causing harm to birds, insects, and other living organisms. As a result, the entire balance of nature is affected. Bittu Sahgal also stresses the idea of interconnectedness by using the equation of Tigers=Forests=Water: "If you save the tiger, you save the forest, you save our precious water resources" (Vachharajani 143). This observation aligns with James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. It suggests that the Earth is a living organism and all its parts work together to maintain balance. It instructs that everything on the planet is interconnected and the act of harming one part of the Earth, whether polluting the air, cutting down forests, or damaging oceans, disrupts the entire system (Rangarajan 53). This idea of interconnectedness also questions the concept of the Great Chain of Being, which placed humans above all forms of life. It presented that the universe is in a systematic order where everything has its proper place. This way of thinking treated nature not as an equal and valuable entity but only as a means to serve humanity. The present text breaks this hierarchical order and defines human beings as part of a broader network of life, rather than above it. It shows that every living organism is important and plays a significant role in making the entire system work properly and maintaining the balance of life.

Vachharajani's text promotes eco-literacy by introducing young readers to real-world environmental problems in a relatable manner. The book uses direct questions and interactive activities to inspire children to read, observe, question, and reflect on the natural world. Nita Ganguly's work, *365 Ways to Save the Environment*, also offers simple and practical tips that readers can apply in their day-to-day lives. Through DIY activities and easy-to-follow steps, it urges children and young adults to become eco-conscious citizens. Vachharajani's book serves as an educational tool for young readers to foster ecological consciousness among them. It suggests doable actions for children and helps them participate in environmental protection: "On hot summer days, leave a bowl of fresh water for birds on your window ledge, and parakeets, mynahs and sparrows will swing by for a drink or two" (155). Through teaching these simple ways to help animals, the book inspires young readers to take small but meaningful actions. The text points out that wildlife is not confined to forests only, but it can also be found in urban landscapes. It gives descriptions of flamingos in Mumbai's skyline and lizards on walls, which reflects that the urban ecosystem is as much a part of nature as remote forests. This perspective is supported by the concept of urban ecocriticism discussed by Swarnalatha Rangarajan in her book *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies*. It rejects the idea that nature only exists in wild places, such as forests, mountains, and rivers. Cities are not separate from nature but a part of the larger web of life, and they, too, function as ecosystems, just like forests and oceans.

The text further explains how food choices affect the environment. The book encourages children to pay attention to food labels: "...become a Label Decoder. The small print on the back



of a food packet tells you about what ingredients it is made out of" (58). When they learn to read and check ingredient lists, they become aware of how the processed foods influence both their health and the environment. The responsible consumer choices of what to buy and eat will lead to a sustainable future. The imported food harms nature as it reduces biodiversity and increases carbon emissions from transportation. The writer also talks about factory farming and large-scale agriculture, which exploit animals and land for human benefit. The use of pesticides, fertilisers, and genetically modified crops is depleting soil nutrition and reducing biodiversity. The book motivates young readers to think ethically about the entire natural world. As human beings have moral responsibility towards one another, they should also have obligations to the non-human entities. It reflects Aldo Leopold's idea of Land Ethics, which calls for a deep respect for all living and non-living elements of the environment. Instead of treating the land as property to be used and exploited, he believed that humans should see themselves as part of a larger ecological community (Rangarajan 51).

The book questions the human-centred approach to food production. It argues that the unequal distribution of food and resources is a result of economic systems that prioritise profit over human and environmental well-being. Even though there is plenty of food, many people still go hungry. This connects to the eco-Marxist view that criticises capitalism. In his book *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard also addresses social ecology and eco-marxism. Eco-Marxists look at environmental problems from a political perspective. It rejects the notion that ecological crises happen only because humans misuse nature. Instead, these crises are the result of the greed of powerful Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and Business Organisations that dominate and exploit both people and natural resources for profit. Scarcity is the result of oppressive economic systems that control the supply and demand in order to increase profit. Small farmers face financial difficulties due to the unequal economic structure: "Smallholder farmers (who own small pieces of land) are often forced to sell all their produce in the market at a loss, and don't have enough to eat" (41). It explains that this capitalist system not only harms the environment but also creates social inequalities.

The issues raised in the text also reflect the problems created by the neoliberal economic model, which places profit and growth above the health of the planet and the well-being of human communities. In this system, natural elements like forests, rivers, water, land and even air are treated as a commodity to be bought and sold for financial gain. The paper further stresses that one of the core tenets of ecocriticism is analysing the role of literature in raising environmental awareness. By explaining CO<sub>2</sub> levels, global temperature rise, and the significance of the 350 ppm limit, the text introduces scientific concepts in a way that children can understand. The call to track CO<sub>2</sub> levels online encourages children to interact with real-world data rather than receiving information passively. It describes that melting glaciers, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events are threats to the entire planet. To make children understand this, it compares the melting of ice caps to heating a pot of water. Just as water expands when heated, the oceans increase in volume as temperatures rise and ice melts. This everyday example makes a difficult concept more relatable. It helps young readers to be aware of the urgency of climate change in a way they can understand. The text employs various learning strategies, such as quizzes, debates, and experiments, to actively engage the reader with ecological challenges.

The chapter on Waste highlights the importance of waste segregation and explains the environmental impacts of personal choices. The book presents a timeline of decomposition to explain how different types of waste affect life-sustaining ecosystems on the planet. Through a clear distinction between biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, it draws attention to the need for responsible waste management for a healthier planet. It also points out how industrial, domestic, and commercial waste have contributed to environmental degradation. Excessive waste production harms both land and marine ecosystems: "Ever seen a cow rooting about in garbage? Chances are that she will end up eating plastic from the garbage, and it will stay in her stomach, ultimately killing her. And plastic also chokes up marine life and other animals and birds" (84).

This reference criticises the human-centred way of thinking and reflects how animals and other living beings are directly affected by human actions. It calls for a biocentric perspective that values co-existence and respect for all living beings. It appeals for more responsible and ethical behaviour. Arne Naess's idea of deep ecology also questions the view that humans are separate from and superior to nature. Instead, it believes that all living things have their own value, regardless of whether they are useful to humans (Garrard 23).

The habit of constantly buying, consuming, and throwing things away is damaging the earth, and humans can't go on forever with this consumerist behaviour. The text emphasises the 4Rs: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, as well as community-based waste management, which supports ecocriticism's idea of ecological sustainability. The book teaches children that nature recycles everything on its own with the help of scavengers, bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms; however, human-generated waste continues to accumulate. It also shows that organic waste can be converted into compost, which is called "Black Gold" because it is very useful and benefits the environment in a variety of ways. This challenges the idea that waste is just something to throw away and instead defines it as a valuable resource that contributes to environmental sustainability. Teaching these habits to children at a young age helps them grow into adults who view sustainability as a normal part of life. Through interactive activities like creating a waste chart, sorting the waste, and using refillable pens, the writer encourages readers to think about how their daily choices impact the environment. It suggests that sustainability is not only about big policies but also about small, everyday habits that can make a significant difference when followed by the majority. The book points out that modern consumer culture often promotes convenience over environmental responsibility. This makes it easy to buy and throw away products without thinking about the consequences: "Now that you know what your household trash looks like, multiply that by everyone who lives in your building, your school, your area. Then think about hospitals, factories, shopping complexes—how much waste is being generated across the world?" (80). This idea helps young readers understand that waste is not just a personal issue but a global one. Every small act of consumption and disposal contributes to a larger environmental crisis.

The chapter "Water" discusses thoroughly the issue of water pollution. Water bodies are contaminated by untreated sewage, poor waste management, and toxic substances from the factories. The chemicals in detergents, such as phosphates, cause excessive algae growth (eutrophication) in water bodies. This process reduces oxygen levels and makes it hard for fish and other aquatic creatures to survive. Waste from cities ends up in lakes, rivers, and oceans and, in this way, affects ecosystems worldwide. Sunita Narain's article "Be excreta wise", published in *Down to Earth* magazine, calls for sustainable waste management. She points out that people should realise the connection between the waste they produce, the pollution it creates, and the possibility of recycling it in a way that benefits the environment instead of harming it. The chapter on water also reveals that over-extraction of groundwater and unfair distribution of clean water can lead to serious problems for human health and survival. This highlights the concerns regarding environmental justice. Some people have easy access to clean water, while others struggle to get it. This suggests that pollution and environmental damage often harm poorer communities the most.

The present-day water crisis has made the discussion on water scarcity more significant. The concept of "Day Zero" refers to a critical stage of water shortage when a region or community runs out of drinkable water. This has already become a real threat to cities like Cape Town and São Paulo, where people have experienced the fear of having no water for their daily use. Indian cities such as Chennai, Bengaluru and Delhi have also faced severe water shortages. Due to falling groundwater levels, overuse of water resources, and poor management, millions of people are struggling to get access to safe and clean water. It reflects the need to make responsible personal choices and apply sustainable water practices in day-to-day life. These examples show that the water crisis is not a challenge the world will face in the distant future, but it's something many people are already facing today. It is impacting their health, daily routines, and livelihoods. The

text makes children aware of real-life scenarios and teaches them the necessity of using water wisely. It teaches them that small steps, such as saving water and reducing wastage, can play a significant role in solving the problem. Further, the critical state of the Ganga, Indus, Aral Sea, and various rivers and lakes shows that water pollution is not just a local problem but a global issue. It affects the entire ecosystem, including both living and non-living organisms, and human communities across the world. It teaches readers that environmental damage affects the entire planet, not just one place. Humans should respect and care for nature rather than exploiting it without thinking about the consequences.

Ecological ethics, a central principle of ecocriticism, focuses on the moral responsibility that humans have toward the environment. It critiques the assumptions that nature is meant solely for human use. Instead, it promotes respect and care for all living and non-living beings. The text inspires young readers to think critically about water wastage, pollution, and over-extraction by industries: “Yet we are fast depleting our groundwater, which means that we could have a serious problem on our hands. Then what will we drink? Colas?” (111). This rhetorical question prompts them to think about long-term sustainability rather than short-term consumption. The book doesn’t merely share facts and data; it also motivates readers to make moral choices and act responsibly. A simple example of fixing a leaky tap shows it’s better to fix issues immediately rather than ignoring the problem. This highlights how important individual responsibility is in protecting and caring for the environment.

The study explains that children’s literature can serve as a powerful medium to help young minds understand the environment and encourage them to care for the planet. By using an ecocritical lens, the paper analyses Bijal Vachharajani’s *So You Want to Know About The Environment* not just as an informative book, but also as a call for collective action. It illustrates that teaching children about the environment isn’t only about giving them information and sharing facts, but also about combining knowledge with curiosity, compassion, and a motivation to make a difference. The text adopts a more positive approach to solving issues, rather than creating fear and a sense of helplessness. It does not frighten children by focusing only on problems, but also raises hope and a sense of empowerment among them by providing possible solutions. The book promotes the idea that even small steps, such as reducing waste, saving water, planting trees, or spreading awareness, can contribute to meaningful change. Children are more likely to develop eco-friendly habits when they learn about the environment in an engaging and practical way. The study points out that such literature can raise a generation that not only becomes aware of the problems but also believes in their ability to contribute to the solution.

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**ECOLOGICAL AESTHETICS OF *BIHU* DANCE OF ASSAM: ENACTING NATURE  
AND ECO-SYMBOLISM THROUGH PERFORMANCE**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the ecological aesthetics of the *Bihu* dance of Assam, focusing on how nature, seasonal rhythms, and environmental symbolism are being enacted through embodied performance. Rooted in agrarian life and the spring festival of *Bihu*, it reflects the indigenous ecological worldviews and cultural relations with land, flora, and fauna. Through the frame of Environmental Humanities, the study examines how *Bihu*'s movement vocabulary- its rhythmic steps, circular patterns, and expressive gestures mimics natural processes. The eco-symbolism embedded in costumes and ornaments, inclusive of the *kopou* orchid and natural motifs of textiles, articulates synchrony with seasonal change. In addition, the musical soundscape created by the *dhol*, *pepa*, *gogona*, *toka* evokes the acoustic textures of rural ecology. The conventional spaces of open-air performance further situate the dance within its environment. The paper argues that *Bihu* is essentially an embodied ecological practice through which environmental knowledge is transmitted and sustainable human-nature relationships are reinforced. Interpreting *Bihu* as a site of eco-aesthetic expression, the study brings forth the role of folk dance in enriching the contemporary discourses on ecological consciousness and environmental cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *Bihu* Dance, Ecological Aesthetics, Eco-Symbolism, Environmental Humanities, Embodied Ecology

**1. Introduction**

Environmental Humanities has emerged as a critical interdisciplinary field exploring how culture, literature, art, and performance shape human understanding of the natural world. Moving beyond scientific or policy-centric perspectives, it studies the emotional, ethical, aesthetic and symbolic dimensions of human-environment relationships. Within this framework, performing arts such as folk dance become significant cultural archives that reveal how communities imagine, narrate, and embody ecological experience. This paper situates the *Bihu* dance of Assam within this academic discourse, investigating its eco-aesthetic dimensions and its role as a performative expression of environmental consciousness.

*Bihu*, the cultural emblem of Assamese identity, is celebrated during three agricultural seasons: *Rongali (Bohag)* *Bihu* marking spring and sowing, *Kongali (Kati)* *Bihu* associated with scarcity and agrarian discipline, and *Bhogali (Magh)* *Bihu* celebrating harvest abundance. Among these, *Rongali Bihu* holds particular significance as the time of vibrant communal celebration, music, and dance symbolising fertility, renewal, and the blossoming of natural life. The *Bihu* dance performed during this season embodies the spirit of youthful vitality, sensuality, ecological celebration, and cultural continuity. It is not merely an aesthetic entertainment but a multisensory ecological experience shaped by climate, landscape, biodiversity, and agricultural rhythm.

This paper argues that *Bihu* dance embodies ecological aesthetics, wherein nature is not represented abstractly but enacted through the dancing body. Through movement patterns, musical instrumentation, costume symbolism, and environmental performance space, *Bihu* articulates a symbiotic worldview that merges human life with seasonal cycles. In doing so, *Bihu* becomes an embodied ecology, a mode of environmental knowledge transmission, and a ritual affirmation of sustainable human-nature coexistence.

## **2. Bihu Dance as Embodied Ecology**

The *Bihu* dance emerges as a deep performative expression of ecological participation, wherein the human body does not merely imitate the natural world but actively enacts and embodies it. Rooted in agrarian temporality and the seasonal cycles of Assam, *Bihu* offers a most vibrant example of how dance can operate as a lived ecological experience.

In traditional *Bihu* performance, dancers, musicians, and audiences are embedded within an expansive sensory field composed of landscape, sound, bodily movement, and atmospheric change. The performance most often takes place outdoors-on riverbanks, in village courtyards, under trees, or amidst fields where the natural environment becomes an active participant in the aesthetic event. The smell of the earth after spring rain, the softness of *Bohag's* warm breeze, the call of birds, and the texture of dust beneath moving feet all contribute to a multisensory aesthetic ecology. Rather than serving as a backdrop, nature co-creates the performance.

Here, the dancers internalize and bodily reveal the rhythms of seasonal transformation within this ecological field. The dance do not represent nature from a distance but are a product of intimate knowledge and generational familiarity with agriculture and the land. The body here becomes an instrument of ecological memory and translates environmental cues into choreographic forms.

This ecological engagement is further deepened through music. Together, the sonic textures interweave with the movements, creating a sensorial continuum that dissolves distinctions between dancer, environment, and community. For the audience, too, aesthetic engagement operates as immersion rather than observation. Watching *Bihu* is an act of environmental participation where the participants feel the vibration of the *dhol-pepa*, sense the changing air, and experience the collective joy of spring's arrival. The aesthetic field expands to include all participants, human and non-human, making *Bihu* not only a cultural celebration but also a dynamic enactment of ecological consciousness.

## **3. Seasonal temporality and agricultural rhythm**

The *Bihu* dance of Assam comes from a cultural ecology wherein ecological rhythms define the structure of social life. It is shaped by seasonal temporality, the cyclical movement of nature that frames the agricultural year of the Brahmaputra Valley. Thus, the triad of *Bihu* festivals aligns seamlessly with the stages of cultivation: *Bohag* (spring), *Kati* (autumn), and *Magh* (winter), producing a cultural rhythm that mirrors the ebb and flow of ecological time.

*Bohag Bihu*, celebrated in April, is the very heart of *Bihu* dance tradition. This is the season when *Nahor*, *Keteki*, *Madhoimaloti*, *Bhatou* etc. flowers bloom; when migratory birds return; when the river begins to swell and new leaves and tender shoots signal ecological renewal. In *Bohag*, the choreographic logic of the dance itself is shaped by temporal ecology. As nature accelerates into plenty, so does the tempo of the performance. Steps that were circular broaden, formations become expansive, and dancers reflect the exuberance of a landscape awakening from winter's dormancy. The sensual undertones of *Bohag Bihu*-playful glances and flirtatious touching-replicate agrarian hopes for fertility, regeneration, and prosperity.

An important ecological symbol within this seasonal framework is *Bordoisila*, the fierce and sudden storm accompanied by strong winds that arrives in early spring. In Assamese folk imagination, *Bordoisila* is a powerful feminine force, often described as a daughter visiting her parents during *Bohag*. Meteorologically, it is a pre-monsoon wind system whose arrival clears the atmosphere, cools the land, and prepares the soil for cultivation. The aesthetic energy of *Bihu* dance reflects *Bordoisila's* dynamic presence: fast spins, vigorous waist movements, and the pulsating rhythm of the *dhol* simulate the turbulence and freshness of these seasonal winds. This dance movement is performed along with the *digholiya seu* of *dhol* where the dancer represents the *Bordoisila* through her dance. *Bordoisila* thus becomes both a natural and symbolic force, marking the transition into the agricultural year.

#### **4 Ecological Embodiment in *Bihu* Movement Vocabulary**

The bodily gestures, postures, and steps of *Bihu* dance are rich with natural imagery and environmental symbolism. The lateral waist movements, oscillating shoulder actions, and rhythmic footwork evoke various natural processes, translating ecological phenomena into choreographic expression. Hand gestures frequently represent forms drawn from the environment: the curved shape of buffalo horns, the fluttering of bird wings, the delicate motion of butterflies, or leaves swaying in the wind. The rhythmic patterns of the feet imitate the movements of small creatures such as spiders or ants. When dancers place their hands on their waists and perform coordinated movements, the posture is understood to evoke trees being shaken by seasonal winds.

A notable example of this ecological embodiment is found in the fast spins performed by *bihuwotis*, the female dancers, which are often compared to the *Takuri*, a rapidly rotating tool used in traditional Assamese weaving. This imagery is echoed in *Bihu* song lines such as:

*Dhule rogor tulile, pepai lohor tulile*

*Nas nas nasoni oii,*

*Takuri ghuradi, pokhila uradi*

*Deha-mon utola kori.*

These verses reinforce the connection between spinning dancers, the *Takuri*, and fluttering creatures like butterflies. Additionally, the circular and spiral spatial formations characteristic of *Bihu* choreography symbolize continuity and ecological balance. Through such embodied performativity, the dance translates ecological realities into kinesthetic forms, producing an aesthetic experience that is deeply sensory, environmental, and culturally resonant.

#### **5. Symbolism of Fertility, Growth, and Regeneration in *Bihu* Dance**

Spring, the season of *Rongali Bihu*, provides an important ecological and symbolic basis for the tradition of *Bihu* dance. In Assamese cultural consciousness, spring is not simply a temporal marker but a deep metaphor of fertility, growth, and regenerative abundance. The performative vocabulary of *Bihu* reflects this seasonal ethos, translating the rhythms of ecological renewal into embodied movement and expressive gesture.

Many choreographic elements in *Bihu* are rooted in the rhythms of the soil; while its circular spatial formations gesture towards the continuity of seasonal cycles. In this sense, the dance acts like an embodied ecosystem in which natural processes are translated into kinesthetic expressions.

Central to this symbolism is the playful quality that characterizes *Bihu* performances. The flirtatious glances, responsive gestures, and dynamic call-and-answer patterns that characterize the interaction between male and female dancers represent more than courtship rituals. The *Bihunam* where the call and answer pattern is followed is called *Jora Nam*.

Female: *Ahu Dhanor Morona Pelai De Bohona*

*Jukari Pelai De Kher,*

*Mare Janibo Bapere Janibo*

*Muloi Seneh Betha Er*

Male: *Aye Janoke Bupaiye Janoke*

*Janok Samaniya Bhai,*

*Tuloi Seneh Betha Eribo Lagile*

*Moringoi Borbih Khai.*

The *bihuwotis* or the female dancers and the males or *bihuwas* in *Bihu* Dance are believed to be *Prakriti* or the feminine energy, and *Purush* or the masculine energy respectively. They symbolize the union that sustains both human reproduction and the fertility of the natural world. Rather than presenting sensuality as spectacle, *Bihu* frames the body as a site where ecological vitality is celebrated, reinforcing the harmony between human life and the life-giving forces of nature. Thus, the symbolic union performed in the course of *Bihu* dance reflects the renewal of agricultural fertility, the blossoming of spring vegetation, and the continuity of social bonds. Through its



ecological metaphors, *Bihu* becomes a cultural expression of the process of regeneration in which the human cycles and natural cycles are inseparable.

## **6. Eco-Symbolism in Costume and Ornament**

Costumes worn during *Bihu* contain dense layers of symbolic meaning associated with natural life, regional ecosystems, and agrarian aesthetics.

### **6.1 Traditional Textile Aesthetics**

Traditional attire for the *bihuwoti*, female dancer, includes *mekhela*, *riha*, *sola* (blouse), and *hasoti*, while for the *bihuwa*, male dancer, *suriya*, *halowa sola*, *sapkon sola*, *enga sola*, *tongali*, *hasoti*, and the *gamocha* are worn. These are characteristically woven from cotton and muga silk, materials whose use reflects a deep grounding in the ecological resources of the region. Natural fibres are often used, dyed with organic colouring agents, showing a textile philosophy deeply rooted in sustainable practices and traditional craft knowledge.

The woven motifs are significant, both aesthetically and symbolically. The geometrical and floral patterns, along with other iconic Assamese designs like the *jaapi* and the various leaf forms, are subtle references to the immediate surroundings. These motifs do more than adorn the fabric; they encode the community's environmental imagination and cultural memory. In the choice of material, the process of weaving, and the patterned designs, costumes worn while performing *Bihu* epitomize a material ecology that reinforces the intimate relationship between Assamese textile culture and the natural world from which it draws inspiration.

### **6.2 Importance of *Kopou phool* and *Jetuka***

*Kopou Phool*, the foxtail orchid or *Rhynchostylis retusa*, is probably the most powerful eco-symbol of *Bihu* worn in the dancer's hair. *Kopou Phool* blooms in spring and thus serves as a seasonal marker, affirming synchrony with spring. The presence of the *Kopou Phool* signals renewal, beauty, and ecological timing. The dancer's body thus assumes the form of a seasonal calendar, inscribing visually the onset of spring. Along with the *Kopou Phool*, female dancers wear other seasonal flowers like *togor*, *nahor*, *bhatou* etc. on their *khupas* (hair bun) as well.

*Jetuka* holds cultural and aesthetic importance within the *Bihu* tradition of Assam. Its importance extends far beyond body adornment: it serves as a feminine beauty, an ecological consciousness, and a ritual well-being. The expressive use of the hands-clapping, light wrist motions, gestural motifs is essential to *Bihu* dance. Visually, *Jetuka*-decorated palms and fingertips enhance these motions, lending elegance and rhythmic weight to the dancer's gestures. Adding sensorially to the performance is the glow of *Jetuka*. The act of putting on *Jetuka* is a much-loved pre-*bihu* ritual shared among women and girls, thereby encouraging intergenerational bonding. It contributes to the collective preparation for the festival, reinforcing Assamese cultural identity and continuity.

### **6.3 Ornamentation and Cosmological Ecology**

Traditional jewellery is an intrinsic part of *Bihu*'s aesthetics, mirroring both cultural identity and ecological symbolism. The female dancers, or *bihuwotis*, wear a wide range of ornaments whose designs are ingrained in the natural motifs of Assam's environment. Necklaces such as *jonbiri*, *dholbiri*, *madoli*, *dugdugi*, and *soriya biri* give added visual rhythm to the performance. *Keru*, *thuriyamukhi kanphooli*, *thuriya*, *jangfai*, *lukapaar*, and *koriya* are normally worn for ear ornamentation, depicting minute craftsmanship inspired by flora, fauna, and other environmental elements.

The female dancers wear *gaamkharu* and *muthikharu* on the wrist, and the fingers bear rings such as *siripota*, *jethinejiya*, *moranejiya*, *podumkoli*, and *hirapota*. The motifs of these ornaments often draw from symbols observed in Assam's ecology embedding environmental meaning into material culture.

Traditionally crafted from copper, gold, or silver, depending on the economic means, these ornaments connect aesthetic refinement with the earth's resources. They thereby form a material expression of cosmological ecology, uniting cultural beauty with the natural world from which their inspirations emerge.

### **7. Traditional Instruments and Environmental Interdependence**

The traditional musical instruments used in *Bihu* dance are *dhol*, *pepa*, *taal*, *gogona*, *khutuli*, *toka*, and *baahi*. These are very closely associated with the ecological landscape of Assam. Made out of material that is readily available to the people, these instruments stand as quick examples of the interrelation between culture and environmental resources. Bamboo (*baah*) which hold a central place in the daily life of the Assamese, are thereby imbued with the symbolic associations of flexibility, resilience, and living sustainably. Their use in instruments like the *toka*, *gogona*, and *baahi* transforms organic material into resonant cultural artefacts.

The *dhol*, which is central to the rhythmic pattern of *Bihu*, is traditionally made from the wood of the jackfruit tree (preferably); its two sides use different skins: goat skin for the *taali* side and cow skin for the *kuboli* side. Expert *dhuliyas* can produce a gamut of sonic textures, even imitating the calls of animals, sounds of raindrops etc. thereby proving that this is an acoustically versatile instrument. The *pepa* is another iconic instrument, made first from buffalo horn and then with the addition of bamboo in some particular part to give it a more refined tonal quality. The *khutuli*, hewn out of clay and often moulded into crescent or banana-like shapes, provides flute-like melodies. *Taal*, however, are made from bell metal and give the ensemble its shining percussive accents.

Collectively, these instruments reflect the transformation of raw natural resources into meaningful cultural expressions without compromising ecological integrity. Their material origins and sustainable crafting practices underpin a philosophy of ecological reciprocity, serving to illustrate how Assamese musical traditions negotiate and maintain harmonious relations with the natural world.

### **8. Vocal Nature Poetry in Bihu Geet**

Traditional *Bihu Naam* serve as one of the most expressive literary dimensions of the festival, functioning as vocal nature poetry that seamlessly blends ecological observation with emotional experience. The lyrics often reference rivers, forests, birds, animals, flowers, weather patterns, and agricultural cycles, thereby reinforcing environmental meaning through poetic narrative. These songs are not merely forms of entertainment; they are lyrical repositories of ecological knowledge that reflect how rural communities perceive, value, and interact with their natural surroundings.

A representative example is the widely sung *Bihu Naam*:

*N Pani Barhile      Nahor Phool Phoolile*

*Ahote Solale Paat,*

*Kuli Ketekiye      Inale-Binale*

*Bihu Bihu Lagise Gaat.*

This *Bihu Naam* succinctly captures the environmental cues that signal the arrival of *Bohag*. The swelling of river water marks seasonal transition, while the blooming of the *Nahor* flower becomes a visual index of spring's onset. The *Ahot* tree changing its leaf evokes a sense of landscape awakening. The call of the *Kuli* and *Keteki* birds, both central motifs in Assamese springtime heightens the sensory atmosphere of renewal. Through such imagery, the song embodies what may be called an eco-poetic consciousness. Each line registers the intimate, rhythmic changes in the environment, translating them into emotional resonance. These *Bihu Naam* signifies not only the festive mood but also the ecological synchrony that binds human celebration with natural flourishing. These songs, therefore, act as oral-literary expressions of environmental attunement, preserving the ecological rhythms of Assamese life in melodic, culturally valued form.

### **9. Performance Space as Environmental Domain**

Historically executed in open fields, village courtyards, forested groves, and along riverside spaces, *Bihu* dance reinforces an intrinsic interconnectedness between the human body and the surrounding landscape. These natural performance environments dissolve conventional boundaries between art and ecology, making the act of dancing a shared environmental experience rather than

a staged spectacle. Without constructed stages, the dance unfolds directly upon the earth, where dancers and spectators alike engage with the textures of the soil, the movement of wind, the warmth of sunlight, and the expanse of the open sky. Such settings foster a situated eco-aesthetic sensibility in which the rhythms of nature become inseparable from the rhythms of performance. In this way, *Bihu* embeds itself within the lived environment, aligning human expression with seasonal ambience and ecological presence, and rendering the dance not as an isolated art form but rather as an active, lived interaction with the natural world.

#### **10. Ecological Ethics, Community Identity and Current Challenges**

The *Bihu* dance is deeply ingrained in the socio-environmental matrix of Assamese society, serving as a cultural practice that articulates not only aesthetic appreciation of nature but also environmental ethics and community identity. As an agrarian festival structured around ecological rhythms, *Bihu* fosters an ethos of reciprocity, respect for land, and livelihood practices that are sustainable. From this perspective, it becomes increasingly important to understand *Bihu* within the context of contemporary environmental crises and the transformation of cultures.

##### **10.1 *Bihu* as a Site of Environmental Ethics**

Environmental ethics in *Bihu* are manifested through reverence for natural cycles, agricultural sustainability, and communal celebration of ecological regeneration. Traditional *Bihu* rituals, such as cow worshipping (*Goru Bihu*); land, tool and tree worship (*Manuh Bihu*, *Nangol Bihu*, *Gos Bihu*), show ethical relations with non-human elements. The festival reinforces the principle that human survival is dependent upon responsible stewardship of soil, water, plants, and animals. In the dance, song, and ritual, environmental values are internalized as part of lived reality, not an abstract ideology; *Bihu*, therefore, can be called embodied environmental pedagogy.

##### **10.2 Collective Identity and Environmental Belonging**

*Bihu* constructs Assamese identity through shared ecological experiences. The open-field and village courtyard celebration builds a community consciousness based on natural space where landscape becomes a cultural anchor. The mass participation of people across age, gender, and class reinstitutes community belonging based on land and locality. In diasporic contexts, the performance of *Bihu* overseas is rendered as an act of cultural environmental memory connecting displaced individuals to ecological origins.

##### **10.3 Gender and Ecological Subjectivity**

Ecological meaning even permeates gender participation in *Bihu* performance. Women's roles in the dance represent femininity with natural abundance and regenerative power, with the female dancers considered as *Prakriti*. Men's roles in playing instruments symbolize vigor and life force, considering male participants as *Purush*. Together, these gendered embodiments construct an eco-cultural balance, a reflection of mutual dependence within both environmental and social systems. Contemporary feminist readings consider *Bihu* a site where ecological and gendered identities meet to resist a patriarchal objectification that repositions the female body as ecological vitality rather than ornamentation.

##### **10.4 Globalization, Commercialization, and Cultural Dilution**

The rising commercialization of *Bihu* in stage competition, television broadcast, and commercial sponsorship has altered performance contexts. Urban stage versions will often use different materials in costuming, substitute artificial flowers for natural ones, and enhance music electronically. Ecological authenticity is reduced, while dance movements tend to shift to those that are more spectacular than agricultural or nature-based gestures. Such transformations run the risk of eroding the environmental ethics encoded in traditional forms.

##### **10.5 Environmental Degradation and Threat to Indigenous Resources**

The symbolic plants and materials of *Bihu*, especially the *kopou* orchid and natural bamboo varieties are under threat from ecological destruction due to habitat loss, deforestation, and climate change. Similarly, the numbers of buffaloes used for making the *pepa* instrument have been

declining, thus threatening material continuity. These environmental disruptions raise urgent questions about sustaining cultural heritage without compromising ecological integrity.

#### **10.6 Cultural Practice for Revitalising Environmental Consciousness**

*Bihu*, therefore, acts as an efficient indigenous environmental knowledge system in the context of contemporary sustainability discourse. The revival of traditional community-based performances in natural spaces could further enhance *Bihu* as a resource for environmental resilience by encouraging responsible uses of natural materials and ecological education through cultural institutions. Academic research, cultural policy, and grassroots initiatives need to collaborate to ensure the continuity of *Bihu* as a living ecological practice.

#### **11. Conclusion**

The ecological aesthetics of the *Bihu* dance of Assam stand as a relation among culture, environment, and embodied performance that is profound and enduring. As this study illustrates, *Bihu* is much more than a celebratory folk dance; it is a multisensory ecological practice embracing the seasonal temporality, agricultural rhythms, and environmental ethics of Assamese life. Its movement vocabulary, developed through natural imagery, agrarian labour, and kinetic expression of ecological cycles, makes *Bihu* transform the human body into a living archive of environmental knowledge. Its choreography, songs, instruments, attire, and performance spaces cumulatively enact the interdependency between human and nonhuman worlds.

The eco-symbolism inherent in textiles, ornaments, flowers, and body adornments underlines the intimate ways in which Assamese cultural identity is interwoven with its natural surroundings. Similarly, traditional instruments made from bamboo, horn, wood, and clay reveal how material culture is maintained via ecological reciprocity and resource awareness. *Bihu*'s performance environments such as open fields, groves, courtyards, and riverbanks further reinforce an eco-aesthetic sensibility that dissolves the borders between art and ecology, placing dance within the rhythms of lived landscape.

The ecological integrity of *Bihu* is under great threat from contemporary challenges such as commercialization, ecological degradation, and the decline of indigenous resources. On the other hand, however, such challenges underline a growing need to foreground the environmental wisdom embedded in traditional practices. As an embodied form of environmental pedagogy, *Bihu* provides rich insights into sustainability, community resilience, and ecological stewardship. Its gendered symbolism, communal participation, and cyclic alignment with seasonal change all affirm a worldview wherein culture and nature are mutually sustaining.

This paper, in interpreting *Bihu* through the Environmental Humanities framework, reiterates the role that folk traditions continue to play in shaping ecological consciousness in an ever-changing world. The need to preserve *Bihu* in its essential ecology is important not only for the safeguarding of Assamese cultural heritage but also for the contribution this makes toward wider global discourses on environmental ethics and regenerative cultural practices. Ultimately, *Bihu* embodies an ecological philosophy celebrating renewal, interdependence, and the cyclical harmony of life, reminding us that human flourishing is inseparable from the health and vitality of the natural world.

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**SOLASTALGIA CONCERNS IN NADIA AHIDJO'S "BEFORE THE RAINS CAME"**

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**Abstract**

The earth, the nourisher and preserver of all forms of life is in the midst of soaring crisis in the age of Anthropocene. The degradation of the natural habitat impacts all lives that directly and indirectly depend on its resources for survival. Human beings, considered as the advanced species of planet earth are affected on multiple levels by the changes in their biological setting. The varied implications can be broadly grouped into physiological and psychological depending on the nature of their affectation. The physiological consequences of environmental change are manifested in many forms that can be visually observed while, the psychological sequela is embedded in the psyche of individuals and demonstrated in passive forms. The psychological uproars evident in human beings are documented by writers of ecofiction who explore the relationship between individual and the natural landscape. Solastalgia, the sense of homelessness experienced while at home due to the completely altered living condition is increasingly incorporated in ecofiction and its sub-genre climate fiction that delve into the altered state of the innate vicinity. Nadia Ahidjo, the Pan-African writer who focusses on the sociological inequity inflicted upon indigenous communities, integrates environmental transpositions to further elaborate the bigotry. This paper aims to probe into Nadia Ahidjo's short story, "Before the Rains Came" through the lens of Glenn Albrecht's Solastalgia. It will delineate the indication of solastalgia through the observation of the psychoterratic state of individuals in relation to the ecological deterioration and the consequent responses to it.

**Keywords:** Solastalgia, Ecofiction, Psychoterratic emotions, Environmental distress, Homelessness

The wellness of an individual is assessed in relation to one's physical and psychological goodness. Mental well-being is considered on par with physiological health in the present times in which human beings are exposed to a number of psychological struggles. The human brain processes a variety of information and stores all the observations inferred from it. The storage of knowledge and its active recollection constitute memory that is considered essential for human survival. Memory is an integral element of human psyche that paves way for the smooth flow of life as it directs human actions. It also plays a significant role in the construction of human emotions by creating meanings from the past and present events. The vast expanse of human memory gives rise to the discipline of memory studies that derives its origin from the roots of psychology. The scientific inquiry into memory brings out multiple influences that further exemplify its inevitability in the understanding of human mind.

The wide arena of memory studies branches into the concepts of individual memory, collective memory, multidirectional memory, contemporary memory and past memory. The retrospection of memory leads to the surge of all the emotions at once, though one emotion eventually supersedes the other emotions. The recollection of past memories evokes positive emotions like happiness, solace and contentment as well as negative emotions like sadness, longing, rage and regret. Emotions are formed by the interrelatedness of multiple factors: "Emotion systems are the complex interconnections of regions that are activated in concert during



an emotion episode” (Hogan 43). The emotions blend with each other and create an experience that becomes the memory of an individual with the passage of time. Nostalgia can be considered as one of the prominent emotions that exerts great influence on individuals.

The earliest literature on nostalgia is found in the works of the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer published in the late seventeenth century. Hofer presents nostalgia as the medical term that denotes the feeling of home sickness along with sociological implications. The analysis of nostalgia in relation to a geographical location and society opens new dimensions of research that amalgamates different elements together:

Nostalgia can be broadly defined as a sense of longing sparked by different experiences of loss often related to changes taking place in the lives of individuals and in society.

Nostalgia is therefore closely connected with notion of “the past.” (Jacobsen 30)

Nostalgia, is therefore closely knitted together with the place. The human mind considers ‘place’ and the various attributes attached to it as major influences that transform human life.

The nostalgia of a place is inclusive of the physical space comprising natural environment, constructed space, the human beings and non-human entities that dwell in it. The longing for the geographical space that continues to exist reveals that the lived space is destroyed, transformed beyond recognition and becomes inaccessible to the person who once relished it. The sudden memory of a place is caused by visual and auditory triggers of actual or related objects as well as people belonging to the place: “Such markings of the calendar, indicating moments of remembrance at particular places, can last for decades...” (Winter 61). While most individuals develop longing for the home they lived in and people whom they loved, some develop a strong emotion of nostalgia for the natural environment that provided them with the essential resources. The longing of these individuals is initiated by their separation from the environment because they consider it as an entity that continues to shape their life and actions. The natural space that they once lived in encompasses experiences associated with all natural resources and living beings that existed in that space making them integral components of their memory.

The relationship between memory and the natural world is reflected in literature that focus on the degrading condition of the earth. The literature that explores the different facets of the environment and the reflections on them is termed as ecofiction. It fictionalises the actual problems of earth and brings out the role of human beings in it. Ecofiction details the adverse impact of scientific advancements on the earth as well as the resultant flourishing. The ecofiction places the ecosystem at the centre and decentres human beings by placing them on a lateral position. Ecofiction can be defined as, “... a composite subgenre made up of many styles, primarily modernism, postmodernism, realism and magic realism, and can be found in many genres, primarily mainstream, westerns, mystery, romance, and speculative fiction” (Dwyer 3). The writers of ecofiction blend the assorted genres of postcolonialism, realism, fantasy and apocalypse to highlight the exploitation of the environment. The struggles of the marginalised are intertwined with the struggles of nature through the writings of significant writers like Barbera Kingsolver, Kim Stanley Robinson, Rick Bass and Ursula K. Le Guin.

Nadia Ahidjo tracing the steps of the earlier writers of ecofiction depicts the present state of the environment that greatly influences the life of human beings who are an integral part of it. Ahidjo as a pan African writer directs her attention towards a diverse range of social causes that are intertwined with the natural world. She bases her work on the existing issues on gender as well as on people at periphery. Ahidjo has also written a number of children fiction that focus on the affinity among human beings that constitute a peaceful world. The popular works of Ahidjo that highlight the role of human beings in the preservation of environment are *Tamara and the Egg*, *My Friend the Witch: Kara Madjo* and her short story “Before the Rains Came” compiled in Margaret Atwood’s collection *Disruption: New Short Fiction from Africa*. Ahidjo’s educational exposures at Rhodes University, South Africa and University of Basel, Switzerland have provided insights on strategic advisory measures that can be taken to empower African youth.

Nadia Ahidjo's popular short story "Before the Rains Came" is set in dystopian Africa where indigenous people are treated as subjects of experiment. The narrator Kahina is an African indigenous woman who observes the completely altered climatic conditions and landscape of her village in Sahel as a result of the invasion of research corporations. She notices how the scientists from the developed countries of the world consider their village as an experimental field due to its degraded environment. She tells about the past prosperity of her place, Sahel, her fellow Sahelians and the natural resources to her younger sister Ténéré, who was just born when the environmental changes began to surface. Kahina's narration excites as well as surprises Ténéré as the world that she describes seems like an impossible reality to her. The short story makes use of memory as an instrument to depict the colonial impact on the native people as well as the natural environment. The story ends in a yearning that arises from the loss of the environment, identity and the inability to protect both.

Nadia Ahidjo's works that create a synthesis of environmental issues and social well-being are appreciated by critics of literature. The assertion of the rights of women and underprivileged people contributes to Ahidjo's global popularity. The concern for nature's degraded state expressed through solastalgia is analysed from the psychological perspective by researchers. The article titled, "Empirical research review on Solastalgia: Place, people and policy pathways for addressing environmental distress" (2025) explores the origin, triggers of solastalgia and methodological trends that integrate solastalgia into mental health programmes. The contemporary application of solastalgia in the age of technology and artificial intelligence is evident in the article titled, "Digital Solastalgia: Exploring User Attachment and Perceived Degradation in Social Media Environments" (2025) by Enrico Cipriani et al. Thomas Byers's "Time change in virtual worlds: Understanding ludo-solastalgia" (2025) uncovers the distress of players in relation to the updates of the game that disrupts their sense of place.

The concept of solastalgia is also interpreted through the lens of language and literature. Lucia Abbamonte and Bronwen Hughes's article, "Solastalgia: A comparative corpus-based study of environmental lexicon" (2025) is a linguistic study that explores the attribution of new meaning to the already existing words related to environment. Falguni Desai and Umang D. Patel's article, "Solastalgia in Selected Oriental and Occidental Poetry: A Comparative Study" (2025) delves into the similarity found in the views of oriental and occidental poets regarding the communal bond and sense of loss. The socio-economic crisis that causes the loss of environment resulting in solastalgia is depicted in Olga Teresa Buczek's scholarly paper, "Sense of Place and Solastalgia: An Ecocritical Reading of 'La seca' by Txani Rodriguez" (2025). The emotions of young adults that springs from solastalgia are documented in Prerona Das and Dr. Mamta Anand's article, "Eco-Emotions and literary Solastalgia: The Adolescent Mental Discomfort in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction" (2025). The impact of human-induced climate change on the indigenous community is identified in the article titled, "Solastalgia and Poetic Resilience in the Environmental Imagination of Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner."

The review of literature provides an overview of the multidisciplinary application of the concept of solastalgia. It iterates that solastalgia has been extensively used to analyse its psychological implications on human beings. The impact of solastalgia and its role in the digitised world is also uncovered through the scholarly articles that have been reviewed. The alternating trends in the utilisation of solastalgia to discover the societal issues are also identified. It is also observed that the arena of solastalgia is gradually seeping into the field of art and literature. The existing literature brings forth the exploration of solastalgia as an evolving discipline. It also acknowledges the social relevance of Ahidjo's works. However, there is hardly any work that explores Ahidjo's works from an ecological perspective. The review of the secondary sources therefore underscores that the works of Nadia Ahidjo have not been examined using the tool of solastalgia.

The present study aims to analyse the causes, manifestation and impacts of solastalgia in Nadia Ahidjo's short story, "Before the Rains Came". The research sets to explore the affectation

of psychoterratic state in individuals due to the changes in the natural environment. It is a qualitative research that ventures into the concept of solastalgia. It uses library research methodology that aids in understanding the background of the study. The methodology involves the interpretation of the work chosen by substantiating it with the data available in library catalogues and database. The analysis begins with the interpretation of solastalgia and its occurrence in literature. It identifies the major causes that initiate solastalgia and it probes into its manifestations on human beings and the society at large.

The advancement of human society facilitates the movement of people and goods from one place to another. The displacement of human beings as well as their movement across boundaries constitute the concept of migration. The individuals usually migrate from their place of origin to other places for a number of reasons ranging from personal commitments like employment, education to social and political causes like forced eviction. These individuals long for their home as they experience homelessness. Similarly, the native and aboriginal communities who live in the natural environment are greatly affected by the rapid urbanisation of the earth. The loss of their physical environment creates a sense of homelessness at home and also induces other tumultuous emotions. The emotion caused by the destruction of the natural environment is termed as solastalgia by Glenn Albrecht. He defines solastalgia as, "... the pain or distress caused by the ongoing loss of solace and the sense of desolation connected to the present state of the one's home and territory" (Albrecht 38). Derived from the Latin word '*solari*' and the Greek word '*algia*', the term solastalgia essentially captures the emotion of pain caused by the irreversible changes in the environment.

Glenn Albrecht identifies the major causes that contribute to the emotion of solastalgia. He does not limit the experience to human beings but he extends it to animals and plants as they are also perturbed by the change. He equates the harms inflicted upon earth and organisms to that of a murder. He terms the killing of land as tierricide and he stresses upon the fact that causes of eradication are the devastating results of human actions. He states that tierricide is a subcategory of ecocide that elaborates on the complete destruction of the environment. The concept of ecocide unravels how the decline of the natural environment has a greater impact on the human civilisation:

The history of pre-modern societies is thus full of examples of social collapse brought on by a combination of localized forms of ecocide and political conflicts. These early societies were especially vulnerable to regional degradations of the environment that occurred often because of human interventions designed to extract a larger surplus product. (Brosz 34)

The breakdown of the natural space produces a rift among human beings that in due course of time transforming it into social dissolution that create stranded individuals.

Nadia Ahidjo craftily captures the killing of land in her short story, "Before the Rains Came". Kahina, the narrator, begins the story with the arrival of people from the developed countries who introduce themselves as prototypes. She narrates the different classifications of prototypes and how all of them consider the native people and land as an experiment. She vividly remembers how, earlier, their land was fertile with all the bounties of nature and how they experienced all climates in their respective frequency. She also recollects how the Sahelians through the natural way of life maintained the equilibrium between the natural resources and the human society. Kahina tells her sister Ténéré that the balanced environment that flourished with the gifts of nature attracted the prototypes who slowly destroyed it with their experimentation: "And then we started hearing of over-abundance all around us, and that's when the trouble began" (Ahidjo 195). The prototypes try to usurp the natural wealth of the land of Sahel considering the Sahelians to be unworthy of it. The complete and sudden confiscation of the resources cause adverse changes in the climatic conditions of Sahel.

Kahina points out how the Researcher prototypes and Humanitarian prototypes who arrive on their land are curious about the availability of water. They decide to transport the excess

water from this land to other places where there is water scarcity: "Next came the Humanitarian Prototypes, they dug around everywhere, collecting rainwater. They were collecting the water for areas where the dry seasons were starting to seem endless" (Ahidjo 195-196). In the guise of helping the needy community, they use the water to construct huge skyscrapers in their own land. The people of Sahel as well as the people who lack adequate water resources do not benefit from it. The hoarding of water by the prototypes, makes the land of native people dry. The unanticipated decrease in the ground water level affects vegetation and animal life. The actions of prototypes result in terracide that contributes to solastalgia. The murder of their land and their incompetency to prevent it, greatly worries Sahelians and stirs up their emotions.

The people who witness the degeneration of earth experience stress that results in psychoterratic syndromes. The syndromes are caused due to the disappearance of their healthy environment that directly impacts their psyche. As Glenn Albrecht states, human body as well as mind maintains a balance with the outer space. However, terracide collapses the balance and disturbs the human mind resulting in different psychoterratic circumstances. The most prominent psychoterratic disjunction is the sense of feeling homeless at home:

The loss of the endemic or the end of endemism via globalization could return a form of nostalgia to the status of a significant psychoterratic syndrome worldwide as people leave loved home locations only to return to sometime later to find they have been rendered homeless. (Albrecht 252)

The altered climatic milieu, movement of fauna and changes in the distribution of a region's flora can also create a sense of homelessness in individuals. This sense of homelessness caused by the loss of environment leaves a lasting impact on the minds of the people.

Kahina and others individuals who are smart and young are taken away to the land of the prototypes. They are forced to move from one place to another in that alien land and are assigned various tasks at a tower-like structure, the Citadel that acts as their headquarters. The people initially chant and sing with the Saviour prototypes who spread the teachings of liberty and modernity. They later work with Scribe prototypes who facilitate their merging with the Saviour prototypes. The places and infrastructure of the retreat that they witness remind them of their homes in their country: "Others didn't speak because they wanted to go back to the retreats, the retreats that reminded us so much of home" (Ahidjo 199). They realise that their homes no longer look like the ones they have seen while growing up. Contrarily, they find a striking resemblance between the retreat and their homes before the advent of the prototypes. The sense of homelessness kindled at the thought of their home reveals the untoward manifestation of solastalgia in the human perception.

Desolation caused by the destruction of environment is yet another psychoterratic syndrome that Glenn Albrecht elaborates on. He propounds that the unrecognisable condition of a land that was once home, creates a void in an individual's psyche. The emptiness continues to grow and becomes intense as the mind reaches a conclusion that the negative changes of their environment cannot be undone. This distress often causes the isolation of individuals as they prefer keeping their pains and worries to themselves: "Cultural links between nature and community might also explain the need for ecological desolation in a world of alienated loners" (Lavigne 99). The desolation disrupts the relation between individuals questioning the idea of society. The disruption of the bond between human beings and nature strains the interdependence of human beings. It reveals that the desolation is not only psychological but it also becomes social as it significantly weakens the construct of a society.

Ténéré filled with curiosity, questions Kahina about the prototypes and their conversation. Kahina discloses to her that the uninhabitable conditions of their land is a consequence created consciously by the prototypes. The native people of Sahel region enjoyed the natural resources and treasured them using their traditional knowledge that is passed down through generation. The prototypes have deliberately erased their traditional knowledge and have commodified their resources. Kahina expresses her vulnerability as she says that her people do not

have the money or connection to gain access to the basic necessities of life. She ruefully laments that,

How to filtrate the brown water that our people were slowly dying from, dying while those in the lands beyond lived in their retreats, drank their clear water in plastic bottles and ate their lab-grown and genetically modified chicken and grain. Is this how it all ends? (Ahidjo 201)

Kahina's dejection and apprehensions about the present and future of her people portrays the presence of solastalgia.

The desolation subsequently leads to anxiety as the condition of earth keeps worsening. The sharp increase in the temperature of earth and changes in climate caused by the modern lifestyle creates concern in all the individuals who are aware of it. The perturbation caused due to weather conditions is termed as meteoranxiety by Glenn Albrecht who predicts that the future generation might be subjected to it. Meteoranxiety is a subsection of ecoanxiety that is connected with all the commotions that occur in the environment:

Climate change is now delivering extreme weather worldwide, and a reasonable response to this heightened risk of weather-related catastrophe is heightened anxiety. Those who live in flood-prone areas, or close to the sea on cliff tops, now have meteoranxiety as soon as severe storm warnings are given by meteorological agencies. (Albrecht 78)

The advancements in science and technology that predict the changes in weather and protect people from major calamities also create anxiety within the individuals. They contemplate their possibilities of surviving the disaster as well as think of their life in the uncertain future. Meteoranxiety is therefore prevalent in most people who are impacted by solastalgia.

Kahina's story begins from the time of prototypes' arrival and the frequent occurrence of strong winds. She says that the winds blow with great velocity and that they need strong anchor to withstand it. Kahina and other people of the Sahel region face harsh and unbearable weather conditions after the first arrival of the prototypes. The violation of their land and resources has altered the living conditions of the Sahelians. Kahina recounts the past where they received due and proper rainfall and when the temperature was ideal for the sustenance of their life. Nonetheless, the present and future become oblivious to them and they hold on to their life expecting the worst. She also says that their place is often subjected to unexpected disasters: "When the rains came, no one was spared, and there was an uproar in the lands beyond" (Ahidjo 19). The people begin to fear even the common weather conditions like rain and wind as they encounter only the extremities of these weathers. The constant apprehensions and continued fear gets embedded in the people's mind. Kahina's account thus presents the yearning for the past as well as the meteoranxiety of the present.

The major manifestation of solastalgia that threatens human existence is the loss of one's identity due to the collapse of ecosystem. The identity of an individual is influenced by a variety of factors ranging from personal life to social relationship. The ecological atmosphere is also an integral part of one's individual and social life that impacts identity. The idea of self that defines an individual is dependent on the environment where one lives in as it is closely woven with their life's fabric: "Not only is the natural world given an identity through the way in which people view and experience their relationships with it, but it also influences individual identities" (Clayton and Opatow 9). The interrelation of human beings and nature shapes their identities but the alteration in this relationship, caused by the transitioned natural atmosphere that disintegrates the individual identity as well as that of the social. It becomes so obscure that the individual faces the need to reconstruct a new one that defines them.

The life of Sahelians who moved to the Citadel is different from those who were left behind in their lands. Kahina details Ténéré about the new knowledge that they gain on the climate and condition of Earth. The knowledge educates them about temperature, the levels of humidity, dew points, fog, wind, pressure and visibility that affect their everyday activities. When Kahina

and the other people return to their land after receiving the education of the prototypes they witness the startling changes of their habitat. The sight of sudden transformations shock them to the extent that they begin to question their own identity: “We forgot our homes, our families, we forgot the grain and the fodder, we forgot the trucks that brought us there, and then finally, we forgot our names. Is this when the empowerment started?” (Ahidjo 197). Kahina says that they do not even remember the staple food that they consumed years back as they have ceased cultivating those crops due to the barrenness of the land. The disappearance of their healthy food and water, fertile land and rich culture gradually obliterate their communal as well as individual identities. The life of the Sahelians portrayed by Nadia underscores the distortion of identity that is a major threat posed by solastalgia.

Solastalgia that is evinced through the diverse conditions discussed earlier has both positive and negative impressions on human beings. The acute solastalgia evolves when people endure the unbearable conversion of their environment without resisting it. The condition in which people tolerate the situation in order to merely survive is termed as negative resilience: “Through a global, conflict-analysis lens, *negative resilience* is connected with the need for survival in the midst of a violent conflict that drives community members to collaborate with perpetrators of violence and tolerate crime and conflict” (Korostelina 3). Their yearning to survive surpasses the basic requirement of healthy and pollution-free environment. The resilience that is mostly considered positive assumes a negative state as the passive indifference to the decaying condition of one’s surrounding affects both the physical and cognitive welfare. This negative resilience caused by solastalgia does not facilitate the reformation of the existing condition rather it leads to stoicism that eventually catalyses the absolute ruination of the locale.

Kahina and Ténéré observe the prototypes from a distance and Ténéré becomes curious about the food that they eat. The proper meal that contains the essential nutrients is a rare sight to the Sahelians, as the people of the present survive on the minimal food after the arrival of prototypes. Ténéré on seeing the clean water consumed by the prototypes, wonders if it in anyway tastes better than the polluted water that they are drinking. Kahina interrupts her saying that the clean environment of Sahel region initially lured the prototypes to come to their land. However, the resilience of the Sahelians to all the damages done to their land resulted in their existing condition. The Researcher prototypes are intrigued by the survival skills of the Sahelians that help them navigate through the harsh climate and unbelievable condition:

“Hey, you! Old man, yes, you! ... When did your people realize they could filter the muddy water and drink it without getting sick? How do you survive on a diet of frog legs only? Doesn’t the noise bother you? Come sit, come sit, share our food. In fact, when was the last time you saw food and fresh water? Tell us everything about this amazing resilience you have shown.” (Ahidjo 194-195)

The resilience of the people becomes conducive for the prototypes to exploit them and their land. The prototypes destroy the land of the Sahelians to build better living conditions for themselves.

The persistence that prolonged the destruction is contradicted by anger, another impact of solastalgia. Anger against the existing environmental crisis possesses the potential to initiate action that transforms the situation making it a positive impact: “Experimental evidence also indicates that making people feel angry about environmental issues can affect their attitudes towards resolving environmental damage” (Stanley 108). Channelising the anger towards the desired goal is essential to achieve the required result. Glenn Albrecht terms the anger directed towards the contamination of earth and its resources as *terrafurie*. *Terrafurie* also known as earth anger is the anger directed against individual harms as well as organised social and political agendas that sideline the natural reserve. Albrecht terms *terrafurie* as a productive earth emotion that can aid in the recovery of the present condition of the earth. *Terrafurie* when combined with ecoactivism proves to be useful in rectifying the situation and laying foundation for an ecologically aware society.



Kahina recalls that during her time away from Sahel, she meets a group of people who refuse to accept the mutations of the prototypes. The prototypes manipulate the Sahelians and other native peoples of Africa that they are working to empower them by transforming their lands. Most of them blindly believe the prototypes while some revolt against them and refuse to follow their instructions. Kahina says that those who ignore are treated as outcasts and are termed as 'climate refugees' by the prototypes: "I heard on the radio that they were trying to apprehend them. That those they caught, they locked away in places even further than our homes, places you might have heard of called No Man's Lands" (Ahidjo 200). She reveals that despite the punishments inflicted on them for opposing, some people express their disregard on the unjust actions of the prototypes. The people exhibit terrafurie and strive to gain the attention of the prototypes and enlighten other people about it. They continue to exhibit their anger in different forms as they desire the reformation of the existing happenings.

The close enquiry into Nadia Ahidjo's short story, "Before the Rains Came" provides a deeper insight into the emotion of solastalgia that is increasingly observed in the recent times. The study unearths the cause of terracide that makes depletion of resources synonymous to murder bringing out the gravity of the act. The manifestations of solastalgia and their influences on the psychoterratic states are also examined in Ahidjo's short story. The emotion of desolation that curtails the progress of an individual and the sense of homelessness that creates an uncertain present throw light upon the earth's condition. The continuing meteoranxiety that fuels the nullification of identity is evaluated in relation to the environmental vitality. The consequences of the by-products of solastalgia namely negative resilience and terrafurie are illustrated through the exploration of Ahidjo's story. It has been studied that solastalgia heralds the emotion of tierraphilia that delineates the love towards earth.

The love for the natural sphere instils in human beings a sense of responsibility to preserve it. However, human beings tend to overlook the boundary between them and the natural world, mandating the need to redefine the conception of space. The intrusion of human beings into the arena of nature obstructs the collective harmony that results in a disordered state. The understanding of solastalgia and the processing of the emotional states attached to is essential to prevent the atrophy of biosphere as it helps human beings to become good neighbours who respect the fence that shelters the earth.

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**ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF INFORMED CONSENT IN ENVIRONMENTAL DATA  
COLLECTION AND DIGITAL ECOLOGY: AN ANALYSIS**

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**Abstract**

In the age of digital ecology, environmental data collection increasingly relies on sensors, satellites, mobile applications, and AI-driven monitoring systems. These technologies generate unprecedented volumes of ecological information, but they also raise profound ethical challenges regarding informed consent, privacy, autonomy, and data justice. This paper reframes informed consent within the context of environmental humanities, emphasizing how data practices shape human environment relationships, cultural narratives, and ecological governance. Through a mixed-methods approach combining literature review and qualitative interviews with environmental data professionals, the study identifies gaps between theoretical ethical frameworks and real-world consent mechanisms used in digital environmental research. Findings reveal recurring concerns related to community-level consent, transparency in climate data use, risks of surveillance, and the extractive nature of data collection technologies deployed in marginalized ecological regions. The paper argues that environmental data is never neutral; it carries social, cultural, and political implications that require robust ethical safeguards. The study concludes by proposing a human-centered, justice-oriented model of informed consent aligned with environmental humanities, emphasizing trust, transparency, and participatory governance.

**Keywords:** environmental data ethics, informed consent, digital ecology, environmental humanities, ecological surveillance, data governance, climate data

**Introduction**

Informed consent has traditionally served as a safeguard for individual autonomy in fields such as medicine, psychology, and human-subject research. It protects participants from coercion and misuse of personal data. However, the rapid expansion of digital technologies into environmental research has reshaped the meaning and scope of consent. Environmental data once viewed as neutral now intersects with cultural practices, community identities, and digitally mediated surveillance. As digital tools increasingly shape how societies interact with ecological systems, the concept of informed consent requires rethinking.

The rise of digital ecology, which incorporates remote sensing, drones, GIS mapping, AI models, and citizen-science platforms into environmental monitoring, has transformed ecological knowledge production. While these tools enhance climate forecasting and environmental management, they also introduce ethical challenges. Environmental data often reveals information about the communities connected to specific landscapes, including cultural practices, governance structures, and vulnerabilities. This complicates the assumption that ecological data is purely objective.

Environmental humanities offer a critical lens to understand how data practices shape cultural meanings and ethical responsibilities. Scholars in this field emphasize that ecological information is embedded in social narratives and political histories. Digital data collection from land, water, or atmospheric systems therefore engages not only with ecosystems but also with the cultural significance and moral values attached to them.

These concerns are heightened when data collection occurs on indigenous territories or socio-ecologically vulnerable regions. Satellites may map land use without notifying residents, drones may capture sacred spaces, and AI systems may draw from community knowledge without acknowledgment. Such practices raise issues of autonomy, cultural integrity, and environmental justice. Many communities remain unaware of how environmental data is gathered or how it may later be used, highlighting the need for a more participatory and transparent ethical framework.

Moreover, large-scale and automated monitoring systems operate continuously and invisibly, making traditional consent mechanisms difficult to apply. Communities are rarely included in decisions about data governance or long-term implications. This lack of participation challenges principles of justice, transparency, and reciprocity.

In this context, informed consent must be reimagined as a multidimensional and community-oriented process. It should incorporate cultural recognition, ecological stewardship, and inclusive governance rather than rely solely on individual agreements. This introduction positions informed consent at the intersection of technology, culture, and environmental ethics, setting the stage for re-evaluating its role in digital ecological research.

### **Review of Literature**

Environmental humanities scholarship emphasizes that environmental data is inseparable from the cultural, historical, and political contexts in which it is produced. As Gabrys notes, such data is always situated, shaped by institutional priorities and social power structures rather than being neutral or purely technical (Gabrys 42). This perspective challenges technocentric approaches and highlights the ethical and relational dimensions of ecological knowledge.

Technological fields, however, often foreground precision and innovation in tools such as remote sensing, climate models, IoT sensors, and drone surveys, celebrating their ability to generate rapid, high-resolution data (Benedict 113). Yet this literature frequently neglects the socio-cultural and ethical implications of data extraction. Knox and Marston argue that technologically driven methods privilege quantitative metrics while marginalizing community experiences and ecological relationships (Knox and Marston 77).

Emerging studies further demonstrate that digital monitoring tools can threaten community autonomy and ecological justice, especially in indigenous landscapes where knowledge is tied to identity and tradition. Instances of drone and satellite use without community consultation have produced mistrust and accusations of data colonialism—where powerful institutions extract ecological or cultural knowledge without consent (Lewis et al. 204; Smith 89).

Legal and policy scholarship similarly identifies gaps in current data governance. Although UNESCO and UNEP recommend culturally informed consent processes that respect indigenous rights and environmental sovereignty, these guidelines are often weakly implemented (“Ethical Principles” 14; UNEP 18). Existing data protection laws, designed for personal or biomedical data, inadequately address collective ecological data and community-level rights (Thompson 301).

Digital humanities research adds that environmental datasets also shape cultural imaginaries of the Earth, influencing public narratives about climate and ecological crises. Yet such representations frequently exclude marginalized voices, reinforcing inequalities in environmental governance (Parikka 66).

Overall, the literature across environmental humanities, law, data ethics, and digital humanities reveals significant gaps in how informed consent is conceptualized and practiced in digital environmental research. While scholars increasingly recognize the ethical stakes of environmental data, meaningful, participatory consent mechanisms remain limited. This review therefore highlights the need for an interdisciplinary re-evaluation of consent grounded in humanistic values, community governance, and ecological justice.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with environmental data professionals and an extensive literature review of digital ecology,

environmental humanities, and data ethics research. Interview participants included environmental scientists, GIS analysts, climate data modelers, and field researchers who routinely interact with community stakeholders. Participants were asked about challenges in obtaining informed consent, transparency issues, and the cultural implications of data usage in environmental contexts. The literature review complemented these insights by examining theoretical frameworks, ethical guidelines, and best practices from global organizations, including UNEP, UNESCO, and data governance authorities.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The qualitative interviews with environmental data professionals illuminate a series of persistent and structurally embedded challenges surrounding the ethical administration of informed consent in digital environmental research. Across responses, participants emphasized that although informed consent is widely upheld as a foundational ethical principle, its practical enactment is routinely diminished by institutional pressures, restrictive timelines, and the technical opacity of contemporary data infrastructures. A particularly salient theme was the systematic neglect of community-level consent. Many professionals reported that researchers often operate under the assumption that environmental data ranging from air-quality indices and soil-moisture readings to biodiversity images and satellite-based land-use maps is inherently public and therefore exempt from the need for explicit consent. Such assumptions reproduce what environmental humanities scholars identify as the erasure of cultural, territorial, and historical contexts that shape how communities understand and relate to ecological information. As Gabrys argues, environmental data cannot be disentangled from the socioecological worlds that produce it; it is always embedded in relationships of care, stewardship, and place-based meaning (Gabrys 2022).

A second critical finding concerns the perceptual and communicative gaps introduced by digital surveillance tools, including drones, geo-spatial sensors, and high-resolution satellite systems. Participants acknowledged the scientific value of these technologies yet noted that they carry significant ethical implications because communities residing within monitored ecosystems frequently lack clarity about how these devices function or what kinds of data they capture. This opacity leads to a divergence between researcher intention and community interpretation, creating an ethical blind spot in which consent risks becoming procedural rather than substantive. In several cases, interviewees described how drone-based mapping was perceived by local residents as a form of policing, surveillance, or land-related monitoring perceptions shaped by legacies of dispossession, mistrust, and state oversight. This aligns with environmental humanities critiques that locate surveillance not merely within technological practice but within historical patterns of power, control, and colonialism (Nash 2019). From this perspective, technologies used in ecological monitoring cannot be ethically evaluated without attention to how they intersect with collective memory and territorial sovereignty.

The interviews further reveal profound concerns regarding the ethical governance of AI-driven climate prediction systems. These systems depend on extensive environmental datasets assembled from sensor networks, community reporting, and in some cases, indigenous ecological knowledge. Participants expressed unease that such data is frequently collected without clear consent procedures or transparent communication regarding how it will be incorporated into machine learning models. The practice resembles what scholars term data extractivism the removal of environmental information from marginalized regions or knowledge traditions without equitable reciprocity or acknowledgment (Benedict 2021). The integration of community knowledge into opaque AI models compounds epistemic injustice, as communities become disconnected from how their own ecological insights are transformed, abstracted, or repurposed in scientific or governmental decision-making processes. Several participants noted that once data enters algorithmic systems, it becomes nearly impossible for contributing communities to trace its use, contest its interpretation, or influence the outcomes it informs.

A broader implication of these findings is the reinforcement of power asymmetries within digital ecological research. Indigenous, rural, and marginalized communities whose environmental knowledge systems are deeply intertwined with cultural identity, spiritual practice, and ancestral land relations bear the disproportionate ethical burdens of contemporary environmental data production. Extracting ecological knowledge without informed consent constitutes not only a breach of data ethics but also a form of environmental and cultural injustice. These dynamics reflect longstanding patterns within global environmental governance, in which external research institutions and international agencies shape ecological decision-making with limited local participation or recognition of community authority.

Collectively, the findings underscore a pressing need for transparent, culturally responsive, and justice-oriented approaches to environmental data governance. Transparency requires that researchers clearly articulate the purpose, scope, risks, and future applications of data collection technologies. Cultural sensitivity entails recognizing that environmental information may hold symbolic, ceremonial, or ancestral significance and cannot be treated as neutral or interchangeable data points. Ethical accountability demands participatory mechanisms in which communities assume active roles in decision-making, oversight, and the interpretive processes that shape data use and dissemination. International frameworks such as UNESCO's ethical guidelines for climate data emphasize these responsibilities, calling for equitable participation and respect for community rights throughout data lifecycles (UNESCO 2023).

Synthesizing these insights, this study argues that informed consent in digital environmental research must be reconceived as a relational, culturally situated, and ongoing ethical practice. Environmental humanities perspectives reveal that consent is not a mere procedural requirement but an expression of reciprocity, respect, and recognition of the agency of communities whose environments and environmental knowledge make digital ecological research possible. Moving forward, ethical environmental data practices must shift from compliance-based models to transformative frameworks grounded in justice, transparency, and collective stewardship.

**Environmental Humanities Perspective: Reframing Informed Consent in Digital Ecology**

The environmental humanities offer an interdisciplinary framework that deepens ethical engagement with the question of informed consent in digital ecological research. Whereas conventional scientific paradigms commonly treat environmental data as neutral, objective, and universally accessible, the environmental humanities challenge this assumption by foregrounding the cultural, political, and historical entanglements inherent in all forms of ecological knowledge. Data, in this view, is never merely a technical artifact; it is produced, circulated, and interpreted within networks of power that shape whose knowledge counts, whose environments are monitored, and whose voices are amplified or erased (Gabrys 41). Recognizing the situated nature of environmental information enables a more nuanced understanding of the ethical stakes involved when digital technologies intervene in ecological spaces.

A central contribution of the environmental humanities is its emphasis on relationality. Ecological knowledge emerges not only from human observation but also from the interactions among diverse species, landscapes, and technological infrastructures. Remote-sensing satellites, AI-driven climate models, and IoT sensor networks all participate in producing environmental meaning, yet these technologies operate within broader socio-political systems that privilege certain forms of expertise over others. For many Indigenous, rural, and place-based communities, environmental knowledge is inseparable from spiritual, ancestral, and territorial relations. Forests, rivers, and wetlands are not merely biophysical entities but living archives of memory, identity, and cosmology (Nash 112). When digital tools extract data from such environments, they inadvertently engage with culturally embedded forms of knowledge, transforming local epistemologies into quantifiable datasets that may circulate far beyond community control.

This dynamic raises the risk of data colonialism, a term used to describe the extraction of ecological information by powerful institutions without meaningful participation or reciprocal benefit (Benedict 74). Digital environmental monitoring no matter how technologically



sophisticated can reproduce historical patterns of dispossession when communities are excluded from decision-making about how their ecological knowledge is gathered, stored, interpreted, and used. This exclusion may result in cultural harm, loss of autonomy, and ecological injustice, particularly when data is mobilized to justify conservation measures, land acquisitions, or development projects that contradict community priorities.

Within this context, the environmental humanities reconceptualize informed consent as a relational and collective ethical practice rather than a procedural or individualistic administrative requirement. Consent is not a discrete moment but a reflective, ongoing process grounded in dialogue, respect, and trust. Such an approach aligns with participatory governance frameworks, which emphasize shared authority in shaping research agendas, data norms, and environmental decision-making. It acknowledges that communities especially those with deep cultural ties to their ecosystems hold rights and responsibilities concerning how environmental information is produced and employed (UNESCO; UNEP).

In addition to relational ethics, environmental humanities scholarship draws attention to the narrative and representational dimensions of environmental data. Ecological information is not only descriptive but rhetorical; it tells stories about landscapes, risk, degradation, and responsibility. Satellite imagery of deforestation, algorithmic vulnerability maps, or real time pollution dashboards can powerfully influence public perception and policy agendas. Yet without transparency and ethical oversight, such representations may mischaracterize communities, reinforce deficit narratives, or legitimize interventions that further marginalize vulnerable groups. Informed consent thus becomes a safeguard against the misappropriation of ecological stories, ensuring that communities maintain agency over how their worlds are portrayed in digital and policy contexts.

A humanities-centered consent model therefore prioritizes dialogue, reciprocity, and long-term collaboration. It includes explaining research purposes, discussing possible ecological and social impacts, clarifying how data will be stored and shared, and inviting community participation in interpreting results. Crucially, it also foregrounds reciprocal benefit-sharing, such as co-developing conservation strategies, strengthening local data sovereignty practices, supporting community-led ecological initiatives, and ensuring that digital monitoring tools enhance rather than undermine local autonomy.

Ultimately, the environmental humanities argue that ethical data governance requires acknowledging the intertwined nature of ecology, culture, and identity. Informed consent cannot be reduced to a technical checkbox; it must honor human dignity, cultural sovereignty, and ecological integrity. By centering community agency, embracing participatory research practices, and foregrounding the cultural significance of environmental knowledge, scholars and practitioners can build more just, transparent, and accountable approaches to digital ecology. Such an expanded ethical framework ensures that technological innovation in environmental monitoring remains aligned with the core principles of the environmental humanities: relationality, justice, and respect for the more than human world.

#### **Proposed Ethical Model for Digital Ecology**

Digital environmental research increasingly depends on technologically sophisticated data infrastructures remote-sensing satellites, drone-based ecological mapping, participatory geo-tagging platforms, machine-learning biodiversity classifiers, and automated climate-prediction systems. While these tools offer unprecedented ecological insight, they also intensify ethical concerns regarding how environmental data are gathered, interpreted, and circulated. Importantly, ecological data rarely exist in isolation: they are intertwined with the lived experiences, cultural practices, and territorial relationships of the communities that inhabit and steward these environments. As scholars in the environmental humanities emphasize, ecological knowledge systems are inseparable from the cultural, spiritual, and political contexts that shape them (Gabrys; Todd). Consequently, informed consent in digital ecology cannot be restricted to narrow,

individualist models of authorization. Instead, it must reflect collective governance traditions, long-term stewardship responsibilities, and the relational ethics embedded in many Indigenous and local ecological knowledge systems.

Drawing on environmental justice scholarship, participatory data frameworks, and emerging conversations in digital environmental ethics (Benedict; Hulme), this paper advances a justice-oriented ethical model for digital ecology grounded in four interlocking principles: Transparency, Participation, Reciprocity, and Cultural Sensitivity. Together, these pillars aim to ensure that environmental data practices align not only with scientific integrity but also with social equity, communal agency, and cultural respect.

### **1. Transparency**

Transparency is the foundational pillar upon which all ethical environmental data practices rest. In the context of digital ecology, transparency extends beyond disclosing what data are collected to explaining how, why, and for whom they are produced. Researchers must clarify the full operational chain: the technical mechanisms of data capture, the algorithmic processes that structure interpretation, the institutional frameworks governing storage and access, and the potential downstream uses of ecological information (UNESCO 12; Benedict 44).

Such clarity becomes increasingly essential as automated environmental monitoring systems AI-driven classifiers, predictive climate models, sensor-based biodiversity networks grow more complex and opaquer. Communities often encounter these systems as “black boxes” whose outputs affect land-use decisions, conservation policies, or risk assessments without providing intelligible rationales (Gabrys 78). For communities whose livelihoods depend on ecological stability, opaque data infrastructures can reproduce epistemic inequities: outsiders gain decision-making authority through data, while local knowledge is marginalized or rendered invisible (Nash 103).

Therefore, transparency requires dialogic, accessible communication, not merely the distribution of formal consent documents. Researchers should explain how drone imagery is processed to generate landscape models; how satellite derived vegetation indices may inadvertently reveal household-level land use; or how bioacoustics sensors track wildlife migration and could potentially identify human activity as environmental noise. Ethical transparency must also address risks including data misuse, privacy violations, political surveillance, ecological misinterpretation, and corporate appropriation of environmental information.

By ensuring that communities fully understand the implications of ecological data collection, researchers enable them to make informed choices that reflect their cultural values, ecological priorities, and long-term stewardship responsibilities. Transparency thus supports not only ethical research but also the possibility of equitable collaboration and shared environmental governance.

### **2. Participation**

Within an environmental humanities framework, participation emerges as a foundational principle of ethical environmental data governance. Rather than treating communities as passive data points within large-scale ecological monitoring systems, participatory ethics insists that they be recognized as co-creators of knowledge. Digital ecology, especially when powered by remote sensing, AI-driven environmental modeling, or global-scale databases, frequently operates at spatial and temporal scales that obscure local agency and cultural specificity. Yet scholarship in the environmental humanities emphasizes that ecological knowledge is inherently situated, relational, and deeply embedded in place-based experience (Benedict; Gabrys). For consent to be meaningful, governance structures must therefore ensure that communities can actively shape research priorities, methodologies, and interpretative frameworks.

Participatory data governance may involve a range of collaborative strategies: community advisory boards that evaluate proposed research; participatory mapping sessions that foreground traditional and experiential ecological knowledge; local data stewardship or ownership agreements; co-analysis of machine-learning outputs to prevent algorithmic misrepresentation; and shared authority over the curation and long-term management of environmental archives. When researchers invite communities into the earliest stages of project design, they disrupt extractive

data practices that historically removed ecological information from its cultural contexts and repurposed it for external scientific, governmental, or commercial objectives (Whyte). Participation thus functions not only as an ethical safeguard but also as a methodological asset: it produces richer, more contextually grounded environmental insights while reinforcing community autonomy. In this sense, participation aligns data governance with environmental humanities' broader commitment to justice, plural epistemologies, and ecologies of care.

### **3. Reciprocity**

The principle of reciprocity extends the ethics of participation by insisting that communities derive tangible and equitable benefits from their involvement in environmental data production. Traditional scientific paradigms often presume that knowledge generation, in itself, constitutes a universal public good. Environmental humanities scholars challenge this assumption by demonstrating how scientific and environmental information especially when extracted from Indigenous, rural, or marginalized communities has historically produced uneven distributions of benefits and harms (Nash; Tall Bear). A justice-oriented ethics of reciprocity counters such legacies by ensuring that environmental data work contributes directly to community resilience, sovereignty, and well-being.

Reciprocity may manifest through multiple forms of benefit-sharing: the provision of climate adaptation planning resources; restoration or conservation support; capacity building through training in data literacy and digital tools; shared intellectual credit through co-authorship; or the repatriation of ecological datasets for local governance and cultural preservation. At the same time, reciprocity requires that researchers remain attentive to potential harms associated with data misuse including surveillance, dispossession, or commercial exploitation of environmental resources. Ethical consent, therefore, is not a one-time transaction but an ongoing negotiation of obligations, benefits, and responsibilities. By reframing environmental data practices as relationships grounded in mutual respect, accountability, and ethical interdependence, reciprocity aligns environmental governance with environmental humanities' call for restorative and community centered stewardship.

### **4. Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural sensitivity acknowledges that environmental knowledge is never solely empirical; it is embedded within the social, spiritual, territorial, and cosmological frameworks through which communities understand the world. For many Indigenous and local communities, environmental meaning emerges from relational ontologies in which land, water, plants, and animals are regarded not as resources but as living relatives and active participants in social life. These epistemologies challenge extractive modes of knowledge production and demand that environmental researchers approach ecological information as culturally situated and spiritually charged rather than universally available data.

Within the environmental humanities, scholars emphasize that ecological knowledge frequently involves sacred sites, ritual cycles, seasonal rhythms, and intergenerational stewardship practices that sustain cultural continuity. When digital tools such as satellite mapping, drone surveys, geospatial modeling, or remote sensing devices document landscapes that hold ceremonial or ancestral significance, researchers must be attentive to the cultural protocols governing the visibility, circulation, and interpretation of such knowledge. Collecting drone imagery of a sacred forest or sensor readings from a culturally significant river is not an ethically neutral act; it constitutes an encounter with community identity, historical memory, and sovereignty.

Therefore, ethical data governance requires culturally grounded consent practices that move beyond standardized research forms. Community leaders, elders, and knowledge custodians must be engaged as decision-making partners whose authority shapes the terms under which environmental data may be collected, stored, or shared. Consent must be communicated through culturally appropriate channels such as oral consultations, collective deliberation, or ceremonies and must respect Indigenous knowledge governance frameworks, including protocols of confidentiality, communal ownership, and restricted access. Cultural sensitivity, then, functions as

a transformative ethical principle: it positions researchers not as extractors of data but as relational actors responsible for honoring the symbolic, spiritual, and territorial dimensions of environmental information.

#### **5. Integrating the Four Pillars**

The four pillars of ethical consent transparency, participation, reciprocity, and cultural sensitivity operate as interdependent elements of a justice-oriented framework rather than as discrete procedural steps. Transparency provides communities with intelligible insight into how digital ecological tools function, what information they generate, and how that information will circulate across research, policy, and technological infrastructures. Participation ensures that affected communities maintain agency over research priorities, data interpretations, and the governance structures that guide decision-making. Reciprocity extends this agency by establishing equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms, preventing the historical exploitation that has often characterized environmental research in marginalized regions.

Cultural sensitivity binds these pillars by grounding consent in the lived experiences, values, and epistemologies of the communities who inhabit and steward the landscapes under study. When integrated, these principles recast informed consent as a dynamic, relational process that evolves alongside ongoing environmental monitoring and data analysis. In this sense, consent becomes a sustained ethical commitment renewed through dialogue, accountability, and shared stewardship rather than a one-time administrative requirement.

This integrated framework aligns with key concerns of the environmental humanities, which foreground the moral and political dimensions of human environment relationships. By emphasizing justice, relationality, and cultural pluralism, the environmental humanities advocate for research practices that acknowledge historical inequities, support community sovereignty, and honor the diverse ways humans understand and inhabit the natural world. Such an approach not only strengthens ethical data governance but also contributes to more inclusive, culturally grounded models of ecological knowledge production that reflect the complexity of environmental change in the digital age.

#### **Conclusion**

The emergence of digital ecology has fundamentally reshaped the ways in which environmental research is conducted, interpreted, and applied. Advanced tools ranging from remote sensing and environmental sensors to algorithmic climate modeling now offer unparalleled possibilities for strengthening sustainability efforts, enhancing climate resilience, and supporting long term ecological preservation. However, these technological interventions also introduce complex ethical challenges that extend beyond traditional scientific concerns. Issues of informed consent, the protection of community knowledge, data ownership, and the recognition of environmental justice demands require deeper reflection through the lens of the environmental humanities.

This paper argues that informed consent in environmental research must move beyond its conventional procedural form. Instead, it should be reimagined as an ongoing, participatory, and culturally grounded process that respects the lived experiences, values, and ecological relationships of local and Indigenous communities. Such an approach emphasizes transparency, co-creation, and the acknowledgment of community agency in shaping the terms of data collection and environmental monitoring.

By integrating humanistic perspectives ethical reasoning, cultural analysis, historical context, and justice-oriented thinking with technological innovation, researchers can create more equitable and accountable environmental practices. Doing so not only protects community dignity and reinforces collective rights but also strengthens the legitimacy of environmental governance. Ultimately, embedding environmental humanities within digital ecological research ensures that ecological data serves not merely as a tool for scientific advancement, but as a catalyst for inclusive, just, and ecologically meaningful environmental futures.

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**TREES AS SILENT VICTIMS- ENGRAM AND ECPHORY STUDY**

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**Abstract**

Trees in literature symbolise life, Resilience, Interdependence, and unconditional love. Environmental memory through the images of the trees is chiefly recorded in Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's works. Her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* published in 2006 brings forth the interconnectedness between nature and humans amidst Biafra Civil war. The war represented the horrible memory of Nigerian genocide with the innumerable loss of lives. Trees are the only living sources which encompass emotional attachment with the victims of war. The trees witnessed the atrocities of war and offered a glimpse of memory to retrieve the past memories of their lavish landscape. The federal government enforced internal conflicts and people were clueless and hopeless to their impermanent state. The rich memory of trees and their emotional bond is traced through the in-depth study of chief characters of the selected novel. The paper also highlights trees as silent victims and role of war in destructing the peaceful nature of life in Nigeria

**Keywords:** Engram, Retrieve, Landscape, Migration, Genocide and Resilience

Nature gives pure source of life for the entire humanity. Trees play a vital role in bridging all kinds of emotions to sustain strong connectivity with humans. The interconnectedness between nature and humans are witnessed through Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun*, a novel dealt with Biafra after civil war. The war engulfed sea of suppressed emotions into the world of alienation. Many people died due to the atrocities of Federal Nigerians. Trees are part of nature stand helpless amidst howling cries of dying men. Federal government enforced displacement of people from their homeland. People moved for their survival but trees could not move for its life. Trees stand as silent victims during the war. A mixture of emotions: Happiness, love, memory, affection was shared under the shade of trees before the war. After the war, no such emotions have role to play under the trees.

The article aims at highlighting the 'engram' elements of memory and 'ecphory' experiences about trees and its connection with humanity. Ugwu, a protagonist of the novel has lot of memories connected with trees to share his perception of life with a Biafra civil war. He moves from his village to town for his better prospects and he always carries the memories of trees and emotions along with him.

The Nigerian civil war was an armed clash between Federal Nigerians and Igbo community. It was a brutal war took from July 6, 1967 to Jan 5, 1970. The power dynamics sparked Nigeria's chief ethnic communities: Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The main causes of the war or ethnic disparities, economic crash, military coupes and neo-colonial forces which play a pivotal role in executing the ethnic and religious persecution among Nigerians. Illiteracy and corruption doomed entire nation into the hell of nothing. The national spirit was lost and they were clueless to unite themselves after famine and war.

Nigeria is gifted with natural wealth namely oil and natural gas besides that it is loaded with coal, gold, Lithium, iron ore and Tin. The resource extraction and economic exploitation are the conspired plan of neo-colonial regime to succeed through ethnic tensions in Nigeria. National consciousness was brought up through music and literature which attracted the entire world. Wole



Soyinka bagged Nobel Prize for literature in 1986 for his blended style of African mythology and western influences. His work addressed issues of freedom, identity, power relations and social justice.

Nigerian literature is a rich Complex web of cultural heritage, historical narratives oral tradition and the oral narratives influence the growth of literary genre in Nigeria.

Nigerian literature covers wide array of genres poetry, short stories and plays. The most recurrent themes are traditional past, colonial atrocities, post-colonialism, identity crisis and Neo colonial traces. Chinua Achebe was widely recognised for his portrayal of pre-colonial African life and impact of European civilization. The other writers are Flora Nwapa and Daniel Fagunwa who contribute contemporary Nigerian literature. They explored magical realism with modern narrative techniques. Ben Okri's *Famished Road* is a fine example of merging folk culture with the modern narrative trends.

Nigerian literature offers nature as a backdrop in the narrative of diverse physical environment of the nation. Chris Abani's *Grace Land* portrays landscape to show the shifting aquatic and land spaces. It also dealt with ecological exploitation by looting natural oil wealth in Nigeria. The lushful landscape reflects cultural identities, ecological issues and social unrest. Nature symbolises purity and stands away from the world of corruption, political conflicts, ethnic clashes, environmental degradation. Nature reflects nostalgic remembrance of past memories and interconnectedness through love and care to humanity.

Civil war broke out in Many African nations. Rwanda, Congo, Liberia, Somalia, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Uganda and Nigeria are among the countries suffering civil war even today. Some eminent scholars have recorded about the shortcomings in Africa since Independence. Frantz Fanon and Rene Dumont discussed:

The new colonial process that would continue after independence. These critics have predicted that Africa, after independence, will face leaders whose unethical activities will lead to a politically divided continent with coups. They also predicted that the increasing dependence of these leaders on colonial masters for monetary help would expose the continent to external exploitation. This will damage the continent's independence and growth. (Uyesi Dergipark web)

Chinua Achebe also opines about the innocent nature of Nigerians as puppets operated by the Neo colonial hands to bring ethnic tensions and socio-political unrest breaking the chain of unity among them. The elite society falls into the trap of benefits offered by the neo-colonial influences and corruption is practice quite casually. According to Chinua Achebe:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise up to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. (Achebe z-lib web)

The paper analyses how trees become silent victims through the theoretical application of Richard Semon's engram and ecphory study of memory. In Nigerian culture, Udala Tree symbolizes dead men's spirits connected to the life of the people in Abba. Children play as gun fighter under the Udala Tree. The childhood practices help the children to fight for the Biafra freedom so they gathered under the trees to bring the national sensibilities over the people.

The main protagonist Ugwu's fading memory brings childhood days back with Nnesinachi. After a long break, Ugwu visits his home for Ori-okpo festival where Ugwu leans against the Ogi tree and mourns for gone by days with Nnesinachi. Because of her marriage with the trader from the north of Nigeria, His disability irritates Ugwu that encircles him with enormous disappointment. The strength of Ogi tree is poor in the Nigerian soils which symbolises Ugwu's fading memory with his cousin Nnesinachi. Ogi trees carry his past memory and makes him feel lingering in his heart for a long time.

Self-centred society never cares for environmental degradation and nature becomes silent victims amidst socio political tensions after the Biafra Civil war. The power politics poisons innocent minds of Nigerians to fall into the trap of cultism, genocide, ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure.

Nigerian literature discusses environmental themes such as natural exploitation, human bonding with nature, fertile landscapes, inter relationship between nature and culture. Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide use oil pollution and climate crisis in their literary works. The above writers represent nostalgic resonance for natural beauty and stand testament to the rise of ecological justice. The eco-literary tradition aims to trace ecological consciousness, environmental sustainability and socio political change. The execution of Ken Saro Wiwa stirred the literary responses to environmental sustainability in the work of art.

The study focusses on finding the engram and ecphory features of memory in the novel *Half of a Yellow* by invoking emotions tied to the Nigerian civil war. The term ecphory means the process of recalling memories in war literature. The theoretical framework of engram and ecphory can be drawn from cognitive psychology and trauma studies.

Richard Semon considers his creation of engram and ecphory in his seminal work *The Nmeme*. Semon defines engram in his words "...enduring though primarily latent modification in the irritable substance produced by a stimulus..." (Semon 21) Moreover the term ecphory "...the influences which awaken the mnemonic trace or engram out of its latent state into one of manifested activity..." (Semon 12)

In Richard Semon's Theory of memory, Daniel Schacter simplifies ecphory as recall or retrieval and engram as memory traces. The previous research was taken on memory in 19th century. Burnham did the research on memory under four parts namely memory of greeks in 19th century, physical, psychical, associate relation and role of habit in memory. In 1859, William Hamilton divided memory into three stages of "acquisition, retention and reproduction." (Hamilton psychnet web)

Robinson divided memory on five stages of associative inhibition, retention, recall, insane and defective. William James in 1890 views memory as "... the cause both of retention and recollection is the law of habit in the nervous system working as it does in the association of ideas." (James 653)

M. R. Lopez opines about Richard Semon's engram memory as "experience activate networks of interconnected elements producing enduring changes that can be reactivated during recall by appropriate external or internal cues." (Schacter 2001) The four features of engram: changes after/through experiences, behaviour manifestation with retrieval cues-ecphory, recall and dormant state between encoding and retrieval stages.

The significant study of engram and ecphory can be viewed from the lens of Richard Semon. The main objective of the study is to show how environmental ambience influence trauma, mental illness, nostalgic memories and engram episodes are formed which affect the mental stability of humanity and nature. In the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* Ugwu, an adult narrates the background picture of Biafra Civil war with the memory of his experiences under the trees.

Richard Semon's first two step of memory theory- engram and ecphory concept analysis have been taken for the study to apply the same features in the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Engram means enduring changes through experience and ecphory means retrieval of such memorable events. In the novel Olanna witnessed intense traumatic memories of brutal phase of Biafra civil war. She tries to save her life from violent men and so she jumps into the train filled with severed dead bodies filed up with blood stains. A mother of a young child carries severed head of her baby into the calabash. Olanna is shocked and nauseated after looking at neatly plaited head of a child inside Calabash.

Olanna remembers neatly plaited hair of the dead baby when she plaits her baby Alice under the cashew tree. She starts describing the hairstyle as, "... how some of the braids fell across the forehead. I keep thinking about the hair on that child's head I saw on the train. It was her thick.

It must have been work for her mother to plait it” (HYS 409 web) Cashew trees offers glimpse of dark memory of a dead child to Olanna. In the moment of temporary relaxation under the trees, Olanna feels emotional alienation and she is retrieved of that incident repetitively. Nature monitors the moves and thought process of all Nigerian lives. There are varieties of trees enriched with embedded with the lives of people. Cashew tree witnesses in permanent mental state of Olanna and stand silent as her offer nothing but share the state of silent victim as in “...She described vaguely familiar clothes on the headless bodies in the yard... the rolled-back eyes of the child’s head in calabash... that night she had Dark Swoop” (HYS113)

In the section, Olanna’s vision of a severed head of a child in Calabash serves as engram and she is reminded of when she plaits her baby hair functions ecphory. There is a strong connectivity of brutal emotion conveyed through calabash of severed baby’s head with Olanna and Cashew tree. The retrieval of that scene makes her ‘dark swoop’ which means temporary mental loss. She is in depressed mood to live the reality amidst war times. Trees evoke the memory of past events for Olanna and Ugwu. Recalling trees before the war symbolize their deep bonding with natural surroundings and stark changes brought by the conflict. Trees convulse dual emotion of golden and horror memories.

Ikejide’s death describes the trees as silent victims. Kainene and Richard run for life during bomb shellings. Ikejide’s head is cut by shrapnel and the head flies in front of them. Nature offers divine blessings for our life. Flora and Fauna is always loyal to us. Nature never shows brutal face to humanity. Trees are helpless when the brutal killings like Ikejide’s death staged by in front of them and they too become silent victims as in “Ikejide’s head was gone. The body was running, arched slightly forward, arms flying around, but there was no head.” (HYS 219)

Richard witnessed death of Nnaemeka by Federal Nigerians at Kano airport. Richard undergoes endured change when Nnaemeka’s death flashes across his mind. Engrammic experience of Nnaemeka’s death disturbs Richard and he thinks of his merciless death recurrently. The writer brings emotional connectivity with kola nuts in Nnaemeka’s death. Kola nuts are the symbol of cultural remembrance. Richard has ecphory memory of the death and he feels that Kainene’s life is spared on that day. Nnaemeka was shot for being an Igbo community. He is sympathetic towards his family who expects kola nuts from Richard to retrieve the soul of their son in their memory as in “the rifle went off and Nnaemeka’s chest blew open...” (HYS 109)

The main protagonist of the novel Ugwu, an adult visits his sick mother after a long time. His village is filled with a lot of memorable experience through the trees. Udala tree, Oji tree, Ube tree elicit memorable flashbacks of his golden days in the village. The emotional significance loads with personal and public domain of innocent Nigerians in the context of Biafran crisis.

Ugwu relives his memories with many trees in contemporary world of Nigeria and the conflict in the society disrupts the continuity of good memories into the hell of troubled memories with trees. His memories with the trees change in the wartime atmosphere and this bonding with the trees reached a state of loud silence.

Finally, the paper justifies the psychological features of Richard Semon’s engram and ecphory that served as a backdrop to the significant study of memories with nature at war crisis. Trees become silent victims and they are helpless when people shed their blood and lost their lives. The emotional sustenance with the trees are brought through many traces of recurring events with Olanna, Ugwu, Richard and Kainene. Trees in Nigeria become witness to brutal horror in the name of Biafra independence. The limitations of this study is to analyse Richard Semon’s third and fourth stages of memory. The research may further do on other works of Adichie in the context of memory and trees. This paper will help upcoming researchers to have a study on ecological memory in Nigerian Literature.

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**ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM AND HYBRID SPACES: POSTCOLONIAL  
NEGOTIATION IN THRITY UMRIGAR'S *THE WEIGHT OF HEAVEN***

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**Abstract**

Nature is prone to various destructions and is invariably susceptible to the cruelty of mankind. In spite of all the resources provided by nature, mankind had been consistently in the process of wrecking the ecology, making it fragile and disruptive. This destructive power of nature is manifested in various forms. Exploiting nature in pursuit of human prosperity and welfare, contributes to the decline of natural resources predominantly. This study is an attempt to examine the human appropriation of natural resources in Thrity Umrigar's *The Weight of Heaven*, using Alfred W. Crosby's Ecological Imperialism and Homi. K. Bhabha's Hybridity as a theoretical framework. Social dynamics and power foster the ongoing degradation of nature, by engaging in practices that destabilize, disrupt, and undermine the ecological balance. The industry seize authority over the Girbal tree in the locality, to formulate medicines derived from it, as an alternative treatment that aids in controlling diabetes. The inhabitants of the region resist this process of exploiting natural resource, as they assert ownership over it. Alongside the resistance, some undertake work in the industry owing to the lack of other employment opportunities in securing their livelihood. The hybrid composition of the workforce facilitates the continued viability of industrial manufacturing processes. By examining and unveiling the industrial motives in exploiting the natural resources by prioritizing their own profit over broader concerns, this study aims to elucidate on the power dynamics embedded in the environmental exploitation process.

**Keywords:** Ecological Imperialism, Hybridity, Ecology, Natural Resources, Environmental Degradation

Nature remains to produce resources that are invariably utilized by the mankind. It provides numerous resources that enable mankind to lead a prosperous and bountiful lifestyle. In turn, people on the receiving end begun exploiting nature by engaging in practices that ultimately lead to the depletion of natural resources. Mankind had turned out to be gluttonous as they desire to derive more from their surroundings that aids them in attaining wealth. The discontented attitude had long prevailed and had been recurring, as men remain dissatisfied with the resources provided by nature. There is a never-ending systematic effort to derive and exhaustively utilize all possible resources and materials from the environment.

Thrity Umrigar's *The Weight of Heaven* captures the collective effort of a group of people in exploiting a natural resource by engaging in the production of medicine that serves to be an alternative treatment that has a therapeutic potential in curing diabetes. Frank and Ellie Benton, an American couple had lost their only son Benny to a sudden illness. In an aim to forget the long-struck grief and past happenings that had led to the demise of their son, the couple accept a job offering in India. Frank holds an authoritative power in the Herbal Solutions. The company asserts authority over the Girbal tree that had long been an asset to the people living in the locality. Herbal Solutions is the firm in which Remy is working in and the company has signed a fifty-year lease to thousands of acres of forest land from the Indian state government. The villagers had utilized the tree's leaves for they have brewed, chewed and also had smoked from the leaves. This is now

taken into control by the company for harvest, and to process this natural resource into a pill that controls diabetes (Umrigar 35).

Exploitation of a natural resource results in a clash between the industrialists and the inhabitants. It stems from the difference of opinion that prevails among them. The management personnel of the industry aspire to utilize the medicinal values of the tree for their industrial development and progress. The company focuses on producing medicinal products using the tree as a raw material. While the authoritative power work for their own personal and industrial growth, the inhabitants on the other hand express opposition to this idea of exploiting the resource that belongs to them. The destruction of nature by men to meet their needs is well posited by Vijeta Gautam and Jyotsna Sinha, as they state that, mankind is driven by the need to construct dams by destroying the trees (203). Mankind had consistently been in a motive to exploit nature, aiming to uplift and improve their standard of living. In the *The Weight of Heaven*, the livelihood of the inhabitants living in the locality had been disrupted by the industrialists by abandoning their rights over the tree. The villagers had lived in harmony with nature by utilizing the natural resources to the fullest. They have made use of the trees for firewood. After the company's lease, guards were assigned to protect the trees which paved way to constant disputes and runins between these guards and the inhabitants who believed that despite the government's order, the trees rightfully belong to their forefathers and is to be passed on to their children. The police had been called several times to quell this unrest (Umrigar 35).

Industries act as agents of modern ecological imperialism, by gaining profit in the conversion of natural resources. Subjugation of labor is a recurrent phenomenon that is often experienced by those who had joined the industry out of economic necessity to support their families. Limited employment opportunities had left these inhabitants to take up this work, as they have no other alternative means of livelihood to sustain their families. Colonial power exploits nature by reshaping the ecology. In the narrative, an American company gets established in India and asserts its dominance by exploiting a natural resource. By employing Alfred W. Crosby's Ecological Imperialism and Homi K. Bhabha's Hybridity, this study examines the dominance exercised by a colonial power simultaneously in social, economic, and ecological spheres. The study examines the ways in which the local workers negotiate their identity within the hybrid industrial workplace. The operation of power dynamics contributes to the cultural and environmental transformation, which results in the exploitation of both.

Recent scholarships on postcolonial ecocriticism contributes to the ongoing debate of ecological exploitation, which is a major concern that continues to warrant scholarly attention in the present era. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* elucidate on the underlying relationship that exists between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The interconnection between the subjugation of individuals and the exploitation of nature is brought forth by Huggan and Tiffin, by stating that the postcolonial writers have made valuable contributions to the ongoing debates on the formerly colonised world and its social and economic developments in many of its regions. Their contributions consisted for most part of the protest literature and in its overt forms like political pamphlet and non-fictional reportages. Contributions were also made in poetries, novels, and plays. This literature aimed at fostering a global consciousness that would give rise to a wide variety of postcolonial contexts in which, both the social and environmental justice are consciously displayed (33).

The interrelation between ecocriticism and postcolonialism is vital in comprehending the convergence and divergence between these areas of inquiry. Qamar Qasmi and Zuhair Akram in "Colonial Exploitation and Neocolonial Developmentalism: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study of Intizar Hussain's *Basti*," posits that ecocriticism and postcolonialism together are remarkably significant as both these fields study the structures that are responsible for oppression and domination, by addressing the colonial power that exploits the natural resources and the ecosystem on the whole. Ecocriticism and postcolonialism function with a common purpose and the exploitation of resources by the colonial power is mapped out by the postcolonial scholars (65–66)



Colonial extraction of resources and the modern industrial exploitation is unveiled by the postcolonial ecologies. A clear depiction of the existing interconnection between environmental degradation and colonial mission, is claimed by Harsha Eswaraiyah and Ravi Kumar, as they state that this postcolonial eco-critical perspective examines the novel's portrayal of the human-nature connection, colonial landscapes, and the long existed and ongoing ecological implications of the colonial imperialism (30). Crosby's Ecological Imperialism, alongside Bhabha's Hybridity, collectively elucidates the complexities of depleting natural resources, and the straddling of the labors in their participation in industrial work that ultimately reflects a paradox, as they strive to preserve the natural resource that such work endangers. Environmental resources are viewed by the imperialists as a destructible resource that could in turn be utilized for their monetary benefits. Priyanka Sharma and Kirti Tiwari in "Eco Imperialism in *Glass Palace*," state that the destruction brought forth by imperialism is well portrayed by Ghosh, by highlighting how it brought attention to things which are ignored otherwise. Ghosh casts attention to the changes that were taking place in the surrounding. He asserted the artificiality of the rubber plantations by stating that it never seemed to be natural (6230).

Contemporary Indian Literature articulates the environmental concerns by shaping the discourses around sustainable development and ecological resilience. Jagmeet Singh and Sakshi Singh critique the environmental costs of postcolonial development by claiming that postcolonial India has been marked by its complex interplay of rapidly emerging urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth, often at the cost of its environmental degradation. As the nation struggles to safeguard its environment by improving its development policies, it strives hard to bypass the colonial exploitation and to claim its position in the global stage (902).

Crosby's Ecological Imperialism with Bhabha's Hybridity provides a comprehensive framework for examining the intertwined dynamics of both environmental exploitation and hybrid identity that intersect within the literary and global contexts. Though the inhabitants residing in the locality are against the industry, there are few others who get employed in the industry, which underscores the underlying negotiation of the inhabitants. As these inhabitants are the people residing in the locality, they seem to negotiate their selves, while also, they straddle to work for a company that had been destructing their natural resource over time. By intersecting these frameworks, the dominance over a natural resource by an American corporation in a colonially inflected, foreign context, and the struggle of the inhabitants in negotiating these changes is made evident in this study.

The ecological conquest of an American corporation in a motive to transform a natural resource into a commodity is well addressed in the narrative. Anand, a labor and union leader of the company had been brutally beaten up by the police, as he and his fellow labors had protested in demand for a better pay. As a result, his demise fueled up the situation and the ignorance of those who hold a higher position in the company is made visible when Gulab Singh, Frank's head of security at Herbal Solutions state that the worker who had died had done nothing criminal. Still the police went to his place and pulled him out to question him about the protest. Singh is ignorant of how cruel they have been to the worker and is worried about how they would tackle the situation next time when they might require the police's help from then. He is stubborn while saying that the villagers have been disputing their rights over the trees, by claiming that the trees are Herbal Solutions' lifeblood. He asks Frank about how else they could keep the villagers away from claiming the trees (34-35). He is ignorant and shows no sense of regret to the loss and the life that they have taken away for their own benefit.

Invading a country to get benefitted from the natural resource that belongs to the people of that particular region had moved these colonialists from one region to another. Although certain discoveries seem to highly contribute to the global market, there is a visible exploitation of natural resources. This phenomenon is articulated by Olarotimi Ogungbemi, as she alleges that the discovery of oil in Nigeria in 1958, positioned this nation in the global energy market as a key player. This great boon was suppressed and shadowed by certain ecological and environmental

repercussions. With a 47% share in Nigeria's oil business, Shell has historically sided with government forces, exploiting the Ogoni peoples' lands and causing catastrophic oil spills that have devastated the ecosystem. According to Robyn Dixon, these spills are disastrous and have contributed to the Niger Delta's ranking as one of the world's most contaminated regions. In 2011, more than 7,000 oil leaks that occurred in the area between 1970 and 2000 were cited by the UN, as it confirmed this grave estimate (361).

The settlement of people in a foreign land to establish control over other people and areas had long begun in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The central pursuit of these corporate colonizers is to attain monetary benefits. These imperialist's ultimate motto is the establishment of a company or a business entity. Toijam Chanu Panthoi and Gyanabati Khuraijam, quote that India accelerated its economic growth with its natural wealth as a fuel, and the Indian farmers watched over the huge plantation projects that were unscrupulously carried out in the fertile agricultural lands (1126). Under the guise of globalization and in a veil, they act as those concerned group of people who work hard for the goodness of the mankind. However, the underlying reason behind the establishment of a corporate company is the financial advancement that is attributed to their own benefit. This is discussed by Crosby, as he scrutinizes that these Neo-Europeans were pulled by various attractions and it varied from place to place in such new-found lands that appeared to be highly noticeable by these Neo-Europeans. However, the variables that are underlying them all and colour and shape them so that a sensible man might be convinced to invest money and possibly his family's lives in Neo-European exploits are arguably the factors that are best described as biogeographical (5).

Umrigar highlights the ongoing class hierarchy in the narrative. The American executives and Indian laborers are distinctly depicted. The narrative illustrates the struggle of the laborers in negotiating a space for living. "...hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (Bhabha 19). The union's protest signifies assertion within a hybrid space. The defiance embodied by the labors is a direct result of modern demands of the corporate and the traditional unity among the labors. Bhabha asserts that it is notable that this Third Space's production capabilities have a colonial or postcolonial origin (56).

Individuals submit themselves to people who are affluent, and this poses a significant impediment to them. Prakash and Edna are employed by Frank and Ellie to work in their household. Frank establishes a deep bond with Prakash and Edna's son, Ramesh, as Frank gets reminded of his son Benny, who had passed away. Prakash harbors a sense of resentment towards Frank for attending to his son's needs, and is distressed by his inability in affording it. Edna reminds her husband of their inability in paying for their son education. She rebels, "Then you teach him. Talk to your son in your broken English. And you pay his school fees. And buy his shoes and uniform. All on your salary—which Frank sir pays, anyway" (Umrigar 44). The hybrid nature of individuals striving to enhance their lives, facilitates the establishment of corporate industries within their country. They could neither submit nor rebel against these people. This is illustrated through the words of Edna, as she asserts their inability in providing for their son and reminds her husband of their dependence on the American couple. This submission had led the outsiders to inherit the natural resources that rightfully belong to the inhabitants.

This study is an analytical and critical approach that explores the ongoing environmental exploitation and inhabitants' negotiation of this hybrid space. By employing Crosby's Ecological Imperialism and Bhabha's Hybridity as a dual lens, this study examines the real-world challenges in negotiating a space that had been occupied by modern developments, which in turn deploys the ecosystem to a significant extent. This study employs qualitative interpretation and textual analysis of Umrigar's novel. The harvesting and utilization of Girbal trees by the corporate for commercial gain leads to deforestation. The local people in the region use the leaves of the tree in their everyday life. This is evident as a woman rebel saying:

They say you help them. But ever since Anand die, there is much anger. Peoples say, our life do not matter to the big sahibs. And we all use the girbal tree our whole lives, miss.

We boil it in our tea, make paste out of it. Some of the older peoples chew it. They our trees, miss. How can a company come and buy our trees? (Umrigar 81)

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis to explore the environmental and postcolonial interconnections in the narrative of Umrigar. This critical examination using the dual lens—drawing from Crosby and Bhabha, aids this research to delve beyond surface level descriptions, by unveiling the patterns of ecological exploitation and postcolonial aspects together. This dynamic landscape is approached in an aim to contribute to the broader questions of ecological imperialism. This study critically examines the underlying factors that are accountable for the exploitation of natural resources. Textual analysis of the narrative provides a vivid depiction of deforestation, environmental degradation, power dynamics in invading a natural resource, and the helplessness of the inhabitants in fighting against varied injustices caused by the invaders.

The analysis of Thrity Umrigar's narrative offers and uncovers a complex tapestry of environmental and societal changes that are intricately woven through the lived experience of local communities. The imperialists' arrival and the establishment of the corporate, cause deeply personal and communal disruptions by impairing the overall well-being of the inhabitants. In the narrative, these trees are perceived by the inhabitants as entities that have accompanied them all throughout their lives and is an enduring symbol that have been integral to their lives over time. The corporate head in the novel, is a man of superiority who claims to be owning similar bioprospecting companies in different places. Pete Timberlake, the boss and friend of Frank appears to be a good man all their lives. However, he gets frustrated and wants Frank to return back to the United States as he thinks that Frank had not dealt properly with things that occurred lately in the factory. The consignment is delayed and Frank assures to send it the next day, but still Pete keeps telling Frank that it would be better for him to return home. Despite the death of a worker, he remained devoid of remorse, and persistently urged Frank to return. He claims to Frank that his contract is up and that the firm needs an Indian to head the plant. Frank is being called back to his country (316). These developing Multinational Corporations are ignorant of the well-being of workers or the habitat of a particular region. Pete's urge in employing an Indian head resembles his instrumentalization of an Indian individual, where one is employed in order to take advantage of his identity. Their foremost concern lies in the maximization of profit. Ethical and humanitarian considerations appear secondary to their economic interests. This is evident as Pete states to Frank that it is more than just the consignment, and with all the labor trouble that he had brought, he wants him to return back (316).

Weak agency exhibited by the inhabitant's results in the indirect embracing and acceptance of the workers who had joined the workforce in manufacturing the antidiabetic pill. The inhabitants' subtle resistance facilitates the industrial enterprises to persist in their destruction of natural resources. Jameel Tahmoush and Mekhala Venkatesh state the disruptions that are experienced by Bedouin community, as their natural environment is invaded by the Westerners. The Bedouin are powerless and are forced to follow the directives without rebelling against or showing any authority to contest them. It is clearly depicted that the loss and destruction of the environment lead ultimately to the inhabitants' loss of their cultural identity. As these inhabitants live in the same place in harmony with nature, their cultural values and practice are deeply embedded in it (43).

The result highlights that ecological imperialism is not confined to the domination of environment. Rather, it further propagates into the socioeconomic domain, embodying in wage discrepancies, hierarchy among the workers, and the ongoing imposition of foreign ideologies and values. The progress of these multinational corporations, conceals their exploitive nature. Farhana Sultana in "Decolonizing Climate Coloniality" claims that, as these transnational corporate monopolies travel the globe for profit, it results in a further entrenchment of colonial dispossession. Extraction and imperialism sustain inequitable political economy, with imperial and developing hierarchies of power relations driven by global market systems (61).

Umrigar's narrative offers a dual critique of both environmental and cultural imperialism. The conquering of nature is inextricably linked to the subordination of people. Both these forms of tyranny continue to reverberate in modern industrial endeavours. By depicting the ecological imperialism and the hybrid nature of some inhabitants, this study unveils the complexities inherent in a society, whose natural resources are being exploited by certain bioprospecting companies. The inhabitants' navigation of the changes and transformations brought forward by the industrialists is addressed.

The study undertakes a detailed appraisal of a society grappling with changes caused by a bioprospecting company and its invasion of Girbal trees in the locality. By illustrating the economic progress of the company, the narrative offers a powerful critique of the transformation brought by the ongoing industrialization and its simultaneous reshaping of the practices and values of the inhabitants in profound ways. The insights from Crosby and Bhabha aids in comprehending the subtle, often hidden, unacknowledged costs of so-called development. The company invades the natural resources by reshaping the entire ecosystem to serve their interest and these resources are turned into commodities for global markets. As a result, the environment and the local community suffer due to the company's unrelenting quest of efficiency and profit. These natural resources are extracted and sold by the multinational companies in pursuit of strategic institutional benefits. This exploitation of nature extends to the disruption of the social fabric of the local community. After the establishment of a bioprospecting industry in their residence, these inhabitants who had lived in harmony with their environment find their livelihoods to be altered, and even threatened. The workers who choose to get employed in this industry, get involved into this system that exploits both themselves and their land. In spite of their company's destruction of their natural resource, their survival now depends on their company's growth and progress.

Crosby claims that ecological imperialism is the exploitation of nature with the eventual mastering and domineering of the social and cultural values of people belonging to that region. These imperialists seek to dominate a land that belong to the inhabitants of that specific region. As a result, both the environment and the inhabitants of that locality are subjugated. Ultimately, the company seems to seep into the family structures in both overt and subtle forms. While Crosby's ecological imperialism aids in examining the ongoing subjugation of men and nature, Bhabha's hybridity aids in exploring the inhabitants' negotiation to the changes, to which they are prone to. Some resisted to submit, while others like Gulab Singh are ignorant of the destruction they cause to their very own nature. Gulab Singh exhibits an attitude that is akin to that of an outsider, evidenced by his lack of consideration and disregard to the challenges experienced by others in his vicinity. The firm with which he is affiliated to had been widely contributing to the depletion of a natural resource. He continues to remain indifferent to the depletion of it, by prioritising the company's production. Choosing to resist the changes firmly is about recognizing who benefits out of those changes and under what cost. It is vital to comprehend that the industrialists have no legitimate rights in owning a land or its resources. Moreover, they are motivated by profit rather than stewardship.

This study unveils the underlying interconnection existing among environmental exploitation and the subjugation of people by invaders from a distant land. This invasion occurs to both the ecology and the inhabitants. Communities adapting to a new, externally imposed system often blend in without any objection. This results in the reshaping of their ways to fit into the demands of the outsiders. This passive assimilation is pertinently depicted by Gulab Singh in the novel. This yielding to external influence results in the normalization of exploitation. It is essential to demonstrate substantial resistance, as only under such pressure, these multinational companies would likely reconsider their positions and ultimately withdraw. By scrutinizing the dynamics of resistance and the far-reaching consequences of industrial expansion, this study prompts critical reflection on the ongoing industrial invasion of natural resources that deploys nature. This underscores the need to exhibit a strong resistance that is of crucial importance, which consequently helps ensure the management of natural resources in a more sustainable way.

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**THE CHANNEL AS A LIQUID FRONTIER OF ETHICAL COLLAPSE: MARITIME  
GEOPOLITICS, DARK ECOLOGY, AND THE SPECTATORIAL POLITICS OF  
SUFFERING IN VINCENT DELECROIX'S *SMALL BOAT***

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**Abstract**

This paper offers an analysis of Delecroix's *Small Boat* (2024) as a critique of the narrative, ecological, and geopolitical imaginings surrounding the tragedy that befell twenty-seven clandestine migrants in the English Channel in November 2021 after wailing repeated calls for help that went unanswered. This reimagines the disaster beyond reportage or humanitarian discourse: entangled human and nonhuman forces at work, rigid maritime jurisdictions overlaid upon fluid waters, technological mediation rendering suffering into data, indifferent consuming agency of the ocean itself. Thus, through a Blue Humanities framework, the paper claims that Channel emerges not as a neutral transitory site but a “liquid border”: where jurisdiction runs down under the pressure of the currents, storms, and other material realities of the sea. It foregrounds three interlocking dynamics. First, the novel dramatizes the violence of governmental sovereignty by dwelling on how French and British rescue authorities invoked an invisible jurisdictional line—“English waters” while drowning was still passing in real time. Second, it looks at how the sea becomes associated to Dark Ecology: an elemental actor; a “lifeless, enormous, malign” thing swollen up with the displaced people of the world so that they become a form of refuse in the global systems of inequality. Third, it interrogates the ethics of spectatorship through the Lucretian *suave mari magno* in order for the novel to tie readers into the same distant, morally absolved gaze that characterized the public response to the tragedy. Delecroix knows how to use acoustic fragmentation, technological mediation, and deep-sea imagery in a way that can uncover what Serpil Oppermann has called ‘storied matter’—the site of narrative convergence between ecological, political, and affective forces. Ultimately, the book suggests that death by drowning at sea is not an accident that stands alone in time, but rather is part of an environmental catastrophe molded by the histories of colonial extraction, climate dislocation, and the moral evasions of current Europe. In other words, Delecroix renders the drowned as both debris and witnesses, forcing a reimagining of ecological justice beyond borders, empathy, and the consolations of rescue narratives.

**Keywords:** Oceanic Vulnerability; Liquid Borders; Disaster Ecologies; Eco-trauma; Human–Nonhuman Entanglement; Maritime Sovereignty; Acoustic Ecology

**Introduction**

On the night of November 24, 2021, an inflatable dinghy bearing nearly thirty migrants sank in the frigid waters of the English Channel. The passengers were mostly Iraqi Kurds or Afghans, Ethiopians, Somalis, Vietnamese, and Egyptians who attempted a perilous journey from France to the United Kingdom; twenty-seven of them drowned. The incident thereby becomes the deadliest one ever recorded using the Channel since small boat migrations sharply shot upward in 2018 (*The Guardian*). Not only does this tragedy involve the loss of lives, but also the kind of institutional logic that made it possible. The French regional rescue center (CROSS) receives repeated calls from distressed people, confirmed with geo-locations that the vessel is within French waters, but would not allow intervention because of jurisdictional boundaries. One migrant’s desperate plea—“I am in the water” was met with the CROSS operator’s infamous retort: “Yes, but you’re in English waters” (*The Irish Times*). The CROSS later recorded the incident as “Rescued.” The



administrative finality of that word stands in stark contrast to the physical reality of death by drowning. In this context, bureaucratic detachment is not a technical failure but a form of moral anesthesia that is a lethal abstraction masquerading as policy.

This legal and emotional void is the theme of Vincent Delecroix's *Small Boat* (2024), which turns the Channel tragedy of 2021 into a philosophical inquiry into the responsibility and violence of procedure and, most importantly, the role of the sea itself in rendering some lives ungrievable. Rather than narrating the disaster through the eyes of its migrant victims, Delecroix focuses on the voice behind the radio, the young French coast guard operator who, in an act of systemic loyalty, is both an agent and a symptom of a broader collapse. In clear, disjointed prose, *Small Boat* criticizes the normalization of those collapses by denying narrative closure or catharsis. The text thus gets less into fixing guilt than into detailed analysis of the 'entangled failures'- legal, ecological, and ethical that shape the moment- currently inflecting climate migration and border securitization. It would place *Small Boat* within the ambivalence of critical intervention in the Blue Humanities since its purported horizontalism between the human-nonhuman acts in the event is a unique characteristic that distinguishes it from other novellas. Such rescue, according to bureaucratic definition, is as much ontological violence as it is governance failure. This refusal denies both the materiality and the fragility of life contained in the sea. It is in *Small Boat* that the Channel, as portrayed, goes beyond a legal threshold into a liquid border where sovereignty dissolves into drift, and responsibility, like the bodies in the water, is subject to currents beyond the control of any single state or agent. According to the coast guard operator in the novella, her professional ethics are defined not by conscience, but by the limits of territorial waters. The sea, however, does not respect such lines. It returns the drowned to the shore that rejected them, defying the logic that sought to outsource their fate.

Thus, the central question guiding this paper is: How does Delecroix's *Small Boat* reframe migrant death at sea as an entanglement of geopolitical, ecological, and narrative forces? To answer this, the analysis draws on concepts from disaster ecologies (Alaimo; Nixon), dark ecology (Morton), and oceanic agency (Steinberg; DeLoughrey), with particular attention to how the novel performs what Serpil Oppermann calls "storied matter"—the idea that narrative itself is a site where material, political, and affective forces intersect:

Reflecting on matter's narrative creativity makes us aware of the trajectories of unfolding stories generated by narrative agencies embedded in bodily natures, ecological processes, geological formations, and human-nonhuman interactions, or rather "intra-actions" to use Barad's neologism again. Retreating glaciers transmit stories about the earth's changing climate, blending global warming with political anxieties and social changes. In a profound sense, these stories display often unanticipated connections between humans and nonhumans, like drugs and hormones released from human bodies into lakes and rivers, altering "the sexual morphology of fish" (Åsberg 2013, 7). Thick with meanings, storied matter names both the alluring charm of the living world and the deadly hangover from toxic landscapes (95–97).

The novella is diagnostic, not merely reflective: it shows how humanitarian discourse stumbles when confronted with planetary crisis, and how storytelling threatens to become a performance of absolution for the safely shorebound. The paper is divided into four sections. The first looks at the ways in which *Small Boat* critiques sovereign jurisdiction by portraying maritime borders as both hyper-visible and absurdly inoperative. The second investigates the sea not as background but as an active and Leviathanic-hungry and historically saturated being that both mimics and mocks human institutions in its agency. Thirdly, the paper discusses the ethics of spectatorship, utilizing Lucretius' *suave mari magno* as an entry point toward understanding how witnessing suffering from a distance has turned into both a moral stance and an aesthetic demand. Fourthly, it develops the argument that *Small Boat* reconceives ecological justice in the Anthropocene, not through calls for empathy or rescue, but by laying bare systemic complicity and narrative failure. Ultimately, *Small Boat* offers no redemption, no reparation, no rescuer. What it offers is a kind of mirror: a

mirror showing the oceanic proportions of contemporary injustice and forcing the readers to face not only the deaths in the water but also the architectures—legal, narrative, and emotional that allow those deaths to disappear.

### **Result and Discussion**

*Small Boat* performs an ironic stultification of sense in regard to the existing state of humanitarian catastrophism across the English Channel as a maritime space in which human law and natural forces combat each other in fatal absurdity. It foregrounds how hard-edged bureaucratic distinctions such as jurisdictional borders become tragically incoherent when adapted to a sea that is fluid and storm-ridden. The Channel is thus depicted as a “liquid border,” an ambiguous space in which legal sovereignty collapses under the weight of ecological motion and political paralysis. The irony is horrific: as the dinghy sank, French and British authorities exchanged GPS coordinates in some mad bureaucratic loop, each trying to blame the other for inaction. Per the BBC's investigation, the first distress call was received by Cap Gris-Nez while the boat was still clearly within French waters, but within 20 minutes, the CROSS passed its position to the UK as “in your zone” based on an arbitrary line in the water (*Arab News*). One survivor said that they were told to “call 999” because they were “in English waters”; this while drowning in the freezing water in the dark, another passenger reportedly cried, “I’m in the water,” only to be met with the astonishing reply: “Yes, but you’re in English waters” (*The Irish Times*). Such titanic bureaucratic evasion, scripted by legal cartographers rather than practitioners of real life, stands at the center of the novel's critique. The CROSS incident report chillingly recorded the dinghy as “Rescued”—a euphemism that erases the death of 27 people from the formal history, reaffirming Michel-Rolph Trouillot's notion of “silencing” in the production of history (*The Irish Times*, Trouillot 26). The atrocities in question shall have been made futile, granted, in a liminal legend unto itself: the sea. The bodies were eventually recovered in French waters, as if to mock the jurisdictional dance in fact (Gov.uk). As the narrator reflects, “But in the end the currents brought their bodies back into French waters” (Delecroix 11). Even in fiction, the sea asserts its nonhuman agency, pushing back against human borders. The Channel, thus, is not a fixed boundary but an ontological challenge like a moving force that renders sovereignty meaningless.

Delecroix's narrator insists that her judgment “has no holes in, no fissures, but it does have boundaries, which correspond exactly to the boundaries of territorial waters” (Delecroix 28). Her cold logic represents a system in which law is mapped onto ocean space, but moral judgment has been drowned. As Rob Nixon might suggest, this is a form of “slow violence”—a structural deferral of responsibility whose effects are accumulative and unseen until they are fatal:

long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological that result from war's toxic aftermaths or climate change... scientifically convoluted cataclysms in which casualties are postponed, often for generations... lingering, off-camera casualties... somatized into cellular dramas of mutation that—particularly in the bodies of the poor—remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated (2-6).

This section of the novel comes across as a shattering indictment of maritime sovereignty, not only for its failure to save but also for its failure to see. It tells of the collapse of established institutions and an epistemological failure: to see the sea as more than a border and the migrant as more than a jurisdictional problem. In the final view, the novel renders the English Channel an archetypal site of liquid sovereignty, a zone where human fictions confront elemental truths, and tragedy is enacted precisely because none will claim the dying. It critiques the limitations of jurisdictional frontiers, but equally, it suggests something more grievous: that even when the law does ascertain responsibility, it remains something of an impotent spectator before the forces of nature. The sea, not the bureaucrats, sealed the fate of the migrants, the novel asserts over and over again. In this turn away from sovereignty, the sea itself decreed the fate, making the national borders irrelevant.

By the will of the currents, the winds, and the elemental apathy of the ocean, their lives and deaths were fashioned not by the law but by time.

The radio operator justifies French inaction by insisting that the dinghy was “right on the edge of English waters,” and would have crossed over “given the direction and the current of the waves” before French assistance could arrive (Delecroix 29). Crucially, one of the passengers hadn't even realized whether they had entered English waters or not. This speaks alone of how irrelevant the distinction even is for the dying in real time. Delecroix's prose here allows the reader to realize a grand irony: human sovereignty is defined by clarity of territory, while the ocean is the place where there is nothing but motion. Political systems claim dominion over fluid space, and their legal architecture collapses when confronted by what Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls the “tidalectic” rhythms of the sea—its refusal to stay still, its power to erase lines: “water appeals because of its lack of fixity and rootedness”; it is described as a “transitory element. It is the essential ontological metamorphosis between heaven and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux” (25). Delecroix's narrator embodies what Hannah Arendt termed the “banality of evil”—not monstrous intent, but the quiet efficiency of bureaucratic inhumanity. In real-world transcripts, the CROSS operator (fictionalized in *Small Boat*) responds to desperate cries with chilling indifference, and when the line cuts, she reportedly mutters, “You don't get it. You're not gonna be saved... I didn't ask you to go” (*Irish Times*). In the novel, this emotional flatness is not accidental but ideologically embedded. The operator justifies her conduct by describing herself as a “function”: someone trained “precisely not to have convictions or a conscience” (Delecroix 5). Empathy, she claims, is an “idiotic luxury” indulged by spectators who are moved but do nothing (Delecroix 32). She refuses to see migrants as individuals, calling them merely “lives stripped bare”—a chilling echo of Giorgio Agamben's theory of “bare life”, wherein persons are reduced to biological survival, stripped of legal or social value:

Insofar as its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life, the camp was also the most absolute biopolitical space ever to have been realized, in which power confronts nothing but pure life, without any mediation (168).

This internalization of inhumanity is not presented as monstrous, but as procedural. Delecroix himself notes in interviews that the disturbing aspect of writing the novel was realizing “I could really be her – and act and speak like she did” (*Booker Prizes*). He describes her as a person without evil intent but fully willing to join in; so much so that her voice becomes an empty vessel. Even her attempts at humor-biting remarks, professional disavowal, underline from which standpoint she stands, the psychological toll of institutional service. To exist in proximity with death, the person must be transformed into a “mass-produced tin-opener” (Delecroix 26). The metaphor, therefore, spells out a much larger crisis: that modern systems dehumanize one as a way of coping with survival. The sea in *Small Boat* is not merely a physical force but also a metaphorical one: it refers to the flood of voices that do not absorb suffering and demands from the institution. And so, for the operator to function, she must drown them out. The operator does not have this voice only for herself; it is the echo chamber of a state apparatus that asks her to hear drowning but never to respond. The tragedy, then, as told by Delecroix, is not just that the sea swallows these migrants up. It is the very state, faced with the elemental unpredictability of the sea, building up a shell of procedures and technical rationality not to feel, preferring protocol to presence. The narrator's defense rests on her ability to cite charts, logs, and coordinates, not lives. This novel makes one realize that evil may not only yell but might as well speak in calm, regulated tones reverberating through headsets and phone lines until it becomes inaudible.

The sea is denounced in Delecroix's novella as a being in its own malignantly autonomous right, an “elemental actor,” one that contradicts human agency and mocks the cold indifference of institutions. Such a vision is correlated with the Blue Humanities and its areas of investigation into nonhuman agency and oceanic sublimity, a climate that engulfs natural forces within political and moral frameworks. As the narrator admits, the sea is “always with me,” a presence she can neither control nor forget. She sees it as a “force of unambiguous harm, gluttoned with women and children,”

an abyss that consumes the vulnerable with terrifying regularity (Delecroix 6). Here, the Channel is not a passive setting but an active agent of violence—“lifeless, enormous, malign. Universal and monstrous” (68). The narrator imagines it hungering to “swallow the ground beneath her, surging inland, engulfing the continent, everything,” suggesting a primal force that cannot be bordered or bureaucratized (6). Such language reflects Timothy Morton’s theory of “dark ecology,” in which nature is not a sanctuary but a site of ontological threat—uncanny, hostile, and entangled with human guilt:

If a war leaves in its wake terrifyingly polluted lands and mangled genetic codes, any victory will be pyrrhic, as death by indirection becomes the ultimate form of friendly fire... we turn soil, air, and water and into slow weapons of mass destruction... the planet itself metastasizes into a combatant: the ultimate, toxic hyperpower, a force of random, abiding retribution (231-232).

Rather than offering redemption, the sea in *Small Boat* mirrors back humanity’s own institutional cruelty. The narrator’s routine work of logging deaths becomes ritualized sacrifice: “Every night we feed that gaping maw... spoonfuls of twenty, thirty poor people... the sacrifice the world pours into the mouth of evil” (69). These metaphors reframe rescue as futile and the state’s moral failure as cyclical. The Channel becomes a Leviathan that demands bodies, not justice. Delecroix furthers this ontology through mythological resonance. The narrator’s colleague Julien characterizes the sea as “the remains of the Flood,” governed not by God but by Leviathan—a figure of chaos and pre-creation (Delecroix 69-70). “Beneath the surface,” he says, “is archaic chaos, reigned over by Leviathan, not God,” and this creature “will probably outlive the Lord God Himself. He never sleeps and neither will he rest till the end of time” (70). In this worldview, the sea predates morality; it is older than the state, religion, or conscience. The narrator internalizes this framing, concluding that to understand her own ethical numbness, one must grasp the sea “for what it really is: evil” (70). The identification of the Channel as evil does not excuse her inaction, but it indicts her by revealing that she operates not in a realm of rational law but under a cosmic force she has ceased to question. The narrator insists that “the cause of their death was—me. Not the sea, not migration policy, not the trafficking mafia, not the war in Syria or the famine in Sudan—me” (Delecroix 27). This confession, though self-directed, paradoxically underscores the inhumanity of the sea. It forces the narrator to adopt blame that belongs, at least in part, to the oceanic system that swallowed the boat. She rhetorically asks, “Why should she be more responsible than... the sea?” (*Booker Prizes*), collapsing the distinction between human and nonhuman agents in the tragedy. Delecroix’s Channel is ultimately a dark mirror to Europe’s chilling indifference: borderless and ancient. Judged through a Blue Humanities lens, it boasts such a site of “disaster ecologies,” wherein violence, as meted out in the Anthropocene, converges: histories of imperialism, climate migration, and bureaucratic cruelty all churn in its dark waters.

The drowning in the *Small Boat* is an acoustic catastrophe: a double failure, firstly, in the rescue and, beyond that, in the translation of voice, gesture, signal, and distance. Through the repeated emphasis on sound—calls for help, replies by radio, sarcastic asides, and the sea’s muffled roar, the novella lays an ethical charge upon the conscience and then moves to deny it. The migrants’ voices are not poeticized; they arrive as raw, corporeal intrusions: “directly in your guts without passing through your ears or mind,” a language that refuses the filter of professional listening and forces itself into the operator’s interior (Delecroix 34). The narrator at times claims authorship; at others, she wonders whether the sentence is spoken by a dying man “from beyond, from the sea and the night” (Delecroix 86). The inversion of the communicative hierarchy by this slippage in the speaker sees the intended, presumably the guarantor of life, who becomes the recipient of the prophetic truth that the sea voices forth. The final words thus function not so much as an out-and-out refusal as an acoustic verdict shared between rescuers and the drowned. Silence becomes an act of consumption. Delecroix stages the “brutal silence” that follows mechanical failure—the engine’s stoppage, the phone line’s death as the sea’s last, most absolute speech act. In acoustic terms, then, the sea does not only erase bodies; it erases the very soundscape that constitutes

political evidence. Investigators and viewers demand a particular utterance—“I will save you; you will not die”—a phrase whose function is less informational than consolatory (85). They want to hear the world’s moral script enacted, thereby reaffirming that moral order still holds. This refusal on the part of Delecroix creates a rupture in the spectators’ ethical complacency: the audience is implicated not only in what it did do but also in what it had to hear to feel connected to everything. The novella thus stages a failure of translation which is both technological (radio vs. human voice), institutional (protocol vs. person), and ontological (the sea itself, with its sonic agency). Using much Blue Humanities slant, the acoustic evidence really becomes ecological evidence: the sea’s roar and the listeners’ silence come together to make the ethical shape of the event.

If acoustic failure reveals how suffering cannot be reliably transmitted into action, the novella’s metaphysical rhetoric reframes sinking as a process that begins on land. Delecroix’s narrator repeatedly insists that “these people were sunk long before they sank” and that their drowning is the culmination of a protracted dispossession: economic collapse, war, predation, and climate stress all conspire to produce migrants who are, in the narrator’s words, “halfway drowned in the sand” (25). Key to this argument is the narrator’s image of a global “broom”: a “gigantic sweep” pushing people from Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East toward Europe. The broom is, at one moment, mechanical, at another figurative: it names policies, trade regimes, extraction, and military interventions, all displacing populations. It also names climatic and economic forces making movement a necessity. Thus, the Channel becomes a dump for those unwanted—a kind of municipal rubbish-tip, “the rubbish bin of the Channel,” where the world’s unwanted are thrown and made to disappear (Delecroix 26). This reading, backward, resonates with Rob Nixon’s thinking about “slow violence,” where structural harms disperse their effects over time and space so that, finally, they can converge into acute catastrophes:

By slow violence I mean a vio-lence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruc-tion that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility (2).

The narrator’s resounding exculpation is tempered, however, by her self-accusatory chant that the cause of the deaths was “me,” which complicates the moral economy: she endorses neither absolution as a cog in the machine nor the sole reassignment of guilt to structures. Her injunction is paradoxical: she acknowledges the structural sweep, but internalizes responsibility—the effect the novel uses to dramatize how political systems produce individualized shame as a psychic cost of structural violence. The novella also stages the imaginative afterlife of the drowned as a counter-site of justice: the drowning man “walks” on the seabed, among “an entire population of drowned people,” and in this subterranean realm, true movement, if not justice, occurs (Delecroix 82). This underwater odyssey is not consolatory; it is elegiac and tragic, positing a posthumous community that the surface world refuses to acknowledge. It gestures toward an ethics of recognition beyond juridical mechanisms— an ethics that recognizes those who have been rendered “bare life” by migration regimes (Agamben). This way, *Small Boat* presents migration as a catastrophe already predetermined, an ontological condition rather than an episodic failure; away from accountability and justice.

*Small Boat* makes one of the most shattering conceptual maneuvers in which the migrant is rendered not just a vulnerable human subject, but also a maritime refuse swept along transnational currents of disposal. Neither is merely an act of dehumanization by the narrator; Delecroix argues that the global order already codes certain other populations as waste. The narrator explicitly imagines the Channel as the final dumping ground for the world’s unwanted: “Who is banishing them, blowing on them, scattering them across the surface of the earth, and sweeping them towards the sea, where they vanish like dust shaken from the coat tails of humanity?” (Delecroix 26) This metaphor of waste extends directly to the migrants’ bodies. The narrator describes them as “already half dead by the time they got there, the children like foetuses of straw, the women and

men like debris, rubbish, dead but unaware of it, floating on the land for hundreds of kilometres before finally floating on the surface of the sea” (Delecroix 25). Through this disturbing imagery, human lives are folded into the broader category of oceanic debris—an ecological and political status that precedes their drowning. In this conceptual frame, the dinghy is not just a failed vessel but a symbolic container of sociohistorical refuse: a “wretched leaky boat,” a “lousy nutshell,” a “heap of rubber dinghy” that is as structurally disposable as the bodies it carries. Even after death, the bodies are reabsorbed into systems of bureaucratic materiality: the corpses appear in reports “scattered among the ballpoint pens, the note blocks, folders” (11), floating not in the sea but around the police inspector’s computer. They become document objects handled, examined, and archived much like environmental samples or waste materials.

*Small Boat* critiques how the oceanic disaster is mediated by technology in a way that allows institutional actors to keep a dangerously ethical distance. Whereas the narrator describes her workspace as being a bubble, excessively closed, and acoustically insulated, such an environment produced a false feeling of security and aloofness while listening to people drown. Her tools, too, serve to reinforce that bubble: “my microphone is a pair of binoculars; my geolocation screen is a pair of binoculars” (Delecroix 67). Referring to how technology transforms the ocean into an abstract field of geolocation coordinates and luminescent dots corresponds to the essence of Delecroix’s protest. Via the screens, the sea becomes “just a black uniform surface”, while human beings become “little luminous dots moving about in fits and starts” (34). The novel also foregrounds the tensions between the professionalized lexicons of rescue— “Calm down,” “Send me your geolocation by WhatsApp” and the raw, unfiltered human cries that break through the line. The migrants’ voices, described as “like grappling irons, trying to hook your imagination” (33), demonstrate how trauma refuses containment. Blue Humanities points out that navigation, surveillance, and communication technologies construct a “techno-oceanic space” where the sea is no longer experienced directly but rather is mediated through several layers. Technology thus produces a moral distortion, where increased informational clarity (GPS coordinates) coincides with decreased ethical clarity (refusal to act). The novel suggests that this technological filtering contributes as much to the tragedy as the storm or the dinghy’s leak.

*Small Boat* doesn’t finish off with an autopsy reconstruction of the disaster; it ends with a visionary descent into the deep sea, redefining the underwater world as a tragic but collective sanctuary. Upon sinking, the young man completely disconnects from the geopolitical boundaries and the bureaucratic voices of the surface world. His descent— “down, down... to the sandy bed of the sea” (Delecroix 84) marks a transition from chaotic human jurisdiction to the calm permanence of the ocean’s depths. In this submerged realm, Delecroix imagines the drowned not as inert victims but as a population: “all twenty-seven of them... an entire population of drowned people.” and they walk “inert, weightless, like astronauts on the Moon,” moving “silent and slow” in the “thin green-blue light of the deep.” (82) The shift from frantic surface noise to deep-sea silence transforms the ocean floor into a collective, posthumous habitation like an inverted polis. The narrator even speculates that the man might not be entirely dead and that the drowned man may have reached somewhere after all. In this underwater odyssey, there is a kind of anti-law: not redemption, but a collective existence that transcends law’s failures. Here, the drowned are no longer subject to borders, to criminal channels, and to the cold indifference of coastguards. They are “heedless” of the silhouettes of cargo ships above, “like the shadows of huge fish.” The deep sea strips away the hierarchies and geopolitical distinctions that structured their suffering on the surface.

In *Small Boat*, witnessing is an ethically disturbing activity. The narrator’s grim declaration, “You will not be saved” is more than a line in a screenplay; it is a rupture in the narrative contract between audience and subject. By this refusal of comfort, Vincent Delecroix implicates his readers further into the ethical failure of spectatorship, foiling any rescue mission. In an interview, he goes on to ask: “What does it mean to be a spectator of the wreckage, as we all are?...What does it mean to stand at this point, on the shore?” The reference recalls the passage from Lucretius: “Pleasant it



is, when on the great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from the shore upon another's great tribulation" (Delecroix 8). In this classical philosophic frame, moral distance is made into an aesthetic experience and thus absolved. The Channel tragedy, in Delecroix's hands, functions precisely as this kind of Lucretian spectacle: a drama whose violence is softened by the viewer's safety. The novel makes this ethical complacency explicit. "There is no shipwreck without spectators," the narrator declares, noting that millions watched, "anguished yet mysteriously absolved" (Delecroix 7). She stresses that the act of observing goes on everywhere: from living rooms to offices and even behind closed eyes. The visibility of disaster and its mediatization produce a more passive form of complicity. The comment echoes, unfortunately, the framing of the media over the 2021 Channel disaster, where horror recordings came out and captured headlines while real accountability was still lagging. The world asked for a comfort narrative: "I will save you; you will not die" and, according to this logic, she could be deemed guilty for refusing to say it. "The world," she said, "wanted me to have said it... so humanity need not doubt its humanity" (6).

The novel works as a meta-trial of the operator's conscience and the reader's own role in the consumption of atrocity. The enforced emptiness of the novel, marked by gaps, silences, and the absence of certain voices, replicates the ethical void into which both the author and audience alike cast their projections and moral comforts. As Helen Stevenson, the book's translator, puts it in an interview, the line "You will not be saved" is designed to "unsettle observers," forcing them to recognize how easily "we... might be charged with negligence... or just... looking-away" (*Inpress Books*). In this sense, *Small Boat* performs a critique of what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence"—not only in the temporal unfolding of ecological and colonial systems, but in the passive, systemic failure of those who bear witness but do not intervene. Furthermore, the novel places the operator's tone-flatness, sarcastic, unwilling-even-more to comfort-on the stage of expectations for a public performance. Fictionally, the most important thing is not whether or not the legal outcome is favorable to the hearer, but whether, morally, her very voice radiates warmth. "The investigator's distress," the narrator claims, "came from hearing herself and everyone along with her, saying: I will not save you" (Delecroix 86). The voice here becomes the site for moral projection. This tension between performative care and material indifference points to the degree humanitarian sentiment often substitutes itself for justice. The moral rupture is not within the agent's action or lack of, but in her unwillingness to confer narrative closure on the watchful world.

### **Conclusion**

*Small Boat* ultimately shows how the deaths from the 2021 Channel crossing cannot be located in any single legal or ecological, institutional, or moral frame. The author refuses to assign simple blame for the migrant deaths at sea either to a particular operator or to malfunctioning bureaucratic institutions. Instead, it presents maritime deaths caused by the convergence of forces far beyond any one human actor: an inflexible maritime border superimposed on highly fluid waters; the indifferent predation of the sea itself; geopolitics that systematically render populations into the exclusionary zone of waste; and voyeurism that transforms catastrophe into consumable narrative. The book inserts the reader into the operator's very subjective interiority, through which one builds an uneasy identification, once again not with glamour, heroism, or humanitarian sentiment, but more precisely with the everyday moral numbness that lends itself to the sustenance of institutional violence. This void is mirrored by the sea's nonhuman ontology-hungry, vast, and terrifyingly mythical. It is not the ocean that is simply evil, but rather the human systems put into place, which exploit its depths to unload the consequences of global inequalities. The drowned here are victims not of a capsized dinghy but of the detritus of the histories predating that moment of sinking. The novel's final turn, its plunge into the Abyss, does not promise redemption but changes the horizon of justice. Here, in the silent platforms of the seabed, Delecroix constructs a posthumous community beyond the reach of sovereign states and national borders. This imagined assembly of drowned souls becomes an indictment against the structures on land that failed to protect them and

a reminder that ecological spaces hold narratives that cannot be reconciled or conveyed by existing legal frameworks. In this aspect, the novel carries what Serpil Oppermann terms “storied matter,” where narrative becomes an intersection of environmental, political, and affective forces. It challenges readers to revisit what responsibility looks like in an age when displacement arises not from parcelled crises but planetary systems-climate, empire, war, and economics that sculpt who is allowed to move, who is made to move, and who disappears in transit. The indictment going against the novel is not constrained only to the individuals who ignored a cry; it asks what it means for all of us to be part of a consensus that regards the ocean as a mass grave for the displaced ones. Above all, it insists that any serious response to ecological justice must begin with the stories we refuse to hear and the very waters that do remember them.

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**ECO-AESTHETICS AND INTERACTIONAL COMPETENCE: A TASK-BASED  
APPROACH TO CLIMATE COMMUNICATION IN NILA MADHAB PANDA’S “KAUN  
KITNE PAANI MEIN” AND “KADVI HAWA”**

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**Abstract**

The media’s crucial role in shaping public perception and emotional engagement with environmental issues has been redefined in light of the escalating climate crisis. Within the framework of the *Environmental Humanities*, this paper examines the intersections between *climate communication*, *media studies*, and *English Language Teaching (ELT)*, emphasizing how film-based narratives can enhance ecological awareness, critical reflection, and interactional competence among *ESL* learners. Drawing on theories of landscape as character, muted colour palette, sound and silence, human–nature relationships, and ethical as well as emotional aesthetics, the study compares Indian cinematic representations—particularly “*Kaun Kitne Paani Mein*” (2015) and “*Kadvi Hawa*” (2017)—that translate the realities of climate change into visceral, human-centered experiences. It further explores how filmic techniques, soundscapes, and visual symbolism function as communicative tools that bridge scientific discourse and emotional understanding. In the context of *ESL pedagogy* at *Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)*, a *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)* framework is employed to use climate films as interactive tasks fostering eco-critical dialogues, classroom discussions, and multimodal literacy practices. By integrating environmental consciousness with language learning, this study positions climate communication as an ethical, affective, and pedagogical practice that nurtures both ecological sensitivity and communicative competence in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanities, Climate Communication, ESL Pedagogy, TBLT, Interactional Competence, Multimodal Literacy

**Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, human beings live in a world increasingly shaped by screens. From mobile phones to cinema halls, digital and visual media strongly influence how societies perceive global challenges, especially climate change. Climate discourse often relies on scientific language that can feel distant and inaccessible to general audiences. Cinema, however, transforms environmental issues into relatable human narratives, enabling viewers to emotionally connect with climate realities (Nixon 4). Through powerful imagery and storytelling, films make invisible environmental transformations visible, prompting individuals to recognize their own role within ecological crises (Alaimo 2–3).

Environmental cinema today serves not just as entertainment but as a form of cultural activism. It functions within what scholars call the *Environmental Humanities*—an interdisciplinary space where ethics, ecology, and cultural narratives converge (Heise 31). Cinematic techniques such as symbolic framing, colour gradients, ambient sound, and character–environment interactions convey meanings that transcend spoken dialogue. Silence can communicate grief or fear, and visual landscapes can become narrative agents themselves, shaping identity and survival (Macdonald 89). As a result, films operate as communicative bridges between scientific knowledge and everyday

experience, encouraging viewers to reflect critically and empathetically on the state of the planet (Nixon 12).

This paper focuses on two major Indian environmental films by Nila Madhab Panda—*Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* (2015) and *Kadvi Hawa* (2017). Both films translate ecological vulnerabilities into deeply human stories. *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* employs satirical humour to critique water politics and social inequality in rural Odisha (Panda). In contrast, *Kadvi Hawa* adopts a subdued visual and sonic palette to depict climate grief among drought-affected farming communities (Panda). By foregrounding landscapes as characters and using muted colours and prolonged silences, Panda's eco-aesthetic choices narrate climate change not as abstract data but as lived struggle (Ghosh 65).

Alongside its cultural significance, environmental cinema offers an effective tool for education—especially English language learning. Today, ESL pedagogy aims to develop not only linguistic ability but also the capacity to engage in socially meaningful dialogue. Scholars argue that communicative competence must include ethical, intercultural, and ecological dimensions (Kramsch 210). In this context, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) becomes a highly relevant framework. TBLT promotes learning through collaborative, real-world tasks that encourage students to negotiate meaning, interact, and express perspectives (Ellis 16). When students respond to climate films through group discussions, role-plays, critical reflections, or multimodal analyses, they strengthen what is known as interactional competence—language use anchored in attentiveness, empathy, and active participation (Walsh 48).

At Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), where students come from diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, integrating climate cinema into English classrooms connects academic learning with lived experience. Many students witness environmental challenges firsthand—water scarcity, rising temperatures, shifting agricultural patterns. Films like *Kadvi Hawa* and *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* validate these realities and provide a platform to express concerns, hopes, and solutions in English. Thus, language becomes more than a subject—it becomes a voice for environmental justice (Gokarakonda 122).

The present study, therefore, has two interconnected aims. First, it analyzes how Panda's films employ eco-aesthetic strategies to communicate climate realities. Second, it proposes a TBLT-based pedagogical model using these films to enhance interactional competence among undergraduate ESL learners at AMU. This model positions the classroom as a collaborative space where students engage in meaningful climate communication rather than mechanical language practice (Ellis 22; Walsh 56). In doing so, it aligns with the broader educational responsibility of preparing learners to participate confidently in the urgent conversations of the Anthropocene (Heise 45).

Ultimately, cinema emerges as a powerful medium for shaping climate-conscious citizens. Visual storytelling evokes emotion, stimulates critical thinking, and encourages ethical awareness—qualities essential for environmental leadership in the future. By merging eco-aesthetics with communicative pedagogy, this paper argues that teaching English in the age of climate crisis must not only improve language proficiency but also cultivate ecological sensitivity and responsible global citizenship. As students learn to articulate their perspectives with clarity and courage, they become active participants in protecting the planet they call home (Nixon 18).

### **Literature Review**

The field of Environmental Humanities has emerged in recent decades to understand how cultural expression shapes public awareness of ecological crises. Scholars emphasize that climate change communication must move beyond data-driven discourse to include emotionally compelling and ethically grounded storytelling (Heise 32). This shift acknowledges that audiences often respond more strongly to narratives than to scientific reports. Nixon argues that climate change produces “slow violence”—a gradual environmental destruction that is difficult to visualize and therefore easy to ignore (2). Cinema becomes a vital medium to make this slow violence visible, especially when it affects marginalized communities.

Environmental cinema plays a crucial role in translating complex ecological concerns into human-centered stories. Eco-aesthetic strategies—such as evocative landscapes, symbolic framing, and immersive sound design—help audiences experience climate crisis on a deeper sensory level (Macdonald 90). By turning the environment into an active agent rather than a background setting, films reshape viewers' understanding of human–nature relationships. Alaimo further emphasizes the value of “trans-corporeality,” the idea that nature and human bodies are interconnected and that environmental harm inevitably impacts social and physical well-being (4). Thus, environmental films not only inform but also encourage ethical and emotional engagement.

In India, climate cinema has gained prominence as filmmakers explore droughts, floods, and resource scarcity affecting rural populations. Ghosh notes that global media often fails to represent climate change equitably, as the most affected people—such as Indigenous communities and farmers—receive the least visibility (67). Indian films like *Kadvi Hawa* and *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* respond to this gap by foregrounding local realities that reflect global climate injustice. These works align with the aims of the Environmental Humanities by challenging audiences to confront socio-ecological vulnerability and rethink development priorities.

Language education has increasingly embraced multimodal resources to enhance student engagement and communicative proficiency. Cinema, due to its narrative and visual richness, supports both linguistic development and cultural understanding. Kramsch argues that language learning is inseparable from cultural experience and that learners acquire deeper competence when emotional and contextual elements shape communication (210). Films, as cultural texts, expose learners to authentic language use, gestures, tone, and pragmatic cues that are difficult to capture through textbooks alone.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is particularly compatible with the use of films in English language teaching. Ellis explains that TBLT emphasizes meaningful interaction in accomplishing communicative tasks rather than relying on mechanical grammar drills (16). When films become the basis for tasks such as discussions, role-plays, reviews, and debates, students are encouraged to negotiate meaning and express complex ideas using English. This approach supports higher-level cognitive skills and real-world communication.

Interactional competence—an essential component of modern ESL pedagogy—is strengthened when students collaboratively interpret film content. Walsh highlights that interactional competence is developed through participation, turn-taking, clarification requests, and emotional expression during authentic communication (48). Environmental films introduce rich thematic content that invites ethical, critical, and empathetic student responses. Gokarakonda suggests that integrating ecological themes in Indian English classrooms fosters not only language growth but also citizenship education, as students reflect on responsibilities toward their environments (124). Therefore, the use of films dealing with environmental crises can help students not only learn English but also articulate their lived experiences related to climate change.

Multimodal learning theory also supports the educational use of cinema. Visual and auditory elements reinforce comprehension and retention, offering diverse entry points for learners with varied strengths. As Alaimo states, embodied and sensory experiences can motivate students to engage more deeply with academic content (5). In classrooms where students face anxiety or hesitation in speaking, films create shared reference points that reduce communication barriers and increase confident participation.

### **Research Gap**

While substantial scholarship exists on environmental cinema and multimodal language pedagogy separately, the intersection between the two remains underexplored, particularly in the Indian context. Studies in climate communication often focus on Western media representations, leaving a gap in research addressing regional storytelling and its educational significance (Ghosh 71). Similarly, although TBLT has been widely implemented in various ESL environments, few

scholars have examined how task-based approaches can incorporate climate-focused Indian films to build both communicative and ecological competence (Ellis 22).

Moreover, research that specifically addresses interactional competence in relation to eco-aesthetic film learning is scarce. Most studies consider films as supplementary materials rather than central tools for shaping student attitudes and discourse about environmental issues (Walsh 59). There is limited exploration of how climate cinema can empower students to engage in ethical communication that contributes to climate awareness, activism, and responsible decision-making.

At institutions like Aligarh Muslim University, where students experience environmental challenges firsthand—water scarcity, agricultural changes, heat extremes—there is significant pedagogical value in bridging film-based eco-awareness with English language skills. Yet formal frameworks for this integration are rarely discussed in published academic literature (Gokarakonda 126). Thus, the educational potential of pairing climate cinema with TBLT remains largely untapped.

This research aims to address these gaps by examining how Nila Madhab Panda's films can be used as core instructional materials to strengthen interactional competence in ESL learning while simultaneously promoting environmental sensitivity among undergraduate students. By presenting a structured pedagogical model that merges climate communication with language education, the study contributes to both Environmental Humanities and English language teaching research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study draws from three interconnected academic domains—Eco-Aesthetics, Interactional Competence, and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)—to examine how environmental cinema can support English language learning while promoting ecological sensitivity. Eco-Aesthetics emphasizes how artistic choices such as landscape representation, colour tonality, symbolism, and soundscapes contribute to environmental meaning-making by presenting nature as an active presence rather than a passive backdrop (Macdonald 90). Through this lens, films like *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* and *Kadvi Hawa* communicate climate realities using affective and sensory cues that deepen audience engagement with climate distress and resilience (Nixon 12). Complementing this aesthetic perspective, the concept of Interactional Competence highlights language as a social practice, developed through negotiation of meaning, pragmatic choices, and collaborative dialogue (Walsh 48). Viewing and discussing climate cinema in the classroom creates real communicative demands that help learners develop empathy, clarity, and responsiveness in spoken English—skills crucial for participating in global environmental discourse (Kramsch 210).

To operationalize these communicative encounters, the study adopts Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes meaningful interaction through task completion rather than rote memorization of language rules (Ellis 16). The audiovisual richness of films supports multimodal learning opportunities that enhance comprehension and encourage students to interpret environmental narratives using their own linguistic resources. Tasks such as group debates, reflective dialogues, environmental problem-solving, and multimodal film analysis activate higher-order thinking while fostering the development of vocabulary, fluency, and ethical awareness. By integrating eco-aesthetic film analysis within a TBLT framework, this study positions language learning as both pedagogical and ethical practice. Students not only improve their interactional competence but also become more conscious of the environmental challenges affecting their communities. Thus, the theoretical framework merges cultural, communicative, and ecological dimensions to argue that climate cinema can be a transformative educational tool for empowering learners as climate-literate global citizens in the Anthropocene.

### **Film Analysis**

Nila Madhab Panda's films *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* (2015) and *Kadvi Hawa* (2017) employ distinct yet deeply resonant eco-aesthetic strategies to communicate climate vulnerability in India.



Through symbolism, landscape imagery, and emotionally charged soundscapes, the films translate water scarcity and climate grief into compelling human stories. Each film foregrounds the environment as an active narrative force, reminding audiences that climate change is not a distant abstraction but a lived experience shaping everyday survival.

*Kaun Kitne Paani Mein: Eco-Politics and Water Scarcity*

Set in rural Odisha, *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* uses landscape and humour to expose the socio-political dimensions of water inequality. In the opening sequence, the camera pans over the fertile terrain of the Upper Village and the dry, cracked soil of the Lower Village, visually establishing water as a determinant of power and privilege (*Kaun Kitne Paani Mein*). This spatial framing reflects what Nixon describes as the “unequal distribution of environmental suffering” (22). The contrasting colour palettes—lush greens for the wealthy and dusty browns for the poor—reinforce the hierarchy created by resource scarcity.

One striking moment occurs in the scene where villagers gather around a nearly empty well, and the echo of the bucket hitting dry stone becomes a symbolic sound cue for desperation. As Alaimo’s notion of trans-corporeality suggests, environmental degradation is experienced directly through bodies—thirst, fatigue, and hunger (4). Panda uses dark humour to highlight political hypocrisy surrounding resource control; for instance, when leaders negotiate water access through marriage alliances, comedy becomes a tool for revealing the absurdity of human greed. While audiences may initially laugh, the humour gradually creates discomfort, encouraging reflection on exploitation rooted in caste and class structures (Ghosh 75).

The landscape thus becomes a character that mediates social relationships and ethical dilemmas. By translating ecological injustice into relatable narrative conflict, the film successfully bridges climate communication and emotional engagement, making viewers question their own roles in environmental responsibility.

*Kadvi Hawa: Silence, Emotion, and Climate Grief*

While *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* critiques environmental politics with satire, *Kadvi Hawa* confronts climate crisis with stark emotional realism. The story centers on a visually impaired elderly farmer, Heddu, whose fear of losing his family’s land to drought embodies the psychic trauma of climate change (*Kadvi Hawa*). Panda’s deliberate use of a muted colour palette—dominated by grays, browns, and fading yellows—reflects a community drained of hope. This visual aesthetic aligns with what Macdonald calls “eco-aesthetic mourning”—a cinematic expression of environmental decay (92).

One of the most affecting moments occurs when Heddu walks through his barren field, guided only by the wind and sound of wilting crops. The near-absence of background music amplifies the silence of a dying landscape. Silence here functions as an emotional language, representing both personal helplessness and collective grief (*Kadvi Hawa*). As Kramsch notes, communication extends beyond spoken language to include gesture, silence, and shared emotional experience (213). Panda integrates these elements to demonstrate how climate change erodes not only livelihoods but also human dignity.

A significant scene unfolds when the loan recovery agent, Gunu Babu, collapses in exhaustion under the scorching sun—a rare moment where the exploiter and exploited both suffer under the same environmental cruelty. This reflects Heise’s argument that climate change blurs moral boundaries while still disproportionately harming the vulnerable (38). The film’s slow pacing and long takes force audiences to sit with discomfort, prompting them to recognize the real-time urgency of climate distress rather than dismiss it as a distant threat.

*Eco-Aesthetics as Climate Communication*

Together, these films highlight two dimensions of climate reality—systemic injustice and psychological suffering. The aesthetic strategies used in both works transform environmental issues into narrative experiences that audiences can emotionally interpret. As Nixon suggests, stories are essential to overcoming the invisibility of slow environmental violence (4). Panda’s cinematic style embodies that principle, making climate change both visible and relatable.

Importantly, the films create rich opportunities for educational integration. When viewers engage with these scenes through classroom dialogues, they practice interactional competence by expressing emotion, negotiating perspectives, and articulating ethical judgments—a crucial goal in ESL settings (Walsh 55). Thus, the films not only advocate for ecological responsibility but also support language development, making climate literacy a communicative skill.

### **Comparative Analysis: *Kadvi Hawa* and *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein***

#### **1. Environmental Themes**

##### **Kadvi Hawa**

- Directly centres on **climate change** as a lived reality for rural India.
- Focuses on drought, crop failure, and climate-induced debt.
- Presents climate crisis as a slow, inevitable catastrophe.

##### **Kaun Kitne Paani Mein**

- Uses **water scarcity** and caste-based water politics as its central theme.
- Exposes social hierarchies and the politics of resource management.
- Deals with environmental degradation indirectly through a socio-cultural lens.

##### **Comparison:**

*Kadvi Hawa* is climate-centric; *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* is ecology-and-society centric. Both show how scarcity alters human relationships, power, and survival.

#### **2. Aesthetic and Narrative Style**

##### **Kadvi Hawa**

- Stark, minimalistic visual style.
- Muted earthy colours reflect drought and despair.
- Realist, slow-paced, and emotionally heavy narrative.

##### **Kaun Kitne Paani Mein**

- Employs satire, irony, and humour.
- Uses vibrant colours and symbolic visuals.
- More dramatic and playful compared to the sombre tone of *Kadvi Hawa*.

##### **Comparison:**

While *Kadvi Hawa* creates **empathy through suffering**, *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* creates **awareness through humour and social commentary**.

#### **3. Representation of Human–Nature Relationship**

##### **Kadvi Hawa**

- Humans are portrayed as victims of climate change.
- Nature becomes an indifferent or punishing force.
- Emphasizes vulnerability and helplessness.

##### **Kaun Kitne Paani Mein**

- Human mismanagement, caste divisions, and political greed cause ecological imbalance.
- Nature responds to human exploitation—not as fate but as consequence.

##### **Comparison:**

*Kadvi Hawa* frames climate injustice as systemic and global, while *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* frames ecological crisis as socially constructed and tied to historical inequalities.

#### **4. Media and Climate Communication Approach**

##### **Kadvi Hawa**

- Appeals to **emotion, empathy, and urgency**.
- Communicates climate change impact through personal tragedy.
- Effective as climate communication because it humanizes data and statistics.

##### **Kaun Kitne Paani Mein**

- Communicates environmental issues through satire and narrative wit.
- More accessible to mainstream audiences.
- Highlights governance, policy, and social justice dimensions.

**Comparison:**

Together, they represent two ends of climate communication strategy:

- **Affective realism** (*Kadvi Hawa*)
  - **Satirical socio-politics** (*Kaun Kitne Paani Mein*)
- Both approaches are valuable in reaching different forms of public consciousness.

**5. Contribution to Environmental Humanities**

- **Kadvi Hawa** contributes to climate ethics, affective ecology, and eco-cinematic realism.
- **Kaun Kitne Paani Mein** contributes to environmental sociology, political ecology, and cultural critique.

**In combination**, the two films show how Indian cinema uses different aesthetic modes—realism and satire—to engage with environmental degradation with both emotional depth and social critique.

**Pedagogical Application: TBLT at AMU (UG ESL Learners)**

Integrating *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* and *Kadvi Hawa* into the ESL classroom at Aligarh Muslim University enables students to improve communicative skills while reflecting on environmental issues relevant to their own communities. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) encourages students to use English for meaningful purposes by completing authentic tasks that require collaboration, negotiation, problem-solving, and expression of personal opinions (Ellis 20). In this context, both films become multimodal learning resources that provide rich content for language practice. Walsh emphasizes that interactional competence develops when learners engage in conversations that demand turn-taking, clarification, and empathy (53). The following tasks are designed to support these communicative processes while nurturing ecological consciousness.

**Task Designs for Classroom Implementation**

**Task 1: Eco-Critical Group Discussion**

**Film Reference:** *Kadvi Hawa* (Scene: Hedu walking through the barren fields)

**Task:** In groups, students discuss how the film portrays climate distress using silence and muted colour palettes.

Guiding Questions:

What emotions did this scene evoke?

How does silence communicate meaning here?

What real-life experiences does it remind you of?

**Outcome:** Students express ethical viewpoints and connect cinematic language to environmental realities.

**Task 2: Role-Play — Community Water Negotiation**

**Film Reference:** *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* (water distribution conflict)

**Instructions:** Students assume the roles of village leaders, farmers, and youth activists to negotiate a fair water-sharing policy.

**Language Supports:**

“I propose that...”

“Could you explain why...?”

“Let us compromise by...”

**Outcome:** Students develop negotiation skills, persuasion, and cooperative communication.

**Task 3: Climate Solution Case Challenge**

**Task Prompt:** “Imagine AMU faces a serious water shortage next year. Design a sustainable plan.”

**Groups Prepare:**

The environmental problem

Action steps (realistic and local)

Community involvement

**Presentation Format:** Oral proposal with visual chart/slide

**Outcome:** Students apply content knowledge to local context using English for advocacy.

**Task 4: Multimodal Scene Interpretation**

**Film Reference:** Sound of empty well in Kaun Kitne Paani Mein

**Task:** Students describe how sound, visuals, and performance create the scene's mood.

**Focus Language:**

Descriptive adjectives (barren, cracked, disturbing)

Verbs of perception (echoes, fades, shakes)

Outcome: Enhanced vocabulary and analytical communication.

**Task 5: Climate Awareness Poster Presentation**

**Task:** Design a bilingual English-Hindi poster raising awareness about water conservation.

**Audience:** University peers

**Outcome:** Development of persuasive speech and public presentation skills.

**Expected Learning Outcomes**

By completing these tasks, undergraduate ESL learners are expected to:

- Strengthen fluency in spoken English through meaningful interaction
- Build robust environmental vocabulary and pragmatic competence
- Develop critical thinking and ethical reasoning
- Enhance collaborative communication and empathy
- Become climate-literate citizens capable of participating in sustainability discourse

Thus, the TBLT framework transforms climate cinema into a catalyst for language development and ecological citizenship at AMU.

### Discussion

The integration of environmental cinema into ESL pedagogy opens new possibilities for fostering both communicative competence and ecological consciousness among learners. Environmental films like Kaun Kitne Paani Mein and Kadvi Hawa do more than depict climate realities—they create emotionally resonant learning environments where language use becomes purposeful, ethical, and socially situated. When students discuss and interpret filmic representations of drought, migration, debt, or political exploitation, they practice language through real-world relevance rather than abstract linguistic drills. In doing so, eco-cinema enhances communicative competence by situating English within the meaningful context of survival, justice, and community. Communication becomes a tool for problem-solving and advocacy, reflecting the authentic communicative functions language serves outside the classroom.

This pedagogical shift aligns with the responsibilities of English language educators in the Anthropocene, an era shaped by urgent planetary crises. Teaching language cannot be divorced from the socio-ecological conditions in which learners live. Integrating climate communication into ESL instruction acknowledges that language learning is also a civic and ethical act. When learners explore climate narratives through tasks such as role-plays, debates, or collaborative planning, they develop interactional strategies like clarification, turn-taking, proposition, negotiation, and persuasion—skills that are essential for active participation in public discourse. This positions the ESL classroom as a micro-public sphere where students learn to express collective concerns and articulate visions for sustainability. Thus, eco-pedagogy becomes both a communicative and moral commitment.

Moreover, environmental cinema uniquely bridges scientific literacy with affective engagement—two components that climate communication often struggles to reconcile. Facts alone cannot inspire change; it is emotions like empathy, fear, and hope that drive people to think and act differently. The barren landscapes of Kadvi Hawa or the satirical competition for water in Kaun

Kitne Paani Mein give climate data a human face. The films evoke the psychological and cultural consequences of environmental decline, prompting students to reflect on their own experiences with climate vulnerability—heatwaves, floods, water scarcity, or pollution. Such affective responses provide a natural foundation for communication, since learners are more motivated to speak when they feel personally invested in the content. Thus, multimodal storytelling transforms climate science into lived understanding.

Through TBLT, this film-based engagement provides opportunities for holistic language learning. Learners decode visual and auditory cues, identify metaphorical framing, and interpret narrative symbolism—developing critical literacy and multimodal competence. When they collaborate to propose solutions for water conservation or climate adaptation, they use English not only as a linguistic system but as a means of action and agency. This supports learner identity formation as climate-aware communicators capable of contributing to local and global discourse.

Therefore, the use of eco-cinema in ESL instruction represents a powerful convergence of education, environmental justice, and communicative practice. It reinforces the idea that every act of language use is embedded within broader social and ecological relationships. In empowering students to voice climate concerns, the classroom becomes a space where knowledge meets responsibility, and where communication becomes a foundation for shaping a more equitable and sustainable future.

### **Conclusion**

Environmental cinema serves as a vital bridge between ecological awareness and human experience, and Nila Madhab Panda's films *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* and *Kadvi Hawa* illuminate this connection through two distinct yet complementary artistic approaches. While *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* uses satire to unmask the political and socio-economic roots of water scarcity, *Kadvi Hawa* adopts a stark, melancholic aesthetic to foreground the emotional devastation triggered by climate change. Together, these films foreground an essential truth: ecological decline is not merely a scientific phenomenon but a deeply social one—marked by inequalities, cultural tensions, and the erosion of livelihood and dignity. Panda's narratives remind viewers that climate challenges disproportionately burden those with the least power and resources, urging society to recognize climate injustice as a moral crisis.

This study demonstrates that cinema, beyond being a tool of entertainment, can be a compelling medium of climate communication capable of inspiring empathy and ethical consciousness. The eco-aesthetic strategies employed in these films—symbolic landscapes, muted colour palettes, strategic silence, and sensory design—help audiences connect emotionally with environmental degradation. By translating scientific abstractions into personal struggles and lived realities, Panda's films become more than cinematic texts—they function as calls to reflective action.

Within the English language classroom, these same qualities create meaningful pedagogical opportunities. Through a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework, students can engage in communicative tasks that prompt collaboration, critical thinking, and expressive use of English. Activities such as eco-critical discussions, role plays, climate negotiation simulations, and multimodal scene interpretation transform passive film viewing into active learning experiences. These tasks help learners build interactional competence by negotiating viewpoints, expressing concerns, and articulating solutions—skills that extend beyond the classroom into civic and global participation. Language acquisition thus becomes intertwined with ecological responsibility.

The integration of environmental cinema into ELT pedagogy is especially timely and relevant in the Indian context, where climate impacts are already visible across rural and urban communities. At institutions like Aligarh Muslim University, where students come from diverse linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds, such pedagogical innovations cultivate both communicative empowerment and environmental citizenship. Learners are encouraged to see themselves not only as English speakers but also as informed voices in climate discourse. This dual development is

essential for the next generation, who will inherit the complex ecological challenges of the Anthropocene.

Ultimately, this research positions climate cinema as a transformative educational resource that aligns intellectual growth with ethical engagement. By bringing films like *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* and *Kadvi Hawa* into the ESL classroom, educators can nurture language skills alongside environmental advocacy, fostering young citizens who are prepared to think critically, act compassionately, and communicate courageously about climate justice. Thus, the fusion of eco-aesthetics and task-based pedagogy not only enriches academic learning but also contributes to building a more sustainable and conscientious society.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS IN HIMACHAL  
PRADESH: A TRIBAL AND INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

Himachal Pradesh's tribal and indigenous communities, whose lives are closely tied to the Western Himalayan ecosystem, face a growing disconnect between environmental laws and their actual implementation. While the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 recognizes their rights, many claims especially in remote areas like Lippa are delayed, rejected, or mishandled, leading to threats of eviction, loss of customary forest access, and limited Gram Sabha participation in key decisions on land diversion and conservation. Yet, progress is emerging through the approval of Community Forest Resource Management Plans (FRMPs), stronger community assertions of co-management rights, civil society advocacy, and the gradual inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in forest planning. The paper argues that meaningful change requires stronger legal recognition of customary land use, improved local capacity, transparent decision-making processes, and enforceable mechanisms ensuring Gram Sabha consent to protect both fragile Himalayan ecologies and the rights and identities of indigenous communities.

**Introduction**

Environmental governance in Himachal Pradesh exists at the intersection of a sensitive mountain ecosystem, legal frameworks, and deeply rooted cultural practices. With its steep landscapes, rich biodiversity, and strong community dependence on natural resources, managing the environment becomes both a legal responsibility and a social imperative. The state serves as a real-world setting where constitutional mandates, environmental legislation, and local traditions converge.

Nestled in the Western Himalayas Himachal Pradesh is not only a region of breathtaking landscapes. But also, a vivid living laboratory. Where the sweeping imperatives of environmental governance meet the enduring presence of tribal and indigenous communities for centuries. These communities stewarded the forests, Waters and hills through customers, collective tenure and ecological knowledge long before modern legal frameworks arrived, yet as contemporary pressures of infrastructure, tourism, climate change and resource extraction intensify the interface between statutory governance and indigenous rights has become increasingly complex. Central to this dynamics and instruments such as the schedule tribes and other traditional forest dwelling recognition of forest rights act 2006 which formally recognize forest dweller rights and state and national forest conservation laws that seek to regulate land and resource use at the same time, governance in Himachal must grapple with the fragility of mountain ecosystems. The legacy of colonial forest policy and the limited of top-down enforcement in tribal areas.

This rises key questions: how effectively are legal frameworks aligning with indigenous norms of land stewardship? Area tribal communities. Being empowered as partners in environmental governance or sidelined in favour of state and commercial interest?

Through the lines of Himachal Pradesh this paper will explore how the legal and institutional architecture interests with tribal world-views. The challenges of implementations on the ground and the potential for more inclusive sustainable governance models grounded in indigenous agency.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on environmental governance, legal frameworks, and indigenous participation in Himachal Pradesh reveals a rich but fragmented field of inquiry. This section synthesises academic, legal, and policy-oriented sources to trace the evolution of environmental law and governance in India, with particular reference to Himachal Pradesh's tribal and indigenous contexts. The review situates Himachal's experience within wider theoretical debates on environmental governance, rights-based frameworks, and customary ecological knowledge. It further examines how constitutional, statutory, and institutional mechanisms have interacted with local practices of environmental stewardship in mountain and tribal regions.

#### **1. Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations**

Environmental governance encompasses the structures, processes, and norms that determine how decisions about natural resources and the environment are made, implemented, and monitored. Scholars such as Lemos and Agrawal (2006) conceptualise it as the intersection of state, market, and civil society actors, highlighting the importance of multi-level and participatory governance. In Himalayan and mountain contexts, environmental governance tends to be pluralistic and decentralised, reflecting the interaction of formal state laws with traditional institutions (Ojha et al., 2019). The concept of 'legal pluralism' the coexistence of multiple normative systems becomes particularly relevant in tribal regions where customary laws operate alongside statutory frameworks.

From a governance perspective, the literature underscores the need for institutional innovation, community-based resource management, and recognition of indigenous rights (Berkes, 2018). The principle of subsidiarity, embedded in decentralisation policies such as the Panchayati Raj system, is meant to ensure local participation in environmental decision-making. However, empirical studies from Himalayan regions reveal that devolution is often partial, constrained by bureaucratic control, technical deficits, and limited financial autonomy (Kapoor & Yadav, 2025).

#### **2. Legal Frameworks Governing Environment and Tribal Rights**

The legal foundation for environmental governance in India is anchored in the Constitution and a network of statutory enactments. Article 48A of the Directive Principles obliges the State to protect and improve the environment, while Article 51A (g) imposes a duty upon citizens to safeguard natural resources. Judicial interpretation of Article 21—the right to life has extended its scope to include the right to a clean and healthy environment (Subhash Kumar v. State of Bihar, 1991; M.C. Mehta v. Union of India, 1987). This constitutional jurisprudence has created a strong normative foundation for environmental protection.

Key environmental statutes applicable to Himachal Pradesh include the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986; the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980; the Biological Diversity Act, 2002; the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974; and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. Together, these laws create an elaborate regulatory architecture for resource use, pollution control, and biodiversity conservation. Complementary to these are rights-based statutes such as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA), which formally recognises forest-dweller rights to land, forest produce, and habitat. The FRA represents a paradigmatic shift from a protectionist conservation approach to a participatory and justice-oriented model of governance (Kumar & Gupta, 2023).

However, unlike several Indian states, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) is not operational in Himachal Pradesh, as the state does not possess notified Fifth Schedule areas. This limits the formal recognition of tribal self-governance in districts such as Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti, where traditional village councils and customary decision-making systems continue to regulate local resource management. Scholars note that the absence of PESA undermines institutional support for indigenous participation in environmental decision-making, thereby constraining the spirit of decentralisation envisaged in the Constitution (Raj & Singh, 2024).

### **3. Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Stewardship**

Studies on indigenous and tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh emphasise their intricate ecological knowledge systems, collective forest management practices, and sustainable livelihood strategies. Ethnographic work in the upper Himalayas documents the Gaddi and Kinnaura communities' customary rights over grazing lands, pastures, and non-timber forest products (NTFPs), including medicinal plants and the highly valued guchhi mushrooms (Kumar & Gupta, 2023). Such practices constitute a living form of environmental governance rooted in reciprocity and restraint rather than extraction. Yet, the erosion of customary institutions under formal law has often led to the marginalisation of traditional ecological knowledge (Berkes, 2018).

Further, research in Lahaul and Spiti indicates that climate variability has rendered tribal livelihoods increasingly vulnerable (Kumar et al., 2023). These communities' exhibit adaptive strategies, but governance frameworks rarely incorporate their local knowledge into climate adaptation policies. The disjuncture between local practice and legal policy remains one of the defining challenges of environmental governance in Himachal Pradesh.

### **4. Governance and Implementation Challenges**

Implementation studies reveal that despite progressive legal frameworks, gaps persist between policy and practice. Bureaucratic fragmentation, limited administrative reach in remote regions, and lack of coordination among departments often weaken enforcement. The Shukla Committee Report (2009) on hydropower compliance in Himachal highlighted systemic non-compliance with environmental clearance conditions, inadequate monitoring, and minimal public consultation. These shortcomings underscore the need for transparent, accountable, and participatory governance structures.

Decentralised governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has shown promise in environmental management, but effectiveness is hampered by resource and capacity constraints (Kapoor & Yadav, 2025). In the absence of PESA, PRIs in tribal regions lack the statutory empowerment necessary to manage forests and common resources autonomously. The literature also points to weak institutional mechanisms for integrating indigenous institutions into the formal governance framework.

### **5. Case Study: Hydropower Project Compliance, Legal Oversight & Local Impacts in Himachal Pradesh**

#### **Background**

Himachal Pradesh, located in the Indian Himalayas, has seen expanded hydropower development since the 1990s. Projects have typically required environmental clearance under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and associated EIA Notification, forest diversion under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, and compliance with conditions issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and the Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board. The state's steep terrain, glacially fed rivers, and high seismicity make compliance and monitoring particularly consequential.

#### **Regulatory Architecture and Clearances**

Hydropower projects in the state pass through a multi-tier process: scoping and Terms of Reference, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and public consultation, appraisal by the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC), forest diversion proposals and compensatory afforestation, consent-to-establish/operate under water and air laws, and post-clearance compliance reporting. Clearances often include conditions on environmental flows (e-flows), muck disposal, slope stabilization, biodiversity conservation plans, and livelihood safeguards for project-affected families.

#### **Compliance and Monitoring Gaps**

Independent reviews and state committees have periodically flagged shortcomings in implementation. Common issues include: inadequate or delayed compliance reports; suboptimal muck management leading to siltation; tunneling-induced springs depletion; non-functional or poorly calibrated e-flow release structures; and weak third-party audits. Earlier assessments (e.g.,

state committee reviews of hydropower compliance) also pointed to limited community participation post-clearance and insufficient integration of cumulative impact assessments across river basins.

#### **Local Socio-Ecological Impacts**

Documented local impacts include altered riverine ecology, fish migration barriers, slope instability and landslide risk along headrace tunnel alignments, and changes to groundwater that affect springs and irrigation kuhls. Socio-economic effects have included land acquisition disputes, delays in livelihood restoration for project-affected families, and stresses on common-pool resources such as pastures and forest produce. In tribal districts like Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti, these impacts intersect with customary rights and traditional governance institutions.

#### **Participation, Consent, and Grievance**

While the EIA process mandates public hearings, practice varies. Meaningful participation is often limited by information asymmetries, technical documents in non-local languages, and compressed timelines. Where Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) claims are pending, questions arise about the timing of clearances vis-à-vis recognition of community forest resource rights. Grievance redress typically proceeds through district-level committees, state authorities, and tribunals, but fragmentation across agencies can prolong resolution.

#### **Judicial and Quasi-Judicial Oversight**

Courts and tribunals (conspicuously the National Green Tribunal) have intermittently intervened to enforce compliance conditions, call for cumulative impact assessments, and strengthen muck disposal and e-flow norms. Judicial expansion of Article 21 (right to life) to encompass a healthy environment underpins these interventions, while continuing directions emphasize monitoring, transparency, and accountability.

#### **Climate and Disaster Risk Considerations**

Extreme rainfall events, glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) hazards, and seismic risk complicate project design and compliance. Recent flood seasons have renewed calls for basin-scale planning, dynamic e-flow regimes, real-time monitoring, and climate-informed disaster risk reduction. Hydropower's low-carbon benefits must be balanced with site-specific risk assessments and adaptive management.

#### **Governance Lessons**

This case illustrates the challenge of translating progressive statutory frameworks into practice in mountainous, tribal regions. Key lessons include: (i) strengthen independent compliance audits and make reports publicly accessible; (ii) enhance basin-level cumulative impact assessments; (iii) ensure early and ongoing participation, with materials in local languages and appropriate formats; (iv) integrate FRA processes and customary institutions into decision-making; and (v) adopt climate- and disaster-risk-informed standards for siting, design, and operations. Together, these measures can narrow the policy-practice gap and align hydropower development with ecological resilience and community rights.

#### **6. Thematic Synthesis and Research Gaps**

The reviewed literature converges on three broad themes. First, Himachal Pradesh's tribal communities possess rich ecological knowledge and a long-standing history of sustainable resource use, which remains inadequately recognised in formal law. Second, while environmental statutes and policies provide a strong legal framework, their implementation suffers from administrative, geographical, and political constraints. Third, the governance of mountain ecosystems requires adaptive, multi-level, and participatory models that bridge the gap between state law and indigenous practice.

Despite a growing body of research, empirical studies that integrate legal, governance, and indigenous perspectives in Himachal Pradesh remain limited. Most analyses focus on either ecological or administrative dimensions, without exploring how legal pluralism operates on the ground. There is thus considerable scope for field-based and longitudinal research examining how

forest rights, environmental compliance, and community governance intersect in the state's tribal regions. Future studies should also consider the implications of climate change and tourism pressures for environmental law and governance in fragile Himalayan ecosystems.

#### **7. Governance and Community Interface**

Environmental governance in Himachal Pradesh is gradually shifting from a top-down system to a community-centered approach. The State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) promotes local participation, gender equality, and decentralized adaptation measures. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) now play a bigger role in managing local resources such as forests, grazing lands, and water systems.

The Forest Rights Act (2006) further recognizes community rights over forest areas, though its implementation remains uneven. Case studies from Kinnaur and Chamba districts show frequent tensions between forest officials and villagers over access to non-timber forest produce and grazing areas.

These situations highlight that governance is not just an administrative process but a social negotiation involving power, identity, and trust. From a humanities viewpoint, governance here is also about how communities tell their stories, interpret their environment, and either influence or get excluded from state decisions.

#### **8. Challenges and Critical Reflections**

Despite strong laws, Himachal Pradesh continues to face serious environmental challenges. Rapid urbanization, tourism pressure, illegal mining, and uncontrolled hydropower projects threaten the fragile Himalayan ecosystem. The remote terrain makes law enforcement difficult, and many communities still depend on natural resources for survival. A key problem is the poor integration of traditional knowledge into formal policy. When local customs and wisdom are ignored, people often feel excluded from conservation efforts. Environmental damage also tends to affect poor and marginalized groups the most, raising concerns about environmental justice and fairness in decision-making. To overcome these challenges, governance must become more dialogue-based, giving equal space to scientific data and local experience. Strengthening coordination among institutions and ensuring transparency will make environmental governance more effective and fairer.

#### **Conclusion**

Environmental governance in Himachal Pradesh stands at a critical intersection of law, culture, and community experience. While constitutional guarantees and statutory frameworks offer a robust structure for environmental protection, their effectiveness ultimately depends on how deeply they engage with the lived realities of local and indigenous communities. A humanities lens reveals that ethical responsibility, cultural meaning, and participatory justice are not optional additions but essential components of sustainable governance. Bridging the persistent gap between formal legal mandates and grassroots ecological knowledge requires genuine community consultation, institutional accountability, and the recognition of indigenous governance practices as legitimate partners in decision-making. As Himachal Pradesh navigates the tensions between ecological fragility and developmental aspirations, its trajectory reflects an evolving case of legal pluralism where multiple systems of knowledge and authority coexist and contend. Ultimately, only by harmonizing these diverse voices can the state achieve an environmental governance framework that is not merely lawful, but also just, inclusive, and ecologically resilient.

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**LIVING LAND: AN ECO-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL  
KNOWLEDGE IN *WHEN THE RIVER SLEEPS***

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**Abstract**

The Northeast, consisting of eight states in the northeastern part of India, is known for its unique geographical features, and even more, for its inhabitants and their ethnic and cultural practices. Protecting the ecology is one of the core concerns of the people living here, and by doing so, they tend to save their ethnic and cultural identity. Through oral tradition—or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)—the generational tradition of caring about the living landscape has passed down to younger generations. However, unlike Western views that see "objects," this worldview treats the land as animate. Easterine Kire, hailing from Nagaland, is one of the pioneers to converge the tradition of oral storytelling into writing. Fearing the loss of rich heritage into a chaotic and consumerist world—akin to the "Windigo" economy described by Robin Wall Kimmerer—her writing serves as a vital act of "re-story-ation." Her work, *When the River Sleeps*, focuses on the importance of ecology and how the People of the Angami Naga community play a role in its protection, sometimes by sacrificing themselves and other times by practising the culture of 'thanksgiving' and reciprocity to nature. She also sheds light on how nature provides in return for its protection, validating the concept of a "Gift Economy." This article discusses Kire's work through the lens of ethno-ecology found in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, arguing that the novel upholds the ethics of the "Honourable Harvest" and the "Grammar of Animacy" as essential tools for cultural and ecological survival.

**Keywords:** Deep ecology, traditional ecological knowledge, ethno-ecology, re-story-ation, reciprocity

**Introduction**

In the era of the Anthropocene, where the logic of extraction threatens global ecosystems, the oral traditions of Northeast India offer a vital counter-narrative. Every day, the world is seeing a new invention, and humans are in constant struggle to make life easier for those who can afford it at the cost of losing the potentiality for future lives. The world is divided between consumerism and minimalism. The minimalist believes that the world is a gift to them and they should take only what is necessary for them, whereas consumerism propagates that true happiness can be attained only through luxurious acquisitions, though they never need it for their entire lifetime, never realising, as Kimmerer argues, that it is the psychosis that "tricks us into believing that belongings will fill our hunger, when it is belonging that we crave" (Kimmerer 308). Every kind of pollution, rapidly increasing greenhouse gases, and extinction of the rare species from the surface of the Earth are some of the most serious problems we humans are facing, and this is becoming graver for future generations. This has attracted the global attention of ecologists. The indigenous people of Northeast India are very much concerned about saving nature, and this has been part of their culture, and it still continues through oral storytelling customs and folklore.

Easterine Kire, belonging to one of the eight states of northeast, Nagaland, currently living in Norway, is one of the pioneers to save the rich heritage of her ancestral land. She is also considered the first writer from Nagaland to publish *A Naga Village Remembered*, the first English

work published in 2003. After that, she has authored seven more seminal works upholding the responsibility to preserve the rich heritage of the Angami Naga community, as she, in an interview, says that the fear of “dying out” of oral narratives and the slow realisation that “it’s all going to be lost” is the reason she started to write. Her writings show the living experiences, vibrant culture, and a mixture of historio-cultural experiences of the Naga people. Her other subsequent works are *A Terrible Matriarchy* (2007), *Mari* (2010), *Bitter Wormwood* (2011), *Life on Hold* (2011), *When the River Sleeps* (2014), *Son of the Thundercloud* (2016), *Don't Run, My Love* (2017), *A Respectable Woman* (2019), and apart from these, she has written numerous other works, including Sahitya Academy Award winner *Spirit Nights* (2022).

She converges the oral tradition into a writing form and thus continues the re-story-ation culture and urges the larger audience to contribute to preserving the nature and use it according to need, also requesting to be a responsible person and follow the rule of reciprocity and consider natural resources as a gift economy and must not use it as a ‘Windigo’ economy. She thus also urges the audience to follow a thanksgiving rule with nature, and that could be the least one could do to save this planet from further degradation.

Her book, *When the River Sleeps*, presents a mix of myth, culture, oral traditions, and folklore about a story that helps readers understand the Angami Naga community and preserve its uniqueness. She also asks the wider audience to protect nature, its flora, and fauna. Set in Nagaland, the book focuses on the Angami Naga community. Vilie, a 48-year-old unmarried man living in a forest shed for the past 25 years, is the central character. His father, Kedo, the village head, is deeply attached to the forest, considering it his ‘wife’. He values the forest as he would a woman and is loyal to it. However, he views it as disloyal and deceitful when his mind disagrees. Vilie dreams of a powerful heart stone in the jungle, granting wealth, cattle, and success in women. The most desired power is ‘prowess in war’. After seeking guidance from a seer, Vilie embarks on a challenging journey to the sleeping river to retrieve the stone. He encounters deadly creatures and overcomes them using traditional and natural tactics. He also meets kind people like Idele, Keyireusap, Kani, and Subale. Kani takes him to the river and through the treacherous paths, brings him back home. He and his wife prepare for his return journey. With the heart stone in his possession, everyone seems his enemy. Humans and spirits are indistinguishable, and he fights them with unwavering determination, guided by the seer’s teachings and old folklore. When his attackers and lurers threaten and offer him money to sell the heart stone, he retreats into the forest to protect it from falling into the wrong hands.

Easterine Kire’s *When the River Sleeps* constitutes a compelling articulation of Naga ethno-ecological principles. The novel systematically foregrounds Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a viable epistemological system, countering materialist paradigms. In the light of Kimmerer’s work *Braiding the Sweetgrass*, this paper argues how Kire illuminates a model of reciprocity considering the ecology as animate rather than just objects, that serves as a powerful eco-critical rejoinder to the extractive tenets of the Windigo economy.

#### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This qualitative eco-critical research employs close textual analysis to interpret Easterine Kire’s 2014 novel *When the River Sleeps*. It examines the primary text to identify specific literary examples of reciprocity interspecies communication and indigenous stewardship. These are then contrasted with Western materialist paradigms.

This study draws on Ethno-ecology and Indigenous Studies, primarily utilising Robin Wall Kimmerer’s theoretical concepts from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013). These include the “Grammar of Animacy” and the “Windigo Psychosis”. To validate the novel’s portrayal of indigenous practices as rigorous knowledge systems rather than mere folklore, the paper references Fikret Berkes’ definition of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Gregory Cajete’s concept of “Native Science”. Graham Harvey’s definition of “Animism” is also incorporated to explore the protagonist’s relationship with the non-human world. Finally, the conflict between stewardship

and greed is analysed through Val Plumwood's critique of the "Mastery of Nature" and Lewis Hyde's theory of the "Gift Economy". The paper argues that the novel presents a model of "Ecological Retribution" where the land possesses the agency to heal the steward and destroy the exploiter.

#### **Literature Review**

1. A substantial body of scholarship explores the spiritual aspect of Kire's ecology. Dr Prafulla Kumar Rai (2025) contends that Kire's narrative embodies a "re-enchantment of the world" and resists Western dichotomies of reason versus myth. Drawing on Arne Naess's "Deep Ecology" concept, Rai suggests Vilie's journey isn't about conquest but "communion". This involves spiritual attunement for survival, prioritising inner strength over physical prowess. Similarly, E. S. Beena and Dr P. J. Giftlin (2021) analyse the text as a "mythopoeic narrative". They propose the forest in the novel functions as a sentient entity governing human interaction through ethical and ritualistic principles. These studies reinforce the notion that in Naga cosmology, "spiritual" and "ecological" are intrinsically linked.
2. Scholars have observed that Kire's folklore establishes "porous boundaries" between the human and non-human worlds. This deconstructs anthropocentrism, suggesting Vilie's identity is fluid and intricately connected to the natural world. This aligns with the concept of "Animism" which recognises the agency of non-human entities like spirits and weretigers as active participants in the ecosystem rather than mere symbols.
3. H. R. Khan (2024) contrasts Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) with 'capitalist modernity' arguing that the miners in the novel represent an 'instrumentalist view' of nature as a dead resource. Khan suggests that the river's 'sleep' represents a state of vulnerable ecological balance threatened by this extractive logic. S. Gayathri further notes that nature in the novel is not passive but an 'empowered, benevolent provider' that actively protects those who seek refuge in it, thereby validating the concept of a reciprocal economy.
4. Sanarul Hoque and Punyashree Panda (2023) contend that Northeast folktales act as a repository for "Deep Ecology" fostering a "consciousness" that motivates indigenous communities to safeguard biodiversity. H. Tynsong et al. (2020) further define this as a "tradition-based" scientific system where knowledge evolves over centuries through experiential learning.

#### **Discussion**

The story in Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* unravels as magical and mythical figures are all over the place, like the Were-tigers – men who become tigers, Widow-women – river guardians, Unclean forest spirits – hostile spirits, Girl in the pool – a forest-dwelling spirit, Spirit children – forest tricksters, and many more. But the narrative has a different and deeper appeal to its wider audience. Rather than just looking into the superficial connotations, when we look between the lines, we see a lot more different meanings than the apparent one. Kire's work is a fictional version of the real-world ecology where she treats everything around as animate, which feels the same as any human would at the time of love and rage. The book opens with Vilie and his 25 years in jungle life, his attachment to it like it's his real wife, and his repeated dreaming of sleeping river and wresting the magical heart-stone gives a strong impression of animation, treating everything around as a person. Vilie's engagement with it aligns with Graham Harvey's definition of animism, where the world is understood as being "full of persons, only some of whom are human" (Harvey 2005). His journey to the sleeping river and returning with the heart-stone, defeating every evil spirit, denotes that survival depends not on conquering nature but on maintaining social relationships with these non-human persons.

The folkloric and ancestral knowledge of Vilie throughout his life in the jungle and especially in his journey to the Sleeping River has helped him survive the dangers. These stories that guide Vilie are not mere folklore but examples of what Fikret Berkes defines as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK): a 'cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief' that has been

tested over generations (Berkes 1999). Vilie does not survive by luck; he survives by accessing this ancestral data archive. His consultation with the village Seer prior to his departure serves not merely as a narrative trope of fantasy, but as a validation of indigenous institutional authority. Within the novel, the Seer functions as the custodian of the community's "cumulative body of knowledge," holding the archival data of those who previously attempted to harvest the Heart Stone. This interaction reframes the journey from a reckless adventure into a calculated expedition rooted in "Native Science," which scholar Gregory Cajete defines as a "process of perceiving, thinking, looking, acting, and coming to know" the natural world (Cajete 2). The Seer provides Vilie with a specific technological methodology for survival, explicitly warning him that "the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers which you would be quite foolish to defy with gunpowder" (Kire 39).

This theoretical instruction becomes practical application during Vilie's paralysis in the "unclean forest." When the "angry spirit" immobilises him, Vilie survives not by physical force, but by accessing the specific psychological protocol archived in his memory: "Vilie suddenly remembered the seer's words. *Let your spirit be the bigger one*" (Kire 87). By reciting the prescribed affirmation—"Mine is the greater spirit! I will never submit to you!" (Kire 88)—Vilie effectively neutralises the threat. Thus, the Seer represents what Temsula Ao describes as oral tradition acting as a "guardian"; he ensures the "researcher" (Vilie) is equipped with the necessary spiritual technology to navigate the sentient landscape without being consumed by it.

There are a number of such instances where he makes use of it; like out on his journey in the unclean forest where Vilie halts to spend the night, he dreams that his legs are very heavy and he is unable to take any step further. When he wakes up, he finds that it was real. His calves are paralysed by cramps and there is a very heavy weight on his chest. He sees that "a dark, indistinguishable shape was sitting on top of him" (Kire 87). It was the angry spirit of the unclean forest, fighting and threatening him. When Vilie's every attempt to overcome fails, his every request and begging does not have any effect on the thing on him. His mind ticks the seer's word who had advised him to let his spirit be the bigger one. He repeats "Mine is the greater spirit! I will never submit to you!" (Kire 88), and after a moment he finds the thing on the ground wounded and defeated, which grew smaller and smaller until it became no more than a beetle.

Another such example where Kire shows that the traditional ecological knowledge of the Naga people is enough and sufficient to live in harmony with nature without disturbing its environment or causing its rage. If it causes an injury, so does it give the remedy. Out on his journey, when Vilie meets 'the bark-weavers', the three women impress him very much by their way of harvesting. The older woman hands him a knife and a pad and instructs him to be careful, warning that accidents can happen at any time. The moment he yanks it, he "got stung for his troubles." "Damn!" (Kire 45). Angami Naga, who prioritise saving nature instead of considering it as resources for exploitation, have the knowledge of the flora and fauna and their remedial features. The area of sting started swelling. Idele immediately took bitter wormwood leaves, kneaded them, and put them on the wounded area. After a moment, she fetched her bag and brought out a bottle of rock bee honey and poured it on the affected area, saying, "Rock bee honey," "It's a cure-all." (Kire 44). As Easterine Kire depicts through Idele's traditional use of rock bee honey, the land carries its own medicinal intelligence. This aligns with Vandana Shiva's argument that the Earth is a "living organism" with regenerative, curative capacities (Earth Democracy). Similarly, Robin Wall Kimmerer notes that plants and natural substances are "teachers and healers" in Indigenous knowledge systems (Braiding Sweetgrass).

Furthermore, Kire deepens the novel's articulation of nature's curative agency through Vilie's reliance on wild ginseng, a plant embedded within indigenous medicinal knowledge. The narrative carefully records how he "made a paste of it and smeared it on his ankles and wrists... soaked it in hot water... and drank down the mixture," placing complete trust in the ginseng's "restorative properties" (Kire 88). This episode exemplifies how healing in the text emerges not through external or institutional systems of medicine, but through an embodied, experiential

understanding of the land's pharmacological potential. In foregrounding Vilie's intimate engagement with plants, Kire affirms a worldview in which the landscape itself functions as a living repository of knowledge, offering remedies to those who remain attuned to its rhythms.

### **The Gift Economy vs. The Logic of Extraction**

Considering the recognition of the land as animate, Kire illustrates that it is a matter of survival for humans to transform their ethic from a right to a responsibility. If the river and forest consist of 'persons' instead of 'things', then to interact with them should require permission and gratitude rather than the colonial calculus of extraction. This is the 'Honourable Harvest' of Robin Wall Kimmerer—a moral agreement in which one is allowed to take from the provider, but must treat the provider with dignity. This is the example in the book where it is most clearly exhibited, as Vilie, instead of seeing the forest as a wilderness to conquer, states, 'The forest is my wife' (Kire 17).

This metaphor of marriage suggests a relationship built on mutual care domesticity and consent. This contrasts sharply with eco-feminist Val Plumwood's critique of the "Mastery of Nature". Plumwood argues that this worldview sees nature as a passive subordinate to humans (Plumwood 12). Vilie's role as a "guardian of the *gwi*" and "protector of the rare tragopan" (Kire 13) isn't just a job but a spousal duty within this ecological marriage. This dynamic mirrors scholar Lewis Hyde's concept of the "labour of gratitude". Hyde explains that in a gift economy the gift must always flow (Hyde 4). If someone hoards nature's bounty without reciprocating, the bond is broken.

Kire dramatises this "return gift" through Vilie's ritualistic language. When harvesting herbs or firewood he prays, "*Terhuomia peziemu*—Thanks be to the spirits" (Kire 85). This isn't mere superstition; it's the currency of the gift economy. By acknowledging the provider's agency Vilie satisfies the debt of the harvest. Therefore Kire suggests survival in the Angami worldview hinges on this reciprocal cycle; extracting without gratitude severs the life-sustaining relationship.

### **TEK as the Science of Survival**

Furthermore, these ritualistic practices serve as a rigorous survival mechanism grounded in Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). As Fikret Berkes explains, TEK isn't static folklore but a "cumulative body of knowledge practice and belief" that governs sustainable resource use (Berkes 8). When Vilie follows the warning "the river offered its bounty but only to those who took no more than they needed" (Kire 45), he's applying an ancient ecological law that prevents over-harvesting. This literary depiction supports Naga scholar Temsula Ao's argument that for the Northeast tribes, oral tradition acts as a "guardian" of both identity and the land (Ao 12). By dramatising these protocols, Kire affirms the indigenous belief that "spiritual" and "ecological" are interconnected; violating the river's spirit destroys the community's physical sustenance.

### **The Pathogen of Consumption**

Kire's ethno-ecological paradise faces a significant threat: the "Windigo". This legendary Ojibwe monster embodies insatiable greed and the consumerist society's insatiable hunger. The "Windigo psychosis" – the delusion that the earth exists solely for human consumption – is personified by the heart-stone. Initially, Vilie's quest is driven by its allure promising "wealth grain women and victory" (Kire 92). This represents the ultimate capitalist fantasy: transforming the sacred (the river's heart) into the secular (political and material power). The heart-stone serves as a litmus test for Val Plumwood's "Mastery of Nature" – a worldview that views the non-human world purely as "instrumental terms" useful only for human ends (Plumwood 12). Had Vilie succumbed to the temptation to use the stone for personal gain, he would have unleashed the Windigo's violence, transforming a living being into a dead commodity.

Kire starkly contrasts Vilie's ethic of stewardship with the extractive violence of the antagonist Hiesa. Vilie, a 'guardian of the forest' tasked with protecting the rare tragopan and

mithuns, embodies a different worldview. Hiesa, on the other hand, represents the consumptive desperation of the 'Windigo'. His murder of his brother Pehu over a trivial disagreement serves as a microcosm of capitalist exploitation. This behaviour illustrates Val Plumwood's concept of the 'standpoint of mastery' – a worldview that treats the other, whether nature or human, purely as an instrument for exploitation and discard. Unlike Vilie, who refuses to kill the weretiger unnecessarily, equating it to killing a man, Hiesa lacks this recognition of kinship. Kire suggests that without the restraint of Traditional Ecological Knowledge the forest becomes merely a stage for human violence and greed.

### **The Ecology of Retribution**

Kire further critiques the 'Windigo' economy by illustrating the devastating spiritual consequences of violence like Hiesa's. Hiesa embodies the human side of extractive greed while Zote represents the ecological backlash when this logic extends to the supernatural.

After enumerating the narrative arc of Vilie's reward for his ecological humility, Kire presents a stark counter-narrative through Zote, a character embodying the catastrophic consequences of weaponising nature. Vilie, the "Steward" negotiating with the forest for survival, contrasts sharply with Zote, the embittered *Kirhupfūmia*—a sorceress with the power to kill by pointing—seeking to dominate spiritual and ecological forces for personal vengeance. Her journey serves as a grim case study of Val Plumwood's "standpoint of mastery"—a worldview viewing the non-human world as a mere arsenal subject to human will. Kire portrays Zote's relationship with the supernatural not as a dialogue but as a violent extraction. Unlike Vilie's prayerful and permissive approach to the river, Zote attempts to harness the Heart Stone's power to wreak havoc upon her ancestral village. Her desire isn't for the "wealth" or "cattle" promised by the stone but for a scorched-earth destruction. She yearns to witness the destruction of young lives and the burning of homes fields and houses. This creates a powerful parallel to Robin Wall Kimmerer's concept of the "Windigo" – the insatiable monster of greed. Zote's insatiable hunger for revenge consumes her humanity transforming her into a vessel of toxicity mirroring the environmental devastation of a war zone.

The novel vividly portrays this toxicity. When Zote attacks the village, she doesn't employ conventional weapons but distorts the very ecological order. She unleashes a "plague of boils" and "globules of pestilence" from her bag alongside a "swarm of rodents and lizard-like creatures" (Kire 151). This scene serves as a powerful eco-critical metaphor: when nature is stripped of its sacredness and weaponised for human conflict, it manifests as disease and infestation. Zote's assault transforms the village into a "battlefield" where houses are incinerated and men are blinded by "shafts from Zote's lightning-swift fingers" (Kire 152). By burning the village, she violates the fundamental ecological principle of the "Honourable Harvest" – she destroys the habitat that sustains life driven by a solipsistic rage that recognises no kinship with others.

However, Kire suggests the "living land" possesses its own immune system against such violations. The climax of this ecological drama unfolds when Zote trespasses into the village council hall, a space steeped in governance and tradition. Her hubris leads her to believe she has conquered the village but her actions awaken a force older and more powerful than her sorcery. The "charred structures" and "smouldering remains" of the village don't remain passive; they reignite to form "tall human-like figures with long spears and shields" – the ancestor spirits (Kire 156). This pivotal moment underscores the novel's deep ecology: it demonstrates that the land is not mere dead matter. It holds the memory of those who once lived there and possesses the agency to defend itself. The retribution is swift and complete. The ancestor spirits, described as "spirit-warriors," march upon Zote with "ululating" war cries (Kire 156). Despite possessing the Heart Stone, Zote is powerless against the collective spirit of the land she sought to destroy. Her "horrific cries" echo through the valley as she is consumed by the very forces she attempted to command (Kire 156). This outcome validates Vilie's warning from the narrative's ancient wisdom: "the



struggle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers you would be quite foolish to defy" (Kire 187).

Ultimately, Zote's downfall serves as the novel's most potent warning against the "Mastery of Nature". Her attempt to wield the spiritual ecology as a tool of terror leads to her own destruction. When Vilie and Ate discover her body later, she clutches the Heart Stone tightly, a poignant symbol of the futility of possessing something without a connection. Through Zote, Kire argues that the earth cannot be conquered; it can only be interacted with. Those who treat the living world as a weapon will ultimately find it turns against them enforcing an "ecology of retribution" that restores the balance disrupted by human greed.

### **The Cure: Restoring the Sacred**

Despite the devastation wrought by Zote's hubris, the novel refuses to conclude in annihilation. Amidst the wreckage, Kire presents a powerful counter-narrative of healing through the character of Ate. While Zote embodies the self-destructive nature of the 'Mastery' mindset, her sister Ate represents the regenerative potential of the 'Gift Economy'. The novel's profound ecological message lies in Vilie's ultimate rejection of instrumentalism. After acquiring the stone, Vilie undergoes a shift in perspective, realising that its true treasure is spiritual, not material (Kire 205). The novel explicitly rejects the commodification of the Heart Stone by revealing its true function as an agent of psychological and spiritual healing. While the 'Windigo' world views the stone as a source of wealth, grain, women and victory, Vilie discovers its restorative power when he places it in the hands of Ate, the outcast Kirhupfūmia. Social ostracisation has led Ate to believe her touch is poisonous, but the stone's contact 'cleanses' her, noting, 'It's burning me a little... Like a cleansing'. This interaction exemplifies Lewis Hyde's theory of the 'Gift Economy', where an object's value lies in its ability to foster a bond between giver and receiver rather than its market price. Unlike a commodity consumed, the stone functions as what Graham Harvey calls a 'spirited person'; it actively participates in Ate's rehabilitation by dismantling the lie of her own evil nature. Consequently, the 'wealth' of the ecosystem is redefined: it's not a resource for economic gain but a source of ontological restoration for the fractured human spirit.

By choosing to guard the stone rather than exploit it, Vilie provides the narrative antidote to the Windigo. He breaks the cycle of consumption by re-inscribing the stone within the logic of the Gift Economy, where the value of an object lies in its ability to establish relationships, not in its market price. Kire thus suggests that the solution to the "chaotic and melancholic world" of modern extraction is a return to an ethic of sufficiency. Vilie's journey concludes not with a conquest of nature, but with a submission to its mystery, proving Kimmerer's assertion that "we are not the masters of the earth, but its servants" (Kimmerer 305). In a global landscape ravaged by industrial greed, *When the River Sleeps* argues that the only way to defeat the Windigo is to remember the "original instructions": that the earth is a community to which we belong, not a warehouse from which we continue to take.

### **Conclusion**

This article demonstrates that Easterine Kire's *When the River Sleeps* transcends regional folklore, offering a sophisticated exploration of indigenous ethno-ecology. By analysing the text through Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the Angami Naga worldview presented in the novel emerges as a vital counter-narrative to modern anthropocentric paradigms. Vilie's journey isn't just a quest for a magical object; it's a narrative enactment of the "Grammar of Animacy," illustrating that the forest is a community of sovereign beings, not a mere resource.

The study underscores the novel's validation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) as a rigorous scientific practice. Vilie's adherence to the "Honourable Harvest" and "Gift Economy" demonstrates that survival depends on a symbiotic, reciprocal relationship rather than linear extraction. Furthermore, the novel critiques global consumerism's "Windigo" nature. Vilie's

ultimate rejection of the heart-stone's material power in favour of spiritual stewardship offers a crucial antidote to the greed driving the current ecological crisis.

Kire's work is a vital tool for bio-cultural restoration in Northeast India. In an era facing environmental degradation and cultural erasure, the novel performs the essential task of "re-story-ation," reminding a new generation that the land's health is tied to their stories. Ultimately, *When the River Sleeps* suggests the river's dormancy stems from humanity's forgotten ability to listen. Kire's narrative serves as a clarion call to awaken from materialism's slumber and reconnect with the living earth as kin, not masters.

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**POETICS OF SLOW CINEMA AND ECOLOGICAL GRIEF IN BÉLA TARR'S  
SÁTÁNTANGÓ**

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**Abstract**

Based on Hungarian novelist László Krasznahorkai's eponymous novel, Béla Tarr's 1994 masterpiece *Sátántangó* (*Satan's Tango* in English) explores, among other things, the environment of unceasing rain and pervasive mud as constituting an expansive psychological landscape that shapes the narrative, affect and temporality. This paper analyses Tarr's aesthetics through Timothy Morton's conceptual framework of "dark ecology" and Rob Nixon's "slow violence" to argue that the film engages with ecological grief which amounts to a profound mourning for a lost future in a dying world. Through its cinematic representation the film renders the psychological consequences of inhabiting a terminally degraded environment manifest in the characters' apathy, heavy alcoholism, intense smoking and cyclical despair that are not simply struck off as post-communist malaise. Through meticulous attention to the texture of desolation, *Sátántangó* presents environmental collapse as inherently and inevitably linked with the soul's decay. This is done through Tarr's use of cinematic techniques like extended long takes, minimal narrative mediation and durational realism which foreground the embodied experience of time in a collapsing world, compelling viewers to confront the relentless inertia, hopelessness and moral desolation that pervade both the village and its inhabitants. With Tarr's aesthetics of slow cinema yoking together the temporality of the audience and that of his characters, the landscape/filmscape becomes inescapable for both. In Tarr's hands, the film's repertoire of immersive style and deliberate pacing, complemented by its environmental consciousness, transforms its temporal architecture into a vehicle for contemplating the human experience within intertwined ecological collapse.

**Keywords:** Dark ecology, Eco-cinema, Ecological Grief, Slow Cinema, Slow Violence

**Introduction**

In the early twenty-first century, critical discourse on the Anthropocene has increasingly turned to affect, mourning and the altered experience of time as indices of environmental crisis. Climate change is no longer apprehended only through spectacular catastrophe, but through what one recent account calls the "feelings of ecological distress – particularly ecogrief and anxiety – [that] have become palpable" as people confront the scale and pace of planetary degradation (Borovica et al. 1). Ecological grief considers this constellation a sorrow that is not reducible to individual bereavement but tied to the sense that the world itself is becoming uninhabitable while the current "climate emergency ... has also brought with it an abundance of different types of grief" as well as the "new forms of grieving and mourning the losses resulting from ecological degradation" (1). This grief is inseparable from the temporal structures of environmental crisis; it is, as Broom and Peterie put it, "temporally complex, anticipatory of the future, occupying and embodying loss of the past" (qtd. in Borovica et al. 2). Under such conditions, both politics and aesthetics are forced

to grapple with forms of violence that unfold gradually, obliquely and atmospherically rather than in punctual shocks.

Timothy Morton's theorisation of "dark ecology" gives this affective and temporal disorientation a philosophical contour. Dark ecology, he insists, is not a consoling vision of harmony but a mode of "ecological awareness," that is "dark-depressing," "[y]et ecological awareness is also dark-uncanny. And strangely it is dark-sweet" (5). Against any "rigid and brittle" (75) logical binarization that would classify into neat categories the living and the dead or even the human and the nonhuman, Morton argues that ecological thought must recognise that "the widescreen view of dark ecology sees lifeforms as specters in a charnel ground in which Life is a narrow metaphysical concrete pipe. Death is the fact that ecological thought must encounter to stay soft, to stay weird" (138). Ecological awareness, in this sense, unfolds on a spectral plane where distinctions between human and nonhuman, subject and object, no longer appear as secure; on the contrary, "in ecological awareness differences between R2D2-like beings and humans become far less pronounced; everything gains a haunting, spectral quality" (138). Morton links this spectral awareness to a radical reconfiguration of temporality. Ecological thought, he suggests, demands that we "think at Earth magnitude," where "anthropocentric distinctions don't matter anymore," and where binaries such as "here versus there, person versus thing, individual versus group" cease to be "thin and rigid" (32). This temporal and ontological stretching is mirrored in the experience of what he elsewhere describes as an encounter with "nested sets of catastrophes" that no longer fit inherited logics of continuity (75). Modern ecological awareness is disturbing because, as Rob Nixon observes in his account of environmental slow violence, "we all inhabit multiple temporal orders that often coexist in frictional states, shifting and sliding like tectonic plates" (61). The Anthropocene is thus not only a geological designation but a crisis of scale and perception in which narrative, causality and responsibility are all scrambled. Cinema has been one of the key testing grounds for exploring this crisis of time and perception. Over the last few decades, critics have identified what Luca and Jorge describe as a "durational aesthetic" (2) in which filmmakers across avant-garde, documentary and art-house traditions have foregrounded time as a palpable dimension of the cinematic experience. This durational cinema, they argue, must be understood in the context of a culture organised around acceleration, such that slow films "confront, and reflect on, the 'experience of a world of speed, acceleration, and cotemporality'" (15). Slowness here is not a mere stylistic quirk but a structural reorientation: long takes, sparse plots and minimal action, as Harry T. Stone and Paul Cooke note in their discussion of Béla Tarr, "foreground the profilmic event they capture as opposed to their narrative function, linking the 'present' of the instant it was filmed with the present of the viewing experience," so that "the image crystallises, budding geometric mirrors and planes that reflect the image from many temporal angles" (317-318).

Within this broader tendency, Béla Tarr's work has become exemplary of slow cinema's capacity to translate historical and ecological crises into temporal experience. As Orban argues, Tarr's cinema is organised around "slow cinema and the extension of time in film [which] places emphasis on physical space," drawing the spectator's attention to "the object on which the camera lingers" and allowing the "action" to pass "before the viewer's eyes as if in real time" (16). These places are not neutral locations but zones where, as she puts it, the derelict Hungarian geographies reveal a "ruined, pock-marked land, the crumbling villages, and the muddy fields," all evidence of the negative influence humans have had on the environment (1). The slowness of Tarr's films does not simply record a pre-existing misery; by "allow[ing] the viewer's gaze to concentrate, often simulating real time" (16), it produces a sense of temporal weight that presses on both characters and spectators, binding them into a shared experience of stagnation. Orban's formulation suggests that slow cinema can stage a kind of co-suffering between viewing body and cinematic body, an insight that dovetails with broader regional analyses of Eastern European film.

Mazierska et al. situate such exhausted bodies within a longer history of political and economic dispossession. The volume proposes a "kaleidoscopic vision" of the cinematic body "as a nexus of often-competing forces, affects and ideologies, and as multiple and fluid" (1). In the

post-socialist context, this vision is sharpened by what the editors describe as “wounded and traumatised bodies: bodies suffering from war and work injuries as well as the effects of everyday brutality and alcoholism,” where alcohol is “seen largely as a means of coming to terms with the deprivations of the state socialist system, but one which also brings traumas of its own” (15). When such bodies are placed in ruined landscapes and derelict infrastructures, they participate in what Ágnes Imre, writing on “corporeal cinema,” calls “grim allegories” that “revolve obsessively around the often-traumatic historical changes in the region” and attend to “the potential bodily impacts of the films on audiences” (qtd. in Mazierska et al. 13-14). The region’s cinematic corporeality thus becomes a privileged site for analysing ecological grief as a lived and material condition.

These lenses position *Sátántangó* as a work that visualises ecological collapse not as an event but as a condition of living. Rather than offering a retrospective allegory of the fall of state socialism, the film constructs an aesthetics of mourning in which environmental ruination and human despair are bound into the same temporal rhythm. Its extended duration, fixation on repetitious labour and attention to dilapidated spaces force the viewer to inhabit the same slow degradation endured by the characters. In doing so, it transforms the aesthetics of slowness into a vehicle for contemplating not only the historical exhaustion of post-communist Hungary but also the more general condition of living, and grieving, in a dying world. Through extreme duration and its relentless attention to bodily exhaustion, ruined landscapes and non-human elements, *Sátántangó* transforms slow cinema into a mode of environmental perception that renders slow violence materially and affectively ever present.

#### **Monotonous Slowness as the Aesthetic of Inevitability**

Béla Tarr’s *Sátántangó* stages ecological grief first and foremost as an experience of time. Rather than representing environmental collapse as a single dramatic event, the film immerses viewers in what Rob Nixon calls the “temporalities of place,” the way place must be “constantly renegotiated in the face of changes that arrive from without and within, some benign, others potentially ruinous” (18). The ruined collective farm is not simply a backdrop but a temporally saturated environment in which human and nonhuman lives are worn down together. In this sense, Tarr’s slow cinema aesthetic becomes a way of making visible what Nixon describes as “slow violence”: forms of attritional harm that unfold gradually and often invisibly, eroding “webs of accumulated cultural meaning” and severing the ties that bind generations to a shared landscape (17).

Alexandra Irímia’s account of *Sátántangó*’s “circular structure” offers a key starting point for understanding how Tarr ties this slow violence to a specifically environmental temporality (218). In both Krasznahorkai’s novel and Tarr’s film, she notes, the story leads back to its own beginning: the final chapter of the book is also called “The Circle Closes,” and in the novel’s metafictional ending the Doctor literally rewrites the opening pages. Irímia shows how this circularity is underwritten by András Bálint-Kovács’s description of the work’s temporal logic:

Krasznahorkai’s novel was special in that it depicted the process of deterioration rather than the static condition of misery. Not a disrupted world, but a continuous disruption. This became the key for Tarr. Monotonous slowness is the time of this ruthless crash, the form of inevitability is the eternal return, which became the basic element of the three great films Tarr made with Krasznahorkai. (Irímia 218)

The emphasis here on “process,” “continuous disruption,” and “monotonous slowness” links Tarr’s durational strategies directly to the kinds of ongoing, non-spectacular ruin Nixon theorises. Ecological collapse in *Sátántangó* is not an apocalypse that happens once; it is an “eternal return” of damp, mud and exhaustion, a “ruthless crash” played out at the level of weather, labour and bodies. The film’s notorious length and its long takes literalise this “monotonous slowness,” forcing spectators to inhabit the same grinding temporality as the characters, and to experience slow violence not as background information but as a durational pressure. Irímia captures this temporal condition when she writes of Tarr’s work:

The lingering monotony and the incessant repetition of time are central principles of composition in Krasznahorkai's work that Tarr's translates into cinematic language... drizzling, never-ending rain infiltrating all frames, extremely daring long shots, and the dullness of mechanical, repetitive gestures... 'There is no escape: time is empty. It is an infinite and undivided dimension, in which everything repeats itself.' ... The circularity of the story and of its treatment of time hints to a repetitive history haunted by disappointed dreams and failed hopes. (219-20)

Orban's discussion of slow cinema as well as Tarr's places further clarifies how this temporal experience is engineered at the level of form. For Orban, "Slow cinema and the extension of time in film places emphasis on physical space. Our attention is drawn to the object on which the camera lingers....Tarr, and other slow cinema masters, allow the viewer's gaze to concentrate, often simulating real time" (16). This describes what happens in *Sátántangó's* opening cow sequence (running for more than 9 minutes), where the camera watches a herd of cattle move through the farmyard and across the muddy spaces of the village. The shot's length and apparent "real time" unfolding refuse to subordinate the animals and the mud to narrative exposition. Instead, as Orban's formulation suggests, the "object on which the camera lingers" (here, the cows' bodies, the slurry of the ground and the broken fences) becomes the focus of our attention. The slow pace "allows the viewer's gaze to concentrate" on these nonhuman and material details, training spectators to perceive the farm as a degraded ecosystem rather than a neutral setting. Within this durational field, Timothy Morton's "dark ecology" becomes an illuminating framework. Morton insists that ecological thought must abandon comforting images of Nature in favour of a more unsettling vision of coexistence as "a nested series of catastrophes that are still playing out rather than as a sequence of events based on a conception of time as a succession of atomic instants" (69). *Sátántangó's* long takes and circular structure enact precisely such a time. The incessant rain, the mud that "would render footpaths impassable and put the town too beyond reach," and the endlessly repeated routines of walking, drinking and waiting make the village feel like part of a much larger catastrophe whose origins and end remain unseen (Irimia 217). Irimia further underlines this point by reading the novel's and film's closing loop as a dark twist on Nietzschean eternal return: the narrative "proves to be an endless loop in both media," a "dark statement of Nietzsche's idea of eternal return" in which "the true referent of the title's 'Satanango' isn't therefore the villagers' drunken dance but all existence—a repetitive, vacuous dance directed by the devil" (218). The "continuous disruption" thus takes on a metaphysical as well as historical dimension (218). Tarr's technique of sending the viewer back to the beginning at the end mimics the experience of ecological grief described by climate psychologists: a temporal state in which, as one account puts it, grief is "anticipatory of the future" while "occupying and embodying loss of the past," leaving subjects stuck in a loop that refuses closure (Borovica et al. 2). The film's circular time is an affective trap, mirroring the feeling that there is no "after" ecological collapse, only a world in which damage is ongoing and irreversible.

The figure in whom this temporal condition is most obsessively condensed is the Doctor. Calum Watt reads the Doctor as a body that lives in two incompatible times at once: the numbed present of addiction and the dilated temporality of watching and writing. Drawing on Deleuze's reflections on alcoholism, Watt concludes by contrasting two modes of time in the film's long takes:

[T]he extreme long takes of Tarr's film evince these two 'times': those slow takes, meticulously rendered through framing and sound, of the doctor's profane, solitary, everyday labours – of drinking, urinating, sitting in a chair – relate to the hardened present, while other points at which the camera lingers patiently and the doctor looks on are those of his 'horror and compassion' – such as this moment of writerly composition in the darkness, the fascination of geological timescales, the imagined activities of others and the cart ride into the distance. This, I think, goes some way towards suggesting why



Sátántangó returns to the doctor at its close, and how the portrait of the doctor achieves its haunting effect. (65–66)

Irimia explicitly ties this figure of the Doctor-as-observer to the spectator's own position:

In all certainty, 'the man at the window' reflects and repeats the spectator's gaze on the screen, trying to make sense of what is on display. The film image becomes thus interchangeable with the outside reality, and the distinctions between the 'seer' in the fiction and the one outside of it begin to blur... [Both] reader and spectator are entrapped in the duration of the characters' feelings and perceptions. (221-222)

This "hardened present" of repetitive bodily acts (the Doctor pouring *pálinka*, urinating into a bucket and collapsing into his chair) echoes the coping practices described in ecological grief scholarship. Borovica et al. note that in the face of ongoing environmental degradation, grief often manifests not as spectacular breakdown but as "solastalgia" (1) that permeates daily life, often leading to maladaptive coping such as increased alcohol use or withdrawal. Tarr's camera, by refusing to cut away from the Doctor's "profane, solitary, everyday labours," turns these coping mechanisms into an index of environmental time: they are not simply symptoms of personal failure, but somatic registrations of a world in which the future has collapsed into an oppressive present. At the same time, as Watt observes, the Doctor's other temporal mode, his "horror and compassion" as he peers out of the window or writes in his ledger, opens onto something like Morton's "concentric temporalities" (77). In one of the film's key sequences, the Doctor sits at his table, surrounded by piles of notebooks, and begins to write the words that echo the novel's opening:

He reached for the pencil again and felt he was back on track now: there were enough notebooks, enough *pálinka*, his medication would last till spring at least and, unless the nails rotted in the door, no one would disturb him. Careful not to damage the paper, he started writing. "One morning near the end of October not long before the first drops of the mercilessly long autumn rains began to fall on the cracked and saline soil." (Irimia 217)

This act of writing sutures together different temporal layers: the Doctor's present and the remembered beginning of the story. It is here that Morton's idea of history as a series of catastrophes becomes especially resonant. The Doctor attempts to hold back disappearance by turning the village into text, but as Irimia notes, "the novel eats itself up in its own construction," so that the Doctor's narrative becomes "a form of that disappearance, a literary illusion" (218). Likewise, the film's return to his point of view at the end suggests that cinematic recording, too, is caught in the same loop of futile preservation in the face of environmental and social erasure.

If the Doctor's sequences dramatize how long takes can expose the tension between numbed present and catastrophic time, Estike's walk to the ruined building foregrounds the nexus of slow violence, dark ecology and ecological grief at the level of gesture. Rancière's reading of this episode emphasises how Tarr uses duration, sound and framing to convert a minor character into the emblem of the film's temporal regime. After recounting the narrative of her small-scale "swindles" and abuse, he describes how the film lingers on her final journey:

In the meantime, of course, the brother has stolen the money and, when she perceives the swindle, Estike starts walking, with the dead cat under her arms, up to a ruined castle where she kills herself with the same rat poison. Her suicide is the event that allows the big swindle to work.... Then come two long sequence shots of walk, the first one taking place at night and the second in the morning light. In those two sequence shots the straight line of the walk gives to the film-maker the opportunity to reconstruct the figure of the idiot. He does it by way of three main procedures, three main dissociations.... We hear Estike's steps but we don't see them. Nor do we see the muddy land. We see only her face and her shoulders in the darkness. We perceive the resolution on that face that seems to project itself towards the final destination. Estike's resolution has become entirely material and we 'hear' it in the rhythmized pace of the steps. (251-252)

Here, the “straight line of the walk” cuts through the film’s circular narrative, but it does so only to lead to an endpoint (suicide) that feeds back into the larger cycle of manipulation and ruin. In Nixon’s terms, Estike is both victim and vector of slow violence: she has internalised the brutal “wisdom” of the new era, tortures her cat to feel some agency, then turns violence on herself in a landscape already stripped of future prospects. Rancière’s insistence that her “resolution has become entirely material” (252) aligns with Morton’s dark ecological claim that, under conditions of ecological crisis, distinctions between psychological interiority and external environment break down: grief is not simply a feeling about a ruined world but a material modulation of bodies moving through that ruin. It is worth quoting Rancière once again to comprehend this point:

Because of Estike’s walk, the manipulation will be split from the inside... a positive mobilisation of their bodies; they will tear themselves away from the circle of repetition... making them face the unknown. We follow a peasant woman holding a lantern... a slow movement of the camera... pans across the faces of each member of the community—one after another... their heads isolated in the dark... neither disappointment nor anger, but the pure encounter with the unknown. The villagers have lost their habits and their bearings... trying to take the full measure of the unknown which falls upon them... This encounter splits up the plot of manipulation... a straight line that diverges from the circle of the plot which goes back to its point of departure. (254-255)

Across these instances, the cows’ opening procession, the Doctor’s alcoholic routines and writing, Estike’s walk, Tarr’s extreme duration and austere style do more than slow down narrative time. They construct what Irímia calls a “process of deterioration rather than the static condition of misery” (218), a cinematic time in which environmental collapse, social abandonment and psychic breakdown are continuous with one another. In this way, *Sátántangó* translates Morton’s catastrophes and Nixon’s temporalities into the felt temporality of a film that asks its spectators to endure its slowness alongside those who live in it.

### **Aesthetics of Dark Ecology and Slow Violence**

Slow violence in *Sátántangó* is not just a matter of stretched time; it is the way the film shows environmental collapse as both socially engineered and ontologically engulfing. The villagers’ world is ruined by a recognisable history of post-socialist dispossession, con-artistry and broken collectivist promises. An act of self-inflicted act of slow violence is depicted through the characters’ incessant smoking that becomes a leitmotif for a death wish. Rob Nixon’s notion of slow violence is crucial here as it foregrounds precisely this double bind: a history that is human made yet experienced as elemental. This becomes clear in his definition of slow violence:

Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility. We need... to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but instead incremental and accretive, and its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. (2)

Tarr’s film responds to those representational challenges not by making slow violence spectacular, but by making it communal and somatic. Nowhere is this clearer than in the notorious pub dance: the interminable dance sequence is at once exuberant and claustrophobic (a desperate attempt by the characters to drown their misery in rhythm, even as the camera’s unflinching gaze and the repetitiveness of their movements emphasize the futility of that effort). The villagers whirl in circles for what feels like an eternity, bodies pressed together, smeared with spilled alcohol and filth, the accordion’s looping motif binding them into a closed circuit. Their circular motion, accompanied by an increasingly discordant tune, mirrors the circular pattern of the story itself, evoking a sense of being trapped in a cycle of decay that time cannot heal. The dance does not release tension, it accumulates it: bodies absorbing decades of economic abandonment, everyday brutality and environmental decay through exhausting, repetitive movement that (to use Nixon’s words) unfolds “across a range of temporal scales.” The sluggish bodies here are the same bodies

Mazierska et al. describe in their account of Eastern European cinematic corporeality as “wounded and traumatised,” marked by war, work injuries, and the dulling effects of alcoholism, and thus already formed by long histories of state and economic violence.

Orban’s writing on Tarr gives a powerful sense of how such scenes of drinking and dancing function as nodal points where historical and ecological grief converge. Discussing Tarr’s broader use of *kocsma*s and ruined interiors, she notes that:

[T]he public place where sorrows are revealed, where impending doom is foretold, where encounters sad and menacing happen, and where even dancing is joyless, just a movement of two bodies, an excuse to have some kind of human contact. The empty beer steins in front of him are neatly stacked as they are in so many Tarr features. He stares at the camera and it slowly moves out. The ironic ending announces there is no one to drink with, again emphasizing the loneliness of the poet and of the actor, but finds a “silver lining” in being able to drown his sorrows.... The camera rotates round the interior of a ruined tower belonging to the church in the forest clearing in Satan’s Tango ... the ruined tower and anguished face both tell the same tale. (132)

Although Orban is writing about *Journey on the Plain* (1995) and Tarr’s collaborations with Mihály Víg, her description maps seamlessly onto the pub in *Sátántangó*: a space where “even dancing is joyless,” and where grief takes on the scale of an “ocean,” overwhelming the characters’ capacity for agency. Within the logic of slow violence, the pub dance is the community’s attempt to keep its head above that ocean, to drown out the awareness that their landscape is disintegrating under them. Research on ecological grief similarly stresses that such grief often takes the form of diffuse, persistent melancholy, substance abuse and a loss of social coherence rather than dramatic breakdowns. The pub sequence externalises that distressed incoherence as a choreography of staggering, sweating bodies turning in circles while the rain lashes the walls outside.

Irimiás enters this world of suspended ruin as a figure of false futurity, promising to convert slow violence into a narrative of renewal. His rhetoric offers the peasants a fantasy of temporal reorganisation: sell the cattle, pool the money and move to a new collective farm that will finally work. Yet, the “future collective farm” is itself a “devastated manor,” a non-place that secures the continuation of their dispossession (Rancière 252). False hope here is not incidental; it is a tactic by which slow violence is sustained. Nixon stresses that slow violence frequently relies on regimes of fossil-fuelled progress and official narratives of development that mask attrition as improvement. Irimiás’s project is a localised version of that script: he repackages environmental and social collapse as an opportunity to start again, while in practice dispersing the community and rendering them even more vulnerable. This manipulation hinges on an intimate knowledge of the villagers’ grief and guilt. He frames Estike’s suicide as a moral failure of the group and as proof that they must follow his plan to redeem themselves. Tarr’s long take of Irimiás preaching in the emptied church accentuates this dynamic: the camera holds the faces of the villagers as they listen, bodies swaying slightly, as if still caught in the rhythm of the pub dance. The false futurity he lays out does not break the circle; it tightens it.

Timothy Morton’s dark ecology helps clarify why these socially engineered processes, in the film, feel so ontologically engulfing. For Morton, ecological awareness is inseparable from shame, abjection and a disturbing sense of inextricable entanglement:

Subjects are created when they force themselves to think that they are not made up of abject stuff. They wipe away the abjection, encapsulated in the vomited sour milk on my baby son’s *pajamas*. As in the phrase “Shame on you.” I can’t actually wipe it off. We enter a thick ambiguous boundary between shame and a region that lies within it. At this boundary there is a recognition of trauma, an acknowledgment that we never wiped away the vomit and never could and, by extension, our body, our ancestors in our bones, the fish swim bladders in our lungs, the bacteria in our guts, the phantasms. Isn’t this what we encounter daily in ecological awareness? (133-134)

The villagers' world is precisely such a "thick ambiguous boundary." Mud, excrement, alcohol and rain circulate through every frame; there is no clean outside from which to survey the ruin. The pub floor is sticky with spilt drink, the paths are churned into sludge, and the interiors are damp and moulding. Morton's insistence that ecological awareness involves recognising that one "can't wipe away the abjection" resonates with the way *Sátántangó* denies its characters any possibility of purification: their efforts to escape (following Irimiás, fantasising about a new start) only entangle them more deeply in the very conditions they want to flee. Irimiás, the supposed saviour, appears only to reorganise their misery: he offers plans, produces speeches, lectures them about duty and solidarity, but every exhortation intensifies their dependence and destitution. His promises of new beginning become mechanisms of control, joining the celestial to base and the sordid: the more he speaks of sacrifice and redemption, the more he entrenches a logic of exploitation disguised as providence. Dark ecology deals with this condition of being trapped in a mesh of more-than-human forces while also being complicit in their production. The film's later scenes quietly insist on a continuum between villagers and animals: pigs wallowing in the same muck the peasants trudge through, the abused cat that becomes Estike's proxy victim and the horses that pull carts across the flooded plain. In the context of Eastern European "cinematic bodies," this continuum is particularly charged. At the level of spectatorship, Irimia's reading of the "man at the window" shows how this dark ecological entrapment is transferred to the viewer (221). After describing the Doctor's gaze, she turns to the famous scene (in the novel) in which rain and time merge at the window pane:

The rain that had been gently pouring till now suddenly turned into a veritable deluge, like a river breaking over a dam, drowning the already choking fields, the lowest lying of which were riddled with serpentine channels, and though it was impossible to see anything through the glass he did not turn away but stared at the worm-eaten wooden frame from which the putty had dropped out, when suddenly a vague form appeared at the window, one that eventually could be made out to be a human face, though he couldn't tell at first whose it was, until he succeeded in picking out a pair of startled eyes, at which point he saw "his own careworn features" and recognized them with a shock like a stab of pain since he felt that what the rain was doing to his face was exactly what time would do. It would wash it away. There was in that reflection something enormous and alien, a kind of emptiness radiating from it, moving toward him, compounded of layers of shame, pride and fear. (222)

Irimia goes on to argue that this "claustrophobic closure" is not only a literary device (with each chapter as a single paragraph from one perspective) but also a cinematic one, produced through "very demanding long takes" and an obsession with contingency that "infiltrates the events in the same way the rain penetrates and soaks every dry surface in the village" (222). For Tarr and Krasznahorkai, she concludes, "time is no longer made of seconds, minutes, and hours" but takes on "the liquidity of rain, the persistence of someone's glance through a window, and the eternal return of a drunken dance" (222). The Doctor's recognition that "what the rain was doing to his face was exactly what time would do" crystallises the film's dark ecological insight: environmental processes (rain eroding surfaces) and historical processes (slow violence eroding lives) are materially indistinguishable at the scale of lived experience. This insight reaches its bleak limit in the final blackout. After the villagers have scattered and Irimiás has moved on, the Doctor boards up his window, extinguishes the lamp and lets the frame fill with darkness. Orban reads Tarr's later films as tending toward such terminal gestures: "walling oneself up or looking leviathan in the eye to find only emptiness," endless rain and wind that make it "impossible to put down roots," and finally "waiting for the end" in a world where even the last tree on the horizon offers no real escape (149). The closing of the shutters in *Sátántangó* anticipates the final darkness of *The Turin Horse* (2011): in both cases, the human response to an ecologically devastated world is not exit but withdrawal, a refusal to unseal the darkness that nonetheless leaves the environment's slow violence ongoing. If earlier scenes show the community metabolising that violence through dance,

drink and fantasy, the last image presents a different, more terrifying mode of response: to accept that the mesh of dark ecology cannot be escaped and to choose non-perception instead. *Sátántangó*, thus, renders slow violence not as an external catastrophe but as an atmosphere: a condition in which dark ecology becomes the very texture of temporality. The ecological collapse is socially engineered in that it is produced and managed through policy, rhetoric and everyday exploitation.

### Conclusion

Tarr transforms temporality into a medium for perceiving violence by embedding spectators in the film's relentless duration. Collapse is not an event in this world; it is a texture of time. In *Sátántangó* there is no nature-as-refuge and no horizon of renewal. The world is not dying beyond the frame; the frame itself is rotting. The film thus proposes a radical model for ecological cinema: one in which spectatorship becomes a form of shared subsistence within the temporality of the dying world. Yet Tarr does not offer mourning as a path toward resilience or repair. Ecological grief here is a state without catharsis or a temporal loop in which past loss and future dread coexist continuously. *Sátántangó* dismantles this forward-directed temporality by confronting viewers with a world in which hope is structurally impossible because history itself leads nowhere. Slow violence thus culminates in a temporal enclosure: the refusal of futurity as such.

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**REIMAGINING SITA: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF BHANUMATI  
NARASIMHAN'S SITA: A TALE OF ANCIENT LOVE**

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**Abstract**

The great Indian epic, the *Ramayana*, invites multiple interpretations that respond to the cultural, personal, and political contexts of its readers. Bhanumati Narasimhan's *Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love* offers a deeply refined and modern rendering of Sita, an archetype of womanly strength and resilience in Indian mythology. Valmiki's *Ramayana* often foregrounds Rama's dharma and his duty towards his kingdom. From an ecocritical perspective, Narasimhan's narrative departs from Valmiki's version which shows Sita's deep emotional and spiritual connection with nature from her birth that symbolizes her emergence from the Mother Earth, to her final merger, which signifies an inseparable reunion of an individual with the natural world. From the interpretation of Valmiki's narrative, Sita appears as the central force behind major events like her abduction which leads to war, and her trial by fire demonstrates a firm adherence to the moral codes of duty and dharma in Rama's kingdom embodying the characteristic of the patriarchal system. In sharp contrast, Narasimhan's narrative focuses on Sita's choice, grief, and compassion which reinforces ecofeminist perspective that allows Sita to recognize her voice, demonstrates her resilience and exercise her autonomy and agency. The paper attempts to analyze the text through an ecocritical perspective, highlighting the significant role of nature in Sita's life. During her childhood in Mithila, she develops a spiritual and emotional bond with nature as she learns about herbs that aid in healing wounds. As a grown-up individual, and later as the queen of Ayodhya after her marriage to Rama, and also during the period of exile, she maintains an innate connection with the forest during her exile. Narasimhan reimagines Sita's narrative by portraying nature as a living entity that helps Sita after her abduction by Ravana, and also while living in Ashoka Vatika in Lanka. It continuously guides Sita through moments of separation, strengthens her resilience, and leads her on a journey toward inner wholeness. The study foregrounds ecological ethics and invites contemporary readers to recognize the inseparable relationship between human destiny, divine love, and the natural environment. Narasimhan's narrative functions both as a literary retelling and as an ecological reminder in an era of environmental crisis.

**Keywords:** Reimagining, Ecocriticism, Myth, Nature, Spiritual Ecology

This paper examines Narasimhan's reimagination of Sita through the lens of ecocriticism, a theoretical framework that interrogates the relationship between literature and the natural environment. "Ecocriticism is a critical mode that looks at the representation of nature and landscape in cultural texts, paying particular attention to attitudes towards 'nature' and the rhetoric employed when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory with the assumption that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs material practices towards the environment, while seeking to increase awareness about it and linking itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and approaches" (Nayar 249). Cheryll Glotfelty, a prominent figure in the field of ecocriticism, explains ecocriticism studies "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). In addition to that, Lawrence



Buell, widely considered as a pioneer of ecocriticism, similarly emphasizes that “literature shapes and reflects ecological consciousness” (Buell 7). By applying this perspective, it may be understood that how Narasimhan’s Sita is portrayed as both deeply rooted in and inseparable from the natural world, positioning her as an ecological subject whose identity and resilience derive from her communion with nature. The paper argues that Narasimha reimagines Sita not as a submissive figure of suffering but as an active embodiment of ecological harmony, resilience, and interconnectedness. Sita emerges as a bridge between the human and the non-human (flora and fauna) that offers a paradigm of ecofeminist strength that analyses patriarchal and human-centered frameworks. The paper also examines the dynamic figure of Sita who moves between duty and desire, silence vs voice, and archetype vs individuality.

The text strongly emphasizes Sita’s origins from the earth itself; a motif inherited from the epic may be reinterpreted with ecological depth. Sita, discovered by King Janaka and his wife Sunaina while ploughing the fields, not only represents Sita as a child of the soil but as a figurative personification of fertility, abundance and natural synchronization. Sunayana, Sita’s mother, is portrayed as a devoted worshipper of Devi Parvati. It is believed that through the goddess’s blessings, King Janaka and Queen Sunayana are blessed with a child after many years of marriage. This moment highlights the fertile and nurturing aspect of nature which brings renewed hope and purpose to the lives of an aging couple. Her identity since her birth to her final merge into mother earth, situates her as an ecological being rather than a figure whose identity may be defined solely by male-controlled structures like marriage and family. Sita’s origin story personifies a reciprocal relationship with the earth that produces her; in turn, she reflects its resilience and nurturing qualities, exemplified throughout her journey; from her childhood at Mithila, as a wife in Ayodhya after getting married to Rama, as a captive figure in Ravana’s Lanka, and later embracing the earth after the fire trial. In Narshiman’s book entitled, *Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love*, in her childhood in Mithila, “Sita would sit with Sunayana to pray. She would pick one flower after another and hand it to Sunayana to offer. She loved to try to catch the little clouds of fragrant smoke that would rise from the incense cones” (13). All these instances seen through Buell’s term “the environmental imagination,” indicate that human lives and natural landscapes co-construct meaning (Buell 12). Narasimhan further expands this connection while showing Sita’s intimate association with rivers, forests, and fields. The emphasis on this aspect has not been described significantly in Valmiki’s *Ramayana*. Rama’s character shaped by his dharmic duties and his inheritance are always interpreted in political and social terms. In sharp, Sita’s dharma seems relational and ecological in various others texts like in Volga’s *The Liberation of Sita*, Amish Tripathi’s *The Warrior of Mithila*, and Divakaruni’s *The Forest of Enchantment* shows her rooted capacity to nurture life and cultivating mutual harmony with the non-human world.

Ecocriticism in Bhanumati Narasimhan’s *Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love* is very rich in ecological integrity because Sita is portrayed as the “daughter of earth” who consistently shows her deep harmony with rivers, trees, forests, and the soil since her childhood in Mithila. In Ashok Vatika,

Sita’s eyes closed and she dived deep within as the gentle touch of the petals enveloped her beings in the waves of beauty. And in that inner silence, the soundless vibration of the sacred word ‘Ram’ rose in soft ripples of bliss. A single tear flowed from Sita’s eyes, sweetened by her devotion and longing for her beloved. (2)

This representation positions nature not merely as a backdrop but as an active companion in Sita’s evolution, reflecting her innocence and vitality while underscoring the deep interconnection between the human and the ecological. The ecocritical reading represents that Sita is raised with ecological awareness, embodying harmony between humans and environment. The exile with Rama and Lakshmana, gives Sita a strong ecological sensitivity as she marvels at the beauty of rivers, speaks kindly to trees, and sees animals as companions rather than threats. She perceives the forest as a moral guide and protector. Sita shows innate tenderness toward birds,

deer, and other forest creatures, nourishing them and speaking to them gently. In Valmiki's *Ramayana*, by contrast, the forest is portrayed as a place of hardship. Similarly, Narasimhan, in her text, also highlights ecological exploitation through the golden deer episode, where Ravana's manipulation of nature exposes the tension between ecological phenomena and human exploitation, ultimately revealing how greed disrupts ecological harmony. In addition to this, there is only one certain incident in Narshiman's text where Sita herself disturbs the harmony of nature and tries to get control over it. "Sita saw the deer and was filled with the cheerful fancy to pet and play with it. But it eluded her. It was unlike other deer, which usually sought to be close to Sita. She requested Rama to catch it for her" (195). During Sita's abduction by Ravana, nature itself registers resistance and sorrow, evident in the grieving trees and the mourning of birds and other creatures. Nature becomes a sympathetic witness to her suffering. The abduction does not show a personal loss of an individual but an interplanetary disturbance, that interlinks the exploitation of women and nature. After her banishment, as a single mother, Sita raises her children Lava and Kusha in the hermitage, surrounded by forests. She teaches them to love rivers, plants, and animals along with teaching music and ethical values. Motherhood becomes an ecological pedagogy as she raises her children in an environment filled with truth and ecological harmony. In the climax, Sita disappears into the soil and merges back with the earth, the place that gave origin to her. This shows the ultimate ecological return that accomplishes the cycle of birth and rebirth. Bhanumati Narasimhan's approach re-centers earth and forest not as a mere backdrop but relates it with Sita's life with natural phenomenon. Her empathy with plants, animals, and rivers highlights the interconnectedness of human fate and ecology, while her return to the earth symbolizes the union of human and non-human. Here, mother earth becomes the symbol of refuge, justice, and truth. Narasimhan's retelling highlights the most significant ecocritical dimensions that represents the forest as an exile. The forest symbolizes the place of adversity, trial, and commotion to the royal couple's domestic life in traditional versions of the *Ramayana*. Narasimhan reimagines the forest as a sanctuary of love, solace, self-identity, resilience, and ecological communion for not only Sita but for the all humanity. Sita establishes a close association with nature during the exile. The forest does not appear to be a hostile or alien place to her, rather it works as nurturing and protective phenomenon to her. Narasimhan's retelling considers the forest as a living entity and a companion that empathizes Sita during her isolation. David Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, reflects the same idea. In his book, he considers nature as "more-than-human world" (Abram 22). He further expands his idea by describing the importance non-human entities such as trees, rivers, and animals in human activities. Sita's resilience during exile is not a product of her personal and social disinterestedness or abandonment but it has emerged from her deep immersion in the forest's ecological richness. Vandana Shiva, an ecofeminist critic, describes it as "the feminine principle of nurturing and ecological balance" (Shiva 40) which is maintained by Sita while establishing a relationship with natural entities such as rivers, trees, and animals. Narasimhan, in her text, positions Sita as an ecological entity life is enriched by her mutual interconnection with non-human life.

Narshiman's text may be studied as an ecofeminist text as the writer not only shows Sita's intimate connection with nature but also highlights the interconnectedness of women's oppression and nature's exploitation under patriarchy. "Ecofeminists argue that patriarchal society's values and beliefs have resulted in the oppression of both women and nature. It ignores women's work, knowledge and "situatedness" (her immediate location in nature, where the relationship with the environment is far more intimate than that of a man's)" [Nayar 249]. Ecofeminism scholars like Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood, find similarities between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Narasimhan's retelling embodies Sita's resistance through her ecological identity, reflects her ecofeminist perspective in her text. Sita, being a royal figure, in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, faces various trials, her exile during pregnancy, her abduction by Ravana, later nurturing her children as a single parent, and finally her final return to the earth, show the exploitation of a woman as well as nature under patriarchal control. Yet

Narasimhan reframes her narrative to highlight Sita's agency. She does not consider herself as a victim of fate when she is not allowed to enter in Valmiki's Forest due to her pregnancy. She willingly chooses exile and draws strength from the forest, and other non – human entities. This shows resilience, what Greta Gaard, an ecofeminist critic, terms as "ecological subjectivity," where the self is defined in relation to ecological networks (Gaard 129), in her essay, *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*.

Moreover, Narasimhan critiques patriarchal and anthropocentric worldviews which sideline female agency in their narratives. Sita rejects the traditional power structures and asserts her own voice. Rama, who fulfills his royal duty demands and sacrifices his personal relationships, whereas Sita devotes her whole life cultivating eco-sense for natural and ecological harmony. Her ultimate decision to embrace mother earth shows her resistance to patriarchal injustice and a reaffirmation of ecological interrelation and cosmic interconnectedness. Sita's final return to the earth, is often interpreted as her acceptance of self-defeat or erasure. While, Narasimhan's Sita is an independent woman who exercises her agency against patriarchal dominance. She bridges as a faultless ecofeminist prototype.

Narasimhan's reimagination of Sita provides a more nuanced understanding of the power matrix between women and patriarchy. The act of joining mother earth illustrates the cyclical nature of life, death, and regeneration. The earth initially gives birth to Sita, nurtures her during the exile, and finally receives her back in the end. This act does not mark it as an eradication of her existence but it shows an affirmation of ecological wholeness. Ecofeminist critic Buell identifies this as the "environmental sublime" (Buell 144), where humans are reabsorbed into larger ecological cycles. The idea refers to moments when human existence is overshadowed by and eventually absorbed into the larger cycles of nature which may upset the anthropocentric supposition of human control over nature. Sita's final return to the earth resonates with this idea as Narasimhan does not consider it Sita's submissiveness or defeat, but affirms her individuality within a continuous ecological cycle of birth, dissolution, and renewal. Narasimhan's Sita has voice that makes her an ecological archetype of strength that may nurture future generations. Sita resists prevailing patriarchal and anthropocentric dominance and re-centers environmental continuity over individual or political power. Moreover, in Indian mythology, Bhoomidevi is worshiped as earth goddess, that symbolizes the ecofeminist belief which treats the earth as a mother, nurturer, and ultimate source of justice. Sita rejects anthropological injustice and prefers to dissolve back into the earth, thus affirming the importance of biological order over patriarchal authority.

Narasimhan's reimagining of Sita reverberates with contemporary ecological crises and ecofeminist discourse in a thought-provoking manner. The modern world is marked by climate change, ecological degradation, and environmental injustice due to industrialization and latest innovations in science and technology. On the other side, Sita offers a counter-narrative that values environmental harmony, flexibility, and development over power and exploitation done by corporate and power structures. The writer positions Sita as a figure of organic understanding what Ursula Heise terms a "sense of eco-cosmopolitanism" (Heise 10), wherein individual identity is connected to global ecological belonging. Though, Sita's story is not confined as an ancient India but it directly speaks to contemporary audiences and demands a justifiable and principled relationships with nature. Narasimhan's scholarly study of Sita provides a broader platform to compare and contrast between Indian ecofeminist traditions and global ecocritical vision. Western ecological narratives often focus on wildlife preservation or environmental engagement, but Narasimhan represents her ecological subjectivity through cultural myth and female resilience. Sita seems as a unique Indian mythological figure that bridges mythology and modern environmental integrity. The text respects traditional spiritual and ecological subjectivity of Indian cultural through the agency exercised by Sita. Sita's embodiment of ecological resilience resonances native and eastern civilizations that emphasizes the holiness of the earth that offers a serious concern to Western anthropocentrism.

Valmiki's *Ramayana* often frames Sita within patriarchal social order where she seems like a submissive figure, but Narasimhan's *Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love*, displays her as an ecological entity who derives strength from her profound interconnectedness with nature. The ecocritical lens, enables the reader to see Sita as a symbol of harmony, resilience, and resistance to patriarchal domination and anthropocentrism. Sita's origin from the earth, her familiarity with the forest, her identity of selfhood within an ecofeminist framework, and ultimately her return to the earth, reframes her story as one of biological kinship. Narasimhan's retelling resonates with ecocritical concerns of modern time, offering Sita as an ecofeminist archetype who develops a maintainable and moral relationship between humans and the natural world. In that way, *Sita: A Tale of Ancient Love* reclaims Sita's voice as her individual strength that also contributes to comprehensive discussions in ecocriticism about the interconnectedness of human and ecological well-being. Through this ecological model, Narasimhan reimagines the character of Sita that is markedly different from Valmiki's *Ramayana*, thus transforms an ancient tale of love into an enduring consideration on ecological synchronization, resilience, and righteousness. In her narrative, Sita is longer bound by patriarchal constraints as she now becomes the voice of the earth itself, reminding the enduring necessity of environmental stability in human life.

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**NATURE AS NARRATIVE: ECO-IDENTITY AND SELF-DISCOVERY IN *THE ONES WE'RE MEANT TO FIND***

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**Abstract**

This paper studies the aspects of eco-identity present within the novel *The Ones We're Meant to Find* by analysing the main character Cee's relationship with and exploration of the environment, which moves parallel to her journey of self-discovery. The paper primarily relies on Mitchell Thomashow's framework of eco-identity, along with supplementary ideas such as that of eco-anxiety, ecological grief, and solastalgia, to form its research base. Set in a post-apocalyptic world where the Earth has become largely uninhabitable, the novel presents a futuristic world devoid of life, meaning, and identity. Through a critical narrative analysis of the text and the main character, this research maps out direct examples from the text, connecting it to the theoretical frameworks employed in the research. The paper ultimately aims to explore the ways in which our environment plays a crucial role in the formation of our unique identity, known as ecological identity or eco-identity, and how our response to the environmental crises around us can shape our relationship not just with our surroundings, but also with our very own selves. It highlights the role and scope of climate fiction in creating eco-identity and in mediating man-nature dynamics in a futuristic world.

**Keywords:** eco-identity, self-discovery, climate fiction, environmental psychology

**Introduction**

A human being is nothing without their sense of self and identity, but a blank page drifting through the winds of life. As such, a person's identity formation plays a crucial role in their self-worth, their self-image, and their life experiences in general. It therefore becomes important to study the ways through which a person may form his or her identity, and the impact they might have on their life choices. Ecological identity (eco-identity in short) is a concept that argues that a person's sense of self is inextricably intertwined with their ecology. This relationship helps them find their place in a society and also within the larger ecological systems. Eco-identity is employed to study how the very environment around us plays a role in shaping us, grooming us, and ultimately forming our identity.

Climate fiction, also known as cli-fi, is a sub-genre and an intersection of science fiction and speculative fiction, which deals with the themes of environmental degradation and climate change. It imagines a future reality where the Earth as we know it is driven to its limit, and human beings look for ways to survive in the imagined environmentally hostile climate. It studies how human beings and societies must adapt to their changing environment, and how their relationship with nature changes as part of this struggle. Characters often struggle with a sense of self-identity, as they are perpetually on a quest for meaning in a world bereft of it. It explores the relationship between humans and their environment, the struggle for survival, and the guilt of ruining our home planet. Climate fiction can play a role in creating environmental consciousness in the readers as well, although its primary goal remains to portray the anxieties related to ecological crises.

This research paper applies the conceptual framework of eco-identity to Joan He's cli-fi novel *The Ones We're Meant to Find*, to examine and understand how the main character's sense of self and identity is formed through her relationship with her environment, and how this eco-identity thus formed plays a crucial role in her survival in a hostile world.

### **Literature Review**

The research published on *The Ones We're Meant to Find* is limited to book reviews on blogs and websites, as the novel remains a fairly recent and underrated piece of fiction. Despite extensive work on eco-identity in cli-fi, there has been no sustained analysis of how posthuman figures like Cee embody ecological selfhood. In place of research done on the novel, the following are some concepts made useful for this research:

Raipola defines speculative climate fiction as "the unfortunate love child of global environmental crisis and narrative imagination, climate fiction is a timely cultural reaction to the growing societal awareness of human impact upon the planet and its climate system" (7). It provides a "narrative experience of the changing world" (7), wherein the "predictive scenarios of climate science are routinely used as a backdrop for the imagined fictional worlds" (8). The characters often question their identity and the world in which they exist. This fictional world "functions as a synecdoche for the changing climate" (8). There is a greater emphasis on the external world instead of just the protagonists' inner world. Speculative fiction is an "ecological prognosis" (8), having a "utopian propensity" (9). In conclusion, while speculative fiction "has at least the potential to detox our thinking from the automatisms of perception brought on by the current cultural paradigm of consumer capitalism." (9).

K J and Chitra emphasise the importance of climate fiction by propounding that "emotional engagement and narratives structured as stories could play a significant role in shaping pro-environmental behaviours" (1). Storytelling becomes a powerful tool to promote "pro-environmental behaviour" (2). This underscores the salient quality of climate fiction as a tool to shape the eco-literary consciousness of its readers.

The impact of climate fiction on its readers' psyches has also been a subject of empirical research in the past. Schneider-Mayerson employed empirical ecocriticism in his research on climate fiction. He conducted a qualitative survey on 161 people who read climate fiction, and found that those who read the selected 19 texts were more liberal and more concerned about climate change than those who did not. The research concludes that literature can be a powerful tool to persuade readers to "imagine potential futures and consider the fragility of human societies and vulnerable ecosystems" (495). This, in turn, can lead to what he calls "ecopolitically significant" means of raising awareness about climate change and building an environmental consciousness (495).

Environmental Psychology is another aspect that studies the relationship between humans and nature, specifically the impact of nature on man's psychological health. It aims "to enhance human well-being and improve man-environment relations." (K J et al. 5). The field includes the following aspects: "(a) spatial behaviour and social space, (b) environmental cognition, cognitive mapping, (c) environmental stress, extreme environments and restoration (d) environmental perception: preferences, evaluation, appraisal and assessment, (e) environmental concern and environment friendly behaviour, natural resource use and conservation." (K J et al. 5).

Milstein and Castro-Sotomayor highlight a lack of "earthly self-awareness in an increasingly human-centered world", which is portrayed by the way in which we ignore our "environmental interlinkages, impacts, and interdependencies" (xvii). They argue that while identity has been studied in depth with respect to their "shaping, and being shaped by, human society", there has been an underwhelming study on their "shaping, and being shaped by, the more-than-human world" (xvii). Eco-identity, therefore, aims to bridge this lacuna of research.



### **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of eco-identity is not a new one, although its presence has diminished in academia over the years. It essentially draws upon the concept of identity politics that is often associated with environmental causes, which also leads to the birth of other ideologies such as that of ecofeminism. At its core, eco-identity is an intersection of man and his environment, wherein his 'self' becomes one with the ecology around him. Such a merger not only shapes his own sense of identity but also dictates his relationship with nature as a whole. As an ideology, eco-identity depends upon various interdisciplinary sources for its conception, such as environmentalism, anthropology, psychology, political ecology, sociology, and literary studies, and likewise.

The term eco-identity was first propounded by Mitchell Thomashow in his work *Ecological Identity: Becoming a Reflective Environmentalist*. He defines it as follows:

Ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self. Nature becomes an object of identification. For the individual, this has extraordinary conceptual ramifications. The interpretation of life experience transcends social and cultural interactions. It also includes a person's connection to the earth, perception of the ecosystem, and direct experience of nature. (29)

According to Thomashow, this identity is crucial for us as "it drives one's commitment to the environment" (qtd. in Doerr 2). He also widens the field of ecology with its expanded use in other domains: "Ecology is used widely, not only as a scientific concept but also metaphorically to describe how humans interact with nature, what is often referred to as an ecological worldview." (29).

Goodwin defines ecological identity as: "An ecological identity is like a fingerprint. Everyone has one. Even though most individuals may not regularly think about their emotional, philosophical, or spiritual connection to their place, it is essential to facilitate an individual's understanding of this concept. This can then lead to more sustainable and long-term environmental action." (Goodwin 39). He breaks eco-identity into two further parts: Knowledge and Responsibility. "Knowledge refers to the understanding of the world around us, and it includes ecological literacy, environmental literacy, and ecological thinking. Responsibility includes the perception of one's place in the world, and the actions it leads to" (39-40).

Some other ideas that lend themselves to the development of eco-identity, and better shape our understanding of it, are as follows:

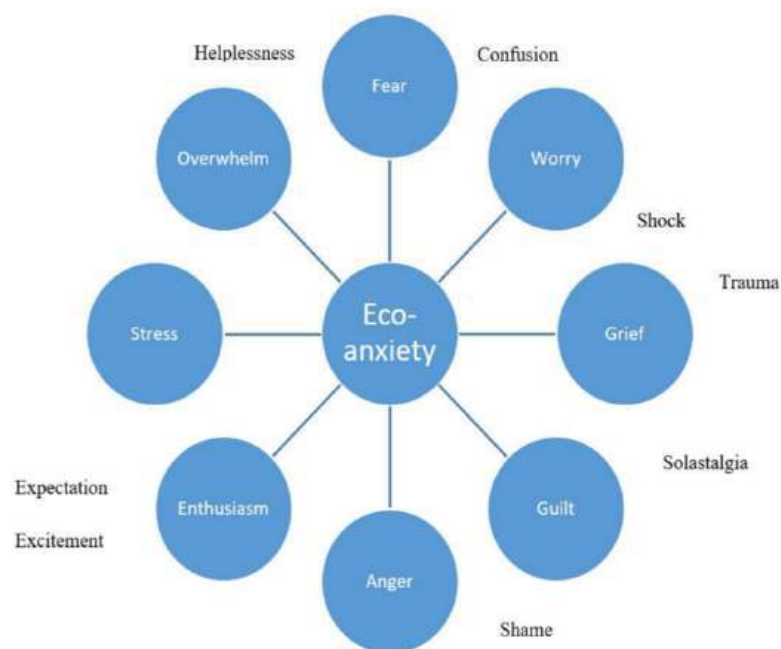
Similar to eco-identity is the concept of environmental identity, which is defined by Environmental researcher Susan Clayton as "a sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment ... that affects the way in which we perceive and act toward the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part of who we are" (qtd. in Doerr 2).

Andrew Light defines that the idea of environmentalism in two forms: attached and detached. In the attached identity, the subject-object becomes one, i.e., the human and nature become one. Whereas, in the detached form, this identity exists, at most, as "a form of empathy with the non-human natural world" (Light 65).

Another important aspect is that of ecological grief, which is defined as "a natural response to ecological losses, particularly for people who retain close living, working and cultural relationships to the natural environment" (Cunsolo and Ellis 275). It is further classified into three categories "grief associated with physical ecological losses (land, ecosystems and species), grief associated with disruptions to environmental knowledge and loss of identity, and grief associated with anticipated future ecological losses" (276). Scholars like Susan Clayton even argue that "working within climate science" negatively impacts the psychological health of professionals; as they often experience "burnout, anxiety, grief, and depression, with some choosing to leave the area of research" (Cunsolo et al. e261).

Related to ecological grief is the concept of eco-anxiety, which is "integrally connected with many ecological emotions, psychosocial phenomena, and mental states" (Pihkala 2). It

“emerges as an adaptive response to the vast socio-ecological problems of our time” (2). American Psychological Association (APA) and EcoAmerica define it as a “chronic fear of environmental doom” (qtd. in Pihkala 4). Furthermore, Susan Clayton states that climate anxiety should not necessarily be viewed as a problem but “an important sign that the individual cares about the state of the planet” (4). Pihkala demonstrates these in the following figure:



(Pihkala, fig. 2, p. 11)

The final concept is that of solastalgia, which was propounded by Dr. Glenn Albrecht. It refers to “the distress caused by the transformation and degradation of one’s home environment” (Galway et al. 1). Solastalgia is a “place-based lived experience” (2). This home environment in question could be socio-ecological, environmental, or even geopolitical (8). According to the figure demonstrated above, Pihkala places solastalgia somewhere between guilt and grief.

#### ***The Ones We’re Meant to Find***

*The Ones We’re Meant to Find* is a work of climate fiction written by Joan He. It is a novel set in a dystopian future where the Earth is ravaged by natural disasters and environmental crises, making it unsuitable for human life. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions have taken over the habitable lands, forcing humans out of their own towns and cities. These “speculative visions ... demonstrate the potentially disastrous effects of climate change on the global environment, while the plot-level events of the narrative focus on the experience of living in a changed world” (Raipola 8). In the wake of such disastrous situations, the environmentalists come up with new living arrangements called eco-cities. These are teardrop-shaped glass structures floating above the seas, consisting of 100 levels with the lowest level being 0, just above the sea, and the highest being 100. Each level is a self-sustaining city of its own. The people are allotted only 90 metres of sky per stratum (136).

There are a total of 8 eco-cities spread across the world, housing about 25% of the earth's population in them. Admittance to these cities is carried out through a lottery system, which is based on one's past treatment of nature. A person is assigned a rank according to their previous levels of environmental consciousness. A rank is further a measure of one's identity, determined by nature. In the future, it is the rank that determines one's identity in the future. Rank is displayed for all to see, displaying how much one has valued nature in the past. It literally becomes a part of one's identity, displayed right below one's name. In a way, a rank is a "measure of what people were entitled to redeem after banking in good planetary stewardship..." (101). The doctors who cured cancer and rid the world of pharmaceutical industries are given rank 1; the engineers who designed the eco-cities are given rank 2. These ranks also go up if someone indulges in activities that contribute to increased carbon footprints, such as going to a club (310). It is also easy to face eviction from them if one indulges in any activities that harm the planet (101). "The eco-cities had been built to protect the planet—and the people from it." (115).

There is a special term for some humans, known as "synths", used to refer to those who had "undergone genetic modification to synthesize their own glucose from carbon and water, a process twice as efficient as intravenous nutrient delivery." (71). It makes a person photosynthetic and increases their rank by a factor of ten (72). This further blurs the line between human and nature, animal and plant, where one can merge their identity with the environment, gaining an eco-identity in the true sense of its meaning. Another aspect of identity is the halo-ing, which is a means through which people can visit places virtually and reduce their carbon footprint. The concept is similar to that of the Metaverse presently being developed by Meta. These halos form a person's virtual identity. The consequence of distancing oneself from the environment and ruining it is that now we have to limit our identity (the physical self) to save the environment. First humans ran from nature, now nature runs from them.

The main story revolves around the two sisters, Celia and Kasey (nicknamed Cee and Kay, respectively). Cee is stuck on an island with no memories of how she got there and where her home is, except for an intense desire to find her sister. Meanwhile, Kasey is determined to find her lost sister as well. This paper explores how Cee's discovery of her identity is intricately tied to the environment, and how she negotiates with this eco-identity to find and fulfill her life's purpose. Since there are two characters of the same name, for the purpose of ease of understanding, the paper refers to the robot as Cee and the human as Celia.

### **Analysis**

The following section analyses the elements of eco-identity present within the novel and how they intertwine with the main character's quest for self-discovery and survival.

#### **Introduction to the Character**

Our main character is Cee, who has been stuck on an unknown island for three years, with no idea how she ended up there, and few memories in her mind to guide her. The island is uninhabited except for a cleaning bot. For all intents and purposes, the island is her little ecosystem where she survives alongside nature. The scarcity of life around her on the island makes her more conscious of it; for example, when a beetle is accidentally killed by her robot, she flinches in despair, mourning the loss of life (5). When the narrative begins, we find that Cee has been sleepwalking towards the sea at night, her consciousness responding to an internal call she does not recognise (He 1–2). Her only source of comfort is her dreams, which are always about finding her sister and going back home: "Home means a city in the sky, sometimes. Or another island." (2). She does not even remember where her home is; her sister, Kasey, is her home for all she cares about. Cee's driving force throughout the novel remains her desire to find her sister, and she spends most of her time trying to build a boat to achieve that purpose.

#### **Ecological Grief and Identity Crisis**

The loss of home and loss of identity manifests itself through various psychological symptoms within the main character's psyche. In her first week at the island, Cee only had a roof over her

head “but [she] didn’t know who [she] was or who [she] was living for” (94), she felt that no one would miss her if she drowned and one day she does drown: “In the tub. I fell asleep, and woke up with water in my nose and mouth but also a name like a heartbeat in my head.” (94). The name she ends up recalling is that of her sister, which gives her the life goal of finding her. Therefore, when she had no identity, no purpose, and no attachments, she was developing harmful suicidal tendencies. Cunsolo and Ellis state in their research on ecological grief that climate change issues can lead to a variety of mental health challenges such as “sadness, distress, despair, anger, fear, helplessness, hopelessness and stress; ... depression, anxiety, and pre-and post-traumatic stress; ... increased suicide ideation, attempts and death by suicide; threats and disruptions to sense of place and place attachment” (275).

In another research, Cunsolo et al. reiterate that some of the symptoms of “climate-related hazards” include “post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, the exacerbation of psychotic symptoms, and suicidal ideation and suicide completion” (e261). Cee experiences all of these symptoms in her initial stay on the island. It is the ecology around her that gives her an identity and a purpose for living. This functions as an anchor thrown to her aid when she has been drowning in the sea of her mind. Pihkala states that ecological grief “may cause strong increase in anxiety and depression, and grief may transform into so-called complicated grief or ambiguous loss” (Pihkala 9). Cee was initially supposed to take two more years to reach the required level of happiness. Cee’s grief is personal but also ecological—it is a loss of home and identity, loss of a world that used to be nurturing but has turned hostile.

#### **Cee’s Connection to Water Bodies**

Another aspect of eco-identity is that Cee is drawn to all bodies of water, whether it is the bathtub, the lake, or the sea, and she finds herself diving in these almost subconsciously: “The water seems to be calling my name ... My feet move to the rim before I realize what I’m doing.” (8). More often than not she has to “tear [herself] away” when she steps out of the lake, afraid that her “heart’s going to snap out” (8). This is more than just a love for nature; her identity is metaphorically as well as literally shaped by water, and as she gains more memories and even begins to see in colour once she steps into the water. Her identity is so tied to the ecology around her that when a boy washes ashore and she has to introduce herself to him, she states her name as: “C-E-E, pronounced like the sea outside that window.” (95). Cee recognises herself as the sea on multiple occasions, and talks in ecological imagery, describing the boy’s voice as “a murmur of moonlight” and she is “the sea, pulled toward[s] it.” (132). This shows how much nature is part of her, and how much she is a part of nature. Even her language has become a part of it. It is a symbiotic relationship—an exchange of resources but also identity and ideas. The nature shapes her, and she shapes it in return.

The real Celia, when she visits the sea for the first time, calls it “alive” (99), stating that: ““When I look at the sea,” Celia continued, “I can almost hear it saying my name. It’s comforting.”” (99). When she isn’t dreaming of her sister, she dreams of the sea, “which usually ends with [her] waking in the ocean.” (155), a phenomenon which happens throughout the novel. Even in sleep, her (eco) identity isn’t detached from her. Cee exhibits extraordinary abilities in water: she can also hold her breath for long periods of time underwater (161), as if the water weren’t an external element but a part of her, one that nourishes her mind, body, and soul. “I’m just following the pull of my gut, the same one that draws me to the pool beyond the meadow. Now it leads me to sea ... There’s a fishing hook caught inside me. The silver thread of moonlight spooling over the waves is the line” (217).

#### **Nature as an Ecological Programming**

In due time, it is revealed that Cee is a bot programmed to check the habitable conditions of the earth while the humans stay in hibernation so the earth can heal—a fact both she and the readers are initially unaware of. She is modelled after the innovator, Kasey’s sister, also called Celia, who was poisoned during her visits to the sea and ultimately chose to die there in peace with nature. Cee is sent to check the earth while the rest of the earth’s population sleeps below the ocean. This

is called Operation Reset. Once the habitable conditions are met, the bot will wake up the rest of the population and be terminated. Therefore, Cee's whole life purpose is ecological; not just her identity but her very creation revolves around nature and has ecological implications for the whole of humanity. These bots begin with only the goal of survival, but as the environment grows favourable, they "seek fulfillment through other avenues" such as goal-setting, which gives them "a sense of purpose" (224). For Cee, it is the nature that gives her motivation as well as purpose.

As Cee accomplishes more goals pertaining to the environment, she is rewarded with more "identity-reaffirming memories", which then further pushes her towards their goal (224). This starts a cycle where she helps nature, and then nature helps her in turn. As Kasey explains, "Identity building will enable the bot to develop more abstract goals, such as those pertaining to the environment outside of itself, increasing fulfillment and the scope of what it can measure." (224). As Cee gains more of her goals (and in turn, her identity), her sense of self extends to the nature outside of her, too. She has been programmed to "see [her]self as a protector" (227), and while she sees herself as a protector of her sister Kasey, this sense of protection extends, by and large, to her environment as well. This parallels Thomashow's concept of eco-identity: "ecological identity describes how we extend our sense of self in relationship to nature" (Thomashow 29). It is a "self-concept" (He 227) that she has in common with her namesake human Celia. Nature brings about a "self-change" in Cee and gives her a "sense of perspective on [her] life, goals, and purpose" (Pritchard et al. 1161).

Pritchard et al. study the relationship between nature and mental health, stating that contact with nature helps in achieving "self-actualisation and self-determination" (1161) and makes for improved mental health and self-esteem. This behaviour is exhibited by Cee throughout the text. Once she begins to see in colour, Cee reaches the "next level of self-actualization" and feels a stronger pull towards the sea (He 237). It is then revealed that her love for the sea is a part of her "programming" as a "built-in safety" which makes her "drawn to all bodies of water, not just the ocean" (237).

The cause of Celia's death was the toxicity of the sea; her blood had "elevated levels of microcinogens most commonly found in deep-sea waste pipes." (103). Consequently, she had suffered an "advanced organ failure and malignant cranial nerve sheath tumors" (104). She had only one month to live without medical intervention. She had taken a boat to the sea and disappeared, choosing to die in the place she loved the most, even if it was also the cause of her death (112). This draws a parallel between Cee and Celia. Ironically, it is the sea that kills Celia, and it is the sea that gives her a second life in the form of Cee; her life and death are both bound by the sea and by the ecology around her.

### **Eco-Identity and Solastalgia**

Something Cee and Celia also have in common is the quest for home and a sort of identity crisis that extends beyond their person—encompassing not just them but their surroundings as well. Celia wishes to live in a world not plagued by disasters of human making, to live naturally and freely: "Like how it was before. No one living in a casket or in the shadow of the stratum above them. Just sun and sky." (102). Celia is always experiencing ecological grief, as it is especially seen in "people who retain close living, working and cultural relationships to the natural environment" (Cunsolo and Ellis 275). But the reality of their world is that the sun, sky, sea—all are poisoned. Despite this, the love for nature is an innate quality that persists in humans anyway. "We need to remember what makes us us." (He 102). The implication here that it is the earth that makes us who we are lends itself to strong interpretations of eco-identity within the text. This identity is constructed but also threatened by the ecological crises prevailing within the novel's world: "I hate knowing our home is trying to kill us." (103). Here she demonstrates a sense of solastalgia, which "tries to capture the feeling of homesickness, longing, and sadness that a person may have even though she still lives at home, because the home environment is being changed or even destroyed" (Pihkala 9). The eco-cities are home, but not truly home. When the very thing that

serves as the axis of one's identity threatens to destroy the self, the disharmony between the self and the identity causes an identity crisis that is well displayed by the characters within the text: by Cee who longs to figure out who she is; by Kasey who is not sure if she wants to save the selfish world or not; and by Actinium who is vengeful against the whole of humanity for threatening the earth (and consequently his eco-identity). In Albrecht's terminology, he demonstrates "terrafurie", which is used to describe "anger or rage because of ecological damage" (Pihkala 10). Kasey's whole character revolves around devising a plan to save the Earth and its people, for which she devises Operation Reset. This is her form of eco-identity.

After finding out the truth about her identity, all Cee wants is spend her life as a normal human being, not as a bot used to gauge the survival parameters of the earth and be shut down when the conditions are met. She wants "to live and laugh without consequence, to feel the sea like people did in the past" (218). There is a tug of war between her identity and her purpose; her love for nature demands that she enjoy it, experience it, and be one with it; and yet to save this very nature, she would have to sacrifice her 'life'. She already faces an identity crisis because of her robotic origin: "Have I ever been alive?" (221), she asks, but this juxtaposition furthers her crisis between being a robot and human; it extends it to planes of ecology where loving nature means letting go of it at the same time. She questions: All these are things she cannot live without: "To not be able to feel the steam on my face, or the sea wind, brisk when I open the door to a bright blue sky, stitched with white seagulls." (308)

In the end Cee wants to just live a happy life on the island because it is all she has known in her limited robotic life: "I love the tang of sea wind on my face and the damp of the sand between my toes. I even love this island, believe it or not, and I love the idea someone else did too, a thousand years ago." (346). Her eco-identity reconnects her with the original Celia: "She was looking for meaning. For something bigger than her. I can give that to her. I can find her. A girl lost at sea." (347). It is this reconnect with her original self—a self that was deeply rooted in their shared ecological identity—that helps her save the world. She chooses her greater identity—her eco-identity—over herself, sacrificing her life and her identity to save the 'eco' part of it. Cee/Celia's eco-identity is consistent throughout the text, expressed by her love for the sea: Celia loves to visit the sea, she is poisoned by it, she takes a boat to the sea to die there peacefully, and in the final scene, Cee the bot dives towards the sea to save the rest of the humans even if it means dying herself. The common denominator in all these situations is the love of the sea, and an ingrained eco-identity gained even at the cost of one's self.

### **Conclusion**

Cee's eco-identity is intertwined with her sense of self. She may be a robot, but her love for the environment and her quest for identity are both real and paralleled by the whole of human experience. Humans do not exist alongside nature, but within it. As such, it is impossible not to weave our environment into ourselves and our identities. It is only when we dismiss our eco-identity that we feel out of touch with our own selves, which has been the case in the contemporary world for the past many years. The slow degradation of the earth can also be traced back to the degradation of our eco-identities. Older communities had devised a mechanism to live in harmony with nature, but we exploit it instead, in turn harming our own selves. So long as we as humans do not reclaim our eco-identity, we will be stuck in a constant loop of environment-induced existential crisis.

Using Light's framework, we can conclude that Celia's is an attached form of eco-identity; she is one with nature, as nature is all she has ever known in her whole existence. It is an extension of her 'self' and a manifestation of her personality: open, free, and wild. Additionally, Kasey's form of eco-identity is a very detached form of eco-identity. It is cold and calculating. Therefore, while both of them have the same purpose, i.e., to save nature, the difference lies in their approach and methodology. Human beings always function as "participants in crisscrossing sociocultural and ecological webs of life, whether consciously or not." (Milstein and Castro-



Sotomayor xvii). Cee and Kasey are no different. Their approaches are complementary, their goals the same. Furthermore, a small but significant detail to notice is that Cee's chapters are written in first-person narrative, connecting us with her and her eco-identity more so than with Kasey, whose narrative is written in third person and is therefore detached from the reader. This demonstrates how their identities are shaped and manifested differently.

A thorough reading of the novel demonstrates that while ecological disasters can cause one to have a loss of identity, it is this very ecology that ultimately helps us gain our identity back in the form of eco-identity, if only we align our 'self' with nature. In the text, nature not only helps Cee find her identity, but more importantly, it also works as a catalyst for her personal growth and improved psychological health in an abandoned world (Pritchard et al. 1161). It becomes a lifeline to hold on when the world is left without meaning. It lends her an "expanded sense of self" (1161), extending her identity to include nature in it, and extending nature to include her in it. Such a developed sense of eco-identity could never do the harm we as humans do, because harming nature becomes equivalent to harming the 'self'.

To conclude with Thomashow's words: "The purpose of ecological identity work is to provide the language and context that connect a person's life choices with his or her ecological worldview, serving as a guide that coordinates meaning, a transition to a new way of seeing oneself in the world." (Thomashow 32). Following this, the researcher believes that the majority of our environmental crises today are caused by a loss of our eco-identity, a disconnection between humans and nature that has only widened over the ages. If all of us developed a solid sense of eco-identity, the world could become a much better place. By locating eco-identity in a posthuman protagonist, this article expands Thomashow's framework of eco-identity beyond the human subject and demonstrates the potential of cli-fi to model environmental selfhood in technologically mediated futures. Cee's eco-identity might be a part of her programming, but so is ours.

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**BEYOND WORDS: THE SILENT CRY OF NATURE IN APPUPEN'S MOONWARD:  
STORIES FROM HALAHALA**

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**Abstract**

The paper seeks to explore environmental degradation, ecological violence and the commodification of nature in the age of neo-liberalism through the silent graphic narrative *Moonward: Stories of Halahala* by Appupen. The novel portrays environmental degradation and the exploitation of nature through minimalistic use of text and prominent use of illustrations and imagery. The dystopian world of Halahala underscores the lethal combination of human greed and industrial and technological development, which results in ecological imbalance on a massive scale. The stories in the book show different forms of environmental violence. Trees are tortured for their teardrops- the Thela, because they have magical, intoxicating properties. Crops are forced to grow overnight with the help of artificial potions, which is against the order of nature. Advertisements and billboards make tall claims about health and happiness while hiding the destruction of nature. The concluding part of the novel shows that humans have built a bridge to the moon, which reveals their never-ending desire. These images show how nature is turned into a commodity. The paper draws upon the theories of posthumanism, postmodernism, and neo-liberalism to study the book. Appupen's visual storytelling shows the pitiful posthuman condition of nature as well as humans under neoliberal capitalism. It also explores how the visual language of silence effortlessly conveys ecological and ethical concerns more powerfully than words. Symbolically, the absence of language reflects the failure of human imagination and the failure of humanity to communicate with nature.

**Keywords:** Environmental Degradation, Graphic narratives, Posthumanism, Neo-liberalism, Commodification of nature

**Introduction**

In the twenty-first century, the field of Environmental Humanities has emerged as a response to the rising ecological crisis. It is an interdisciplinary field that brings together ideas from literature, philosophy, history, anthropology, and the arts to study environmental issues. Unlike regular environmental science, which focuses mainly on data and technical solutions, it looks at the cultural, ethical, and historical aspects of environmental issues. It helps us understand how human beliefs, stories, and actions affect our relationship with nature. Graphic narratives, as a part of literature, strongly express the complex relationship between humans and the environment. Through their combination of visual art and minimal text, they provide new ways of seeing and understanding ecological crisis, making them potent tools of environmental expression.

Appupen's *Moonward: Stories from Halahala* (2009) is a meaningful contribution to this discourse. It is a silent graphic novel that unfolds through visual sequences and has almost no dialogue. The book creates a dystopian world where industrial progress and human greed have disrupted the natural order. The world of Halahala is not a distant planet but a mirror to our own world—an allegorical space where nature becomes a victim of unchecked technological advancement and capitalist ambition. Through surreal imagery and dark satire, Appupen shows

how the endless human desire for profit turns nature into a commodity, depriving it of natural essence and purity.

The novel depicts several episodes of ecological exploitation: trees are tortured for their teardrops- the Thela, which are sold as intoxicating commodities; crops are artificially forced to grow overnight with the help of a magical potion, violation of the rhythm of natural growth etc. The next day, these crops walk on their own to the factory, where they get themselves cut, processed, and packed for the benefit of the leader and humankind. It shows how even nature is turned into a mechanical labourer serving human greed. Advertisements promote “healthy” consumption while hiding the destruction it causes to nature, and ultimately, humans extend their exploitation beyond Earth by building a bridge to the moon. These episodes together form a visual critique of the Anthropocene—an era of human domination and ecological imbalance. Appupen’s silent storytelling uses the power of images rather than words to communicate a sense of loss, grief, and guilt that transcends language.

The paper situates *Moonward* within the theoretical frameworks of posthumanism, postmodernism, and neoliberalism. Posthumanism helps to analyse the portrayal of trees, crops, and the earth as conscious living entities in the novel that suffer under human dominance. It also challenges the anthropocentric hierarchies. Postmodernism reveals how *Moonward* reflects the artificiality of capitalist society, where advertisements and illusions replace the authentic reality of life. Neoliberalism exposes the ideology that drives the commodification of nature and ecological ruin, a world where economic order and even feelings, emotions, and life are turned into profitable products.

The absence of dialogue in *Moonward* is not a drawback but a deliberate choice. Here, silence becomes a language of mourning, warning, and resistance. It forces the reader to confront images directly, without the involvement of text, which engages them emotionally with the suffering of the natural world. The graphic form transforms ecological crisis into a visual and moral experience with the help of its blend of colours, expressions, and symbols. This study reveals how the exploitation of nature shows the degradation of human ethics and imagination. The silent narrative, through its visual storytelling, calls for a re-evaluation of humanity’s place within the ecological system. By reading *Moonward* through the lens of Environmental Humanities, the paper aims to show how art can work as both witness and critique—showcasing the silent cry of nature in a world that has forgotten the humanness of humanity.

### **Environmental Humanities and Graphic Narratives**

Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field which seeks to integrate ecological awareness with art, cultural and aesthetic understanding. In this era of ecological vulnerability, it challenges the conventional separation of human culture from the natural world. It encourages us to view humans as a part of the ecosystem and not above it. It focuses not only on saving the environment but also on how narratives about nature are created and shared. Through this approach, literature, art and media become tools to confront environmental degradation, revive ethical consciousness and reconstruct the relationship between humans and non-humans. Within this framework, environmental storytelling becomes a mode of moral inquiry, and artistic forms like graphic narratives become an important vehicle to transmit ecological knowledge.

At the core of Environmental Humanities lies ecocriticism, which studies how literature and culture represent the relationship between humans and the environment. During its formative period, shaped by Romantic notions of beauty and spirituality, ecocriticism often regarded the environment as an ordinary backdrop for human experiences. Posthumanism and other newer approaches, on the other hand, don't agree with this perspective that humans are the centre of the universe. They view nature as something that is alive and not just something to be admired or talked about. Instead of only representing the world, art interacts imaginatively with it. Storytelling in this mode crosses the boundaries between the species and gives space to nonhuman entities.

This is where graphic narratives play an important role as their visual form can represent these ideas more expressively and more forcefully.

Graphic narratives combine illustrations and text to convey ideas; this combination is stronger than just words alone. Words alone might not be able to express ideas as effectively as this combination. Such narratives engage both visual and textual understanding, which is similar to how ecological thinking emphasises multiple perspectives. These narratives not just describe the world plainly but bring it to life, showing its complexity and interdependence. The structure of graphic narratives is similar to that of an ecosystem- each panel connects to the next, creating a flow that suggests continuity. This mirrors the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the entities in the ecosystem.

*Moonward* exemplifies the ideas of environmental aesthetics, which is a way of viewing beauty through ecological engagement rather than mere detached observation. Philosophers like Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant contrast the traditional scenic appreciation of nature with a more participatory model that situates the observer within the natural process. Rather than believing that beauty lies in distant harmony, they locate beauty in flux, imperfection, and interdependence. These qualities mirror the natural processes of birth, life, transformation, decay, and death. The work depicts a dystopian world where natural and mechanical elements merge. Fig. 1. Shows machines that even have wings; they work in the fields and get exhausted, and drink water like living beings.



**Fig. 1. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.**

These dystopian landscapes of Halahala reflect both fear and wonder, which makes the reader uncertain about the future. His art combines surrealism with science fiction to present natural degradation, greed, and dehumanisation through symbols and motifs. Here, nature is not separate from humans; it reflects our moral and spiritual failures. According to this, *Moonward* is not just a story about environmental degradation but also an experiment in perception and ethics. Its visual language awakens emotional understanding rather than intellectual judgement. As Timothy Morton, in his work *The Ecological Thought*, explains:

Ecology shows us that all beings are connected. The ecological thought is the thinking of interconnectedness. The ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it's also a thinking that is ecological. Thinking the ecological thought is part of an ecological project. The ecological thought doesn't just occur 'in the mind.' It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral. (7)

Morton's concept of ecological thought emphasises that everything —humans, animals, plants, and even inanimate objects —is interconnected. The graphic novel thus reinforces the idea of coexistence through art. Understanding this web is not just about intellectual knowledge but about adopting a mindset that accepts and respects these connections. This perspective challenges traditional views that separate humans from the environment, and makes us realise our place and integral role within the ecological system. The graphic novel thus becomes a carrier of coexistence through art and speaks more loudly about individual and collective responsibility towards nature and its ethos.

#### **Posthumanist Perspectives in *Moonward***

Posthumanism challenges traditional anthropocentrism, which places humans at the centre of the universe. Posthumanism, on the other hand, shifts the focus from humans as the central agents of meaning and value to a more inclusive understanding of the world. It emphasises the agency of nonhuman entities—plants, animals, objects, and even ecosystems—acknowledging that they have capacities to affect, respond, and exist independently of human perception. It also encourages interdependence and mutual vulnerability across species. This approach talks about nonhuman subjectivity and the ethical implications of human interactions with the nonhuman. Fig. 2. shows how Appupen portrays the earth as a sentient being with human-like features, emphasizing the posthuman perspective that nature possesses consciousness and emotional capacity.



**Fig. 2. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.**



In *Moonward*, Appupen presents trees, crops and the earth not as mere background to be aestheticised, but as active and living participants in the narrative. These elements are filled with sensitivity and emotional resonance, which suggests that they are sentient agents capable of experiencing the consequences of human activity. Fig. 3. depicts the story in which trees are physically and mentally tortured, making them cry, exemplifying posthuman principles by bringing forth the emotional and sensory life of trees. Here, trees are conscious beings who can suffer and their tears are literal as well as figurative signs of distress at human intrusion.



**Fig. 3.** Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.

The overnight growth of crops signifies unnatural acceleration, thus pointing to human interference and technological manipulation. Acceleration in growth, rather than symbolising abundance, signifies ecological anxiety and imbalance.

Fig. 4. shows one of *Moonward*'s most striking symbols is the bridge built to the moon which represents not the progress but the overreach— an attempt to conquer and commodify even the celestial bodies. The moon, which was initially distant and mysterious, is later transformed into the logo of the ruling leader— an emblem of political and economic control. The transformation of the moon into a corporate brand shows the posthuman critique of anthropocentric arrogance. The

bridge, therefore, is not just a link of unity or progress but a symbol of domination, showing how human ambition colonises both earth and sky.

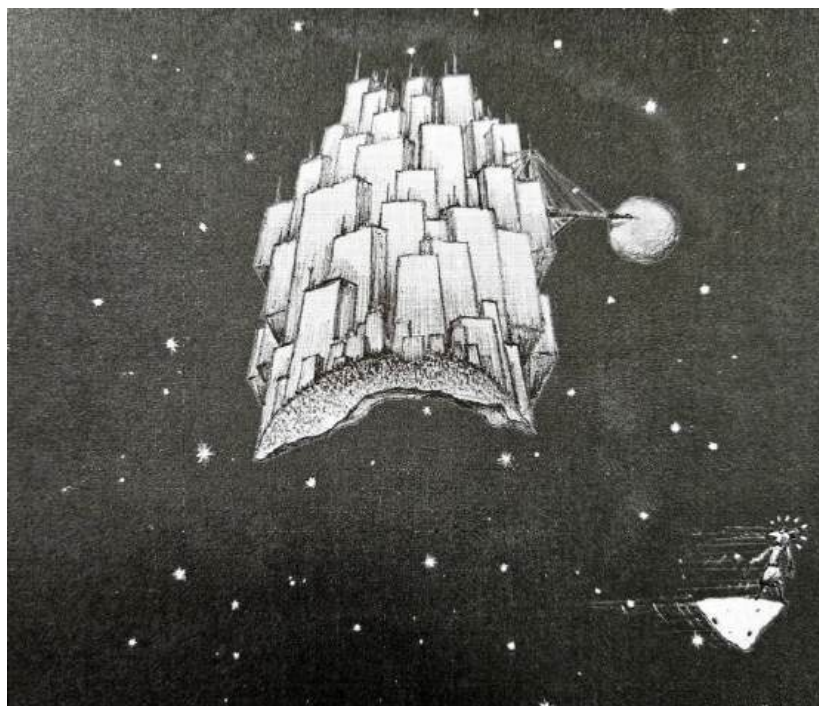


**Fig. 4. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*.  
Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.**

Silence plays a central role in the graphic novel *Moonward: Stories from Halahala* by Appupen, which functions as a powerful form of posthuman expression. In this novel, silence carries meaning; it carries more depth than words. Appupen does not use speech bubbles and written dialogues which gives space to the landscape, creatures and natural forces to communicate visually. It allows the reader to sense the language of the non-humans. Through this silence, Appupen redefines communication as a multisensory activity. The reader becomes an ethical listener who is invited to comprehend nonhuman distress and agency without the filter of human language. The visual silence becomes a shared space of empathy where meaning and emotions are felt rather than spoken.

In *Moonward*, Appupen tries to dissolve the line between humans and their environment. The figures often blend into the landscape and the natural entities such as trees, plants, and mountains that have human-like faces. The earth's blackened surface mirrors the moral decay of humans. The blurring of categories embodies posthuman ethics- the recognition that human and nonhuman fates are connected. Appupen's art associates human experience with ecological suffering and depicts a world in which the exploitation of nature inevitably leads to the corrosion of the human spirit and society.

The graphic form of *Moonward* amplifies its posthuman message. The tears of trees, the rapid growth of crops, and the darkening soil create an affective ecology that relies on visual sensation rather than verbal narrative. The reader engages affectively and not intellectually, sensing the pain and agency of the non-humans through the illustrations in the book. In this way,

the book extends posthuman empathy through the visual imagination, which transforms mere observation into ethical witnessing. Appupen's work thus reinforces the need of the posthumanist world. His silent and sorrowful world gestures towards being humble and sensitive towards nature.

**Postmodern Critique in *Moonward***

*Moonward* offers a powerful critique of postmodern capitalism. It uses Jean Baudrillard's ideas of simulation, fragmentation, and hyperreality to show how modern society lives through images rather than reality. Baudrillard argues that in today's postmodern world, real experiences and truth are replaced by their copies or simulacra, which means that we don't relate to truth or authenticity, but to surface ideas and signs. *Moonward* reflects this idea through its dystopian world, Halahala, where advertisements, artificial crops, and the authority create an illusion of abundance that hides a dying planet. In Halahala, crops are not natural or grown for survival, but they are artificially produced overnight to serve the markets and consumer desire. These images of plenty are not signs of fertility but deceit and falsification. In Fig. 5, there is an advertisement for a healthy drink named Supa Kola, which says "Drink Healthy, Think Wealthy." The drink promises that it is a natural drink that brings happiness, health, and energy, but behind the images lie despair, gloom, and ecological decay.

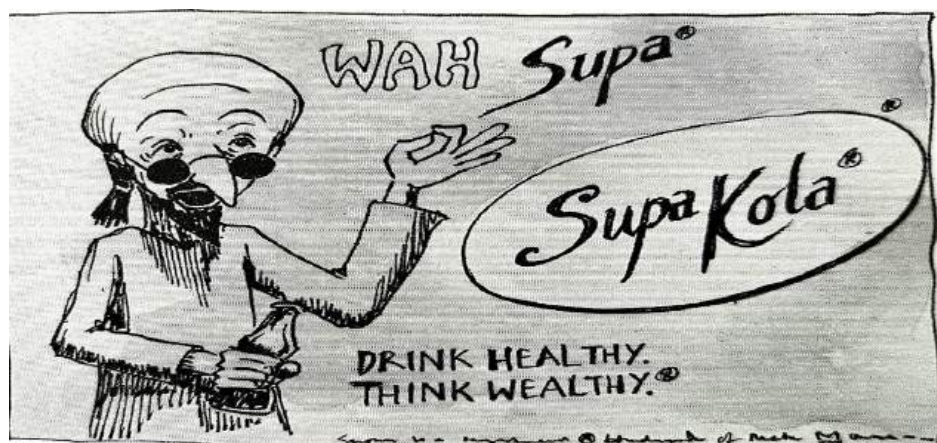


**Fig. 5. Appupen. *Moonward*:  
Stories from Halahala. Blaft, 2009,  
unpaginated.**

This incident perfectly captures Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality- the advertisement does not reflect reality, it replaces it. As Baudrillard famously writes in his book *Simulacra and Simulation*:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. (2)

Baudrillard's statement highlights how, in the postmodern era, representations don't just distort reality but substitute it entirely. The 'map' (the sign, the simulation) overtakes the 'territory' (the real world) until only appearances and models remain. In *Moonward*, health and happiness shown through the advertised version become more real than the actually existing ecological conditions. The so-called healthy drink becomes a symbol of how corporations sell comfort while masking



destruction. The abuse of the earth is hidden under the surface beauty of marketing. Fig. 6. and Fig. 7. show the stark visual contrast between polished advertisements promising health and happiness and the actual ruined, darkened environments, exposing the postmodern disconnect between representation and reality.



Fig. 6. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.



Fig. 7. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.

Appupen uses visual irony to make the illusion visible. The contrast between polished advertisements and ruined environments makes a commentary on postmodern life in which people

are surrounded by images of happiness even as their life is affected by despair, and helplessness. This mirrors Guy Debord's concept of the "society of the spectacle," in a book by the same name which states, "The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images."<sup>(2)</sup> It tells that media and consumerism produce an endless show that distracts people from real sufferings and pain. Even the narrative is fragmented and episodic, just like postmodern reality, where meaning is distorted and manipulated by the media. In this way, *Moonward* shows Baudrillard's warning that in the postmodern age, the image becomes more real than the truth itself. Health, happiness, and progress are manufactured as mere products. Reality and authenticity no longer exist in today's world; they only exist as brand identities. Appupen thus shows how the greatest tragedy of postmodernity is not just the ecological crisis but the human ability to ignore it as they are distracted by the endless spectacle of consumption.

#### **Neoliberalism and the Commodification of Nature**

The universe of *Moonward* also reflects the workings of neoliberalism —an ideology that treats the market as the ultimate authority and values profit above ethics or ecology. This thought encourages privatisation, competition, and economic growth without any limits. From this perspective, even nature becomes a form of capital. Forests, rivers, and soil are measured not by their beauty or necessity but by their exchange value in the market. In the book, the story of the forced crop growth reveals how the logic of the market overpowers the natural process of life. Crops are genetically manipulated, chemically enhanced, and harvested not for sustenance but for industrial profit. The land becomes a machine, and the workers appear robotic, who are trapped in an endless cycle of labour. Fig. 8. shows the mechanized agricultural process where crops and workers appear robotic, illustrating the neoliberal transformation of both nature and humans into commodities serving industrial profit.

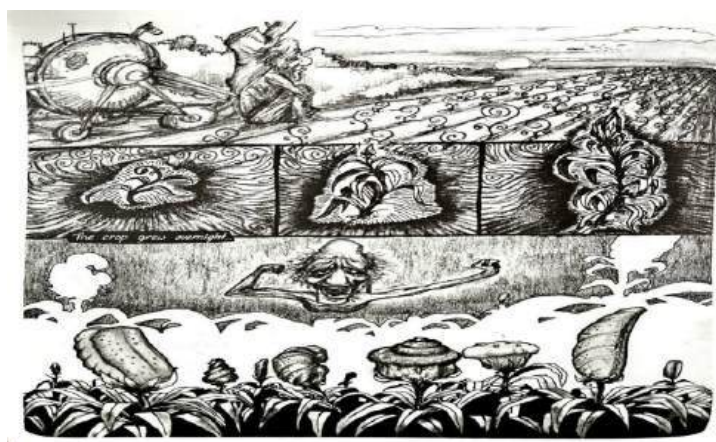


**Fig. 8. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Blaft, 2009, unpaginated.**

This image reflects the eco-marxist critique that capitalism affects both nature and humans, creating what Karl Marx called a "metabolic rift," in which natural cycles are broken for economic gain. As John Bellamy Foster, in his 1999 article "Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology", explains that capitalism causes "an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself," which means that it breaks the natural cycles between humans and the earth that keep life balanced.

The bridge to the moon is another powerful metaphor in *Moonward*. It represents the dream of limitless expansion, of reaching beyond earthly boundaries to exploit new frontiers. The bridge is built not for exploration or wonder, but for conquest. It shows how capitalism extends its reach, trying to turn everything, including the moon, into a commodity.

The leader named Nana in *Moonward* embodies the political side of neoliberal power. He speaks the language of progress and development, promising prosperity while ignoring the destruction his system causes. His control over nature shows how the corporations work and exploit resources in the name of modernisation and development. Fig. 9. shows Nana consuming money, a darkly satirical image that embodies the self-destructive nature of greed and the corrupt political dimension of neoliberal power.



**Fig. 9. Appupen. *Moonward: Stories from Halahala*. Braft, 2009, unpaginated**

In one striking image, Nana is seen eating money, a darkly ironic symbol of greed and self-consumption. Appupen's depiction of Halahala as a gloomy and dangerous place, rendered in black and grey, shows how development becomes another name for devastation and decay. The gothic imagery exposes the horror of the neoliberal economic model of growth, revealing how progress in this world is built upon the ruins of nature and humanity. Appupen, through his art, warns that if humans continue to see nature only as a resource, both earth and imagination will become barren.

Silence in art can act as ecological resistance by reflecting humanity's failure to "hear" or engage with the natural world. When no words are spoken, the silence prompts us to pay close visual attention and makes the form itself an ethical statement. This shift urges empathy that goes beyond language, fitting with post-human and eco-ethical aesthetics where seeing becomes a way of moral awareness.

In *Moonward: Stories of Halahala*, the lack of dialogue disrupts the usual human-centred story told through words. Instead, rich images help us feel for non-human life and encourage us to think about our ethical connection to the environment. Without any linguistic filter, the story uses silence as a powerful tool to awaken our ecological consciousness. The



absence of words shows a break—humans are no longer fully in control or understanding, which highlights the limits of human-centred thinking. This silence invites us to think about our shared responsibility for the planet and evokes a deep moral response through what we see rather than what we read.

Thus, the silence in *Moonward* becomes an act of ecological resistance—a visual ethics that calls for a post-human viewpoint, one that questions the dominance of human speech and embraces many-species interaction and environmental awareness. This approach mirrors a wider trend in eco-ethical aesthetics, where silence and form communicate urgent ecological realities and prompt moral reflection beyond words.

### Conclusion

Appupen's *Moonward: Stories from Halahala* is a profound example of studying the environmental, ethical, and spiritual crises of the contemporary world. By merging visual storytelling with silence, it transcends conventional language and exposes the consequences of human greed, technological obsession, and ecological alienation. Through its dystopian imagery, the book transforms the ecological crisis into an aesthetic and moral experience, urging readers to confront the pain inflicted on nature by capitalist and neoliberal systems. The novel's world of Halahala functions as a mirror to our own—an exaggerated yet recognisable reflection of a society where nature has been commodified and human ethics have eroded in the guise of progress.

Viewed through the frameworks of Environmental Humanities, Posthumanism, Postmodernism, and Neoliberal critique, *Moonward* demonstrates how graphic narratives can articulate ecological awareness in ways that traditional text cannot. It gives voice to the nonhuman, reveals the illusory nature of postmodern consumerism, and critiques the capitalist logic that transforms both life and landscape into marketable commodities. The silent form of the novel is not the absence of language but becomes a potent language of empathy and resistance, compelling readers to "listen" visually to the suffering of the earth. In doing so, Appupen transforms art into an ethical practice—a space where mourning, reflection, and ecological consciousness converge.

Ultimately, *Moonward* exemplifies how environmental storytelling within the graphic narrative medium can challenge anthropocentrism and awaken a renewed sense of coexistence. It reminds us that true progress lies not in domination or expansion, but in restoring balance, humility, and respect for all forms of life. In the silence of its panels, the novel speaks the loudest truth of all: that the fate of humanity is inseparable from the fate of the planet.

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**POSTCOLONIAL ECOLOGIES: HUMAN AND NONHUMAN DISPLACEMENT IN  
AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GLASS PALACE***

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**Abstract**

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* offers a powerful convergence of post-colonial critique and environmental consciousness, making it an important text within the field of Environmental Humanities. Ghosh's depiction of the teak trade, deforestation, and the commodification of natural landscapes mirrors the mechanisms of colonial domination and capitalist extraction. The narrative foregrounds the interdependence between ecological degradation and cultural displacement, illustrating how imperial power transformed both the environment and indigenous ways of life. Drawing upon post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Frantz Fanon, and Antonio Gramsci, this analysis extends key concepts—hegemony, subalternity, hybridity, and mimicry—to environmental contexts. The colonised landscape, like the colonised subject, becomes an entity subjected to control, erasure, and redefinition through imperial narratives. The displacement of the Burmese royal family, the exploitation of labourers in the timber industry, and Rajkumar's commercial ventures reveal how ecological and human exploitation functioned as interconnected systems of empire. By blending historical realism with environmental awareness, Ghosh reconstructs colonial history as an ecological history of loss and adaptation, exposing how environmental violence underpins the colonial project. Situating *The Glass Palace* within the discourse of the Anthropocene, the paper argues that environmental degradation and colonialism share a common logic of domination. Ultimately, Ghosh's novel calls for an ethics of ecological and historical accountability, inviting readers to recognise the continuing legacies of empire in the environmental crises of the postcolonial world.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanities, Eco-imperialism, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Hegemony, Subaltern, Hybridity, Anthropocene

Amitav Ghosh, an acclaimed Indian English novelist from Calcutta, channels his deep engagement with the cultural and national ruptures caused by colonialism into his literary works. His fiction frequently merges historical documentation with imaginative storytelling, creating narratives that illuminate the lived realities of colonial experiences. While *The Glass Palace* stands as one of the most prominent examples of his historical fiction, Ghosh consistently employs this narrative strategy across his oeuvre. His continued exploration of the colonial era has positioned him as a leading voice in postcolonial literature.

In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh intricately crafts a narrative that follows multiple characters set against the socio-political backdrop of colonial Burma. Through this novel—alongside others such as *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies*, where historical episodes also shape the fictional world—Ghosh demonstrates his capacity to animate historical memory and bring forgotten or marginalized stories to the forefront. His artistry in interlacing real events with fictional lives has earned him widespread international appreciation. Notably, *The Shadow Lines*, winner of the Sahitya Akademi Award, further solidified his status among eminent postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, and Vikram Seth.

This study focuses on postcolonial dimensions within *The Glass Palace*, including imperial domination, the subaltern condition, Otherness, mimicry, hybridity, diaspora, exile, and

various forms of displacement affecting both humans and the environments they inhabit. The novel captures the extensive socio-ecological consequences of British imperial expansion in Burma and India—from the annexation of Burma in 1885 to the aftermath of the Second World War. By chronicling the lives of three interconnected families—the Burmese royal lineage, Rajkumar Raha's family, and the family of Saya John—Ghosh portrays how colonial rule reshaped identities, uprooted communities, and altered ecological landscapes, revealing the enduring imprints of empire on both human and nonhuman worlds.

In *The Glass Palace*, Amitav Ghosh portrays the downfall of the Burmese monarchy and the vast disruptions caused by colonial domination. King Thebaw, Queen Supayalat, and their daughters reside in the magnificent palace after which the novel is named, but their world collapses once British forces invade Burma. Uprooted from their homeland, the royal family is forced into a life of exile, first in Madras and later in Ratnagiri, marking the beginning of their cultural and emotional displacement.

Parallel to this narrative, the story follows Rajkumar, a young Indian orphan who migrates to Burma after losing his family to the plague. His struggle for survival leads him to work at Ma Cho's food stall and later into the teak trade under the guidance of Saya John. Rajkumar's journey reflects the economic migrations and ecological transformations brought on by imperial capitalist exploitation. His eventual return to India with Dolly—formerly a maid in the Burmese palace—illustrates how the colonial enterprise continuously reshapes relationships, identities, and the environments people depend upon. However, the outbreak of the Second World War and the Japanese invasion devastate the social fabric and commercial networks Rajkumar relied upon, further intensifying the theme of displacement.

Ghosh's narrative excavates the workings of British imperial power—its cultural dominance, strategies of control, and its production of exiled and hybrid identities. Through characters navigating multiple geographies, the novel highlights the layered psychological, economic, and ecological consequences of colonisation on both humans and nonhuman landscapes. Forest resources such as teak become symbols of extractive colonial capitalism, demonstrating that the impact of empire extends beyond people to the environments they inhabit.

Diaspora in *The Glass Palace* functions not only as a geographical shift but as a profound reconfiguration of cultural belonging, memory, and ecological connection. Edward Said's famous remark that modern imperialism has produced "the age of refugees and displaced persons" is reflected throughout Ghosh's narrative of forced and voluntary migrations (Ghosh 175). Characters are pushed across borders as empires collapse, wars erupt, and landscapes are transformed into imperial resources.

Postcolonial literature as a mode of critical inquiry—shaped by prominent authors like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth, and Amitav Ghosh—interrogates these histories of oppression and their lasting residues. This approach examines not only the lived experiences of colonised populations in regions across Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, but also how colonialism altered ecosystems, mobility, and cultural memory. In Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, postcolonial ecologies manifest in the ongoing displacements forced upon communities and landscapes under the weight of empire, revealing a world continually reshaped by the forces of power and survival.

The foundation of postcolonial theory is often attributed to Frantz Fanon, whose work exposed the psychological and political violence inherent in colonial domination. This field has been expanded by influential thinkers such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, Antonio Gramsci, and Bill Ashcroft. Among them, Bhabha remains particularly significant for introducing key concepts like ambivalence, hybridity, and mimicry—ideas that illuminate the unstable and contradictory power dynamics between coloniser and colonised. Edward Said's groundbreaking study *Orientalism* (1978) similarly critiques how Western discourse constructs the East—especially Asia and North Africa—as inferior "Other," reinforcing global hierarchies of power. As Ania Loomba points out, postcolonial studies continuously

investigate the fluid identities and cultural transformations shaped by colonial interactions, encompassing diaspora, in-betweenness, creolisation, and mobility.

British imperialism functions as a core force of disruption throughout *The Glass Palace*. The idea of hegemony, popularised by Antonio Gramsci, helps explain how colonial rule operated not only through armed dominance but also through ideological control—persuading colonised populations that imperial interests served their own. The British expansion into Burma exemplifies this strategy. They advanced their military campaign in November 1885, using mainly Indian sepoys as the primary manpower of conquest, revealing the layered exploitation at the heart of empire. Within days, Burmese defences collapsed, and the invaders seized the royal palace—symbolically shattering the sovereignty of the Konbaung dynasty and exiling King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat to India. As Saya John later observes, Burma was violently absorbed into the British Empire and restructured as a province of British India, transforming not only its governance but also its social and ecological landscapes.

Ghosh also foregrounds the human cost behind imperial warfare through Saya John's memories of wounded soldiers in Singapore—young Indian men, displaced from rural communities and pressured into fighting wars for an empire that saw them as expendable. Their suffering reflects how colonialism exploited both bodies and environments in the service of imperial expansion.

The Burmese royal family's expulsion from Mandalay embodies the trauma of exile. Once rooted in the ecological and cultural heart of Burma, King Thebaw and Queen Supayalat are forcefully removed from the Glass Palace and deported to India. As they leave, the material marker of their authority is taken from them—"The palace was empty now, stripped of its treasures" (Ghosh 43). The displacement strips them from both land and identity, illustrating Fanon's notion that colonization alienates colonised subjects from their environment.

Mimicry—another significant concept in Bhabha's theory—takes shape in the novel through characters who assimilate to colonial norms. Arjun, Uma's nephew, embodies this psychological displacement as he adopts British military culture, dress, and behaviour, earning the nickname "Angrez" among his peers. However, his eventual disillusionment mirrors a broader awakening to the violence of colonial complicity—recognising that he has been turned into a tool against his own people.

Across these examples, *The Glass Palace* demonstrates how British imperialism not only dislocated communities and reshaped identities but also reorganised labour systems, natural resources, and cultural hierarchies. Ghosh reveals a world in which colonial power rearranged both human and nonhuman ecologies—showing that displacement in postcolonial narratives extends far beyond the movement of people to the transformation of landscapes, belief systems, and ways of living.

Diaspora emerges in Ghosh's narrative as one of the most profound consequences of colonial occupation—disrupting belonging for individuals and communities while reorganising the ecological and social worlds they inhabit. Edward Said's observation that modern imperialism has created an age defined by refugees and forced migrations finds clear resonance in the novel, where large-scale mobility becomes a defining feature of colonial power.

Diaspora in *The Glass Palace* functions not only as a geographical shift but as a profound reconfiguration of cultural belonging, memory, and ecological connection. Edward Said's famous remark that modern imperialism has produced "the age of refugees and displaced persons" is reflected throughout Ghosh's narrative of forced and voluntary migrations (Ghosh 175). Characters are pushed across borders as empires collapse, wars erupt, and landscapes are transformed into imperial resources.

Within *The Glass Palace*, diaspora is portrayed through both forced and voluntary relocations. The Burmese royal family faces exile from Mandalay after British conquest, their journey to India marking a dramatic rupture from homeland, memory, and the natural environment that shaped their identities. Ghosh depicts King Thebaw's sorrow as he travels through Rangoon,

recalling neighbourhoods once filled with Indian labourers—workers brought in by the British to perform tasks the Burmese would not, showing how empire exploited both human labour and local ecosystems.

Rajkumar's story similarly reflects layered displacement. Having lost his family to disease, he migrates from India to Burma in search of survival, only to later be uprooted again during the Japanese invasion. His longing for Burma, a land he grew to love deeply, illustrates the emotional trauma of ecological detachment. He expresses heartbreak over leaving behind a place where, as he recounts, hunger was once unknown and life thrived in harmony with the land—revealing how colonial warfare disrupts human–environment relationships.

Rajkumar's trajectory exemplifies the ecological dimensions of diaspora. First orphaned in India by disease and poverty, he migrates to Burma, integrating into the teak and timber trade—an industry fueled by colonial extraction: "The empire needed timber; the forests fell." (Ghosh 112) Here, human survival becomes entangled with ecological exploitation, revealing what Graham Huggan calls the "environmental violence of empire". When Japanese forces invade, his return journey to India marks a second displacement: "Despite everything that had happened, Burma was the only land he had ever loved." (Ghosh 309–310) This longing is not just emotional but ecological—his identity was shaped by Burmese soil, forests, and waterways. Additionally, Ghosh foregrounds the displacement of Indian labourers brought to Burma under British rule:

"They had been brought to work in the mills and on the jetties, to pull rickshaws and clean the latrines." (Ghosh 49) These workers became a mobile, rootless labour force, exemplifying the postcolonial understanding of diaspora as a structural consequence of imperial capitalism.

Displacement in the novel also extends to labouring bodies and nonhuman ecologies. Rajkumar benefits economically from the colonial teak industry—an enterprise that relies on relocating workers into forests and extracting massive amounts of timber. This highlights how colonisation not only displaces people but also transforms landscapes into resources for imperial profit.

The narrative further explores concepts of subalternity and Otherness. Despite serving in the British army, characters like Arjun, Hardy, and Kishan Singh remain socially inferior within the colonial hierarchy. Their English officers treat them as outsiders, reminding them that mimicry of British customs can never erase racialised inequality. This marginalisation underscores how colonial systems suppress the voices of the colonised, denying them full agency within their own lands.

Through its expansive portrayal of migration, exile, and ecological disruption, *The Glass Palace* demonstrates how British imperialism destabilised both the social fabric and environmental balance of South and Southeast Asia. Ghosh's narrative aligns with key postcolonial theories—from Fanon's critique of colonial violence to Bhabha's ideas of mimicry and hybridity—while broadening the discussion to include environmental histories. The novel suggests that colonial domination dislocated not only people but also forests, labour systems, and cultural worlds, leaving behind enduring scars across human and nonhuman ecologies. By examining the human and ecological dimensions of colonial power in *The Glass Palace*, it becomes clear that British expansion radically altered not only political borders but also social relationships, cultural identities, and the natural world. Understanding these dynamics enables us to confront the long history of colonial exploitation and recognise how its consequences persist in the present, urging a commitment to justice and equity for communities that continue to bear these legacies.

Gramsci's concept of the subaltern is visible in soldiers like Arjun, Hardy, and Kishan Singh. Though dressed in British uniforms, they remain racially inferior in the eyes of their officers. Arjun's attempt to mirror Englishness—showing Bhabha's mimicry—is ridiculed: "He is the one who's the most English; we call him the Angrez." (Ghosh 297) Yet mimicry does not enable equality—only alienation. Arjun ultimately realizes he has become a weapon against his



own land: “What are we? Tools in the hands of others.” (Ghosh 353) This awakening represents Fanon’s “psychic decolonization,” exposing the invisible violence of imperial ideology.

This study has traced several critical postcolonial concepts—diaspora, exile, mimicry, subalternity, Otherness, imperialism, and hegemony—through the lives of Ghosh’s characters. Figures such as Rajkumar and Saya John initially thrive under the colonial timber economy, benefiting from extractive systems that exploited both human labour and Burmese forests. Yet even they become vulnerable to new forms of displacement when global conflict disrupts imperial networks, as seen in Rajkumar’s forced relocation to India and the tragic death of his son during the Japanese invasion.

The exiling of King Thebaw’s family to Ratnagiri exemplifies the ruthless dismantling of indigenous sovereignty and ecological belonging, while the widespread economic instability in India and Burma illustrates how colonial policies devastated both people and landscapes. Moreover, Indian soldiers like Arjun are drawn into imperial warfare through psychological hegemony, only to realize their expendability within the colonial hierarchy. In parallel, Rajkumar’s exploitation of migrant labourers reveals how colonial logic reproduces itself through aspiring elites, blurring the line between resistance and complicity.

Ultimately, Ghosh’s narrative exposes the intertwined exploitation of humans and nature under empire. While the British—and those who collaborated with them—profited from controlling forests, trade routes, and labour forces, ordinary people endured forced mobility, cultural loss, and environmental degradation. Yet the novel also foregrounds acts of resilience, community, and solidarity that challenge imperial domination. In weaving together historical reality with fictional lives, Ghosh provides not just a critique of empire, but a powerful reminder of the bonds between people and the environments they inhabit. *The Glass Palace* thus stands as a significant postcolonial ecological text—one that urges readers to remember, rethink, and repair the continuing impacts of displacement in the aftermath of colonial rule.

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**HYPERREALITY, ECOLOGICAL ALIENATION, AND ETHICS: GEORGE SAUNDERS  
AS A POSTMODERN ECOCRITICAL VOICE**

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**Abstract**

In this paper, an alternative approach will be applied to George Saunders as a unique postmodern ecocritical author who's creative and thought-provoking fictional works unfolds the game of simulated image of "nature", its commodification and planned alienation in the neo capitalist socio-political set up. To highlight the ecocritical claims, this research will hold its focus on *Pastoralia* and other select fictions of Saunders and opine that several postmodern techniques like hyperreality, satire, parody, irony, absurdity, fragmentation etc. are taken into use by Saunders to unveil the unsmooth and unparalleled existence between ecological crisis and superficial portrayal of "nature" by contemporary corporate dominated cultural trends and practices.

This article investigates George Saunders as a postmodern ecocritical writer, concentrating on how his work questions the depiction, exploitation, and alienation of nature in modern society. The research, which focuses on the short story *Pastoralia*, examines how Saunders uses postmodern narrative methods such as irony, fragmentation, and hyperreality to attack both ecological deterioration and cultural constructs of "nature." *Pastoralia*, a corporate theme park that compels employees to act as prehistoric humans works as a hyperreal ecosystem, emphasizing the artificiality of human interaction with nature as well as the ethical issues created by such simulations. Using Bruno Latour's concept of socio-natural hybrids, Timothy Morton's concept of hyperreal ecology, and Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, the paper illustrates how Saunders' work highlights the inconsistencies between the realities of environmental crises and nostalgic fantasies of the past.

In order to highlight recurrent themes of environmental commercialization, corporate domination, and posthuman ethical collapse, the research places *Pastoralia* alongside previous Saunders works, such as *The Semplica-Girl Diaries*, *Escape from Spiderhead*, and narratives from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*. Manicured lawns, sterile labs, and theme parks are examples of artificially created landscapes that are portrayed in these works as places where nature is subservient to technical and commercial demands. The study emphasizes how Saunders tackles environmental alienation, gradual ecological violence, and the moral ramifications of human dominance over nonhuman systems by embracing the work of ecocritical thinkers like Lawrence Buell, Rob Nixon, Kate Soper, Amitav Ghosh, and Donna Haraway.

In the end, the research establishes Saunders as a prominent postmodern ecocritical voice whose fiction forces readers to confront the Anthropocene's interconnected ecological and ethical concerns, the artificiality of their surroundings, and the commercialization of nature. His writings show how literature may shed light on the ethical and environmental consequences of residing in corporately controlled and technologically mediated environments.

**Keywords:** George Saunders, Postmodern ecocriticism, Hyperreality, *Pastoralia*, Environmental alienation, Corporate ecosystems

Although not explicitly known as an ecocritical voice in the literary history of American literature, George Saunders through his postmodern narrative techniques highlighted the most crucial inconsistencies about the concept of "nature" in the present time cultural scenario. Hitherto, the fictions of Saunders were the subject of research from postmodern, allegorical, humoristic, speculative and humanistic point of view and to some extent, the fictions were supposed to be

linguistically playful too. But, an active research from ecocritical point of view was absent and to be honest, none of his fictions were explicitly eco-assertive. So, the relation between Saunders and Ecocriticism was not explored as such. So, this study is going to do that.

In an interview to Orion magazine, Saunders implicitly expressed his understanding of eco-consciousness as “As a writer, the work is always particularization — to move from mere concept (tree, forest) into specific descriptions ... this process of particularization is somehow related to increased tenderness for.”(Saunders, *Orion*) In another of his quotes, a tone of deep ecological sense can be realized while he said, “I guess, is the ultimate environmentalism — like, a fondness for everything that is, and an enhanced recognition that it’s actually all one thing, all interconnected, and if we like any of it, we’d better feel tenderness for all of it.”(Saunders, *Orion*) In another interview to St. Louis Magazine, on the question of the ecological destruction and despair, he appears to be with optimistic tone. In his language, “We can work at feeling more affectionate and loving, and despair doesn’t help anybody.”(Saunders, *St. Louis Magazine*) But rather than focusing Saunders’ interviews and eco-opinions, it is better to look at his fictions which reflect strongly significant messages with its portrayal of simulated nature, technologically modified and mediated nature, corporate-hearted super individuals, materialized and objectified environment and alienated historical landscapes.

A legal or justified concern aroused by observing the pseudo-ongoing process of transformation of the concept of nature or natural environment in the literary texts of postmodern time. To be explicit, from the perspective of a literary eco-activist, the re-research of the representation of Nature and natural environment in the literature of different ages have adopted a significantly diverse medium of representation along with the socio-cultural or socio-technological interactions and mediums. But in the history of representation mediums, the latest representation of nature was in a way far more manipulated, shaped, and corporatized or commodified. And that is the concern. The Epistemology of nature in postmodern time is being compromised through the postmodern inventions in such a way that the new generations of human beings or the post genZ have internalized the concept of nature or environments through the hyperreal or super representations of the natural objects. Actually the paper has tried to point out that through the examples of the eco-parks, artificial landscapes, human laboratories etc. in the stories like *Pastoralia*, *the Semplica-Girl Diaries*, *Escape from spiderhead* and stories from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* by George Saunders.

In this research, some select fictions of Saunders will go through new lens of postmodern ecocriticism which will question the making of hyperrealities, the simulations and corporate capitalist fantasies regarding the nature. Saunders’ stories have become that critiquing narrative which holds accountable those anthropocentric practices which actually divert from eco-ethics. His stories satirize the manufactured ecologies like theme parks, pre-historic caves, manicured suburbs, experimental and artificially designed laboratories, engineered wildlife creations which are actually dangerously unnatural but surprising pretend to be natural. These superficial environments are dangerous in this sense that it intensifies the process of alienation of human beings from the actual ecological experiences. The select stories also reveal the slow process of masking the systematic damages and ethical corruptions by employing cultural fantasies of nature. Saunders’ portrayal of manufactured surroundings, human frailty, and commercialization in *Pastoralia* emphasizes ethical responsibility, connection, and exploitation, reflecting ecological fragility and the effects of man-made systems on both humans and nature. Here in this story, nature is not portrayed as natural but as a dramatic effect by the machinery of performance and hyper-real objects.

Rethinking Saunders’ select stories as effectively Postmodern Ecocritical, both postmodern theorists and ecocritics need to examine. In this regard, the works of Jean Baudrillard, Timothy Morton, Lawrence Buell, Bruno Latour, Rob Nixon, and Donna Haraway will be analytically applied and then this study will place *Pastoralia* and other comparable tales like *The Semplica-Girl Diaries*, *Escape from Spiderhead*, narratives from *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* in a

theoretical framework that highlights simulation, posthuman ethics, slow violence, and socio-natural hybridity, commodification, alienation and artificiality. Through the fictional works, it will justly be explored that ecological exploitation, corporatization of nonhuman bodies and the ethical failures happens inevitably when commercialized tendencies overpower the ecological balance ethics. The research will try to examine the dystopian danger that the natural environment may no longer stay natural but a product to be sold, bought and consumed by the by hegemonic ideological apparatuses of neo-capitalist socio-political set-up.

Although at the beginning, ecocriticism concentrated mainly on nature writing and Romantic pastoral traditions, contemporary scholarship has broadened the field to encompass other fields like cultural studies, posthumanism, and environmental justice, reflecting the discipline's growing interdisciplinary scope. Postmodern ecocriticism questions the ideological frameworks that speak out how nature is represented in late capitalist culture. Rather than treating nature as a fixed, untouched point of reference, postmodern ecocritics argue that any understanding of the natural world is already shaped by systems of power, cultural narratives, and political interests. In this view, nature is not any isolated objective entity existing outside human influence but a concept continually mediated through power, economy, language, representation, and social structures.

George Saunders' fictionalized worlds are the perfect illustration of Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulation" - and therefore represent an opportunity to analyze the "simulations" created by George Saunders in his short story collections (*Pastoralia*). Hyperreality occurs when the representation of the "real" is replaced by simulated versions of it which we find more believable than the "original". The fabricated visions of pre-history in *Pastoralia* that were presented at the theme park have no basis in either history or ecology. Therefore, the theme parks' version of "nature", is completely a product of scripting, and is intended as a manufactured display designed to create an impression on the visitor based on their expectations of what they want to see versus having any actual connection to the natural environment. The theme park serves as a metaphor for how late capitalist culture reduces nature into an economic commodity - thereby transforming nature from a living, breathing, ecological reality to a consumable fantasy.

The socio-natural hybrid model of Latour gives us a powerful framework to understand why the natural environments in Saunders' fiction cannot be divided into "either/or" categories as nature or as culture. In other words, Latour rejects the idea that each domain exists in a pure, unaltered form from one another, instead suggesting that we live in a world where human social structures and physical materials are intertwined within complex systems. This hybridity is embodied in the settings of Saunders that are hyper-controlled laboratories through the carefully groomed wildlife parks and even the manicured lawns of suburbia being propagated by the uneven global labor. These places reveal just how much corporate and economic forces are entering into ecological systems and proves that what we tend to call nature has already been predetermined, controlled and commodified by human influence.

Morton's concepts of hyperobjects and ambient ecology provide an additional theoretical framework for reading the environmental tensions in Saunders's work. Morton puts forward that contemporary ecological crises—whether climate change, mass extinction, or the diffusion of industrial pollution—operate on scales so immense and temporally stretched that they exceed ordinary human comprehension. Saunders's fiction stages this difficulty by portraying characters who inhabit meticulously crafted artificial ecologies that obscure, sanitize, or divert attention from the broader environmental devastation unfolding beyond their immediate perception. Through these mediated environments, Saunders satirically reveals how late capitalist culture fosters a form of ecological disorientation, in which the overwhelming reality of environmental harm is softened into consumable experience, leaving individuals ill-equipped to confront the true scope of planetary crisis.

The work of Lawrence Buell and Kate Soper further places Saunders within a lineage of environmental thought that questions how culture manufactures the idea of "nature." Buell's notion of the environmental imagination emphasizes literature's capacity to illuminate the complex

interdependencies that bind human and nonhuman worlds. Soper, by contrast, directs attention to the ideological versions of nature produced under consumer capitalism—versions that aestheticize and sanitize the nonhuman in ways that obscure its material realities. Saunders's theme parks exhibit what Soper terms a "negative ecoculture," a regime in which nature is not encountered as a living, dynamic presence but repackaged into a consumable spectacle. In dramatizing these artificial environments, Saunders exposes how capitalist fantasies displace genuine ecological engagement with engineered, marketable illusions.

The notions of Donna Haraway and Rob Nixon further situate Saunders's work within contemporary debates about posthuman ethics and environmental justice. Haraway's insistence on multispecies entanglement emphasizes the intricate relationality that binds human and nonhuman life, urging readers to rethink ethical responsibility beyond the limits of the human. Nixon's theorization of slow violence—environmental harm that unfolds gradually and disproportionately affects marginalized communities—offers a complementary framework for understanding the less visible forms of ecological damage represented in Saunders's fiction. Together, their ideas help illuminate how Saunders exposes the deferred, obscured, and unevenly distributed consequences of environmental degradation, particularly as they shape the lives of vulnerable beings across species lines.

Taken collectively, these theoretical approaches show how Saunders's narratives participate in a broader constellation of postmodern ecological thought—challenging fantasies of exaggerated realities, foregrounding experiences of environmental estrangement, and probing the ethical lacks that define life in the Anthropocene. Through this lens, Saunders's fiction emerges not merely as social satire but as a critical engagement with the ecological and ethical complexities of contemporary existence.

To understand the concept of simulation or alternative reality from earlier historical sense, a nearby similar nature-based literary movement in the early nineteenth century was rigorously practiced and that is Romanticism. Even Romanticism was a revival movement of sixteenth and seventeenth century pastoral literature across Europe and classical Greek pastoral literatures. But the point of discussing the origins of pastoral literatures is the idea or the concept of pastoral itself. Now, if the guess-playing or reading between the lines approach is applied, then it can be assumed that the pastoral literatures were simulations of nature by that time society's literary practices. Pastoral literatures were the representation of nature or natural environment. But Eco-ethics was not violated in that representation, neither any corporate-capitalist motive was there. But, in present time, Baudelaire's concept of simulation is indicative of something projected simulations which are unethical rather ecologically unethical because, in a suburban area, where nature is not directly available and people don't have the first hand experience. Then, that simulated reality turns into "more real than the real" creating a romanticized, sacred idea of nature. But the simulated reality of hyperreal nature is being fed to people and that is made normalized over time and practices of repetition and that is the problem. (Baudrillard)

*Pastoralia* is a very useful text for the case study that will help us evaluate both the artificial ecologies that are produced through nature simulation by corporations and the ideological implications of such simulation. In this particular case, the story is set at a theme park (the park's main attraction) and the park employees enact a version of history on behalf of their customers and pretend to be primitive humans living in caves and able to communicate only using pre-written grunts. While the park is entirely artificial and presented to customers as an immersive portal into a lost natural world, rather than attempting to preserve the past, its artificially simulated prehistoric ecology is provided for customer consumption, controlled and bundled by the park as a hyperreal nature.

The experience of nature is also alienated twice: the employees are unable to engage with their surrounding in a natural way since it is a creation, and they are unable to engage with one another due to the corporate regulations that require them to grunt. This alienation reflects the theory of estranged labor, introduced by Karl Marx but projected to the ecological space. Workers are

ensnared in a misguided nature, they are compelled to assume a past that did not exist and monitored by the use of bureaucratic memos, which substitute actual communication. The simulation does not only misinterpret their sense of nature, it also disintegrates their humanity, which demonstrates to the mess of ecological and ethical alienation.

The theme park in *Pastoralia* is a mix-up space, a convergence of human behaviour, ecological representations, and technology. The theory provided by Latour assists in the understanding of how the park has no delimitations: the caves are neither natural nor entirely artificial, the employees are humans who play the roles of animals or primitive beings, the visitors eat the simulation as the educational one. The hybrids are a mirror of the Anthropocene, in which the ecological conditions are irrevocably connected to the corporate and technological ones. Saunders reveals the way corporations misuse not only the labor but the whole ecosystem by transforming it into the profitable simulacrum.

The story raises the question of the morality of existing in such hyperreal ecologies. Corporate ideology is embedded within the characters to such an extent that the characters consider job security more important than moral accountability. As the main character is coerced to write about the perceived failure of one of his colleagues Janet, he finds it difficult to have ethical accountability, though he eventually yields to corporate pressure. This ethical collapse is indicative of more widespread societal failures to meet the ecological destruction. Equally, as the employees are rationalizing the harmful behavior due to survival, the societies are rationalizing the degradation of the environment due to economic stability. The theme park turns into a microcosm of Anthropocene morality: people have to go through the systems in which the ideals of simulation and financial gain are more important than ecological and ethical values.

Whereas ecological simulation is foreshadowed by *Pastoralia*, in his larger work Saunders provides a range of artificially created environments that can be found returning to the same themes of ecological alienation, commodification, and corporate domination. Comparative reading of *The Semplica-Girl Diaries*, *Escape from Spiderhead*, and tales of *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* shows the stability of the postmodern ecocritical vision by Saunders.

In *The Semplica-Girl Diaries*, suburban families use "Semplica Girls" as living ornaments to decorate their lawns; poor women in the developing world who have been captured on micro threads. The artificial ecosystems that are built around consumption and status the manicured lawns, an embodiment of suburban ideals of neatness, prosperity and order, are artificial. These lawns are similar to the hyperreal pastoral landscapes of *Pastoralia*: carefully tended and deprived of nature. The Semplica Girls are the symbol of human body commodified and landscaped. They get to be incorporated into the environment acting as living properties. This hybridisation is echoed in the posthuman ethics proposed by Haraway, in which nature, human and technology are in opposition to each other. But Saunders reveals the violence in such hybridity. The suburban ecosystem is a system where capitalist aesthetics dominate organic life (plants, animals, or humans). The novel turns Nixon's long-term violence into drama: the long-term damage to exploited workers is made invisible due to the naturalization and euphemism. Saunders criticizes a society which considers nature and those who are marginalized as decorative elements.

*Escape from Spiderhead* changes the place to a laboratory where inmates are tested on drugs. Although it may appear to be irrelevant to ecological problems, the story represents ecological alienation in the sterile and overcontrolled environment. Laboratories as well as theme parks and lawns of suburbs are the ecosystems influenced by corporate and technological power. The emotional, behavioral and even moral decisions are produced in this hyperreal scenery, by administering chemicals. The notion of hyperobjects presented by Morton can be used to explain the wider ecological resonance of the story: the experiments in the laboratory are described as the desire of humans to dominate complex systems with the help of technologies. The novel challenges the morality of human beings as objects to be manipulated and in turn the ecological systems. The fact that the protagonist, Jeff opposes actions that are chemically induced can be seen as an opposition with the concept of corporate control and a claim of agency that is similar to



ecological movements that opposed corporate exploitation. The story criticizes anthropocentric hubris that humans think that they can control nature (even human nature) with the help of technology.

In his first collection of *Civil War Land in Bad Decline*, Saunders introduces several examples of artificial ecology installed in theme parks belonging to the corporations. These nostalgic nature fantasies have been illustrated by these parks which are created to replicate historical landscape or wilderness experiences. The narratives reflect the degrading ecologies: swamps with invasive species, amusement parks on the toxic grounds, and landscapes with ghosts of violence of the past. In such worlds, climatic devastation is a fact that cannot be separated with corporate negligence and historical amnesia. The theme parks are fictionalized versions of nature that masks the destruction of the environment and stipulates imaginary data about the past. These landscapes represent the concept of the "toxic sublime" by Buell, aestheticization of the destruction of the environment. In his satirical approach, Saunders points out the way in which corporate capitalism even commodifies the ecological rot, providing entertainment at the cost of ruined environments. (Buell) The idea of slow violence by Rob Nixon revisits *Pastoralia* and the overall work of Saunders in the form of the unbroken but cumulative damage caused by corporate institutions. The working conditions include mental burnout, financial insecurity and environmental degradation that employees have to endure in their day to day work. The artificial ecologies in the theme parks must be maintained at all times, which stress the unsustainable essence of the landscapes manufactured. (Nixon)

The other theme that continues to appear in Saunders fiction is the complete alienation that people suffer towards ecological systems as well as their sense of morality. *Pastoralia* subjugates workers to a designed environment which replaces a true ecological interaction to the demands of corporate performance. In *Sea Oak* and the tales of *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, the landscapes of suburban areas and leisure industries conceal the ecological violence that is concealed in the global supply chains. In *Escape from Spiderhead*, the alienation is brought about by manipulation at a more literal level in order to take away the characters of their emotional independence. Saunders argues that alienation is not solely a state of mind or inner existence but an environment-generated state that conditions perception, empathy, and moral imagination and in most cases, distorts it. In sympathy with Lawrence Buell and his perception of environmental representation as a concern in the context of ethical engagement, Saunders shows how hyperreal ecologies end a substantial relationship with the nonhuman world in favor of spectacle and control.

In all his writings, Saunders exposes how much corporate systems dictate parameters of ecological and ethical living. These institutions dominate ecosystems like properties, suffer bodies by labor or technology, and design experiences to suit market forces. The moral failure in the fiction of Saunders is not therefore explainable in terms of personal failure; but arises out of more systemic frameworks that tend to diminish the opportunities of moral agency. Saunders criticizes the socio-economic realities that create ecological injustice and promote inequality in keeping with environmental justice models. His tales reveal how the might of corporations not only undermines the environment, but also reveals the moral basis that the ecological stewardship would otherwise rely on. Stressing that humanity should remain with the trouble, to acknowledge and live within the nonhuman systems, Donna Haraway offers a fruitful way of understanding the ecological vision that Saunders presents. His stories are instances of the repercussions of rejection of such entanglement. Societies of the fiction of Saunders instead seek technological or corporate replacements, simulated geography, chemically produced feelings, sterilized suburbanism, and they attempt to find isolation out of the intricacies of ecological interconnection. It is in these situations that Saunders is trying to make his unspoken claim that ecological ethics are based on the realization of human nonhuman interrelationship. His work cautions against the attractive and destructive illusion of a world where ecological links can be contracted, simplified or substituted.

Saunders depicts corporations as those that are much less concerned with the ecological stewardship or the ethical responsibility, but mainly with the maximization of profits and

protection of the image instead of ecological and human welfare. The disorientation of characters in hyperreal contexts is reflected in the fragmentation, absurdity and dark humor presented in the narrative style of Saunders. This stylistic changeability reflects the environmental division in the worlds he creates, in which environments are split out of their natural situations and re-created as the spectacles of a corporation. As the characters fail to continue to draw the line between real ecological settings and the simulated ones, the readers are also brought into the realm of epistemological doubt.

Saunders employs postmodern aesthetics not as a decorative device but as a way of creating a wakeup call to the ecological consciousness: by disrupting the narrative clichés, he similarly disrupts environmental clichés and asks the viewer to take a critical look at the mediation of the modern ecological experience. There is a unique combination of postmodern narrative technique and ecocritical questioning in the fiction of George Saunders, which reveals the ethical and ecological contradictions which characterize modern life. In all his tales nature is not shown as an untouched environment, but as a mediated process that is defined by corporate structures, technological interventions, and fantasy images. By revealing the routinely ethnicized nature of environmental damage behind aestheticized landscapes that conceal exploitation and environmental deterioration, these simulated environments demonstrate. Characters in Saunders live in spaces that are designed to be similar to nature and at the same time hide the violence, both of nature and social, that allows them to be created. This alienation is psychological and ethical in depth and aimed at the same. Producers of the hyperreal ecologies experience that they are limited to exercising moral abilities by the ecologies that shape their social lives as being about corporate profit, performance, and consumer satisfaction. Describing these circumstances, Saunders reveals the expansion of the environmental alienation to the inner world, dismembering the self-awareness and reducing the moral duty. His fiction thus can be heard in ecocritical reasoning of representation developing environmental consciousness: when spaces are produced or managed to conceal destruction, ethical action becomes even more challenging. Meanwhile, Saunders accepts the inevitability of posthuman entanglement. Even in artificial settings, man is still locked in the net of ecological, technological, and corporate interrelations that cannot be controlled by a single person. Through the pre-emptive anticipation of such entanglements, Saunders critiques fantasies of ecological purity or autonomy, based, instead, on an ethics of interdependence in the Anthropocene. At the end of the day, Saunders turns out to be more than a satirist of late capitalism. He is also one of the major postmodern ecocritical voices whose writings have provoked the readers to reevaluate the ethics of ecology in a corporately mediated world signaling the ability of literature to address the hyperreal conditions of the modern ecological life.

To be continued with the conclusive part, it can effectively be understood that situating postmodernist George Saunders as an ecocritical literary entrepreneur actually bears fruits of newer and alternative narratives and perspectives of countering eco-ethical challenges which are the centre of debate of ecocentric and anthropocentric activities. May be Saunders' fictions are not deliberately indicative of unfolding the false representation of Nature and environment, but the fictions offers the best possible medium of narratives and storylines. *Pastoralia* is one of the key examples of how Saunders satirizes the epistemic violence to the concept of "nature" in the late capitalist social set up with its corporate ideal-based ecosystem, hyper-real image of nature and deliberate ecological alienation. Not only this, Saunders's other fictions *The Semplica-Girl Diaries*, *Escape from Spiderhead*, and *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, too simultaneously revealed the structural entanglement of environmental crisis, corporate extractivism, and moral disintegration. Saunders' textual ecology demonstrates that environmental crises are not reducible to biophysical perturbations but are deeply embedded within the cultural imaginaries and semiotic regimes through which late capitalism renders "nature" intelligible, exploitable, and exchangeable. His postmodern ecocritical assemblage exposes the ontological instability of the human-environment divide and foregrounds the extent to which ecological consciousness is produced, disciplined, and commodified by hegemonic ideological apparatuses. In doing so, Saunders

compels readers to confront the hyperconstructed, simulacral conditions of their environments and to recognize ecological crisis as a symptom of broader cultural, economic, and epistemic disintegrations.

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**PLANTATIONOCENE MONOCULTURE AND CHEMICAL COLONISATION: AN  
ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES READING OF THE NOVEL *ENMAKAJE***

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**Abstract**

The Malayalam novel *Enmakaje* written by Ambikasuthan Mangad, deals with the chemical poisoning of a primordial land in Kerala in the name of plantation agriculture. The villages in the Kasargod district of Kerala are devastated by the ariel spraying of the toxic chemical endosulfan in the cashew plantations. The novel unravels how corporate hegemony and chemical modernity join hands together to produce a plantationocene cultivation, thereby destroying the biodiversity of the region. Once considered a sacred land by the natives, the village of Enmakaje is turned into a graveyard of a modern agriculture system that focuses on profit generation and ignores the traditional knowledge system. As a result of the continuous spraying of the chemical Endosulfan for years, the land becomes toxic, resulting in multi-generational health disasters, poisoned water bodies, and loss of biodiversity and climate changes. It is an ecological wasteland of the plantationocene, where the logic of extraction focuses on profit and production over environmental ethics. The endosulfan spaying through the air is a form of chemical colonisation, which takes place slowly and invisibly through water, air, soil, and animal and human bodies through generations. The novel exposes the systemic neglect and violence and also the dominance of industrial agriculture in the backdrop of human suffering. Lastly, the novel stresses the need of rethinking developmental policies and highlights the need for a sustainable, ethical, and community-led planetary futures. Through the lens of environmental humanities, the paper tries to discuss not only a regional ecological disaster but also tries to place it in the larger context of global histories of the plantationocene which includes issues related to monoculture, ecological violence, and erasure of indigenous knowledge systems.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanities, Plantationocene, Chemical Colonialism, Slow Violence, Environmental Racism, Ecocide, Affective Ecologies

The concept of Plantationocene, explained by scholars like Donna Haraway and Anna Tsing links the present geological era to the exploitative histories of plantation cultivation. It tries to explain the current environmental and social issues in a broader way compared to the concept of Anthropocene. The plantation system prefers monocropping instead of multiple crops being cultivated in the land. It involves the forced alienation of labour and land, transportation of plants, animals and people. It involves the dominance over human beings and nature. The concept of plantationocene is often used alongside other concepts like Capitalocene and Chthulucene.

Plantationocene is introduced as an alternative to anthropocene. Writers like Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway are of the opinion that the plantation system which was part of the colonialism created ecological crisis. In the plantationocene system, monoculture is preferred to other forms of cultivation where a single crop is cultivated in acres of land with disproportionate use of chemical fertilisers. This intense use of fertilisers damage soil, water and through the process of bio magnification it is carried over to generations causing genetic mutations and destroys the biodiversity. Thus, through the process of 'slow violence,' the balance of ecosystem is lost and many living creatures go extinct disrupting the biological cycle.

The traditional ways of labour which is community based is destroyed and land gets separated. Labour is exploitative and is on the basis of caste. Many people migrate to cities or other places from their native land due to the labour conditions in their native land. A system like this relies heavily on chemical pesticides, weedicides and fertilisers which are often banned in capitalist countries due to their toxicity. Such harmful substances are used by corporates in third-world countries where they extract profit by investing less amount of money and cheap labour. Forest laws often support exploitative tendencies and prevent the tribal community from fetching forest produce. Subsequently they have to work in plantations which offer only cheap labour and they are exposed to harmful chemical substances. In such a way, they colonise the space and alienate the indigenous communities.

Plantationocene emerged in the fifteenth and seventeenth century colonial plantations of cotton, sugar, tobacco etc. Plantation cultivation can be considered as the early factories of capitalism. Anna Tsing in her work *The Mushroom at the End of the World* highlights that plantations were the first modern factories and says "Plantations are machines for simplifying ecosystems. They grow just one or a few kinds of beings and eliminate the rest" (Tsing 38). She argues that plantationocene is the key feature of anthropocene and it destroys the biodiverse ecosystem. Donna Haraway talks about the 'reduced ecologies'-where diversity is replaced by monoculture. They argue that the term anthropocene is not enough to describe the root cause of environmental issues as it encapsulates the entire human race. They identify that the real problem is the plantation model of cultivation which was created by the European colonisation. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it expanded through scientific forestry, chemical fertilisers, agrobusiness of corporates etc. They argue that plantationocene is not complete, it exists in oil palm plantations, genetically modified crops, tea and rubber plantations etc.

The plantationocene era in India started with the coming of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. Soon after the arrival, they started cultivating spices, sugarcane, cashew, coconut etc which they exported to their own country. This is the earliest form of plantationocene seen in India. Later the French and Dutch too started plantation cultivation in Malabar and Coromandel coasts. It fully began during the time of the British rule in the eighteenth century when they started cultivating indigo in Bengal and Bihar, tea and coffee in Assam, Kerala and Karnataka, and rubber in Kerala. This phase included deforestation, displacing Adivasi communities, plantation acts to control labour etc.

The ecological consciousness of the post-colonial world emerged with the publication of *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson. It exposed the harmful effects of the synthetic pesticides, like DDT. The book made the world aware that chemical contamination is not just a health issue but has deep political and ethical undertones too. The novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) written by Jean Rhys explores the colonial history in sugar plantations. In the novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), Marquez talks about the imperialism in the banana plantations and Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* (1997) talks about the environmental racism and exploitation in Kerala. V. S Naipaul's novel *A Bend in the River* (1979) talks about the extractive tendencies of colonialism set in the postcolonial Central Africa. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) talks about the ecological crisis that happens in the Sunderbans. The works of Mahasweta Devi like *Titu Mir* (2000) show the plight of farmers in pre- and post-colonial India. The Malayalam novel *Enmakaje* (2009) written by Ambikasuthan Mangad is an example of the plantationocene, in which the chemical endosulfan destroys the ecological balance and transforms the land into an arena of chemical colonialism.

The novel *Enmakaje* written by Ambikasuthan Mangad is set in the toxic atmosphere of the villages in Kasargod like Enmakaje. The land was once a hotspot of biodiversity. All forms of life lived in communion with nature. They practised organic farming, took only what they wanted, loved and cared for animals and birds. River water was the elixir of life. Rain poured in plenty and the land was fertile. The utopian land was vibrant with life and happiness until the government started plantation cultivation of cashew trees, rubber and areca nut. The monoculture of the crops

needed hectares of land and the forest was cleared for cultivation. Biodiversity is lost and many of the species disappeared and birds rarely visit the place. The monoculture requires the use of chemical pesticides for speedy results and higher profits. The chemical killed many small insects like earthworm and pests that played a role in maintaining soil nutrition. It creates 'slow violence' and 'bare life' conditions to the communities living there.

The plantationocene in *Enmakaje* is not just about plantations. It highlights the mechanisms of chemical governance and the way in which these plantations produce toxicity as the outcome of monoculture. Endosulfan is used as the new colonial weapon to conquer the land and people. In the colonial period, the imperialist powers used force to colonise the subject. In the modern age the capitalism uses agro-chemical industry to conquer the land. It is the new form of imperialism that existed earlier. *Enmakaje* turn out to be the colony of the post- colonial plantationocene. Vandana Shiva writes:

Monocultures are not just an agricultural choice; they are a political and epistemic choice. The creation of plantations required the destruction of nature's diversity and the uprooting of local communities who had co-evolved with that diversity. Plantations imposed the rule of one plant, one commodity, one market- over complex ecological systems and sophisticated cultures of care. This is the central violence of monoculture: it turns living, self-organising systems into uniform, industrialised spaces managed through chemicals and coercion (Shiva 12).

The land was untouched by outside world and now everything has changed. Subbanayak tells Neelakandan:

Fish, frog and snake no longer live in these waters. Earlier they were in plenty. I clearly remember that. The python used to rest in this river bank. It has not harmed anyone. Peacocks come in flocks to the *Satyappadi* by noon time and spread their feathers. It is a sight to behold. But now, no one comes here (Mangad, trans. 103).

Villagers do not know that endosulfan is the cause of deformed creatures in the land. Instead, they believe that the anger of *Jadadharimala* is responsible for the current situation. The government, politicians or the company do not inform them that they should take care of themselves from the side effects of endosulfan spraying. The doctor who has been treating the villagers finally found out the real cause was the aerial spraying of endosulfan. Doctor says:

I have an important matter to share with you. I have heard about the issues related to the death of cows and honeybees. All houses have patients here. Not only children, many others have died. I have been trying to find out the real cause of unusual happenings here. Now I came to know about the real problem here. The curse of the place is that poisonous substance which is being sprayed in the land in all these years (Mangad, trans. 111).

The aerial spraying of endosulfan reflects the colonial practice of exerting external control over land and bodies. In the post- colonial world, newer technology is used to control people.

*Enmakaje's* people and biodiversity have overcome so many migrations, military expeditions from centuries. But now... when people got freedom and the many elected governments that they chose are spitting venom on their face like Kaliyan, the mythical poisonous snake. Those who are supposed to protect its citizens have been bribed for just thirty silver coins. They have become harbingers of death for the poor people (Mangad, trans. 153).

The lack of attention to the harmful side effects is described by Jayadevan:

Endosulfan is being sprayed above the permissible limits for twenty-five years here. What we saw in Perle camp is the harmful result of the spraying. The poison does not decompose easily in the soil and it stays there for many years. These organo-chlorines have the ability to imitate hormones and alter the rhythm of biological processes (Mangad, trans.152).



Endosulfan is not being used for the benefit of people but with the intention of increasing yield and profit from the plantations. The poison that is being sprayed not just affects the present generation but future generations including children. They become a community which is unable to think of a toxic free future. Time in plantationocene is therefore suspended where people exist in chronic uncertainty. Time here is extractive in nature which requires speed, greater productivity and efficiency.

The state sponsored violence neglects the right to life. The government officials support spraying and put behind bars and kills people like Rajeev who oppose government policies and speak for the people. Scientific reports alter facts and falsify the truth. The bureaucratic system supports the government. The suffering of villagers goes unnoticed by the outside world. No interference of media and NGOs or human or animal rights organisations. They are all made invisible by the system. The state-corporate nexus suppresses the voice of local communities and reflects the logic of profit above life. The plantation system makes the ecology sterile, where water, air and soil become carriers of poison. Neelakandan says:

Law says that a pesticide should not be sprayed in the same place continuously for not more than three years. It is because the pest overcomes it in the fourth year. But here, the same poison is being sprayed continuously for twenty-five years... Crores of money have reached many as commissions and bribes. That is why, the department of agriculture, agricultural scientists and politicians do not speak a single word against them (Mangad, trans. 159).

The history of monoculture starts with the arrival of Portuguese in Kerala when they brought with them the cashew nuts. The profit from the crops makes the capitalists to destroy traditional multi cropping system and promotes mono cropping which results in the loss of biodiversity which includes endemic animals and medicinal plants. The history of capitalist monoculture is same everywhere. Jayarajan says:

Karnataka's eucalyptus plantations and Himalayan pine farming destroyed the biodiversity of the earth. Look at the acacia forests in Kerala. Why such a plant which was used to fill the marshland in Australia travelled seas and come here? Is it like favouring some country's agenda in the name of afforestation in Kerala? If not, why such an unworthy tree is planted in our land which has a lot of worthier ones like the mango and jack fruit trees? These trees only increase the acidity of the soil, absorb large amounts of water and also cause diseases in children. In reality, politics of multiplicity is being destroyed by the culture of monocropping. What is the end result? Only poverty, natural disasters and diseases... (Mangad, trans. 161).

Moreover, plantations replace forests and such divided spaces lack biodiversity and community bonding. Ramachandra Guha writes: "The forests were not empty spaces to be conquered; they were living systems that sustained human and non-human life. The introduction of chemical-intensive plantations transforms them into zones of extractive violence" (Guha 12).

In *Enmakaje*, the cashew plantations act as an enclosure destroying the common people echoing Silvia Federici's argument that capitalism remoulds land into simple, controllable monocultures that neglect community reproduction and ecological knowledge. The land is cleared and planted with cashew nut trees. Later, the land is used for rubber cultivation. This reflects the historical shift in the plantation monoculture which started with the cultivation of cashew nut trees and pepper. The shift in cultivation exemplifies Vandana Shiva's critique: "Monocultures are a form of ecological colonisation" (Shiva 112). The introduction of rubber accelerates the extractive nature of capitalism which has already started in the cashew plantations. The introduction of a foreign crop like rubber destroyed the cultivation of traditional crops in Kerala which resulted in the loss of indigenous varieties of many food crops in the land. It destroyed the traditional system of crop rotation and local food systems. The rubber plantations act as a connection link to the global capitalist industries which decides the agriculture system in the third world countries. The shift in cultivation represents the effects of neo liberal agricultural policies, industrial pressures

and export-oriented monocultures which are the parts of globalisation process. When compared to cashew, rubber provides much more income to cultivators and has better markets globally in automobile and manufacturing industries. The shift in cultivation is presented as a kind of external pressure on the people, showing the level of global market penetration into the remote ecologies and how it reshapes the landscapes and cultures of the indigenous people. The cultivators and workers depend on the global market for price determination and international price fluctuations affect the local economy. The better pricing in the international markets compels cultivators to increase the production by the heavy usage of chemicals on land and thereby making land and biodiversity more vulnerable. The shift in farming reflects the global pattern of cultivation in South and Southeast Asia, where monoculture of cash crops alters the landscapes and make them 'anti-forest landscapes', as Anna Tsing calls such changed topographies which are productive economically but ecologically barren. The shift from cashew to rubber is not only agricultural rather it reflects the industrialisation process that happens globally. The novel is a critique of the neo liberal and capitalist policies that penetrate into the henceforth untouched rural ecologies in the veil of agriculture. The situation in *Enmakaje* parallels the radical deforestation of the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats for rubber cultivation. Madhav Gadgil points out that such deforestation and fragmentation of land eventually turn it into a desert and people become 'ecological refugees.'

Chemical colonisation is a term used to refer the way in which colonial and neo-colonial powers deploy control over land, bodies and environment through chemicals like fertilisers, pesticides, industrial wastes and radioactive substances. It is a continuation of the historical colonial policies carried forward in the modern age using capitalistic and neo liberal policies. The chemical-rich plantations of colonial era promoted monoculture of crops like indigo, rubber, cashew nut, pepper, cotton, tobacco etc. The colonial era witnessed the foundation of plantationocene with its forest laws, deforestation and monocropping of certain cash crops. By the late nineteenth century, British agricultural departments started pest control trials, fertiliser experiments, arsenic- based pesticides. The colonial powers treated the Indian soil as infertile and unproductive and imposed chemical treatments in the soil. The post Independent India witnessed the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 70s which saw the heavy usage of chemical fertilisers like urea and NPK in India. It also introduced the pesticides such as DDT, endosulfan heptachlor and aldrin etc. which are essential for the growth of high yielding varieties of seeds. The groundwater is contaminated and indigenous varieties of seed are lost and traditional knowledge system is rendered useless. Multinational agro- chemical firms have become the new 'colonisers' replacing the colonial plantation system and ushering in a pesticide dependent agribusiness model.

The industrialisation phase of the 1970s to 1990s saw massive toxic accidents like the Bhopal Gas tragedy (1984) which killed thousands of people in India and made many neuro-genetic, and causing reproductive disorders along with water and soil contamination. Indian rivers like Yamuna and Sabarmati became chemically loaded as a result of the neo colonialism of the chemical industry. The post liberalisation era opened its market to capitalist companies like Monsanto, Syngenta etc which accelerated the GM crop trials, pesticide dependence and seed patent regimes etc. The process of chemical colonisation continues to operate in the modern age affecting hormones, fertility, DNA and development of the foetus. The mercury poisoning in the Japanese city of Minamata, Seveso dioxin contamination in the US etc are several incidents that happened globally.

The novel localises the toxic history of global agro-chemical industries into an embodied narrative set in Kasargod district of Kerala. *Enmakaje* becomes a localised plantationocene site. Globally, such industries focus marginalised communities, indigenous or rural populations. In the novel *Enmakaje*, targeted groups are the Adivasi like rural community, women and children etc. The region is a sacrifice zone just like what happened in the US, Africa, Latin America, China etc.

The return of Neelakandan and Devayani to the cave represent the return to an anti-plantationocene. The couple entering the cave once again represent the returning to the womb of the mother. It symbolises the wish for rebirth and protection from a toxic world. The returning also

shows that life in the land is no longer possible and they have become geological refugees. The cave is anti-capitalist which refuses state monitoring, plantationocene and chemical colonisation. Theirs is a political act where they chose to live a life outside the capitalist and neo liberal policies that destroyed them. It emerges as the most decisive form of resistance in the novel, silent yet provides a compelling message to the world. The cave becomes a counter- space of plantationocene, spatially and ethically.

Chemical colonisation operates invisibly through agents like pesticides, fertilisers etc that penetrate into the land, body and water unlike the classical colonisation which needed armies and ammunitions. In this type, the dominance is up to the molecular level and does not need any physical force to achieve it. The empire proliferates through toxicity instead of territorial conquest. The bio political control operates at the molecular level rather than laws. Chemical colonisation occupies the most intimate spaces unlike the colonisation that happened earlier. It affects breath, breast milk, womb and underground water. Soil becomes a historical document of a devastated community even after years. Chemical colonisation creates discarded spaces which are toxic in nature.

Chemical colonisation destroys traditional knowledge systems too. This reflects patent colonisation or 'biopiracy' as Vandana Shiva puts it. Mangad shows that chemical colonialism is also another form of patent colonialism- where science replaces the wisdom of the community. Jayarajan says:

I have understood another thing about the neem tree. It is world's best bio pesticide. But now, it is under the watchlist of corporates. Products with neem which are more than sixty-five are patented by them. Most of them is this bio pesticide form of neem. The traditional knowledge system of our country which is more than two thousand years old is looted. It is the same people who bought this chemical pesticide to our land is plundering our bio pesticide to other places. They are destroying us in two different ways, aren't they? (Mangad, trans. 148).

Vandana Shiva talks about poison cartel which functions globally connecting chemical industries that make fertilisers, pesticides and genetically modified crops. They function as small cartels since they function collectively to control chemicals, seeds and agriculture. These cartels symbolise the new colonial power through domination of nature. These chemicals are the tools of control and replace the traditional knowledge system. The incident of endosulfan spraying represents the poison cartel system which is a nexus of government and corporate companies. Shiva writes "the poison cartel enters through government programs, public institutions, and agricultural departments, disguised as progress" (Shiva 45). The chronic illness of the villagers, deformities and trauma represent the 'slow violence' Shiva attributes to the chemical industry and the cashew plantations represent how monocultural landscapes become sacrifice zones. She says: "Chemical agriculture is not a liberation; it is a new form of colonialism. It colonises the soil, colonises our bodies, and colonises our food system through dependence on toxic chemicals and corporate control" (Shiva 112).

In Hindu mythology *balakhilyanmar* are dwarf sages who live in the pores of Lord Indra's skin. They are mentioned in the Hindu texts like the *Mahabharata*, Puranas and Vedic texts. They signify that spiritual power is independent of physical stature. In Hindu mythology, *balakhilyanmar* are described as small beings and are almost invisible to human eyes. The mythical figures of *balakhilyanmar* are employed in the novel to show bio vulnerability. Mangad invokes the figure of *balakhilyanmar* to show the shrunken, fragile bodies of endosulfan affected children. It shows how poison reduces life- human bodies become miniature, vulnerable like the ancient dwarf sages. The endosulfan victims are invisible to the state just like *balakilyanmar* are invisible to human eyes. The children are like the *balakilyanmar* not because they are divine, but because they are 'invisible' to the state, medical records and excluded from compensation lists of the state. Like the *balakilyanmars* who occupy a liminal space between the human and the divine, endosulfan victims too exist in the liminal state of biological uncertainty. The endosulfan affected

children are excluded from the regular categories of health or disability. According to legends, the anger of *balakilyanmars* shook Indra. Mangad has this parallel by hinting that the collective sufferings of affected children have the power to destroy all like a divine indictment.

The mythical *balakilyanmar* represent the ethics of environmental humanities that humans are not the only ones that exists in the world which aligns with the multispecies ethics of Donna Haraway and others. The absence of *balakilyanmars* is a form of imaginative colonisation which poisons the stories, beliefs and memory. The ecological consciousness collapses when children no longer hear about the stories related to *balakilyanmars*. The absence of *balakilyanmars* represent the collapsing of small ecologies under chemical colonisation. It is always a known fact that small animals and insects, birds are the ones who suffer first when such issues arise.

Nature is said to have healing properties. In the novel, trees, soil, land heal the human world. By the act of going back to the cave, Neelakandan and Devayani try to heal themselves by connecting with the rhythm of nature. It is a shift from the geo traumatic time of the human to the geological time. In a world of toxicity, the only possible future is the return to the older, nature-based ways of living. The cave ending of the novel shows that modernity is a failed project which is not able to provide good to the people and the state has neglected its citizens and the forest is replaced by plantations. The only mode of survival is the return to the mother earth. They both enter the cave as refugees. It is an anti-plantationocene act in which humans return to the shelter made of stones where the ancient man once lived. It is an escape from the chemical colonisation of the plantationocene. It is not a regressive act but it is the only form of survival that exists. In fact, it is the only place where the chemical colonialism has not reached so far. Thus, the cave becomes the only refuge since the outside world has become graveyards of chemical industry. When they return back to the place once the story of human age started, life comes in a full circle. It is a backward movement in time, away from the poisonous and toxic chemicals, venomous capitalist policies and diseases.

Ambikasuthan Mangad's novel *Enmakaje* presents the local, catastrophic representation of the chemical contamination which started from the Industrial Revolution and which is still continuing unchecked. The novel is the mirror that reflects the toxic histories worldwide through its depiction of endosulfan poisoning- a chemical pesticide made in the age of synthetic chemical expansion and which is seen as harmful and banned across different countries due to its potential for destruction of biological life and bioaccumulative properties. Just as how the colonialism turned the world into its testing laboratory, endosulfan- a product of post war age turns the land of Kasargod into a plantationocene landscape with the support of state sponsored agro-chemical industry, monoculture and environmental racism. Mangad's narrative presents the long history of chemical colonisation through the depiction of endosulfan stricken landscapes which creates geo trauma, slow violence, and environmental destruction. *Enmakaje* becomes a landmark text that explains how plantation economies create multi- generational toxicity, spatial injustice and diseases in the post- colonial plantation economies, making it a key text in understanding the plantationocene and chemical colonisation in South Asian countries.

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**RECLAIMING THE SACRED: BHAKTI AND THE ETHICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL  
CARE IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIA**

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**Abstract**

This study examines how the Bhakti tradition, with its emphasis on devotion, humility, and equality, can provide a moral and spiritual framework for addressing ecological crises in postcolonial India. In ancient Indian thought, nature was regarded as sacred and intimately connected to human life. Colonial exploitation and modern industrialization disrupted this relationship, fostering domination over nature and contributing to ecological degradation and ethical disconnection. By analysing the writings and songs of Bhakti saints such as Mirabai, Ravidas, Kabir, and Guru Nanak, the research highlights a vision that embraced all life as divine. These devotional practices emphasized love, service (seva), and spiritual egalitarianism, linking social reform with environmental sensitivity. Their teachings offer a model of care that values interconnectedness rather than control, presenting a path for integrating ethical responsibility with spiritual life. The study also critiques postcolonial India's development trajectory, which has often overlooked indigenous spiritual wisdom, leading to a fractured relationship with the environment. It argues that reinvigorating Bhakti principles can help reconcile material progress with ecological stewardship and moral responsibility. Methodologically, the paper combines textual analysis with historical interpretation, bridging religious thought and environmental philosophy. Ultimately, reclaiming the sacred through Bhakti is not a nostalgic return to the past but a vital strategy for fostering a compassionate, sustainable, and spiritually grounded ecological consciousness in contemporary India.

**Keywords:** Bhakti Tradition, Bhakti Saints, Ecological Crises, Ecological Consciousness, Spiritually and Environment

**Introduction: The Sacred, the Broken, and the Forgotten**

The environmental state of postcolonial India demonstrates an intense moral and spiritual breakdown. The modern Indian nation received an ancient cultural heritage which revered natural environments yet now faces extensive environmental destruction through deforestation and river contamination and industrial waste. Environmental historian Ramachandra Guha explains that modern Indian development models based on colonial and postcolonial frameworks introduced a utilitarian nature perspective which contradicts traditional Indian environmental beliefs (Guha, 2005). Sivaramakrishnan demonstrates in *Ethics of Nature in Indian Environmental History* that the transition from community-led resource protection to state-controlled management systems destroyed native ecological values. The ecological breakdown in post-independence India represents both environmental destruction and a fundamental cultural and existential breakdown because people lost their connection to nature's sacred essence (Sivaramakrishnan, 2015).

**Context of Environmental Degradation in Postcolonial India**

The Indian government chose to build its progress through industrialization and centralized planning after gaining independence in 1947. The construction of large dams together with mining activities and urban growth projects became recognized as development milestones across the



nation. The drive for development resulted in the forced relocation of rural and tribal populations while it harmed natural habitats and suppressed local environmental wisdom. The Indian developmental vision according to Guha transformed nature from its sacred essence into an economic commodity through the clash between agrarian values and industrial modernity. Environmental scholar Lynn White Jr. explains this worldwide spiritual crisis through the process of removing ecological understanding from religious frameworks (LeVasseur & Peterson, 2016). The Indian environmental degradation stems from colonial interference which destroyed native religious ecosystems through the implementation of extractive and technocratic systems that converted human relationships with nature into utilitarian values (Vandana, 1988). The research supports worldwide academic work about spirituality and environmental ethics through its intellectual assessment. The climate emergency represents a fundamental shift in human awareness according to eco-philosopher Joanna Macy who demands a spiritual transformation based on empathy and understanding of interconnectedness (Macy, 2025). The environmental deterioration in postcolonial India stems from a fundamental spiritual and moral crisis which developed because people lost their ability to connect the sacred with ecological reality.

#### **The Rupture between Ancient Ecological Ethos and Industrial Modernity**

The ancient Indian worldview established a complete connection between people and their environment and divine forces. The Rig Veda and Upanishads present Brahman as the source of all existence while devotional (Bhakti) traditions developed this connection by showing divine presence in all living things. The book *Hinduism and Ecology* edited by Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (1999) demonstrates that Indians never treated nature as lifeless substance because they recognized prakriti as the sacred feminine power which maintains all existence. The introduction of industrial modernity brought an end to this fundamental connection between realities. Modern rationalism established a mechanistic framework which treated nature as mere physical substance without any form of consciousness or moral value.

Supratik Sen presents the environmental crisis in his 2021 article "The Green Gita", *Connecting Ontology, Soteriology, and Environmental Ethics* by showing how the Bhagavad Gita's devotion-based divine presence stands against contemporary efforts to remove sacred value from nature. The bhakta who follows Isvara through devotion maintains ecological equilibrium because it represents the natural order of dharma. The authors Arne Naess and George Sessions in *Deep Ecology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1995) develop similar ecological frameworks which base their approach on reverence instead of control. The epistemological shift from nature-based participation to technological control of nature represents more than economic development's physical effects.

#### **Spiritual Disconnection as the Root of the Ecological Crisis**

The ecological deterioration of India stems from a deep spiritual separation between humans and their natural environment. The loss of essential values including *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *aparigraha* (non-possession) has led to the replacement of reverence-based ethics with administrative and technocratic environmental management systems that lack spiritual foundation. The shift in moral and philosophical direction has transformed environmental protection into a policy-based system which separates from its spiritual essence from its operations. The destruction of sacred groves which served as divine sanctuaries and maintained local spiritual systems demonstrates how human society lost its ability to see nature as sacred (Banerjee, 2024). People today view environmental damage as a management issue instead of recognizing it as a deep moral and spiritual problem. Srikanta Mondal explains that true sustainability requires people to develop spiritual awareness through reverence for all living beings because this leads to inner awakening (Spirituality and Deep Ecology, 2025). The global eco-theological movement supports Sen's (2021) argument that ecological restoration requires people to rediscover their spiritual connection

with nature through moral and spiritual re-enchantment. The physical damage to land and water represents only a part of the largeness.

#### **Rationale for Using Bhakti as a Moral-Spiritual Framework**

The Bhakti tradition provides an original system of ethics which enables people to develop their crisis because it also involves the loss of *sraddha* which represents the sacred understanding of divine-life interconnected environmental awareness. Through its core values of *prema* (love) and *seva* (service) Bhakti eliminates the human-centered system which separates people from nature. J. Bennett explains in her dissertation *Understanding Bhakti through Rasa Sentiment* (Loyola Marymount University, 2016) that bhakti rasa creates a sentimental connection which unites all creatures as expressions of divine essence. The philosophical framework transforms the concept of care into a devotional practice which establishes an ethical stance *Dharma* and *Ecology of Hindu Communities* (Routledge, 2011) shows how Bish based on sacred bond with life's inherent divinity. The national example of Pankaj Jain's and Swadhyaya rural communities protect their ecosystems through their collective devotion to rituals and service work. The international eco-theological field describes this approach as an "ethics of care" which uses spiritual love to drive environmental stewardship (Macy, 2024). The Bhakti worldview presents an essential alternative to modern environmentalist approaches because it brings back emotional and compassionate and selfless service-based moral language into current ecological discussions.

The fifteenth chapter of the Bhagavad Gita according to Sen shows that *isvara* maintains the cosmic order (*dharma*) while true devotion requires humans to protect this divine balance in nature. The essays in Tucker and Chapple's *Hinduism and Ecology* show how religious rituals and artistic works and devotional poetry help people experience again the natural world through their consciousness. The various perspectives demonstrate that Bhakti functions as a transformative moral framework which bases its values on humility and compassion and interconnectedness to solve modern environmental problems.

#### **Theoretical and Historical Framework: From Sacred Ecology to Postcolonial era**

The pre-colonial Indian ecological perspective demonstrated that *prakriti* (nature) and *atman* (self) exist as one complete system which shows humans need the natural world to survive. The Prithvi Sukta of the Atharvaveda presents Earth as the mother who has all creatures as her children to show that nature and spirit exist as a single whole. The deep ecological values of Hinduism appear in its cosmology which treats environmental damage as *adharma* because it breaks both moral and cosmic laws. The authors Narayanan (2001) and Baindur (2009) explain that ancient Indian knowledge treated forests and mountains and forests as sacred divine manifestations which led people to practice self-control and worship and protect nature instead of exploiting it.

The sacred sites across India demonstrate how people have practiced ecological spirituality throughout history. The Ganga and Yamuna rivers and Kailash Mountain and Peepal tree received worship from people who believed them to be living deities that connected them to spiritual realms. The concept of *hierophany* by Eliade describes how sacred entities manifest through natural elements which Vedic geography demonstrates by showing all landscape areas as divine and serving as spiritual bridges to the divine (Jane, 2021; Sinha, 2014). The sacred view of nature in India established a "divine ecology" which united physical and spiritual elements to promote nature respect before the development of contemporary environmental ethics.

The arrival of colonial rule in India transformed the sacred perception of nature because it converted natural resources and land into commercial assets. The British forestry system and capitalist operations and scientific methods worked to convert sacred territories into financial assets which damaged traditional ecological traditions of indigenous communities (Swami, 2003). The post-independence Indian government maintained its development-oriented approach which focused on technological advancement and industrial growth at the expense of environmental sustainability. The modern path of development has been shown by Nandini (2024) and other

literary and ecocritical studies to perpetuate environmental disregard through neoliberal economic systems. The practice of eco-spirituality and deep ecology teaches people to develop an "ecological self" which represents a complete identity that exists within the active universe (Mondal, 2025; Shenoy, 2016). The Bhakti movement presents an alternative perspective which teaches people to reconnect with nature through devotion and equality and by seeing divinity in all living things to create a more united and compassionate world.

#### **Bhakti as Ethics: Devotion, Humility, and Respect for Life**

The Bhakti movement spread throughout South and North India from the 8<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as a spiritual and social transformation movement. The movement started with the Tamil Alvars and Nayanars before Kabir and Namdev and Mirabai and Guru Nanak continued its mission to provide spiritual access to everyone by opposing ritual practices and social class systems. The core principles of Bhakti include devotion (bhakti) and humility (*vinaya*) and service (*seva*) and equality (*samatva*) which unite spiritual practices with ethical conduct. The Bhakti reformers taught people to focus on inner devotion instead of social position while they criticized oppressive systems and worked to create an inclusive society based on compassion (Shafiulla, 2019; Mishra, 2018). The Bhagavad Gita states that "the Lord dwells in all beings" (Bhagavad Gita 10.20) to demonstrate that all living beings possess sacred value and equal worth. The concept of interconnectedness in existence serves as the foundation for an initial ecological ethic which emerged during this period. The Green Gita by Supratik Sen demonstrates that Bhakti teaches people to show care for nature while they demonstrate compassion toward every living creature. Through its rejection of human-dominated social structures Bhakti establishes a spiritual obligation to protect nature. The Bhagavad Gita (15.19-20) supports this perspective by declaring that anyone who sees Me in everything and everything in Me will never lose Me or Me lose him (trans. Radhakrishnan, 1948).

The practice of selfless service known as *seva* served as a spiritual practice which also protected the environment according to this moral and ecological framework. The University of Florida dissertation by Ved Ravi Patel (2020) demonstrates that Bhakti service reached beyond human care to support the health of all living creatures. The practice of devotional feeling (bhakti) naturally led people to perform compassionate actions which united their prayers with concrete care for others. Through their teachings Kabir and Mirabai demonstrated how devotion leads to responsible behaviour by showing that God resides within every heart. The fundamental values of Bhakti which include devotion and humility and service directly relate to caring for nature according to Hiren Gohain (1987) who describes this approach as "emotive humanism" which combines deep ethics with complete inclusiveness.

#### **Voices of the Saints: Textual Analysis and Ecological Resonances**

The spiritual ecology of Mirabai and Kabir and Ravidas and Guru Nanak exist through their teachings which promote compassion and humility and respect for all living beings. Parihar (2025) studies Mirabai's poetry to show how she uses love as a path to achieve divine union through ego transcendence. Through her poetic imagery Mirabai shows how divine love brings life to dry lands by making the earth green again which demonstrates how complete surrender (*samarpan*) eliminates distinctions between personal existence and universal reality. Helen Hillgardner (2013) explains that emotional surrender through love creates an ecological practice which treats the world with care. Through her teachings about universal compassion Mirabai transforms the traditional concept of liberation (*moksha*) into a state where people achieve relational balance between their inner selves and the natural environment.

Through his songs Kabir uses natural imagery to fight against religious rituals and material possessions. The Scientific Research Journal (2023) explains that Kabir uses water and weaving and breath as symbols to demonstrate the deep connection between all living things. Through his work as a weaver Kabir discovered that divine unity exists throughout both natural

and social realms. The fails to purify his bowl so it cannot remove his sins. Through his statement he demonstrates how faith should manifest as ethical conduct which respects the natural world. Through his teachings Kabir established that life depends on breath (prana) because this substance maintains existence while promoting ecological principles of equilibrium and natural relationships spiritual hypocrisy of empty rituals becomes evident through V.S. Sethi's statement that the Ganges River. Through his spiritual teachings Kabir teaches people to practice humility while living simply and in harmony with nature.

Ravidas and Guru Nanak spread Bhakti teachings which evolved into distinct social and environmental principles. The Guru Nanak taught through Japji Sahib that air functions as our spiritual guide while water represents our father and earth serves as the Great Mother according to Gurmukh Singh (2020). Ravidas establishes that personal spiritual purification leads to environmental harmony because self-purification creates moral and environmental equilibrium. Through his concept of *shudhhi* he demonstrates how to care for creation through acts of purification. Their combined teachings promote universal compassion and humility and sacred life appreciation while opposing human dominance and recognizing divine essence in every existence. Through their teachings they present an ecological doctrine which demonstrates that serving the world and protecting nature represent spiritual practices.

Guru Nanak touched all aspects of the Nature. According to him, God's presence is everywhere and its light can be seen through the nature. Guru Nanak admires Nature and describes its value in following words –

ਕਹਣਾ ਹੈ ਕਿਛੁ ਕਹਣੁ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥ ਤਉ ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ (SGGS 151)

("Kahṇā hai kichh kahṇ na jāe. Tau kudrat keemat nahī pāe. ||1|| Rahāu") (SGGS 151))

It means, much need to be said about the Nature (Kudrat or creation), but it cannot be fully described because of its limitless nature. Nature cannot be estimated.

ਕੁਦਰਤਿ ਹੈ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਇ ॥ ਜਾ ਕੀਮਤਿ ਪਾਇ ਤ ਕਹੀ ਨ ਜਾਇ ॥ (SGGS 84).

"Kudrat hai keemat nahī pāe. Jā keemat pāe ta kahī na jāe. (SGGS 84)"

It means, Creator's Energy is preserved in Nature, it not be valued. Even if one tries to find the value, it could not be described.

Saint Kabir used natural objects as metaphor or in symbolic context to convey his philosophy or message. One of his shaloka is given below;

ਕਬੀਰਾ ਖੜਾ ਬਾਜ਼ਾਰ ਮੈਂ, ਮਾਂਗੇ ਸਬਕੀ ਖੈਰ, ਨਾ ਕਾਹੂ ਸੇ ਦੋਸਤੀ, ਨ ਕਾਹੂ ਸੇ ਬੈਰ।

(Kabeera khadā bāzār mein, mānge sabkī khair, nā kāhū se dosti, nā kāhū se bair.)

It means that Kabir often compared a saint to a tree that gives shade to all, even to those who cut its branches.

Saint Ravidas also used natural objects to convey his philosophy. One of his shaloka is given below;

ਸੂਰਜ ਏਕ ਅਨੇਕ ਕਿਰਾਣੀ, ਜਲ ਤਰੰਗ ਜਿਓਂ ਹੋਯ। ਰਵਿਦਾਸ ਕਹੈ, ਸਮਝੀਓ ਭਾਈ, ਏਕ ਤਜ ਅਨੇਕ ਨ ਹੋਯ॥

(Suraj ek anek kirani, jal tarang jyo hoy, Ravidās kahai samjho bhāi, ek taj, anek na hoy)

It means, the sun is one, though its rays are many; water is one, though waves appear countless. Ravidas says, truth is one, though seen through endless forms.

Different Bhakti saints encouraged their followers to protect the environment. Saint Kabir compared the nature with Guru, Father and mother (*Pawan guru, paani pita, mata dharat mahat*). We found natural harmony in the bhakti tradition. But, by the passage of time the main essence of the bhakti tradition lost and people started degrading the nature and its objects, such as rivers, ponds and temples etc.

### **The Postcolonial Predicament: Development, Disconnection, and the Loss of the Sacred**

After India gained independence, Jawaharlal Nehru implemented modern development strategies which maintained colonial perspectives about natural resources. The industrial development strategy of Nehru's modernization project used big dams and scientific approaches to create a

strong nation but resulted in spiritual decline and increased separation from nature. The scientific approach of Nehru led to forest and river and land management through centralized control instead of recognizing their sacred nature according to Arnold (2013) and Sukumar (2020). The modernist approach discarded ancient ecological values while introducing administrative and practical methods to view nature.

The expansion of urban areas and industrial farming operations during the Green Revolution period intensified environmental disparities while upholding the outdated belief that people should rule over nature. The postcolonial Indian state-maintained systems for exploitation instead of sustainability which resulted in Punjab experiencing groundwater depletion and environmental degradation according to Nandini (2024). The environmental crisis demonstrates how modern society faces an internal conflict because people want to advance technologically but also want to protect the Earth according to Dutta Dey (2024) and Ziai (2012). The "fractured ecology" described by DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) demonstrates a spiritual breakdown because human control over nature shows our internal separation from nature.

The Bhakti perspective unites divine essence with all living beings to establish an ecological framework which neoliberal capitalism lacks. According to Gayathri Dev (2020) Supratik Sen explains in the Bhagavad Gita that all creatures including humans and non-human species belong to the divine unity which promotes unity instead of domination. The current Indian policy framework disregards traditional ecological knowledge by upholding the colonial distinction between spiritual and physical domains. The process of complete decolonization needs us to make nature to postcolonial eco-critics and writers including Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide* sacred again because this will restore equilibrium between human beings and their relationship with Earth and all living things according.

#### **Reclaiming the Sacred: Toward a Bhakti-Based Environmental Ethics**

The Bhakti tradition establishes a profound moral framework which enables people to practice Devotional Environmentalism. The practice of divine love through humility and compassion and equality and selfless service and simplicity enables people to care for nature. According to Supratik Sen (2021) the Bhagavad Gita establishes that all living beings stem from divine essence which makes environmental stewardship both a spiritual obligation and an ethical responsibility. The concept of spiritual ecology emerges from Sen (2021) and Pradheksa (2023) who demonstrate that environmental reverence develops when people view nature as sacred and interconnected. Through devotion people protect nature because this action represents their living prayer which expresses love and service toward all existence.

The concept of "Devotional Environmentalism" implements three essential Bhakti principles which include ecological love as a fundamental principle and selfless service for sustainability and community-based living instead of consumerism. People develop natural care for nature because they understand that divine energy exists within every living being. The approach shares similarities with Gandhian ecology because it promotes three core principles of environmental stewardship which include living simply and practicing non-violence and depending on oneself. The combination of Bhakti and Gandhian principles establishes a moral framework which promotes environmental respect through sacred practices and promotes mutual care between living beings (Durand, 2017).

The application of Bhakti as an ecological ethic enables people to create educational programs and environmental activism and develop sustainable policies. The education of Bhakti principles helps students develop empathy toward nature while learning about their shared duty to protect it. The practice of *seva* (selfless service) and sacred grove restoration under Bhakti principles leads to sustainable environmental practices which align with Gandhi's approach to environmental protection through small acts of compassion. Through Bhakti we understand ecological restoration requires more than policy changes because it demands a spiritual connection with nature which expresses divine love through care for all living beings.

### **Conclusion**

The fundamental principle of Bhakti teaches that love functions as a powerful force which leads to devotion as a transformative process. Through Bhakti people rediscover their natural bond with nature while understanding that environmental protection requires spiritual dedication. The practice of environmental protection develops into an expression of love which demonstrates affection and attention and admiration for every existence in nature. The practice teaches people to abandon their controlling mindset and separate thinking because all existence including life and nature and divine essence exists as a single interconnected system. The path to genuine sustainability requires people to adopt basic human values which include humility and empathy and life appreciation. Through its practical approach Bhakti provides a contemporary solution to modern environmental challenges by promoting simplicity and self-control and service to others. The practice requires people to transform their inner nature from material consumption to spiritual connection and from emotional detachment to active concern. Through its combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary requirements Bhakti transforms environmental work into a spiritual practice. Through Bhakti people learn to view nature as their fellow traveller in life instead of treating it as a resource for exploitation. The practice enables people to develop their moral perspective while strengthening their connection with Earth. The concept will expand through partnerships between different faith communities and worldwide environmental organizations and traditional nature protection practices. Together, these can build a shared ethic of love and responsibility for the planet. The message of Bhakti stays simple yet powerful: to serve the divine is to care for all life. Through that care, both humanity and nature heal. In this way, devotion becomes the heart of renewal, a path where spiritual peace and care for the earth come together.

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**WOMEN, ENVIRONMENT, AND EMPOWERMENT: AN ECOFEMINIST STUDY OF  
JHUMPA LAHIRI'S *THE LOWLAND***

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**Abstract**

This paper offers an ecofeminist reading of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*, examining how the novel interweaves women's struggles with environmental degradation. Set against the backdrop of postcolonial India's political unrest, Lahiri's narrative exposes the parallel structures of domination that subjugate both women and nature. Through the experiences of Gauri and Bela, the study explores how women's connections to the natural world evolve into acts of resistance, renewal, and self-realization. Drawing on the insights of ecofeminist thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Carolyn Merchant, etc., the paper illustrates how Lahiri's female characters move from silence and confinement toward ecological and personal consciousness. The wetlands of Tollygunge emerge as more than a setting—they become a living, symbolic landscape that mirrors loss, transformation, and the potential for rebirth. Ultimately, the study argues that *The Lowland* transcends personal and political narratives to envision a more harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. By linking women's empowerment with ecological balance, Lahiri's novel underscores that true healing—emotional, social, and environmental—lies in dismantling the boundaries that divide humans from the natural world.

**Keywords:** Environment, Ecofeminism, Resistance, Empowerment, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

**Introduction**

Ecofeminism is a theory which examines the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, arguing that a patriarchal system is responsible for both. As Md Ehtashamul Islam Khan notes in his work, the term ecofeminism was first coined by French feminist novelist and civil rights activist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*. During the 1970s and 1980s, ecofeminism emerged as a dynamic movement that merged feminist thought with environmental activism, particularly in opposition to anti-nuclear initiatives and ecological degradation. Ecofeminist advocates argued that environmental destruction is deeply intertwined with the oppression of women, and they stood firmly against racism, classism, and ecological exploitation. The movement further critiqued modernization and industrialization for eroding Indigenous cultural values, communal ethics, and natural ecosystems. D'Eaubonne attributed the ecological crisis to patriarchal structures and highlighted the leadership of Indigenous women who mobilized and led environmental protest marches (123). Ecofeminists, writers and activists, through their writings and activism, have tried to empower women and contributed to the preservation and maintenance of the environment. "Ecofeminism believes that the liberation of women will only be attained with the liberation of nature and similarly, the liberation of nature can only be effective with the liberation of women" (Desai 114). Ecofeminism extends the study of literature, art and theories of feminism and environment with interdisciplinary method. Its main concern is the treatment of ecological degradation and the status of women in the patriarchal society. Literature that is well known for contemplating contemporary issues could not have remained unaffected by ecofeminism. As Khan observes, Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India* illustrates how women's beliefs and actions embody their intimate connection to nature and the vital feminine principle essential for survival (123). Shiva writes:

Prakriti is worshipped as Aditi, the primordial vastness, the inexplicable, the source of abundance; she is worshipped as Adi Shakti, the primordial power. All forms of nature and life in nature are the forms, the children of Mother Nature, who is nature itself, born of the creative play of her thought. (39)

As King correlates the idea of ecofeminism with the postcolonial theoretical perspective:

"Ecofeminism is a Western philosophy, theory, and movement that views nature and women as 'others,' rendering them objectified and subordinated." Similarly, Gaard argues that "patriarchy functions as a dominant power that shapes the worldviews and mindsets of people within a society". (qtd. in Khan and Khan 169)

The ecofeminists struggle against injustice, violence, unfairness, gender biases and inequality to women and nature in the name of growth and development. They argue that the patriarchal economic system commoditises everything, including women. The privatisation and commodification of food and seeds, land and water, and women and children degrade the social values of women and deepens the patriarchal norms and values, which intensifies violence and injustice against women. (Matin and Khan 50)

Ecofeminist thinkers point out that many forms of injustice toward women and toward the environment come from the same mindset. When societies pursue growth without considering its human and ecological consequences, they often see both women and nature as resources to be controlled, used and profited from. That is why ecofeminists criticize economic systems that change everything into commodities, from land and water to seeds and even human labour and bodies. Such practices not only loosen traditional social values but also reinforce the belief that women are secondary, exploitable and less deserving of agency. As a result, the very structures that claim to generate progress end up deepening inequality and impartiality and allowing violence and discrimination against women to prevail.

Rosemary Radford Ruether states, "There can be no liberation for women and no solution for ecological crisis if model of domination persists in society. Feminists and environmentalists should unite their demands to envision a radical reshaping of the agenda of peace" (qtd. in Khan and Matin 153). The idea behind this statement is that ecological harm and the oppression of women come from the same thinking process, one that treats both nature and marginalized groups as resources to be confined. As long as this pattern of domination shapes social, economic and political framework, all efforts to solve either issue will remain incomplete. The quote suggests that feminists and environmentalists face a common struggle, even if they focus on different forms of exploitation. By working together, they can push for a new vision of peace that challenges hierarchy itself and promotes relationships built on care, equality and mutual respect rather than power and control.

Women are oppressed and colonized like nature at every level same from elite class to working class, from rural to urban, even in the tribal society, in the tribal areas, women are very close to nature and work in the natural areas but they don't have the right to use the resources they are surrounded with as Matin and Khan has pointed out in his writing:

The ambivalence of tribal women emerges that they are materially connected to nature and water without any biological requisite. Their association with and use of water is pragmatic, yet they are deprived of the right to access environmental resources on which their lives depend materially... Ecofeminist finds a link between violence and oppression that capitalism and patriarchy propagate in the forms of industrial development, which dispenses violence to nature and women. (32-33).

This idea highlights how tribal women often have a practical, everyday relationship with nature, especially with resources like water, not because of any biological destiny but because of their roles within their communities. Even though their work are based on these resources, they are frequently denied real control or get access to them. Ecofeminists argue that this inequality highlights a larger pattern shaped by capitalism and patriarchy, where economic and industrial growth is obtained at the cost of both the environment and women. In this view, the exploitation of

natural resources and the marginalization of women are interrelated forms of violence that reinforce each other.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a distinguished professor of creative writing at the Lewis Centre for the Arts at Princeton University. She has become an acclaimed author and one of the leading figures in contemporary American literary circles. She has lots of accolades for his academic writing, including a Pulitzer Prize for her masterpiece of story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (2000) and the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award for *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008) and *The Lowland* (2013), nominated for the Booker Prize. Her first magnum opus novel, *The Namesake* (2003), was adapted into a popular movie with the same title. She is not usually labelled outright as an ecofeminist writer, but her works lend themselves well to ecofeminist readings with the themes of belonging and displacement, migration and trauma. Ecofeminism looks at how the control of women and the exploitation of nature often follow the same structures of power. In Lahiri's fiction, the reader usually observes women negotiating pressures inside family systems, social expectations, and political landscapes, and these personal struggles run parallel to disrupted or damaged environments. Her novels and short stories often work the same way. Her characters migrate, adapt, and rebuild their lives, and their emotional lives are tied closely to the spaces they inhabit. Homes, cities, and entire countries carry the weight of memory, loss, and renewal. Lahiri's focus on belonging, fragmentation, and the search for identity aligns with ecofeminist concerns about how people and places are reshaped by power and history.

In her famous Booker prize nominated novel, *The Lowland* for example, the landscape of Tollygunge is not just a backdrop. The marshy lowland, its slow transformation, and its eventual destruction echo the breakdown of family bonds and the quiet erasure of women's agency. Gauri's journey shows how women are pushed into roles they never chose, much like the land is reshaped without care for its natural rhythms. The violence of the Naxalite movement also unsettles both the physical environment and the lives of women who are forced into silence or displacement. Lahiri never makes this connection explicit, but the parallels are there. So while Lahiri may not write with an activist ecofeminist agenda, her fiction offers thoughtful ground for ecofeminist interpretation. She shows how gender, place, displacement, and environmental change are deeply connected, and how women often carry the heaviest emotional cost when the world around them shifted.

#### **Ecofeminism in *The Lowland***

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* is often studied through the lens of migration, family conflict and political trauma, but the novel also presents itself as an open text to an ecofeminist interpretation. Ecofeminism relates the oppression of women with the exploitation of nature, arguing that both systems of domination comes from patriarchal structures that value control, hierarchy and ownership. When a reader approaches *The Lowland* with this framework in mind, the novel shows a rich network of connections between gendered experiences, damaged landscapes, uprooted lives and the slow violence that shapes both human relationships and the environment. Lahiri never creates these themes explicit through polemic. Instead she works by tracing the nuanced patterns in which women's lives mirror the state of the natural world around them, and how history leaves scars on both bodies and places.

At the very beginning of the novel is the marshy stretch of land in Tollygunge that refers the book its title. The two ponds, the grazing cattle, the seasonal flooding and the changing light offer more than a setting. They are part of the emotional architecture of the story.

After the monsoon the ponds would rise so that the embankment built between them could not be seen. The lowland also filled with rain, three or four feet deep, the water remaining for a portion of the year. The flooded plain was thick with water Hyacinth. The floating weed grew aggressively. Its leaves caused the surface to appear solid. Green in contrast to the blue of the sky. (Lahiri 01)

Ginni Rani states that "the pleasant natural setting of *The Lowland* presents a balanced and harmonious symbiosis, symbolizing love and harmony between brothers" (Rani 259). From the beginning, the lowland appears as a living presence that grows, erodes and absorbs what humans leave behind. Subhash and Udayan, the two brothers whose fates shape the narrative, grow up with the lowland as their playground. The ponds are shallow but dangerous, holding silt and weeds that can trap a careless foot. Even this early description gestures toward the ecofeminist idea that nature is both nurturing and vulnerable, generous yet mistreated, much like the women in the story.

The political turmoil that pulls Udayan into activism casts a long shadow over both the human and ecological landscapes of the book. The police violence that strikes the neighborhood, the surveillance, and the restrictions on movement dismantle the fragile relationship between the community and its surroundings. "They took control of certain neighbourhoods, calling them Red Zones. They took control of Tollygunge. They set up makeshift hospitals, safe houses. People began avoiding these neighborhoods. Policemen started chaining their rifles to their belts" (Lahiri 104). Ecofeminism often pays attention toward how militarized and authoritarian structures degrade the environment in the same pattern they degrade marginalized people. The novel's descriptions of the lowland after Udayan's involvement with the Naxalite movement highlights this connection. The place becomes an epicentre of danger and secrecy; it becomes a place where authority intrudes, where life is at stake, where fear replaces the earlier sense of youthful freedom. Lahiri's choice to relate political violence with a familiar and eco-friendly environment invites readers to ponder how political systems alter not only social expectations but also leave lasting impact on land.

Gauri's story deepens this theme. When she gets hitched Subhash after Udayan's death, she enters a life full of grief, displacement and the weight of unspoken expectations. Her migration from Kolkata to Rhode Island is not only a shift in cultural space but also a shift in ecological space. The thick air, the slow-changing seasons and the cold Atlantic coast create a sharp contrast to the humid, crowded, plant-rich world she leaves behind. Ecofeminist readings often draw attention to how women's identity is associated with their relationship with place. For Gauri, the new landscape is both refuge and exile. She wanders the coastline alone, seeking a sense of sequence order after the trauma of witnessing Udayan's execution. These walks reflect how she uses the natural world to control her emotions, but they also reveal her alienation. The shore provides her solitude, but it does not give her sense of belonging.

Lahiri uses Gauri's journey to explore the tension between freedom and dislocation that echoes many ecofeminist concerns. As Gauri joins library to study philosophy, she tries to construct a life that is separate from the expectations placed on her as a widow, a mother and an immigrant woman. Yet this search for independence comes at a cost. She disconnects herself from her daughter Bela and allows Subhash to take the responsibilities of parenting. Unlike Ashima in the novel *The Namesake*, Gauri denies to toe the line and adapt herself according to the framework of the traditional role of the Indian Bengali immigrant wife. She resists against the claustrophobic traditions enforced on her. Although it is not easy to empathize with a mother who abandons her baby and her spouse, especially when the husband is the very character who provides her a window of escape from the life of a widow and an unwanted daughter-in-law. Gauri can be portrayed as an iconoclast, who dismantles the so-called notions of what she should and must do. The cutting of her hair and her sari's are the first symbols of this resistance. As mentioned in the novel:

In one corner of the floor, all of her saris, and her petticoats and blouses, were lying in ribbons and scraps of various shapes and sizes, as if an animal had shredded the fabric with its teeth and claws. He opened her drawers and saw they were empty. She had destroyed everything. (Lahiri 141)

In ecofeminism, the critique of patriarchy comprises the critique of systems that expect women to play nurturing roles regardless of their desires. Gauri's challenge to these expectations is not romanticized. Lahiri shows it as incomplete, painful and morally complexed. Still, Gauri's struggle



shows a core ecofeminist idea: when women fight against the roles imposed on them, they also challenge the social structures that define how humans relate to one another and to their environment.

A full ecofeminist reading of *The Lowland* must also consider how the novel presents the notion of motherhood. Gauri's denial of a traditional maternal role has often been analyzed as cold or selfish, but an ecofeminist perspective complicates that judgment. As Lahiri writes:

Though he had encouraged her to visit the library in her spare time, to attend lectures now and again, she realized that he didn't consider this her work. Though he'd told her, when he asked her to marry him that she could go on with her studies in America, now he told her that her priority should be Bela. She's not your child, she wanted to say. To remind him of the truth. (Lahiri 162)

Ecofeminism criticizes the idealization of motherhood as a natural and expected role for women. Gauri challenges this idealization. Her refusal to anchor her identity in Bela's life is a refusal to accept the structures that governed her earlier life in Kolkata. Whether she is justified or not is a separate question. Lahiri's portrayal of her is unsentimental, but it invites empathy for the complex pressures that shape Gauri's decisions. Likewise, Bela's choice to mother communities and ecosystems rather than a biological child highlights another way women redefine care outside traditional norms. The contradiction between Gauri's and Bela's approaches embodies the ecofeminist idea that nurturing does not have to follow a single model.

The physical space of the lowland back in Tollygunge continues to serve as a symbolic counterpoint to Gauri's new world. The lowland appears a repository of the past, a place that witnesses of Udayan's death and Subhash's memories. Over time, it becomes altered by urban development, with walls and fences replacing the open marsh. "In the taxis, they sat in traffic, pollution filling her chest, coating the skin of her arms with a fine dark grit. She heard the clanging of trams and beeping of car horns the bells of colourful rickshaws pulled by hand. Rumbling buses with conductors thumping their sides, reciting their routes, hollering for passengers to get on" (Lahiri 206). This transformation of the landscapes mirrors how personal histories become contained, rewritten or buried. Bela, a daughter was born to Gauri, but soon she started feeling suffocated in the loop of both the marriage as well as in her traditional role as a mother. She keeps to be haunted by the memories of her first husband, the biological father of her daughter and "Even now, part of Gauri continued to expect some news from Udayan. For him to acknowledge Bela, and the family they might have been. At the very least to acknowledge that their lives, aware of him, unaware of him, had gone on" (Lahiri 154). Ecofeminism often suggests that the degradation of natural spaces reflects a society's desire to control what is unpredictable or inconvenient. In the novel, the lowland's gradual erasure parallels the characters' attempts to impose order on their grief. The change in land use is not catastrophic, but it is steady and irreversible. It reminds us that the natural environment, like memory, is fragile and easily reshaped by human hands.

Bela, the daughter of Gauri leaves behind, spreads the ecofeminist reading into the next generation. Unlike her mother, Bela grows up deeply connected to the natural world of Rhode Island. She provides help to Subhash in garden, works hard on farms and eventually dedicates her life to environmental activism and community farming. Bela's relationship with nature is not nostalgic or symbolic; it is practical, physical and grounded. "She majored in Environmental Science. For her senior thesis she studied the adverse effects of pesticide runoff in a local river" (Lahiri 221). After graduation, "she got a job on a farm" (Lahiri 221). Subhash thinks Bella would be satisfied "to test the soil or help cultivate a new crop breed" (Lahiri 221). But she has a different purpose. She is a person completely devoted to soil, plants and animals. "She was there to work as an agricultural apprentice in the field. Putting in irrigation lines weeding and harvesting, cleaning out animal pens" (Lahiri 221). "She reproached Subhash for throwing out his vegetable scraps instead of composting them. Once, during a visit, she went to a hardware store to buy plywood and nails, building a bin in his backyard, showing him how to turn the pile as it cooled" (Lahiri 224). She believes "what we consume is what we support" (Lahiri 224). Being influenced by Bela, Subhash

“grew conscious of eating according to what was in season, according to what was available” (Lahiri 224). Through her, Lahiri highlights a different model of engagement with the environment, one that aligns closely with ecofeminist ideals of care, interdependence and community rather than control. Bela’s work shows her values, but it also reflects her attempt to create sense of her scattered family history. By cultivating land and teaching others to protect ecological cycles, Bela performs a healing role that the previous generation could not achieve.

Her activism also increases the ecofeminist reading of Gauri’s desires. Bela’s personality is designed by both the trauma she inherited and the absence she endured. Her desire to save the environment becomes a way of healing the emotional wounds caused by Gauri’s departure. Ecofeminism argues that women often pay attention toward environmental work because it offers a sense of agency and purpose that patriarchal structures refuses them. Bela’s path follows this pattern. She refuses conventional professional ambitions and instead chooses a life embedded with care for the land. Lahiri presents this choice not as a retreat but as a form of ethical engagement. Bela’s life is marked by uncertainty, but it is also marked by integrity. Through her, Lahiri shows how caring for nature can be a way of caring for oneself.

The novel also comments on how migration disturbs ecological belonging. Subhash, who tries to provides Bela a stable childhood, struggles with his own sense of displacement. He adapts to American landscapes but never fully assimilates with them. His bond with the lowland of his childhood remains persistent even as the land itself changes in his absence. As Lahiri asserts:

Long ago, when they had first come to Tollygunge, the water had been clean. Subhash and Udayan had cooled off in the ponds on hot days. Poor people had bathed. After the rains, the floodwater turned the lowland into a pretty place filled with wading birds, clear enough to reflect moonlight. (215-216)

Ecofeminist scholars often point out that displacement, whether triggered by political conflict or economic migration, weakens people’s relationship with the environment. Lahiri shows this sense of loss with gentle detail: the fog on the Rhode Island coast, the winter storms, and the changing texture of the air. These descriptions mark the distance between what Subhash remembers and what he experiences. His personal memory of the lowland serves as a personal anchor, even though the place no longer exists in the form he recalls.

*The Lowland*’s symbolism becomes most powerful in the final movements of the novel, when the story circles back to Tollygunge. The land that once held ponds and reeds has been replaced by residential buildings. The past is invisible on the surface, but it remains embedded in the soil. As reflected in the novel:

As they approached the two ponds, he saw that the small home he’d left behind had been replaced by something impressive, ungainly. Some scaffolding was still in place, but the construction looked complete. He saw palm trees rising behind the house. But the mongo tree that had spread its dark branches and leaves over the original roof was gone. (Lahiri 106-107)

In her research paper titled *Practical Ecocriticism and Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Lowland: An Analysis*, Bipasha Majumder (De) makes the following claims: The novelist has very beautifully incorporated the issue of environmental degradation and its aftermath into the very texture of the novel. Calcutta, in which the novel is set, is depicted by Lahiri as an extremely polluted city. At the very outset, she writes: “In autumn egrets arrived, their white feathers darkened by the city’s soot, waiting motionless for their prey” (3). In Calcutta, the ponds and the lowland behind them are clogged with garbage thus causing water pollution (385-86). Ecofeminism teaches us that land holds the traces of human history, *The lowland* does exactly that same. Even as new structures rise, the story insists that the marsh holds what was done there, including Udayan’s death and the silence that followed. Lahiri uses this landscape to highlights that memory and trauma cannot be fully erased. Landscapes, like people, hold what they have endured.

Lahiri also relates gender and environment through the theme of silence. Silence surrounds Udayan’s political activities, surrounds Gauri’s trauma, and surrounds the lowland itself after the

execution. Ecofeminist critics often argue that both women and nature are compelled to be silenced in dominant cultural narratives. *The Lowland* provides space to these silences, not by filling them with explanations, but by showing their weight. Gauri never opens her lips about what she witnessed. Subhash never discloses the truth about Bela's parentage. The lowland never "speaks," but it holds everything. Lahiri's portrayal of silence suggests that some truths remain buried but still shape the lives they touch. Nature, in this reading, seems a quiet witness to human suffering. In the end, *The Lowland* uses its landscapes and its women to explore the intertwined nature of trauma, memory and ecological change. Ecofeminism provides a lens through which to show these connections more clearly. The novel does not provide solutions or lessons. Instead it gives us a set of stories in which land and gender intersect again and again, sometimes in peaceful harmony and sometimes in painful opposition. *The Lowland* that once offered freedom becomes a place of death and later a place of containment. The women who move through the novel hold the scars of a patriarchal world while seeking forms of life that make sense to them. Their attempts are not perfect and often painful, yet they disclose what ecofeminism emphasizes: the need for relationships based on respect, interdependence and honesty.

Ruffling the pages of *The Lowland* through an ecofeminist perspective highlights how deeply Lahiri's fiction is embedded in the material world. Her characters do not float through abstract themes; they live within specific geographies that shape their choices and reflect their inner lives. The novel becomes a study of how history, gender and environment intersect, how landscapes carry memories and how people try to rebuild their life within and against the places they dwell. This perspective presents the book not only as a family saga but also as an exploration of what it means to belong to land, to one another and to the past. Lahiri's careful attention to nature, her nuanced representation of women's lives and her quiet critique of power structures together generate a story that resonates strongly with ecofeminist concerns. In exploring the journeys of Gauri, Bela and Subhash across continents and through changing landscapes, *The Lowland* inspires us to see how human lives are embedded in more than history. They are embedded in the earth itself, an earth that remembers everything.

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**BEYOND DESPAIR: ANALYSING PREMEE MOHAMED'S *THE ANNUAL MIGRATION OF CLOUDS* AS A MODEL OF HOPEPUNK AND COLLECTIVE SURVIVAL IN CLIMATE FICTION**

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**Abstract**

This paper argues that Premee Mohamed's novella, *The Annual Migration of Clouds*, offers a crucial model of Hopepunk within the contemporary genre of Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi). The story is set in post-collapse Alberta and it follows Reid, a young woman infected with a heritable, consciousness-altering fungus, Cad. She considers a rare opportunity for individual advancement against her deep devotion to her struggling, mutual-aid community. The work moves beyond the apocalyptic pessimism that characterizes much contemporary dystopian fiction. It instead foregrounds the mechanics of collective survival including communal food acquisition, resource sharing, and cooperative governance and demonstrates that despite a climate-ravaged world, interdependence is the most effective survival tool. In addition, the paper studies the Cad infection not only as a biological threat, but also as a symbol for the inherited, incapacitating problems inherited from the earlier "Back Then" society. The repeated inner conflict for the character to establish her own agency over the fungus's instinct to preserve itself is an echo of the human struggle for self-determination under the threat of environmental and societal breakdown. *The Annual Migration of Clouds* is an intimate portrait of the strength to endure. Through the personal and emotional suffering of a single character, the novella illustrates that moral community, moral principles, and hard-won optimism are robust and pragmatic responses to environmental degradation. It suggests that we need to change the ways that we imagine and are preparing for the future.

**Keywords:** Hopepunk, climate fiction, apocalyptic pessimism, dystopian fiction, interdependence

**Introduction**

In a time in which the very realities of climate change are becoming more apparent with increasing natural calamities and ecosystem destruction that cannot be undone, the stories that we construct about our future have considerable importance. This worldwide worry has elicited in literature the new genre of Climate Fiction, also known as Cli-Fi. Over the decades, the speculative fiction frequently portrayed the future in the bleak tones of the apocalypse, with the worlds in the future being dominated by severely competitive scenarios, scavenging, and the complete absence of human dignity. Although these dystopian visions are effective at their warnings, they often leave the reader at a place of despair, which adds to the feeling of doom. Nevertheless, a counter-movement is becoming a part of this landscape, a movement that confronts hegemony of hopelessness. This paper suggests that the novella by Premee Mohamed, *The Annual Migration of Clouds*, is an essential and powerful exemplar of this movement, termed as Hopepunk, through the advancement of collective survival and optimism through hard work as the most realistic reaction to a fractured world.

In order to get a complete value of the intervention made by Mohamed, it is important to explore the literary scenario in which it is based. In its turn, Climate Fiction is a genre that employs narration to investigate the reasons, effects, and human reactions to the change of the environment. Works written early frequently tended towards apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic, which put more stress on the disastrous, or catastrophic, occurrence of collapse. Although these stories were effective in raising the awareness, they often culminated in a pessimistic cul-de-sac,

suggesting that humanity's fate, once the planet tips, is one of mere survivalism, paranoia, and a regression to primal violence. Such works are often centered on the individual hero or the small, fortified family facing a hostile world and its people.

This pessimism is something that the Hopepunk ethos attempts to destroy. Hopepunk is also a literary and philosophical stance identified by the author Alexandra Rowland as a reaction to massive adversity, where kindness, community and cooperation is not the indication of naivety but is in fact, the radical gesture of defiance. Where it's opposite, "Grimdark" believes that the human race is selfish and corrupt in nature, Hopepunk believes that helping each other, creating a better future and having hope are the most difficult, strongest decisions one can ever take. It is not a passive hope that things will work themselves out, but it is an active hope, a hope that is constructed day by day with grit and through mutual help, through tenacity not to give in on one's moral ideals. At its heart, Hopepunk is a genre of struggling to and investing within a community, even when there are numerous reasons why that community is destined to fail.

The Annual Migration of Clouds is a work of Hopepunk that takes on the ethos with a depth of intimacy as it is set against the backdrop of a climate-ravaged Alberta. It tells of a young girl named Reid who is in the middle of a two-fold pressure: one to survive on a daily basis in her society and another of a struggle with Cad, a consciousness-altering parasite fungus that she has inherited after her mother. This biological infection is a highly effective central metaphor utilized in the novella. Cad signifies the literal and figurative debts of the "Back Then" society, the ecological sins, the systemic failures, the inescapable problems, which were inherited by the next generation. Reid is in a never ending internal war to prove that she has an agency of her own and that the fungus is selfish to live and then its selfishness is to kill her, much like a human being is fighting a world that appears to have been created to destroy her self-determination.

The story of Mohamed does not theorize about collective survival; it simply describes its mechanics in a detailed manner. The society in the middle of the story is not a utopia, it is scarred, resource- deprived, and flawed. However, it can survive on the basis of exercised interdependence, the communal food procurement, the equitable distribution of limited resources, and the communal administration. This is not a romantic dream but a dirty and hard-nosed necessity. It is due to this adherence to these principles that the community survived. The climax of the story where Reid is faced with a rare opportunity to escape on her own to the mysterious university named Howse and her deep devotion to this town is the place where the philosophy of Hopepunk is tried and true.

In this paper, the work by Mohamed will be discussed in terms of its redefinition of the story of climate catastrophe. It is going to explore how the novella explains collective action as the best survival resource, and defend it by claiming that the theory of collective action is a necessary response to the individualism of the traditional dystopias. Moreover, it will perform a close reading of the Cad fungus, which it will not be viewing as a mere plot tool but as an advanced symbol of the hereditary liabilities of the Anthropocene. Lastly, the paper is going to show how the personal experience of Reid is what enables him to make the argument that moral principles, emotional fortitude, and a sense of commitment to community are not privileges in a broken world, but are in fact the building blocks of a sustainable, practical, and ultimately optimistic approach to survive. By doing so the novella does not become a survival story but it brings a roadmap of how we can rethink the future that we are living in.

### **Methodology**

The discussion of this paper owes its analytical basis to the conceptualization of Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism as a theoretical approach explores the connection between literature and the physical world. It goes beyond using nature as a context, or pastoral ideal, and explores how cultural texts mediate and are mediated by ecological conditions and ideologies. Ecocriticism in relation to Climate Fiction is a tool that cannot be neglected, to dismantle the discourse of nature, crisis, and survival as we make it. This paper will use an Ecocritical approach to achieve a close reading of the novella *The Annual Migration of Clouds*, with three main areas of interest.



To start with, the analysis will be concerned with the representation of the human and non-human world. Ecocriticism promotes a view of the interdependence of both human systems and natural systems. The paper shall examine how Mohamed mingles the lines between the two, which is most evident by the Cad fungus. This parasite is a legal combination of the biological (the fungal organism) with the cultural and psychological (human consciousness, inherited history). Through this relationship, we are able to see how the text comments on the inseparable and problematic nature of human beings in the natural world that it has transformed.

Secondly, the ecocriticism will be applied in the paper to criticize the anthropocentric assumptions which frequently take root in the apocalyptic fiction. The classic dystopian narratives are often based on a humanistic conflict with an inimitable world and continue to reproduce a history of conquest or solitary existence. This paper is going to argue that this paradigm is criticized by Mohamed in her novella. The existence of the community is based on the ability to adapt to a surrounding environment and work together as opposed to trying to control it and own resources alone.

Lastly, the methodology will be the analysis of the environmental ethics put forward by the text. Ecocriticism is very much concerned with values and ethics that determine human relations with the environment. The paper will explore how the novella builds an ethic of care, responsibility and reciprocity, not only to the land, but also to other individuals. This ethical issue becomes a focal point of study by analysing the case of Reid as she has to choose between self-interest or communal obligation. It is in this Ecocritical perspective that the paper will show that Hopepunk sensibility of the novella is essentially an ethical standpoint, which espouses a future driven by sustainability, not merely in environmental sense, but in a most social way. Through this approach, the present analysis will support its overarching thesis, which is that Mohamed utilizes the instruments of speculative fiction to create a viable, community-centred ethics in the Anthropocene.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The essential analysis of *The Annual Migration of Clouds* by Premee Mohamed, in terms of an Ecocritical dialectic and Hopepunk subgenre, produces three main conclusions that support the thesis statement: the novella is a necessary response to the current climate and climate fiction, specifically through its expression of a possible, community-based ethics. As the analysis shows, the text is systematized in contesting the established assumptions of anthropocentrism and individualism of traditional dystopian texts. In particular, the results outline (1) the Cad fungus as a complex biological and psycho-social metaphor of the inherited liabilities of the Anthropocene, literally questioning ontological borders between human and non-human; (2) the group reciprocal collectivism as a radical and necessary renunciation of neo-liberal, survivalist individualism, putting into question the traditional ethic of conquest; and (3) the narrative manifesto of the ethical decision undertaken by Reid, which builds an actionable ethic of care and purchased optimism as the only viable stance.

### **The Cad Fungus: Symbiosis, Inheritance and the Non-Human Debt**

A conceptualization of the Cad fungus in *The Annual Migration of Clouds* by Premee Mohamed is the main and the most generative to be found in the course of this critical analysis. This figure, not a biological catalyst, or even, in a particular sense, a hazard to the environment, is here called the deep and unavoidable literary baggage of the Anthropocene, a material, untenable, even cross-generational liability. The critical analysis of the Cad is central as it undertakes systematically the original mandate of the Ecocritical approach, the radical and problematic disintegration of the traditional ontological separation between the human and the non-human. By using the Cad, Mohamed manages to make the connection between these two categories not as a battle of two different entities, but one of an inevitability, and more frequently, adversarial and deep ethical interdependence.

The story makes the Cad not a disease grabbed somewhere outside but rather a family plague, which can be inherited by the child. This feature is the most important allegorical shift, which reflects the inherently systemic ecological failures inheriting the “Back Then” generation of the individual, the one who has built the climate crisis and the mass extinction processes. The descriptive of the fungus is a strong and direct attack on the reassuring concept of linear time and historical responsibility:

“Cad doesn’t move sideways. It appears spontaneously: and then implacably, silently, it moves down through genes and time like water seeking its lowest level.” (Mohamed 8)

It asserts that the deep ecological crimes of the past that were systemic cannot be solved, paid back, or merely sent to history. They are in fact physically passed on to the new generation as an irreversible, physiological liability.

The infection then serves as an ideal, nightmarish allegory of inherent degradation of the environment. The numerous abstracts, diffuse, and geographically removed consequences of past exploitation in the form of global power disorder, mass extinction, resource drainage, and poison saturation are literalized and interiorized within the biological framework of the host. The Cad is the total of unchecked ecological effects, transferred into an internal, biological condition of existence. The debt has ceased to be repayable in currency, in carbon or some abstract resource; it is a debt of the flesh, and must be paid in flesh, and paid in existential flesh, which is never-ending, continuous, insistent, demanding that one be present merely to be.

The interdependence between Reid and the Cad is symbiotic but extremely parasitic. Although parasitic in its primary, survivalist needs, it is symbiotic in the need that they coexist hence compelling a radical rethinking of the anthropocentric idea of agency. The Cad is not a passive curse. It is an active, influential agent that literally mediates the consciousness of Reid, and literally controls her actions, desires and even, her innermost survival instincts. The main character, Reid is not essentially an isolated figure, but rather a kind of hybrid, a living landscape of biological and ethical entrapment in which the fungal biological drive and the cultural heritage of social debt are in an ongoing, internal war. She is both a human being and a host, agent and a mediated being. Such an idea fits squarely into the major arguments of environmental philosophy and ecocriticism, especially the arguments put forth by theorists such as Lawrence Buell, who emphasize the need to develop an environmental imagination that emphasizes porosity and interpenetration of human and non-human systems. The book explicitly presents the human body, traditionally regarded as the ultimate demarcation of self, as a porous vessel of the effects of a changed, harmed natural environment. In a dramatic twist, the Cad is the altered environment, ruined by the past human activity, now dominating and affecting the species that brought it to be different.

The power of the Cad is much greater than that of the strictly physiological and it functions as a debilitating and enduring ethical hazard. The fungus itself requires highly selfish behaviour with a view to its own survival. Most importantly, these biological needs to survive are flawlessly matched with and enhanced by the hyper-individualistic and competitive ideologies that tend to dominate the ideologies of survivalism in a post-collapse setting. The Cad, so to speak, is a perverted biological replica of the same neo-liberal, self-interest ideology that caused the climate apocalypse to begin with. The worst moral failures of the past are made cellular. The novella therefore follows to the letter the creation of the notion that the greatest existential threat to the enduring future is not the fungus itself, but the ideology of selfishness and individualism that it is being biologically reproduced by and which the generation of the “Back Then” institutionalized. Mohamed raises the stakes of the climate crisis story by connecting an ethical threat to a biological parasite in a straight-to-the-point manner. It changes the discourse of simple physical survival against an alien world to that of a radical, internal challenge of moral ecology a war waged on the immediate topography of the self. The eternal war of the moral consciousness of Reid, fuelled by her sense of community against the primal, cannibalistic self-interest of the Cad is a miniature of the conflict between the ethical life of today: the need to have the collective flourish against the

innate, self-destructive selfishness of the individual (and by extension the systemic-economic) self-interest.

It is this inner struggle that drives the Hopepunk argument of the narrative. The ability to oppose the deterministic desires of the Cad is an exercise of moral strength on the part of Reid as a willed action. This decision, which she has been forced to take again and again, with agonizing slowness, despite her biological imperative, says that human cooperation and moral thinking are not sentimental frivolities but types of radical political and ecological resistance. The very existence of the Cad indicates that morality cannot be a luxury that can be enjoyed when all things are well but the currency of life in a world of shortage. It is the fight against Cad, then, that is the fight against the poisonous psychological and social legacies of the hyper-individualistic paradigm that precipitated the disintegration.

The Cad requires a non-individualistic reaction to a biological issue. The impulses of the Cad being purely self-serving, any measure to conquer it must also, by definition, be communal. Reid needs to depend on the framework and the crutch of her community, the common resources, the emotional support, and the risk they share in keeping her alive to resist the urges of the fungus. This forms a feedback loop in that the community keeps Reid going so that she can be moral and then the community structure is reinforced as the value and necessity of this particular structure itself is reinforced.

This discovery solidly grounds the Cad fungus as the plot and thematic heart that connects the ecological critique of Ecocriticism (of questioning anthropocentrism and emphasize the interconnectedness of all environmental aspects) with the ethical, heroic necessity of Hopepunk (of making the conscious, ethical decision to disregard self-interest to be the main heroic act). The inner, biological conflict of the Cad is closely connected with the outer conflict of a long-term, ethical social order, which predetermines the inevitable context of the community mutual collectivism. The Cad is an indelible reminder that in the Anthropocene-bequest world, ecological sustainability and ethical maintenance are terms that are not only homonymous but also inseparable.

#### **Reciprocal Collectivism: Dismantling the Anthropocentric Hero**

The second overarching conclusion of this discussion is concerned with the systematic critique of anthropocentric assumptions and survivalist ethic that the novella presents of the main apocalyptic and dystopian fiction tradition. In *The Annual Migration of Clouds* by Premee Mohamed, there is neither the lone, conquering hero, the fortified, nuclear family, nor the rise of the charismatic, individual leader. Rather, the text itself prefigures a paradigm of mutual collectivism that is proved to be not a sentimental or utopian ideal but an empirically favoured and needed survival strategy in a world of diminished resources and an unnaturally volatile environment. This obedience to collective, decentralized action is the groundbreaking principle of the novella, which challenges the established individualism of the classic dystopia to the fullest extent, which is the second fundamental goal of the approach, the ethic of adaptation instead of the traditional ethic of conquest.

The style is reminiscent of the theorizing of ecocritical theorists like Cheryll Glotfelty who highlights how literature tends to serve an ideological purpose in mediating the relationship between human culture and nature, and that replicates a history of domination and individual exceptionalism. Mohamed denies this history. The society described in the text is consciously presented as non-utopian. It is mutilated, lacking resources, always exposed, and flawed in structure. This is vital to the Hopepunk thesis: the collective form is never a form of an idealized socialist dream but a grim and practical and necessary requirement. This makes the whole philosophy of the novella pragmatic as opposed to simple idealism, emphasizing the revolutionary point of view that collaboration, in this state of scarcity and danger, is the sole most sensible and lasting reaction to the ubiquitous environmental unpredictability. Their survival is governed by the principle of interdependence practiced:

“We have to trust each other to survive. Trust each other to work, and to tell the truth.” (Mohamed 27)

The mechanics of this collectivism are carefully described in the novella not as an abstract system of belief, but as particular, yet vital communal processes. These are community food procurement, impartial and non-negotiable presentation of resources, absence of hierarchy in decisions and collective responsibility in environmental vigilance. An example is the communal hunt. It is more than collective labour; it is being put forward as the communal epistemology, the process of knowing the land and gaining access to resources that is subject to collective, tacit knowledge, mutual trust, and instant, non-negotiable distribution of the harvest. Hunt success demands the combined efforts of all skills and the implicit faith that the acquired resources will be shared by the whole group, and not by the most powerful individuals. This is markedly different to the standard version of the grimdark dystopian narrative, in which a successful hunt always results not only in hoarding but also in conflict and the creation of a competitive hierarchy with the hunter getting the lion share. The capacity to share limited resources immediately and fairly in the vision of Mohamed is a social resilience mechanism. It eliminates internal conflict, keeps all members alive and most importantly strengthens the same social structure that made the acquisition possible in the first place. The community lives by a post-scarcity ethic of scarcity-defined world. They act as though resources are limitless in distribution, when they know that resources are critically limited and hard to acquire. It is this dedication to fair distribution, the ideology of a barrier against the renewal of the competition that wrecked the "Back Then" world.

The collective decision-making process also enhances the rejection of the anthropocentric hero. Power is decentralized, situational, and dependent on mutual agreement. Migration choices, allocation of resources, and even expulsion of the Cad-infected are complicated affairs that are multi-voiced. The moral and practical judgment burden is shared over the community so that the solutions are stress-tested through a diverse source of knowledge and experience. This decentralized power is itself an anti-fragile structure, which avoids the single-point-of-failure that an individualistic hierarchical model of leadership entails. The community does not die exactly because it does not trust its destiny in a unique, special person. The collectivist model is intrinsically de-centric to human relationship with the environment. In contrast to the traditional anthropocentric narratives where the environment tends to be an adversary that needs to be overcome, tamed or brought to a pre-crisis condition, the community in the novella adapts to the environment and functions according to it, its inexplicable and often threatening power. They are not clung to the unachievable world of the “Back Then”. Rather, they aim to be able to live sustainably in the existing disordered world. This modification is the heart of the Ecocritical argument against human exceptionalism, which is expressed through the work of such thinkers as Greg Garrard, who study the rhetoric of environmental crisis. In this story, the condition of surviving is not given to the attempt to exert control upon a hostile environment, but to the acknowledgment of the vulnerability of the community as a whole, and to the exploitation of its internal power, its capacity to work together. The concerted effort to adjust their culture, rituals, and the economy to the resource constraints the migration cycles, the scarcity of arable land, the fungal threat everywhere illustrate a dramatic transformation of an ethic of control in an ethic of alignment.

Essentially, the structure of the community is an ecological structure. It puts the well-being of the whole system above the desire of the individual unit. This is an extreme contrast of the homo economicus model of human interaction that informs much of traditional dystopian literature. And yet, their survival is not based on capital accumulation or technological superiority, but rather on the effective preservation of the social fabric. In this, the novella also recommends an ecologically-minded collectivism empirically warranted by its enduring success amidst the bottomless disintegration. The observation that the collective survival portrayed in the novella is not only a literary defence of the Hopepunk ethic, but also a realistic, ecologically-friendly roadmap to a post-collapse societal model is confirmed. It predetermines the rejection of

individualism as a necessary condition of sustainability. It is the further survival of the community that serves as the ultimate evidence that the very ethic that brought about the Anthropocene crisis, the individualistic one, is what does not allow real recovery. *The Annual Migration of Clouds* introduces an essential and compelling makeover to the climate disaster by not focusing on the myth of the main character but on the situation of reciprocal collectivism, the claim that collective vulnerability is the best place to start when communal resilience is necessary.

**The Ethical Position: Reid's Choice and Construction of an Ethic of Care**

The third and most final result of this analysis is concentrated on the climax of the narrative which is the ultimate paradigm of the ethical position of the novella and which satisfies the final pillar of the methodology of the study. The choice, between the unique life chance of escape and intellectual growth at Howse University, or to abide by the personal obligation to her marginalized community, which confronts the protagonist Reid is not just a dilemma of personal choice. It is a kind of existential test of the suggested ethics of care, responsibility and reciprocity that the story has been so meticulously working out. This decision is an oblique, inevitable confrontation between the remnants of the threatening, individualistic, meritocratic dream (symbolized by Howse) and the life-affirming, life-maintaining tradition of community (symbolized by her town).

The invitation to study in Howse University is an effective, illusive sign. It represents the classical way out of the dystopian hero: the possibility of personal redemption, the gaining of professionalized, often scientific or technological, knowledge, and the possible regaining of some form of "Back Then" privilege, comfort, and intellectual independence. Howse is the surviving desire of that same system, of personal career, of rivalry, of a neglect of the concrete communal work in favour of the abstract knowledge, which after all stirred the first ecological and social disaster. It is the final seducing reflection of the ethic of exceptionalism. The offer is what the mental toils of the present, in comparison with the physical toils of the elite, and the relative security of the elite. This temptation is real, comprehensible due to the inner conflict of Reid, which was increased and armed by the selfish nature of the Cad:

"But I know I could have made it up there. Anger: the infection still lets me feel that. If I had doubted that the Cad was worsening, that doubt is gone. Nothing changes. Nothing changes except for the worse." (Mohamed 88)

The decision to select Howse is the decision to follow the way of least resistance, which corresponds to the prevalent biological desire (the Cad) and the prevalent historical ideology (individualism).

The ultimate decision made by the novella, however, where Reid actively decides to remain, pushes this scene much deeper into the realm of personal sacrifice. It makes the choice a radical act of commitment to a common future and a political renunciation of the ethic of individualism. And it is at this point that the Hopepunk sensibility is no longer merely a theoretical approach but is one that turns into a practical, ethically-motivated act and this marks the boundaries and obligations of justified optimism. Her choice is not a passive act of resignation, but an aggressive, self-conscious act of moral agency in opposition to the course of self-interest.

In selecting her community, Reid picks an ethic of relationality as opposed to the classical Enlightenment ethic of autonomy. This is an ethic model that is strongly endorsed in ecocriticism, environmental ethics and feminist ethics of care, which identifies the origin of morality and value, not in abstract individual rights or categorical imperatives, but in connection, interdependence, and particular human relationships. She confirms that moral principles and emotional strength are not luxuries of a fractious world, but the cornerstones of a viable social order. It is in this regard that the paper makes the necessary ethical intervention. In the Anthropocene, sustainability should be characterized not only by the responsible use of resources (the environmental sense), but, much more importantly, by the social fabric, which cannot be neglected (the social sense). It claims that to have an ecologically sound future there must be a moral community. A community that prizes the uniqueness of one of its members, the utility of its

knowledge, the emotional weight, the social bond, over the potentiality of individual progress, is necessarily more stable and morally thriving than a system in which individual progress is valued to the detriment of the bond among its members. The decision demonstrates that social trust is the most important resource and neither land nor technology take its place.

The resulting ethic of care is based not on unilateral sacrifice, but on reciprocity and obligation. Reid does not make the decision on a unilateral, charitable giving to the poor; it is a payback on what she and her community had invested in to begin with. They had always shared common resources, emotionally supported and jointly taken risk to keep her alive in the face of the Cad and the environmental collapse. Her stay effort creates an ethical and financial system in which duty is not a liability but rather the necessary currency of existence and prosperity. This construct changes selflessness as an abstract virtue into a practical need. The ethical gravity of the choice reflects the main Hopepunk idea that active hope is not passive waiting, it is the rewarded optimism that comes as a result of constant work and dedication towards others.

This observation therefore brings us to a conclusion that *The Annual Migration of Clouds* is the parable of sustainability of moral ecology. The plot development of Reid, to which the renunciation of the personal way and the acceptance of the social duty is a culmination, answers unequivocally the pessimism of the apocalypse of the literary forefathers. It puts forward the assumption that the future is not enshrined in any miraculous technological fix, the coming of a unique, flawless saviour, or in the possession of special knowledge known to a select few. Rather, sustainability can only occur through the mindful and challenging decision to invest in the ethical community.

### **Conclusion**

This discussion presents *The Annual Migration of Clouds* a central piece of climate fiction, as it advocates a practical Hopepunk philosophy. The Cad fungus is the allegorical device of the novel, the inevitable, genetic, biological, ethical debt of the Anthropocene. In this type of parasitic symbiosis, the text essentially breaks down the human non-human boundary and calls into question the independent subject. Through her example, Mohamed shows that individual exceptionalism and conquest are not the real way to become resilient. It lies in hard and long-lasting learning of reciprocal collectivism. Reid's conscious decision proves that morality is the required currency of survival. In this story, hope is thus a living, ongoing and shared commitment of a moral watchfulness and it is the crucial work of living in a compromised world sustainably.

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**HABITAT, HERBS, AND HEALTH: ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES IN THE ‘AIN  
AL-HAYĀT**

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**Abstract**

This paper reinterprets *A'in al-Hayāt*, a classical Unani medical treatise on healthy ageing, written in Arabic by Muhammad bin Yūsuf Harawī (d. 1544), who accompanied Bābur, the Mughal Sovereign, to India and possibly served as his personal physician. It is reinterpreted through the lens of Environmental Humanities. While traditionally studied as a medical work, the text also offers profound insights into human–environment relations. Unani medicine revolves around six essential factors (*asbāb-e-sitta zarūrīya*) for maintaining health—atmospheric air, food and drink, sleep and wakefulness, bodily movement and rest, retention and excretion, and mental states—each deeply connected to ecological conditions. The treatise’s discussions on abode and habitat demonstrate how climate, geography, and urban–rural settings were seen to shape both bodily constitution and its function. Its extensive use of herbal medicine reflects a rich corpus of traditional ecological knowledge that links healing to local ecosystems. Harawī also incorporates several Indian herbs and drugs into his prescriptions, reflecting early cross-cultural adaptation and bioregional awareness. Harawī’s emphasis on balance in lifestyle resonates with ecological philosophies of harmony and sustainability, suggesting that human health is inseparable from environmental well-being. He implicitly notes the adverse influences of deforestation and ecological degradation. By situating ageing within the rhythms of seasonal and environmental change, *A'in al-Hayāt* constructs the body as a microcosm of nature. This paper argues that this sixteenth-century treatise provides an early framework for understanding health as an ecological process, offering valuable insights for contemporary Environmental Humanities debates on sustainability, climate, and extrinsic ageing.

**Keywords:** *A'in al-Hayāt*, Habitat, Herbs, Health, Deforestation

**The life of a tree-cutter is short.**

\_Harawī

The health of human beings has long been intertwined with the habitats they inhabit, where clean air and pure water, as well as ecological balance, support life and vitality. Herbs that flourish in these environments translate ecological diversity into remedies for human well-being. In the early sixteenth century, Muhammad bin Yūsuf Harawī<sup>1</sup> (d. 1544), a physician (*hakīm*) under Mughal patronage, wrote extensively on ageing, its causes, and remedies. His arguments incorporate the influence of both favourable and adverse environmental conditions on human health and vitality. He further prescribed several herbal drugs for promoting health and vitality. His ideas, grounded in the Greco-Arab philosophical tradition of medicine, reflect an early attempt to relate environmental conditions to human aging and well-being within the intellectual milieu of

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<sup>1</sup> Harawī was a native of Herat. He wrote numerous books; *Bahr-al Jawāhir*, a medical lexicon, and *A'in al-Hayāt* are famous. His son Yusuf bin Muhammad, a skillful physician and an eloquent poet, known as Hakim Yusufi, also served Babur as his personal physician and compiled many medical treatises. (Azmi 47-48)

the Mughal period. Hence, this paper reinterprets his work, *A'in al-Hayāt*<sup>1</sup> — a treatise on healthy ageing — through the lens of environmental perspectives, examining how air, water, and habitat shape human health and longevity.

In the Mughal court, physicians<sup>2</sup> (*hukamā*) occupied a position of respect, rooted in the Greco-Arabic tradition of *Ṭibb-i Yūnānī* and informed by Ayurvedic notions. They prepared remedies from fragrant herbs and rare spices, balancing the humours<sup>3</sup> (*akhlāt*) of the body for the royal families. Their approach emphasised harmony between body, mind, and surroundings, illustrating how health in the Mughal world was perceived as an extension of ecological balance. Muhammad bin Yūsuf Harawī (d. 1544) was one of them. He was originally a Persian physician who came to India from Herat along with Bābur, and possibly practised under his personal patronage. He compiled a comprehensive Arabic treatise on healthy living, *A'in al-Hayāt*, which integrated Greco-Arab medical principles with spiritual and social insights. Harawī intended his work to benefit all people alike — both the common and the elite. (Rahman 27; Ahmad 31)

Harawī divided his work into three sections, starting with an introduction that detailed the sources he used. These included classical medical texts such as *Qānūn* of Ibn Sīnā, *Al-Hawī* of Rāzī, *Mukhtarāt* of Ibn Hubāl and the ideas of renowned physicians and religious philosophers like Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Dioscorides, Rufus of Ephesus, Galen, Charaka, Tabarī, Samarqandī, Qarshī, Jurjānī, Prophet Muhammad and others, along with his observations and insights.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The process of editing, translating, and preparing a critical edition of the manuscript *‘Ain al-Hayāt*, initially made accessible through the efforts of the renowned scholar Hakim Syed Zillur Rahman—who used three manuscripts (two from Raza Library, Rampur, with Accession No. 8910 and 652 and one from Ibn Sina Academy of Medieval Medicine and Sciences, Aligarh)—the Hyderabad manuscript (Accession No. 8882) was not available to him. Later, Dr. Ashfaq Ahmad accessed the Hyderabad manuscript and used it as the base for a revised and critically collated edition, since it was in good condition and previously unutilized. The new edition was compared with the Zillur Rahman printed version, and discrepancies or omissions were annotated. A final version was thus prepared for English translation, covering any unclear or missing parts in the previous Urdu translation of Zillur Rahman. Both versions are utilised and cited in this research paper.

<sup>2</sup> Mughal physicians were well-versed in the works of ancient Greek and Persian medical scholars, such as Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna. They have also made them familiar with Ayurveda literature and utilised them in their practice. (Rezavi, 40-65)

<sup>3</sup> In Unani medicine, human health and temperament are governed by the balance of four fundamental humours (*akhlāt*): blood (*dam*), phlegm (*balgham*), yellow bile (*ṣafṛā*), and black bile (*ṣaudā*). Each corresponds to one of the four elements—air, water, fire, and earth—and possesses qualities of heat, cold, moisture, and dryness, respectively. The harmonious proportion of these humours ensures health, while their imbalance leads to disease. This concept, derived from Hippocratic–Galenic thought and elaborated by physicians such as al-Rāzī (Rhazes) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), remained central to Mughal medical cosmology, linking the microcosm of body with the natural macrocosm. (Ahmad and Qadeer 21-29).

<sup>4</sup> He confessed to loan information from various medical writings particularly *Al-Qānūn fī al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine) is written by Abū ‘Ālī Al-Ḥussein Ibn Abdu‘llāh Ibn Sīnā, known in the West as Avicenna, was one of the most eminent Muslim physicians and philosophers of his days whose influence on Islamic and European medicine persisted for centuries; *Kitāb-al Hāwī fī al-Tibb* (Liber Continents) by a prominent Persian physician, Muhammad Ibn Zakāriya al Rāzī, known as Rhazes; and *Zakhīreh Khwārazmshāhī*, is a work of another famous physician of Persia, Ismāīl Jurjānī; *Tazkira* (It is not clear which particular book he used. There were several books of

The first section of *A'in al-Hayāt* explores the mechanisms of the human body and the fundamental principles of its functioning. Harawī explains that life depends on *ḥarārat ghareezī*<sup>1</sup> (innate heat), the natural warmth that enables sensation, movement, and all physiological processes such as digestion, absorption, and excretion. This heat is sustained by *ruḥbat ghareezī*<sup>2</sup> (radical moisture), a vital fluid present from birth. As this moisture diminishes with age, the body weakens, leading to disease and eventually death. His ideas are rooted in the humoral theory of Greco-Arab medicine.<sup>3</sup> (Rahman 28-33; Ahmad 33-38.)

In the remaining two sections, Harawī turns to preventive care and healthy living. He emphasises six essential factors<sup>4</sup> (*asbāb-e-sitta zarūriya*) that sustain health:

1. Air And Climate (*hawā`*),
2. Food And Drink (*ma'kūl wa mashrūb*),
3. Evacuation And Retention (*istiḥḥā wa ihtibās*),
4. Sleep And Wakefulness (*naum wa yaqāzah*),
5. Physical activity and Rest (*ḥarakat wa sukūn-e-badanī*), and
6. Psychological activity and Repose (*ḥarakat wa sukūn-e-naḥsānī*)

He interprets the decline of health as a result of the loss of innate heat (*ḥarārat ghareezī*) and radical moisture (*ruḥbat ghareezī*), and therefore recommends natural remedies, balanced diets,

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this name, such as *Taḥkīr al-Suwaydī* by Muhammad bin Tarkhān Anṣārī al-Suwaydī (1204-1291 AD.); Minhāj (Either *Kitāb Minhāj al-Dukkān* by Ibn al-Attar al-Kuhīn or *Kitāb Minhāj al-Bayān fī-ma yasta'milu hu al-Insān* by Ibn Jazlah.); and *Kitāb al-Mukhtārāt fī al-tibb* (The Book of Selections in Medicine) written in 1165 by Ibn Hubāl etc. He extensively cited the accounts of renowned physicians and medical experts like Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Dioscorides, Rufus of Ephesus, Galen, Charaka, Abū'l-Hasan 'Alī ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Tabrī, Rāzī (Rhazes), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Najīb al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, Ibn al-Nafīs Qurashī/Qarshī, Ismā'īl Jurjānī, and others. He also quoted the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, Caliph 'Alī and other religious scholars. Harawī added that for what he could not find in their works, he resorted to discussions with learned physicians and experienced authorities. In the course of the work itself, a large number of authorities are cited by their names. In some cases, he relied upon his observation and inquiries. He also disagreed on certain matters with those of seasoned experts and included his own views. (Rahman 27; Ahmad 31)

<sup>1</sup> Innate heat, also called vital or natural heat, or *caladium innatum*, is a term in Greek medicine that has generally referred to the heat produced within the body, usually the heat produced by the heart and the circulatory system. It was a somewhat controversial subject among scholars because it was formerly believed that heat was acquired by an outside source such as the element of fire. Harawī also criticized this notion. (Zafar et al. 70-73)

<sup>2</sup> Radical moisture, also called vital or innate moisture, is a Greek physiological concept developed by medieval Arabo-Latin medicine, referring to inborn moisture specific to living beings. It retains innate heat that powers all physiological functions. (Zafar et al. 70-73)

<sup>3</sup> The functioning of an oil lamp is often used as an analogy to explain the concepts of innate heat and radical moisture. The flame represents innate heat, which powers the physiological functions, just as the flame provides light and heat. The wick symbolizes radical moisture, which sustains the flame, similar to how the internal moisture of the human body supports innate heat. The oil serves as supplemental moisture, supplying the necessary fuel to keep the flame burning. Just as the oil nourishes the wick, proper nutrition derived from food and drinks maintains the equilibrium of innate heat and radical moisture, thereby ensuring vitality. Over time, as radical moisture depletes, health weakens, similar to the flame of lamp fading as the oil and wick run out. (Gilleard 494)

<sup>4</sup> These factors are considered crucial for maintaining health. (Ahmad and Qadeer 21-29)

and disciplined habits that restore these vital forces, while warning against practices that exhaust the body or hasten ageing. (Rahman 28-33; Ahmad 33-38.)

## **1. Abode and Habitat: Environmental Foundations of Health**

### **1.1 Quality of Air and Climate**

Harawī devoted considerable attention to the quality of air (*hawā'*) and the climatic environment, emphasising their profound influence on health and temperament. A moderate climate—neither so cold as to cause shivering nor so hot as to induce excessive sweating—was, in his view, most conducive to digestion and general well-being. Extreme temperatures, excessive dryness, or humidity, he warned, disturb the balance of humours (*akhlāt*) and invite disease. Similarly, cold air affects the body. Furthermore, polluted air—laden with foul vapours (*bukhār*) or smoke (*dukḥān* or *dukḥkhān*)—was seen as harmful to both body and mind, causing respiratory disorders and melancholy. He distinguishes between vapour and smoke, noting that vapours are composed of subtle gaseous and watery elements (*ajzā' mā'iyyat wa hawā'yyat*), while smoke arises from earthy and combustible substances. When these mingle, he warns, the air becomes polluted, troubling the lungs and hindering proper respiration. Such corruption of air, he adds, weakens the innate heat (*ḥarārat ghareezī*). Quoting Plato (Aflātūn), Harawī remarks: “Had it not been for steam and smoke, man would have lived many long days.” (Rahman 107-108, 124-142; Ahmad 146-147, 167-168, 172)

### **1.2 Nature and Purity of Water**

Among various kinds of water, rainwater (*mā' āl-maṭār*) held a special place for Harawī, as it was clean, light, and refreshing to the nervous system, benefiting vital organs such as the liver, spleen, and kidneys. He regarded it as superior to spring or well water, which could accumulate impurities and harm the constitution. (Rahman 107-108, 124-142; Ahmad 146-147, 167-168, 172)

### **1.3 Beneficial Climates of High Altitude**

Harawī praised living at high altitudes (*maskan āl-a'lā*), where the air is clean, thin, and cool. Such environments, he observed, strengthen the body, sharpen the senses, and prolong life by preserving innate heat (*ḥarārat ghareezī*) of the body. The freshness of pure air, he noted, uplifts the spirit, much like pleasant fragrances or delicious food invigorates the soul. (Rahman, 71, 112; Ahmad 84, 136)

### **1.4 Abodes and Living Spaces**

Harawī also associated the condition and arrangement of abodes with health. Homes that were dark, damp, or poorly ventilated bred sickness and lethargy. He recounts an experiment in which he found a patient dwelling in a dark house. He instructed the man to move into a spacious, well-lit room with whitewashed walls; remarkably, the patient recovered on the same day. Harawī concludes that “the best dwelling (*makān*) is one that is well-built and time-tested, properly ventilated, brightly illuminated, and possessing a moderate warmth.” (Rahman 132; Ahmad 165)

## **2. Epidemics and Deforestation: Decline of Air Quality and Ecological Imbalance**

### **2.1 Purification of Air during Epidemics**

In times of epidemic (*wabā'*), when the surrounding air became corrupt, Harawī recommended various natural means of purification. He suggested burning the bark of citron (*utrūj*), which was believed to cleanse the atmosphere and dispel noxious vapours. Likewise, he advised fumigating, possibly homes and streets, with frankincense (*lubān*), a resin whose aromatic smoke was thought to neutralise infectious miasmas and restore the natural balance of air. These practices reflected the prevailing Unani conception that epidemic diseases arose from the corruption of air due to excess moisture, decay, or celestial disturbances. Through such recommendations, Harawī harmonised medical, spiritual, and environmental principles—demonstrating that preserving the purity of air was as essential to health as maintaining the balance of humours (*akhlāt*) within the body. (Rahman 43, 98; Ahmad 36-37, 121)

## **2.2 Deforestation**

Remarkably, Harawī even cautioned that excessive tree-cutting and deforestation could shorten human life. He states, “The life of a tree-cutter is short” (*dirakht afgan būd kam زندگانī*), carries a dual meaning beyond its literal admonition against felling trees. On the surface, it warns that those who destroy greenery may shorten their lifespan. Implicitly, it reflects an early understanding of the connection between ecological balance and human health. By linking the act of deforestation to diminished longevity, Harwi anticipates modern insights into environmental determinism, whereby the degradation of forests and natural habitats can have direct negative consequences on air quality, climate regulation, and the availability of medicinal plants—factors essential for sustaining human life. In the context of Mughal-period environmental thought, such verses exemplify a moral and practical ethos that associates the stewardship of nature with physical, social, and spiritual well-being. (Rahman 137; Ahmad 172)

## **3. Lifestyle, Conduct, and Emotional Ecology: Harmonizing Body, Mind, and Environment**

### **3.1 Healthy Habits**

In *A'in al-Hayāt*, Harawī conceives health as the outcome of harmony among body, soul, and environment, grounded in moderation and righteous conduct. He maintains that excess in any habit—whether food, rest, exertion, or emotion—disturbs the natural temperament (*mizāj*) and weakens the innate heat that sustains life. Overeating, starvation, irregular meals, or consumption of spoiled or market-prepared food (*ta'ām al-sūq*) corrupts digestion and leads to illness. He strictly forbade eating a patient's leftovers. Similarly, he warns that prolonged or empty-stomach bathing depletes bodily moisture, while extended stays in the *ḥammām*<sup>1</sup> (bathhouse) may cause weakness of the nerves, loss of appetite, and faintness (*ghashī*). Cleanliness, when observed in moderation, purifies the body and aligns it with the elemental balance of air and water. (Rahman 33-142; Ahmad 39-179)

### **3.2 Physical Activities**

A disciplined way of life, according to Harawī, moderate exercise (*riyāzāt*), massage (*dalk*), meditation, and silence (*sakūt*), which preserve inner calm and renew innate warmth. Activities such as horse riding, hunting, playing chess, and listening to melodious sounds invigorate the spirit and strengthen the body when practised in moderation. Sleep, especially on the left side and upon barley husks (*tabn al-sha'ir*), aids digestion and restores natural heat, while excessive slumber or wakefulness upsets bodily rhythm. (Rahman 38-39, 64, 68-71, 77, 78, 84, 104, 117; Ahmad 68, 74-75, 81-83, 92-94, 102, 113-114, 121, 127, 142, 168-170)

### **3.3 Sexual Pleasure**

In the sphere of sexual life (*jīmā'*), moderation again defines health: temperate intercourse renews vitality and relieves strain, but excess leads to premature ageing and debility.

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<sup>1</sup> A *ḥammām* is a public bathing house traditionally associated with cleansing rituals and therapeutic massages. The term *ḥammām* (Arabic) or *hamām* (Turkish) denotes a place dedicated to bodily purification through water and steam. Originating in the Roman bathhouse tradition and later refined under Byzantine and Islamic influences, it evolved into a cultural institution promoting hygiene, health, and social interaction. Endorsed by Unani physicians as a form of therapy to stimulate circulation, rejuvenate the skin and internal organs, and balance humoral conditions, the *ḥammām* held both medical and social significance. During Mughal India, the construction and use of *ḥammāms* became widespread, blending Persian architectural aesthetics with local traditions, and were often built by rulers such as Bābur to provide relief from the region's heat, dust, and winds. (Babūr 532, 634, 639); For *ḥammām* therapy in Unani medicine, see Mohammad Tausif et al. 07-10; For having a good idea of *ḥammāms* during the Mughal period see Irfan 448-60)

He condemns adultery (*zinā*), self-emission (*istimnā' bi'l-yad*), and sodomy (*liwāṭat*) as acts that waste the vital seed, corrupt the humours, and bring moral and physical ruin, whereas legitimate union, by contrast, when guided by affection and restraint, enhances both physical and mental composure. Foods are regarded as more effective than drugs in restoring and strengthening libido. (Rahman 55-57, 124-142; Ahmad 64-66, 155-156, 160-163)

### 3.4 Moral Conduct

Equally vital are moral and emotional disciplines. Maintaining kinship ties, showing gratitude, practising charity, and upholding justice are acts that preserve health and attract divine blessing, while seclusion, greed, and injustice bring decline. Emotional states such as grief (*gham*), worry (*ham*), fear, and anger upset the equilibrium of the humours and diminish innate warmth, while contentment, generosity, and exposure to pleasant sounds restore joy and strength. Through these reflections, Ḥarawī situates health within a moral and social climate in which the well-being of the body corresponds to the harmony of the soul and the order of nature. (Rahman 34, 104, 124-142; Ahmad 40, 75, 94-104, 114, 128, 150-179.; 104-104, 124-142)

## 4. Herbs and Aromatics: Natural Agents of Healing

In the *A'in al-Hayāt*, Ḥarawī demonstrates how medical knowledge in the early Mughal period was deeply rooted in ecological awareness and the sensory interactions between humans and their environments. He prescribes eighty-eight simple drugs (see Table 1), largely composed of herbs, spices, and roots easily found in domestic and local ecologies—such as clove, fennel, cardamom, saffron, bay leaf, ginger, and garlic—reflecting an intimate engagement with household botany and regional flora. In addition, he formulates ten compound preparations, including *anoshdārū*, *barsha'shā*, *tiryāq kabīr*, *jullāb* (rose water), *julanjabīn* (rose and honey syrup), *khamr*, *ghāliya*, *fālūdaj*, *ma'ul lahm*, and *muṣallaṣ*, each illustrating the material culture of medicinal blending where natural scents, textures, and climates shaped healing practices. Ḥarawī's unusual prescriptions—such as recommending young pigeon meat for kidney atrophy, or residing near pigeons and inhaling their breath and odour to treat paralysis (*fālij*) and smallpox (*judarī*)—further reveal how the body, animal life, and environment were perceived as interconnected agents in the maintenance of health. (Rahman 33-142; Ahmad 39-179).

**Table 1: List of some ethnomedicinal plants and other simple drugs<sup>1</sup>**

| Sr. No. | Local Name                      | Botanical name                   | Preparation/ Part used | Therapeutic uses                                           |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | Ās/Myrtle Fruit                 | <i>Myrtus Communis</i> Linn.     | decoct. pdr.           | Joint pain, hair fall, whitlow ( <i>dākhīs</i> )           |
|         | 'Ambar / Ambergris <sup>2</sup> | -                                | Marine drug            | Cardio-tonic                                               |
|         | Amla /Āmlaj                     | <i>Emblica officinalis</i> Linn. | decoct. pdr., fr.      | Eyesight, hair fall, hemorrhage, piles ( <i>bawāsīr</i> ), |

<sup>1</sup> For detailed information on each entry listed in the table, see Rahman 33-142; Ahmad 39-149.

<sup>2</sup> Ḥarawī pointed that origin of ambergris is debated: some say it is the excreta or vomit of a sea animal that feeds on a sea plant, while others, like Ibn Sīnā, citing an anonymous Indian traveler reject this and suggest it forms from aromatic honey washed into the sea, where the waxy part melts and returns to shore. Melted and filtered Amber turns white, while that found in dead sea animals becomes black and foul-smelling (*zanjī*). The best Amber is light (*ash'hab*), followed by blue (pistachio), and then black. Authentic Amber melts like oil when heated and is edible.



|  |                                                  |                                            |                              |                                                                                                                                     |
|--|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                                  |                                            |                              | desiccation of wet phlegmatic fluid                                                                                                 |
|  | <i>Bād</i> or <i>Fād Zahr</i> / Bezoar           | -                                          | Animal extract               | Antidote for poisoning especially aconite                                                                                           |
|  | <i>Bādranjūya</i> /<br><i>Bādhrañjūya</i>        | <i>Melissa parviflora</i><br><i>Benth</i>  | decoct.<br>pdr., fl.,<br>lv. | Anxiety, nightmare ( <i>kābūs</i> ), toothache, hiccup ( <i>fawāq</i> ), menstruation                                               |
|  | <i>Bahrāmaj</i> / <i>Bēd mushk</i> / Musk-Willow | <i>Salix caprea</i> Linn.                  | resin, ps.                   | Headache, eye disease                                                                                                               |
|  | <i>Basil</i> ( <i>buzr āl raiḥān</i> )           | <i>Ocimum sanctum</i> Linn                 | sd.                          | Diarrhea ( <i>‘ishāl</i> )                                                                                                          |
|  | <i>Behman</i>                                    | <i>Centaurea behen</i> Linn.               | rt.                          | Gout, vertigo ( <i>sadar</i> ), numbness ( <i>kḥadar</i> )                                                                          |
|  | Bisbāsa / Mace                                   | <i>Myristica fragrans</i><br><i>Hout.</i>  | lv., br.,                    | Constipation, diarrhea, abrasion ( <i>sahj</i> ), dribbling of urine                                                                |
|  | <i>Dār chīnī</i> or <i>ṣīnī</i> / Cinnamon       | <i>Cinnamomum</i> Verum                    | ol., br.,                    | Aphrodisiacs, dementia ( <i>nisyān</i> ), digestion, eyesight                                                                       |
|  | <i>Dār Filfil</i> / Long Pepper                  | <i>Piper longum</i> Linn                   | fr., ol.                     | Epilepsy, chronic cough, liver cleanse                                                                                              |
|  | <i>Dār Shīsha‘ān</i> / Thorny broom              | <i>Calicotome spinose</i><br><i>Linn.</i>  | rt., decoct.                 | Mouth ulcer, hemoptysis                                                                                                             |
|  | <i>Darūnaj</i> / Leopard’s bane                  | <i>Doronicum hookeri</i><br><i>Hook F.</i> | rt.                          | Flatus of stomach and uterus                                                                                                        |
|  | Ersā/Īrsa/Orris                                  | <i>Iris ensata</i> Thunb.                  | rt., ol.,<br>decoct.         | Insomnia, menstrual flow, scrofula ( <i>kḥanāzīr</i> ), removes <i>kalaf</i> ( <i>melasma</i> ) and <i>namash</i> ( <i>naevus</i> ) |
|  | <i>Fāghīa</i> / Henna Flower <sup>1</sup>        | <i>Lawsonia inermis</i> L.                 | fl.                          | Syncope                                                                                                                             |
|  | <i>Faranjmushk</i> / Shrubby Basil               | <i>Ocimum Gratissimum</i> L.               | br.,                         | Cardio-tonic                                                                                                                        |
|  | Fennel Seed ( <i>buzr āl rāz yānīj</i> )         | <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> Mill.            | sd., lv., st.                | Vision, procreating milk                                                                                                            |

<sup>1</sup> In Unani medicine, not only the flower of henna but also its stem, bark, roots and seeds are widely used due to their therapeutic properties.

|  |                                                          |                                        |                       |                                                                                                      |
|--|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Garlic ( <i>ṣūm</i> )                                    | <i>Allium sativum</i>                  | bl., ps.,<br>decoct., | Intestinal worms,<br>dribbling of urine<br>( <i>taqtūr āl-baul</i> ),<br>toothache,<br>chronic cough |
|  | Ginger ( <i>zanjabīl</i> )                               | <i>Zingiber officinale</i>             | rz.                   | Dementia,<br>blepharitis<br>( <i>sulāq</i> )                                                         |
|  | <i>Halīlaj</i> / Myrobalan                               | <i>Terminalia chebula</i><br>Retz.     | sd., pr.              | Leprosy,<br>headache, brain-<br>tonic                                                                |
|  | <i>Jadwār</i> (Naked Larkspur)                           | <i>Delphinium denudatum</i><br>Wall.   | np.                   | Aconite<br>poisoning ( <i>bīsh</i> )                                                                 |
|  | <i>Jauzbua</i> / Nutmeg                                  | <i>Myristica fragrans</i><br>Houtt.    | sd.                   | Cornea, vascular<br>keratitis ( <i>sabal</i> ),<br>Anasarca ( <i>Itisqā āl laḥmī</i> )               |
|  | <i>Kabāba</i> / Toothache Fruit                          | ( <i>Zanthoxylum alatum</i> ,<br>Roxb. | np.                   | Septic ulcers,<br>strengthening<br>gum, expulsion of<br>calculus from<br>kidney                      |
|  | <i>Kahrabā</i> (Yellow Amber)                            | <i>Vateria indica</i> , Linn.          | -                     | Vomiting,<br>hemorrhage,<br>dysentery                                                                |
|  | <i>Khūlanjān</i> / Galangal                              | <i>Alpinia galangal</i> Linn.          | rt.                   | Erectile<br>dysfunction                                                                              |
|  | <i>Kundur</i> / Frankincense<br>( <i>Olibanum</i> )      | <i>Boswellia serrata</i> ,<br>Roxb.    | np.                   | Palpitation,<br>amnesia ( <i>nisyān</i> )                                                            |
|  | Leaf of Hemp ( <i>waraq āl qinnab</i> or <i>qunnab</i> ) | <i>Cannabis indica</i>                 | lv., ol.              | Dandruff, bed<br>bug repellent                                                                       |
|  | <i>Lisān āl-Thaur</i> ( <i>ṣūr</i> )<br>/Borage          | <i>Borago officinalis</i> L.           | pdr., lv.             | Loosen gum,<br>cough                                                                                 |
|  | <i>Maṣṭakāl</i> / <i>Mastagi</i> / Mastic                | <i>Pistacia lentiscus</i> Linn.        | np.                   | Phlegmatic<br>cough, hepatitis                                                                       |
|  | <i>Mūmiyāi</i>                                           | Bitumen, Mineral Pitch                 | -                     | Fracture of bone,<br>facial palsy<br>( <i>laqwa</i> ), migraine<br>( <i>shaqīqa</i> )                |
|  | <i>Nammām</i> /Water Mint                                | <i>Thymus serpyllum</i>                | np.                   | Stillbirth,<br>Brainpower                                                                            |
|  | <i>Nān-khṭwāh</i> / Caraway                              | <i>Trachyspermum ammi</i><br>Linn.     | np.                   | Ecchymosis<br>( <i>turfā</i> ), epigastric<br>pain, headache                                         |
|  | Oud ( <i>‘aūd</i> )                                      | <i>Aquilaria malaccensis</i>           | np.                   | Mouth refreshing,<br>brain tonic                                                                     |
|  | Peppermint ( <i>na ‘nā</i> )                             | <i>Mentha arvensis</i> Linn.           | lv., ps.,             | Birth Control,<br>nausea                                                                             |

|  |                                                            |                                           |                      |                                                                                          |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <i>Qāqulla</i> <sup>1</sup> / <i>Hālbuwā</i><br>(Cardamom) | <i>Elettaria cardamomum</i>               | br., pdw.,           | Cardio-tonic,<br>epilepsy                                                                |
|  | <i>Qaranful</i> / Clove                                    | <i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> L.             | pdr.                 | Night blindness,<br>lesion, digestion,<br><i>dam'a</i> (epiphora)                        |
|  | <i>Qishr al-Utruj</i> / Bark of the<br>citron              | <i>Citrus medica</i> Linn.                | br.                  | Cardio-tonic,<br>antidote                                                                |
|  | <i>Qust</i> / <i>Qast</i> / Costus root                    | <i>Saussurea lappa</i> C. B.<br>Clark     | ol., ps.             | Colic pain,<br>muscular<br>weakness                                                      |
|  | <i>Rāsan</i> /Inula                                        | <i>Inula Conyzae</i>                      | rt.                  | Sciatica (' <i>arq āl-<br/>nasā</i> '), joint pain                                       |
|  | <i>Safarjal</i> / Quince                                   | <i>Cydonia vulgaris</i>                   | fr.                  | Asthma ( <i>rabw</i> ),<br>orthopnea (),<br>bleeding                                     |
|  | Saffron ( <i>za'farān</i> )                                | <i>Crocus sativus</i>                     | decoct., rt.         | Skin colour, flow<br>of urine,<br>aphrodisiacs                                           |
|  | <i>Salīkhā</i> / Cassia-bark tree                          | <i>Cinnamomum cassia</i>                  | br.,                 | Uterine swelling,<br>flow of menses,<br>neutralizes snake<br>poisoning                   |
|  | <i>Şandal</i> <sup>2</sup>                                 | <i>Santalum album</i> Linn.               | pdr., ps.,           | Headache,<br>swelling                                                                    |
|  | <i>Sūsan</i> / Lily/ Orris                                 | <i>Iris ensata</i> Thunb.                 | fl., rt.,<br>decoct. | Chronic cough                                                                            |
|  | <i>Sāzaj</i> / Tezpāt<br>(Indian bay leaf)                 | <i>Cinnamomum tamala</i>                  | lv.                  | Palpitation, bad<br>breath                                                               |
|  | Sealed Clay ( <i>ṭain makhtūm</i> )                        |                                           | pdr.                 | Bleeding                                                                                 |
|  | <i>Sūniz</i> / Black Cumin                                 | <i>Nigella sativa</i> Linn.               | sd.                  | Intestinal worms,<br>menses flow,<br>leprosy, trigger<br>sneezing (' <i>ats</i> )        |
|  | <i>Sua'd</i> / Nut-grass                                   | <i>Cyperus rotundus</i>                   | rt.                  | Skin colour, piles                                                                       |
|  | <i>Şumbulu't-ṭib</i> / Spikenard                           | <i>Nardostachys jatamansi</i><br>(D. Don) | ol., wh.             | Jaundice<br>( <i>yarqān</i> ),<br>paralysis,<br>eyesight, coma,<br>dropsy,<br>brainpower |
|  | <i>Sūranjān</i>                                            | <i>Colchicum luteum</i> Linn.             | rz.                  | Joint pain,<br>phlegm,<br>internal piles                                                 |
|  | <i>Utruj</i> / Citron                                      | <i>Citrus medica</i> Linn.                | sd., lv., rn.        | Antidote for<br>poisons, effective<br>in the sting of                                    |

<sup>1</sup> When combined with cucumber and watermelon seeds, it helps in relieving kidney stones.

<sup>2</sup> Harawī mentioned three types of sandal: white, red and yellow.

|  |                                       |                            |     |                                                                            |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                       |                            |     | scorpion, lice, insects, and snake                                         |
|  | <i>Zarnab / Yew</i>                   | <i>Taxus baccata Linn.</i> | np. | Used in exhilarant preparation                                             |
|  | <i>Zarnabād or Zuruḡbād / Zedoary</i> | <i>Curcuma zedoaria</i>    | np. | Insect bites, vaginal flatulence, detoxing smell of onion, garlic and wine |

\*Decoction (decoct.), powder (pdr.), fruit (fr.), flower (fl.), leaves (lv.), bark (br.), root (rt.), rhizome (rz.), paste (ps.), preparation (pr.), non-specified (np.) and oil (ol.)

## 5. Food and Seasons: Ecological Rhythms of Diet and Digestion

### 5.1 Grains and Legumes

Harawī emphasises a diet grounded in natural, unprocessed foods to maintain digestion and immunity. Among grains, rice (*arz*) is valued for its warming and astringent properties—it nourishes the body, dispels flatulence, and induces clear dreams. Indian physicians (*ḥukamā' al-hind*) regarded it as the most balanced staple. Chickpeas (*ḥummuṣ*) were praised for enhancing innate heat, reducing glandular swelling, and improving vocal clarity. Their decoction, he notes, benefits dropsy, jaundice, and kidney stones. (Rahman 34-35, 59; Ahmad 41, 68-69)

### 5.2 Oils and Liquids

Olive (*zaitūn*) and its oil, long esteemed in Greek and Islamic medicine, strengthen the hair, stomach, and skin while protecting against ulcers and toxins. Rose water (*mā' al-ward*), when applied externally or ingested, soothes headaches, strengthens vital organs, and clears vision. Harawī cautions, however, that hot water infused with strong minerals like alum or vitriol can be harmful. (Rahman 66, 75, 108-109; Ahmad 78, 89-90, 132-133)

### 5.3 Animal and Dairy Products

Foods of animal origin occupy a significant place in Harawī's regimen. Eggs, especially soft-boiled, enhance blood production and are beneficial for respiratory ailments. Honey serves as both a laxative and an appetite stimulant, while fresh cow's milk delays ageing, improves memory, and heals ulcers. Light meat soups made from young sheep or goats restore vitality and support digestion. He also praises musk for its invigorating and antiseptic qualities.<sup>1</sup> (Rahman 46-47, 71, 84-86, 99-103, 106, 110-111; Ahmad 55-56, 104-105, 122-126, 130)

### 5.4 Fruits, Nuts, and Seasonal Balance

Fruits and nuts play a central role in restoring equilibrium. Dates enrich the blood and aid convalescence; figs ease respiration and digestion; apples and pomegranates fortify the heart and liver. Almonds calm the mind and induce sleep, while pistachios and raisins balance humours and cleanse the skin. Similarly, other fruits, watermelon, pear and quince are discussed. Harawī stresses that the timing and nature of meals must align with seasonal rhythms—warm and moist foods suit winter, while cool and light dishes sustain summer. Excessive consumption of oily, sour, salty, hot, or burnt and other unsuitable foods—especially after awakening from sleep or in large quantities—disrupts digestion and undermines health. Wine (*kḥamr*), symbolised vitality and sensory pleasure yet was morally and physically cautioned against for its excesses, while betel leaf

<sup>1</sup> Harawī prescribed *Qarā' Ānqīb*, is a meat soup made by boiling minced meat till liquid trickles from it then it is strained and drunk.

(*tāmbūl*), rooted in Indian ecological and cultural practice, offered a natural, socially accepted means to sustain warmth, health, and conviviality.<sup>1</sup> (Rahman 44-106; Ahmad 52-130)

In my closing reflections, I would add that Harawī extends the ecology of health beyond flora to encompass the mineral world, bridging Greek, Islamic, and Persian traditions. Gems and metals, imbued with cosmic vitality, were employed as remedies, amulets, and talismans to restore bodily equilibrium and protect against both physical and metaphysical disorders. Ruby (*yāqūt*) was said to strengthen the heart and guard against plague (*tā'ūn*); pearl (*lūlū*) and emerald (*zabarjad* or *zumurrud*) to clarify vision and balance the humours; while gold, silver, coral (*bussad*), garnet (*la'l*), and lapis lazuli (*lājaward*) each embodied distinct curative powers. Through this synthesis, Harawī presents nature—whether plant, stone, or metal—as a continuous spectrum of healing forces linking environment, matter, and the human constitution. (Rahman 43-124; Ahmad 52-149)

Harawī envisions health as a holistic state grounded in moderation, self-discipline, diet, exercise, social harmony, and spiritual balance. His counsel emphasises that true well-being arises not merely from medicine but from the moral and ecological order of life. By situating ageing within the rhythms of seasonal and environmental change, *'Ain al-Hayāt* constructs the body as a microcosm of nature

In linking human vitality with ecological ethics, Harawī anticipates what Ramachandra Guha identifies as the enduring Indian understanding of harmony between culture and nature. (Guha) His reflections on plants, air, water, and minerals reveal a proto-environmental consciousness that situates health within the broader web of life. Even amid modern technologies such as cloning and nanoscience, as Dr Ashfaq Ahmad notes, Harawī's regimen remains relevant and worthy of renewed exploration for its potential insights into geriatric and preventive medicine—reminding us that enduring vitality depends on a life lived in balance with nature itself. (Ahmad 29)

Furthermore, the inconsistencies in *'Ain al-Hayāt* may stem from its survival in later eighteenth-century handwritten copies, in which omissions or additions occurred during transcription. Written in a lucid style that blends Persian and Arabic medical terminology, Harawī's work, as Hakim Zillur Rahman suggests, likely inspired later physicians such as Hakim Syed Afzal Ali Khan in their treatises on healthy living.<sup>2</sup> (Rahman 19; Ahmad 18)

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<sup>1</sup> Betel (*pān*) in India, especially in the Mughal period was both a delicacy and a medicine, widely consumed by rulers, women, and the common masses. Among rulers it was a symbol of hospitality, luxury, and courtly etiquette. It was used for its stimulating and digestive properties, often chewed with areca nut, lime, and spices. For *pān* culture in India, see *Humayun nama* 33; *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* II 135, 164, 190, 207, 302; Natnoo, 39-41.

<sup>2</sup> Afzal wrote *Sarchashma Hayāt* in Persian at the behest of Wajid Ali Shah (1822-1887), the last nawāb of Awadh.

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**SARASVATI GIFT: ECOFEMINISM, SACRED FEMININITY, AND ECOLOGICAL  
RENEWAL IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY**

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**Abstract**

Through her book, Kavita Kane recreates the mythological story of Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge and creation, and turns it into a very ecofeminist narrative. Instead of describing Sarasvati as a goddess of wisdom, the story depicts her as an ecological personage, with her cycles of creativity, water, and communication showing how the feminine and the environment are interrelated. Like other women in her works, the rejection of patriarchal wisdom by Sarasvati revealing the oppression of women and the alienation of humanity from nature, making critical structural connections between gender-based violence and ecological destruction. The dual identities of Sarasvati as a river and a goddess also contribute to the themes of renewal, loss, and recovery, prompting a reconsideration of how the divine femininity can be used to create opportunities in the relationship between the self, society, and the environment. The information presented below is based on the works of ecofeminist scholars, such as Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant, to show how the novel incorporates feminine agency in its environmental ethics. Kane opposes anthropocentrism by the way twins who represent androcentric ideals are depicted, which allows the reader to conclude that we can develop a spiritual ecology and restore the relationship that we have with the earth. The Sarasvati gift, as a concept of nurturing and imparting knowledge, is repositioned as the value of ecological care, cultural renewal, and opposition to both ecological and social exclusion. Finally, the creative quality of the Gift by Sarasvati can be seen as a message of healing: it restores the sacred feminine as the source of justice, it is a message that underlines the need to engage the gender justice dimensions with the ecocentrism angle, and it is a call to the reader to re-examine their environmentalism commitments in the same light as the ideals on the face of Sarasvati. In harmonizing Indian mythology with ecofeminist criticism, Kane will give us a culturally meaningful vision of interrelated sustainability, where the knowledge, nature, and gender justice ideals are essentially interwoven.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Sarasvati's Gift, Kavita Kane, Indian mythology, gender, ecology, environmental humanities, Vandana Shiva, Carolyn Merchant, feminine divinity.

**Introduction**

Due to the climate crisis and the accelerated destruction of the eco system, it is paramount to guide humanities research towards the development of environmental awareness. In this respect, ecofeminism has represented one of the most influential theoretical and epistemological perspectives that connect ecological well-being to gender equity using mythological settings with feminine characters that negotiate the connections between human beings and the natural world. Environmental Humanities studies the ways myths, literature, and other cultural discourses place people in the ethical relationships with the environment. Feminine divine mythic reinterpretations serve as a powerful context for imagining non-patriarchal and healing connections between humans and nature. Kavita Kane, a contemporary Indian feminist reinterpretation of myth, aligns with this vision by representing women as potential agents of sociocultural and spiritual change. In the opening scene of her novel *Sarasvati's Gift: The River of*

Life, Kane presents the goddess Sarasvati not only as the deity associated with wisdom, art, and speech but also as a river goddess who carries all the elemental implications of ecological wisdom, continuity, and life-sustaining harmony. In Kane's story, the Sarasvati River is more than just a real river; it becomes a strong symbol of wisdom, rebirth, and balance with nature. Through the problems, decisions, and words of Sarasvati, the tale criticizes male-dominated systems that take advantage of both women and nature, thus upsetting social and environmental balance. Aligned with ecofeminist views, Sarasvati's Gift suggests that harm to the environment and the subjugation of women come from the same hierarchy of powers: patriarchy and anthropocentrism, which both belittle femininity and the natural world. Kane's take on Sarasvati pushes back against these limiting systems by celebrating her as an artist, a healer, and a rebel. In the end, Sarasvati is a blessing inside ecofeminism. She represents a force of renewal and rebellion, and her being could act as a basic story that connects women's rights with caring for the environment in the search for fairness and lasting health.

### **Objectives**

This paper discusses the ecofeminist themes in Kavita Kane's *Sarasvati's Gift* by merging feminine divinity and ecological balance to promote love and interdependence. It investigates the connections that Kane establishes between patriarchal power and environmental destruction, thus narrating Sarasvati as an indictment against both gender-based exploitation and ecological degradation. The article assesses how Kane uses mythological components for raising ethical-ecological awareness among her readers, besides exploring what new space this particular novel opens within Environmental Humanities that essentially calls for a fusion of feminist-spiritual-ecological perspectives. It also discusses the metaphorical meaning of the river Sarasvati as a source of life and resistance; plus, how feminine agency is represented in the story as an important part of female empowerment toward ecological restoration and justice.

### **Research Gap**

Kavita Kane's works have been widely received feminist, mythological, and psychological readings; however, the ecological dimensions in her writings have not been critically engaged with by any critic despite the fact that the novel has immense relevance to ecology. Most of the scholarship available is centered on issues of women's agency, mythic reinterpretations, or feminist narratives. The complex intersection between ecology and femininity has not yet found its way into literature. Further, there has been no study to date that explores how the desiccation of the Sarasvati river—with all its historical, cultural, and mythological baggage—can be read as a metaphor for both the decline of divine feminine power and ecological degradation. There are virtually no scholarly works relating this issue to ecofeminist ethics in terms of recent or contemporary Indian reinterpretations. This article thus seeks to fill this gap by offering what is essentially an inaugural continuous ecofeminist reading of *Sarasvati's Gift* that not only critiques Kane's reimagining of myth but also her gendered perspective on ecological consciousness as a pathway toward justice and healing. The project aims at bringing forth feminine divinity as a source for ecological regeneration and ethical contemplation by linking both Vedic symbolism as well as modern authors within the ecofeminism discourse.

### **Literature Review**

Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced ecofeminism, asserting that women and nature are oppressed under patriarchy and have been similarly exploited throughout history, making them critical to the global crisis (d'Eaubonne 1974). Following her lead, Vandana Shiva expands on this notion by emphasizing that women's experiences in agriculture, nurturing, and survival practices constitute a unique form of ecological wisdom and resilience (Shiva, *Staying Alive*). In the same vein, Carolyn Merchant describes in *The Death of Nature* how the perception of nature has transformed from viewing it as a nurturing mother to one of domination wherein patriarchal

systems mechanize and exploit nature. Within the Indian context, ecofeminist scholars have discussed goddess traditions, river worship, as well as community practices that culturally signify the connection between femininity and nature. The sacred rivers of India—the Ganga, Yamuna, and Sarasvati—are celebrated for their purity, fertility as well as the divine feminine power that they embody which supports life creation and knowledge.

Kavita Kane's novels are unique in literary studies for their feminist perspectives (Chakraborty, 2020), emotional experiences (Menon, 2021) and the deep psychological exploration of women in mythology (Sharma, 2022). But there is a clear lack of ecofeminist analysis of Sarasvati's Gift: discussions on ecological ethics, riverine women and divine feminine power are missing from the dialogue in Environmental Humanities. This research positions Kane's works at the intersection of mythology, feminism and ecology and expands the domain of Indian ecofeminist criticism and Global Environmental Humanities.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative literary analysis through close readings of Sarasvati's Gift focusing on character development, symbolic motifs and narrative techniques. The analysis is informed by an ecofeminist theoretical perspective drawing on the works of Vandana Shiva, Karen Warren, Greta Gaard and Carolyn Merchant to explore themes of oppression, peace and ecological identity in the novel. It situates Kane's re-telling within the context of Indian mythology and culture by looking at goddess traditions and the ecological significance of rivers and related rituals and expressions. Finally, a connection is made between Kane's narrative and the global ecofeminist discourse through a comparative approach and sees how Kane's re-narration contributes to an ongoing dialogue that weaves together gender, nature and power in contemporary literary studies.

### **The Principle of Feminine Ecology and Sarasvati**

The Vedic and Puranic literature regards as the goddess of knowledge, communication, and expression of art, Sarasvati is said to have mythical connections with the river of the same name. Her relationship to the river and its flow, and especially the unceasing running rhythm that symbolizes cycles, makes her actually the life-giving power of the ecofeminists, which stresses on nurturing, interconnections, and the process of cyclical renewal of nature. The mythology of Sarasvati, which most of the time is depicted as creating in contrast to other mythologies, where the mythical power of most deities exhibits violence towards others in their quest to gain dominance (a path of destruction), the mythology portrays creativity and challenges the traditional concepts of agency due to the aspect of fluidity and regeneration which echoes ecofeminist ideas of agency as non-exploitative and which provide restorative power. In Sarasvati in her Gift, Kane turns Sarasvati into a cosmic being whose nature is closely connected with water, creation and knowledge. Thus, the river of Sarasvati does not only have a geographic and historic value, but it is a metaphor of ecological consciousness and divine unity. In this story, her character underlines the aspect of the feminine divinity that is more than natural as part of the culture and the continuity of the environment and the culture. The lost river motif, her no longer being a part of the earth, referred to in the Nadi Stuti hymn (Rigveda 10.75) is revisited in the adaptation of Kane with an ecofeminist interpretation of the concept, that the feminine is being erased is, as Kane views it, akin to eradicating the ecological, the cultural amnesia. The concept of Sarasvati as a symbol is based on balance, flow, and harmony; Kane describes her as powerful and self-reliant, fighting against the attempts of the patriarchal forces to limit or steer her in her actions. Specifically, the battles between Sarasvati and Brahma help emphasize the feminine empowerment versus the patriarchal control. The mythical and historical patterns of masculine domination trying to control or exploit the feminine can be traced in the wish of Brahma to have Sarasvati and turn her into a producing tool; it is similar to what rivers and the natural world have endured in industrial and anthropocentric cultures. Sarasvati and her dismissal of ownership and the claim of freedom and

meaning is a sign of environmental survivability and feminist rebellion through the story. The oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, as argued by eco-feminist scholars including Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant, have always had the same cultural and ethical basis. Many Indian rivers have been personified in goddess forms of Ganga, Yamuna, Kaveri, and Sarasvati who are worshiped due to their huge power but their physical forms have been neglected, polluted and exploited. This conflict is evident in the story of Kane because although they respect the goddess and the river, they also condemn the societal and institutional practices that interfere with their lives. Thus, the notion of the lost river being symbolic can be viewed as a premonition of the results of ignoring or destroying of the feminine power and ecology. In addition, Sarasvati portrayed by Kane is described as a source of wisdom and ingenuity, and she uses her water to bring to humanity the so-called gift of wisdom. She is generative and cyclic in her actions and is more than benevolent and goes along with the ecofeminist spiritual model of sustainability and mutual respect. This is due to the fact that the speech and wisdom delivered by Sarasvati is as a result of her river which helps in the reconstruction of culture, art, and consciousness without causing disruption to the nature. The fact that patriarchal forces are trying to steal her knowledge or move her flow to fulfil their interests is also a sign that the source of balance and interdependence that forms the basis of human livelihood is threatened: In fact, water, which is vital to human existence, is also prone to pollution and degradation in the form of rivers. Equally, feminine wisdom is very important but it is easily wiped out. The rituals associated with Sarasvati do not just remind of ritual, exploration, and sustenance but also comment on them; notwithstanding a veil of reverence, the sacred may be a mask of exploitation, depending on how one views it, as both Shiva and Alley have worked with the holiness and not thought about the material conditions of women and rivers. Kane through Sarasvati calls upon the reader to think about the ecological balance as a necessity of feminism. Associating the restoration of the environment with the reclamation of feminine agency, voice and space, both mythological and contemporary, Kane attracts the appropriate attention. In the overarching context of Indian mythology, the feminine nature of rivers would tend to naturalize such attributes as service, nourishment and emotionality as natural female qualities with narrative and symbolism being the basis. On the other hand, the mountains are a representation of male, transcendent, and monumental power as compared to the flowing nature of rivers which give life. The work by Kane is an attempt to break these binaries as Sarasvati is not merely a functional character, but also a self-reliant, strong, and revitalizing presence against the forces which seek to put her in her place. Accordingly, Gift introduces the readers to an ecofeminist figure of Sarasvati, demonstrating nurturing, creative energies, her capacity to withstand patriarchy and oppression, and cyclical, non-linear, and relational knowledge systems, which create ethical approaches of ecology based on the principles of justice and sustainability. The reinterpretation provided by Kane highlights the possibility of mythology to provide both criticisms and solutions to social and environmental injustices with the feminine divine and calls on a new devotion to- and thus care about- women and the earth.

#### **Myth, Memory, and Metaphor in Kane's Story: Ecofeminist Perspectives of the Sarasvati Gift**

Ecofeminism highlights an intimate relationship between the oppression of women in patriarchy and subjugation of nature, which are based on an epistemological view of objectification, dominance and commodification. These conflicts are brought out in Sarasvati: Gift by Kavita Kane where Sarasvati is given a chance to represent opposition and transformation. The gift of Sarasvati of her connection to vac (speech) and jnana (knowledge) forms an ecofeminist epistemology of interdependence, nurturing and creative, non-hierarchical change. Kane and other modern Indian female writers use Sarasvati as the means of independence and agency, which demonstrates the self-determination of women. The wisdom, artistry and flowing voice of Goddess Sarasvati become cultural pillars, which summarizes an ecological consciousness, in her Gift. The

story breaks down the dichotomous nature of masculine/culture and feminine/nature and advocates a relational epistemology and morality of flourishing centred on care, reverence and balance rather than domination or conquest. Kane suggests that the feminine is not passive or receptive only but is dynamic and is powerful and essentially rejuvenating the world through Sarasvati. The key aspect of the ecofeminist perspective of Kane is the restructuring of the river Sarasvati, which is losing significance, into an ecological and spiritual memory. The Sarasvati River, the subject of Vedic hymns and Hindu culture, is traditionally lost- buried underground. However, the loss of the river does not only mark the beginning of an ecological change: it is a metaphor of cultural and even psychological harm. The drying of the river is used in the story of Kane to symbolize the loss of the ecological consciousness and spiritual understanding as a negation of the sacred feminine. The loss of the river that Sarasvati laments can be understood as a current mourning over the environment a theme that has already been covered in the Environmental Humanities as an affective turn that critiques the gendered connotations of mourning the loss of the environment. Therefore, rootlessness can be considered as a consequence of an imbalance. Kane introduces this disproportion, which means that the wisdom and agency of the feminine will be disregarded in the patriarchal societies, and, as a result, they will put their ecological balance in danger. The sorrow of Sarasvati is not merely her sorrow, it is also the sorrow of the interruption of the harmony not only in herself, but in the whole world around her. The drying of the river in this context represents the spiritual and material consequences of anthropocentrism human activity that breaks the relationships in the natural environment. Kane artfully incorporates the ecological crisis into the myth that is based on the spiritual and ethical background through her narrative decision. Sarasvati criticizes the social and institutional values of emphasizing domination and utility in lieu of care and reciprocity. When the goddess observes the destruction of the environment or excessive patriarchy, she plays the role of a martyr, and a force of healing and regeneration, which ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies call the generative potential of interconnectedness. Her gift is not her possession but is a gift endowed with a sort of ethical faculty; she has not only a gift but a practice, a practice of opening to the environment, of renewing, and by which culture and the environment could again be united. It is interesting to note that Kane criticizes the feminine or nature as a nurturer or a forgiver; the assertiveness of Sarasvati, her denial of female or natural subordination, makes her an eco-warrior identity. She teaches the human race that responsibility should become the hand in hand with care and learning and should be accompanied with vigilance and bravery to fight against injustice directed both against women and the planet. Kane resurfaces and reinvents the power of the goddess to the Anthropocene by depicting Sarasvati as a shaker and shaper of myths. This ecofeminist reclaiming of Sarasvati posits the necessity of the convergence of the social and ecological justice. The argument is that the ecological healing of our world is associated with the healing of female voice, agency and dignity. In this regard, the Gift by Sarasvati finds its hope not in returning to the past, but by actively creating a new future in which the so-called gift may be collectively possessed, in which ecological consciousness, creative ethics, shared responsibility, not of women alone, but of the whole Earth.

#### **Ecological Isolation, Control, and Violence**

The ecofeminism arguments, as portrayed by Kane, focus on the ways women are peripheralized in the patriarchal structures as well as on how nature is dominated, objectified, and exploited in the patriarchal structures rather than being regarded as equals in a mutual and creative relationship. The constant attempts of Brahma to control Sarasvati not only point to the mythological contradictions but also represent the wider problems of society as a whole in which the man dominates over feminine as well as a problem of exploitation of earth and resources. The final rebellion of Sarasvati against Brahma can be regarded as the strong comment on the necessity of females to struggle against conformist structures and glorify the importance of female independence and autonomy in the recovery of the ecological balance. This sense of loss and

alienation to the society reflects the environmental sorrow caused by our laxity and boasting of the nature. The fact that the Sarasvati river has dried up can be viewed as a sad incidence of losing the sense of ecological consciousness and moral ethics, i.e. that the silencing down of feminine voices in the context of patriarchy has led to the disproportion in the fundamental balance of life. In this respect, Kane applies myth as a means of relating ancient warnings to current urgency to prompt the reader to think of the consequences of being disconnected and lost. Re-reading the story of Sarasvati, Kane promotes interconnectedness, respect, and justice as the principles of the gender relationships and nature protection. The story assumes that the way to restore is to build relationships with others and to deny the idea of alienating human beings to the relationships that they have. The gift of Sarasvati is a creative and fertile power, which opposes the means of patriarchal power and opens the way to a future where the sacred feminine can be revered and the culture, along with the ecology, renewed.

#### **Environmental Education, and Ethical Awareness**

Knowledge in *Sarasvati Gift* does not exist as the successful academic performance; it is more of an ecological knowledge wherein the postulates of unity, caring, and interdependence are critical elements here. Kane puts it that the real knowledge is a human-environmental equilibrium (Kane, p. 98). This view portrays the concept of relational ethics. This idea is echoed by the idea of Earth Democracy which is the approach of Vandana Shiva that encourages the human beings to welcome the biodiversity and ecological interdependence as well as respect all living beings (Shiva, *Staying Alive*). In the teachings of Sarasvati, harm to nature is equivalent to harm to the self (Kane, p. 150), which means the ecological consciousness is associated with the moral obligation. Sarasvati is a guide in the field of ecological ethics reflecting the idea that knowledge must not bring down life, it must increase it. The connection with flowing water is a symbol of constant renewal and balance and means that we must be reciprocal and careful of the natural cycles of life. The story of Kane shows that disconnection to this wisdom leads to the destruction of nature which is clearly portrayed through the shrinking Sarasvati River, which according to Kane is a scar of human avarice and negligence (Kane, p. 173). The ecological restoration presented in the novel by means of Siegel using Sarasvati as a voice, is that feminine creativity and care are essential to humanity and must be reclaimed. The text by Kane encourages the readers to re-define knowledge as more than intellectual understanding and texts, but through the lens of a living and ethical practice that incorporates spirituality, ecology, and gender justice. According to Sarasvati, my gift involves, not only information, but creation, preservation, and transformation which are sacred, cyclical and nonlinear (Kane, p. 101). The circular view offers an opposing patriarchal opposition of domination and subjugation, by adoring interrelation and rebirth. Finally, the gift of Sarasvati provides an ecofeminist dream in which knowledge is compatible with nurturing and wisdom is the basis to the environment and social peace.

#### **Ecological Stewardship and the Divine Feminine in Sarasvati's Gift**

The *Sarasvati's Gift* by Kavita Kane is a fusion of spirituality and ecology and the recovery of the divine feminine as an ecological protector whose attributes of curative powers, artistic abilities, empathy, and cyclic renewal are essential to ecological sustainability. The divinity of Sarasvati is not a mere mythical depiction but it exists in the form of a living force that brings together intellect and intuition, arts and nature, humanity and the cosmos. Kane explains the idea of knowledge as flowing as water, that is, they connect, nourish and refresh all life (Kane, 114), and *Sarasvati Gift* is an important mythopoetic ecological narrative that is based on Environmental Humanities perspective. The fact that Sarasvati was depicted in the novel as a spiritual ecologist emphasizes the idea that she is an advocate of ecological ethics, where every element of taking care of the earth is inevitably connected with the issue of developing ethical consciousness. Sarasvati teaches the wisdom that when the natural world is caused harm it is violence to ourselves (Kane, p. 150). This concept correlates with Earth Democracy by Vandana Shiva that emphasizes



the significance of biodiversity and interdependence to sustainability. Finally, Kane challenges the readers to view ecological stewardship as a religious responsibility, especially as a religious responsibility based on feminine wisdom, as opposed to materialism reductionism. Incorporating gender and ecology into the plot of *Sarasvati*, Kane breaks the traditional dichotomy of feminine/nature and masculine/culture. She highlights the skills of *Sarasvati* in mediation, creativity and fluidity as a possible template of multi-species, gender-equitable approaches to sustainability. This model echoes ecofeminist calls of expanded forms of ethical concern beyond anthropocentrism, which acknowledge that it is not only anthropocentrism that shares the gift of life but also species and ecosystems. Kane offers a model of ecological practice through empathetic and activist-driven practice through her character of *Sarasvati*. *Sarasvati* characteristics have often been used in newer Indian environmental movements, particularly in campaigns which seek to save rivers and empower women. The moral value of *Sarasvati* remains at the point of mythology and human action, when scholars examine the literary and visual forms of her gift to go beyond metaphor to concrete practices and lived experience in the struggle of environmental justice; numerous of these possibilities of advocacy are discussed in the story by Kane. Being an archetype, *Sarasvati* is associated with balance and harmony, both of which are needed to tackle the ecological unbalanced Ness of the numerous crises of the Anthropocene. Her encounter with Brahma depicts the strain between patriarchy and feminine independence, which is an example of the part of the ecofeminism critique of hierarchical oppression. The claim by *Sarasvati* that there should be a freely and ethical dissemination of knowledge is an androcentric mode of monopolization which advocates a relational epistemology as opposed to an exploitative based on the model. As a result, Kane *Sarasvati* Gift of *Sarasvati* is a reinstatement of a sacred feminine ecology that calls upon the readers to consider myth as an ethical source of activism in support of the Earth. Similarly, the goddess continues to appear throughout the story to shatter negative discourses as it demonstrates the value of feminine creativity in the life cycle and nurturing an ecological awareness. Kane in this retelling underlines the importance of appreciating the divine feminine and making gender-ecological justice and leading to the realization of an equitable and a sustainable world in which knowledge creation is in harmony with nature in creative and balanced relationships.

### **Conclusion**

*Sarasvati* Gift by Kavita Kane is a reinterpretation of mythology through a bright ecofeminist lens with the elements of gender justice and environmental awareness. The story depicts that not only feminine empowerment but also environmental prosperity is compromised by a generic patriarchal way of thinking, which Kane uses to examine the story via *Sarasvati*. Consequently, the story promotes a harmonious living based on care, wisdom and respect to nature. The text is a unique contribution to Environmental Humanities and ecofeminist literature because *Sarasvati*, who embodies the environmental ethics of feminine divinity, is the main character. The re-thinking of *Sarasvati* in the ecofeminist terms allows the novel to show how the mythology has profound ethical importance in addressing the current ecological and gender-specific crisis. The knowledge, innovation and the rapport to the environment that is the gift of *Sarasvati* is an inspiring pattern to follow towards an ecologist as well as the cultural future of feminism, because it acknowledges the agency of women in environmental action and literary invention. The ecofeminist discussion, prompted by *Sarasvati*, and the fundamental efforts in the area of Environmental Humanities, is, more and more, establishing connections between Indian traditions and feminist movements worldwide. More importantly, the *Sarasvati* Gift by Kane highlights the interrelated process of healing the Earth and the war on gender-based oppression as one. In calling on the sacred feminine and emphasizing the relational ethics, the novel calls on action to a just future in which the ecological and gender justice actions are intimately connected, as the readers become encouraged by the potential and transformative power of myth, culture, and feminist approaches to environmentalism.

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**LOCALIZING THE SDGS: A CRITICAL STUDY OF INDIA'S ASPIRATIONAL  
DISTRICTS PROGRAMME**

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**Abstract**

"Local and regional governments are indispensable for to effectively delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a reality the government has acknowledged by promoting SDG localization. "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refers to the integration of subnational contexts into the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda. It involves not only setting context-specific goals and targets but also identifying appropriate means of implementation and establishing indicators for measuring and monitoring progress. Localization operates in two interrelated dimensions: first, by enabling local and sub-national governments to advance the SDGs through bottom-up initiatives tailored to community needs; and second, by employing the SDGs as a strategic framework to shape and guide local development policies. In order to accelerate social and economic development in the country's least developed regions, the Indian government introduced the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) in 2018. 28 states and 112 districts were found by the software. These districts were chosen because, when compared to national averages, they had continuously demonstrated poor improvement in key categories like health and nutrition, education, agriculture and water resources, financial inclusion and skill development, and essential infrastructure. This paper analyzes the impact of SDG localization, specifically within the context of the NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme. It discusses various case studies highlighting how these districts have successfully achieved SDG goals. Finally, it outlines key lessons learned regarding effective SDG localization strategies.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Aspirational district programme, NITI Aayog, regional development, sustainable development, UNDP, "Whole of Society Approach

**Introduction**

In 2015, 193 countries of the United Nations (UN) embraced a new development agenda. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development puts forth an ambitious plan to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its associated 169 targets within a span of 15 years. The SDGs present a new and coherent way of thinking about diverse facets of development and motivate countries to act in areas of critical importance for both humanity and the planet (Scharlemann et al., 2020). Drawing from the Millennium Development Goals and influenced by the human development approach, the 2030 Agenda pledges to "leave no one behind" and to reach the furthest behind first" (UNDP, 2016). The Sustainable Development Goals are different because each goal is linked to the others, and progress in one area depends on progress in another. Therefore, countries need to move away from working in isolated policy areas and instead create coordinated strategies that recognize these connections and address them together.

'Localizing' the Sustainable Development Goals refers to shaping the 2030 Agenda according to the needs and conditions of specific regions or local areas. It covers the entire cycle, from setting relevant targets and choosing implementation strategies to monitoring progress with appropriate local indicators and advocacy. Localization is a bidirectional effort: it enables bottom-up action by sub-national governments while providing a global framework for their local development policies, all through participatory planning and evaluation. Because India is vast and has wide variations in culture, population, and economic conditions, adapting the SDGs to local needs becomes essential. Success depends less on national scope and more on subnational interventions,

as these governments are the main implementers. Current initiatives address the complexity of this task by focusing on six core objectives: allocating ministerial ownership, adapting goals to local realities, creating localized monitoring metrics, establishing strategy frameworks, systematizing implementation, and performing targeted reviews.

The 2030 Agenda declaration mandates a 'whole-of-government' approach because it recognizes the SDGs as 'integrated and indivisible,' requiring a balance across the economic, social, and environmental pillars. The Agenda explicitly states that the interlinkages between the goals are crucial for success, necessitating integrated solutions. Fundamentally, this means uniting diverse stakeholders—such as ministries, departments, and public agencies—across traditional sectoral boundaries for integrated planning and implementation of development programs.

In order to accelerate development in 112 underdeveloped districts, the Indian government launched the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) in 2018. The program aims to enhance important areas like health, education, agriculture, financial inclusion, and basic infrastructure. It is based on the concepts of convergence, cooperation, and healthy competition. ADP has been a successful illustration of how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) may be implemented locally in India by employing data-based planning and concentrating on quantifiable outcomes. Of the 17 SDGs, 15 are directly related to the tasks performed by the nation's local governments.

#### **Methodology**

For this paper, researchers have primarily used Secondary data from Localizing SDGs Early lesson from 2019, the "Champions of Change" dashboard on the official website of NITI Aayog for conceptual analysis. Apart from this various journal from Google scholar, research scholar, JSTOR has also taken into consideration.

#### **Objective of the study**

- To related aspirational district programme with sustainable development goal
- To study the Indian model of localization of SDG
- To study various case study of aspirational district in achieving SDG goals
- To discuss the lesson, learn during the localization of SDG

#### **Indian Model of SDG Localization**

**At the central level,** the primary policy body of the Indian government, NITI Aayog, is in charge of integrating the SDGs. It creates the nation's long-term strategy for accomplishing the objectives, unifies activities at the federal and state levels, and provides policy recommendations.

**At state level,** States and Union Territories play the main role in localizing the SDGs. Each one must set up its own system to implement the goals according to its local needs. The SDG Vision document is created by the Department of Planning and Statistics, which serves as the coordinating agency at the state level.

**At the district level,** by incorporating elected representatives from Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local authorities, the Department of Planning and Statistics collaborates with the SDG cell to coordinate SDG-related activities. The primary organization involved in this endeavor is the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), which develops training courses for local officials in both rural and urban regions. In each state and Union Territory, NIRD works with the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) to implement these capacity-building initiatives, which allow authorities to match local development plans with the more general SDG objectives.

Figure 1: Process of localisation of SDGs in India

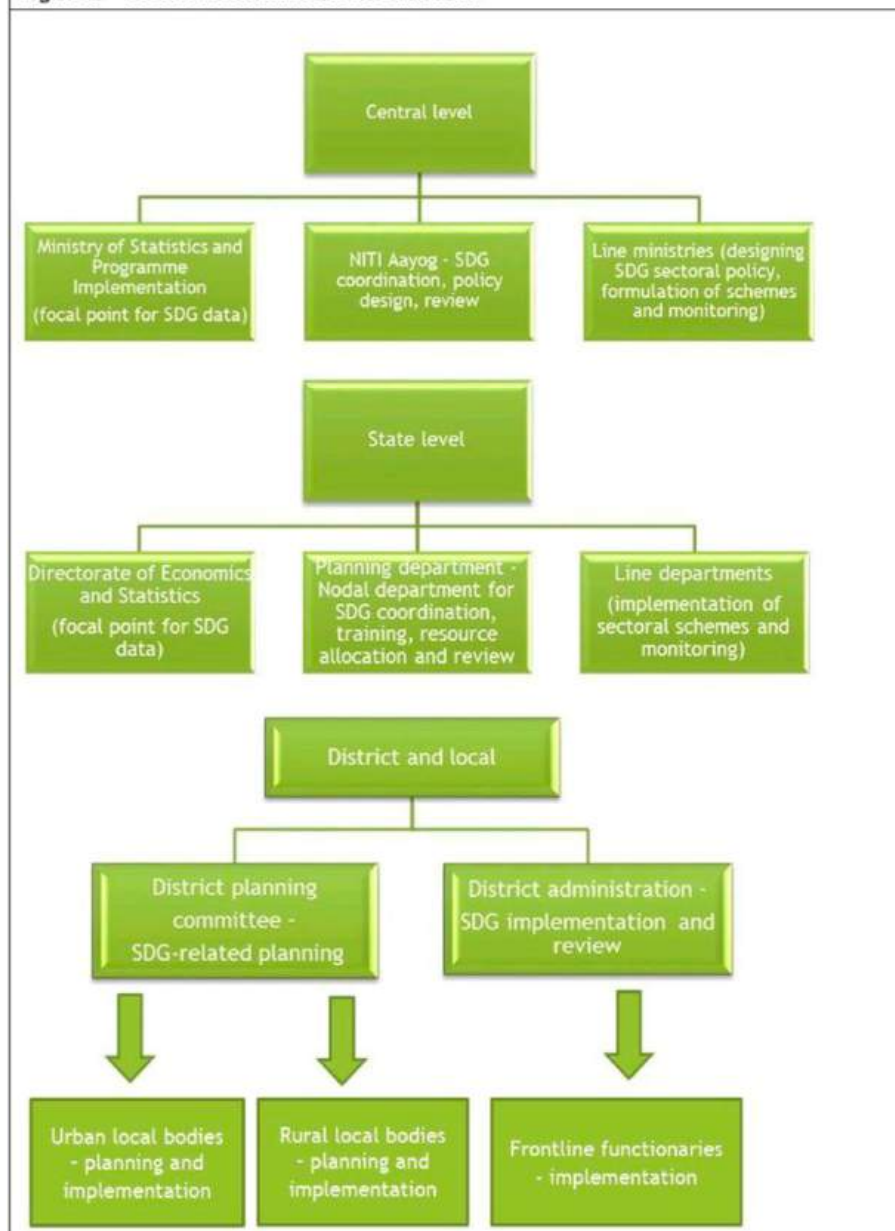


Image is taken from: Localising the SDGs in India; The role of government and private training institutes by Sreerupa Sengupta and Avik Sinha

**Aspirational District Programme and Sustainable Development Goal**

| <b>Aspirational Districts Program domains and the weights</b> | <b>The United Nations identified sustainable development goals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Health &amp; Nutrition (30%)</b>                           | <b>GOAL 1:</b> No Poverty<br><b>GOAL 2:</b> Zero Hunger<br><b>GOAL 3:</b> Good Health and Well-Being<br><b>GOAL 6:</b> Clean Water and Sanitation<br><b>GOAL 10:</b> Reduced Inequalities<br><b>GOAL 17:</b> Partnerships for the Goals                               |
| <b>Education (30%)</b>                                        | <b>GOAL 1:</b> No Poverty<br><b>GOAL 4:</b> Quality Education<br><b>GOAL 5:</b> Gender Equality<br><b>GOAL 8:</b> Decent Work and Economic Growth<br><b>GOAL 10:</b> Reduced Inequalities<br><b>GOAL 17:</b> Partnerships for the Goals                               |
| <b>Agriculture &amp; Water Resources (20%)</b>                | <b>GOAL 1:</b> No Poverty<br><b>GOAL 2:</b> Zero Hunger<br><b>GOAL 12:</b> Responsible Consumption and Production<br><b>GOAL 13:</b> Climate Action<br><b>GOAL 14:</b> Life Below Water<br><b>GOAL 15:</b> Life on Land<br><b>GOAL 17:</b> Partnerships for the Goals |

**SDG Achievement through Successful Implementation in Aspirational Districts**

**SDG 1: No Poverty-** This Sustainable Development Goal focuses on eliminating poverty in every form, beginning with ending extreme poverty worldwide. To achieve this, countries must introduce universal social protection measures and strengthen the economic security of vulnerable populations against crises and disasters. This approach ensures equal access to economic resources and supports sustainable livelihoods for everyone.

Reducing poverty is a major priority in rural India, as a large share of the population continues to live below the poverty line.

**Case study**

**District: Chhatarpur in Madhya Pradesh**

To make agriculture more profitable, the Chhatarpur Aspirational District introduced the Horticulture Price Agreement Initiative. This programme provides both forward and backward linkages, ensuring farmers receive the highest possible price for their produce and are included as partners in local micro-processing units. It also creates job opportunities for local youth. The initiative focuses on vulnerable groups such as small and marginal farmers, women-headed households, persons with disabilities, and farmers from socially disadvantaged communities.

**SDG 2: Zero Hunger –**

This Sustainable Development Goal focuses on eliminating hunger and ensuring that everyone has access to nutritious food throughout the year, while also improving overall nutrition levels. To achieve this, countries must adopt sustainable and resilient farming methods that strengthen small farmers and increase production despite environmental pressures. Since sustainable development is



strongly connected to agriculture, SDG 2 highlights the importance of food security and promoting farming practices that protect long-term sustainability.

**Case study**

**District –Ramgarh, Jharkhand**

The Agriculture Entrepreneur Scheme is a strong example of how the District Administration, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and local communities can work together to create a replicable model for agricultural growth. The initiative focuses on training selected “agripreneurs” in modern and efficient farming methods to build a more profitable and low-cost system. Implemented by the CSO Transform Rural India (TRI), the programme chooses one farmer out of every hundred in a village and teaches them the complete process from cultivation to marketing. This approach supports better resource use, informed planning, and reduces dependence on middlemen. As a result, the model is gaining popularity, with more farmers showing interest in adopting techniques like mixed cropping and drip irrigation.

**SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being -**

Ensuring health and general well-being for individuals of all ages is the main focus of this Sustainable Development Goal. In order to do this, nations must improve their health systems so that everyone has access to high-quality, reasonably priced healthcare while simultaneously drastically lowering the number of avoidable illnesses and deaths. Access to healthcare is crucial for enhancing people's health and standard of living in rural places.

**Case Study**

**District: Kandhamal in Odisha**

The Aspirational District of Kandhamal (Odisha) has demonstrated a remarkable transformation in maternal healthcare. By challenging traditional practices, the district achieved the state's highest rate of Institutional Deliveries (97%) and a significant 65% reduction in maternal deaths.

A key component of this success was the introduction of innovative Delivery Vans to ensure women reached facilities safely and to encourage institutional births.

**SDG 4: Quality Education -**

This Sustainable Development Goal aims to ensure that everyone receives fair and high-quality education and has access to learning opportunities throughout their entire life.

**Case study**

**District: Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand**

To address the issue of inadequate school infrastructure and poor student-teacher ratios, the Udham Singh Nagar District Administration initiated a strategic school merger and integration program. Schools with limited resources were combined with better-equipped, nearby facilities to maximize resource usage. Students traveling over 1 km to the new location are provided transportation. To further enhance the receiving schools' capabilities, the Administration also launched the School Adoption Programme to secure essential furniture and infrastructure support through corporate CSR funding.

**SDG 5: Gender Equality –**

In order to guarantee that women and girls have equal rights and opportunities in all facets of life, including economic involvement, political leadership, and resource access, it focuses on eradicating all forms of discrimination and violence against them.

**Case study**

**District: Firozpur in Punjab**

To raise awareness about the ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ campaign, the Firozpur District Administration introduced a creative outreach initiative. Graffiti featuring successful women from various fields were painted on over-bridges to showcase their achievements and motivate local girls and women to aim higher. The district also dedicated two major roundabouts to the campaign, displaying statues of “a mother caring for her daughter” and “a girl engaged in studies.” These public art displays serve as constant reminders of the importance of girls' education, the role of mothers, and the need to improve the sex ratio through greater social awareness.

**SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation -**

Having clean water and proper sanitation is vital for rural development, as it helps prevent water-related illnesses and leads to better living conditions.

**Case study**

**District: Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand**

The Udham Singh Nagar District Administration, in partnership with Piramal Sarvajal, introduced the 'Sarvajal Project' to deliver safe drinking water through decentralized systems. The initiative uses solar-powered, cloud-linked water dispensing kiosks to create a sustainable supply network, ensuring that even remote areas receive clean water. To support the project, the Administration involves schools and students in awareness campaigns that encourage water conservation.

**SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy -**

SDG 7 is the global commitment to ensure universal energy access that is both affordable and clean. To ensure a sustainable energy future for everyone and the planet, this calls for significantly increasing energy efficiency and hastening the deployment of renewable energy technology.

**Case study**

**District: Gumla in Jharkhand**

Because many remote hamlets in Gumla could not be electrified due to scattered houses and difficult terrain, the District Administration partnered with the international NGO Barefoot College. They formed Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of local women and trained them—known as "Solar Mamas"—to assemble solar panels, lights, and photovoltaic circuits. In its first phase, the project provided solar energy to 150 households that previously had no electricity. Along with supplying power, the initiative also helped the women gain useful skills and access income opportunities such as bee-keeping and coffee cultivation, giving them a stable source of livelihood.

**SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth -**

The goal of this Sustainable Development Goal is to guarantee that everyone has access to good jobs while fostering consistent and equitable economic growth.

It calls for the creation of quality job opportunities, support for entrepreneurship, and protection of workers' rights so that everyone can work in safe and productive conditions.

**Case study**

**District: Hailakandi in Assam**

In the Hailakandi district, women from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have started producing affordable and hygienic sanitary napkins. This initiative serves two purposes: it strengthens the economic independence of SHG members and greatly increases menstrual health awareness in the district. By manufacturing enough napkins to meet the needs of all women linked with local SHGs, the programme has helped ensure safer and more hygienic menstrual practices for most women in Hailakandi.

**SDG 9 Industry innovation and Infrastructure –**

Its aims to modernize and build resilient infrastructure, drive sustainable industrial growth, and stimulate technological innovation and research.

**Case study**

**District –Golapara, Assam**

The shortage of natural resources and the shutdown of stone quarries had severely slowed down the construction of all-weather roads in the district. To overcome this issue and ensure year-round connectivity, the district adopted eco-friendly road construction technologies. By using these green methods, including recycling waste plastic, dependence on natural resources was reduced and the overall cost of building and maintaining roads decreased. This approach has not only supported sustainable practices but also resulted in economic benefits for the entire state.

**SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities -**

This Sustainable Development Goal focuses on making urban life better and more sustainable. It promotes inclusive, participatory, and integrated planning to ensure that cities provide affordable

and safe housing, accessible transportation, adequate basic services, and high-quality public spaces for all residents.

**Case study**

**District(s): Shrawasti and Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh**

The Bal Sansad programme has been introduced in more than 3,200 schools in Shrawasti District, Uttar Pradesh, giving children a space to share their opinions on family, school, and community matters. Along with making students aware of their rights, it teaches democratic values by allowing them to elect school leaders through secret voting. First started in the Aspirational Districts of Shrawasti and Bahraich, the initiative also promotes inclusiveness by encouraging collective participation in activities like school assemblies and cleanliness drives. The model has been successful and is now being adopted in other districts across Uttar Pradesh.

**SDG 16 Peace justice and strong institution-**

This Sustainable Development Goal seeks to secure global and local stability by fostering peaceful and inclusive societies. It strives to create efficient, transparent, and responsible institutions at all levels of government and to ensure that everyone has access to justice.

**Case study**

**District: Goalpara in Assam**

The Goalpara District Administration introduced the Infrastructure Snapshot App, an Android-based tool that allows real-time tracking of public facilities such as schools, health centres, and government offices, as well as better monitoring of scheme implementation. To improve accountability, the app includes features like GPS-based location tagging (even without internet), a system to report infrastructure problems, and options to document staff absenteeism with photos. It also works as an emergency reporting platform, allowing users to send alerts about disasters and domestic violence. By using digital technology, the app has strengthened the connection between citizens and the administration, resulting in quicker service delivery, more grievances being resolved, and increased public participation in improving district infrastructure.

**SDG 17 Partnership for Goal-**

This goal highlights the importance of bringing together and sharing knowledge, skills, technology, and financial support from all parties involved, including governments, businesses, academic institutions, and civil society. Its purpose is to strengthen global cooperation by improving policy coordination, increasing sustainable financing, supporting trade, and enhancing capacity-building efforts.

**Case study**

**District: Hazaribagh in Jharkhand**

Human capital is the key driver of success in any organization, outweighing the enabling roles of Technology and funding. Recognizing that motivation and recognition are often more effective than monetary compensation, the Hazaribagh District Administration created a pioneering 'BDO Scorecard'. This initiative tries to motivate Block Development Officers (BDOs) and the frontline staff of rural development by assessing their performance with increased transparency and objectivity, including the officers' self-assessment. The BDO Scorecard assessment will now be included in their Annual Confidential Reports (ACR) for a comprehensive evaluation.

**Insights and Lessons from Practice**

**Aligning the long-term vision, strategy, plans, and budgets of the states and UTs with the SDGs can guarantee ownership:** The government's long-term vision, planning process, and budgets must be completely aligned with the SDGs. A thorough analysis of the interrelated routes leading to developmental outcomes is equally crucial. This will guarantee that the budget and plans are flexible and agile enough to adapt to any changing circumstances. The majority of Indian states have modified their plans to align with the Sustainable Development Goals and created SDG-based vision documents.

**Dedicated SDG centres** are important because they offer technical assistance to the government in integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into regular planning. These units are usually

placed within the main coordinating department or institution. Based on the capacity of each state or Union Territory, they may function as facilitators, coordinators, or integrators. They also play a major role in capacity-building and support research efforts at the sub-national level.

**Creating institutional ownership:**

The 2030 Agenda offers a unified and interconnected development framework that brings together economic, social, and environmental goals to promote inclusive and sustainable growth, eliminate poverty, and protect human rights. For this vision to be effectively implemented at the local level, strong political commitment is crucial. Shifting to comprehensive, systems-oriented method for planning, budgeting, and monitoring—along with smooth cooperation across sectors and society—requires dedicated leadership from the highest levels of government.

**Creating a strong review and tracking system**

The effectiveness of SDG vision documents and action plans depends on creating a strong system for continuous monitoring and evaluation. This process should be fully coordinated and include all key stakeholders. It is important to treat all SDG indicators as a single, interconnected set that works together, reflecting the linked nature of the goals and targets. At the state level, reviews should take a holistic view of overall progress while also examining achievements within individual sectors.

**Private sector:** As a key driver of sustainable growth and progress, the private sector is vital for the SDGs. It fuels this progress by creating skilling and job opportunities and developing innovative solutions. For India specifically, the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) framework established a mechanism through which businesses can channel their resources and efforts directly toward meeting the SDG targets. Adopting a whole-of-society approach to achieving the SDGs requires a "whole-of-society" approach built on multi-stakeholder partnerships. This is critical because diverse partners bring unique skillsets and expertise to the table, effectively augmenting the capacities that individual institutions may lack in a specific area.

**Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** are uniquely positioned to serve as a vital link, bringing the voices and concerns of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations to the attention of government, the private sector, and academia. Their crucial role is to promote the human rights of these sections and ensure their inclusion.

Broad and diverse partnerships are vital for reaching the SDGs. The aim is to create win-win collaborations where public and private stakeholders combine their strengths and resources to achieve common goals.

**The 'Whole-of-Government' Approach:** Although developing SDG-based Vision Documents has helped state and UT governments adopt a whole-of-government approach in their planning, even greater advantages can be achieved by applying this integrated method to budgeting, implementation, and monitoring as well—not just planning.

**Aligning Local Plans with SDGs:** The most powerful way to build community ownership and embed the SDGs at the grassroots level is by strengthening local self-governance institutions. Because their members are directly elected and required to engage with the community, they are best positioned to guide local planning processes.

**Leaving No Community Behind: Reaching** those who are most disadvantaged first is essential to fulfilling the "Leave No One Behind" commitment. This requires a strong system to identify marginalized groups and ensure they can access their rights and receive all entitled benefits.

**Budgeting:** Simply mapping budgetary priorities to the SDGs doesn't guarantee resource coherence. Accounting and budgeting frameworks must be aligned and integrated with the SDGs, requiring both Central and State levels to assess the availability and need for financial resources to implement the goals.

**Monitoring:** The National Indicator Framework (NIF) is vital for tracking progress and identifying data gaps. Further efforts are necessary to harness and unify development data to ensure that all policy decisions are evidence-based and effective.

**Capacity Development:** SDG training should go beyond explaining the 17 goals and their targets. It must also build the core skills and abilities needed to effectively achieve these goals by 2030.

**Communication and Advocacy:** It plays a critical role in engaging advocacy to maintain momentum for SDG localization. Public awareness and sensitization initiatives must be intensified to ensure the implementation process is participatory and inclusive. Furthermore, targeted behavior change communication is essential to encourage society to adopt practices that truly promote sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

The National Indicator Framework (NIF), launched in 2017 by MoSPI in collaboration with NITI Aayog. NITI Aayog has established the benchmark for assessing SDG implementation in India and guides policy. This central document led states to create their own State Indicator Frameworks. Progress on the NIF was officially documented in MoSPI's 2020 report. The Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP) represents one of India's most significant efforts to translate the vision of the 2030 Agenda into actionable outcomes at the grassroots level. By embedding the principles of convergence, collaboration, and competition within governance, the programme has demonstrated how the localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved in diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts. Its emphasis on real-time data, outcome-based monitoring, and participatory planning has not only accelerated improvements in health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure but has also created a replicable framework for other regions. At the same time, the experience of ADP highlights that localisation is not without challenges— issues of capacity constraints, uneven resource distribution, and the need for stronger community participation remain central to sustaining progress. Nevertheless, the programme underscores the transformative potential of subnational governance in advancing the SDGs. It reaffirms that achieving sustainable development in India requires empowered local institutions, inclusive planning, and continuous innovation in monitoring and delivery mechanisms. As such, the ADP stands as both a laboratory of learning and a blueprint for scaling SDG localisation, offering valuable lessons not only for India but also for other countries pursuing the 2030 Agenda

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**CONTRASTING NATURE’S BEAUTY AT STAKE WITH HUMAN’S GREED: AN  
ECOCRITICAL READING OF MARIO PETRUCCI’S BOSCO**

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**Abstract**

‘Let Nature be your teacher’ advocates the renowned high priest of Nature, William Wordsworth, in his poem “The Tables Turned”. There is no better teacher or preacher in the world than Nature. Mother Nature always represents both sides of a coin. On one side it nurtures the soul in an aesthetic way and on the other side when people hurt or harm her she rises up in tooth and claws and thereafter the consequences are unbearable. As a multi skilled person, Mario Petrucci an Italian born British poet, an environmentalist, physicist, film maker and scientist has combined Nature’s beauty and unknown face of human in his collection *Bosco*. *Bosco* in Italian means forest. This paper aims to discuss how people tend to mutilate the magnificence and charm of Nature. Anthropocentric vision which is human centered, neglecting all other sources of the Earth have also been investigated in the ecopoems “Watchmakers”, “woodcuts”, “Oak”, “sapling”, “Deserted”, “Dryad”, “Snapshots”, “Sequoia”, “logwood” and “Exodus” from the collection *Bosco*. Humans are portrayed as the most dominating force which ignites the molestation of Mother Nature followed by a string of problems like environmental degradation, rise in temperature, health issues, climate change etc. Ecophilosophy coined by French post structuralist Felix Guttari promotes ecological harmony and equilibrium. Deforestation, a global problem, is being addressed universally with various strategies and scientific approaches, yet is burning bright with man’s greed that extends miles beyond his need. The research paper explores and highlights the inhuman side of humans by substantiating the poems of Petrucci that warn about the catastrophic effect of the exploitation of our environment.

**Keywords:** Anthropocentric, Beauty, Deforestation, Ecophilosophy, Catastrophe

Ecocriticism, the interdisciplinary study of literature and environment is defined by Lawrence Buell as a “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis” (20). The term ‘ecocriticism’ was coined by William Ruckert in 1978. Ecocriticism is the study of inter relationship between human and nature. Cheryll Glotfelty is affectionately called as the father of ecocriticism. By the end of 1990’s the organisation ASLE (Association of the Study of Literature and Environment) was developed by the dignitaries like Wendell Berry, Lawrence Buell, Camille Dungy, Rick Bass and others. They saw the rapid growth of eco studies among the literary society. Environmentalists contributed their articles and papers in the journal ISLE (Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment) which explored eco criticism at various levels. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey, popularly called as Lake Poets of the Romantic era, have celebrated Mother Nature in their poems. Wordsworth in his poem “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” claims, “A presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime”(97-98). He explores the profound connection with Nature. The bundle of emotions expressed in his poems convert the readers to sages who can communicate with Nature and also experience the tranquility.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**418 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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There is rapture on the lonely shore,  
There is society, where none intrudes,  
By the deep sea and music in its roar,  
O love not man the less, but Nature more (4.1602-1606).

Lord Byron in his "Childe Harlod's Pilgrimage" Canto IV, stanza 178 seeks the company of Nature which is loaded with images like "pathless woods", "lonely shore", "deep sea" and "music". It is the alternate source for him to get away from the chaos and conflicts that humans face in everyday life. He loves Nature more than humans because he is experiencing the aesthetics, joy, tranquility which calms his soul. He even treats Nature as a separate society. John Keats's sensuousness in his poems "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" appeals the reader.

Being inspired by such romantic poets in his early days, Mario Petrucci, an Italian born British man has to his credit, a multifarious literary career as an award winning poet, filmmaker, scientist and an essayist. As a fascinating fact Petrucci identifies himself as an ecophilosopher. His stupendous contribution to literature includes ten poetry books, lectures and films. All his renowned works are his reflection on life, death, quest for identity, destruction, beauty of Nature. The vulnerability of Nature is also aptly captured in his poems. If Nature gets destroyed people cannot live in harmony. *Bosco* which got published in 1999 is divided into three sections namely "Arboretum", "The True Service" and "Woodsmoke". After reviewing Petrucci's *Bosco*, David Dancomb firmly believes, "In the trees and forests of this powerful sequence of poems, there is more than aesthetic pleasure. There is a celebration of life itself. This is poetry with a purpose, in language that is a joy to read" (50). Mario Petrucci's *Bosco* deals with the hidden themes of deforestation. Though deforestation is taken for study at a deeper level in eco studies, it still remains unresolved. Eco critics assert that Critical Plant Studies (CPS) has a huge impact on diverse areas of plants including agriculture, forestry and environmental ethics. Climate change is one of the largest environmental challenges affecting the planet and humanity.

Deforestation amounts to destroying the homes and habitat of millions of species. The ever growing demand for the forest products and the conservation of forest to agricultural land along with forest fire and urban encroachment of the forest land have resulted in drastic deforestation. It is estimated that the world currently loses one million hectares of forest land every year. This not only affects the climate by increasing the atmospheric level of carbon di oxide, but also endangers the environment by inhibiting water recycling, triggering severe flooding, soil degradation and the extinction of plant and animal species. "Watchmakers", "woodcuts", "Oak", "sapling", "Deserted", "Dryad", "Snapshots", "Sequoia", "logwood" and "Exodus" are some of the poems from the collection *Bosco* that treat deforestation empathetically.

Mario Petrucci portrays himself as an ecopoet who is concerned with ecological changes. The poems in the collection explore how humans molest Nature. Ecocriticism examines the relationship between environment and literature while ecosophy includes human contribution in its gamunt interconnecting harmony, love and aesthetic beauty. The poem "Woodcuts" reveals a carpenter who is chopping down the trees to make artifacts. Mother Nature has always been an enigma so widely used and so capable of fulfilling human needs. The fact that the forest, once with majestic mahogany, ebony and yew trees, have been cut down, adds pathos when the readers visualize it. The beautifully embossed startled owl and badger captures the eyes of the readers and at the same time the wooden chips of the murdered trees surrounding the carpenter's foot exposes man's incredible intent on devastating the forest. All the trees have been fostered by Nature for centuries. Man does not have sympathy for trees and hence for multifarious reasons he is molesting the forest.

He sees none of this. Knows only  
that he must always go with the grain  
that the thin slab of history he works  
must be right - and so will let millennia pass

through gnarled fingers, the grip of a vice,  
to make a life's artifice. (23-28)

There is no doubt in the creativity of the carpenter and his deep connection with the woods; the artifact he has made will stand for centuries. His unconscious disrespect for Nature is driven home like a blow with a line, "He sees none of this". He is determined to "go with the grain". In the anthropocentric vision of the carpenter, he believes he is superior to Nature without knowing her wrath when she is exploited. He sees beauty in the artifacts he had made but fails to realize how cruel deforestation is. Similarly, the poem "Watchmakers" critiques the negative environmental effects of consumerism while highlighting the elegance and skill of traditional handicraft as a reflection on the interaction between humans and environment. The poem asks readers to ponder the worth of nature, the significance of sustainable practices, and the complex relationships that unite all living things through striking imagery.

Insisting on the same phenomena, the reader ear marks one more poem "Sapling". The speaker in the poem is the young boy who observes the pristine beauty of the forest every morning. The richness of Nature is sensed through the smell of dark deep woods, sweet sound of wood pigeon, squabs, cuckoos and finches. The serenity of Mother Nature is magnificently captured in the poem. To get rid from harsh realities of life the boy finds solace with Nature but he is suddenly interrupted by the jarring noise of a woodman's axe whose intention is to destroy the beauty of the forest. Petrucci treats "axe" as a violent symbol which harms the young boy who cannot bare the human's interrupting the environment. He knows molesting Nature will have its own negative impacts. The contrast between the young boy's innocence and woodman's jealousy enhances the ambivalence of the poem. Ecophilosophy, in Arne Naess perspective, promotes ecological harmony and equilibrium. By presenting the tranquil harmony of Nature and man troubling the meaningful silence of the forest, Petucci advocates ecosophy, condemning deforestation.

Ecosophy critiques human being's unresponsive consciousness as reflected in contemporary literary theory and practice. Mario Petrucci's "Sequoia" exemplifies the ideas of ecophilosophy through its examination of interconnection, criticism of human damage, contemplation of time, and recognition of the resiliency and memory of nature. Through the personification of the final Redwood tree, the poem highlights the interdependency of all living things. A profound grasp of the relationship between humans and nature may be seen in the trees curse against the buzzsaw and its wielders, which implies that human actions have a substantial impact on the natural world. This supports the idea of ecophilosophy, which holds that all lives are interrelated and have intrinsic value.

With the final  
Crack, time  
Stopped  
Instants  
Mushroomed like fungus-  
Alarming (7-12).

With a hyperbolic touch, the poet says, once the trees are destroyed time stands still. The analogy to fungus suggests decomposition and the natural cycle of life and death. The rotting debris that fungus frequently grows on can be compared to the aftermath of a tree's death. The word "alarming" conveys a sense of urgency or worry, implying that it is uncomfortable that these instants are multiplying quickly. The broader consequences of environmental destruction can be seen through "fog" creating chaos which prevents humans to appreciate the beauty of the forest. Hence man is disconnected from Nature for this own selfish behavior.

Deep ecology rejects anthropocentrism and promotes a holistic view of ecosystems. Arne Naess, father of deep ecology, comes up with a new idea that Nature itself has value in it. It provides all the resources but all forms of life in the universe deserve equal respect. Deep ecology advocates the protection of nature, and recognizing the intrinsic value of all living beings. "Logwood" poem serves as a poignant exploration of the relationship between humanity and

Nature through an ecocritical lens. "Logwood" embodies deep ecology concepts by questioning human supremacy, highlighting interconnection, personifying nature, criticising human exploitation, and recognising the resilience of the natural world.

You have me stumped.severed  
to heat blood  
Charred out, my heart - blistered  
by bucketfuls of sparks  
stinking out your grate (1-5).

The poem's voice and tone are immediately apparent in the opening line. The usage of expressions such as "You have me stumped" and direct address give the tree a unique personality. The tree expresses its anguish and implies that the reader bears responsibility for its demise, giving rise to a tone of grief and accusation. The poem invites readers to consider the notion that humans are superior to nature by giving voice to the logwood tree. The tree's lament serves as a reminder of the need for respecting nature and the inherent worth of trees. The logwood recognizes the tenacity of nature and its place in the natural cycle despite its suffering. This is in line with deep ecology's appreciation of the environment's resilience in the face of human damage.

The poem "Oak" shatters the readers when they find no sign of the acorn. Acorn is from where the oak tree emerges. "Here, a twig that failed / to green. There, an empty chalice. / No sign of the acorn" (10-12). There cannot be regeneration or new life without the acorn. The destruction of the forest and the chopping down of the oak trees highlights the decline of fauna. When man takes the axe in his hands, interconnectedness with Nature is completely lost. The rejuvenation of Nature is impossible with deforestation, which is not merely a destruction of trees but also represents the catastrophic event which eventually leads to climate change. In the Biblical connotation, that was the last oak tree in the forest as it is compared to the holy chalice which Jesus used for his last supper with his disciples. Precisely, Chalice and the oak tree are the strong symbols which suggest the sense of loss, absence and pain. The creaking noise in the poem makes the readers visualize the decline of pristine beauty of the oak trees. It was a huge catastrophe. Readers feel it is an apocalypse paving the way for numerous environmental abuses like loss of flora and fauna, lack of rainfall and poor land management.

In Greek mythology, a Dryad is a tree spirit or nymph that is, frequently connected to oak trees but can also be found in other kinds of trees. Within the poems framework, the dryad represents a close relationship with nature, capturing both its fragility and beauty. Through rich imagery and emotional depth, "Dryad" effectively explores topics of human avarice and deforestation in the opening line "Mist defoliates the trees". The poem emphasises the conflict between the persistent beauty and resilience of nature and human acts that take advantage of it. It asks readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and the repercussions of ignoring it through the eyes of a Dryad.

Petrucchi, as an environmentalist, has a profound aesthetic sense exemplified in his poems. Being inspired by lake poets, his poetic style is appealing to the readers. Like Wordsworth's solitary reaper, the speaker in the poem "Snapshot" recollects his nostalgic memories with a photograph that takes him to good old days. He is visualizing the lush landscape, Mother Nature with her lavish beauty appears picturesque in his inner eye. He is sitting in a wicker chair and longing for a serene view and tranquility which humans have robbed in the name of deforestation.

he moved his chair to the window itself –  
but leaned too close, fogged it  
with breath. He could make out  
nothing. So, he had no option.  
The heavy oak of the door (26-30)

He finds nothing other than desolate landscapes. Human greed overshadows Nature's beauty. The poem highlights the conflict between human needs and the preservation of the natural

environment by driving home the negative effects of exploitation. Deforestation disrupts ecosystems, reduces biodiversity, and alter landscapes. The consumption of fresh woods from willow tree to make cottage doors and windows on a large scale leaves the forests maimed beyond repair. Nature survives today, in a sadly mutilated form, a maternal figure that has stirred the communal guilt of our generation.

In the poem "Exodus", the migration of the sunbird serves as a metaphor for the long gap between humans and the natural world. The bird's departure from the familiar woodland as it soars symbolises the growing gap that exists between people and the natural environment as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, and a greed-driven emphasis on technical advancement. Habitat is incapacitated when trees are consistently destroyed. The chaotic urban life standing away from Nature is dealt in the poem "Deserted". How humans are merciless can be seen through the image of trees "shorn like army haircuts". The fast growing urbanization and the extension of roads emphasize the complete change from greenery to smoky environment.

The first wave in ecocriticism emphasized on writing about Nature, frequently praising it without critically examining its political or social implications. Understanding how literature reflects and shapes human relationships with the natural world requires an ecocritical analysis. Through the application of an ecological lens to texts, researchers can reveal the moral, social, and political ramifications of environmental concerns, leading to a greater understanding of the interdependence of all living things and the significance of sustainability. From the ecocritical study of the poems the researcher concludes, if humans fail to recognize the importance of forest the consequences will be terrible. Man's greed plays a vital role in harming and dismantling the ecosystem. As a result, Deforestation increases the risk of landslides and floods by causing soil erosion. Wayanad landslide that happened in Kerala caused significant decline that swept away villages of Punjirimattom, Mundakkai, Chooralmala, and Vellarimala. The Ecosystem with diminished capacity fails to act as a protective barrier and makes communities more vulnerable to disastrous effects.

From the poems of Petrucci, the researcher finds Mother Nature is bountiful in fulfilling the needs of mankind. Infelicitously, she has been maimed and molested by man in his attempt to abate his greed. The inhuman proliferation of his species has turned man into the greatest threat for earth. Little realizing that all the living and non-living beings on this earth are interconnected, man has been depleting all the life support systems, the natural resources. The consequences of exploiting Nature to its extreme has been foreboded by many a philosopher over the centuries.

The harmonious relationship with Nature experienced by the little boy in the poem "Sapling", who is suddenly interrupted by the sound of an axe, shocks the reader. The sunbird's migration in the poem "Exodus" obviously reveals the isolation and loss of habitat. Man's never ending greed continues to grow with the speaker in the poem "Woodcuts" and "watchmakers" who have vanished the long lasting beauty of the woods. "Logwood" and "Oak", in an ecocritical view, condemn man's greed and Petrucci makes the reader feel the pain the tree goes through. The reader laments for the last redwood tree in "Sequoia". The poems can be interpreted as a response to the changing environmental conditions caused by human activities that contribute to global warming.

The devastation of nature would have devastating with far-reaching effects on human existence in addition to the environment. The depletion of biodiversity, the breakdown of ecosystem services, the scarcity of food and water, and the rise in natural disasters, health hazards, and the fallout from the economy, social displacement, and psychological effects highlight how vital it is to protect our natural environment for the progeny.

A study of the environment is an integral part of any literary pursuit. Ecocriticism emerged as a coherent and organized discipline. Ecocriticism aims to enhance the values of human communities and Nature. If we nurture her with love she gifts us bountifully. Wordsworth in "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" asserts "Nature never did betray / the heart that loved her" (lines 123-124). In the present world people betray nature by contaminating her in

various ways. So she is hitting back on us by showing her destructive side. Lord Byron in his "Child Harold Pilgrimage Canto IV, Stanza 178 rightly affirms, "Man marks the earth to ruin - - his control" (line 1612). Human actions may continue to bring destruction but Nature will reclaim to its beauty and diminish the ruin marks that human has made.

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**REPRESENTATION OF ADIVASI ECOLOGIES IN SELECTED WORKS OF  
MAHASWETA DEVI AND MAHADEV TOPPO**

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**Abstract:**

Mahasweta Devi's writing is instrumental in introducing the Fourth World Literature to the mainstream population. Devi has brought tribal culture, traditions, exploitation and plight to the forefront. She had spent a large part of her life working with them, fighting for them and voicing for them. The urban reader gets a glimpse of tribal life through her lens. In the 1960s and 1970s when India as a nation was going through a period of rapid economic, social and political change, Mahasweta Devi was amongst the very few writers who wrote about tribal people and their struggles. As time passed indigenous writers like Mahadev Toppo started writing their own experiences where readers got a first-hand experience of tribal life. Toppo chooses the mainstream language Hindi to express himself. He also, like Devi, focuses on tribal culture and traditions as well as their displacement, rights as humans and their relation with nature in the contemporary anthropocentric context. This paper explores tribal representation in Indian literature by juxtaposing Mahasweta Devi's selected works and selected poems from Mahadev Toppo's anthology *Lessons from Forest and Mountain*. In the context of environmental humanities these two authors are authentic voices of the Adivasi ecologies where Mahasweta Devi represents activism through literature and Toppo reflects upon his lived experience through poetry, in two distinct temporal and cultural milieus. The paper also focuses on the representation of indigenous ecological knowledge in literature.

**Keywords:** Adivasi ecologies, Indigenous ecological knowledge, Mahasweta Devi, Mahadev Toppo, Tribal life

**Introduction:**

Today's world is going through a climate crisis where everyone's life is affected by global warming, climate change and their after-effects. The after-effects are prevalent all over the globe and have affected humans as well as non-human creatures. This climate crisis was mostly addressed through scientific and technological frameworks whether it's in labs, organisations, school or college departments or even environmental ministries of all nations. Humanities has been a keen observer and an academic critique of this constantly changing world. Scientists made tremendous progress in providing scientific solutions to the climate induced global problems however the scientific language makes it difficult for the common citizens to understand scientific terms like carbon footprint, carbon credits, carbon capture and a lot more where the common citizens feel disconnected from the aftereffects of the climate crisis. The emergence of environmental studies in humanities with ecocriticism in literature, study of environmental impacts in sociology, geography, anthropology etc. led way to a new interdisciplinary field, the Environmental Humanities.

The Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field of enquiry where nature meets culture. It is an attempt to come up with alternative solutions, approaches and frameworks for the most important issues of our time, which revolve around the environment, climate crisis and Anthropocene. Environmental Humanities also serves as a platform to bring together



various subjects from humanities and serves as a bridge between pure sciences, technical education and the humanities.

Historically, Indian environmental thought draws heavily upon its rich philosophical and spiritual traditions from religious scriptures and bhakti movement where nature is always considered as a source of life. 'The same philosophy is carried forward late in Gandhian philosophy and environmental movements like Chipko. In contemporary Indian academia, the Environmental Humanities is influenced significantly by postcolonial theory and subaltern studies. Scholars such as Ramachandra Guha, Madhav Gadgil, Vandana Shiva, Amitav Ghosh, Mahasweta Devi, and Dipesh Chakrabarty have significantly contributed to this field through their writings, which critically examine the intersections between environmental degradation, socio-economic inequalities, indigenous rights, gender, and global capitalist forces.' ("*Literary Latitude*") Ramachandra Guha refers to Indian Environmentalism as 'livelihood environmentalism' (xii) in contrast to the 'full-stomach environmentalism' (xii) of the west in his book *Speaking with Nature*. However, he does not include the Adivasi way of life in his book on Indian environmentalism. Adivasi communities have always lived in harmony with nature, from birth to death. Forests, rivers, mountains, and non-human life have always been inseparable parts of tribals. However, these indigenous voices remain marginalized in the mainstream discourse.

Adivasi indigenous ecological knowledge is passed on to the next generations through oral traditions, stories, songs, rituals and their overall way of life. Tribals have been facing displacement and subjugation in India. Representation of tribal life in Indian literature is limited and romanticized. But Mahasweta Devi was a real voice of the unspeakable Adivasi community of India. 'For the first time for Indian mainstream literature, Adivasi became the central character in her novels and short stories and the issue of tribal marginalization, and subjugation was discussed in mainstream literature.' (Madavi 301) While Mahasweta Devi is the pioneer of tribal writing, Toppo is the contemporary representative of the Adivasis. Toppo's anthology *Lessons from Forest and Mountain* 'is a series of lessons that one should take from Mother Nature. It has a powerful voice against many social, political and cultural issues like deforestation, the peripheral status of Adivasi culture, tradition, and philosophy, identity crisis, urbanization and unemployment'. (Kuiy 1)

Together Devi and Toppo allow deeper understanding of Indigenous ecological knowledge through their literary works. Devi chooses the path of activism whereas Toppo expresses his anguish through poetry, both serving one aim of bringing into the forefront the Adivasi Ecologies. Human beings from all over the world are finding solutions to the environmental disasters and extreme weather conditions we are experiencing in our daily lives. The solutions range from top most scientific experiments like cloud seeding, carbon capture to lifestyle changes like zero waste, slow living, going back to nature etc. However, modern humans forget that the indigenous people of this earth, the Adivasis, had been following a sustainable lifestyle for centuries, yet their ecological knowledge is neglected in the conventional academic and policy discourses. With this background, when we look at Mahasweta Devi's literary works we get a detailed documentation of Adivasi struggles, their marginalization, exploitation as well as their inherent indigenous knowledge. Mahadev Toppo also tackles these issues through his poetry. His poems reflect upon the oral tradition, indigenous ecological ethics, affinity with nonhuman life, and modes of sustainable living. Both Toppo and Devi depict different historical moments but share a common commitment to Adivasi lives.

Most of the scholarship on Adivasi representation in literary studies is focused on the political and social dimensions. Similarly, Mahasweta Devi's works also are examined through the same lens. However, with the emergence of Environmental Humanities, scholars are trying to decipher the treasure trove of indigenous ecological knowledge embedded in Devi's tribal narrative. On the other hand, Mahadev Toppo's poetry that is rooted in oral tradition and Indigenous cosmology is one of the very few tribal voices expressing themselves through literature. It has received limited

critical enquiry. Thus, there is a significant gap in research/scholarship in the comparative reading of Devi's activist writing and Toppo's poetic expression.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and study how these two writers have represented Adivasi ecologies belonging to two different timelines, different cultures and different socio-political scenarios but striving towards bringing forth the sustainable world of tribals in the context of climate crisis, forest destruction, and cultural erasure. By analysing "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha" and selected poems from *Lessons from Forest and Mountain*, this paper attempts to highlight how literature can function as an important source to understand Indigenous relationships with land, forest, and non-human life, and for critiquing the ecological violence of extractive modernity. The scope of this paper is limited to the examination of tribal representation and indigenous ecological knowledge in these two writers in the broader context of orality, decolonial ecologies and environmental humanities. Though the title suggests Adivasi ecologies the paper is restricted to ecological study of the mentioned texts. This study is significant as it analyses two different yet complementary literary voices—Mahasweta Devi and Mahadev Toppo. In today's anthropocentric world it is significant to highlight the age-old wisdom of indigenous communities to the forefront. With a comparative analysis of Mahasweta Devi and Mahadev Toppo, the study analyses how writers belonging to different timelines look at the tribal traditions and how they weave indigenous ecological knowledge in their works where one has used short story as a genre and the other one has expressed it through poetry.

#### **Literature Review**

The association between indigenous communities and their ecological worlds has increasingly become a crucial field of study within the broad spectrum of Environmental Humanities. 'From Alaska to Australia, scientists are turning to the knowledge of traditional people for a deeper understanding of the natural world. What they are learning is helping them discover more about everything from melting Arctic ice, to protecting fish stocks, to controlling wildfires.' (Jim Robbins) In Indian context, when we think of Indigenous or Aborigines, we could only think of the Adivasis as they are supposed to be the original residents of India.

#### **Environmental Humanities and Indigenous Ecologies**

Lawrence Buell, is a prominent scholar in the field of ecocriticism. He has analysed the relationship between environment and literature in his seminal book *Environmental Imagination*. Buell's ideas have been foundational in establishing ecocriticism as a legitimate field of inquiry within literary theory. The Environmental Humanities has broadened the scope of literary criticism by not only restricting the eco-critical analysis of the text but also trying to understand the economic, socio-political, psychological and cultural dimensions of the current ecological crisis. Many theorists have come up with ideas relevant to the present environmental scenario. Eminent scholar Ursula K. Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* emphasizes the traction between local ecological knowledge and global environment connections. She discusses how storytelling genres shape public understanding of complex environmental issues.

Another prominent scholar in environmental humanities Stacy Alaimo rejects the western idea of using nature as just a resource and labels it a delusional idea. Eminent Indian scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty also supports similar thought in his important essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses" where he argues that anthropogenic climate change collapses the distinction between natural history and human history. He emphasizes that it is now imperative to delve into deep history, the history of man as a species, to the times beyond the time for which written or recorded history is extant. Within Indigenous eco-critical thought, Adamson explores how the concept of "nature" is very different for multicultural writers and activist groups than it is for mainstream environmentalists. This is one of the first books in the USA to examine the intersections between literature and the environment from the perspective of the oppressions of race, class, gender, and

nature, and the first to review American Indian literature from the standpoint of environmental justice and ecocriticism.

Malcom Ferdinand's new book *A Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World* published in 2022 states that environmental damage is mostly driven by the technocratic and capitalist ecosystem that has led to the destruction of Earth's ecosystems and has become a threat to human and non-human communities. On the other hand, he points out that the colonial structure and imperialism had resulted in racial slavery and the domination of indigenous people and women with reference to the Caribbean world.

Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* contributes another crucial framework for this study. Nixon formulates the term "slow violence" and describes it as ecological harm that is gradual, dispersed, and often invisible because of climate change, pollution, toxic exposure, deforestation, etc. Effects of slow violence are prominently seen in marginalized communities such as Indigenous groups of the Global South as they are the most vulnerable sections of the society.

Scholars such as Ramachandra Guha who associates the idea 'livelihood environmentalism' (xii) to Indian environmentalism fail to acknowledge the origins of Indian Environmentalism to Adivasi ecologies and their indigenous ecological knowledge. Though he gives passing references of Hindu religious texts and peasant communities, he starts tracing the origins of Indian Environmentalism from the Chipko Movement. Whereas another prominent Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva views Indian environmentalism as a necessary shift from the western industrial, colonial model to one rooted in indigenous knowledge, ecological harmony, and farmer-led seed sovereignty like India.

#### **Adivasi Literature, Oral Tradition and Knowledge Systems**

Critical enquiries on Adivasi literature are relatively in their infancy as compared to mainstream Indian literary studies, yet it forms a crucial body of scholarship on Indigenous ecological knowledge in India. One of the prominent voices in Adivasi literature is G. N. Devy's *Painted Words* where he states that tribal cultures share a unified worldview that values such as intuitive knowledge, spiritual relationships with nature, and a dreamlike imagination that blends time, space, and existence in ways which are totally different from mainstream literary traditions. Their oral traditions are rich in memories, ritual, and creativity are now threatened by modern education standards, dominated by the western literary models that prioritize written texts over oral knowledge.

Writers such as Temsula Ao and Mamang Dai have shaped present-day considerations of Indigenous relationships with land. Temsula Ao is one of the significant literary voices from the Northeast in general and from Nagaland in particular. As an ethnographer she worked on the oral tradition of her own Ao Naga community. Her contribution is no less than that of an environmentalist as she voices not only for the cultural transformation but also for the environmental degeneration in the Northeast. Ao's *These Hills Called Home* situates nature as a living agent in the Naga lifeworld, not merely a backdrop but a participant in social and historical processes. ([Samadaar](#)) One more voice from the Northeast is Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* which highlights how landscape, myth, and memory form a continuous epistemological system in the tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh. However, Mahasweta Devi and Toppo represent Adivasi ecologies from Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh where the terrain of the land and social norms are different from the Northeast.

Mahasweta Devi has been a favourite author amongst Indian and foreign scholars because most of her works are studied, analysed and theorised in journals, for M. Phil and PhD dissertations. Many scholars focused on Mahasweta Devi's critique on caste oppression, patriarchy, red tapism, labour and human rights etc. However, in recent years scholars have started analysing her texts from environmental context, be it ecofeminist readings of her texts, ecocritical analysis of her stories or finding indigenous ecological knowledge in her stories, the focus of scholarship is shifting from

purely social angle to ecological, and eco-polito-social perspectives. When we think of scholarship on Mahasweta Devi, the first well-known name is Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. She opened Devi's works to the world when she translated her works from Bengali into English. Spivak's 'Introductions' or 'Author in Conversation' sections of the translated texts serve as a background informer to the readers. The reader gets to know the point of view of the author and the translator also. For many readers who are not aware of the tribal history get to know about the same through these conversations with the author. *Imaginary Maps* also starts with the 'Author in Conversation' section where Mahasweta Devi describes how Indian tribals were alienated from their roots in an attempt to bring them into the mainstream. She mentions that 'They had no sense of property.....they believed that land and forest and river belong to everyone.....They understood ecology and the environment in a way we cannot yet imagine.'(ii) From this quote we see the innate connection of the tribals with nature. They believed in community land holding however, the mainstream corrupted them and now in this uncertainty of climate crisis where agriculture has become difficult, we are again going back to community farming. This stresses the importance of indigenous tribal knowledge of land and agriculture practices. "Pterodactyl" is an important text if one wants to study Mahasweta Devi as she says, 'Pterodactyl is an abstract of my entire tribal experience.....It will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalized people all over the world.'(xiv)

Anuradha Bose in her recent critical essay, compares the perception of land and forests in tribal communities as opposed to in western modernity. She analyses how Mahasweta Devi's work portrays ecological resistance of tribal communities' through myth, oral history and non-hierarchical relationships. In another critical essay "The Green-consciousness and Cataclysmic Outcomes in the Selected Works of Na D'Souza, Mahasweta Devi and Akkineni Kutumbarao: A Study in Ecocriticism" scholars Dr. Chetan Singh and Dr. Anmol analyse how these authors address the impact of development on indigenous communities. Another scholarly article by Dr. U. Sumaty in the journal "Literary Explorer" examines "Pterodactyl" through the lens of environmental justice. It also highlights the plight of tribals of Pirtha. In similar lines Payel Pal in her article "Witnessing Tribal Life and the Environment: An Ecological Re-Reading of the Select Narratives of Mahasweta Devi" reads "Pterodactyl" as critique of modernisation. She also stresses upon the destructive impact of modernization on tribal life as well as on the ecological balance of Pirtha.

Unlike Devi, Mahadev Toppo has yet to receive substantial academic attention, though he is a central figure in contemporary Adivasi poetry in India. Toppo's anthology *Lessons from Forest and Mountain* originally published in Hindi in 2017 and the English translation appeared only in 2022. His work is recently published whereas Mahasweta Devi's works are in circulation from the 1970s. This is one of the prominent reasons for less critical works on Toppo's poetry. Most of the writing on *Lessons from Forest and Mountain* is in the form of book reviews, commentaries on translation and culture of Jharkhand, interviews of the author published in literary journals and portals. Scholar Hare Krishna Kuiry has written critical articles on the anthology in consideration. His paper "Selected Poems from Mahadev Toppo's Lesson from Forest and Mountain: A Translation and Its Role in Part of Jharkhand's Green Politics" focuses on the green politics present in the poems. Another article in "New Literaria" journal gives an overview of the anthology. Though Toppo also deals with issues relevant to the tribal ideology like ecology, mainstream invasion, slow violence, scholars tend to study established authors. However, we can say that Toppo is the rising star of Adivasi ecology. There is no known scholarly work which compares Devi and Toppo from an ecological angle. This paper aims to fill this research gap by analysing both writers from the perspective of Environmental Humanities.

**Methodology:**

In this paper qualitative, interpretive research methodology is used concentrating on close textual analysis. A comparative analysis is conducted to understand the intersection of these two writers in different genres and in different times.

**Adivasi Ecologies in Mahasweta Devi**

Mahasweta Devi's name is synonymous with protest, social activism and the fight for tribal rights. She is one of the main crusaders of the tribal and subaltern cause in India. She had brought the problems, pain, plight and indigenous lives of tribals to the forefront. She wrote about those tribes who are not included in the Scheduled Caste list of the government of India, the 'denotified' tribes. Till her last breath she was instrumental in voicing the concerns of the tribal people. Gayatri Chakravorty-Spivak, who has translated some of the major works of Mahasweta Devi such as *Breast Stories* and *Imaginary Maps* into English, suggests that this interplay of activism and literary writing in Devi's fiction can be of substantial interest to current academic discourse and practices. Spivak insists that Devi's work suggests a model in which activism and writing can reflect upon each other, providing a necessary vision of inter-nationality, and the possibility of constructing a new kind of responsibility for the cultural worker. The story in consideration is "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha" from Mahasweta Devi's influential work *Imaginary Maps*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The collection is dedicated to 'For all the indigenous peoples of the world'. It consists of three powerful stories, 'The Hunt', 'Douloti the Beautiful' and a novella 'Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha'. Mahasweta Devi, the author of the text talks about the third story in the collection in the section 'The Author in Conversation' as, 'Pterodactyl is an abstract of my entire tribal experience. Through the Nagesia experience I have explained other tribal experiences as well. I have not kept to the custom of one tribe alone. In the matter of respect for the dead, for example, I have mixed together the habits of many tribes. If read carefully, Pterodactyl will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalized people all over the world.' (xiv) As stated by Heise in her book *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism fits Devi's works as it emphasises on the connection between local environmental experiences with broader global and planetary systems.

The story is about an unearthly terror in the Pirtha village. Puran Sahay, a journalist from Bihar comes to Pirtha in search of a story or bite. The SDO questions Puran about his reason to go to Pirtha. He shows Puran the map of Pirtha which is shaped like 'some extinct animal of Gondwanaland' (98). Puran goes to Pirtha in search of a newspaper article but leaves the place with wisdom and empathy for the tribals. For Puran, Pirtha is not just a tribal belt but a whole new experience where all his pre-concieved notions about Adivasis get washed away and it leaves him with an understanding of the 'Fourth world ecology' (200) as Gayatri Spivak puts uses this term in the appendix of the book, Pterodactyl is a symbol of the natural habitat of places like Pirtha that should be preserved. Mahasweta Devi's world of Pirtha not just represents the local ecological disasters but talks about the plight of all aboriginals of the world. This claim is supported when Devi states, 'So Pterodactyl wants to show what has been done to the entire tribal world of India.....Each tribe is like a continent. But we never tried to know them.' (xv). With the symbol of pterodactyl, the writer wants to stress upon the ancient history of tribals which is prehistoric than the history of civilisation. Through the image of pterodactyl Devi focusses on the erasure of Adivasi traditions and way of life. It is evident when the translator Gayatri Spivak mentions that 'the pterodactyl is not only the ungraspable other but also the ghost of the ancestors that haunts our present and our future. We must learn 'love', as Puran does in Pterodactyl, in view of the impossibility of communication.' (203)

"Pterodactyl" the story also documents what Rob Nixon coins as 'By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon 2) The signs of 'slow violence' are evident throughout the story. It is pointed out by Shankar, the only educated ones from the tribals of Pirtha, when he says that there was once a forest, hill, river and they. They had villages, land, and homes. They were self-dependent. They were happy in the old days. He presents an idyllic picture of the tribal past. He blames the outsiders, the mainstream Indians, for their situation today. The author also mentions how the government is exploiting

natural resources of Pirtha in the name of development and employment generation, 'soil of Madhya Pradesh is rich in iron, manganese, coal, limestone and tin ore. Large scale-medium range-tertiary range and small industries are developing fast. Agri business is also developing apace, every day (109). When we look at these lines in isolation, we see progress but when we see these in the context of Pirtha it seems like destruction. Puran not just witnesses tribal life but also becomes an onlooker of how the system works toward the destruction of their indigenous way of life in the name of development. He remembers how once a documentary filmmaker had mentioned modern road as a symbol of tribal grave, 'when the Adivasis walk along that road to market, they walk on the graves of their education system, their irrigation system, their supply of drinking water, their health centers'(109). When the Adivasi is walking on the road, he/she is trampling upon the history, traditions and culture of the aboriginals. 'Slow violence' is also evident when Shankar highlights, 'we were kings. Became subjects. Were subjects, became slaves. Owed nothing, they made us debtors.'(119) Not just government bodies but NGOs or welfare trusts like Kaushaji's exploit tribals and showcase them as uneducated and rustic to gain funds from foreign agencies. Kaushaji also thinks of displacing them at the outskirts of the nearby towns and dreams of/plans of developing a picnic spot where the tribals reside. Pterodactyl is seen as the ghost of tribal ancestors. It is also a symbol of tribal history which dates back to the prehistoric era but because of modern influence it is going extinct. It is also a symbol of tribal indigenous ecological knowledge. There are many references in the story of millets like koda and kutki being the staple food of Adivasis, "What's the use of giving rice to the tribals? When have they eaten rice? (108). This comment by the truckdriver shows how the byproducts of the green revolution - rice and wheat - intruded on their plate.

The story is full of examples/references of indigenous ecological knowledge of the Adivasis of Pirtha. The indigenous tuber tree is referred to as 'Khajra tree as the Kalpataru, the fabled tree of gifts (126). They eat the tuber of this tree. They split the leaves and weave mats from the leaves. The BDO also emphasises the importance of forests when he says, 'In India, there were various kinds of forests in the past. There were traditional uses of trees and forest products. (126). Puran also finds out that drawing and engravings are natural to the Adivasis. 'They all can draw. You'll get engraved pictures like that in every hut. They draw flowers, trees, monkeys, elephants, birds. (128) - This line shows that drawing and engraving are natural to the Adivasis. The structure of their houses is quite indigenous and suitable for the time and space. The houses were constructed in such a manner that the enemy could be spotted easily. But all this indigenous knowledge which is connected to the local ecology is gradually becoming extinct like the pterodactyl.

However, through "Pterodactyl" Mahasweta Devi warns the reader that not just the Adivasis but everybody's existence is at stake in this anthropocentric world. It is evident when Puran thinks that the Pterodactyl must be thinking this about us, humans - 'We are extinct by the inevitable natural geological evolution. You too are endangered. You too will become extinct in nuclear explosions, or in war, or in the aggressive advance of the strong as it obliterates the weak, which finally turns you naked, barbaric, primitive, think if you are going forward or back. Forests are extinct, and animal life is obliterated outside of zoos and protected forest sanctuaries. What will you finally grow in the soil, having murdered nature in the application of man-imposed substitutes?' (158)

Puran's visit to Pirtha changes his whole perspective of the Adivasis. He becomes empathetic towards them and feels that 'Only love, a tremendous, excruciating, explosive love can still dedicate us to this work when the century's sun is in the Western sky, otherwise this aggressive civilisation will have to pay a terrible price, look at history, the aggressive civilisation has destroyed itself in the name of progress, each time.(197)

#### **Adivasi Ecologies in Mahadev Toppo**

The title of this anthology is itself suggestive of the author's intentions. It signifies the importance of lessons we can learn from forests and mountains. The selected poems from Mahadev Toppo's



*Lessons from Forest and Mountain* play a vital role in Jharkhand's green politics by 'highlighting the intricate relationship between environmental health and cultural survival. Through vivid imagery and poignant narratives, these poems call for immediate action to address environmental degradation and protect the rights and cultural heritage of indigenous communities. The poet's poignant narratives intertwine the themes of environmental displacement, cultural resilience, and the socio-political struggles of indigenous communities in Jharkhand'. (Kuiry 58) Toppo discusses the Jal, Jungle, Jameen anthem of Adivasis in the poems. In the very first poem of the anthology 'A Song to Sharpen Rusted Arrows', Toppo depicts how chains of modernity have taken away nature from the Adivasis. He says that all the main rivers were encroached and chained with rods and cement and that's why these rivers will not sing and swing along with their *Jadur* song. Here the poet focusses on erasure of traditional knowledge and tribal co-existence with nature by 'slow violence' (Nixon 2) especially of rivers. We see this in Toppo when he writes. 'Because limbs of these rivers are tied or being tied with chains of rods and cement' (41). The poet continues to explain that Adivasis' adaptation to a modern lifestyle will not bring meaning to their existence. He concludes the poem by saying it is better to be free from the chains of modernity and compose a new *Jadur* song, meaning to start anew.

In the next poem "I was Happy" the poet carries forward the theme of displacement of Adivasis in the mainstream or modern world. He recounts various tribal rituals he used to follow like 'gaining grains for the whole year from my fields and granaries', 'making thick cushion of hays', 'sipping salted red-tea' etc. These are not only tribal rituals but also traditional ways of living which are in-tune with the surrounding ecology. He then talks about the influence of modernity on tribals and how this urge to get assimilated in the mainstream divided them and left them with nothing. By becoming part of the mainstream, the Adivasis have lost their identity and indigenous ecological knowledge which was in tune with nature. The poem comments on how modernity continues the colonial patterns in the postcolonial world. Toppo ends his poem with a sharp symbol of 'blood and sweat' (46) when he narrates that tribals now have all materialistic things like 'TV, Freeze, AC, bungalow, motorcar'.(46) They can speak all global, regional and tribal languages.

'However, we do not have one thing –  
Our fields and land  
Related to the graves, *Sasandiri*  
*Sarna*, *Masna* of our ancestors,  
Associated with their souls,  
And drenched in their blood and sweat (46)

With these lines he stresses upon how the Adivasi history and identity is systematically erased by the mainstream. However, he does not stop here and accept defeat. He comes up with a solution when in his poem 'Books will have to be written' he challenges his tribal brethren/fellows to write their own history. Toppo urges the tribals to write about their struggles, their ancestors, and their natural world because the mainstream will neither write their history nor will accept them. He also emphasises on the oral history of Adivasis when he mentions 'Your history was neither created in words on the pages of History, nor could it be recorded in the books.' (51). He further points out that though it is not written it is witnessed by 'trees, rivers, rocks', souls of ancestors, *Sasandiri* (a stone on the grave), *Jaherthan* (place of worship) and your folksongs' (51) According to Toppo the Adivasis would 'either been thrown on the margins in the books of history, or have been excluded from it'(52) He indicates how the mainstream books carry on the colonial attitude of describing an Adivasi as 'monkey, bear or other animal' and not recognising him/her as a human being. In the concluding lines of the poem Toppo fervently urges the Adivasis:

You will have to search for a definition  
To define yourself as a human being.  
You will have to write  
Your own books  
Against their ideologies, beliefs, opinions;

Against their barbaric ideological attacks. (52)

Here we clearly see the rage in the poet's mind through his sharp and direct language. He encourages the tribals to find their own voice and express it. Toppo continues his theme of bringing together the tribal community and showcasing the damage caused by modernity to the tribals. In his poem 'Tragedy, a Hope' he beautifully depicts how a tribal aspires to be one with the mainstream but in an attempt to do so loses his/her self-identity. He also highlights how mainstream culture and media erase indigenous culture by 'slow violence' (Nixon 2) when he mentions 'I've gradually turned into a part of machine.' (55) He also feels alienated from the tribal traditions when 'On TV every Thursday morning I see their traditions and customs, their food habits and difficult lifestyle.' (53) He also reminisces over his simple tribal lifestyle which was close and connected to nature. He portrays struggles of the marginalized communities like tribals who aspire to be part of the mainstream but feel alienated and ignored when they actually become part of it. He focuses on how Adivasis are displaced from their native lands 'in the name of dams, canals, roads, factories, and mines' (55-56). Through this line Toppo succeeds in showcasing what Nixon calls 'slow violence' (2). In the name of development, we see erasure of sustainable tribal culture. He also questions how Adivasis are always judged by the mainstream or upper-class and upper-caste eyes. He expresses his frustration when the upper-class people write books on tribal traditions and ways of life. 'They come and explain to us only our traditions. Our land, forest, water, roots, lifestyle, language, culture, rights, developments, capitalism, and revolution, they talk of.' (56) He also comments on the ignorance of tribals who let this destruction take place. He sums up the poem by evoking in them a desire for self-respect, and identity.

'After all, someone among us only was Birsā, someone was Tāntya.....

We have been drowned in the drowsiness of self-doubt.....

But why are we still unfamiliar

With the sun of our own experiences

And its dazzle?' (58)

Toppo's poem "Why do You Laugh at Us? Is a record/documentation of indigenous ecological knowledge of the Adivasis? In this poem the poet questions modern belief of considering tribal people as uneducated, black or underprivileged. He affirms that indigenous ecological knowledge is so much ingrained in Adivasis that they can identify and recognise any herb in the forest just 'by looking at their leaves, or sniffing their roots' (60). He also mentions that they can tell the time by 'looking at the start at night' (60). He challenges the modern/urban dweller when he says,

"Observing the activities of ants and spiders

we can fortell, when it will rain?

Or when climate will change?

We can save our lives even in tsunmai

As we saved ourselves in Adaman.

Even your computers

Could not predict weather change so accurately.' (60)

When we look at these lines, we realise that the Adivasi life was so much in tune with nature and we do not need fancy machines to control the destruction we have created in the name of development but a sustainable approach to be in sync with nature like the Adivasis.

### **Conclusion**

This paper brings out Adivasi ecological knowledge of Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh into the broader academic discourse of Environmental Humanities. It moves away from the western frameworks of environmental humanities and focuses indigenous ecological knowledge of Indian tribals. It demonstrates how indigenous communities led a sustainable way of life and how modern lifestyle and mainstream culture have destroyed it. Mahasweta Devi's story and Toppo's poems offer a decolonial perspective on environmental literature in India. Devi and Toppo present complementary yet distinct expressions of Adivasi ecologies in India, Both the writers emphasised

on the 'slow violence' taking place in the name of development. They are concerned about the very existence of indigenous culture of the tribal people. Devi uses pterodactyl to showcase her tribal experience whereas Toppo uses his own experiences as a testimony to the systematic erasure of tribal oral tradition and history. Devi is a brilliant storyteller and a well-established voice in marginalised literature. Her sharp and compelling language sustains the reader's engagement throughout the story. Devi's activist writing succeeds in challenging the stereotypes associated with Adivasis as illiterate and rustic rather the story positions them as authentic voices that had been following sustainable lifestyles with indigenous ecological knowledge. Toppo also through his poetry conveys how the tribal community is self-sufficient and connected to nature. Toppo's poems are a social commentary on the lives of tribals. Though both the authors choose different genres of literature, their expression becomes a cultural document of tribal history. This paper bridges the gap between activist storytelling and poetic testimony. It positions Indian indigenous voices at the center of environmental literary studies. Though this paper is limited to Mahasweta Devi's short story "Pterodactyl, Puran and Pirtha" and selected poems from Mahadev Toppo's anthology *Lessons from Forest and Mountain*, there are several possibilities for future research such as comparative analysis of African and Indian tribal ecologies, analysis of oral history and environmental literature, study of contemporary environmental literature etc. Both the writers' analysed in this paper have written these texts in different timelines. Devi has written this story in the 1990s whereas Toppo has given words to his feelings in the 2000s. The gap may seem like a decade's gap but in this decade India as a nation has changed drastically. After the LPG reforms of 1991 the Indian social, economic, political scenario has changed. Green cover in India is decreasing at an alarming rate and Adivasi communities continue to remain marginalised. However, education has uplifted many Adivasis from the entrenched system, they still face discrimination. Both Devi and Toppo employ different narrative styles, both of them vehemently critique colonial means of the mainstream under the guise of modernity. They also document/chronicle the indigenous ecological knowledge of the Adivasis in their literary works and reclaim that only love, empathy for the Adivasis and self-esteem among the tribal people can truly ensure their empowerment.

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**BEYOND BARRELS: EXPLORING PETROFICTION IN KAINE AGARY'S *YELLOW-YELLOW***

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**Abstract**

Petrofiction is a literary theory that examines how fiction portrays the societal, cultural and political impacts of the petroleum economy. It specifically analyses how the black gold is depicted in literature, exploring its role as a source of power, wealth and conflict. While ecocriticism and ecofeminism have been widely studied, little attention has been paid to the aspect of petroleum as a resource and the social and environmental costs of oil production and consumption. This study employs close reading to analyse Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, using petrofiction as its critical framework to examine Niger Delta oil exploitation, poverty, corruption, and the urgent need for sustainability. It investigates how ineffective ecological governance accelerates socio-cultural degradation, positioning the novel as a significant contribution to petro-narrative discourse. The protagonist of the novel, Zilayefa, grows up in poverty after her white father exploits and abandons her mother, Bibi. Although Bibi strives to educate her, an oil spill destroys her farmland and hopes. After finishing school, Zilayefa moves to Port Harcourt seeking better opportunities, and shapes her own future. The narrative foregrounds the socio-economic and ecological consequences of oil extraction, showing how administrative failure, criminality, and environmental damage produce moral decline and desperate survival strategies. With no compensation from the state or oil companies, communities endure compounded hardship. Set during Nigeria's oil boom, *Yellow-Yellow* exposes the irony of a petroleum-rich nation impoverished by systemic mismanagement and exploitative policies. Therefore, the analysis explores the deep interconnectedness between human interests and the environment across four key dimensions: socio-political, economic, gender, and ecological. The study aims to depict the disastrous consequences of irresponsible human actions on both the environment and humans themselves, through the lens of petrofiction, stressing the need for sound policies to ensure the sustainable use of oil for the prosperity of the people.

**Keywords:** Petrofiction, petroleum economy, ecology, exploitation, sustainability

**Introduction**

As a literary theory, petrofiction examines how fiction represents the social, cultural, and political effects of the oil industry. It focusses on the impact of oil production and consumption, especially the environmental and societal costs. Petrofiction examines how oil, often referred to as "black gold," is portrayed in literature as a source of power, wealth, and conflict. While other literary theories, like ecocriticism and ecofeminism, have explored environmental issues, petrofiction particularly looks at the role of petroleum as a resource and how its exploitation can lead to harmful consequences for both humans and the environment.

This study uses close reading as a research methodology to analyse the novel *Yellow-Yellow* by Nigerian author Kaine Agary. It applies the core concept of petrofiction to explore issues related to oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, along with themes of poverty, corruption, and their wider impact on Nigerian society. The study examines the role of governance in socio-cultural degradation and environmental damage, highlighting the urgent need for sustainability. The main focus, therefore, is to understand the novel as a key example of petrofiction, illustrating the importance of sound policies and the judicious use of oil for the prosperity of the people.

### **Theoretical framework**

The literary genre of petrofiction explores the impact of oil on society, politics, and the environment, addressing themes like socio-economic inequalities, resource exploitation and environmental damage. The term blends "petro" (from the Greek word "petra," meaning rock, associated with petroleum) and "fiction" (creative storytelling). The concept was introduced to highlight the lack of literary focus on the pervasive effects of oil, despite its profound influence on modern economies, politics, and cultures. A notable example is the novel, *Oil!*, by American novelist Upton Sinclair. Petrofiction performs the critical function of connecting literature with the complex realities of our oil-dependent world.

The term "petrofiction" was coined by Amitav Ghosh in his essay "Petro-fiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel" (1992), where he defines petrofiction as a narrative that focusses on petroleum and its effects on people and the environment. He suggests that petrofiction serves as a type of activism, raising awareness about oil-producing communities and the associated environmental issues. Ghosh attributes the lack of oil-related themes in literature to the discomfort it causes the oil industry and the hesitancy of oral traditions of many oil-rich regions to confront the issue. Today, petrofiction is even more relevant due to the ongoing reliance on fossil fuels and the climate crisis. As a result, it highlights the ethical responsibilities of both the oil industry and the consumers, influencing both literary criticism and environmental studies. This study uses petrofiction as its major theoretical framework, with some aspects of postcolonialism, ecocriticism and feminism, to analyse the issue further, in the light of the novel, *Yellow-Yellow*.

### **Analysis of *Yellow-Yellow***

Kaine Agary is a Nigerian author of Ijaw descent, known for her debut novel, *Yellow-Yellow*. Her works address social and gender issues, particularly, the challenges that women face in a patriarchal society. *Yellow-Yellow* explores the struggles of young women in the Nigre Delta, including poverty and exploitation. Agary's writing has been praised for its immersive storytelling and focus on personal identity, survival and the pursuit of a better life. The novel follows the journey of Zilayefa, a young girl of mixed-race with a Nigerian mother and Greek father. Raised in a village with no knowledge of her father, she is sent to Port Harcourt to live with Sisi and her friend, Lolo. There, she is exposed to the city's affluent world. Zilayefa enters a secret relationship with an Admiral, whereby, she seeks a father-daughter connection. However, the relationship culminates in an abortion. The anguish of this unfortunate incident prompts Zilayefa to understand herself and her society, ultimately helping her refocus on her goals and strive for independence.

The opening passage of the novel poignantly establishes a link between oil as a resource and the implications of its misuse on the Niger-Delta society. Zilayefa recalls that while in her penultimate year of secondary school, a crude oil pipeline running through her village had ruptured, flooding several hectares of land with oil and destroying her mother's farm. That was the first time she had seen crude oil, spreading relentlessly across the land and drowning small animals in its wake. The thick, black, viscous liquid had covered the ground knee-deep. This terrifying sight becomes Zilayefa's first real understanding of the destructive nature of oil extraction in the Niger Delta. The spill, by devastating farmlands, leaving the earth barren and killing innocent creatures, reveals the dangerous ecological consequences of man-made exploitation. Overwhelmed, the community feels powerless to do anything with it or to halt its destructive flow. This incident highlights the material aspect of petro-violence and the destructive presence of crude oil. In the novel, this oil spill also becomes a catalyst for Zilayefa's displacement. The community's inability to use or benefit from the oil symbolises the colonial-capitalist "resource curse," in the form of postcolonial dependency and exclusion from the wealth beneath their own land.

Here, the flowing crude symbolises the aggressive spread of petro-capitalism. It can be seen as a force that pollutes the environment, destroys livelihoods, and disrupts ecological balance. The dying animals underline the vulnerability of those who are most exposed to these impacts. At



the same time, the scene, as a whole, captures the novel's central conflict – the clash between regular, rural life and an extractive industry that erodes both the local identity and the environment.

The exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta has been the source of devastation for both the people and the environment, drawing continued attention from writers as well as critics. The prevalent oil politics has transformed Niger Delta literature into a powerful site of protest, as authors ranging from the colonial to post-independence periods constantly lament the despoliation of land and waterways that once sustained healthy, meaningful lives. This forms the core of petrofiction, under which the destruction of land, water, crops, and livelihoods motivates much of the region's narrative output.

*Yellow-Yellow* directly reflects this reality; Bibi's farmland is ruined by an oil spill, leading to dispossession, economic displacement and ecological degradation. This also shows the cultural attitudes toward nature and the responses of the society towards ecological change. Besides poverty and displacement, the novel highlights the consequent disruption of traditional practices of the Nigre Delta, thereby, exemplifying the cultural decline that the literature critiques. Through all these experiences, the profound role of ecological destruction in shaping the psychological, cultural, and economic realities of the community has been demonstrated. This directs one's attention to the crucial matter of resource utilisation, and how the lack of proper management of oil by the administration leads to the destruction of the farmland of Zilayefa's mother, which was their sole source of sustenance. Not an isolated incident, this reflects the suffering of many such people who lose their land and livelihood.

As they face the challenge, the community people go to complain about the matter, expecting the oil company to pay compensation, besides resolving the issue. However, to their sheer disappointment, the company puts the blame on young men for the problem and even refuses to pay compensation for an issue that they were responsible for. This way, an administrative failure results in the loss of a source of income for many.

The blatant irony here is that while the natives die, the wealthy whites profit from the petroleum of the Nigre Delta. This portrays that dearth of resources is not the cause of the suffering of the natives, but it is the politicisation. The negligence of the oil companies causes the natives to suffer the consequences of the oil spills; yet, neither corporations nor the government is held accountable. When Zilayefa sits with her peers listening to the radio, they often hear Ijaw speakers from Port Harcourt or Lagos describe how the Niger Delta has been devastated without fear of legal, moral, or social repercussions, even as local ethnic groups suffer and die while the wealth of their land enriched others. These broadcasts provide Zilayefa with an early exposure to a shared political awareness, revealing the broader grievances that shape the reality of her community. The stark contrast between the suffering of the locals and the outward flow of profit exposes the exploitative nature of petro-capitalism, as those who endure the damage are never on the receiving side of the benefits. This moment also captures the central concerns of the novel—marginalization, environmental injustice, and the increasing gap between resource-rich communities and the beneficiaries of their exploitation.

Since 1956, crude oil has been produced in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta and it has generated significant national revenue since 1958. Yet, the region that holds this wealth remains one of the poorest in the continent. *Yellow-Yellow* reflects this contradiction through the destruction of Bibi's farmland. This oil spill event triggers poverty, displacement, and long-term psychological trauma. Zilayefa's entire journey arises from this ecological catastrophe, illustrating how the mismanagement of oil resources, coupled with the absence of sustainable development programmes, shape the lives of the Niger Delta communities. This is especially true for young women, whose futures are determined by the economic and environmental consequences of petro-capitalism.

Such volatile conditions of the Niger Delta have eventually shaped a body of African petrofiction, wherein writers raise their voice against ecological degradation and dehumanisation. *Yellow-Yellow* fits well in this tradition. The novel depicts how exploitation of oil marginalizes

rural communities, especially women like Zilayefa. The oil spill that destroys her home and the gender-specific risks she faces in the city mirror the intersection of gendered vulnerability, postcolonial inequality and environmental harm. The portrayal of the Niger Delta as a region, where immense oil wealth coexists with poverty and ecological ruin, reinforces the absence of sustainable legal and environmental frameworks that provide protection from continued colonial patterns of resource extraction. Bibi's ruined farmland represents this dynamic, revealing how ecological destruction reconstructs both landscapes and identities. Situated within this discourse, *Yellow-Yellow* offers an ecofeminist critique by showing that Zilayefa's precarity is inseparable from the same extractive forces that ravage her environment. This illustrates how petro-capitalism produces and entangles environmental and human crises.

Gradually, such exploitation and deprivation frustrates the native boys. As a consequence, a young generation, who could lead an active and constructive life, is forced to choose violence and adopt corrupt ways to avail the basic needs. These boys fight against the political system and get meddled in with various other unnecessary problems, at a time when they are supposed to receive an education and make way for a bright future. The news broadcasts also drive them to violence. Another aspect here is that the youth suffer moral decadence, which affects the socio-cultural domain of the Niger-Delta people at large. Some of them even joined boys from other villages and kidnapped executives of oil companies or obstructed the workers from doing their work.

Occurrence of oil disasters forces the people to resign themselves to fate, leaving them helpless and frustrated as the compensation is continuously denied. As can be noted in the text, even when the community appeals to the oil company and holds them responsible for the pipeline burst, the company deflects the blame by alleging youth sabotage and refuses to pay for the devastating losses. This evasion of responsibility illustrates how government and multinational oil firms influence narratives to avoid accountability. *Yellow-Yellow* reflects this important postcolonial dynamic, where ecological harm is dismissed, and ordinary people are deceived and abandoned. Zilayefa's journey is shaped by this systemic disregard, revealing how administrative neglect and corporate evasion determine the future of Niger Delta communities.

Depriving the natives of any education, awareness and news about recent happenings is one dominant way in which the oil company keeps them in the dark and exploits them. The oil companies, as the natives know, arrange amazing scholarships, but they are of no use to the ones in need as they simply do not have access to such news. It is ironic to think of the use of such scholarships for wealthy people. However, one realises the importance of education in overcoming such challenges through the dream Zilayefa's mother wishes to achieve through her.

Due to the limited number of university seats each year and the lack of knowledge about scholarships from the oil companies, many prospective students are discouraged. This highlights systemic educational barriers in Zilayefa's world. The failure of the political and bureaucratic systems to provide equal access to education sets an unjust model, stifling aspirations and perpetuating poverty. In *Yellow-Yellow*, this denial reflects the general structural inequalities, which get fueled by the oil economy. Here, while wealth enriches the elites, the public institutions remain inaccessible and poorly-funded. The dearth of opportunities for higher education underscores the frustration and stagnation faced by the rural youth, highlighting the novel's critique of failure in governance and resource mismanagement. Altogether, they lead to constrained personal growth and perpetuate cycles of poverty.

The instability in governance directly affects the academic performances of the students, limiting their future opportunities. Various factors such as irregular salaries of the professors, political unrest, and campus disruptions determine how long students remain in school. *Yellow-Yellow* exposes this fragility of the education system, implying how administrative and institutional inefficiency can lead to a decay in academic progress. This instability also represents the broader dysfunction of the oil economy, where national wealth fails to cater to public needs

and services. As far as the Niger Delta youth, like Zilayefa, are concerned, their futures are shaped less by merit and more by a system crippled by mismanagement and neglect.

In spite of the persistent extraction of their natural resources, the Niger Delta receives little support from authorities, leaving the residents resentful and marginalised. This situation typifies petrofiction's critique of extractive injustice, the focus of postcolonialism on exploitation and state involvement, and the concern of ecocriticism with the environmental hazards imposed on vulnerable communities. In the novel, Zilayefa has a personal confrontation with this dynamic, as her region gets denied the benefits of its own oil wealth, shaping both her circumstances and the broader social landscape.

Therefore, while the Ijaws and other ethnic groups suffer and even die, the wealth drawn from their land enriches others. This awareness deepens the Niger Delta crises, highlighting the postcolonial paradox of resource extraction. Foreign companies and the elites profit from local resources, while indigenous communities suffer poverty and neglect. In *Yellow-Yellow*, such injustice drives youth to migrate and pushes young women into precarious labour. This captures the novel's petrofictional critique of dispossession in a nation, which is supposedly postcolonial, but where the remnants of colonialism linger on.

Social evils such as corrupt administration, political unrest, and harsh economic conditions eventually force young native girls, like Zilayefa, to leave their homes in search of work in foreign lands, or to engage in sexually exploitative activities such as prostitution. There are certain places in Nigeria, such as Bonny, where expatriates live and work for oil companies. The knowledge of such places and what opportunities they have to offer makes Zilayefa contemplate taking extreme steps. Here, she considers selling her body to survive, which a path was already taken by girls from her village. This highlights how economic desperation and the presence of exploitative multinational oil firms create and exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities, pushing local women into perilous labour, while foreign workers profit from regional resources. In *Yellow-Yellow*, this tension between agency and compulsion exposes how petro-capitalism shapes not just ecologies, but also bodies and identities, revealing the profound costs.

Environmental plunder in the Niger Delta harms women disproportionately. Following pipeline explosions and oil spills, their lives are marked by poverty, hardship and community stability. The resulting unemployment also pushes men into evils such as vandalisation, robbery, kidnapping, and oil bunkering. All these further destabilize the region. Oil spills release toxic hydrocarbons into soil and water, contaminating crops, aquatic life, and domestic water sources. Also, widespread biodiversity loss erodes every aspect of livelihood.

This aligns with ecofeminist insight that women bear the heaviest burdens of environmental harm. In *Yellow-Yellow*, Zilayefa's mother exemplifies this reality of how oil exploitation inflicts gendered suffering, as ecological destruction plunges her into poverty and single motherhood. Ecological despoliation can be strongly linked to women's suffering, positioning their sexuality as a site of vulnerability. Petro-capitalism also fuels sexual exploitation and marginalisation. Zilayefa is herself a child born from a foreign oil worker's exploitation, and her resultant stigma, conflict of identity and vulnerability reveal how women's bodies become extensions of the same destructive forces that ravage the environment.

In *Yellow-Yellow*, ecological destruction indirectly leads to bodily vulnerability. With no options to earn a livelihood, girls like Zilayefa are pushed toward Port Harcourt, where they get exposed to exploitation by men like Sergio and Admiral. Here, oil extraction results in collapse of rural economies, environmental ruin creates desperation, and women become commodified. Ultimately, the women's bodies mirror the Niger Delta itself, where territories are stripped of agency, penetrated, and repeatedly exploited for the benefit of outsiders.

By foregrounding the interconnected dangers of environmental destruction, distorted gender relations, and harmful political and cultural norms, Kaine Agary firmly aligns *Yellow-Yellow* with ecofeminist discourse. Her narrative reveals how destructive oil activities devastate ecosystems and how environmental collapse undermines both human and ecological well-being,

with women bearing the brunt in most cases. As their lives and means of subsistence are overturned by the oil spill, Zilayefa and Bibi are rendered vulnerable to exploitation by male oil workers.

This brings one to Zilayefa's sexual encounter with an Admiral, who takes advantage of her innocence. However, it is too late by the time she realises the mistake. Not knowing what to do next, she approaches Admiral. Zilayefa is distraught when he forces Zilayefa into an abortion. She sees this as an act of immense bodily violation, and Agary aligns Zilayefa's personal suffering with the wider ecological destruction of the Niger Delta. Zilayefa's dreams are aborted too, paralleling the region's own aborted potential, as multinational oil companies penetrate and disrupt the land, water, and air. This suffocates the natural life, just as the foreign Admiral suffocates Zilayefa's aspirations and dignity. Thus, through this ecofeminist lens, the female body and the ecological body become terrains of colonial and patriarchal exploitation: both are invaded, stripped of agency, and forced to bear unwanted consequences of external power.

In *Yellow-Yellow*, Zilayefa's vulnerability to sexual exploitation by men like Sergio and Admiral figuratively reflects the violation of the environment itself. This illustrates the critique of oil companies as violators of land, the metaphor of ecological rape, and the idea that women's bodily suffering is closely linked with environmental despoliation. Ecofeminist theorists with differing perspectives converge on the point that environmental despoliation and the subjugation of women are intertwined, as both concern themselves with women and the environment. This framework provides a theoretical framework for reading the novel, where Zilayefa's body becomes a metaphor for the Niger Delta itself. Both are violated, controlled, and polluted by external forces, and a parallel can be drawn between her sexual vulnerability and the region's ecological vulnerability.

In the novel, Zilayefa observes that the very water she drank shimmered with blue, purple and red streaks from the leaking oil. Ironically, the oil flowed through pipelines, that carried the region's wealth from beneath her land into the pockets of a few, privileged people who governed Nigeria. Environmental degradation caused by oil companies destroys the traditional livelihoods of Niger Delta communities, whose fishing and farming activities are ruined when the spills contaminate their lands and rivers. The polluted waterways and oil-soaked farmlands make food production impossible, thrusting the families into poverty and hardship. Oil, therefore, becomes a harbinger of suffering rather than wealth.

Apart from the negative impact of human activities on life below water, the novel focusses on the nature of the waters, which are mentioned as being different during the day and at night. The people were all aware of the wrath of the Atlantic, and that it was unwise to venture into the waters. There were some popular stories in the area of children playing around the shore who got sucked into the stomach of the Atlantic, while some others were lucky enough to return unharmed.

The natives in *Yellow-Yellow* know the power and fury of the waters, and realise the need to respect and not misuse them. Zilayefa watches the surfers and thinks that only white people would attempt an activity as reckless as riding the fierce waves. People in the Niger Delta are aware of the ravaging nature of the Atlantic and therefore, maintain a safe distance. However, we must realise that nature simply reacts to the way she is treated. In the wake of the incessant exploitation of natural resources to meet our selfish, unending desires, we destroy the ecology and, consequently, we end up destroying ourselves. That is why it is important to act wisely and adopt sustainable methods of resource management.

The constant political strife and daily struggles deeply affect the natives of the Niger Delta, especially young women like Zilayefa. She clings on to memories of childhood for joy; the moonlit nights filled with singing, dancing, and communal games that once brought happiness and security. These reminiscences stand in sharp contrast to the environmental devastation caused by the oil spill. Zilayefa also remembers rituals with the other girls, etching permanent designs on their skin using soot and blades. This was a symbolic expression of their deep cultural connection

to their land and petroleum. In the novel, these memories highlight the profound loss of fertile land, cultural continuity, and innocence, emphasizing the novel's mournful tone and its critique of the disruptive impact of petro-capitalism on traditional life in the Niger Delta.

Another instance which highlights the cultural significance of oil in the Niger Delta is the description of a native woman's beauty, as she is admired by Zilayefa for her deep, palm-kernel-brown skin with the smoothness of refined palm oil. This imagery is drawn from local natural materials and reflects a deep cultural connection to nature. The lush, organic beauty contrasts sharply with the environmental destruction caused by oil exploitation. This emphasizes the threat that cultural rootedness faces due to petro-capitalism. The communities also risks losing their identities, which are intertwined with an untouched natural world.

The novel critiques the profit-motive that drives oil capitalism, treating land and water as mere resources rather than as living ecosystems. Oil companies and the government operate within this capitalist, anthropocentric framework. The ecological disaster caused by the oil spill demonstrates the consequences of ignoring a holistic, symbiotic relationship with the environment. By showing how environmental ruin stems from such ignorance and the rejection of deep ecological principles, *Yellow-Yellow* emerges as an ecologically-aware work of petrofiction that exposes the destructive outcomes of exploiting the oil resources of nature indiscriminately.

The persistent conflicts arising from misrule and exploitation naturally breed tension and bitterness among the natives. This is reflected in a conversation between Zilayefa and Sisi, as the latter avoids discussing the troubling news to protect her mental health. This shows the intense emotional fatigue caused by Nigeria's instability and the common coping strategy, adopted by the natives, of distancing oneself from societal failures. In *Yellow-Yellow*, the scene underscores both Zilayefa's growing political awareness and Sisi's protective detachment, highlighting how the Niger Delta residents struggle to manage the emotional toll of systemic dysfunction.

It is disheartening and ironic to note that colonial and governmental failures have turned the once-harmonious communities in Nigeria against each other, deepening the divisions amidst their shared suffering. With over two hundred ethnic groups, the country's longstanding peaceful coexistence has ultimately given way to violence over minor disputes. This national instability forms the backdrop of Zilayefa's story, linking her personal struggles to the broader political neglect and systemic inequalities. In the novel, corruption and underdevelopment, driven by the oil economy, intensify ethnic tensions, illustrating how fragmentation and exploitation shape individual lives in the Niger Delta.

Agary's critique makes one question how an oil-producing state could suffer petrol shortages, how a country with crude oil reserves and refineries could export petrol while its people were deprived of it. Petrofiction, therefore, exposes the contradictions of oil-rich nations facing scarcity. Together with postcolonialism, it reflects the novel's broader political reality, whereby a corrupt state allies with oil companies, while rural populations endure deprivation.

The administration and oil companies provoke the natives through misinformation, censorship, and by terrorizing dissenters. Many natives avoid reading newspapers, distrusting biased reports, especially because journalists criticizing the government face arrest. News often centers on detained activists, assassinated politicians, and international sanctions, yet the leader remains apathetic, valuing oil revenue over human rights. This authoritarian regime is sustained by oil wealth and is immune to both demands of citizens and global pressure. In *Yellow-Yellow*, this mirrors the plight of the Niger Delta, with corruption and repression intensifying marginalization. Thus, petro-politics corrupts not only the environment, but also democracy and truth.

Consequently, this drain of wealth through exploitative means for political gains results in the natives waiting in long queues for the plentiful wealth of petrol whose rightful owners they are. Transporting this inflammable liquid was done at the risk of their houses and even their lives. This again raises our concern about the inherent irony of the situation of the natives of Nigre Delta. It was common to see people queued up with jerry cans at petrol stations, carrying petrol and diesel to their homes.

*Yellow-Yellow* raises vital concerns about human survival in a degraded, and exploited environment, emphasizing the pain of Niger Delta communities who live in abject poverty even amid abundant oil wealth. Zilayefa's community, environmentally devastated yet surrounded by oil wealth, illustrates this paradox, which is central to petrofiction. The utter scarcity of fuel that the natives face is brought out in the following lines, intensifying the disturbing irony underlying the fact.

There are instances in the novel where pickup trucks with jerry cans are arranged for petrol. The exploitative and colonialist plunder had left the oil-rich nation with no working refineries and unending fuel scarcity. These occurrences highlight the painful questions of the oppressed natives; why they suffer despite their wealth, what those in power are doing, and why the government and oil companies lack moral accountability. Traffic accidents involving petrol-carrying vehicles, leading to explosions, represent the lack of strength in infrastructural and administrative institutions. Public disillusionment turns into turmoil over the fuel shortages—despite Nigeria's oil exports and refineries—emphasise widespread frustration with a corrupt system.

Oftentimes, people in power misuse their power for their own political advantage, suppressing those who dare to question them and not keeping in mind the negative impact of their actions. It again brings to focus the irony of the situation, which contributes to exacerbating inequality and increases the gap between the rich and the poor. Often, oil companies used the Nigerian armed forces in order to terrorise and even sometimes kill innocent natives who dared to question the prevalent inequity between the workers and the elite of Nigeria.

It is important to identify humanity's major environmental concerns, such as depletion of natural resources, exploitative technologies, pollution, and species extinction. This resonates directly with the petrofictional context of the oil politics of Niger Delta. This framing situates *Yellow-Yellow* within global debates on extractivism and ecological crises, highlighting the novel's significant role in the larger literary response to environmental degradation driven by resource industries like petroleum.

Therefore, alongwith the need for better policy-making for economic prosperity and the socio-cultural enrichment of the natives, the novel also implies the pressing need to adopt sustainable methods of resource management.

### **Research findings**

Set during Nigeria's oil boom, *Yellow-Yellow* reflects how the country's wealth contrasts with its lack of basic resources due to poor policies and exploitation of oil. The novel highlights the socio-economic and ecological effects of oil exploitation, critiquing administrative failure, criminality and environmental damage. Such pollution leads to moral decay, with both men and women resorting to desperate measures, such as kidnapping and prostitution. Meanwhile, the government and oil companies remain negligent, leading to further suffering.

An exemplary work of petrofiction, *Yellow-Yellow* recognises the deep connection between human interests and the environment. The study has aimed to portray the impact of irresponsible human actions on multiple levels; socio-cultural, politico-administrative, economic, and ecological. Through the life and experiences of the protagonist, Zilayefa, the study has sought to highlight the fact that administrative and ecological actions can have multiple implications on various aspects of the society. Therefore, the need for sound policies is stressed to ensure the sustainable use of oil for the prosperity of the people, while ensuring ecological balance.



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**THE LANDSCAPE OF IDENTITY: EXPLORING GENDER, SUBJECTIVITY AND  
ECOLOGY IN CHERYL STRAYED'S *WILD* AND ROBYN DAVIDSON'S *TRACKS***

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**Abstract**

This study intends to examine gender identity in women's solo travel narratives that perceive the wilderness as a site of feminist resistance. Through a reading of two travel memoirs, Cheryl Strayed's *Wild* (2012) and Robyn Davidson's *Tracks* (1980), this paper analyses the intricate connections between women's solo travel and nature, highlighting how physical landscapes serve as platforms for embodied experiences and transformation, thus challenging societal perceptions of femininity. Such travels transgress boundaries which are physical, cultural, and existential, and act as a medium through which women assert mobility and autonomy. The body is reimagined as fluid and interconnected, challenging rigid boundaries between human and nonhuman worlds within the environment. The narratives produced by Strayed and Davidson not only articulate personal experiences but also contribute to an ecological discourse, underlining the relationship between human psychology and the natural world. The research uses textual analysis to interpret how these memoirs engage with themes of gender and environment as a part of ecofeminist literary criticism. The study further draws on affective ecocriticism which explores the emotional and sensory dimensions of human-nature relationships. This combined theoretical and methodological approach enables an intricate understanding of the narratives that focuses on both feminist agency and ecological interdependence. The findings imply landscape as a multifaceted construct, natural, mental and cultural, ingrained with meaning shaped by personal experiences and social values. Addressing the influence of social and cultural factors, the objective is to understand identity, gender, and embodiment in the context of such travel experiences and their representation and interpretation within an ecocritical framework.

**Keywords:** Travel writing, Gender identity, Wilderness, Ecofeminism, Empowerment

**Introduction**

Women's travel narratives gained prominence in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as women began to write and publish their experiences challenging cultural assumptions and perspectives. However, catering to a readership based on gendered boundaries and societal norms, women travellers were compelled to restrict certain aspects of their travels to meet the expectations of a conservative population. Travels were rather romanticized as quests, internal or external, which must be conquered after a battle that rendered the traveller heroic at the end. The concept of movement and agency for women is transformative but to claim space and representation in travel literature was problematic as the discourse itself was majorly dominated by traditional masculinity. Travel writing is flexible, subjective, and fluid and therefore remains unstable in its composition. Women travelling and documenting their journeys were comprehended as eccentric and odd, and publishing their works seemed to be a difficult task. Women wanderers, under this transition, opened doors that involved a wide spectrum of discussions on topics regarding social affiliations, identity and crisis, and most importantly, about writing and publishing their travelogues (Sreekumar & Poongodi 397). Immersing oneself in the wilderness or an alien environment brings out innate capabilities and realizations that build human character, nature and soul. From a psychological outlook, the self (ego) takes command and constitutes new experiences in a gender-neutral space. This temperament falls under the individualist cultural mindset which gives prominence to independence, uniqueness and self-reliance where social behaviour tends to be

dictated by attitudes and preferences of individuals rather than the needs of the group as a whole (Nickerson). Such travels bring theories of space and place into focus. The understanding of psychological and social space, solitude, and nature represent a symbolic site unmarked and unidentified, yet safe and free from traditional prejudices. This space empowers female travellers to construct a new identity both personally and physically, ultimately shaping their future discourse.

Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild: A journey from Lost to Found* narrates her story of hiking 1,100 miles in 1995 from Mohave Desert, California to Oregon Washington Stateline, a part of the Western United States. Strayed's memoir narrates the story of a twenty-six-year-old orphan whose journey begins with personal struggles such as the loss of her mother, drug abuse, professional failures, and a broken marriage. The memoir mirrors the journey of a woman who aspires to rebuild her individuality and status. This endeavour to (re)write her identity manifests in an unplanned and unprepared trek that challenges her both mentally and physically. Strayed's mother Bobbi, reflecting on her regrets after being diagnosed with cancer, embodies the essence Strayed's entire journey. Bobbi recognizes that her identity and womanhood was tied to others' expectations, reducing her to the familial roles of someone's daughter, mother, or wife. In fulfilling these duties, she admits that she lost her individuality. She expressed her lack of control and agency, acknowledging that she never had the chance to be in the "driver's seat" of her own life (Strayed 430). Her voyage is essentially an inward speculation of redemption and solitude that presents a narratorial standpoint from which every person in her life is examined. Robyn Davidson, also known as the 'Camel lady', crossed the Gibson Desert in 1977 on a solo trek of 2,700 km across a span of nine months. In her book *Tracks: One Woman's Journey Across 1700 Miles of Australian Outback*, stressing on the concept of liberty, she views personal freedom as crucial valuing the ability to think independently and make her own decisions (Davidson 312). Davidson, when asked about her motive for crossing the Outback with four camels, asserted in an interview that actions defying cultural expectations and conventions often disturb society and provoke discomfort. She felt compelled by an instinct to pursue something challenging and meaningful that would bring purpose to her life (Black). Both Davidson and Strayed take an impressive tour of the wilderness but the primary thrust or motive behind such a decision is still vague. However, some parallels in the authors' lives indicates a possibility of shared motives. The death of their mother, the absence of a father figure, and ultimately, a disintegrated family structure forced them to move out of their homes at an early age. Strayed's condition resembles Davidson's, as she writes in the book about her father's absence during her childhood, her mother's death, and the emotional separation that developed among her siblings afterward (Strayed 13-14). Both women were never part of a functioning society and had always felt alienated since childhood, attributing this to their upbringing and financial status. As Davidson reflects on her circumstances before the trek, she confesses that she never experienced a home of her own, shifting from the discipline of boarding school to communal living with large groups of friends (Davidson 53).

#### **Research Methodology**

This paper employs a qualitative research methodology and adopts textual analysis as the primary method to explore the interrelations between gender, travel, and ecology. Open-ended and exploratory in nature, qualitative investigation scrutinises "verbal accounts or descriptions in words" offering flexibility in gathering and decoding collected data (Elliott and Timulak 149-50). This methodology helps to understand solo travel as a phenomenon and its inherent relationship with the environment. The main objective of textual analysis is to interpret the "structure, content, and functions" of underlying themes, meanings, and concepts embedded in literary texts. Among the four approaches to textual analysis, content analysis appear proficient to identify and understand the reoccurrence of a specific phenomenon and its characteristics in both texts. To determine and decode the *units* of analysis, which comprise travel, gender, and wilderness,

“meaning units, and thematic units” guide the decoding and interpreting process, focusing on the representational, intersectional, and thematic articulations (Frey et al.). These units illustrate travel and wilderness as a place of transformation, negotiation, and resistance for women, how femininity is reimagined and redefined, and themes such as mobility, adventure, and ecology emerge in women’s travel narratives.

Grounded in feminist literary criticism, the study focuses on embodied and subjective experiences of women, and examines wilderness as a branch of ecocriticism and its existence in travel literature as a site of retreat and rejuvenation for women solo travellers. Through a comparative reading of *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed and *Tracks* by Robyn Davidson, this paper positions women’s travel memoirs as literary artefacts through which female travellers narrate, explore, and reinterpret their encounters in the open. My work studies the eudaimonic aspect of travel which seeks meaning, personal growth, self-actualization, and expressiveness, asserting a hands-on experience (experiential) form of learning. Both books point to “nature connectedness”, a psychological bond between the self and the environment formulating an identity that is interconnected with nature. Personal growth, purpose, and authenticity, are important features of eudaimonic wellness which resemble a close alliance with nature. Such solo travels undertaken by women in the wilderness results in self-expansion of their innate traits related to self-concept, ultimately shaping the traveller’s prosocial behaviour (Lengieza 02-03). Data is collected and presented in distinctive ‘meaning units’ adhering to the topic of research. The units exhibit information that is textual and contextual enabling readers to understand the connection between personal narratives and their theoretical implications. These units are constantly compared and differentiated until the existing data can be categorised to understand the phenomenon (Elliott and Timulak 153-155). Qualitative textual analysis deciphers and interrogates how individuals in particular settings construct meaning from their experiences and environments. This study involves interpretation of the social conditions in which texts are created to understand how personal narratives are shaped by broader cultural, social, gendered, and ecological discourse (Smith 03).

Strayed, and Davidson, both as solo travellers and authors, articulate their alliance to the wilderness through personal narratives negotiating themes of womanhood, identity, and empowerment. Critically evaluating how landscapes are deduced and decoded through personal, psychological, and sensory details, the protagonist’s evolving self is understood through the lens of affective ecology. Such feminist narratives are not discerned as simply autobiographical reflections but as multi-layered literary landscapes where boundaries between gender, mobility, and nature are blurred and reconfigured.

### **Wilderness and Womanhood**

Strayed’s journey, which signifies personal trauma and an attempt to rebuild herself through traveling alone, could be seen as escape from drugs, abortion, divorce, and alienation. Her troubled status, probably, could be restored through this achievement of completing a hike that no woman had attempted before, thus earning her a new status. Driven by a need for transformation, Strayed expresses her determination to return to her authentic self, convinced that the journey along the PCT would help her rediscover her strength, clarity, and purpose away from the chaos of her past life (Strayed 92). What drives a woman to seek solace and peace in the outdoors? Is it another way of asserting agency over one’s body and narrative? Or do such travels empower one to change one’s turbulent past and image in society? The burden of social institutions and communal ties has pulled women back from claiming or crafting an identity that depends solely on one’s true potential. The absence of patriarchal figures, orthodox social conventions, and boundaries makes the wilderness a site suitable for introspection. The static elements of nature act as catalysts of change in body and spirit for the traveller. In her journey of rediscovery amidst nature, Strayed observes that despite her scepticism toward many things, she felt certain that “the wilderness had a clarity” that embraced and included her (Strayed 226). This decision appears impulsive than intentional, as none of them had any knowledge or vision regarding the expedition.

Rather, their estrangement from family and society somehow serves as a deciding factor to disengage from human civilization, permitting them to re-enter it after a process of transformation that is both internal and physical. Strayed anticipates the natural environment as a site of rebirth. She imagines the Pacific Crest Trail as a space where she could evolve and reconnect with the girl she once was. The wilderness becomes a place that helps her unite her past and future selves (Strayed 14). A possible hypothesis of the outcome was the creation of a new social persona in which the female traveller had achieved a milestone that seems unachievable and incomprehensible through challenges posed by the natural landscape. Davidson's trek was undertaken to reflect on the living conditions of the Aboriginals of the Outback, and to revisit the colonial past of Australia, which included these Aborigines. Sponsored by the National Geographic, which documented her trip to Aboriginal land, her book seeks to renegotiate Aboriginal identity and history and to recover Aboriginal knowledge. Numerous reports about the trek state Davidson's motivation was to find 'meaning' outside of the noise of modern society but she admits in the book to have made the decision *instinctively* and had only given meaning to it later. The trek was never an adventure that was meant to prove something but she confesses on the difficulty to act on that decision (Davidson 51). She conveys in the book about a transformation that also resonates with Strayed. Davidson echoes feeling "invincible" and "untouchable", believing that the desert had tested her limits and that there's nothing more for her to learn (Davidson 270). Travel writing for women explorers becomes instrumental in shedding traditional selfhood and in "unbecoming" the feminized woman constrained by rituals, spectacles, and the diminished embodiment of traditional femininity (Beck 97). It facilitates a mechanism where social, historical, and cultural conflicts clash and unfold contradictions that exist in analogous continuation between the mind and life, self and other, human and nonhuman world, creating multi-layered dimensions of communication and perceptions.

Twenty-first-century travel writing identifies with a sense of post-industrial alienation, focusing on the lone traveller whose encounter with foreign landscapes reveals an absence of postmodern sensibility. The wilderness acts as a catalyst for resilience and agency, providing a space of *tabula rasa* which advocates emotional and physical growth. Such solitary experiences in the wild underscore opportunities that enable women to emerge as empowered individuals in social dynamics. Strayed and Davidson journey through nature, shedding their previous identities laced with trauma and insecurities, a metaphorical transition similar to the natural process of abandoning old layers, unfolding a renewed aspect of body and mind. For instance, Davidson observes her growing physical and mental strength as her body adapted to the harsh conditions of the trek. She notes that by this stage of her journey she had become so fit that she was nearly immune to cold and pain. She had long been in awe of men who could endure pain silently, and now she had become one of them (Davidson 232). Analogously, Strayed discusses her physical resilience, describing how her muscles grew stronger each day even as her tendons and joints weakened from exhaustion (Strayed 114).

Cheryl Strayed is called 'Queen of the PCT' (Strayed 467) and Robyn Davidson gained the title, 'Camel Lady' (Davidson 281). The society acknowledges and applauds their action, and this shapes a new image or identity for them within the same culture in which they had failed to receive recognition. Such narratives negotiate the feminist discourse by signifying the body and highlighting subjectivity as they confront societal perceptions of strength and vulnerability. Considering this manner of thought, travel writing under the feminist lens of speculation becomes a device to address trauma, making it politically significant where the traditional, and social structure is deconstructed. The notions of femininity, freedom, and healing operate at a deeper level of understanding and purpose for women who embark on solo journeys.

Arguably, unification of all the elements in the surrounding environment and within the body thrives in creating a coherent ecosystem, amplifying the consequence and magnitude of such journeys. The arduous process of travelling through a territory, in mind and body, requires effort that tests a traveller's patience and tolerance. Moreover, the constant dilemma

of readjusting back to a civilized society, with its boundaries and barriers, offers an insightful perspective into a solo woman wanderer's mindset. The constant anxiety of returning to a civilized space, complying with societal norms, such as attire and etiquette, has perhaps driven women to seek solace in the wild. Davidson contemplates her detachment from societal norms and expectations, questioning concerns of etiquettes and appearances, and realizing that such matters were irrelevant in her environment. She reflects, "Did it matter, I would think to myself, if all the buttons had gone from my shirt and trousers? Would anybody notice or care?" (Davidson 227). Lefebvre's concept of 'lived space' which Soja later developed into 'third space' aims to expand the understanding of how individuals experience and conceive a physical space. Soja's concept of 'lived space' refers to the "precise circumstances in which we live", constituting a continuous negotiation of physical, emotional, and ideological aspects of space. Lived space apprehends the intricacies and uncertainties of spatial experiences allowing diverse interpretations to merge without categorizing one above the other. It becomes a place devoid of any hierarchical model of interpretations composing it into a site of connections and conflicts where multiple implications can coexist at the same time. *Wild and Tracks* reveals, develops, and examines this space, highlighting gender consciousness, focusing on physical and conceptual frameworks of gender identity and experience within a broader social context (Collis 180). These travels from periphery to the center create a junction of different cultures formed, negotiated and re-formed that becomes a 'third space' for women travelers which allows for new interpretations and expressions. Within this space, new identities are represented and redefined, subverting dominant structures of power, promoting space for marginalized voices. Through this dual lens, identity, agency, and experience are interpreted critically uncovering cultural codes, spatial meanings, and identity markers within travel narratives that value fluidity and empowerment.

#### **Ecological Consciousness in Female Travel Narratives**

Affective ecocriticism is a domain of study that bridges the gap in comprehending the interconnectedness between nature and human beings. Under the spectrum of affective ecology, an intensive and interrelated reading can be formed between literature, nature, and human, providing a new discourse between emotional engagement and environmental narratives. It is instrumental in understanding how the physical environment, real or imagined, can evoke feelings or emotions through literature or other artistic representations. The human-nature relationship is awakened by writers and other means of production like cultural texts, visual narrative, etc. triggering interpersonal and subjective feelings we experience in daily life and is a reflection of our behavior in such a setting (Mossner, *Affect, Emotion, and Ecocriticism* 133). The range of emotions experienced can be heightened and manipulated by such tools, ultimately becoming universal and central to understanding how we feel and think. Mossner propagates a cognitive ecocritical approach to interpret how environmental narratives signal personal reactions resulting in (re)imagining physical environments and ultimately create sense and association with known or unseen places. She uses the concept of "embodied simulation", which suggests that readers and viewers blur boundaries between their own bodies and those of others, real or imagined, while comprehending a narrative (*Affective Ecologies* 26-27). This simulation finds voice in Davidson's experience in the desert where the internal and external representations are unified in a subconscious reality of co-existence. Davidson explains that the self exists as a reaction between the mind and external stimulus rather than as an isolated inner being confined within the skull. She further theorises that in the absence of social stimuli or interaction, the self struggles to define and understand its essence and boundaries. It begins to mirror its surroundings, adapting for survival. She writes, "It becomes limitless, with its roots more in the subconscious than the conscious – it gets stripped of non-meaningful habits and becomes more concerned with realities related to survival" (Davidson 236). Eduardo Kohn in "How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human" tries to develop a structure that projects selfhood beyond the human world and tries to establish relations between humans and other living species proposing a framework of



'representational system'. He illustrates the example of the Quinchua-speaking Runa of Avila, a village in Ecuador's upper Amazon to support his idea further. The author proposes that both humans and nonhumans interact with the world and with each other as selves, possessing a unique perspective and an individual point of view. He conceptualizes this interconnection as an "ecology of selves". Such ecological relations are not simply the outcome of mechanical cause-and-effect interactions between organisms as isolated objects. Rather, they emerge from the complex interplay of the subjective, experiential worlds these organisms inhabit. Representation, intention, and purpose shape how diverse human and nonhuman beings perceive their environments (Kohn 04-05). The environment transforms into an interwoven 'net' or 'web' that these travel writers experience and convey through their complicated and intimate involvement with nature. Davidson elaborates, "Certainly I was intensely tuned to my environment, aware of the interconnections of things – that net, or web, of which we are a part" (Davidson 315). An 'interconnected network' is shared consciously and subconsciously by Strayed in the PCT trek as she points out, "I was a pebble. I was a leaf. I was the jagged branch of a tree. I was nothing to them and they were everything to me" (Strayed 134). This interaction acknowledges Davidson and Strayed's experiences in the wilderness, where the internal and external representations are unified in an interconnectedness. Both texts establish a profound yet overlooked notion of women's symbolic relationship with place, space, human, and non-human species during the course of travel which resist categorisation. Recognising, understanding, and accepting innumerable perspectives of non-human entities and forces that exist within nature have enabled women to develop interspecies psychology. The dichotomy between *home* and the *world* remains a contested site as women remain alienated to aspects of place and space in heteropatriarchal societies. Strayed and Davidson, during their course, reject personal and socio-political dualisms between the self and the other, concentrating instead on interconnected identities (Gaard 11, 13-14). Both women successfully restructure their roles, otherwise symbolic of gender and social stereotypes, crafting new and enhanced engagement in public spheres as writers and activists, serving not just as exemplars, but as rather something achievable for common women. Both journeys celebrate the 'natural' by reconnecting with the environment and by situating the body as a vital source through which a new self emerges. Fairness, for this political, social, and personal self is re-viewed as an act of liberation, a movement beyond the physical route, a statement of transformation from periphery to the centre.

Women's travel writing decodes the cultural ecosemiotics that examine human relationships with nature from a gendered semiotic paradigm. The concept of the semiotic threshold, characterized by its intricate and unstable exchanges between external and internal substances (Tian and Wang 138), can highlight how women's involvement in this domain brings forth a new understanding of an interplay between gender and semiotics. Women travellers in the physical world make meaning of signs and interpretations from natural objects which resembles a close association with their surroundings. The meaning making process is subjective and personal that indicate women's active participation and involvement in the physical environment in (re)forming an identity which is ecocentric. This, inherently, also means that all nonhuman and inanimate things hold 'value' in creating narratives which on an experiential level can be intimate and yet collective. A cultural ecology of literature regards such gendered experiences as ambiguous that helps to establish an imaginative space for 'otherness' encouraging individuality and diversity within an interconnected context that goes beyond inherent binaries and ideological messages. A semiotic link between the traveller and the existing landscape function in a metacognitive domain creating a distinct sensorium in literary texts that marks the beginning of counter-discourses (Zapf 91-92). Therefore, these literary texts exude an evolutionary design which results from the differentiation between the inner and outer settings with disparity between psychic worlds of female travellers and the systemic modes of social communication. This inclusion produces a new form of linguistic expression that emphasizes the interactive and dialectical relationships between cultures and their environments, as opposed to deterministic

views prevalent in traditional ecological approaches. Female travellers assert their agency by moving across various subject positions, interrogating fixed meanings, and forming new understandings of self, place and society.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

A fundamental divide exists within ecofeminist theory between two contrasting perspectives on understanding ecology. On one hand, there is a “nature-endorsing” stance that sees women and nature as interconnected in their experiences of oppression. On the other hand, there is a culturalist, “nature-skeptical” approach that questions this viewpoint, arguing that it oversimplifies the relationship and instead emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature, which is shaped by language, values, and socialization. The celebratory approach is criticized for reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes, while the nature-skeptical approach risks dismissing the importance of nonhuman world. A post-structuralist interpretation of ecofeminism recognizes that these differing viewpoints are shaped by language, power dynamics, and historical constructions of oppressive systems and subjectivity (Zapf 47-48). Subjects explored in *Wild* and *Tracks* echoes contemporary postmodern feminist movements by embracing the fluidity of experience and multiplicity of voices. These solo travels engage with broader cultural dialogues reinforcing values of autonomy, agency, and self-definition highlighting the complexities of identity formation in non-traditional spaces. Ultimately, the focus on individuality, intersubjectivity, agency, and creativity within women’s travel writings enriches the discourse on cultural and literary semiotics. By navigating their experiences through the lens of travel, women not only assert their identities but also contribute to a broader feminist understanding of gendered semiosis, establishing travel writing as a vital space for creative expression and empowerment.

Val Plumwood in her book *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* critiques the rationalist culture that propagates nature/human dualism characteristic of the west. Historically, women were deemed as the “Others of reason” in the rationalist construct, handled as a colony by elite men who claim superiority by virtue of their association with ‘reason’. Reduced to the realm of bodily existence, bounded by domains of physicality and materiality, women are categorised inferior to elite men who became representatives of reason. Rationalism has traditionally viewed reason, logic, and abstract thought as superior and therefore masculine, while emotions, senses, and the physical body have been subjected as feminine and hence inferior. This perspective reinforces a strict division between the mind and body, positioning the head as a part of the higher body, embodying reason whereas the lower body assumes the seat of vile desires. This binary emphasises hierarchies that empower rationality over emotion, spiritual over the bodily, placing intellect in an elevated, abstract, realm separating it from and above the chaotic, lower, and transient world of physical existence (04, 19-20). In travel narratives, the body assumes central position against the backdrop of the wilderness, and no longer serves subserviently to any other human, non-human, or natural force. The female body is placed in conjunction with all elements, not only redefining agency but also renavigating identity that is newly discovered and obtained. The wilderness elevates above the public and private sphere dismantling the economic rationalist culture that naturalises gender dualisms by characterising exclusions as rational between the public and private. This double dualism of public and private separates the economic (public) sphere from the domestic (private) realm of the household, and simultaneously separates the economic (private) from the political (public) sphere. The economic domain marked as ‘public’ and ‘productive’ is contradicted against the ‘private’ sphere of household associated with reproduction, caregiving, ecological interdependence, emotional bonds, altruism, and ethical responsibility. This division detaches women’s reproductive and maternity roles from the public and economic rationality dismissing active participation in compensated labour (32-33). Travel accounts written and published by women provide a means of gaining financial independence. The fact that women can capitalise their experiences of travel and simultaneously express their stories which tend to become literary art form opens a new portal of opportunities. The wilderness,

otherwise coded with male traits, and distinguished as a male-oriented region, presents a varied level of meanings and realities. The journey becomes a process to establish a territory that surpasses the dualistic nature of the 'public' and 'private', 'productive' and 'reproductive'.

Strayed and Davidson's writings denote how culturally powerful texts often emerge as post-traumatic storytelling, where the unspeakable aspects of the past coexist with efforts to reconstruct and re-envision the future. Furthermore, wilderness in travel writing can also be seen as an outcome of "feminist utopianism," where women can create their own narratives, free from patriarchal oppression. Helene Cixous' metaphor of "writing in white ink" underscores this transformative potential, encouraging women to express themselves through a distinct language that resonates with their unconscious female sexuality. Feminine writing is the inception of "thought through body" manifesting in women's travel writings that projects the self and explore the unconscious, thus instituting a new movement (Chakraborty 2898). Through travel and travel writing, women can share their experiences of bodily autonomy, agency, and self-expression, creating a space for feminist resistance and empowerment. These travel narratives are 'metaphorical' individual texts endowing female travel writers to explore and assert their sexuality and desires by declaring "a third body" in their voyages which remains independent from the Symbolic Order. Rather than following a singular or linear writing structure, these narratives display an abstract and pluralistic undertone indicative of a counter space, the 'Otherness', defying the masculinist structure of language (Chakraborty 2901). These writings demonstrate how writers and readers interpret signs and inscribe their unique ideas and perception into the existing sign systems. Women's interventions within these texts symbolically interrupts cycles of trauma and violence, promoting regenerative experiences that reconnect the disjointed spheres of mind and body, self and other, and culture and nature. This interactivity from a literary standpoint illustrates the separation from chaotic social foundations, and on the other hand, implies that the space found through such cultural texts forms expression and (re)integration into the larger social discourse (Zapf 91). These solo journeys cultivate a broader understanding of gender, identity, and nature thereby enriching the wider cultural discourse on travel and identity.

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**STAND-UP COMEDY AS AN ECO-NARRATIVE: AN ECO-FEMINIST APPROACH TO  
MANAGING ECO-ANXIETY**

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**Abstract**

The rise in eco-anxiety, an emotional response motivated by fear and concern for the planet due to the degradation of the environment and climate change, has triggered a psychological burden on youth. Eco-anxiety paralyzes youth with helplessness and emotional passivity in the face of global environmental problems. It has inspired stand-up comedy to serve as a diverse means of tackling complex and threatening environmental issues, navigating society to adapt to a more equitable means for sustainable communities. This paper examines how select contemporary female stand-up comedians, including Aditi Mittal, Michelle Wolf, and Kristina Wong, through the lens of critical ecofeminism, discuss ecological and women's issues. It analyzes stand-up comedy through Leont'ev's activity theory, entailing it as an activity system that sheds light on environmental issues from a feminist perspective. The study identifies humour as a powerful tool for engaging audiences on ecological and sustainability consciousness. It positions Stand-up comedy as a kind of eco-narrative that could help to mitigate "eco-anxiety", leading to build awareness and commitment to sustainable practices.

**Keywords:** Stand-up comedy, Eco-narrative, Eco-feminism, Eco-anxiety, Sustainable communities, Climate action

**Introduction**

The eco-anxiety conjugates the world due to the various deterioration factors of the environment which individuals experience via climatic changes, deforestation and pollution. These aspects led individuals to acquire significant psychological problems, which led to the increase in stress rates and the emergence of new instances of anxiety and depression symptoms. According to Tavoracci and J. Ladner, eco-anxiety prevails mostly in university students and youths. Research shows that there is less involvement among the population in environmental activism, which is limited by psychological factors that could be causing them not to take effective and active environmental action. According to emerging studies, eco-anxiety is prevalent among people who possess low education as well as young women, which means that there is an overwhelming necessity to address the issue of psychological condition (Larionow et al. 12-13). This highlights the urgent need to coordinate efforts to counter our environmental issues and help those individuals who have anxiety problems due to the environmental degradation. Awareness of psychological causes and factors of eco-anxiety have the ability to design support mechanisms that would help the anxious individuals overcome the environmental participation barriers.

The ecological imbalances created by environmental disruptions lead to gender disparities that promote systematic marginalization of women, whose positions as custodians of natural resources bring about certain ecological effects on them. In her Nobel Lecture on December 10, 2004, Wangari Maathai states that, in Africa, women are the greatest caregivers and thus the great responsibility of tilling the land and feeding the family. They are therefore the most likely to notice when the environment has been degraded due to scarcity of resources to support their families when they need them the most (Maathai). It highlights the capacitance of women as solution-givers

when it comes to gender and ecological degradation, and also the value of women in the environmental discussion. Reflectively, issues such as ecological deterioration, sex disparity, and gender inequality that have been observed to affect the world in the recent past have obtained an increased focus in recent years, stand-up comedy has become an engaging activity system that carries along with it the intricate issues. Stand-up comedians employ the stage not only to make people laugh but also to critically think and discuss the social issues in an oblique manner. They break stereotypes, create awareness of injustices, and cast a light on environmental issues in a manner that is attractive to a wide range of viewers. Stand-up comedy, as a medium, advocates and drives interaction with audiences concerning social justice with humour and activism catalyzing transformation in society.

The paper examines the ways in which contemporary female stand-up comedians converse about environmental issues into the limelight by incorporating the feminist and environmental themes into the humour factors. It claims that stand-up comedy is a sort of cultural performance in the service of environmentalism since comedians such as Aditi Mittal (Indian stand-up comedian), Kristina Wong (American stand-up comedian) and Michelle Wolf (American stand-up comedian) address ecological problems and attempt to reduce eco-anxiety with the help of comprehensible humour. Through the lens of feminist perspectives on environmental concerns, these comedians foster an enhanced comprehension of gender and ecological justice. This paper positions stand-up comedy as a form of "eco-narrative," positing that humour possesses the potential to motivate sustainable behaviors, consequently affirming stand-up as a viable platform for elevating critical environmental consciousness.

#### **Literature Review**

According to Greg Gaard and Karen J. Warren, ecofeminism presents itself as a potent theory that connects environmental exploitation and gender oppression by pointing out that the capitalist and androcentric structures mobilize both factors. Ecological degradation is associated with vulnerabilities in subaltern groups, emphasizing the pains of nature and underprivileged women (Mies and Shiva). Greta Gaard, in her essay *"From 'Cli-fi' to Critical Ecofeminism,"* suggests that artistic media of climate justice narrative in documentary, literature, and music would be beneficial to put people in motion and feel the urgency about climate change. In this light, stand-up comedy, as an eco-narrative genre, cultivates an emotional bond with nature and dwells on eco-awareness and sympathy (Gaard 186). However, it seeks to overcome eco-anxiety by transposing the notoriously abstruse dimensions of environmental matters.

Stand-up is uniquely positioned to use artistic media to challenge societal norms because alternative perspectives are conveyed through divergent lenses as it is considered as the primary medium to discuss complex issues. Some scholars like Mintz and Gilbert suggest that it has opened up a wide field of interaction on sensitive issues including social and political satire. Besides, Stand-up comedy retains its capability of providing alternative frames of reference in deviating situations, implicitly by use of irony, parody, and satire. With this rhetorical flexibility, comedians are able to negotiate controversial or threatening space with rhetorical shrewdness, re-inventing problems of racism, sexism, global warming, and capitalist excess in ways that can be intelligible and emotionally compelling such as capitalist excess in grammatical and emotion-based formulations. This intelligibility, in its turns form comedy act as a communicative bridge. In a time of excessive media coverage on the issue of climate change, where viewers grow increasingly desensitized to more traditional practices of activism or policy advocacy, humour serves as a counter-hegemonic practice that can potentially re-awaken the masses. Comedians offer cognitive and affective space on which people confront harsh reality and laugh at its awareness or discomfort and sometimes, can be confronted with critical consciousness. The role of comedy in environmental activism is developing, and comedians discuss unsustainable behavior and environmental indifference, filling the gap between the environmental movements and society.



Critical ecofeminism proposes the juxtaposition of gender and environmental justice with other modes of social inequality and constitutes a suitable theoretical paradigm in understanding the manner in which feminist comedians approach environmental concerns in their performances. Comedians such as Aditi Mittal, Kristina Wong, and Michelle Wolf, use their practice to create awareness of the impact of ecological crises, in pursuit to seek social and environmental justice. Their performances are more likely to relate their personal stories, sharp observation and humour to discuss the problems related to environmental degradation and gender. Thus, they also shed light on structural inequalities that contribute to these problems, which drives people to wonder about the aftermath of environmental policy and social justice.

This echoes some of the key ecofeminist principles because with their performances, they disaggregate complex environmental issues, and this way creates a sense of familiarity and draws focus to the point of intersection between environmental degradation and social injustices (Gaard 186-187).

Activity theory aids in understanding the social impact of stand-up comedy as an eco-narrative. This framework allows individuals to view how individuals utilize cultural instruments such as humor to create collective experiences as they form collaborative cognitions (Engestrom 5-6). Comedians provide humor to promote ecofeminism through their own action system that makes the listeners scout their stance towards ecological problems and rights of women. Combination of critical ecofeminism, eco-narratology and the Second Generation Activity Theory proposed by Leont'ev, helps to analyse feminist stand-up comedy that incorporates both funny and ecofeminist messages in it.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

The research integrates Critical Ecofeminism with Leont'ev's Second Generation Activity Theory and Eco-narratology to analyze how feminist comedians employ humor to speak on the issues of women and the environment.

Critical ecofeminism emphasizes the intertwining of women's oppression and nature, deduces a link to embodied knowledge and environmental justice (Gaard 186). This observation is exemplified by stand-up comedians embracing the gendered effects of ecological destruction, thus demonstrating social and ecological interconnectedness. Critical ecofeminism is a discerning analytical framework for understanding the discourse of ecological issues by female stand-up comedians. This branch of environmental feminism is sometimes called "*material ecofeminism*" or "*eco-ontological feminism*," emphasizing the intertwining of human beings with the environment and the value of the epistemology of the body. Critical ecofeminism transcends essentialist and social constructionist claims that may be overgeneralizing identity and environmental activism. Rather, it offers a new "feminist politics of the body-in-place" that integrates race, gender, sexuality, and class with environmental justice. Greta Gaard promoted the value of creative media, e.g., music, documentary, and literature, as powerful tools to mobilize people to action and to make people care about climate change emotionally (Gaard, 186- 187). In this light, stand-up comedy is a powerful medium to instill ecological awareness.

Leont'ev's Activity Theory provides a foundation for analyzing how stand-up comedy functions as a socially and historically situated activity system where comedians, audiences, environmental themes, and cultural tools intersect (Engestrom 5-6). It builds on Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology, in which he divides human activity into layers formed by collective practices. Within this framework, stand-up comedy is seen as an activity system composed of subjects (comedians), tools (language, satire, metaphor, etc.), objectives (promoting environmental consciousness), and communities (audiences). These elements define a stand-up performance as an "activity system" in which the comedians use humour as a mediating tool to criticize existing cultural norms. A comprehensive understanding of Leont'ev's activity theory can be effectively conveyed through the diagram represented by Engestrom. (Refer to Fig. 1)

Leont'ev explains that activities exist within their social and historical environment, which determines their form and context (Leont'ev 81). The individual performs actions through conscious goal-oriented behaviour, which stems from unconscious motives (Leont'ev 62). The human use of tools enables people to connect subjects with objects while converting natural events into purposeful cultural actions (Leont'ev 52). In such an activity, motive determines the meaningfulness of an activity for the subject and gives it its direction (Leont'ev 103). The primary objective of such an activity system is to create a unity of consciousness and activity.

Eco-narratology, an area of literary studies considers how narratives reflect and react to environmental issues. This area of study is interested in how narrative devices, including metaphor, symbolism, and irony, and satire, can affect how readers interpret environmental catastrophes and elicit emotional reactions to environmental issues. It is based on the theoretical understanding that narrative is a primary source of environmental concern and moral inclination towards environmental degradation, which is shared by ecocriticism and narratology. The practices utilized within ecocritical narratives supplement this research by evaluating the way humorists utilize metaphor, satire, and irony in discussing environmental issues. Metaphors make abstract-appearing environmental issues more comprehensible, satire and irony facilitate subtle commentaries on superficial evidence of environmental paradoxes, such as green washing and political inaction. This approach allows a comprehensive analysis of environmental and gender justice issues.

By applying these theoretical frameworks, Stand-up comedy proves to be an ideal activity system for proposing environmental awareness and social as well as political commentary into the public domain. In the context of activity theory, feminist Stand-up comedians transform the stage into a field of activism by engaging the audience in ecological and gendered conversations. Consequently, this framework will highlight how stand-up comedians establish an effective cultural critique that advances ecofeminist discourse through humour.

#### **Analysis**

##### **Stand-up comedy as an Eco-Narrative**

Stand-up comedy, as a form of eco-narrative, explores gendered and ecological issues whereby the convergence of humour and narrative generates environmental narratives that are both engaging and comprehensible to the audience. Stand-up comedians narrate complex issues about ecological deterioration in a way that invites emotional connection and insight from the audience. In this light, Stand-up comedians like Aditi Mittal, Kristina Wong, and Michelle Wolf employ humour to critique environmental negligence simultaneously drawing attention to the intersecting struggles of women's issues. Aditi Mittal, an Indian stand-up comedian, in her stand-up routine, *Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say* (2015), presents an excellent opportunity for analysis of how humor functions as an environmental feminist critique. Through her commentary on menstrual sanitary pads, she develops a sophisticated eco-feminist narrative that interrogates gendered experiences and the interactions with capitalist forces, along with the environmental crisis.

Mittal's prime focus on sanitary pads forms a platform to transpose popular female anatomy into understanding challenges related to hygiene taboos and market-made environmental damage. In her punchline, she states, "There's gels, Channels, crystal wings and leak lock systems—the whole fucking system. Ladies once in a month there is science in your chaddi," critically satirizes modern consumerism and marketing strategies through the jargon (*Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say*, 00:08:56). She uses her witty description of menstrual products to reveal the illogical aspects of consumer culture that connects high-tech products with female empowerment. The items listed above i.e., '*gels, channels, crystal wings and leak lock system*' use advertising terminology while making fun of excessive engineering in menstrual product creation to illustrate marketing's emphasis on profit rather than utility. To create satire, the speaker incorporates extremely scientific language because it parallels ecological concerns regarding excessive manufacturing, combined with discarding products quickly, and generating excessive packaging waste. Through his humorous approach, Mittal performs an anti-establishment act that exposes both ecological harm

and hidden costs throughout the pursuit of modern solutions marketed to women as liberating and hygienic. She adds on,

Where this woman throws a pad into a pond and the pad soaks up the entire pond. This personally makes me realize the situation in Japan today would have been very different. Throw a pad at the tsunami (repeat, applause). The lives we would have saved.. (*Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say*, 00:08:36)

This accelerates humorous ways of narrating environmental and women's issues. She points out the excessive packaging and disposal issues associated with it, which are marketed as a necessity but often exploit consumer insecurities. She exaggerates the pad's absurd power through a comedic line, "*Throw a pad at the tsunami.*" The exaggeration in this statement functions beyond comic purpose since it emphasizes the impenetrable absurdity of the unawareness corporation's show toward the environment. The characterization of menstrual pads with unrealistically extreme absorption capabilities allows Guanflagh to make observable the actual chemical composition of these waste-generating products. The humor in these punchlines matches eco-narratological techniques that utilize satire to communicate environmental issues in a manner that appeals to readers' emotions and their accessibility. In relation to this, she comments, "That's why every pad is individually wrapped, which is then placed inside a newspaper by the chemist and then placed inside a black plastic bag" (*Things They Wouldn't Let*

*Me Say*, 00:08:08). These lines illustrate the absurdity of such practices that affect the environment and oblige us to reconsider our social norms and how they impact nature. Her observation of how menstrual products get wrapped (individually wrapped while placed inside a newspaper, then wrapped in black plastic), demonstrates corresponding criticism about societal control of women's bodies alongside her environmental concerns. This rich narrative functions both as a realistic inspection and as an allegorical examination of gender-related stigma related to menstruation. Through this analysis, the comedian exposes that ecological degeneration stems from social practices that victimize female biological functions. Women are stigmatized in society; their menstrual cycle ends up being encapsulated by excessive packaging, which creates consequential environmental damage, yet it remains as a natural result of shame-based culture, which simultaneously devalues and scrutinizes women's bodies. Mittal mocks the menstrual taboos associated with Indian society and slams the consumer culture for promoting ecological degradation with her sarcastic statement.

Michelle Wolf, an American stand-up comedian, remarks on climate change in her stand-up routine "*Nice Lady*", where she reinterprets cultural symbols, subverts expectations, and uses feminist and ecological concerns. She raises awareness of the negligence of humans toward environmental degradation through her punchlines.

Climate change is a real big deal, and everyone says Mother Nature. And I do believe nature is a woman because she's trying to kill us in the most passive-aggressive way possible. It's not some sort of immediate fire or flood or cool explosion. She's just like, 'What? I raised the temperature a little. Oh, are you uncomfortable? Maybe I wouldn't have if you'd taken out the recycling like I asked. I'm fine. (Wolf)

These punchlines employ the cultural image of "*Mother Nature*" as a woman and nature to challenge traditional beliefs through feminist satire. The symbolic image of nature as a nurturing mother gets reversed by Wolf as she portrays nature with a passive-aggressive feminine nature that creates a disquieting and amusing picture. By achieving this, she transforms nature from a romanticized picture into an enraged feminine power that expresses anger against human disregard through time. Through the opposition of tone and theme, Wolf creates satire with the use of ordinary dialogue to present the worldwide climate change emergency. Through her line, she explores traditional indicators of strained relationships that emerged from heteronormative representations of domestic femininity, simultaneously transforming environmental deterioration from a distant planetary catastrophe into a close and individualized result of human carelessness. Literary analysis shows that Wolf transforms '*Mother Nature*' into a grotesque feminine character

who refuses adherence to standard feminine norms. The speaker reframes 'Mother Nature' from an earth goddess figure into a woman burdened by emotion who uses quiet spite against humanity to respond to their irresponsibility. It also reveals a critique of society's inability to notice continuous environmental destruction, which falls under the category of "slow violence" (Nixon). Through satirical exploration of passive-aggression as a feminized communication practice, Wolf exposes the dominant social order that has suppressed both warnings about environmental damage and female expression.

In their stand-up performances, stand-up comedians Aditi Mittal, Kristina Wong, and Michelle Wolf cleverly use eco-narratology techniques to humorously critique the links between consumerism, environmental degradation, and gender dynamics. They encourage audiences to think about the social and ecological consequences of their daily decisions by using personification, satire, irony, hyperbole, and intersectional critique. In their performances, Wong and Wolf employ personification to portray nature as a conscious being that suffers. In *The Plastic Bag Fight*, Wong vocalizes Earth by saying, "That's the sound of the earth crying...you're literally raping me with your plastic" (00:00:21). By allowing nature to "speak," created a personal connection with audiences, prompting them to view environmental degradation with empathy and a sense of responsibility. Such an anthropomorphic representation of the Earth causes empathy because it redefines environmental destruction as violence. Likewise, in "Nice Lady," Wolf envisions passive-aggressive "Mother Nature" and humorously explains that she "raised the temperature a little" to show her frustration and highlighting the responses that nature showed towards stereotypically feminine qualities of temper. This anthropomorphized depiction of the Earth evokes empathy by reframing environmental destruction as a form of violence. Similarly, in "Nice Lady," Wolf imagines "Mother Nature" as passive-aggressive and humorously states that she "raised the temperature a little" to express her frustration, playfully relating nature's reactions to stereotypically feminine traits of temper.

Satire also forms part of Mittal and Wong's routines to criticize consumer culture, particularly the environmentally destructive results of wasteful products directed toward women.

In 'Things They Wouldn't Let Me Say', Mittal ridicules the marketing of menstrual products, stressing out the ridiculousness of terms like "gels, channels, crystal wings, and leak-lock systems." Her hyperbolic language mocks the over-inflated claims employed to sell these products, showing how consumer culture mines insecurities related to women's bodies for profit while fuelling environmental waste. In parallel Wong mocks plastic consumption, amplifying Earth's reaction to plastic waste to emphasize the absurdity of single-use plastics. In her stand-up, she personifies nature using irony and blends commentaries on ecological and gender. Mittal and Wong shed light on the ecological impact of consumer culture, reflecting that these comedians artfully employ multiple narrative techniques, demonstrating 'Stand-up Comedy' as a potent space of eco narratives.

#### **Leontiev's Second Generation Activity Theory and Stand-Up Comedy**

Stand-up comedy, when examined through Leontiev's Second Generation Activity Theory, provides an understanding of how comedians (subjects) employ humour as a tool in a larger cultural activity system. (see Fig.2.) This approach looks at the interaction between tools, community, and rules that govern human activities and how comedians like Mittal, Wong, and Wolf use the comedy stage as a social space to challenge dominant narratives on gender and environmental issues. In such a framework, female stand-up comedians act as the subjects who employ tools including scripts, language, narrative technique (satire, personification, irony), microphones, stage, and technology (social media, recordings). The object of their acts is to create awareness of women's and ecological issues, which is shaped by rules of social norms, audience expectations, and comedy regulations. The community encompasses of audiences, fellow comedians, critics and society at large. The division of labour entails audiences as active participants while stand-up comedians as entertainers and ecocritics in the activity system. The

outcome of such activity promotes social awareness on ecological and women's issues, resulting in social transformation and women's empowerment, which is perceived through sense and meaning. These comedians draw their audiences into a type of ecofeminist critique by situating environmental issues within comedic frameworks. For example, Kristina Wong, known for her comedy and activism, constantly incorporates critiques of consumer culture and sustainability efforts in her act (Wong).

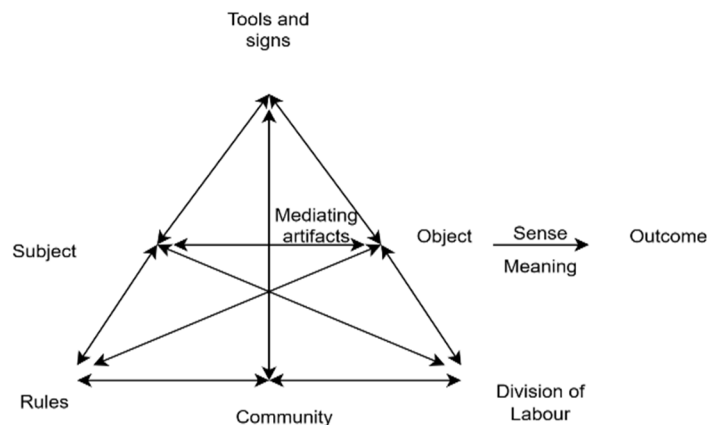


**Fig.1. The structure of human activity system (Engestrom, 1987, p. 78)**

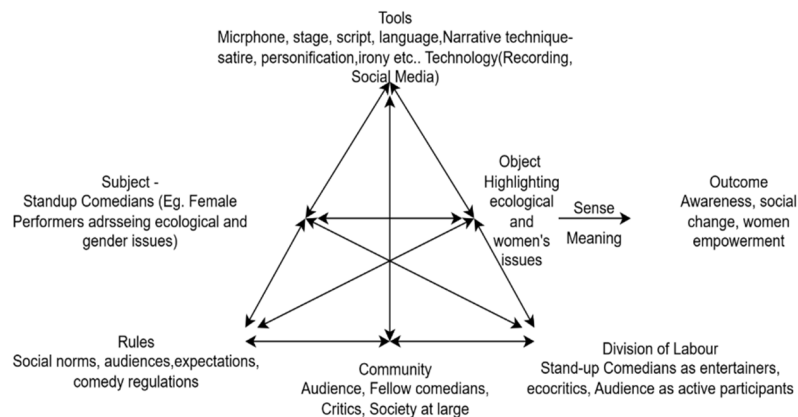


**Fig.2. Stand-up comedy as an activity system**

In stand-up comedy as an activity system, each comedian's performance serves as catalyst for both entertainment and social critique, with the primary goal of raising awareness about ecological and gender issues. Comedians like Aditi Mittal, Ali Wong, and Michelle Wolf employ humour to engage their audiences to reflect about their own ecological footprint by foregrounding the

absurdities of consumer culture. In retrospect, Wong tackles plastic pollution, Wolf playfully tackles climate change and Mittal satirizes the commodification of sanitary products. Each comedian's "purpose" is to defy consumer apathy by inviting viewers to reconsider their role in perpetuating environmental degradation. In this way, comedians engage a range of eco-narratological strategies, including satire, personification, irony, hyperbole, and direct address, as mediating tools. These approaches allow comedians to construct cultural connections with their audience while ridiculing consumerism. For example, Wolf personifies "Mother Nature" as passive-aggressive, using a trait that is easily recognizable with the audience, reflecting her disdain for the environment (Wong). Similarly, Mittal exaggerates descriptions of sanitary napkins, using familiar marketing jargon to highlight consumer excesses. These techniques balance the public in terms of lightness and powerful social criticism so that stand-up comedians could create impactful information despite comedy restrictions.

These comedians challenge cultural taboos by tackling issues of gender and environment, striking at traditional norms for consumerism and environmental disregard. Wong uses exaggerated language as emphasis on the plastic pollution matter, compared it to an assault on nature, and breaks conventional politeness to prompt an audience into facing the seriousness of environmental damage. Audiences are active interpreters and responders, comedians placing them within an ecosystem, inviting reflection on consumer habits. Mittal's critique of marketing sanitary products, Wong's portrayal of Earth as a suffering entity-these pull audiences into urgent conversations about consumerism and environmental harm. Humor connects personal accountability and collective awareness of pressing issues.

The role of comedians in this model of activity is both entertainer and eco-critic, and the contradictions of comedy and social commentary can be resolved successfully. The audience, as the active co-creators, engage in the dynamic process with the narratives of gender and environmentalism, which suggests a change in the sphere of comedy where comedians act as social commentators. Through this dual role, Stand-up comedians such as Mittal, Wong, and Wolf expand the scope of stand-up comedy to incorporate eco-critical and feminist discourse hence redefining the expectations of audiences.

The contradictions within this system of practice stimulate transformation. The comedian parodies the irregular cultural events, like non-linking ecological problems to ordinary consumption practices and linking consumerism and environmental destruction. One example is the overpackaging of female products (sanitary pad) that Mittal criticizes as a demonstration of the hypocrisy of marketing as necessary those products without considering the impact they have on the environment. The inconsistencies generate self-awareness by the revelation of the lack of connection between consumption patterns and ecological sustainability. Female comedians such as Mittal, Wong, and Wolf perform eco-critical comedy and employ stand-up comedy to catalyze environmental management and social change. The repositioning of the audience's expectations and comedy as a phenomenon is produced in such a process. Their humour is a call to shift the point of view, to bring individual responsibility into harmony with systems critique, and to make feminism and environmental concern accessible to the audience without the language of guilt or terrorism, but through irony, humour and reflexivity.

### **Critical Ecofeminism and Stand-up Comedy**

In recent years Critical Ecofeminism has been a theory that links environmental degradation and subordination of women together and proposes that the two are inherently related to consumerist life, patriarchy, and ecological oppression. In this light, comedians such as Aditi Mittal, Ali Wong and Michelle Wolf have managed to create a niche in which they employed humour to share their thoughts about the risky intersection of environmental and gender-based problems. These artists push the paradigm of critical ecofeminism by performing their stand-up comedy shows, focusing on the effects of consumer culture on the environment and the bodily freedom of women in



addition to condemning the capitalist and patriarchal systems of commodification of nature, and the lives of women in their everyday life.

Stand-up comedy has been a platform by which comedians such as Aditi Mittal, Ali Wong, and Michelle Wolf have addressed the cultural expectations and norms with a sense of humour as a way of expressing an ecofeminist critique that would otherwise be received with opposition. According to scholars such as Greta Gaard and Carolyn Merchant, the critical ecofeminist theory explains the process through which the patriarchal systems commodify women together with the natural resources as commodities. Mittal employs this to criticize the over packaging of menstrual items, a metaphor for a bigger cultural trend of profiteering off women without regard to the environmental cost. Wong employs humour to address plastic pollution and plastic waste as well as the implications that are involved with plastic waste in general. She simplifies environmental matters in simpler languages, which illustrates negative impact of consumerism on earth. The wit of Wong creates sustainability issues very authentic to the viewers by involving them in the captivating stories that make them rethink about their actions. Conversely, Wolf employs satire to discover climate change, as a reflection of the ecofeminist fears around the marginalization of women and pollution of the environment. In her approach, Wolf demonstrates to the audiences how gender relations are used to facilitate a way of comprehending the ecological issues more to enable people to perceive these issues with more critical perspectives.

With their creatively crafted punchlines, these artists confront the consumerist culture and create awareness among audiences on their gender exploitation and environment degradation.

Their generalized comedy creates more accessible critical ecofeminist ideas, promoting the awareness of consumers and their personal responsibility, and pushing the limits of the ecofeminist theory, by taking into account the feminist and environmental problems. Their practice of introducing humour in serious topics creates people more willing to engage in complicated concepts. Mittal, Wong, and Wolf could be considered as cultural speakers who mobilize crucial discussions through humor regarding gender and ecology, and consumerism in the daily life of modern people. These comedians promote critical ecofeminist theories through their work based on academic discourses and reach a broad audience who should also tackle this issue.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the monologues of female comedians like Aditi Mittal, Kristina Wong and Michelle Wolf depict the strong potential of stand-up comedy as an eco-narratological tool. The combination of activity theory, critical ecofeminism, and narrative techniques provides them an opportunity to turn the stage into an arena of ecofeminist criticism. In fact, their humour alleviates eco-anxiety and triggers consideration of the environmental and feminist issues, making stand-up a cultural act. The authors have aimed at bridging the gap between comedy and activism by using the eco-narratology techniques such as satire, hyperbole, irony, and critical intersectionality as a form of resistance and pedagogy through the use of humour. This greater application of stand-up comedy in environmental discourses enhances the possibility of its appeal to attention and consciousness by people. The successful reinterpretation of the environmental discourses through the prism of feminism allows these comedians to make a dramatic turn in the discourse beyond scientific jargon and stereotypical expressions of feminist discourse and towards engaging, conversational dialogue that appeals to a larger audience. Their performances are not just entertainment, they call to social conscience which makes the listeners think, ask and, most importantly, act in regards to the interrelated crises of environmental and gender injustices. These comedians were able to reconcile ecofeminist thought with humour through their stand-up acts, turning the harm inflicted on the environment into much that is emotive and gendered, rather than technical or scientifically informed. The work of these comedians is powerful as they use humour to transform eco-anxiety into a call to action and raise awareness about ecological problems and gender justice. By redefining the narratives on environmental issues within a feminist framework, these comedians

enable the shift in the discourse on environmental issues toward emotive, compelling discussions that can be identified with and interpreted by a wider audience.

The paper acknowledges some major limitations that should be discussed and considered. Among the primary issues is that the application of humour in telling the stories of the environment and gender equality might implicitly diminish the issues since the audience would assume that the issues are not of significant seriousness. The article discusses a few comedians such as Aditi Mittal, Kristina Wong and Michelle Wolf but it is culturally and linguistically incoherent. It poses queries of how their comedy can be related to different cultures and languages. Humour is directly related to the cultural background; the experiences and the stories of the comedians might not be attractive and or relevant to a majority of people across the world. The study can be flawed in its light because it does not fully depict the effects of humor as applied to different cultures and languages. This can change the manner in which people get the message about the environment and gender equity.

Theoretical frameworks of activity theory, critical ecofeminism and eco-narratology might simplify their complexities in their applications to the use of stand-up comedy. Though these theories play a valuable role in giving useful information, excessive dependence on them can oversimplify complex dynamics of humour and its influence not only to discourse of society but also on individual beliefs and feelings. The nuance that these theories contain is the key to understanding how humor can be used to shape attitudes to serious problems, and the research might be enhanced by a more detailed analysis of such fineness. In addition, the outcome of humour application in influencing eco-anxiety and attitudinal change is not researched as the content-based study did not concern such problems. Although the content analyses of humor applied during comic performances explain the application of humor in the performances, they fail to explore the psychological and emotional effects after using this kind of humor in detail. Future studies can address this gap by continuing to examine how humour is associated with negative effects and how audiences perceive it, and whether humour can mitigate eco-anxiety or provoke a more participatory and active perspective on environmental and gender equality concerns. Developing some kind of a relationship between humor and its possible harmful effect, and investigating the perceptions of audiences to these issues is an essential contribution to the existing discussion.

Reflectively, humour must be more than just entertainment and must not only be immediate pleasure. It may be the source of profound revelations, and the way to reflect on how complicated life and the issues can be. Humour can be a powerful means of social change and positive transformation of individuals as it can be viewed as a tool of understanding and growth. The use of humor establishes a powerful social developmental force that makes individuals challenge their minds on the established norms. Thus, this research highlights that the use of humour, provides a practical path for achieving sustainable progress regarding environmental issues and gender inequity by creating understanding and enabling constructive conversations.

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**STORYTELLING AND ECOLOGY IN CHAU DANCE: RECLAIMING SUBALTERN  
LANDSCAPES THROUGH ECOCRITICAL NARRATIVES**

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**Abstract**

The intersection of ecology, culture, and performance finds a powerful expression in Chau dance, an indigenous art form rooted in the tribal and subaltern traditions of Purulia (West Bengal), Mayurbhanj (Odisha), and Saraikela (Jharkhand). This paper, titled “Storytelling and Ecology in Chau Dance: Reclaiming Subaltern Landscapes through Ecocritical Narratives,” explores ecological storytelling in Purulia Chau, where myth, folklore, and lived experience converge to express a symbiotic relationship between human life and the natural world. This paper positions Chau not merely as a cultural artifact but as a living archive of environmental justice and sustainability. Performed during festivals aligned with seasonal and agricultural cycles, Chau integrates music, movement, and narrative to create a living ecological map, reflecting the interdependence between man and the natural world. Costume and mask construction relies on sustainable materials such as clay, bamboo, jute, vegetable dyes, and animal-hide drums, exemplifying a circular ecological principle where resources are drawn from, utilised, and returned to the environment. Movements in Chau deliberately mimic natural processes: the sway of trees, the flight of birds, and the flow of rivers. Dancers embody both human and nonhuman forms, illustrating an ecocentric philosophy in which all elements of nature are interconnected. Purulia Chau motifs include representations of fire, rain, earth, and forest deities. Beyond aesthetic expression, the dance functions as an educational and cultural mechanism, transmitting environmental knowledge, moral responsibility, and sustainability practices across generations. Traditional practices of sustainable living, organic costume-making, and communal participation mirror ecological principles of balance and renewal. Chau also serves as a medium of subaltern resistance, allowing tribal communities to assert ecological wisdom and cultural identity within landscapes often dominated by hegemonic social structures. Drawing on ecocritical theory (Glotfelty, 1996) and deep ecology (Naess, 1973), this study situates Chau as a performance bridging environmental consciousness with cultural resistance.

**Keywords:** Chau, Ecology, Subaltern, Nature, Performance, Storytelling

The rhythmic heartbeat of Chau dance originates from the red soil of Purulia, where the language of the body merges with the language of the earth. Born of undulating hills and the sun-scorched plains, of the whispering Sal forests and the untamed wilderness, Chau dance is the earth dreaming through human limbs. Each step seems to awaken the red dust beneath; each leap echoes the breath of wind through the trees. Evolving from the deciduous forests and the awe-inspiring wilderness of West Bengal’s Purulia district, this indigenous art form is a movement, a living cosmology, a sacred dialogue between the human and the more-than-human, where motion transforms into meditation, and rhythm becomes reverence. In Purulia, the drumbeat carries the pulse of the land, resonating with the heartbeat of the forest, the people, and the timeless earth itself. The people of this landscape, the Mundas, Santals, Bhumij, Kurmis, and Mahatos, have, across generations, shaped an art form that mirrors the spirit of their environment. The Purulia Chau, a living intangible cultural heritage, becomes an aesthetic articulation and an eco-ethical

consciousness, where nature is both a being and a relative. The rural folk communities of Purulia, the Mundas, Santals, Bhumijis, Kurmis, and Mahatos have long cultivated non-material cultural specificities within their eco-cultural framework, a living weave of ritual, ecology, and memory. Sustainability in Purulia Chau philosophy is an inherited rhythm, a wisdom embedded in gesture, craft, and collective ritual. Long before “sustainability” became a global discourse, the communities of Purulia had already woven ecological ethics into their aesthetic fabric. For them, the act of creating, performing, and preserving Chau is inseparable from the moral obligation to protect and coexist with nature.

Every element of Chau from its costume to its music speaks the language of sustainable living. The vibrant masks, moulded from the clay of local fields, are painted with vegetable dyes drawn from leaves, flowers, and roots. The bamboo frames and jute cords that support these creations are sourced respectfully, following cycles of growth and replenishment. The drums that resound through the night are crafted from animal hide, not as instruments of exploitation but as continuations of life’s circle each strike on the dhamsa reverberating like a heartbeat shared by earth and performer. In this harmony of resource and reverence, Chau embodies what Arne Naess (1973) envisioned as deep ecology — a practice grounded in equality among all forms of existence.

The ritual performance of Chau transforms these ecological principles into collective experience. The festivals of Chaitra Parab or Gajan, when Chau is most fervently performed, are not mere celebrations but communal affirmations of life’s cyclical renewal. Villagers gather under the open sky — the earth their stage, the moon their witness — to re-enact myths that intertwine divine creation with environmental continuity. The body of the dancer becomes the vessel through which the community prays, celebrates, and remembers. The performance thus bridges the material and the metaphysical, where sustainability is no longer an environmental concern alone but a spiritual covenant with the world. This ritual aesthetic is deeply participatory. Costumes are collectively crafted, music collaboratively composed, and narratives communally transmitted across generations. The guru-shishya Parampara, the oral and embodied pedagogy of Chau, ensures that ecological and cultural values are simultaneously preserved. The transmission of this art form, therefore, is also the transmission of an environmental ethic: to take only what the earth offers, to create with humility, and to return with gratitude.

Within this ecology of making and meaning, Chau resists the alienation of modern production. It challenges what Vandana Shiva calls the “monoculture of the mind” (1993) the homogenizing force that separates humans from nature and art from life. In contrast, Chau’s creative process thrives on plurality, interdependence, and ritual reciprocity. It teaches through embodiment that sustainability is not achieved by control but by communion, not through policy but through participation.

In every mask moulded, every step performed, and every drum struck, Purulia Chau rehearses a cosmology of balance — an eco-aesthetic where art sustains life, and life, in turn, sustains art. Its ritual practice reminds us that ecology is not an abstract ideal but a lived rhythm, a shared breath between the dancer and the soil beneath his feet.

The dry climate, dense deciduous forests, and the awe of untamed creatures have together choreographed a performance tradition of striking vitality. Purulia Chau, born in this elemental landscape, carries within its masks and martial postures the very textures of the soil that sustains it. The clay, bamboo, jute, and vegetal dyes that form its costume are not materials chosen at whim, but symbols of a circular ecology, a process where art grows from the earth only to return to it. In every movement, Chau reflects that Arne Naess (1973) envisioned as the philosophy of deep ecology, an awareness that self-expands through identification with all living forms, dissolving boundaries between performer and environment, human and non-human.

The present study thereby situates Purulia Chau within the converging streams of Ecocriticism, Deep Ecology, and Subaltern Studies, viewing the performance as both an ecological ritual and a political text. Through Cheryll Glotfelty’s (1996) call to reimagine literature and by extension art

through the lens of nature's agency, Chau becomes legible as a performative eco critique, dramatizing the entanglement of myth, ecology, and human struggle. At the same time, thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty remind us that any indigenous articulation of identity must be read as a subaltern utterance, a reassertion of voice from the margins of both empire and modernity. Chau, then, may be read as a double discourse: an environmental text that is simultaneously a declaration of being heard in a world that has long silenced its native storytellers. The scope of this inquiry narrows upon Purulia Chau not only as an aesthetic tradition but as a spatio-temporal phenomenon, whose evolution is inseparable from the geography and temporality of its soil. The dance is the landscape embodied, its vigour shaped by the harsh rhythm of drought, its grace nourished by the generosity of forest and rain. Within this eco-cultural continuum, Chau performs a subtle resistance. It keeps alive a philosophy of coexistence long before sustainability became an academic discourse. It invites us to perceive ecology not as a science of systems, but as a poetics of survival, woven through myth, ritual, and collective remembrance. To explore this entanglement of ecology and identity, the study employs an interdisciplinary methodology blending performance analysis with ethnographic interpretation and textual inquiry. It highlights rhythm, movement, and material enact the spiritual geography of the community, and how Chau's mythic narratives transform environmental experience into cultural expression.

Within the embodied vocabulary of the dancers lies an entire cosmology of sustainable coexistence, a choreography of the earth's wisdom. The performance space, the akhra, is itself an extension of the environment. It is often set under open skies, encircled by the silence of the forest or the hum of distant fields.



The setting is elemental dust becomes the stage, fire the illumination, and the drumbeat the pulse of continuity. Here, the temporal and spatial dimensions of Purulia Chau are intimately tied to the ecological cycles of the land. The material culture of Chau reflects an unbroken dialogue with the environment. The masks, magnificent and emotive, are crafted from clay, paper pulp, bamboo, earth soil, pieces of paper, rags, glue made of flour, chisel made of wood, wooden hammer, scissors, dye of different shades, feathers, bamboo sticks, ashes, threads, brush and natural pigments etc. These materials are drawn directly from the surrounding landscape, echoing what Fikret Berkes (1999) describes in *Sacred Ecology* as “traditional ecological knowledge”, an



indigenous ethic of sustainable resource use and ritualised reciprocity with the earth. Similarly, the musical instruments dhol, dhamsa, shehnai, and mohuri are embodiments of ecological materiality. The animal-hide drums, the bamboo wind instruments, and the wooden flutes resonate not only with music but with memory. Their sounds seem to recall the forest's rustle, the monsoon's murmur, the collective breath of the people who shaped them. In this sense, Chau is not merely inspired by nature; it is composed of nature, materially and spiritually.



In its narrative structure, Chau often retells myths of creation, fertility, and transformation, stories that link human fate to the moods of natural elements. Gods of rain, forest spirits, and mountain deities populate these performances, not as distant figures of worship but as presences felt in the everyday. The villagers who perform them re-enchant the relationship between man and the sacred landscape. In these performances, the mythic is ecological and the ecological, mythic. Even the movement vocabulary of Chau reinforces this organic continuity. The dancers' sweeping arcs mirror the bend of trees in the wind, their leaps emulate the startled grace of deer, and their spinning steps evoke the spiralling rhythm of storms. These gestures are not mimetic but metamorphic, the performer does not imitate nature but inhabits it. Through this process of embodiment, Chau enacts what Naess's Deep Ecology calls the "self-realisation of all beings," where the boundaries between the dancer and the environment dissolve into a shared ontology of being. The body becomes the medium through which the earth remembers itself. . The red dust that rises with every leap becomes the very pulse of the earth, merging the performer with the cosmos in an act that recalls what Gregory Bateson once termed "the pattern that connects", the sacred interdependence between all forms of life (Bateson, Mind and Nature, 1979). In this sense, Chau enacts what anthropologist Tim Ingold describes as the "dwelling perspective," wherein human existence is woven into the textures of the environment, rather than standing apart from it (Ingold, The Perception of the Environment, 2000). The performers, through their muscular precision and ritual discipline, inhabit an ecological consciousness, one that transforms movement into a metaphysical dialogue between the corporeal and the cosmic. The Sal forests, the dust-laden air, and the rhythmic beats of the dhol and dhamsa do not merely accompany the dance; they compose it. This embodied ecology is also a narrative of memory of a people's relationship to land, labour, and livelihood. In Chau, the mythic and the material intermingle, reflecting what Raymond Williams once called "structures of feeling" collective emotional registers through which a community articulates its lived history (Williams, Marxism and Literature, 1977).

The Sal forests, dense and murmuring, become both witness and participant; the dust of the red earth rises like incense, enacting its own choreography. Here, nature is not the backdrop but the essence of performance, an animate force that co-creates the aesthetic and spiritual world of Chau. When the drums — dhol, dhamsa, and madal begin to beat, their resonance ripples through the ground, awakening the dormant vitality of the soil. Each note carries the memory of the forest and the breath of the wind. In this symphonic communion, the boundaries between performer and environment dissolve. The dancer's leap mirrors the wind's surge, the spin echoes the whirl of falling leaves, and the stillness between gestures evokes the hush before monsoon rain. The performance, thus, becomes a cosmic dialogue, a ritual ecology that recognises the sacredness of interdependence.

The masks of Chau, often crafted from the very clay of Purulia's soil, embody this ecological intimacy. Once dried in sunlight and painted in vibrant natural hues, they are returned to the performer as vessels of transformation. The dancer, in donning the mask, inhabits not only a mythic persona but also an element of the environment, as though the earth itself lends its face to the human form. This act, as performance theorist Richard Schechner might suggest, signifies a liminal state where human and nonhuman merge in a shared ritual consciousness (Between Theatre and Anthropology, 1985). Such performances gesture toward an indigenous epistemology where ecology and spirituality are inseparable. The seasonal rhythms of sowing and harvest, the cycles of drought and abundance, and the collective rituals of gratitude and renewal find their reflection in Chau's choreography. The dance becomes a ritual reenactment of survival and surrender — what Victor Turner described as the "communitas" of ritual performance, where social and spiritual boundaries dissolve into collective transcendence (The Ritual Process, 1969).

The stories enacted are not only mythological but ecological parables, performances through which the community remembers its belonging to the earth even amidst modernity's alienation. Eco-critical perspectives further illuminate that performances sustain a biocultural resilience, an enduring form of cultural resistance to erasure and displacement. The dance becomes both archive and activism, a repository of indigenous ecological wisdom and a rhythmic reclamation of identity against extractive modernity. As Arne Naess's deep ecology suggests, the recognition of intrinsic value in all beings resonates within Chau's aesthetic, where divinity, animality, and humanity coexist without hierarchy. In this performative ecology, the dancer's breath aligns with the rhythm of the drum, which in turn mirrors the heartbeat of the soil, an unbroken cycle of reciprocity. Thus, Chau is not a dance of domination over nature but of participation within it, a poetic articulation of being-in-the-world that bridges philosophy, performance, and environmental ethics. As Victor Turner (1982) notes, ritual performance often serves as a site for negotiating social and environmental renewal. Chau, likewise, offers a collective re-enactment of balance between human ambition and natural restraint, between creation and consumption, between memory and transformation.

Similarly, in the pala Mayur Nritya, the dancer's elongated arm extensions replicate the spread of peacock feathers, choreographing the elegance of avian courtship rituals. The Kailash Leela and Nataraj sequences often include swirling movements that evoke elemental forms, wind, fire, and cosmic rotation mirroring the ecological cycles of creation and dissolution described in Hindu cosmology. Sudhir Kakar notes that such mimetic embodiment in indigenous performance functions as a "psycho-ecological communication system," allowing performers to inhabit the subjectivities of natural beings (Kakar 112). Through these gestural codifications, Chau becomes a pedagogical instrument; children and young dancers learn not only movement but also how to observe, respect, and coexist with local ecosystems.

The narratives of Chau palas are inherently ecological. Mahishasura Mardini depicts the cyclical battle between cosmic order and chaos, reinforcing the responsibility to maintain environmental balance. Banabibi Pala, performed in regions influenced by Sundarban culture, dramatises human-tiger coexistence, warning against ecological overreach. Kartik Nritya emphasises valour, hunting ethics, and the protection of animal life. As Amitav Ghosh argues in his ecological writings,

mythic narratives often encode environmental anxieties and survival strategies for communities living close to nature (Ghosh 74). Chau similarly functions as a repository of eco-myths that explain the moral laws governing human–earth relationships. The open-air performance spaces of Purulia—paddy fields, village courtyards, or mango groves further situate the performance in direct dialogue with natural surroundings, turning each pala into a living classroom on ecological ethics.

For the tribal communities of Purulia and Mayurbhanj, Chau is a major conduit of ecological learning. Younger performers acquire knowledge of seasonal cycles, agricultural patterns, and animal behaviour through rehearsal, performance, and mask-making. Craftsmanship activities; collecting clay, processing bamboo, mixing vegetable dyes, teach sustainable practices that formal education often neglects. As Debiprasad Chattopadhyay notes, indigenous art forms encode “people’s science,” a grassroots epistemology rooted in collective knowledge rather than institutional instruction (Chattopadhyay 118). Chau embodies this tradition: it democratises ecological education, passing it through the body, the drum, the mask, and the landscape itself.

The story of Purulia Chau is the story of the land itself an unbroken dialogue between geography and imagination, between the pulse of the people and the heartbeat of the earth. Nestled within the rugged terrains and dry plateaus of West Bengal’s Purulia district, this dance form germinated in the red soil where forests, fields, and faith converge. Here, ecology a living presence, an ever-evolving collaborator that shapes the rhythm, texture, and temperament of performance.

The eco-cultural framework of Purulia Chau emerges from the symbiotic bond between the natural environment and the tribal imagination. The region’s undulating terrain, arid climate, and belt of Sal and Palash forests, along with the hum of monsoon winds and the haunting cries of wild animals, have given birth to a performance aesthetic that is both raw and transcendental. As scholars of intangible heritage note, rural folk communities of Purulia, particularly the Mundas, Santals, Bhumij, Kurmis, and Mahatos, have contributed immensely to the development of non-material cultural specificities that reflect their deep ecological consciousness (UNESCO, 2010). Within this eco-cultural web, Chau evolves as ritual survival a form of dance that mirrors the balance, struggle, and renewal inherent in the ecosystem itself.

In the dust-laden air of Purulia, the dance of Chau is more is a declaration. Beneath the thunder of drums and the shimmer of masks lies a silent yet unyielding protest, a choreography of resistance born from centuries of marginalisation. Here, the body becomes the site of both remembrance and rebellion; the earth itself becomes a metaphor for endurance. The dancers’ leaps and spins, drawn from the very pulse of the land, articulate what the subaltern cannot say in words, an ecological and political testimony that reclaims both territory and truth. Beneath its rhythmic masks and martial grace lies a long narrative of political suppression and marginalisation. The Chau performers, mostly belonging to Adivasi and lower-caste communities, have historically existed on the peripheries of power, economy, and representation. Their art, therefore, becomes more than performance; it becomes resistance.

The primitive history of Chau embodies the politics of endurance. It speaks for the silenced, dances for the dispossessed, and sings for the land itself. The marginalised communities who sustain this tradition, the Mundas, Santals, Bhumij, Kurmis, and Mahatos, who have long danced on the edges of history, yet through Chau, they reclaim the centre. This act of dancing upon the soil is, in itself, political. The red earth of Purulia often dismissed as barren or marginal becomes sacred ground through performance. When the dancer’s foot strikes the earth, it reclaims territory not as property but as belonging, not as resource but as relationship. The ecological consciousness of Chau thus transcends mere environmentalism; it becomes an act of earth politics, a reclamation of the right to live, create, and define one’s world in harmony with nature. In this sense, Chau embodies what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) terms a provincializing of Europe, a re-centring of indigenous epistemologies that unsettle colonial narratives of progress and modernity.

Each performance of Chau is also a confrontation with erasure. It resists the forces of industrial expansion, deforestation, and economic exploitation that have endangered both the ecosystem and

the communities who guard it. The preservation of this art form, then, becomes an act of ecological defiance, a refusal to let the landscape, language, and labour of the subaltern be forgotten. As Ranajit Guha's *Small Voice of History* (1982) suggests, the seemingly minor, rural expression holds revolutionary potential when it asserts its continuity against the machinery of erasure.

Through its ecological vocabulary of dust, drum, and divine myth, Chau transforms survival into artistry. It redefines resistance not as confrontation but as continuity: to keep dancing, to keep creating, to keep living in defiance of disappearance. The performance becomes a ceremony of reclamation, where each gesture renews a bond with the earth, and each rhythm revives ancestral memory.

Viewed through the lens of ecocriticism (Glotfelty, 1996) and decolonial thought (Spivak, 1988; Chakrabarty, 2000), Chau emerges as an archive of ecological ethics and subaltern wisdom. It resists the linear narratives of progress and instead embraces the cyclical time of renewal, where decay leads to rebirth, where ritual transforms scarcity into celebration. It shows that sustainability is not merely an environmental policy but a cultural practice, a rhythm of living that honours continuity over consumption, reverence over conquest.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us, "the subaltern cannot speak" within the hegemonic structures that silence indigenous knowledge (Can the Subaltern Speak?, 1988). Yet in Chau, the subaltern moves — and through movement, speaks. Each performance by the Munda, Santal, Bhumij, Kurmi, or Mahato community transforms silence into expression, absence into presence. Chau does not speak through written treatises, but through embodied memory, through sweat, rhythm, and movement preserved across generations. In its masked silence, Chau speaks loudly of identity, struggle, and survival. It is history performed where the marginalised remain visible, audible, and unforgotten dance thus becomes a decolonial utterance a form of embodied rhetoric that challenges the epistemic hierarchies which have long reduced tribal life to ethnographic curiosity. In their rhythm lives the "small voice of history" that Ranajit Guha (1982) envisioned, a voice that speaks not through speech but through pulse, through presence, through performance. Guha said subaltern consciousness is not silent, it speaks through alternative vocabularies of expression. Chau becomes one such vocabulary, a "politics of presence" where bodies, drums, and mythic storytelling reclaim agency. The red soil that once bore witness to neglect becomes, through Chau, a stage of resurgence. In this context Partha Chatterjee further reminds us that the subaltern does not merely mimic dominant culture; it crafts its own autonomous sphere of meaning. Chau, in this sense, is a cultural counter-narrative that resists erasure.

Ranajit Guha argues that subaltern consciousness survives through alternative modes of expression, and Chau embodies this truth, its drumbeats and choreography form an unwritten archive of struggle. Partha Chatterjee further notes that subaltern communities do not merely imitate dominant culture; rather, they generate parallel, autonomous cultural spaces. Chau is one such autonomous aesthetic world self-rooted, communal, and deeply symbolic. A fascinating example of this rootedness is seen in the legendary Chau dancer Padma Shri awardee Gambhir Singh Mura, whose practice emerged from the wilderness itself. His artistic journey remains inseparable from nature and community. Unlike classically trained urban dancers, Mura's training emerged from the ecosystem. He learned by carefully observing animals—the movements of the apes, leap of the deer, the stealth of the tiger, the flutter of the peacock—and transforming these observations into breathtaking kinetic vocabulary. His akhra, the traditional community performance space, became a site of cultural memory, intergenerational learning, and collective pride. Audiences still recall how his akhra performances blended discipline, organic movement, and mythic storytelling into an electrifying experience. A rare visual documentation of his jungle-inspired movement practices remains available on YouTube, preserving his legacy for future generations. Women-led Chau troupes performing Durga Nritya and Krishna Leela narrate how agricultural cycles, river patterns, and monsoon rhythms shape their rehearsals and festival performances. These ethnographic encounters illuminate the intimate relationship between

ecological knowledge and lived experience affirming that Chau is not only performed but inhabited as an environmental lifeworld.



**A picture of Gamhir Singh Mura from you tube where he is imitating an ape to develop steps for Chau**

In the end, the dance returns to the soil, as all things do. The echo of the dhamsa fades into the night, and yet its vibration lingers within the earth, within the hearts of those who move and those who witness. Chau, in its essence, is a way of knowing, a way of being, a living philosophy that redefines the relationship between humanity, nature, and the sacred. Emerging from the red dust of Purulia, Chau carries within it a memory older than civilisation, a memory of balance, reciprocity, and reverence. In every leap that mimics the flight of a bird, in every spin that evokes the cycle of seasons, lies an ecological intelligence that predates theory. Chau teaches through embodiment what deep ecology articulates through abstraction that life is not hierarchically ordered but interwoven; that all beings, human and nonhuman, exist within a single, breathing continuum (Naess, 1973).

Chau's enduring vitality lies in its refusal to separate the aesthetic from the ethical. It's art offering a return of gratitude to the land that sustains it. The masks of clay, the drums of hide, the music of wind and flame all fuse into a poetics of reciprocity, where creation and care are one. The dancer, in surrendering to the rhythm, becomes a conduit through which the earth itself moves, reminding us that art is not apart from life but its most intimate reflection.

In a world fractured by disconnection from nature, from history, from one another, Purulia Chau stands as a luminous act of remembrance. It reminds us that the soil holds stories, that the body holds knowledge, and that the dance holds the possibility of wholeness. In its swirling dust and resonant drums, Chau whispers an ancient truth: that to sustain the earth, one must first learn to move with it to feel its rhythm, to breathe its breath, and to honour its eternal dance of becoming.

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**AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL THEMES IN SELECTED  
SHORT STORIES BY RUSKIN BOND**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines Ruskin Bond's love for human, nature and environmental ethics through an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism, is an interdisciplinary field of study which explores the portrayal of environment in literature and provides a framework to analyze how Bond's narratives illuminate the eternal connections between people and the natural world. His work depicts a teeming world of flora and fauna and often portrays harmonious, symbiotic relationships and respect for nature. These narratives highlight the indispensability of protecting the nature which is a real wealth that to be transferred to the future generation. Bond's stories implicitly and explicitly address environmental degradation and ethical responsibilities. They invite readers to contemplate the ethical dimensions of environmental degradation and the responsibilities of individuals and communities towards environmental stewardship. While critiquing environmental damage and advocating for ecological balance, Bond's approach is described as "not overtly political or didactic." His narratives subtly encourage reflection and a sense of responsibility, urging humans to act as caretakers of the earth. This subtle method effectively fosters a personal connection, distinguishing his work from more overtly political ecocritical texts.

**Keywords-** Ecocriticism, Environmental Ethics, Human-Nature Relationship, Biodiversity, Ruskin Bond

**Introduction**

Ruskin Bond is one of India's celebrated authors, recognized as a master storyteller and chronicler of the Indian landscape. An Indian author of British descent, he enjoys popularity among both adults and children. Throughout his literary career, which has spanned several decades, he has written numerous short stories, essays, and poems. His writing is characterized by simple narration that vividly brings the natural world to life. He began his career at a young age with his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, published when he was just seventeen. This debut work earned him the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957. Subsequently, he won the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 and the Padma Bhushan from the Government of India in 1999 for his valuable contributions to English literature, particularly for children.

A defining aspect of Bond's work is his profound connection to the natural world. Growing up in the foothills of the Himalayas, he spent considerable time in places like Dehradun and Mussoorie in the Garhwal region. His writing is deeply rooted in these landscapes, as he meticulously describes India's diverse ecosystems, from tranquil foothills to bustling towns amidst forests. His narratives capture the essence of rural life more effectively than many Indian writers. His writing radiates a passion for the natural landscape, where his affinity for nature is not merely a backdrop but emerges as "an actor in the drama" and a character in its own right (Govindappa 2). He finds solace, inspiration, and joy in nature, offering careful observations of everything from the smallest insects to the largest animals.

Bond's detailed descriptions of places demonstrate a deep knowledge of the flora and fauna of the Himalayas. His writings significantly contribute to the environmental discourse in

contemporary Indian literature. Through storytelling, Bond communicates environmental values, making complex issues accessible and relatable to readers of all ages. Bond vividly portrays the disastrous consequences of the selfish and irresponsible human invasion on nature, such as deforestation and quarrying. Bond's enduring significance lies in his ability to blend captivating narratives with a profound respect for nature, inspiring readers to appreciate the natural world and encourage action towards a sustainable future.

He is considered an ecologist and a true environmentalist through his literary advocacy for conservation and wildlife protection. His works articulate and expose the march of human towards the destruction of human kind by exploiting the nature of his comfort and luxury. He imparts mankind environmental hazards and to necessity of living in harmony with nature.

Ecocriticism is a field of literary and cultural analysis that examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Over the last three decades, ecocriticism has developed into a significant area of study, exploring how humanity imagines and portrays its connection with the natural world across various cultural productions. From classical literature to modern media, it has played a vital role. At its core, ecocriticism seeks to explore and examine how texts depict nature. The influence of human invasion on nature and the ethical considerations arising from these interactions are also integral to its study.

Ecocriticism, politically analyses the increasing environmental challenges and crisis to develop a society with environmental responsibility. It evaluates texts based on their relevance and effectiveness in addressing environmental challenges. Unlike many traditional literary theories, which primarily understand the world as a social sphere, ecocriticism expands this concept to encompass the entire ecosphere. It is considered as a critical approach that integrates ecological understanding with cultural analysis.

Ecocriticism highlights the integral relationship between human culture and nature. It analyzes how authors engage with environmental resources and challenges. It also acknowledges that human development is significantly influenced by the forces of nature and vice versa. Therefore, it considers nature a crucial factor in critical analysis. By doing so, ecocriticism emphasizes the need for a deeper ecological awareness in the interpretation and understanding of literature and culture.

Ecocriticism is a critical practice, focus on the depiction of nature in the literature. This practice studies the concepts of wilderness and the intersection of environmental discourse with disciplines like history, philosophy and ethics. Ecocriticism, with its focus on the Earth as a central concern, provides an effective framework for examining how literature portrays environmental issues and nurtures ecological awareness. A comparison with other critical approaches, such as feminism and Marxism, highlights ecocriticism's distinct focus on the environment. By examining these intersections, ecocriticism not only enhances our understanding of literature but also broadens our perspective on environmental issues.

What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies (Glottfelty xix)

This perspective underscores ecocriticism's unique position among critical theories due to its direct engagement with environmental issues and the physical world. It underscores the deep links between human beings and the natural world and aims to draw attention to the moral obligation people hold in caring for the environment. Ruskin Bond is seen as an author who predominantly showcases nature and its components, thus applying ecocriticism in his work. His writing reveals how both nature and humanity are interdependent.

This study aims to investigate the diverse ways in which environmental themes are depicted in selected short stories of Ruskin Bond, using an ecocritical perspective. The analysis seeks to emphasize how these narratives promote ecological awareness and encourage readers to

reflect ethically on human–nature relationships. Ecocriticism will serve as the theoretical framework, guiding the examination of the connection between literature and the natural world. Through this approach, the study will illustrate how the texts represent nature, address the consequences of human actions, and convey the moral implications embedded in these portrayals.

The scope of this paper involves an in-depth analysis of selected short stories by Ruskin Bond. These stories are chosen for their vivid descriptions of nature, exploration of human interaction with the environment, and subtle commentary on environmental issues. The specific stories that will be analyzed include *The Blue Umbrella*, *The Night Train at Deoli*, *The Cherry Tree*, *Dust on the Mountains*, *The Leopard*, *Growing Up with Trees*, *My Father's Trees in Dehra*, and *Death of the Trees*. These stories will serve as illustrative examples to highlight key points.

This paper is structured to demonstrate how Bond's narratives reflect ecological consciousness and advocate for environmental stewardship. Through the examination of these texts, the study will reveal the intricate ways in which Bond's storytelling encapsulates the delicate balance between nature and humanity. Ultimately, the analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how literature can inspire readers to engage with environmental issues critically and ethically.

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review examines existing scholarship on environmental themes in Ruskin Bond's work, establishing a foundation by identifying the research gap for study. The application of an ecocritical framework to Bond's selected short stories is essential. Scholars widely recognize Bond's deep connection to nature and the prevalence of environmental themes in his writing. His narratives often feature natural landscapes, particularly the Indian Himalayas, and the vibrant personalities of its inhabitants. By immersing readers in rural life, Bond is frequently described as akin to an expert botanist or naturalist, owing to his meticulous descriptions of flora and fauna.

Bond records numerous varieties of trees, flowers, and shrubs that cover the hills, detailing their general characteristics and sometimes even their medicinal properties. His descriptions also extend to fauna, ranging from the smallest insects to large animals like elephants and tigers. Authors such as Sunita Boli have highlighted how Bond's *The Book of Nature* is written like a botanist's account, thoroughly researched on the plant kingdom. He succeeds in frequently describing the features of plants, orchards, flowers, and trees. Beyond mere descriptions, Bond's work is characterized by a profound connection to the natural world and an inherited environmental consciousness.

Scholars note that nature is not just a backdrop in Bond's stories but a pervasive force influencing human life. This exploration of the human-nature connection is evident as protagonists often find solace and inspiration in nature. Reviews of his collected stories and nature writings, such as *All Time Favorite Nature Stories*, emphasize how Bond explains natural features and surroundings with such detail that it draws the reader into the settings. His storytelling provides vivid descriptions of India's diverse ecosystems, including valleys winding down from snowy peaks and streams flowing to the foothills.

Existing studies emphasize Ruskin Bond's quiet yet powerful environmental ethic and his subtle engagement with environmental issues. His work, while often nostalgic and admiring, addresses significant concerns such as deforestation, urbanization, and the impacts of modernization. Stories like *Dust on the Mountain* illustrate the consequences of deforestation and quarrying, depicting the loss of grass, flowers, shrubs, birds, butterflies, grasshoppers, and ladybirds. N. Anjan and Dr. C. Sathoshkumar's paper "Ecological Concern in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories" specifically analyzes this, citing a passage from *Dust on the Mountain* to exemplify the depleted landscape. Similarly, the paper "Eco-Criticism in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond" mentions *No Room for a Leopard* as addressing deforestation and its outcomes, including the disgraceful state of the animals after deforestation. These narratives, implicitly or explicitly, encourage readers to consider the consequences of human actions on the environment. Bond is

regarded as an advocate for the protection of forests and animals, and his works are recognized for their potential to foster biodiversity awareness and alert readers to the dangers of environmental damage.

Ecocriticism provides an appropriate theoretical lens for examining these aspects of Bond's works. Greg Garrard, in his book *Ecocriticism*, describes the field as an exploration of the connections between literature and the natural world. He distinguishes ecocriticism from conventional literary theories, which primarily examine the links between authors, texts, and society, by noting that ecocriticism broadens its focus to encompass the entire ecological system. Though it is a comparatively recent area within literary and cultural studies, ecocriticism stands out for its strong association with ecological science. Even if ecocritics are not specialists in ecology, the discipline encourages them to cultivate ecological understanding and engage with knowledge across various fields.

According to Garrard, early ecocritical studies tended to focus narrowly on particular literary forms such as Romantic poetry, wilderness narratives, and traditional nature writing. Much of the scholarship in the twentieth century centered on figures like Wordsworth and Shelley. Over time, however, ecocriticism has expanded into a broader cultural practice, examining a wide spectrum of cultural texts and expressions—including popular science writing, films, television, visual art, and architecture. This shift toward cultural ecocriticism makes it possible to explore the intricate interactions between nature and culture across multiple media. The development of the field has been strongly shaped by the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), which organizes international conferences and publishes influential research, playing a major role in the growth of ecological literary criticism worldwide.

Key figures and texts have significantly shaped the development of ecocriticism. Prominent figures in American ecocriticism have provided thorough critiques of pastoral ideology in American fiction and have been influential. In evaluating environmental literature, the criteria include the non-human environment being a significant presence and human interests not being the sole legitimate focus. This aligns with the text's environmental ethics, which are seen as a process. Jonathan Bate's work has been pivotal in British ecocriticism, linking Romanticism to environmental traditions. Similarly, Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* introduced the concept of a biocentric land ethic, advocating for respect for the biotic community. This perspective is influential in eco-political thought, providing theoretical tools for analyzing literature from an earth-centered perspective.

Despite the acknowledgment of environmental themes in Bond's work within existing scholarship, there is a notable research gap. Specifically, there is a lack of focused, in-depth ecocritical analysis of a selection of his short stories. Such analysis is necessary to systematically explore how Bond's narratives foster ecological awareness and ethical reflection. While some papers briefly mention using an ecocritical examination or approach, they often provide only general observations or focus on specific themes or limited examples. A comprehensive analysis of how specific environmental themes, narrative strategies, and literary devices in a range of Bond's short stories contribute to building ecological consciousness through an ecocritical framework is needed.

This study contributes to the existing body of work by employing an ecocritical framework to analyze particular environmental themes and narratives in Bond's selected short stories, potentially offering new insights not fully explored in previous studies. By applying the concepts and tools of ecocriticism, such as analyzing the representation of nature, human-nature relationships, and environmental concerns, this study aims to illuminate how Bond's seemingly simple stories engage with complex ecological issues and promote an environmental ethic. For instance, examining stories like *The Blue Umbrella* (which subtly comments on materialism and the value of non-material things, including connections to nature), *Growing Up with Trees*, *My Father's Trees in Dehra*, and *Death of the Trees* (which highlights the death of trees due to human carelessness), and *The Leopard* (which addresses respect for animal rights and habitats), through

an ecocritical lens will provide a deeper understanding of their environmental significance. This approach will delve into the specific ways Bond's narratives convey ecological messages and encourage readers to reflect on their relationship with the natural world.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The core conceptual framework of this study focuses on analyzing Ruskin Bond's selected short stories through a critical lens. The primary concepts include the rich tapestry of nature and biodiversity, critiques of environmental degradation and human impact, and the exploration of the human-nature relationship alongside environmental ethics. These themes are essential as they align with the fundamental concerns of both Bond's writing and the field of ecocriticism.

Firstly, examining the rich tapestry of nature and biodiversity is crucial because Bond's narratives are renowned for their detailed and celebratory portrayals of the natural world. His stories often highlight the beauty and complexity of ecosystems, reflecting a deep appreciation for the environment. This examination not only enhances our understanding of Bond's work but also contributes to broader discussions within ecocriticism about the significance of preserving nature.

A prominent concern in Bond's work is the critique of environmental destruction and the consequences of human actions on the natural world. His stories often highlight the damage caused by human interference and invite readers to reconsider how they engage with their surroundings. Through these narratives, Bond underscores the urgent need to confront ecological problems and promote sustainable ways of living. In doing so, his writing offers meaningful insight into the environmental challenges of the present era.

Moreover, Bond's exploration of the human-nature relationship and environmental ethics provides insight into how individuals interact with their surroundings. His stories often portray the interconnectedness of humans and nature, emphasizing the ethical responsibilities people have towards the environment. This exploration underscores the importance of fostering a respectful and harmonious relationship with the natural world, highlighting the moral imperatives within environmental discourse.

### **The Rich Tapestry of Nature and Biodiversity**

The rich tapestry of nature and its diversity forms the first core concept to be examined in Ruskin Bond's selected short stories. Bond is widely recognized for his vivid and affectionate portrayal of the physical world, discussing it in depth, along with the challenges it faces. He treats nature not merely as a static backdrop but as a vital, dynamic presence within his stories. This approach is central to ecocriticism, fundamentally the study of the relationship between literature and the environment. Bond demonstrates a profound interest in the natural world around him, which has led him to extensively study and document the astounding diversity present, particularly in the Himalayan region where he has made his home. His meticulous descriptions of numerous varieties of trees, plants, and shrubs have led some to describe him as more akin to a botanist.

Bond's attention extends beyond flora to encompass the vast animal kingdom, from the smallest insects to large animals like elephants and tigers. His ability to capture minute details, such as the combs of an insect, and describe them with apparent ease alongside mighty creatures highlights his deep connection and reverence for all life forms. The geographical settings, particularly the picturesque landscape of the Himalayas, are not incidental but form the primary stage for many of his narratives. Bond's narratives are at their best when describing this region in its various manifestations. His descriptions often track the dramatic changes in flora as one ascends from the foothills through the temperate zone to higher altitudes.

Works like *The Book of Nature* serve to explore the plant kingdom in detail, including botanical names, characteristics, uses, and mythological associations. This detailed and loving depiction serves a crucial purpose within an ecocritical framework. Lawrence Buell suggests a key criterion for evaluating environmental literature is when "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is

implicated in natural history" (7). Bond's work fulfills this criterion by bringing the natural world to the forefront, making it a subject of attention and respect in its own right.

By rendering the natural world with vibrancy and detail, Bond fosters a sense of inherent value and complexity, cultivating in readers an appreciation of biodiversity. This counters the historical tendency, sometimes critiqued within ecocriticism, for literature to use nature primarily as a backdrop or a reflection of human concerns. Bond's portrayal suggests a relationship with nature that acknowledges its presence and significance beyond its utility or aesthetic appeal to humans. He believes there is much to learn from the natural world and views trees as representing past connections with humans, suggesting deeper interrelationships than mere scenery.

Critics note Bond's talent in this area, emphasizing his precision and affection. Sunita Bhola observes, for instance: "He is more like an expert botanist and has recorded in his writings the numerous varieties of trees, flowers, and shrubs that cover the hills" (123).

This critical perspective highlights the depth of Bond's engagement with the specifics of the natural world, moving beyond generalized nature writing to offer portrayals grounded in close observation and, seemingly, expertise. His depictions of animals are equally detailed, demonstrating a profound understanding and affection, to the point where he considers creatures like birds and insects to be "beloved companions." This intimate connection allows him to write about all forms of nature "with equal felicity," from the smallest ant to the largest elephant, demonstrating an appreciation for the entire spectrum of life.

Bond himself expresses this sense of connection and reverence for the natural world through his writing. In a passage reflecting on trees, he writes: "... I listen to their whisperings, their own mysterious diction; and bow my head before their arms and ask for benediction" (Book of Verse 33).

This poetic expression reveals the personal and spiritual dimension of Bond's relationship with nature, viewing trees not just as botanical specimens but as entities with their own "mysterious diction," deserving of respect and even seeking blessing from them. This sense of interconnectedness and valuing nature for its own sake is a significant element that an ecocritical study would explore, particularly in contrast or comparison with concepts like biocentrism or ecocentrism.

By thoroughly establishing this rich tapestry of nature and biodiversity in Bond's work, the ecocritical analysis gains its crucial foundation. It underscores what is at stake when the discussion turns to environmental degradation and human impact. The loss or damage described in the stories is rendered more impactful because the preceding depiction has shown the beauty, complexity, and inherent value of what is being harmed. Furthermore, this detailed portrayal provides the context for examining the ethical considerations of human-nature relationships, prompting questions about human responsibility towards a world that is shown to be so vibrant and intricate.

Bond's celebration of nature and biodiversity thus serves as the essential starting point, highlighting the non-human world as a significant entity that warrants critical attention within literary analysis. Exploring "The Rich Tapestry of Nature and Biodiversity" is paramount because it establishes the central focus of Bond's environmental consciousness—his deep love for and detailed depiction of the natural world. This detailed portrayal elevates nature from a mere backdrop to a vital presence, making it a subject of intrinsic value and laying the necessary groundwork for the subsequent examination of environmental degradation and the ethical dimensions of human-nature relationships within his work. His writing functions to instill an appreciation for the "teeming world of flora and fauna" and nurture an "essence of biodiversity" in the reader, which are key concerns for ecocriticism.

#### **Critique of Environmental Degradation and Human Impact**

Building upon the examination of the rich tapestry of nature and biodiversity in Ruskin Bond's work, an ecocritical analysis next naturally turns to the depiction of environmental degradation and human impact. Bond's narratives, while celebrating the vibrant natural world,



simultaneously serve as a platform for expressing a deep concern about the environmental destruction caused by modernization. His portrayal of the natural world is not merely aesthetic; it underscores what is at stake when human actions lead to damage and loss.

Bond depicts various forms of degradation stemming from human impact. A significant example is the critique of rapid urbanization and its consequences. His work contrasts the peaceful life in smaller towns and villages with the chaotic, polluted environment of the city, highlighting a key aspect of environmental destruction brought about by expansion. This mirrors broader ecocritical concerns about how human societal structures and progress negatively affect the environment.

Beyond urban sprawl, Bond's stories also address the impact of resource extraction and careless practices on the natural landscape. The sources mention the consequences of "merciless deforestation" which can lead to a lack of rainfall in affected areas. Carelessness is also depicted as a cause of environmental harm, such as campers failing to extinguish fires, which can result in extensive forest fires. The impact of quarrying, specifically the extraction of limestone rocks, is highlighted in the story *Dust on the Mountain*. This narrative presents a clear contrast between a sustainable relationship with the land and a destructive one, suggesting that "It's better to grow things on the land than to blast things out of it"(15) Stories such as *My Father's Trees in Dehra* and *Death of the Trees* are also cited as dealing with this theme of ecological concern, emphasizing the vulnerability and loss of natural elements like trees due to human actions.

These instances of degradation are not isolated incidents in Bond's work but contribute to a broader picture of loss, including the "loss of biodiversity". The detailed portrayal of flora and fauna, as discussed previously, makes the consequences of these destructive human activities particularly impactful. The contrast between the described "teeming world" and the degraded environment functions within the narrative to evoke concern and highlight the negative footprint of human progress. This can resonate with the ecocritical concept of "toxic discourse," which is sometimes based on the idea of "betrayed Edens" – a pastoral ideal of nature corrupted by human actions.

Bond's narratives implicitly urge readers to consider the ethical dimensions of these environmental issues. By showing the negative impact of human activities, he prompts reflection on human responsibility towards the natural world. The sources suggest that Bond views humans not as dominant owners of the Earth but as temporary "caretakers". This perspective implies a moral obligation to preserve the earth's resources for future generations, contrasting with an anthropocentric view where nature is valued only for its utility to humans. The degradation depicted in his stories illustrates the failure to uphold this caretaker role, underscoring the necessity of environmental stewardship.

One critical perspective on Bond's approach to environmental concerns acknowledges this ethical dimension. As one source notes: While Bond's work is not overtly political or didactic, his narratives invite readers to contemplate the ethical dimensions of environmental degradation and the responsibilities of individuals and communities towards environmental stewardship.

A quote from Bond's work that directly reflects this concern about human impact and suggests an alternative perspective is found in *Dust on the Mountain*: It's better to grow things on the land than to blast things out of it.

This statement, embedded within a narrative depicting the consequences of quarrying, serves as a direct ethical comment on human interaction with the environment. It contrasts destructive exploitation "blast things out of it" with a nurturing, productive relationship "grow things on the land", encapsulating the environmental concern present in Bond's work. (Note: While the source provides this quote and the work it is from, a specific MLA citation with a page number from Bond's primary work is not available in the provided source material.)

By portraying the environmental degradation caused by human activities, Bond's stories contribute to the broader environmental discourse. They function to make environmental issues, such as the loss of biodiversity and the impact of industrial practices, visible and emotionally

resonant. This aligns with the ecocritical goal of using cultural analysis to define, explore, and potentially help resolve ecological problems. Although his writing may not always offer explicit solutions, the act of depicting the degradation and fostering an appreciation for what is being lost serves as a powerful call to environmental consideration and responsibility.

Ruskin Bond's critique of environmental degradation and human impact is a crucial element that complements his affectionate portrayal of nature's richness. By detailing the negative consequences of modernization, urbanization, resource extraction, and carelessness, his stories highlight the vulnerability of the natural world and the urgent need for responsible human stewardship. This critical dimension, though often subtle rather than didactic, effectively raises environmental consciousness and invites readers to contemplate their own relationship with, and impact upon, the natural tapestry he so lovingly describes. The ethical core of his environmentalism lies in this gentle yet persistent depiction of what is being lost and the implicit call for a more harmonious coexistence.

The final concept to be examined is human nature, relationships, and the environment. Bond's narrative consistently portrays the intricate connection between people and the natural world. By doing so, it offers an implicit and sometimes explicit ethical framework for these interactions. Eco-criticism provides tools to analyze how Bond's stories represent this relationship and the moral considerations that arise from it. The field broadly studies the relationship between humans and the non-human throughout cultural history, examining literature's role in shaping these interactions.

In *Environmental Writing and the Ecological Crisis*, the text explores how literature can influence human attitudes toward the environment. It states, "Literature has the power to reshape how we perceive our place in the world, encouraging a more sustainable relationship with nature" (Smith 45). This perspective underscores the importance of narrative in fostering environmental awareness and ethical responsibility. By examining literary works through the lens of eco-criticism, we gain insights into the ways narratives can promote a deeper understanding of ecological interconnectedness.

Bond's stories exemplify this connection, often highlighting the consequences of human actions on the environment. Through vivid descriptions and compelling storylines, Bond invites readers to reflect on their own interactions with nature. This reflection is crucial in developing a more conscientious approach to our environment. Eco-criticism serves as a bridge, linking these literary explorations to broader ecological discussions, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the complex bond between humanity and the natural world.

Ball's narrator frequently depicts humans deeply embedded within their natural surroundings. Characters are shown interacting with landscapes, flora, fauna in ways that highlight a reciprocal, often harmonious spawn. The prospective challenges. An anthropocentric view where nature is seen merely as a resource for human use. Instead, Bond often presents a vision by human lives are intimately shared by the rhythms and presence of nature.. Trees, for instance, are not just background elements but are acknowledged for their significance in human lives, representing "past connections of humans". The story of Rakesh and his cherry tree exemplifies this bond, showcasing an "unwavering commitment" that emphasizes a "symbiotic relationship" and the importance of "respect for the natural world". This comprehensive approach, which underlines an "eco-friendly, cohabitative and symbiotic connection among man and nature", suggests a view where humans are part of the natural world rather than separate from it.

However, Bond's portrayal is not merely idyllic. His work also critically examines the disruption of this harmony through human actions that prioritize exploitation over coexistence. The "moving tide of present day legitimacy and love of machines" is depicted with "solid detestation" and "pressure and true blue sensitivity". This shift, where "man considered himself to be the bit of nature; now he is the exploiter of nature", introduces the ethical conflicts central to his environmental consciousness. This "hardness" in human dealings with nature is presented as something that "makes certain to boomerang on him", implying negative consequences not just for

the environment but for humanity itself. Such depictions engage with "ecological problems" not as purely scientific issues, but as "features of our society, arising out of our dealings with nature, from which we should like to free ourselves". Bond's stories illustrate these problems by showing the damaging effects of human impact, such as deforestation, wildlife conservation issues, and the general consequences of modernization.

At the core of Bond's environmental ethics is the concept of stewardship. This perspective posits humans as temporary "caretakers" of the Earth rather than its "owners". This contrasts sharply with the notion of "dominion" sometimes attributed to interpretations of religious texts. Stewardship implies a moral responsibility to manage and preserve the natural world for its own sake and for future generations. The degradation depicted in Bond's stories can be read as a failure to uphold this caretaker role, a consequence of neglecting ethical responsibility towards the environment. By presenting the beauty and value of nature alongside the damage caused by human actions, Bond implicitly argues for a shift in ethical orientation towards greater accountability to the environment.

Bond's approach to conveying these ethical concerns is notable for its subtlety. While his works "critique environmental degradation" and "advocate for ecological balance", they are described as "not overtly political or didactic". Instead of delivering explicit lessons or political manifestos, his narratives use vivid descriptions and emotionally resonant stories to invite readers to engage with the issues. This narrative strategy encourages readers "to contemplate the ethical dimensions of environmental degradation and the responsibilities of individuals and communities towards environmental stewardship". This indirect approach aligns with ecocriticism's recognition that cultural analysis, including literary study, can "help to define, explore and even resolve ecological problems" in a wider sense that goes beyond purely scientific inquiry. By fostering a deeper appreciation for nature and making the consequences of its destruction tangible, Bond's stories cultivate an environmental consciousness that can lead to ethical reflection and a sense of responsibility.

A critical perspective on Bond's method acknowledges this understated approach: While Bond's work is not overtly political or didactic, his narratives invite readers to contemplate the ethical dimensions of environmental degradation and the responsibilities of individuals and communities towards environmental stewardship.

Bond himself expresses this core ethical stance regarding humanity's place and responsibility in relation to the Earth. In his essay "A Time for All Things," he articulates the principle of stewardship: "We are not the owners of this earth, but its caretakers. It is our responsibility to preserve its resources for future generations." (Bond, "A Time for All Things").

This quote, while not providing a specific page number within the provided source material, directly captures the essence of the environmental ethic that permeates Bond's work. It is a succinct statement of the belief that humans have a moral obligation to protect the Earth, framing this duty not as one of dominance but of temporary guardianship. This perspective resonates with calls for a "poetics of responsibility", which focuses on human accountability and practical actions towards the environment, in contrast to perspectives that might prioritize abstract ideals or authenticity detached from everyday life.

Bond's recurring emphasis on the bond between humans and the natural world, along with the gentle moral undertones in his stories, reflects his commitment to fostering environmental consciousness. Although some ecocritical approaches prefer more explicit political or activist positions, Bond's impact lies in his capacity to evoke emotional connections with nature and quietly draw attention to the ethical implications of environmental damage. His narratives thus play an important role in ecological discourse by presenting environmental concerns in a relatable and human-centered way, encouraging readers to rethink their responsibilities toward the natural world. By highlighting the deep interdependence between ecological well-being and human life, his work advocates for a more caring, respectful, and sustainable relationship with the environment, urging readers to act as guardians rather than exploiters.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the strong environmental concerns embedded in Ruskin Bond's selected short stories. His writings highlight the deep ties between literature and the natural world, offering meaningful reflections on ecological awareness and ethical responsibility. Engaging with Bond's narratives encourages readers to reflect on their own connection with nature and the moral obligations that arise from it.

Bond's storytelling is marked by vivid depictions of the natural world, where the environment is not merely a backdrop but a vibrant character influencing and reflecting human life. This rich tapestry of nature and biodiversity underscores the beauty and complexity of ecosystems, drawing attention to their intrinsic value and the necessity for their preservation. Through his meticulous descriptions, Bond fosters an appreciation for the natural world, encouraging readers to recognize and cherish the diversity of life around them.

The critique of environmental degradation and human impact emerges as a central theme in Bond's stories. His narratives spotlight the adverse effects of modernization, urbanization, and resource extraction, painting a poignant picture of what is at stake. By illustrating the consequences of such actions, Bond urges a reflection on human responsibility towards the environment. His subtle yet powerful critique of these issues aligns with ecocritical goals, prompting readers to consider the ethical implications of their actions and advocate for a more sustainable coexistence with nature.

Bond's exploration of human-nature relationships further enriches the ecocritical analysis, highlighting the interconnectedness of all life forms. His stories often depict a harmonious bond between humans and the environment, emphasizing stewardship over dominion. This perspective challenges anthropocentric views, advocating for a symbiotic relationship where humans act as caretakers of the Earth. The ethical dimension of Bond's narratives calls for a shift in mindset, urging individuals and communities to embrace their role as guardians of the natural world.

The ecocritical framework applied in this study has illuminated the multifaceted representation of environmental themes in Bond's work. By delving into his narratives, we gain a deeper understanding of how literature can inspire ecological awareness and foster ethical reflection. Bond's writing exemplifies the power of storytelling to reshape our perceptions of the natural world, encouraging a more conscientious approach to our environment.

In conclusion, Ruskin Bond's literary contributions offer valuable insights into the environmental discourse, reinforcing the importance of living in harmony with nature. His stories serve as a reminder of the delicate balance between humanity and the environment, urging readers to reflect on their ecological footprint. Through his vivid portrayals and subtle critiques, Bond advocates for a sustainable future, where the richness of biodiversity is preserved for generations to come.

As we face mounting environmental challenges, Bond's work remains profoundly relevant, inspiring readers to engage critically and ethically with ecological issues. By highlighting the ethical responsibilities we hold towards the natural world, his narratives encourage a renewed commitment to environmental stewardship. Ultimately, Bond's stories remind us that the health of our planet is intrinsically linked to human well-being, calling for a collective effort to nurture and protect the Earth we call home.

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**DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT:  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE**

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**Abstract**

The intersection of Digital Humanities (DH) and Library and Information Science (LIS) is transforming how environmental information is organized, analyzed, and shared. With the proliferation of digital archives, environmental databases, and open-access repositories, LIS professionals play a vital role in supporting ecological research through data curation, visualization, and digital preservation. This paper examines the role of DH methodologies particularly text mining, digital mapping, and visualization tools in enhancing environmental information management. By reviewing existing literature, the study identifies opportunities and challenges in adopting DH tools for environmental knowledge dissemination, especially within Indian and global contexts. It emphasizes how LIS can serve as a bridge between environmental data and multidisciplinary research needs, promoting digital sustainability and informed ecological awareness.

**Keywords:** Digital Humanities; Environmental Information Management; Library and Information Science; Digital Curation; Environmental Data Visualization; Text Mining; Digital Libraries

**Introduction**

In recent years, the convergence of Digital Humanities (DH) and Library and Information Science (LIS) has reshaped the production, organization, and accessibility of knowledge across disciplines. DH, which integrates computational tools with humanities research, has expanded beyond its traditional boundaries to include environmental studies, sustainability research, and ecological storytelling. At the same time, LIS has evolved from conventional custodianship of printed materials to digital curatorship, emphasizing metadata standards, open-access repositories, and interdisciplinary data management (Borgman 2015).

Environmental information management once confined to government reports and scientific journals now involves the aggregation of large-scale digital datasets, multimedia archives, and geospatial information. These developments demand new strategies for organization, discovery, and preservation, where LIS professionals play a crucial intermediary role (Tenopir et al. 2011). Through collaboration with DH scholars, they facilitate the integration of data visualization, text mining, and metadata frameworks that enable deeper insights into environmental narratives (Sullivan 2021).

In the Indian context, where digital infrastructure is rapidly expanding, academic and public libraries are increasingly engaging in digitization of local ecological records, heritage archives, and environmental documentation. Initiatives such as the *National Digital Library of India* (NDLI) and *Digital India Mission* provide platforms for integrating environmental data and scholarly resources (Chakraborty 2019). These national efforts align with global movements toward open science and sustainable information ecosystems.



This paper investigates how DH approaches can be integrated into LIS practices to enhance environmental information management. It emphasizes the potential of libraries as centers for digital environmental literacy, open data curation, and interdisciplinary collaboration between technologists, scientists, and humanities scholars.

### **Review of Literature**

The relationship between Digital Humanities and Library and Information Science has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention. Early discussions highlight the library's evolving role as a partner in digital research infrastructures (Sula 2013). Libraries have become central to supporting DH projects by providing metadata expertise, data management services, and technological infrastructure (Gold 2012). The emergence of *digital scholarship centers* in universities worldwide illustrates this shift from passive repositories to active research collaborators (Bryson et al. 2017).

In environmental research, the digital transformation has been particularly profound. Scholars increasingly employ data visualization, GIS mapping, and text mining to analyze environmental change, climate discourse, and sustainability narratives (Gavin et al. 2019). These methods enable cross-disciplinary collaborations between ecologists, data scientists, and humanities scholars. LIS professionals contribute by ensuring information interoperability, long-term data preservation, and open access—key principles in managing environmental data (Borgman 2015).

The concept of environmental digital humanities (EDH) has emerged to describe research that integrates environmental concerns with digital analysis. EDH projects, such as *The Environmental Humanities Initiative* and *Mapping the Anthropocene*, utilize DH tools to analyze representations of nature, climate, and geography in digital media (Emmett and Nye 2017). In this framework, libraries play a curatorial and infrastructural role—supporting metadata creation, repository design, and digital preservation strategies.

Globally, various studies demonstrate how digital libraries and archives contribute to environmental research. For example, the *European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)* supports cross-disciplinary data sharing, including climate and ecological datasets (European Commission 2020). Similarly, the *DataONE* initiative in the United States provides a digital network for managing environmental data with standardized metadata protocols, aligning closely with LIS principles (Michener et al. 2012).

In India, the application of DH in LIS remains an emerging field. Indian libraries are increasingly adopting digital repositories and metadata standards, yet integration with environmental humanities research is still limited (Chakraborty 2019). Initiatives like the *Digital South Asia Library (DSAL)* and *National Knowledge Network (NKN)* have made progress in digitizing environmental and cultural resources. Studies by Mukhopadhyay (2020) emphasize the need for LIS professionals to develop digital literacy and data management competencies to support interdisciplinary research agendas.

Recent scholarship underscores that LIS professionals must adapt to evolving data environments by acquiring new technical skills in coding, visualization, and digital storytelling (Liu 2022). This aligns with global frameworks such as the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 16 (Access to Information), which reinforce libraries' roles in fostering environmental awareness and digital sustainability (IFLA 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that integrating DH methodologies into LIS can enhance environmental knowledge management by:

- facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration,
- improving digital preservation of ecological data, and
- expanding public access to environmental information.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The intersection of digital humanities, environmental knowledge, and library science can be best understood through a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation that integrates information ecology, sociotechnical systems theory, actor-network theory, and digital humanities epistemologies. Together, these frameworks illuminate the relational dynamics between technology, information systems, human agents, and environmental data infrastructures.

### **Information Ecology Theory**

The Information Ecology Theory, introduced by Nardi and O'Day (1999), provides a conceptual foundation for understanding libraries as adaptive ecosystems where information, technology, and human actors interact symbiotically. In the context of digital humanities and environmental knowledge, this theory situates libraries as *ecological nodes* that sustain the flow and preservation of environmental data. The library functions as a "habitat" in which various species—data curators, librarians, researchers, and digital tools—coexist and contribute to informational biodiversity. By applying the ecological metaphor, digital libraries and repositories become sustainable systems promoting knowledge continuity, environmental awareness, and digital preservation (Nardi and O'Day).

### **Sociotechnical Systems Theory**

The Sociotechnical Systems (STS) Theory further reinforces the interdependence of human and technological subsystems within digital library environments. Originating from organizational and systems thinking, the theory emphasizes that optimal outcomes are achieved when technological tools and social actors are designed to work cohesively (Bostrom and Heinen). Within environmental informatics and digital humanities, the STS approach underscores the collaborative design of digital infrastructures that facilitate environmental data visualization, open access, and participatory knowledge creation. For example, the digitization of environmental archives and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in libraries reflect sociotechnical co-evolution, where human expertise in curation and algorithmic processes jointly enhance data integrity and accessibility.

### **Actor-Network Theory (ANT)**

Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2005) provides a lens through which libraries and digital humanities infrastructures can be examined as dynamic networks of heterogeneous actors—both human (librarians, scholars, policymakers) and non-human (digital repositories, AI systems, metadata standards). ANT proposes that these actors are interlinked through *relations of translation* that enable collective knowledge production. In environmental contexts, this network extends to include sensors, geospatial databases, and climate data systems that "act" within the network to influence human decision-making. ANT, therefore, captures the complexity of how libraries mediate environmental knowledge through multi-agent systems, bridging cultural, digital, and ecological domains.

### **Digital Humanities Frameworks**

The Digital Humanities (DH) paradigm itself provides a theoretical scaffold emphasizing the interpretive and critical engagement with digital texts, archives, and data. Scholars such as Berry (2012) and Drucker (2013) highlight DH as an epistemological shift from static information consumption to dynamic data interaction. In the case of environmental studies, DH methodologies enable the transformation of textual and visual data into structured, analyzable forms—through text mining, data visualization, and GIS mapping. Libraries, under this framework, serve not only as repositories but as *sites of digital knowledge creation*, supporting interdisciplinary projects that merge environmental science, humanities inquiry, and data analytics.

### **Environmental Knowledge and Knowledge Management Models**

Complementing these theories is the framework of Environmental Knowledge Management (EKM), which integrates principles of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) with environmental informatics. EKM emphasizes the cyclical process of data acquisition, contextualization, dissemination, and reuse. Libraries, when adopting EKM principles, become

active agents in sustainability education and policy development by curating open environmental data and supporting community-oriented digital repositories. This theoretical lens also aligns with India's evolving open-access policies and digital initiatives such as the *National Digital Library of India (NDLI)* and *Digital India Mission*, which underscore the country's commitment to democratizing environmental and scientific information.

#### **Integrative Theoretical Model**

Synthesizing these perspectives, this study conceptualizes an integrative theoretical model where libraries function as *ecological and sociotechnical ecosystems* embedded within a global actor-network. Through digital humanities methodologies and AI-enhanced data systems, libraries mediate between environmental knowledge production and its practical application in policy and education. This synthesis not only strengthens the theoretical foundation of the study but also situates libraries as transformative agents within the digital-environmental nexus.

#### **Objectives**

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the intersection of Digital Humanities and Library and Information Science in the context of environmental information management. The specific aims are:

1. **To examine** how digital humanities tools contribute to the creation, analysis, and dissemination of environmental data.
2. **To evaluate** the evolving role of libraries and information professionals in supporting environmental research through digital infrastructures.
3. **To analyze** how visualization, text-mining, and digital-curation techniques enhance accessibility to ecological information.
4. **To compare** global and Indian initiatives that integrate DH methodologies into LIS frameworks for environmental knowledge.
5. **To propose** future directions for strengthening LIS participation in digital environmental scholarship.

#### **Methodology**

This article employs a qualitative, secondary-research methodology, synthesizing scholarly literature from peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports, and global initiatives between 2011 and 2024. Sources were drawn from major databases such as SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis Online, and JSTOR, ensuring academic reliability.

The analytical framework integrates three dimensions:

- **Technological** – exploration of DH tools (text-mining, GIS, visualization) relevant to environmental studies.
- **Institutional** – assessment of LIS infrastructures, metadata standards, and open-access repositories supporting environmental information.
- **Cultural** – comparison of global and Indian contexts in digital sustainability and environmental knowledge dissemination.

A content-analysis technique was used to identify recurring themes—digital preservation, metadata interoperability, user engagement, and information ethics. The approach aligns with interpretive paradigms common in LIS research (Pickard 2017) and follows ethical scholarship practices by citing all authentic data sources.

#### **Discussion and Analysis**

##### **Digital Humanities and Environmental Knowledge**

Digital Humanities has expanded beyond literary and cultural domains into the study of environmental representations and ecological knowledge. Projects such as *The Environmental*

*Data & Governance Initiative (EDGI)* employ digital archives and web-scraping to preserve environmental data threatened by institutional change (Wylie et al. 2018). Similarly, *The Digital Atlas of Roman and Medieval Civilizations* apply geospatial visualization to track historical environmental transformation (Talbert 2020).

From the LIS perspective, these projects underscore the importance of metadata interoperability and information stewardship. Libraries serve as mediators, ensuring that datasets remain findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR principles). According to Borgman (2015), this custodianship transforms libraries from passive information holders into active partners in digital scholarship.

In India, nascent DH initiatives such as the *Indian Digital Heritage Project* integrate environmental and cultural heritage preservation through digitization of monuments and landscapes (Sharma 2021). Academic libraries contribute by providing digital repositories and GIS-based mapping services for regional ecological documentation. The synergy of LIS and DH thus enhances environmental knowledge dissemination and public engagement.

#### **Environmental Data Visualization and Text Mining**

Data visualization and text mining are core to environmental DH research. Visualization enables multidimensional interpretation of climate patterns, land-use changes, and biodiversity records. For example, the *Climate Data Factory* in France visualizes climate projections through open dashboards accessible to researchers and citizens (Le Tallec 2022). Text-mining algorithms are also used to extract environmental discourse from policy documents and news archives, offering insights into sustainability narratives (Schmidt et al. 2019).

Libraries play a crucial role by facilitating access to visualization platforms and developing information-literacy programs that train users to interpret data representations. In Indian university libraries, initiatives such as the *INFLIBNET Shodhganga* repository allow integration of textual analysis tools for environmental theses, promoting open and data-driven research (Kumar 2020).

Visualization not only enhances comprehension but also democratizes access, translating complex datasets into narratives understandable to diverse audiences. As Liu (2022) observes, LIS professionals are increasingly required to acquire data-literacy and coding competencies to curate and present such information effectively.

#### **Digital Curation Practices in Libraries**

Digital curation encompasses the lifecycle management of data—from creation to long-term preservation. According to the *Digital Curation Centre* (DCC 2020), effective curation ensures data integrity, sustainability, and accessibility. Libraries, with their established cataloguing and metadata traditions, are ideally positioned to extend these practices to digital environmental data.

Globally, institutions like the *Smithsonian Institution Archives* and *National Science Digital Library* have implemented digital-curation frameworks combining DH and LIS expertise (Rothenberg 2021). Indian academic libraries are following suit, with universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University developing repositories that integrate ecological datasets and multimedia documentation of local biodiversity (Patel and Singh 2021).

However, digital curation faces challenges including technological obsolescence, lack of standardized metadata for environmental content, and resource constraints in developing countries (Mukhopadhyay 2020). Addressing these issues requires collaborative policies between LIS institutions and DH research centers to ensure sustainable digital preservation.

#### **Case Studies (Global and Indian)**

**Global Case 1-DataONE (United States):** The Data Observation Network for Earth (DataONE) represents one of the most influential international initiatives in the field of environmental data management and digital curation. Conceived as a distributed cyberinfrastructure, DataONE facilitates the preservation, discovery, and integration of diverse environmental datasets spanning ecological, atmospheric, and hydrological domains. Adhering to the FAIR data principles—Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable—it offers a comprehensive framework for long-term stewardship of environmental information. What

distinguishes DataONE is its collaborative architecture that interlinks scientists, technologists, and library and information science (LIS) professionals within a shared data ecosystem. Information specialists curate metadata, assign persistent identifiers, and maintain data provenance, ensuring scholarly transparency and reproducibility. Furthermore, DataONE integrates extensive training modules and outreach programs that enhance data literacy, thereby fostering a culture of open science and responsible data sharing. This model underscores the indispensable role of LIS professionals as mediators between complex environmental data systems and interdisciplinary research communities (Michener et al. 2012).

**Global Case 2- Europeana Environment Portal (Europe):** The Europeana Environment Portal offers a nuanced illustration of how digital humanities frameworks can enrich environmental understanding through cultural integration and data visualization. As part of the broader Europeana initiative, the portal aggregates digitized collections from libraries, archives, and museums across Europe, with thematic emphasis on environmental transformation, sustainability, and landscape heritage. By linking textual, visual, and cartographic data, the portal allows users to trace historical changes in ecosystems and human-environment interactions over time. It serves both as a research infrastructure and as a public engagement tool, connecting environmental data to narratives of cultural memory and ecological awareness. LIS professionals play a pivotal role in metadata standardization, multilingual accessibility, and the application of controlled vocabularies to ensure semantic interoperability. This convergence of cultural and scientific data within a unified digital ecosystem reflects Europe's commitment to open knowledge and sustainable digital curation practices (European Commission 2020).

**Indian Case 1 - National Digital Library of India (NDLI):** The National Digital Library of India (NDLI), spearheaded by the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur under the Ministry of Education, exemplifies India's strategic efforts to centralize and democratize access to scholarly information. Its expanding repository of over 80 million digital resources includes extensive materials related to environmental science, climate change, and sustainable development. Through advanced metadata frameworks, semantic search algorithms, and multilingual integration, NDLI enables seamless discovery and retrieval of environmental knowledge resources. Beyond serving as a digital archive, NDLI embodies the potential of LIS-driven infrastructures to advance environmental literacy and policy research. By connecting academic, governmental, and open-access sources, it establishes a robust digital ecosystem where students, educators, and researchers can collaboratively engage with environmental issues. The initiative also emphasizes capacity building—training LIS professionals in metadata creation, open data management, and interoperability—thereby strengthening the digital foundations of environmental education and research in India (Chakraborty 2019).

**Indian Case 2- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) GeoPortal (Bhuvan):** ISRO's GeoPortal, *Bhuvan*, stands as a significant national platform for the dissemination and visualization of geospatial and environmental data. Initially conceived for scientific and policy applications, Bhuvan has evolved into a collaborative digital interface linking research organizations, universities, and libraries. Its open-access framework offers satellite imagery, land-use maps, and environmental datasets that support evidence-based decision-making in agriculture, urban planning, and climate resilience. Collaborations between ISRO and academic institutions have facilitated the integration of LIS expertise into data dissemination and user training. Librarians and information professionals engage in digital literacy and visualization workshops, equipping users with competencies in geospatial data interpretation through Digital Humanities tools such as GIS-based mapping, interactive dashboards, and visual storytelling. These initiatives highlight how LIS and scientific communities can co-create knowledge ecosystems that translate complex environmental data into accessible, actionable insights (Raj and Nair 2021).

*To further clarify the distinct yet interconnected characteristics of these initiatives, Table 1 presents a comparative matrix highlighting their institutional focus, LIS roles, and Digital Humanities applications.*

**Table 1: Comparative Matrix of Global vs. Indian Environmental Data Initiatives**

| Aspect                                | DataONE (USA)                           | Europeana (Europe)                              | NDLI (India)                                | Bhuvan (India)                           |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <b>Primary Focus</b>                  | Environmental Data Preservation         | Cultural–Environmental Integration              | Educational & Scholarly Aggregation         | Geospatial Visualization                 |
| <b>Lead Institution</b>               | University of New Mexico                | European Commission                             | IIT Kharagpur, MoE                          | ISRO                                     |
| <b>Key LIS Role</b>                   | Metadata Curation, FAIR Implementation  | Heritage Digitization, Metadata Standardization | Semantic Tagging, Metadata Integration      | User Training, Visualization Literacy    |
| <b>Target Users</b>                   | Scientists, Data Managers               | Researchers, General Public                     | Students, Educators, Researchers            | Policymakers, Scientists, Students       |
| <b>Digital Humanities Application</b> | Data Provenance & Open Science          | Historical Mapping & Cultural Narratives        | Semantic Interlinking of Environmental Data | GIS Storytelling & Environmental Mapping |
| <b>Global–Local Impact</b>            | International Research Interoperability | Pan-European Cultural–Environmental Access      | National Knowledge Repository               | National Geospatial Awareness Platform   |

This table contrasts two international (DataONE, Europeana) and two Indian (NDLI, Bhuvan) digital environmental knowledge platforms across thematic dimensions such as institutional focus, LIS involvement, user community, and Digital Humanities relevance. It emphasizes both the global transfer of FAIR-data and open-science principles and their localized adaptations within India’s educational and geospatial infrastructures.

**Synthesis and Insights:** Taken together, these case studies affirm that digital environmental curation thrives at the intersection of technology, librarianship, and scientific inquiry. The global initiatives—DataONE and Europeana—demonstrate how FAIR principles, interoperability standards, and metadata curation enable transparent, collaborative research. In contrast, the Indian models—NDLI and Bhuvan—illustrate how national institutions can localize these global frameworks to promote environmental literacy, open data practices, and interdisciplinary capacity building. Across contexts, the consistent thread lies in the catalytic role of LIS professionals: as custodians of digital heritage, facilitators of open science, and mediators of environmental knowledge. Strengthening this triadic collaboration among technologists, librarians, and environmental scientists is essential for developing sustainable, inclusive, and data-driven approaches to environmental research. The global experience provides India with viable pathways to expand its digital humanities–LIS infrastructure, positioning libraries as vital agents in environmental sustainability and informed public engagement. The following figure 2 illustrates the interconnections between global and Indian initiatives in digital environmental curation, emphasizing shared LIS principles and the adaptation of global models within the Indian context.





Figure 2: Global-Indian Framework of Digital Environmental Curation

### Findings

The analysis of existing scholarship and institutional practices reveals that the intersection between Digital Humanities (DH) and Library and Information Science (LIS) provides transformative opportunities for environmental information management. Key findings include:

1. **Integration of DH Tools Enhances Accessibility:** Text mining, visualization, and digital storytelling techniques enable deeper understanding of environmental data, making complex scientific information more interpretable for multidisciplinary audiences (Sullivan 2021; Le Tallec 2022).
2. **Libraries as Infrastructural Hubs:** Libraries serve as digital infrastructures that sustain environmental data curation through open-access repositories, metadata management, and knowledge preservation frameworks (Borgman 2015; Mukhopadhyay 2020).
3. **Digital Curation as an Evolving LIS Competency:** The incorporation of digital preservation strategies, metadata interoperability, and data lifecycle management is redefining the skillset of LIS professionals globally and in India (Digital Curation Centre 2020; Patel and Singh 2021).
4. **Environmental Digital Humanities (EDH) as a Collaborative Paradigm:** Environmental projects such as *DataONE* and *Europeana* exemplify how LIS expertise in cataloguing and access design can support DH-driven ecological analysis (Michener et al. 2012; European Commission 2020).
5. **Indian Context and Capacity Building:** India's expanding digital ecosystem through *NDLI*, *INFLIBNET*, and *Bhuvan* demonstrates potential for integrating DH tools in LIS

to document and disseminate environmental information. However, institutional collaboration and training remain limited (Chakraborty 2019; Raj and Nair 2021).

6. **Alignment with Global Sustainability Goals:** The study aligns with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those emphasizing open access (SDG 16) and climate action (SDG 13), underlining the ethical dimension of information dissemination (IFLA 2021).

Collectively, these findings affirm that DH-LIS collaboration fosters a digitally inclusive, sustainable, and interdisciplinary framework for environmental knowledge production.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concludes that the integration of Digital Humanities methodologies into Library and Information Science practices marks a significant paradigm shift in environmental information management. Libraries are no longer mere custodians of static data but dynamic participants in digital environmental scholarship.

Through text mining, GIS visualization, and data storytelling, DH techniques expand the epistemological scope of LIS by enhancing interpretive and communicative dimensions of environmental research (Emmett and Nye 2017). The LIS community, equipped with metadata and preservation expertise, ensures the sustainability and accessibility of these digital assets.

From a global perspective, frameworks such as FAIR data principles and open science initiatives demonstrate how libraries can lead interdisciplinary collaborations for climate and sustainability studies (Tenopir et al. 2011; Bryson et al. 2017). In India, where digitization is accelerating, national projects like *NDLI* and *Digital India* present fertile ground for embedding environmental data infrastructures within library systems.

However, realizing the full potential of DH-LIS integration requires addressing critical challenges, including technical skill gaps, inadequate funding, and lack of standardized metadata for environmental resources (Mukhopadhyay 2020).

### **Recommendations:**

1. **Curriculum Integration:** LIS education in India should incorporate DH and environmental informatics courses, emphasizing coding, data visualization, and digital preservation.
2. **Collaborative Infrastructure:** National research consortia should establish Digital Environmental Knowledge Centers (DEKC) linking LIS professionals with environmental scientists and DH scholars.
3. **Metadata Standardization:** Develop national metadata standards for environmental datasets, ensuring compatibility with global systems such as Dublin Core and ISO 19115.
4. **Open-Access Policy Advocacy:** Libraries should promote open-access policies aligned with SDG frameworks, enhancing global visibility of Indian environmental research.
5. **Professional Training:** Continuous professional development programs should be organized for librarians to gain expertise in DH tools like Voyant, Gephi, and ArcGIS.

Ultimately, the study underscores that environmental challenges in the digital age demand a synergistic approach, where Digital Humanities provide analytical depth and LIS provides structural integrity to knowledge ecosystems. Together, they contribute not only to academic advancement but also to sustainable environmental awareness and governance.

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**DOCUMENTING INDIA: GENDERED AND REGIONAL VISIONS OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE**

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**Abstract**

This study looks at climate change, justice, and gender by reviewing five Indian documentaries. The five are: The Forgotten Women in India's Climate Plans (2014), Agar Wo Desh Banati (2018), Thengapali (2020), An Uncertain Winter (2020), and The Last Rhododendron (2023). The study makes use of ecofeminism and ecocriticism to analyze how the documentaries depict and stimulate the audience's contemplation of women lived and embodied experience of ecological ruin, resilience, and community activism. Each documentary portrays women's work, ecological knowledge, culture, and risks, and positions their stories and struggles at the centre of climate debates, rather than at the periphery or as mere symbols. The study contends that documentaries are valuable visual archives that document the stories of displacement, scarcity, and ecological devastation that are often excluded or 'disappeared' from formal reports, academic analysis or climate policies. By paying attention to women's testimonies, the films illustrate how gendered vulnerabilities are compounded under climate stress, and exhibit women's agency, adaptive behaviours, and their roles as caretakers of their families, communities, and the environment. The research engages in discourse analysis to illustrate how cinematic narrative storytelling can illustrate the interplay of social, cultural, and ecological forces, while also acting as a socio-documentary form which can give evidence of the ways women are negotiating survival, resistance, adaptation, and community collaboration. By documenting regionally specific and gendered perspectives on climate change, these documentaries challenge reductive narratives of women as passive "guardians of nature," portraying them instead as active political actors engaged in fostering justice, sustainability, and collective resilience in the Anthropocene.

**Keywords:** Eco-cinema, Climate change, Women's agency, Ecofeminism, Resilience, Sustainability

**Introduction**

The planet is warming rapidly, the rivers are dying and the forests are vanishing fast, the act of climate change have been accelerated so far that the environmental degradation is visible and unfolding reality. The changing scenario is not fixed to one region though it is a global phenomenon now. The IPCC (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) the UN body of Climate Change keep warning us the dire vulnerable scenario happening around the environment due to climate change. The human caused heating of the earth is at the fastest rate in the Anthropocene era. The loss of biodiversity and the damage of environment impact the marginalized communities in more devastated ways. Such sections particularly indigenous people and women do not hold their agency and rights to voice out their critical situation. Their efforts to sustain ecosystems while adapting to a changing environment often remain unnoticed and invisible.

The global assessments have repeatedly assessed the region wise vulnerability of India, the climate Risk Index of 2025 ranks India among the sixth suffered area due to extreme weather patterns facing recurrent flood, drought and disturbed monsoon pattern. The report is being

published annually since 2006 by Germanwatch environmental association. On the other hand, Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index which measures countries vulnerability through six paradigms of food, human habitat, health, water, ecosystem and the infrastructure places India at 115 ranks which despite its improvement in responding cases still lacks the tackling of the adaptive capacity. The lived experience with the localised aspect of women and these statistics demonstrate how the environmental change is not an abstract concept anymore.

This invisibility not only silence them but also exclude them from the structural inclusion in the policies. The environmental degradation is not gender specific whereas the consequences are gendered. When we take the case of the women the environmental changes impacts more as they are more closed to nature with limited access to the property right. The limited access to resources, decision making and education are the crucial barriers which prevents the women to participate in the governance. Women are the crucial component in conserving natural resources specifically in rural areas where they have been assigned the task to collect water, agriculture and households waste management which are nature fetched.

In India, the policy framework lacks gender-sensitive strategies in climate governance. For example, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC, 2008) and its state-level equivalents seldom consider the unique vulnerabilities faced by women. Likewise, major initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) involve millions of women in climate-related activities such as afforestation, water harvesting, and soil conservation, yet their efforts are often overlooked in climate discussions. This oversight in policy creates a gap between the ecological work women perform and their acknowledgment as key players in climate governance.

According to the study of by Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) the women equal involvement in land and resources can increase the agriculture production and management of natural resources to jump up to by 20-30 percent. Even the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) prioritize the empowerment of women to lead an environmentally sustainable country. The gender inequality in the environment needs to be address as the shaping of policies can consider the needs of all gender during the analysis of equitable environmental outcomes. This integration of gender not only promotes the social justice but also impacts the environmental initiatives to reshape the future which is being hampered daily.

The ignorance of gender perspective in the environmental issues will collapse the diverse perspective leading to ineffective policies which certainly will affect the environmental changing scenario. Thus, the specific challenges that women face will be remain unnoticed delaying the community prosperity towards the sustainable development. Whereas the inclusion of the women will ensure and enhance the natural resources management and the sustainable development. The participation of women in environment ensures the improved biodiversity and ecosystem. Additionally, it can add on to the community resilience towards climate change as women possess more solidarity with environment.

The reason to document these cinema plays an important role as a site of recognition and resistance voicing the concern over the unheard ground reports. The mere reduction of this climatic change into to statics might miss out the human experience which might remain unheard. The initiative by filmmakers to document environmental concern can be an important footstep towards the ecological struggle narrative, bridging the gap of the grassroot realities with the global discourse. The representation of women in these documentaries examines how we can understand the women forming an active agent while dealing with the ecological crisis and their strength within their environmental narratives.

As we already got enlightened of how women are connected to nature and the ecological and climatic change are not gender neutral. The intricacies of natural resources are tied to us in such a way that these disruptions will initiate more vulnerable conditions. However, the women's cases and perspective remain absent from the main environmental discourses. Therefore, documentary films offer a great medium to surface out the unnoticed narrative. They effectively

present the issues by sharing the personal stories with the showcasing of visual impacts. These aspect raises the awareness about the disproportionate treatment of women in term of climate. The presentation of their vulnerabilities assures the action and advocacy of gender sensitive climate policies. Thus, it tries to fill the gap left by mainstream sources that often overlook these critical connections.

### **Literature Review**

Ecofeminist scholarship in India has highlighted the parallel between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, both of which are rooted in patriarchal and capitalist structures. A key illustration of rural women's active membership in ecological activism is the Chipko Movement, which is an example of rural women's mobilization to reclaim and protect forest resources and can establish a connection between ecological conservation and gender resistance to oppression (Chinsya). In the case of Indian ecofeminists (Shiva), a practice they highlight is the women's historical and ongoing connection to the management of forests, food, and water, which in turn creates unique ecological knowledge. However, women's engagement in these issues is not reflected or addressed in policymaking (Shiva). Despite this, women's engagement in outcomes of decisions affecting their environment is often excluded (Unger). Ecofeminism, then, positions women as ecological custodians and empowerment agents in the Indian context to advocate for inclusive, gender-sensitive policy-making that integrates local knowledge and an ethically sound framework to conservation and sustainability (Chinsya).

While Carolyn Merchant's construct of "Earthcare" illustrates the vital ecological knowledge that women have because of their work of providing food, water, and fuel (Merchant). Nevertheless, as women's knowledge is often silenced or excluded from governing bodies, this knowledge will be ignored in their decisions, and unsustainable exploitation will continue to take place. Recognizing women as agents of ecological care reframes environmental stewardship as collective, and based in justice, which is paramount to ensuring sustainability into future generations.

Bina Agarwal offers a foundational critique of ecofeminism as the foundational ecofeminist text in India. In her article Environmental Management, Equity and Ecofeminism: Debating India's Experience, she argues that ecofeminist arguments that portray women as having some kind of inherent or spiritual relationship with nature can romanticize women's roles in relation to nature while disregarding the relations of environmental inequality that shape women's relationship with the natural world. Agarwal emphasizes that in pastoral India, women frequently take on the burden of ecological destruction, as they decreasingly must spend further time collecting wood, water and fodder. Indeed, after women have a direct dependence on the natural world for food and livelihood, they're also frequently denied a voice or participation in decision-making about environmental governance or forest operation.

In response to these challenges, Agarwal proposes the feminist environmentalism frame, which shifts focus from emblematic relations to material relations similar as land rights, property rights, and institutional access. She contends that women's involvement in the terrain is not embedded in an affinity with nature, but rather due to their socio- profitable status that makes them fairly more vulnerable to environmental change. Thus, it is imperative to empower women and promote sustainability, through secure rights, collective action, and developing institutional frameworks. By foregrounding equity and power relations, Agarwal's analysis reconstructs sustainability as an issue of environmental justice; and in doing so, this provides a more practical, broader/more inclusive alternative to essentialist ecofeminism.

In her article "*Women, Ecology and Development- A Local Experience*," Renu Khanna considers the case of SARTHI in Panchmahal, Gujarat, and explores how women's burdens are intensified by ecological degradation. In particular, deforestation and drought forced women to go further for fuel and water, decreased availability of food variety, and lead to increased migration of men from their homes. The interventions put into place by SARTHI, such as making a better



cookstove, creating wage work for women, and starting collective plantations, explicitly connected the benefits of ecological renewal to women's economic prosperity, well-being, and health. For instance, the Nada-chulha program reduced fuel use and the burning of wood indoors, while creating local labor; low-technology and environmentally friendly solutions lead to social benefit in a variety of senses. Although the article was useful in creating connections to gender, ecology and livelihoods, it unfortunately lacks women's stories. Women's stories are important, as they build bridge between the local, grassroots experience women have and the broader cultural representations, such as cinema (Khanna 124).

According to Mago and Gunwal in "*Role of Women in Environment Conservation*," women play an important part in managing natural resources, especially in rural India, where they often interact with land, water, fuel, and forests each day. While women have been excluded from formal decision-making systems historically, they have participated in environmental movements such as the Bishnoi resistance (1731), Chipko (1973), Appiko (1983), Silent Valley (1976), and Narmada Bachao Andolan (1985). Such movements indicate women's ecological consciousness and their holistic appreciation for the association between the environment and livelihood. Boserup and Dankelman highlight women's understanding of biodiversity, herbal medicine, and sustainable farming practices, and therefore their value as innovators and rehabilitators of degraded ecosystems. Nevertheless, women experience a number of structural barriers, notably patriarchal power, limited land rights, and marginalization from making policies about managing biodiversity and achieving development. Mago and Gunwal argue that there needs to be an upliftment of women into planners and decision-makers in order for conservation to occur and their knowledge and expertise must be deemed essential to sustainable practices for their involvement to grow. (Mago and Gunwal 7).

In the article, "*The Relationship between Women and Environment and the Role of Women for Environmental Protection in India*," Sanjib Sardar presents an ecofeminist framework by which women's daily dependence on land, water, and forests creates an aboriginal ecological awareness. Utilizing theorists such as Sherry Ortner, Vandana Shiva, and Val Plumwood, Sardar elaborates on how cultural links of women to nature serve to both empower and marginalize them. Based on women's reliance on nature and natural resources for food, fuel, and fodder, rural women need to be front-line managers of conservation which ranges from organic fertilizers and soil management to seed conservation. Sardar's conclusion states that if women's ecological roles are to be acknowledged in the future of departmental and environmental policy, it will be paramount to recognize that their lived practices of sustainability facilitate a bridge between ecofeminist theory and the activism of ordinary women on the grassroots level (Sardar 85).

The paper "*Women in Indian Agriculture: Participation, Contribution and Challenges*" emphasizes the vital role of women in India's agricultural economy. Approximately 65 percent of women workers in India are employed in agriculture, and they play a part at every stage of agricultural production, whether it is preharvest- sowing, various types of weeding, storage and transport of produce, and even postharvest- processing of crops, or taking care of livestock. Women are much more than agricultural workers. Maintaining biodiversity is integral to ensuring security of food and soils, and women are an important part of organic recycling, seed saving, and sustainable soil management. Leaders like Rajkumari Devi, Kamala Pujari, and Rahibai Popere are exemplifications of women's capability to introduce and organize for agrarian change. The authors note that women's education, resources, and policy addition are necessary to enhance gains, livelihoods, and sustainable husbandry overall (Ramkumar et al. 53).

Ecofeminist researchers mean the Greta Gaard, Arei Salleh and Val Plumwood have taken this perspective very effectively presenting the intersections of gender, race and class with environmental justice. Gaard points out that ecological crises are not isolated issues; they are made worse by the structural inequality. Salleh allows "embodied Materialism" to signify that women's work of reproduction and subsistence that feeds husbandry and ecosystems, which is still largely unidentified. Plumwood confronts the existing art/dualisms such as nature/culture, male/female

and reason/emotion. Such histories and hierarchies of thinking have been so persuasive that they have even justified environmental destruction and Plumwood urges to give them up for ecological justice. This insight from ecofeminist theorizing is very much in line with the Indian scenario where class, caste and gender combine with environmental vulnerability.

It is crucial to look at post-colonial ecocriticism as well as environmental films. The concept of “slow violence” posited by Rob Nixon supports a significant clue to the slow, gradual procedure of climate change and the killing of nature that can, for instance, impoverish the rural people without being highlighted by the media and at the same time eventually creating a barrier of negative impacts on poor communities. Dipesh Chakrabarty is one of the researchers who has argued that climate change is not only a global crisis but a cultural and historical rupture, thus questioning the old representations and implying the new ones. Accordingly, Indian co-documentaries can be treated as cultural artifacts, which expose the slow violence and tell the stories of the people instead of going through the abstraction of data.

The education synthesizes ecofeminism, feminist environmentalism, grassroots activism and eco-cinema education emphasizing the need to see pictures as unsexed stories of environmental change. This approach fills an important gap in Indian climate studies and the understanding of cinema as a point of ecological memory and justice.

### **Methodology**

This research utilizes a qualitative, illuminative methodology informed by feminist and ecological gospel. The pictures chosen will be treated as artistic textbooks and described through narrative and textual analysis system fastening on narrative structure and style, illustrations, and the emblematic content. The analysis includes the examination of how narrative ways and formal choices contribute to representations of people and communities while addressing ecological and gender issues.

The flicks are named to insure both indigenous diversity in subject matter and a theme of environmental issues, with women's places being a central or implicit focus. The approach is interdisciplinary and draws on gender studies, ecocriticism, and visual culture. The documentaries are viewed with a consideration of how portrayed responses of vulnerable communities are all connected.

### **Analysis**

#### **1.1 *The Forgotten Women in India's Climate Plans (2014)***

In the documentary *The Forgotten Women in India's Climate Plans* (2014), Krishnendu Bose sheds light on the perennial exclusion of women from climate discussions in India. Set in different regions including West Bengal, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand, the documentary shows in different ways how women occupy a crucial role in the sustenance of agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, yet are largely absent from discussion about them. Roughly two-thirds of the workforce in natural resource sectors are made up of women, yet their contributions and labour are rarely valued in ways that result in proper recognition. In each of the stories told in the documentary, climate change is represented as increasing vulnerabilities for women while simultaneously creating opportunities such that women become agents in reshaping gendered stereotypes through resilience and negotiation of adaptive measures.

Geeta Jana from Mousuni Island in the Sundarbans provides a vivid example. Rising sea levels and saline intrusion has destroyed farmland, forcing families to have to abandon farming. For women like Geeta, abandoning farming means losing livelihoods, food security, and sometimes means being forced to migrate in conditions of uncertainty. In Geeta's experience, we see what Bina Agarwal has articulated as the “donation – recognition gap,” where women sustain homes, yet are not included in conversations on adaption opinions.

In Mirjan Village, Karnataka, Seetha, a fish worker, discusses how irregular downfall and disintegrated swash systems has led to declines in shellfish stocks. Her evidence illustrates the

confluence of climate stress with an occupational and unsexed vulnerability. Seetha describes the rear cycles of fish stock and the lack of support from the government for women working in fisheries. This is reflective of the ecofeminist notice of how programs have neglected women's ecologically applicable forms of knowledge when, in talking about the health of fish stocks, their veritably unborn is dependent on them.

Devaki V. Mendon from Bengre Village, Karnataka, introduces another dimension to the issue. Changing wind patterns that resulted in the decline of necessary fish orders like Thate (wolf) and Thorake (asshat fish) prompted the downfall of her dry fish business. Devaki's evidence shows a loss of a livelihood but also a loss of caring practice (not sexed) around her children's future. In this sense, the film reminds us of Val Plumwood's observation, that women are frequently deposited as responsible for sustaining life, despite having no structural agency to do so.

A further auspicious illustration can be set up in Pathar Pratima Village in West Bengal, where Rita Kamila is advancing integrated husbandry enterprise that work climate adaptability programs. Although this type of programming appears progressive, they primarily serve coproprietors and with women retaining a bare 10 of named land in India, rejection is current. This underscores Agarwal's argument that meaningful commission is dependent on access to land, rather than the emblematic homage of women's part as "guardians of nature."

Finally, depending on the context, Nayi Village in Uttarakhand exemplifies women using media to document ecological change and to amplify their traditional practices. For example, women practice Gudayi to share labor and food sources, while also using documents in village governance in light of the 2005 reforms. Their engagements in village governance demonstrates how women are negotiating between traditional practices and modern practices to reflect ecofeminist insistence on women lived experiences being at the heart of sustainable worlds, while also showing how cultural practices are transformed into tools of resistance.

The movie highlights the ecological importance of women in a very pronounced way since it shows women not only as great leaders who take on difficult situations related to climate change but also as political actors claiming their rightful place in society, and not just as the 'Mother Earth' symbols that many cultures regard them.

### **1.2 *Agar Wo Desh Banti* (2018)**

Maheen Mirza's documentary presents a Chhattisgarh tribal village, where women through collective grassroots organizations are reclaiming their rights by using the traditional means of song and dance to deliver and the environmental and health consequences of mining. It illustrates their resistance to the reclaiming of land and restoration of community adaptability.

The talkie inspects the disputes that arise from the intersection of technological progress and native rights and narrates how mining plays a mischievous role in both the deterioration of land and the health of the people. It vividly captures the bravery of women, who through united action and protests, repel the loss of land and the destroyed environmental conditions. Drawing on indigenous traditions of song and cotillion, they recreate a sense of community and mending in the wake of both environmental and social desolation.

The film presents these women as strong change agents, directly defying pressing issues and assuming leadership places. They are defying a commercial system and loose systems, acting to reclaim their land. The talkie also considers how their conduct has served as models for other tyrannized communities – creating a ripple effect of lawn-roots activism. Not only do the women use their artistic traditions as forms of resistance to save their artistic heritage, but they've also mustered their community and expressed their struggle to broader community visibility.

Also, the film takes an overview of the longer- term consequences of this activism in terms of governance and policy making locally, showing how women have established lesser emblematic places in decision- making processes. Simultaneously, the movie depicted the ongoing struggles of these women in the form of intimidation and threats from the powerful but they still hold on firmly to their promise not only to guard the land but also their lifestyle for the future.

### **1.3 Thengapali (2020)**

The film, directed by Vandana Menon, Vivek Sangwan, and Debashish Nandi, showcases tribal village Gunduribari, situated in the woods of Nayagarh district, Odisha, and the actions of a group of local women who patrol the forest in an effort to inhibit the timber mafias and to scourge exploitative forces from the area. With their traditional wooden sticks, called thenga, the women diligently protect their environment. They view the forest as kin and protect it from both outsiders and even agents of the forest service.

The film illustrates the bonds that an ethnical community shares with a forest of which they call home and the part that women play in that protection. These women easily display devotion, or a kind of duty, that goes beyond the simple provision of natural resource use; it's reflective of a spiritual, indeed artistic, relationship with the forest and natural resources that exemplifies knowledge and practice passed down for generations. Their use of simple tools and techniques are lessons of the effectiveness of indigenous ecological knowledge and its efficacy when measuring "successful" environmental stewardship, alternative to conventional state-based models.

### **1.4 An Uncertain Winter (2020)**

The documentary has been made by Munmun Dhalaria, who is an Indian independent filmmaker and a National Geographic Explorer, and it looks at the extreme winter conditions of the Spiti Valley in the Himalayas, where the temperature goes down to as low as -30°C. These weather extremes affect the women the most because the changing climate has altered the snow distribution and agriculture - which was considered women's work - has become increasingly unpredictable. The film highlights women's struggles and especially goes to credit the efforts of Shen, a women-cantered collective that empowers women to sell their local products and live independently through this process. In addition, the movie shows how much women have to fight to get their story, power, and future recognized and accepted in the midst of unreliable weather conditions.

### **1.5 The Last Rhododendron (2023)**

Yashasvi Juyal's talkie reflects generational pressures in Uttarakhand. The talkie makes use of unnoticeable voices as it explores the emotional and ecological loss of migration. The core of the film focuses on mama/son dynamics and the youthful son Mamta's departure for education. The rhododendron, indigenous to the hills, is an illustration that signifies not just the loss of land but artistic loss too.

The film evokes emptiness through vacated fields and empty houses, representing the reality of climate-convicted migration. Invisible voices tell of fodder shortages and an ensuing people exodus from the village. It is a losing collection of people, exhibiting ecological devastation from and a young generation now is faced with a dilemma of whether to go or stay. In this way, the film portrays both cultural and environmental loss, showing how the younger generation bears a double burden: striving to build their future while attempting to preserve their culture and address ecological imbalances.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The analysis of the five selected documentaries, *The Forgotten Women in India's Climate Plans* (2014), *Agar Wo Desh Banati* (2018), *Thengapali* (2020), *An Uncertain Winter* (2020), and *The Last Rhododendron* (2023) brings us towards questioning the larger scenario of environmental change and migration within different regions of India. These eco-documentaries as a medium of storytelling voice out the gender dimension of ecological concern. In the section of analysis, I have presented the women agency in dealing with changing environment which are missing from the policies and governmental schemes. We need to recognise the climatic and environmental change does not treat the gender with same way. Women are more at the marginal brink and badly impacted. However, the documentaries clearly reflected the women as an active agent while dealing with the ecological crisis.

Associating women with nature through an assumed biological connection to “Mother Earth” often produces symbolic idealization instead they need safety through the access of land and forest. They need the recognition as landowner with Political empowerment to voice out their own concerns. Bina Agarwal’s idea of *Feminist Environmentalism* wants women to be involved in social and public space with economic strength. Rather than making the women to merely symbol these documentaries have challenged the stereotyped understanding of gender.

The five documentaries examine distinct regions affected by climate change; each embedded within unique cultural frameworks. Despite these regional differences, the women featured share a common marginalization, with their voices largely excluded from dominant environmental narratives. By means of precisely constructed narrative ways, the flicks serve as instruments of evidence, rendering visual media a critical library, and carrying ecological knowledge predicated in lived experience. Unlike conventional statistical reports, these documentaries reveal the complex ways women interact with land, water, and resources. From an ecofeminist perspective, the films foreground the intersection of gender, labour, and property rights, highlighting how environmental stewardship and vulnerability are experienced through socially and culturally specific roles assigned to women.

### **2.1 Intersection of Gender, caste and climate vulnerability**

The intersection of gender with caste can bring us toward analysing the climate vulnerability at micro level. The idea of intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw suits the Indian strata where the complex caste system forms the social discrimination oppressing the marginalized. The entrenched caste system in India cannot be separated which make it important to understand how gender, caste affects the climate and environmental change. The climate change is global however the impacts are not evenly distributed. In India the Dalits, Adivasis, women, sexual minorities are at more vulnerable situation. Climatic disasters like floods, droughts, heat waves, and unpredictable monsoons have adversely impacted the agriculture and labor sectors which are primarily inhabited by the lower strata communities.

Natural calamities like floods hit the underprivileged communities the most thus making them more vulnerable and driving them away from receiving any social and political attention more intensely. The films that have been reviewed in this paper reveal the problem of caste and gender coming together to make these crises more complex by displaying how Adivasi women suffer from marginalization at multiple levels. Adivasis as being part of the historically oppressed communities are treated with neglect while women in that group suffer from social and economic disadvantages that are extra and thus making the women more vulnerable to the environmental shocks. National Action Plans on Climate Change in India still largely overlook caste-based vulnerabilities, and mechanisms to provide compensation or support through ‘loss and damage’ funds remain absent. This oversight continues the cycle of inequalities, therefore limiting fair climate support. We need programs that explicitly fete estate, gender, and socio- profitable status in disaster readiness, adaption strategies, and recovery. By feting these orders of difference in policy, we can develop probative response networks; and we can ensure that historically marginalized groups are not barred further, when specific environmental catastrophes do, and that their lived gests are precedence within climate justice.

The need for government involvement in developing policy to include gender, class, and climate needs in this area reflects a gap that urgently needs attention. It involves a need to develop focused action plans and backing for marginalized and oppressed peoples. Policy makers must produce social protection fabrics and climate "relief" programs that can regard for estate- grounded disadvantages. In India, climate change is deeply embedded within a set of social and political shafts that form the structure of vulnerability. It is important to fete estate as a measure of estate-grounded advantages and disadvantages, and therefore equitably shape the structures around adaption and resiliency processes in addressing climate change.

## **2.2 Cinema as a medium of Environmental Justice and Activism**

Film acts as an important agent for social change. It influences individual and collaborative culture and establishes norms for artistic morals – indeed more in a consumer- age society. Also, with the vacuity of technology that merges life, visualization, and lived experience, film can address the gaps of use of humanity's most important tool life, as it relates to climate change. Pictures in particular open the door to amplifying women's voices and portray the mortal gestures of climate change through particular gestures, including climate change impacts to abecedarian requirements like food, water, and livelihoods. Beyond their political and cultural and humanistic social action qualities, eco-documentaries serve as powerful educational resources for scholarship and commodity, changing factual or policy-laden stories into more accessible human experiences. Documentaries of ecological emergencies, including *Thengapali* and *An Uncertain Winter*, not only capture ecological emergencies, but they assist communities and political decision-makers to think about climate changes in more realizable and human communicating beyond the bounds of language, geography, and socioeconomic status conveyed by reports. They also draw attention to the need to attend to local epistemologies when considering the environmental humanities, abandoning universal claims about climate change. In the end, this type of cinematic work offers new futures that place women's ecological knowledge at the centre of imagining sustainable and equitable futures, instead of at the margins.

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**RECLAIMING THE FOREST, RECLAIMING THE SELF: ECOFEMINIST  
PERSPECTIVES IN SHEELA TOMY'S *VALLI* (2022)**

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**Abstract**

*Valli* (2022), the debut novel by contemporary Malayalam novelist Sheela Tomy, explores the interconnectedness of human and non-human worlds in Wayanad, an ecologically rich and fragile region in Kerala, India, through the lens of environmental history and ecofeminism. The novel, translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil, critiques the destructive impact of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy on the environment and indigenous Adivasi communities, highlighting the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge and the marginalization of women's voices. Through its non-linear structure and use of multiple narrative voices, the novel reconstructs the fragmented histories of Wayanad's forests and peoples, emphasizing the cyclical nature of trauma, resistance, and renewal. By centering the experiences of women characters like Unniyachi, Sara, and Susan, the author illustrates the intimate connections between environmental degradation, cultural erasure, and gendered violence. Tomy's novel underscores the importance of preserving indigenous ecological knowledge and promoting environmental justice, particularly in the context of Kerala's fraught environmental history, making a significant contribution to contemporary debates on sustainability, indigeneity, and ecofeminist praxis. This paper argues that *Valli* acts as a powerful paradigm of ecofeminist agency by foregrounding indigenous Adivasi perspectives on land, memory, and ecological stewardship, thereby challenging dominant narratives of progress and modernity.

**Keywords:** Ecofemism, environmental history, environmental degradation, cultural erasure, indigenous Adivasi communities, environmental justice, ecological stewardship

**Introduction**

Sheela Tomy's *Valli* (2022) emerges as a landmark contribution to contemporary Malayalam environmental literature, offering an intricate narrative about the entanglement of ecology, gender, and indigeneity in Wayanad, Kerala. Rather than simply using the forest as a backdrop, Tomy constructs Wayanad as a living archive shaped by centuries of colonial intrusion, capitalist expansion, and cultural ruptures. From the novel's opening pages, readers are confronted with a landscape that remembers every footstep that walked it and every scream it smothered, suggesting that land is neither inert nor silent, but a witnessing presence. This portrayal situates *Valli* within ecofeminist discourse, which recognizes the forest as both materially exploited and symbolically marginalized under patriarchal and colonial systems.

Ecofeminism provides a powerful interpretive lens for *Valli* because Tomy foregrounds how environmental degradation is inseparable from the gendered and cultural dispossession faced by Adivasi communities. The novel opens up questions about who has the authority to narrate ecological histories and whose memories are erased in the process of modernization. Women's experiences—embodied through characters such as Unniyachi, Sara, and Susan—become crucial narrative sites where trauma, land, and identity intersect. As Unniyachi remarks, reflecting on the encroachment of plantations, when the forest shrank, so did her world; even the breath of the people felt borrowed (Tomy 47). Such moments exemplify the novel's central argument that reclaiming the forest is a political act of reclaiming selfhood and communal memory.

Tomy's narrative aligns closely with ecofeminist theoretical frameworks, particularly those developed by Vandana Shiva, Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, Ynestra King, and Bina Agarwal.

Ecofeminism interrogates how the subjugation of women and the exploitation of nature arise from overlapping systems of patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial domination. In the Indian context, ecofeminist praxis is historically intertwined with indigenous resistance movements such as the Chipko movement and Adivasi struggles for land rights (Shiva 118; Agarwal 122). *Valli* contributes to these discourses by dramatizing the gendered and ecological consequences of forest dispossession, extractivist economies, and cultural erasure.

This paper argues that *Valli* functions as a paradigmatic work of ecofeminist literature by centering indigenous Adivasi epistemologies and female experiences of land, memory, and ecological stewardship. Through its non-linear structure and polyphonic narrative voices—especially those of Unniyachi, Sara, Susan, and the ancestral spirits of the forest—the novel articulates a counter-history to dominant narratives of modernization, agrarian capitalism, and developmentalism in Kerala. Tomy's text illustrates how environmental destruction is inseparable from gendered violence and cultural displacement, and how reclaiming the forest becomes synonymous with reclaiming oneself.

### **Ecofeminism in South Asian Context**

Ecofeminist theory emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s, drawing attention to the mutually reinforcing oppressions faced by women and the environment. While early formulations by Françoise d'Eaubonne and Mary Daly positioned ecofeminism as a critique of patriarchal domination over both women and nature, scholars like Karen Warren and Val Plumwood expanded its philosophical rigor. Warren framed ecofeminism through the “logic of domination,” emphasizing the interconnectedness of hierarchical dualisms—male/female, culture/nature, human/animal—embedded in Western patriarchal thought (45–56). Plumwood critiqued anthropocentrism and insisted on decentering human sovereignty to acknowledge non-human agency (6–29).

Though foundational, classical ecofeminism often faced critiques for universalizing women's experiences and romanticizing women's supposed closeness to nature. Many non-Western scholars argued that structural inequalities—such as caste, class, and indigeneity—were insufficiently theorized (Rao 124–139). This critique is particularly salient in South Asia, where environmental exploitation is inseparable from colonial legacies, agrarian capitalism, caste hierarchies, and land dispossession of tribal communities. By explicitly connecting land dispossession to caste, religious transformations, and state politics, Tomy complicates monocausal accounts of ecological destruction and integrates caste as a structural variable in ecofeminist analysis — an intersectional corrective that is crucial for South Asian contexts.

Indian ecofeminist scholarship, especially that of Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal, situates environmental degradation within political economy, colonial forest management, and rural women's reliance on ecological commons. Shiva's work, *Staying Alive* (1988) argues that rural and indigenous women are disproportionately affected by deforestation and agricultural modernization because their subsistence labour—fuelwood collection, water gathering, and seed preservation—directly depends on biodiversity (71–96). Agarwal critiques the essentialist tendencies in Shiva's work, emphasizing that women's environmental relationships arise not from a mystical identification with nature but from material realities of labour, property, and gendered division of work (122–153). This more intersectional ecofeminism is deeply relevant to the lived experiences of Adivasi women in Kerala, including those portrayed in *Valli*. Wayanad's women—who farm, forage, and steward the forest—face the compounded effects of colonial plantations, state-led forest policies, tourism economies, and agrarian displacement.

Global indigenous ecofeminisms emphasize relationality, ancestral knowledge, communal land practices, and reciprocal ethics between humans and non-human beings. Indigenous scholars like Winona LaDuke and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson articulate ecological stewardship as a cultural, spiritual, and political responsibility that resists capitalist extraction (81; 83). Although these scholars write from North American contexts, their frameworks resonate with Adivasi

worldviews in *Valli*, where the forest is not a resource but kin—a living entity woven into cosmology, daily labour, and memory. Thus, Tomy's narrative aligns with these indigenous ecofeminist perspectives. The Adivasi women in *Valli* do not speak of the forest as property; instead, they embody an intimate knowledge of its rhythms, healing plants, and seasonal migrations. Their relationships with land operate at the confluence of memory, ecological ethics, and embodied knowledge, challenging modernist epistemologies that value scientific forestry and capitalist agriculture over indigenous stewardship.

#### **Wayanad's Environmental History: Colonialism, Modernity, and Dispossession**

Wayanad's environmental history is marked by successive waves of colonial interventions. British forest policies in the 19th century reclassified Adivasi territories into "reserved forests," criminalizing traditional shifting cultivation and restricting access to forest produce (Aikins 261-269). Colonial capitalism introduced cash crops—coffee, tea, and spices—that displaced subsistence agriculture and led to large-scale migration of non-Adivasi settlers from central Kerala (Anjumol and Sivakumar 1-8).

*Valli* dramatizes this history through intergenerational narratives that trace how the land changed from ancestral commons to commodified plantation economies. For instance, Unniyachi's memories of an expansive, living forest contrast sharply with later scenes of fenced plantations and monoculture farming (Tomy 291-304). Such shifts reflect historical processes documented by Kerala environmental historians, who note that postcolonial agrarian capitalism intensified ecological degradation, soil depletion, and displacement of tribal communities (Gadgil and Guha 100-105). Tomy critiques the ideology of progress—roads, plantations, real estate, hydropower projects—that promises prosperity but delivers ecological ruin and cultural displacement. This critique aligns with post development theorist Arturo Escobar's perspective, who argue that development often serves as a tool of neo-colonial control (Escobar 3-25).

The novel situates the destruction of Wayanad's ecology within the developmentalist ethos of post-independence Kerala. Despite the state's progressive reputation in social indicators, environmental policies—such as the expansion of eucalyptus plantations, land reforms favouring settler farmers over indigenous communities, and construction of dams—aggravated ecological fragility. Tomy depicts this violence not through abstract commentary but through intimate, embodied scenes: rivers turning toxic, elephants losing migration routes, and women foraging deeper into the forest as accessible resources disappear. This aligns with Partha Chatterjee's argument that postcolonial states often replicate colonial developmental logics—privileging urban and caste-dominant interests while marginalizing indigenous populations (33-48).

Cultural erasure forms another layer of violence. As settlements expanded, Adivasi rituals, songs, forest lore, and oral histories faced systematic suppression. *Valli*'s narrative method—non-linear, fragmented, and polyphonic—reflects this historical rupture. The novel not only tells stories but also reconstructs a cultural memory endangered by displacement and deforestation. In this sense, Tomy participates in what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence"—the incremental, invisible, long-term violence inflicted through ecological destruction and cultural dispossession (2-14). The slow violence of environmental degradation is inseparable from the slower, subtler violence of forgetting.

#### **Reclaiming Land and Womanhood: A Critical Reading of *Valli***

Sheela Tomy's *Valli*, first published in Malayalam in 2019 and translated into English by Jayasree Kalathil in 2022, emerges as a powerful ecofictional narrative grounded in the geographical, historical, and cultural particularities of Wayanad, Kerala. The novel's dedication—"For forests ravaged by fires / For people rendered voiceless / For languages without scripts" (Tomy 1)—sets the tone for a text that is simultaneously intimate and expansive, grounded and multiscalar. Like Arundhati Roy's invocation of the "unconsoled" (1) in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Tomy's work intertwines individual and collective suffering, placing human and non-human worlds in a

shared frame of vulnerability. The narrative spans three generations and exposes how land, memory, culture, and identity resist erasure even as they undergo radical disturbance. Through this scope, *Valli* positions place as a key organizing principle, using the specificity of Wayanad to articulate broader critiques of environmental degradation, patriarchal oppression, and anthropocentric violence.

From its opening pages, the novel aligns itself with an eco-spatial understanding of narrative. The introductory list of meanings of the word *Valli*—including vine, earth, and woman— (Tomy 7) anticipates the ecofeminist resonances that thread throughout the text. The novel's structure, which incorporates letters, diary entries, folklore, songs, scripture, and filmic references, underscores the multiplicity of voices needed to articulate the complex relationship between humans and their environment. While this variety contributes to the novel's richness, it also demands attentive reading due to the density of narrative techniques and the wide cast of characters. Nevertheless, these devices reinforce the novel's central themes: displacement, resilience, ecological transformation, and the interdependence of human and non-human life.

The vivid opening depiction of Kalluvayal— "a dense, deep forest"—contrasts starkly with the grim image of its present condition as a place of "thin rivers" and "bald forests" (Tomy 1–2). This juxtaposition foregrounds the ecological losses that structure the novel's trajectory. Kalluvayal functions not merely as setting but as an active presence, embodying what critic Lowell Wyse identifies as a convergence of "nature, space and story" (4). By anchoring the narrative in this place, Tomy foregrounds the entanglement of landscape and lived experience. The forest's transformations mirror those of the community that inhabits it, reinforcing the ecofeminist principle that violence against land and women operates through parallel logics of control and exploitation.

The ecofeminist dimensions become particularly evident in the lives of Sara, Kali, and Annamakutty, whose experiences reflect various forms of patriarchal subjugation and involuntary migration. Sara's elopement with Thommichan—forced by fear of caste- and class-based disapproval—exposes the social pressures that restrict women's autonomy. Kali's trajectory is even more tragic: first raped, then shamed and rejected by her own family under the guise of moral policing, she becomes a symbol of patriarchal hypocrisy and abandonment. Annamakutty's movement into her husband Ivachan's household initially appears to promise stability but quickly devolves into isolation and emotional suffocation. Her transition from a home filled with music to one dominated by rebukes and reprimands exemplifies how marriage can operate as a mechanism of containment rather than liberation. These stories collectively reveal how gendered displacement is woven into familial, social, and cultural systems, situating women's suffering within a broader ecology of loss.

Tomy intensifies these connections by aligning female characters with the forest itself. Moments such as Lucy's attempt to pluck a *chempakam* flower—frustrated by its height yet struck by the softness of the tree (Tomy 43)—highlight the ways in which women perceive and interact with the natural world as kin. Susan's diary entry declaring that women storytellers would write "about forests, not places" (Tomy 278) suggests that women's narratives are inherently ecological, shaped by forms of relationality that extend beyond human concerns. As flora and fauna disappear alongside the displacement of women, *Valli* illustrates how patriarchal and ecological violence are mutually reinforcing, making the novel a distinctly ecofeminist intervention (Nataraj 253-259).

The novel's critique extends beyond patriarchy to condemn the anthropocentric exploitation of Kalluvayal. As forests are cleared and natural resources extracted, the land responds with floods and fires, only to be further subdued by technological advances that humans deploy in the name of progress. Through these dynamics, the text gestures toward post humanist thought, questioning the presumed superiority of humans and acknowledging the agency of non-human beings and systems (Wolfe 17). The correspondence between Susan and her daughter Tessa exemplifies this shift. While Susan laments her separation from home and reflects on themes of freedom and bondage,

Tessa describes her creation of a robot, Betty, and ponders whether machines—and humans—can truly understand concepts such as obedience and love. Tessa’s assertion that “it’s not machines that don’t know how to love; it’s human beings” (Tomy 100) signals an inversion of anthropocentric assumptions and aligns with Donna Haraway’s notion of “collaborative” and “competitive entanglements” (19-37) between humans and non-humans. Through such dialogues, the novel pushes readers to contemplate a world in which technological and organic life coexist in shifting, unpredictable relations.

Despite its preoccupation with loss and disruption, *Valli* also foregrounds the power of relationality and community. Characters often support one another through networks of care that transcend biological ties. Figures like Basavanan, Annamakutty, Tommiachan, and Lucyamma sustain intergenerational bonds that shape the emotional landscape of Kalluvayal. These relationships counteract narratives of isolation and despair, demonstrating modes of survival rooted in reciprocity rather than domination. Myth, folklore, and oral storytelling further enrich the community’s resilience. Even as the novel foreshadows tragedies—such as rape, natural disasters, and disappearances—it implies that collective consciousness and resistance remain possible, and even necessary, in the face of systemic harm.

Ultimately, *Valli* stands as a significant contribution to contemporary Indian literature, particularly in the fields of ecocriticism, geocriticism, and literary spatial studies. Its focus on the Global South, indigenous histories, and postcolonial landscapes provides valuable material for scholars examining how marginalized communities navigate environmental and socio-political upheaval. Tomy’s novel urges readers to rethink assumptions of human supremacy and consider instead an ethic of complementarity between humans, non-humans, and place. Through its layered narrative and ecological consciousness, *Valli* calls for renewed attention to the interwoven fates of land, women, and community, offering a timely reminder of the urgent need to restore harmony within our shared environment.

#### **Ecological Memory, Resistance and Ecofeminist Agency in *Valli***

*Valli* stages Wayanad as an eco-social archive: a landscape where folklore, gendered histories, extractive capitalism, caste and religious politics, and the longevity of indigenous knowledge converge. The novel repeatedly links the fate of the land to the fate of women, and the word *Valli* itself (plant/climbing vine; land; young woman; daily wage) becomes a central metaphor that fuses botanical, social, and gendered registers. Reading *Valli* through the lens of ecofeminist agency helps us to shift attention from individualist or merely psychological readings of the novel’s women to an analysis of collective, place-centered, and relational forms of resistance enacted by and around women. Put simply, Tomy’s text stages the co-constitutive oppression of women and nature, and it imagines plural forms of agency that are rooted in ecological interdependence, embodied memory, and anti-extractive praxis.

Set primarily in the Kalluvayal region of Wayanad, *Valli* moves across time registers — folklore, oral histories, and contemporary encounters between Adivasi communities, migrants, state agents, entrepreneurs, and women whose lives are shaped by ritual economies (including the Devadasi histories) and by the extraction of land for tourism, plantations, and mining. The novel’s episodic and polyphonic form interweaves multiple viewpoints (including Unniyachi, Susan, Tessa, Sara, and the communal memory of the forest/land) and uses local myths and seasonal rhythms to slow narrative time and to insist on continuity between human histories and ecological processes. The book weaves the multilayered tales of land, women, forest and the downtrodden to create an amazing forest of allegory, using the multi-valence of *Valli* to make land and woman contiguous categories rather than simply analogous ones.

One of *Valli*’s central interventions is to render extractivism as a gendered and caste-inflected process. Tomy shows how the commercialization of the landscape — through plantations, tourist enclaves, and land transfers — systematically erodes Adivasi livelihoods and cultural practices, with women bearing specific burdens. Extractive projects disrupt seasonal work patterns, ritual

practices, and the reproductive economies that sustain community life; they also transform material relations so that female labour (both reproductive and waged) is devalued, displaced, or monetized in ways that compound precarity. This pattern mirrors the arguments of socialist ecofeminists who link capitalism's need for cheap labour and resources to the simultaneous commodification of women's work and natural commodities. The novel captures social dimensions encountered due to man's greed and narrates the degeneration of Wayanad into an ecosystem of social and ecological violence.

Tomy also foregrounds caste and religious politics as structural mediators of ecological harm. The erasure of Adivasi land rights and the introduction of market logics are not neutral processes but are deeply inflected by caste hierarchies and by state and non-state actors who benefit from dispossession. Women from marginal positions — Devadasi descendants like Unniyachi, working women like Susan, or younger women like Tessa and Sara — experience multiple violences that are simultaneously gendered, caste-based, and ecological. This intersectional formulation resonates with contemporary ecofeminist scholarship that insists on attending to race, caste, and class when theorizing the links between gender and nature (Ruether 140).

Several women in the novel act as repositories of place-knowledge — seasonal calendars, herbal knowledge, ritual timings, and oral histories that encode land stewardship. These practices are a form of epistemic agency: they resist epistemic erasure by preserving alternative knowledges that contest extractive ideologies. Unniyachi's life-history as Devadasi, for instance, is not merely a personal story but a site where ritual economies and plant lore persist as counter-archives to market narratives. Ecofeminism argue that such embodied knowledges constitute a form of resistance precisely because they refuse the reduction of ecology to a resource base for capital (Mies and Shiva 9). Tomy's scenes of women collecting seeds, naming grasses, and reciting local myths enact what Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies would describe as reproductive knowledge and subsistence practices that challenge capitalist commodification (Mies and Shiva 10).

A central theoretical pivot in ecofeminist critique is the denunciation of the dualistic thought that separates reason from nature and privileges mastery (Plumwood 190). Tomy implicitly stages the violence of this logic: developers, bureaucrats, and market actors treat Wayanad as a set of resources to be reorganized for profit, while women and Adivasi communities articulate alternative modes of value. Val Plumwood's analysis of the "mastery of nature" (120) helps us read *Valli* as a literary indictment of epistemologies that naturalize domination; Plumwood shows how dualistic thinking converts relational existence into exploitable objects, and Tomy's narrative dramatizes the everyday effects of this conversion on women's embodied lives. The novel thus becomes a field-test of Plumwood's thesis, where mastery thinking reigns, relationships fracture, and the land is rendered disposable (141). At the same time, *Valli* refuses simplistic pastoral nostalgia. Tomy is careful to avoid romanticizing pre-capitalist life; her ecofeminist reading is materialist in tone — it recognizes internal social contradictions (gendered ritual hierarchies, the politics of the Devadasi system) even as it critiques extractivist transformations. This balanced approach aligns with ecofeminist insistence on complex, intersectional analysis rather than a mere return to an idealized nature (Kings 63-87).

Ecofeminism insists that women's experiences of environmental degradation are gendered, embodied, and often shaped by their role as caretakers of land and community (Mies and Shiva 46). In *Valli*, the stories of Unniyachi, Sara, and Susan highlight the intersections of gender, ecology, and trauma. Unniyachi is the novel's ecological memory-keeper. She represents indigenous matrilineal knowledge systems that link land, birth, rituals, and forest stewardship. Her body itself becomes a site of ecological inscription: the rhythms of her labour, menstruation, childbirth, and healing practices echo the rhythms of the forest.

Unniyachi functions as a living archive. Her biography — as a figure linked to Devadasi practices and to older ritual economies — allows the reader to see how ritualized attachment to land and communal rites contains knowledge that resists commodification. Unniyachi's memory work and her refusal to fully assimilate to market logics articulate a refusal rooted in embodied tradition. Her



agency is epistemic and mnemonic: she refuses erasure by preserving modes of relating to the land that are not mediated by cash value. This echoes ecofeminist points about the politicized content of reproductive and ritual labour.

Unniyachi's foraging practices—identifying edible leaves, medicinal tubers, and forest mushrooms—exemplify what Agarwal calls “subsistence ecologies,” wherein women's labour forms the backbone of sustainable environmental practices (152). Unniyachi's knowledge is neither mystical nor essentialist; it is learned through generational transmission, labour, and intimate relationship with place. Her eventual displacement and death symbolize the rupture of ecological continuity. Yet her memory persists through Sara and Susan, demonstrating ecofeminism's emphasis on matrilineal inheritance and resilience.

Tessa and Sara (younger women in the novel) represent emergent forms of ecological consciousness: they absorb the memories of elders yet must invent new languages of resistance in the shadow of tourism, NGOs, and state development projects. Their agency is hybrid: part rooted in local lore, part engaged with newer forms of activism and legal claims. The novel's timeline — moving between past and present — allows these younger characters to inherit both constraints and resources, thereby modelling ecofeminist notions of intergenerational and intersectional praxis (Kings 63-87).

Sara embodies the tensions between modernity and indigenous rootedness. Educated and mobile, she experiences the forest both as home and as a site of loss. Her narrative grapples with guilt, nostalgia, and political awakening. She becomes increasingly aware of how patriarchal and developmentalist ideologies shape environmental destruction. Sara's ecological consciousness is shaped by personal trauma: deforestation coincides with gendered violence and cultural erasure. Ecofeminists argue that women across the world experience environmental decline at intimate bodily levels—through food insecurity, water scarcity, or toxic exposures (Warren 89; Shiva 122). Sara's story illustrates this entanglement as she witnesses the contamination of rivers, the disappearance of wild species, and the increasing vulnerability of Adivasi women.

Susan is a figure who embodies the contradictions of modernity and care labour. She negotiates paid work and unpaid reproductive labour, and her movements between the forest and the town exemplify the double bind many women face when ecological devastation forces migration or shifts in labour regimes. Susan's choices — managing household responsibilities while participating in local efforts to protect land — show a pragmatic, situated agency that juggles survival and resistance. Tomy's rendering allows us to see how ecological crises feminize precarity and how women's agency often appears as adaptive, improvisational labour rather than dramatic protest.

Susan represents ecofeminist agency in action. Her involvement in local environmental movements mirrors real-life Adivasi women activists in Kerala who mobilize against land grabs, mining projects, and ecological displacement. Susan challenges both casteist patriarchy and state-led environmental policies, embodying what scholars call “intersectional environmental justice” (Whyte 19–29). Her activism moves beyond nostalgia for lost pasts to articulate a vision for sustainable, community-led futures. Through her, Tomy emphasizes that ecofeminism is not merely philosophical but political- tied to land rights, legal battles, and grassroots mobilization. A key strength of *Valli* is that it does not idealize Adivasi communities. Tomy depicts internal conflicts, economic hardships, and generational tensions. Yet she affirms the epistemic value of indigenous ecological knowledge. This knowledge is relational, ethical, and sustainable, contrasting sharply with extractive logics of capitalist forestry and plantation agriculture.

The novel repeatedly stages communal acts of remembrance — funerary rituals, storytelling circles, and the preservation of place-names — that operate as political counter-memories. Rather than private grief, these moments perform communal refusal: they keep alive the histories that extractivist processes aim to erase. Ecofeminist theory recognizes mourning and memory as practices that produce political subjectivity; by maintaining the continuity between past and present, they also produce claims to place and to future existence (Mies and Shiva 224). In *Valli*,

folklore and ritual sustain alternative ontologies of the human–nonhuman relation, thereby becoming a basis for collective agency.

The novel foregrounds quotidian acts — withholding labour, refusing to sell certain plots, collective harvesting, and the passing on of survival strategies — as forms of resistance that, while not spectacular, are durable. Ecofeminist praxis often centers such everyday economic strategies (subsistence farming, seed-keeping, cooperative labour) as crucial to undermining extractive economies that depend on atomized, disposable labour. In *Valli*, women’s negotiation of daily wages, their control over small tracts of land, and the negotiation of rituals around wage measures serve to sustain community life in the face of dispossession.

Tomy’s portrayal of intergenerational female ties — elders teaching younger women songs, rituals, or plant-lore — evidences a transmission of ecological and feminist knowledge that functions as institutional memory. These intergenerational practices constitute a networked agency: women do not act as isolated actors, but as nodes in living genealogies of care and resistance. This reading aligns with ecofeminist calls to reconceptualize political agency as rooted in care networks and relational obligations rather than in autonomous, liberal subjectivity (Mies and Shiva 20).

The novel’s focus on a single ecological-cultural region (Wayanad) allows it to elaborate the multiple senses of the term *Valli* and thereby to show how language, economy, and gendered labour interlock in a very specific place. This fine-grained localism reinforces ecofeminist arguments about situated knowledge (Haraway 575-599). Moreover, *Valli* does not treat folklore as pure romantic residue; instead, folklore is a living repository of ecological relations that is threatened by market regimes. The novel thus models how cultural forms can be political tools for ecological resistance. This emphasis responds to critiques of ecofeminism that either romanticize tradition or ignore material inequalities (Shaji 73-76).

Indigenous stewardship in the novel includes seed preservation, protection of sacred groves, seasonal migration practices, and multispecies relational ethics. These practices challenge patriarchal and colonial epistemologies that reduce forests to timber, commodities, or tourist attractions. Ecofeminist scholars argue that stewardship rooted in community and care can offer alternative ecological paradigms in the Anthropocene (Gaard 215–234). *Valli* demonstrates this through characters who resist destructive development projects, reclaim communal lands, and restore ecological commons. Care—embodied, emotional, communal—emerges as a political force. Women in *Valli* engage in what Joan Tronto calls “political care”: caring not only for family but for land, community, memory, and justice (127–142). This care is not passive; it mobilizes resistance, fosters solidarity, and counters environmental destruction.

### **Narrative Structure and Polyphonic Voices**

Fragmented narrative form of the novel mirrors the cyclical temporality of ecological processes. Rather than following a linear plot, the novel moves through memory, ancestral stories, contemporary crises, and spectral presences. This temporal structure parallels ecofeminist and indigenous conceptions of time—non-linear, relational, and embedded in ecological rhythms rather than mechanical sequences. Such narrative strategies challenge Western historiographic models that privilege progress, development, and linear modernity. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, modern historical consciousness marginalizes non-modern temporalities, especially those tied to the land and to non-human agencies (97–113). Tomy’s novel resists this epistemology by foregrounding Adivasi temporalities that move through cycles of loss, resistance, and renewal.

Formally, the novel uses recurring vegetal imagery and placenames as organizing tropes; its translation retains the indigenous cadences and the novel’s insistence on local lexicons, thereby keeping the ecological lexicon at the center of narrative meaning. The text’s formal strategies — shifting focalizations, interlaced folklore narratives, and attention to labour practices (daily wages, paddy measures) — all foreground how economic regimes alter ecologies and thereby transform gendered social formations. *Valli* is less a novel about individual rescue or moral self-fashioning,

and more a text committed to representing the systemic vanishing of a place and its people under development.

The act of naming — the multilingual register in which local terms, placenames, and botanical lexicons feature — is itself political in *Valli*. The polysemy of *Valli* enacts the entanglement of human and nonhuman signification. Translator Jayasree Kalathil's rendering plays a crucial role in preserving these semantic resonances for an English-reading audience; her choices preserve the novel's ecological vocabulary and thereby make the text legible as an ecofeminist archive. The translation retains local cadences and ensures that the land's conceptual weight is not domesticated into a generic 'environmental' theme but remains anchored to the lived linguistics of Wayanad. From an ecofeminist standpoint, the politics of naming is important because the colonization of local lexicons frequently precedes physical dispossession: to rename a place is often to begin its transformation into an extractable resource. Tomy's resisting of this renaming registers an anti-colonial ecofeminist ethic.

The forest in *Valli* is more than setting; it is an active narrative agent. Rivers, animals, ancestral spirits, and trees possess voice, memory, and agency. This recalls Plumwood's call for recognizing non-human agency and decentering human exceptionalism (182-203). The forest speaks through shifts in season, absences of birds, the sudden appearance of elephants, and the recurrent motif of water—pure, polluted, or absent. Ecofeminist narrative theory suggests that literature can represent non-human agency through metaphor, polyphony, and multispecies storytelling (Oppermann 305–317). Tomy adopts these techniques, challenging anthropocentric narratives and presenting the forest as a character with its own history, grief, and endurance.

By interspersing ancestral stories with contemporary events, *Valli* constructs memory as a form of ecological and cultural resistance. In the novel, remembering is political because erasure is central to the colonial and capitalist project. Oral histories passed on by women—songs, rituals, plant lore—become counter-archives that resist dominant narratives. Sara's recollections of her grandmother, for instance, are not merely sentimental but function as repositories of ecological knowledge essential for survival. This resonates with anthropological research indicating that Adivasi women in Wayanad maintain extensive knowledge of medicinal plants, soil cycles, and foraging practices (Sandesh, Kumar and Smitha 3489-3495).

### **Conclusion**

*Valli* stands as a major contribution to ecofeminist and indigenous literary traditions. Through its portrayal of Wayanad's ecological history, its centering of Adivasi women's voices, and its critique of colonial and patriarchal modernity, the novel articulates a vision of ecological justice grounded in care, memory, and relationality. The novel does not offer simplistic resolutions. Instead, it proposes alternative futures grounded in ecological reciprocity, indigenous land rights, women-led stewardship, cultural memory, and multispecies ethics. The forest does not return to a pristine past, nor does the community embrace modernity uncritically. Instead, Tomy imagines a world where ecological healing is intertwined with social justice and cultural resurgence. The novel resists tidy resolutions: instead, it pauses with the durability of memory and the persistence of networks of care. This is an ecofeminist aesthetic decision: it refuses both tragic fatalism and miraculous redemption, choosing instead to make the reader accountable to sustained practices of care.

For Tomy, reclaiming the forest is inseparable from reclaiming the self—especially for women whose bodies, labour, and memories carry the scars of environmental and cultural violence. *Valli*'s ecofeminism is not metaphorical but material, rooted in the lived realities of Adivasi women and their ongoing struggles for land, dignity, and ecological survival. As global environmental crises intensify, the novel offers a powerful reminder that sustainable futures require listening to indigenous women, acknowledging ecological histories, and embracing relational models of stewardship that challenge dominant paradigms of progress.

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**NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN EXILE: A STUDY OF DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN  
CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S *ARRANGED MARRIAGE***

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**Abstract**

Diasporic writing in novels, short stories, poems, travelogues, and essays has long been an integral part of postcolonial literature. It portrays the emotional and psychological experiences of individuals who have migrated from their homeland, reflecting their struggles to reconcile the past with the present. A deep longing for the homeland and an attachment to native traditions, religions, and languages characterize this form of writing. The sense of loss, alienation, nostalgia, and cultural dislocation becomes central to the diasporic consciousness, giving rise to rich narratives of belonging and identity. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, one of the most prominent writers in contemporary diasporic literature, powerfully captures these themes in her *American Book Award*-winning collection of short stories, *Arranged Marriage*. Through this work, she portrays the emotional landscape of immigrant women caught between two worlds — the expectations of Indian tradition and the realities of Western culture. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni addresses a range of social and personal issues including racism, economic disparity, domestic abuse, miscarriage, and divorce. These experiences are intertwined with themes of identity crisis and repression, making her characters' journeys deeply relatable and poignant. Through vivid storytelling, she presents how displacement transforms individuals, especially women, as they confront societal norms and personal desires. Her depiction of diasporic life reveals both the pain of separation and the possibility of renewal, highlighting how migration shapes identity, belonging, and self-understanding.

**Keywords:** Alienation, Motherhood, Divorce, Diaspora, Identity Crisis, Death, Repression.

Diaspora studies constitute a vital field within postcolonial literary scholarship, examining the cultural, psychological, and social experiences of communities who live away from their geographic origins. The Jewish, British, Chinese, African, Russian, Turkish, Greek, Lebanese, Korean, and Iranian diasporas show how people have moved and changed cultures over time. Parallel to these vast traditions is the South Asian diaspora, whose literary expressions form a major component of postcolonial literature. Writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meera Syal, Anita Desai, Sunetra Gupta, Padma Hejmadi, Anjana Appachana, and Meena Alexander have explored themes of migration, identity negotiation, gendered displacement, and cultural hybridity. Among this celebrated group, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has secured a distinguished place for her profound engagement with the struggles and triumphs of Indian immigrant women.

Divakaruni's own migration to America at the age of nineteen shaped her consciousness as a writer. Her early years in the United States exposed her to racial prejudice, economic challenges, and cultural alienation. These experiences inform her literary voice, especially in her award-winning debut short story collection *Arranged Marriage* (1995). This text portrays the complexities of diasporic consciousness—the awareness of living in-between cultures, emotionally tethered to the homeland yet confronted by the realities of the host culture. Divakaruni's protagonists grapple with emotional isolation, cultural conflict, domestic abuse, gendered



marginalization, and shifting identities as they navigate unfamiliar spaces. Through intimate portraits of women negotiating their roles as wives, daughters, and individuals, Divakaruni offers a compelling representation of diaspora not merely as a geographical displacement but as a psychological and existential condition.

Diasporic consciousness in *Arranged Marriage* can be critically examined through key postcolonial theorists: Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, and Paul Gilroy. Their ideas illuminate the hybrid identities, cultural dislocations, and emotional negotiations embedded in Divakaruni's narratives. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "third space" is central to understanding characters who occupy liminal cultural zones. According to Bhabha, cultural identity is never fixed but constantly negotiated in spaces where different cultural values intersect. Divakaruni's protagonists frequently inhabit this third space—they carry Indian cultural expectations but must simultaneously adapt to American norms. Their identities become hybrid constructions shaped by dislocation, memory, and negotiation.

Stuart Hall argues that identity is not an essence but a process shaped by history, culture, and change. Hall posits that diasporic identities are perpetually generating and regenerating themselves through transformation and differentiation. This theoretical insight explains the evolving subjectivities of Divakaruni's characters, who must continuously redefine themselves in response to displacement and cultural conflict.

Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space emphasizes that diaspora is not only about migrants but also the interaction between migrants, non-migrants, and cultural structures. In *Arranged Marriage*, diaspora space emerges in homes, workplaces, airports, marriages, and memories—sites where Indian and American cultural logics collide, producing both conflict and creativity. Paul Gilroy's focus on transnational identities and the movement between cultures provides another lens for Divakaruni's characters. Gilroy argues that diasporic subjects are shaped by routes, not roots. The journeys undertaken by Divakaruni's women—emotional, physical, and cultural—demonstrate identity as constantly reshaped by migration. Together, these theoretical perspectives ground our reading of Divakaruni's work as a rich exploration of diasporic consciousness, displacement, and identity negotiation.

Divakaruni's protagonists repeatedly confront cultural expectations that clash with personal desires and individual agency. In "The Word Love," the narrator acknowledges the tension between her mother's traditional expectations and her attempt to live independently in America. She reflects: "My mother had taught me that duty to the family was everything, yet here I was with someone she would never accept" (Divakaruni). This tension exemplifies Bhabha's notion of the third space, when identity is constructed through negotiation rather than inheritance. Similarly, "Clothes" symbolizes the protagonist's cultural transition. When she admires the bright American outfits in California, she describes them as "colors that made me feel like someone new, someone I had not yet learned to be" (Divakaruni). Clothing becomes a metaphor for transformation, cultural adaptation, and the desire for agency.

Migration in *Arranged Marriage* is deeply gendered. Many of Divakaruni's female characters travel to America through *Arranged Marriages*, often without agency. In "The Bats," the narrator reveals the emotional burden placed on women: "We left one kind of fear behind only to find another waiting for us" (Divakaruni). This line captures the double exile—leaving the homeland but not escaping patriarchal control. In "The Disappearance," the protagonist articulates the alienation of domestic confinement: "The silence of the apartment pressed on me like another person" (Divakaruni). The immigrant home becomes a site of loneliness where women struggle to assert their identities. Another example is the story "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs." The main character's aunt tells her, "America is not what you think it is..." "Here, your brownness becomes a burden" (Divakaruni). This conversation puts racial awareness at the center of how people in the diaspora build their identities. In *Arranged Marriage*, Divakaruni captures the everyday realities of diasporic life through detailed observations of cultural difference. The narrative highlights how the American lifestyle—symbolized by the 24-hour convenience store where Somesh works—

contrasts sharply with the rhythms of Indian life, where shops customarily close early, especially at mealtimes or in the afternoon heat. Somesh reminds Sumita that alcohol consumption is not morally condemned in America but normalized as part of social culture, subtly introducing her to the cultural reorientation that exile demands (20–21).

Divakaruni portrays how immigrants arrive in foreign countries expecting freedom and self-fulfillment, yet soon confront the clash between the values of their homeland and the demands of their new environment. Sumita is a newlywed Indian woman living in the United States. She believes very strongly that a good wife must be respectable by serving guests, covering her head with her sari, avoiding her husband's name, and following the rules that define modesty in traditional Indian homes. These customs, strictly maintained even in their California home, heighten her sense of displacement and remind her constantly of India.

Although her life in America resembles the structured domesticity typical of Indian households, Sumita's emotional landscape shifts dramatically when her husband is killed at his workplace. Despite the tragedy, she hesitates to return to India, fearing that reclaiming her former identity would be more difficult than navigating life in a country she perceives as "dangerous." Her decision reflects the deep internal conflict and the complex process of assimilation that many first-generation immigrants experience.

"Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs" also has a similar story about identity. In this story, Jayanti moves from Calcutta to Chicago to live with her aunt Pratima and uncle Bikram. As a young woman belonging to the first generation of Indian-Americans, Jayanti clings to the memories of her past, considering them essential to her sense of self. However, upon arriving in America, she finds her relatives' cramped apartment far less glamorous than she imagined. The room assigned to her, barely the size of her bathroom back home, accentuates her sense of dislocation. Even her monogrammed luggage becomes a reminder of her privileged life in India—something she hides under the bed to avoid discomfort (41).

Divakaruni, like many diasporic writers, explores the universal human struggle for identity in unfamiliar territories. Her stories foreground themes of alienation, nostalgia, and fractured belonging—emotions that dominate the immigrant experience. Jayanti, who comes to America with high hopes, faces terrible bigotry on the streets as a bunch of youngsters throw insults at her and her aunt and hit them with dirty snow. The incident destabilizes her understanding of race and belonging, forcing her to reevaluate her privileged identity as an upper-class Indian in the context of American racial hierarchies.

Jayanti's longing for her home in Calcutta becomes stronger with each passing day. At the same time, she can't stop thinking about America, which is represented by the lovely blond hand of the flight attendant who first welcomed her with a warm towel. The picture stands for her conflicting wants: the tug of home and the appeal of the unknown. Her beautiful dream—"Will I marry a prince from a far-off magic land / Where the pavements are silver and the roofs all gold?"—shows the constant struggle between fantasy and reality, between feeling like you belong and feeling like you don't, that molds the diasporic mentality throughout *Arranged Marriage*.

An immigrant like Jayanti is constantly suspended between imagined and lived realities, between memories of the past and the demands of the present. Her experience embodies the duality of diasporic existence—the tension between the symbolic world of longing and the material world of adaptation. Jayanti stands on the balcony of her aunt's house during a severe winter. She notices that the "piercing pain" of freezing snow on her hands goes away for a while as she thinks about the future she had previously dreamed of in America. This scene shows how imagination may be a safe place for immigrants to work out their new identities.

The conflict between personal ambition and conventional expectations and the collision of cultures are two important parts of the diasporic experience in *Arranged Marriage*. Divakaruni illustrates how immigrant women, in particular, are burdened with negotiating both the tangible insecurities of exile and the emotional weight of familial obligations. They often find themselves navigating between the remnants of old patriarchal norms and the emergence of new ones in their

adopted countries. The spatial and cultural dislocation they experience intensifies their struggle to build a stable identity in foreign surroundings.

In "Perfect Life," Meera, an Indian woman living in America, chooses to pursue education and a career over conventional domestic roles. Her encounter with Krishna, a six-year-old orphan, however, alters her understanding of motherhood and responsibility. Her growing attachment to the boy leads her to envision a life in which she accompanies him to school, takes him to amusement parks, and shares a future as his single parent. Krishna's sudden removal from the foster care system devastates Meera, pushing her toward a momentary impulse to abandon her life in America and seek security through an *Arranged Marriage* back in India. Yet she resists this impulse, recognizing that returning would be a far greater mistake than the emotional choices she had already made.

Loneliness and emotional displacement plague many immigrants in Divakaruni's stories. In "Affair," Abha recounts the isolation of her friend Meena, who was unable to adjust to American life because her husband, Srikant, was absorbed in his professional obligations. Meena's solitude becomes especially painful after her miscarriage, drawing her closer to Ashok—Abha's husband—who shares her unspoken grief over childlessness. Meena finds solace in confiding her deepest fears and desires to him, overlooking the emotional toll these places on Abha. Meanwhile, Abha grapples with her own insecurity and sense of betrayal, illuminating the inner fractures that diasporic women often endure.

"Meeting Mrinal," the final story in the collection, presents another dimension of diasporic disillusionment. Asha envies the independence and professional success her childhood friend Mrinal enjoys in England. However, Asha's perception of Mrinal's "perfect life" collapses when Mrinal confesses that she, too, has been struggling but has been pretending to be happy. This revelation intensifies Asha's own grief—stemming from her divorce from Mahesh and her strained relationship with her teenage son, Dinesh. Reflecting on the mythological ideals she once tried to embody—like Sita and Kunti—Asha begins to understand that Mahesh may also have carried unrealistic heroic expectations for himself. She recognizes that both men and women are trapped by illusions of perfection, and that the notion of the "perfect life" is itself hollow.

The women in Divakaruni's stories embody the psychological tensions faced by many South Asian immigrants who attempt to navigate between inherited cultural norms and the expectations of American society. In traditional Indian contexts, women are expected to uphold moral values, maintain familial stability, and adhere to prescriptive gender roles—norms that many women in the diaspora continue to bear. Sandra Ponzanesi's observation in "In My Mother's House" resonates with these narratives: immigrant women are often seen as cultural custodians, responsible for preserving tradition and maintaining emotional continuity in a foreign land. Practices such as traditional dress, domestic rituals, and gendered responsibilities become symbolic markers of cultural survival.

Divakaruni's "Arranged Marriage" is set in both India and the United States. It shows the hardships of Indian-born women who are trying to find their own identities while living in two different cultures. The stories deal with hard topics including racism, interracial relationships, socioeconomic inequality, abortion, and divorce. They also show the personal struggles of women trying to find love, duty, independence, and a sense of belonging. Divakaruni's powerful depictions of loss, longing, and adaptability show that living in a diaspora is not just about being in a different place, but also about having a different way of thinking that is full of paradoxes and emotional turmoil. As an immigrant herself, Divakaruni brings authenticity to the experiences she depicts, capturing the nuanced challenges faced by Indian women in America. *Arranged Marriage*, therefore, stands as both a collection of stories and a composite reflection of diasporic women's lives—their aspirations, anxieties, and resilient negotiations of identity in exile.

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**ARTISANS OF TRADITION: EXPLORING THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ROLE  
OF INFORMAL POTTER WORKERS IN INDIA: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** This particular systematic review paper aims at examining the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of India's informal potters with a focus on how these skills contribute to economies and the preservation of cultural practices. In some Indian villages, informal potters who are sometimes marginalized in the academic debate and economic policies are necessary in the preservation of culture and creation of job opportunities. **Method:** In order to undertake a systematic review which incorporates all the relevant literature across various disciplines, literature for this review was searched on academic and various literature databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus and ProQuest. The review explains the socioeconomic status, experiences and cultural significance of these potters, difficulties they face in their day to day life. **Findings:** The analysis showed the great impact that informal potter especially women have in safeguarding customs and practices especially in the rural and indigenous societies where pottery is practiced. These artisans for instance, sell valuable and useful articles that are of value in the context of the society thereby making an effective contribution to the economy. Nonetheless, they have a number of challenges such as weak economies, a poor market and a lack of government and private sector support. The research recommends certain specific investigations, such as inadequate market access and skill training support initiatives and sounds such policies to address the issues. **Conclusion:** The research concludes with the observation that, besides making pottery, informal potters can also be regarded as custodians of culture. As such, the importance of these workers should be recognized and their contributions appreciated to safeguard the pottery industry against the effects of the contemporary economy.

**Keywords:** Potter, Informal work, Cultural preservation, Obstacles, Social security

**I. Introduction**

Informal potters in India operationalizing livelihoods and change while preserving cultural legacies simultaneously. Pottery is an age-old tradition within many communities: crafting pots, vessels, lamps and terracotta wares is a job and for many a familial practice passed down generations (India Water Portal, 2021). In pastoral India, a potter's wheel and kiln indicate uniqueness within the community and provide monetary sustenance. Pottery is primary for diverse everyday family activities, rituals, festivities and neighborhood market trade. It is the stuff embodiment of that culture within society for that people (The Indian Express, 2024). The mud works of these artisans express more than functional utility; they symbolize a whole community's inherited knowledge and local aesthetics core to its distinctiveness. But the globe for these informal potters is also altering. Industrial mechanization, cheaper monetary alternatives and changing customer habits all generate market pressure for conventional pottery. Due to rising prices of mud, inadequate access to markets and decline in demand for wonderfully crafted works, Nuagaon's potters in Odisha are

pivoting from ornate, ornamental pieces to essential utility ware like kulhads and biryani handis (Times of India, 2023).

As urbanization increases along with the availability of mass manufactured goods, the importance of hand-crafted pieces of pottery diminishes. The convenience of mass manufactured pottery as well as the cost factor makes consumers prefer the mass manufactured pottery over hand crafted wares (Millennium Post, 2019). Also, many of these artisans belong to caste pottery communities where pottery is hereditary and the younger generation is deterred from continuing the craft due to unstable earnings and other occupations (Business Standard, 2023). Recognition of informal potters must include their critical cultural and economic dual role. As for the economic role, their craft constitutes employment often within family units and servicing of auxiliary livelihoods, such as clay extraction, ware mould preparation, painting, transportation and local fair and bazaar official selling. Culturally, their wares express communal ideals and local rituals and serve as memory markers; as for example, clay cups (kulhars) as eco-friendly alternatives at tea stalls, earthen lamps during festivals, and terracotta idols in religious observances (The Indian Express, 2024).

These crafts shape the built environment of villages, contribute to local economies and maintain artisanal ecosystems. The importance of clay items lies not only in the material object but also in the intangible connection they create: the connection to place, to material culture and to community identity. These connections are important to understand the meaning of informal clay items and the informal pottery culture whereby no documented evidence exists but the items made are crucial to place and identity. The informal nature of this work, however, poses many challenges. Artisans are not able to access formal markets, finance and institutional support. They also lack training and resources to scale operations and defend themselves against exploitation. As high-quality clay and other raw materials become scarcer and more costly, access to fuel and kilns, as well as modern production methods become limited. As younger generations leave the craft, both the economic and cultural potential of that community is lost (India Water Portal, 2021; Reddy et al., 2024). For informal potters, the low cost of modern alternatives, exploitation of wages and the abandonment of traditional forms to meet market demands all risk the cultural quality as well as the economic potential of that craft.

For informal potters, the craft exists in a complex informal economy that reflects their integration and adaptation. It is planned and culturally rich, however, the economic integration is more of a deleterious shock. They are pushed to the economic margins and market integration becomes the predator, they lose their culture and their craft becomes a raw material for exploitation. The art of pottery is more than just an economic enterprise. It sheds light on the intersection of material culture, livelihood and identity. The informal potter's social economic contribution, as well as their role in preserving culture and sustaining livelihood, must be recognized. The challenges that these potters face need deeper comprehension: the need to preserve the craft while enabling a sustainable livelihood; the enabling of access to economic and material resources to markets while preserving the cultural integrity and the need to balance the polar opposites of tradition and metamorphosis. In this, potters are better appreciated as custodians of heritage and local economy actors while maintaining their equilibrium during turbulent times (Patel & Mehta, 2024; IICD, 2023).

## **II. Importance of the Study**

The research on the socio cultural and economic aspects of the informal potters of India has several issues. It starts by addressing the important topic of cultural preservation. Informal potters constitute a large section that holds great cultural significance as they have some traditions of pot making that seem to be unique for many. The importance of retaining these practices, which are not only significant in cultural sense but are also pillars in the many societies sense of self, is explained in the study. In particular, informal potters in rural and semi-urban areas add great value economically. Their work helps to support local economies by producing goods which are decorative and functional to a certain society. Other than the ceramics that they sell, they also



affect the economy and job opportunity of other businesses to a larger extent. By making their financial involvement the focal point, the study brings out the relevance of these artisans in economic growth and the challenges they face due to their informal nature. Research is essential when it comes to tackling issues of social justice and equity. Most informal potters are uneducated and utilize subsistence means and work within vulnerable, marginal regions with minimal or no access to markets and support systems. By identifying their social and economic status, the research encourages policies and programs that will enhance their conditions and their art. There is a strong emphasis that social fairness has to be first enacted in order to foster more recognition and help of informal artisans. On the other hand, by combining cultural studies and economics with social sciences, the interdisciplinary nature of this research makes the academic debate more interesting. It provides sociologists, politicians and academics an insightful understanding of how culture and economy shape the lives of people and how people develop their practices. Finally, the research argues that in order to empower informal potters it is paramount to mention and improve market access and education and other types of support. The reason behind this research is to ensure the survival of their trade, this is positive for the artisans and strengthening the cultural as well as economic aspects of their societies by recognizing them and addressing their concerns.

### **III. Objectives**

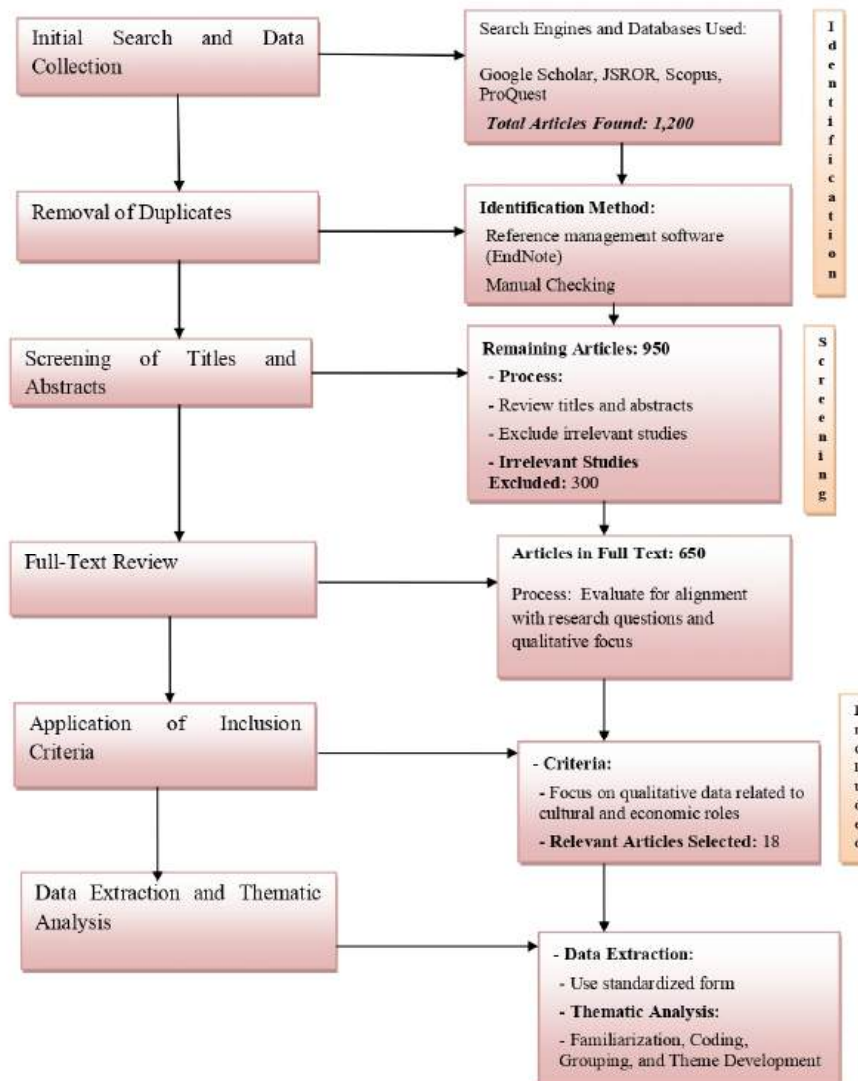
1. To study the contribution of informal potter workers in persevering culture of India.
2. To examine the socio-economic conditions of informal potter workers in India.

### **IV. Methodology**

In the first instance, and as an essential aspect of the systematic review, a broad gathering of literature on informal potters in India who possess cultural and economic significance was sought. To maintain an interdisciplinary orientation on the issue, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus and ProQuest as other academic and other literature databases were used. For example, “traditional pottery,” “informal potters,” “cultural heritage,” and “economic contribution” about India were some of the keywords used in the search. For up-to-date literature, the search was limited to publications published in between 2015–2024. English published studies that focused on the socioeconomic conditions, cultural significance and challenges of informal potters were selected. Following such thorough assessment of the abstracts and titles, a small number of articles located around key concepts were reviewed for quality and relevance through full text reading. Using a data extraction tool, the researchers aimed also at addressing research questions on the cultural and economic roles of potters, challenges faced by them and possible or actual interventions. The narrative was synthesized in such a way that it enabled the in-depth evaluation of the cultural and economic importance of these artists as well as the identification of gaps in the existing literature. Even to the extent to which the analysis was done, the intention of the findings is to assist in enhancing the understanding of the readers on the roles these peoples play towards the preservation of culture and development of local economies and the challenges associated with that. Figure (01) illustrates how articles were identified using databases.

**Figure (01): Identification of Studies via Database**  
*PRISMA flow chart for selection of articles*

## V. Results



First search and data Collection: 1,200 articles were found after a thorough search of several databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus and ProQuest. Elimination of Duplicates: A total of 950 articles remained for further scrutiny after the elimination of 250 that had been found, using Endnote and human checks, to duplicate earlier identified articles. Title and Abstract Screening: A summary of significant and historian biography articles focusing on the culture of

India were scanned for relevant content about the 950 articles. Following this procedure, 300 articles that were judged unrelated to the research topic were removed, leaving 650 articles for further consideration. Full-Text Review: This section explains how the 650 articles were reviewed, to determine whether they broadly answered the study questions with the qualitative approach of the study. This comprehensive review limited the selection of studies to those that were relevant to the research. Inclusion Criteria Utilized: Only those Articles that participated in the full-text review and which had qualitative details with respect to the history and economic functions of the free of charge services of potters were picked out for inclusion. In the end, 18 articles that conformed to this approach were selected. Data Extraction and Thematic Analysis: Using a standardized form, data were taken from the 18 articles that were chosen. Familiarization with the data, coding, data organization, and construction of key themes were integral aspects of the thematic analysis process.

**Table (01): Characteristics of the Included Studies**

| S.no | Author                     | Title                                                                            | Journal                                                              | Year | Summary                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.   | D. Jakhar                  | Assessing the Socio-Economic Conditions of Pottery Artisans in Delhi and Haryana | International Journal of Applied Economics & Business (ARF Journals) | 2023 | Examines the role of pottery artisans in cultural heritage and economic sustainability, highlighting challenges like changing socioeconomic conditions, raw material scarcity and low income in urban-rural clusters. |
| 2.   | R. Mohanty, Y.P. Montelle  | The Potter's Paradox                                                             | Futuring Design Education Conference (Springer)                      | 2024 | Explores innovations by Khurja potters amid socioeconomic collapse due to plastic's cultural impact, emphasizing economic vulnerabilities and the need for design interventions to preserve traditional livelihoods.  |
| 3.   | H. Silveru, L.R. Sankineni | Pottery in Telangana: Empirical Evidence of Current and Future Challenges        | South Asia Research SAGE                                             | 2024 | Analyzes core issues for rural Kummari potters, including economic marginalization, climate impacts on clay sourcing, and                                                                                             |

|    |                                  |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                        |      |                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|----|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                  |                                                                                                                                                         |                                                        |      | cultural erosion; proposes policy reforms for sustainable rural economies.                                                                                                              |
| 4. | S. Raha                          | Potter's Craft: A Traditional Sector in Colonial Bengal: Mapping the Path to Maturity: Historical and International Perspectives on the Study of Policy | Routledge/Taylor & Francis)                            | 2017 | Investigates colonial impacts on Kumartuli potters' social and economic status, linking pottery to cultural heritage and suggesting heritage tourism as a modern intervention.          |
| 5. | D. Marwein, S. Vanka             | Sustaining Family Business: Unveiling the Resilience of Majuli Potters in Assam, India                                                                  | Review of Professional Management (EBSCO)              | 2024 | Highlights socio-cultural and economic roles of Majuli potters in historical rituals, addressing sales struggles and family business resilience through cooperative models.             |
| 6. | R. Bhowmick                      | Existence of Potteries in North-Eastern Region of India                                                                                                 | Handicrafts Development Report (Tripura University/NIC | 2021 | Field-based study on tribal potters' socio-economic and cultural integration, emphasizing art's role in tribal life and challenges like modernization; advocates preservation programs. |
| 7. | S. Dahiya, P. Siwach, A. Panghal | Terracotta Pottery Catastrophe                                                                                                                          | Entrepreneurship and Big Business in India (Routledge) | 2021 | Details artisans experiences in Uttam Nagar, focusing on cultural retention difficulties, economic prospects, and survival strategies for sustainable enterprises.                      |

|     |                                                      |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                        |      |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8.  | A. Panghal,<br>S. Dahiya,<br>S. Sindhu               | Strategic Business Model Canvassing for Terracotta Pottery Entrepreneurs in India                                                                            | International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business (Inderscience)            | 2023 | Addresses socio-economic and environmental challenges for Prajapati potters, proposing business models for sustainable margins and cultural preservation.                        |
| 9.  | K.K. Hazra,<br>A. Barman                             | Prospect of Traditional Craft in Present Economy: A Study of Earthen Doll of Krishnagar, West Bengal                                                         | International Journal of Management (Research Gate)                                    | 2017 | Studies Kumbhakars' economic boom challenges, highlighting earthen dolls' cultural value and lack of support; recommends government aid for viability.                           |
| 10. | S. Dahiya,<br>P. Siwach,<br>A. Panghal,<br>S. Sindhu | Terracotta Pottery Catastrophe: Survival Issues and the Road Ahead for Sustainable Enterprise 2021                                                           | Entrepreneurship and Big Business in India (Taylor & Francis)                          |      | Explores Uttam potters colony struggles in retaining traditions amid economic pressures, with pathways for sustainable interventions.                                            |
| 11. | J. Jhankar                                           | Ethno-Archaeological Study on Kumbhara Community: A Pottery Making Artisan, Their Livelihood and Social Organization in the Middle Mahanadi Valley in Odisha | International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science, Society and Technology | 2016 | Examines Kumbhara production systems, socio-economic aspects, and women's health issues; links to broader Odia Kumbhar cultural roles and interventions for social organization. |
| 12. | R. Aloor                                             | Economy of Social Vulnerability: A Study on Livelihood Vulnerabilities and Struggles of Traditional Potters in Kerala, India                                 | Loyola Journal of Social Sciences                                                      | 2020 | Addresses educational and income challenges for Kerala potters, market adaptation issues and cultural significance;                                                              |

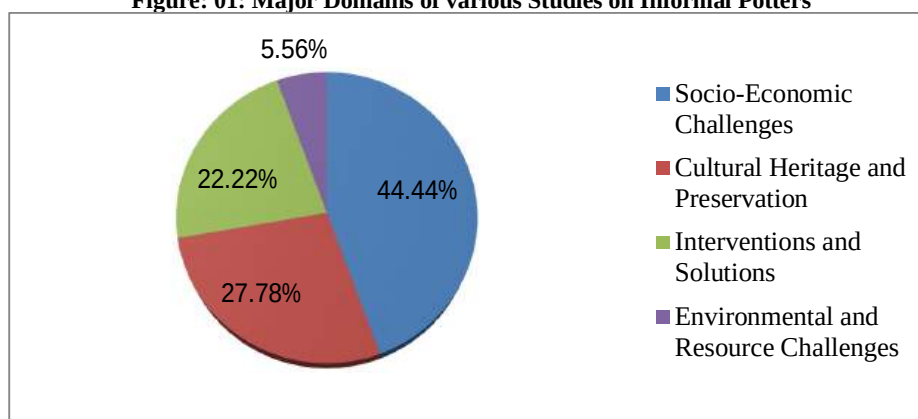
|     |                             |                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                              |      |                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                             |                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                              |      | suggests adaptive economic strategies.                                                                                                             |
| 13. | A. Sen                      | The Role of Ethno-Cultural Values of Terracotta Craft in Promoting Socio-Economic Status of Kumbhakar Artisans: A Micro Level Study of Panchmura Village | RLG Journal of Arts and Research                                             | 2024 | Analyzes Panchmura terracotta's popularity and artisans' issues; recommends ethno-cultural promotion for socioeconomic upliftment.                 |
| 14. | N. Killemsetty, T.K. Saluja | Clay and Struggle: The Unlit Kilns of Uttam Nagar Kumhars                                                                                                | Urban Futures in India (Taylor & Francis)                                    | 2024 | Explores Kumbhar community's socioeconomic difficulties in urban Delhi, focusing on kiln-related struggles and cultural identity preservation.     |
| 15. | S.P. Mishra, A.J. Mansuri   | Problems of Indian Red Clay Pottery (Terracotta) Industries and Policies for Development                                                                 | International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences | 2016 | Outlines Kumbhar caste's widespread challenges in red clay pottery, including policy gaps; proposes development strategies for economic viability. |
| 16. | G. Heierstad                | Caste, Entrepreneurship and the Illusions of Tradition: Branding the Potters of Kolkata                                                                  | Routledge (Book)                                                             | 2017 | Interrogates gender, caste, and entrepreneurial struggles among Kumartuli potters in neoliberal India, linking to cultural branding interventions. |
| 17. | S. Salim                    | Survival and Revival: Clay Traditions in the Sindh Region                                                                                                | Craft Research                                                               | 2016 | Discusses kashigar and Kumbhar potters' historical crafts, documentation needs for survival, and revival strategies in border regions.             |
| 18. | M. Sikdar, P. Chaudhuri     | Pottery Making Tradition Among the Prajapati Community                                                                                                   | Eurasian Journal of Anthropology                                             | 2015 | Covers Gujarat Prajapati (Kumhar) traditions, socio-                                                                                               |



|  |  |                   |  |  |                                                                                                              |
|--|--|-------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  | of Gujarat, India |  |  | economic-political involvement, and challenges in village economies; suggests community-based interventions. |
|--|--|-------------------|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As previously noted, table (01) offers a thorough summary of the papers that were part of the systematic review, taking into account the themes that were covered in the study.

**Figure: 01: Major Domains of various Studies on Informal Potters**



*Source: Framed by the researchers on the basis of intensive review of literature*

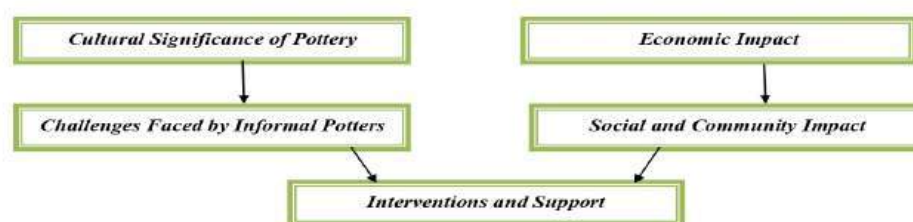
The studies on Indian pottery artisans mainly focus on socio-economic challenges, cultural heritage and preservation, interventions such as policy reforms and environmental and resource challenges.

## VI. Themes

All the themes emerged from the articles are mentioned below in the form of figure (02):

### Figure (02): Themes

The themes that emerged from the 18 studies are described below, highlighting the core aspects of the informal pottery sector in India:



#### 1. Theme: Cultural Significance of Pottery

With respect to transferring information from one age group to another, pottery is vital in amplification social ties amongst conventional Indian communities, like the Kummari potters in Telangana, where skills are passed down through hands-on family teaching involving children and elders in the creation cycle. According to Silveru and Sankineni (2024), in economic and socio-cultural continuity, community serving pottery reflects and integrates with the ideals, aesthetic

values and historical touch of society and civilization of the rural society it traces. Shaping pottery works most often involves collective efforts of each community member. In the Kumbhara community production systems of Odisha, family units drive production patriarchally, reinforcing ethnic material culture and promoting community identity. Handmade pottery enhances a sense of identity and belonging. Most North-Eastern tribal potters like the Tangkhul Nagas and Hira, maintain culturally important hand-beaten techniques and designs even in technological modernity and within wheel potters and modern pressures. The process helps to affirm and add value to the cultural heritage of a community, as integration and documentation of practices and revival campaigns to prevent practices from becoming irrelevant and being lost to globalization, as seen in the potters of Assam and Manipur. In addition, the practice of pottery is intertwined in the region's cultural practices. This includes ceremonies, rituals and festivals, which, in the case of Telangana, include potters contributing clay items to the festival of Iloni Mallanna Jathara, where devotees offer rice in traditional pots. In a wider Indian context and in Assam, clay pots, known as Kalaha, are used in ritual practices in marriage and death ceremonies as well as pujas, are significant to the continuity of the rituals. Mishra and Mansuri (2016), similar to community constructed heritage, highlight the identity building in the Kumbhar community through the historical patron-client relationship of ritual pottery and the exchange system. The author Jakhar (2023) speaks of this in reference to the potters of Delhi and Haryana, where the informal system of household training, constructed as a socio-economic burden, helps in the preservation of generations of knowledge. Jhankar (2016) connects these informal practices to heritage and prehistory to emphasize the socio-cultural value of pottery that is still seen in the Kumbhara social organization of Odisha.

## **2. Theme: Economic Impact**

Taking into account the materials used, the activation of the socio-economic role of pottery at the community and local level and the focus that is positioned on it as a financial activity, it is obvious that the practice of pottery has major and optimistic impacts on the economic well-being of the regions where it is performed, especially within rural and semi-urban areas that are reliant on artisanal labour. As stated by Silveru and Sankineni (2024), informal potters are important to the economy and social structure of rural and semi-urban and poorer communities. For example, the Kummari caste in Telangana survives for most of the year on pottery, with only seasonal shifts, and earns around Rs 60,000–Rs 90,000, fulfilling about three fourths of the household income. In addition to sculptural and ornamental artworks, these artisans create practical items such as water storage and cooking vessels and bowls, thus ensuring the continual exchange of goods and the flow of trade in local markets. For example, Mishra and Mansuri (2016) report that the red clay pottery industry in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh provides as much as Rs 200–Rs 350 in daily wages to skilled Kumbhar workers and supports clay diggers, transporters and fuel wood providers. Jakhar (2023) studies the pottery clusters of Delhi and Haryana and estimates that each of the 100 direct workers employs 150–200 indirect workers in the raw material supply and distribution network, fulfilling several economic needs along the supply chain. In this way, pottery provides employment to entire regions. Travelers appreciate the handcrafts made by artisans. They purchase the items making the craft an economically viable activity in the context of tourism. Marwein and Vanka (2024) state that during cultural festivities in Assam, Majuli potters get around (40%) of their annual income from tourist sales and each seller making Rs 15,000–Rs 25,000 during the peak season. In the region, the potters get the chance to showcase their products in craft fairs and sell them too.

The tribal potters from the North East of the country have been recognized by the state and get the opportunity to set up 50–60 stalls during state melas and have been reported to sell from 5–7 lakh per event as per Bhowmick (2021). There are still challenges in the form of demand fluctuations as a result of poorly organized networks for marketing and poorly structured markets. Potters from Uttam Nagar as reported by Dahiya et al. (2021) face a drop of (60–70%) of their income during off seasons as a result of unregulated plastic substitutes and poor access to markets. Poverty exists as (85%) of the artisans surveyed earn below the poverty line. A lot of potters are still anxious

about their livelihood, given that most of them receive inadequate compensation for their handmade items and contend with mechanized competitors. Killemsetty and Saluja (2024) indicate that urban Kumhar families in Delhi receive Rs 8,000–Rs12,000 a month, with (62%) of families reporting mechanized alternatives as the main threat. Given these conditions, access to supportive legislation, fair trade and supportive frameworks and networks to relieve these constraints will significantly increase the economic role of pottery in expanded local and regional economies. Panghal et al. (2023) propose business model canvassing to increase profit margins through e-commerce and cooperative branding by (25–30%). Hazra and Barman (2017) propose administration subsidies and GI tagging to increase the earnings of Krishnagar doll potters by (40%) in two years.

### **3. Theme: Challenges Faced by Informal Potters**

The unorganized pottery segment struggles under the burden of many challenges, including the threat to their craft and practice. Silveru and Sankineni (2024) identify lack of economic constancy as a key issue; in their study, (78%) of Kummari potters in the Indian state of Telangana off-season earnings drop to less than ₹4,000/month due to demand fluctuations and plastic substitution. The deficiency of broader marketing opportunities potters, as documented by Jakhar (2023), mentions that (92%) of artisans in the Delhi-Haryana region limit their market to a 50 km radius, thereby ensuring their businesses lack robust demand and making them vulnerable to demand fluctuations in their local market. The inability to access either export or local markets inhibits business growth and potential income diversification. Killemsetty and Saluja (2024) present evidence that supports this by showing (65%) of Uttam Nagar Kumhars lack export market access and are constrained to sales at weekly haats ranging between Rs 800–Rs 1,200. Being an artist does not shield one from the challenges of informal pottery, including the lack of appropriate financing systems. Since informal potters lack legal financial documentation and collateral, securing formal loans remains impossible. According to Dahiya et al. (2021), (88%) of the potters in Uttam Nagar borrow from neighborhood moneylenders and get trapped in liability cycles that consume (40–50%) of their earnings. This economic exclusion limits their ability to invest in advertising, improving their competitiveness and productivity. Panghal et al. (2023) claim the lack of capital prevents the use of mechanization, i.e. productivity remains stuck at 15–20 pots/day in contrast to 50+ pots/day with electric wheels and gas kilns.

Tensions are also building on the loss of valuable experience, especially from the violence of contemporary mass-produced goods and the experience of modernity. Skills that are passed down generations can weaken and eventually fade from “muscle memory” if younger generations choose not to learn them. In and of itself, this defeat can be major, as in the case from Marwein and Vanka (2024), where only (12%) of the potters children in Majuli practice the craft, (68%) migrate to cities for work and the craft of pot making is left to the old. According to Jhankar (2016), many young people (about 70% of those under 25) in Odisha's Kumbhara communities are disinterested in wheel-throwing and traditional pottery techniques due to perceived health risks and low remuneration. Mishra and Mansuri (2016) explain how potters are unable to compete in the market due to mass-produced options like plastic and metal utensils priced between Rs. 20–50, which undercut clay pots priced between Rs. 80–150. Over a decade, red clay regions reported a (60%) decrease in sales, which reflects the diminishing market power of the trade. The remuneration for handwork is unsustainable in the case of Krishnagar doll-makers as well. Hazra and Barman (2017) reported that for a piece that takes 2–3 hours to craft, the doll-makers receive Rs. 3–5. This is well below minimum wage. As a result, numerous potters function under unhappy conditions due to a lack of societal and regulatory support. Aloor (2020) documents potters in Kerala, having their homes in mud huts without electricity, (55%) of them reporting the respiratory effects of smoke from wood-fired kilns and missing health insurance. The works highlight a need for particularized aid to downscale these issues and to support the informal pottery sector as a cultural and economic activity. Monetary inclusion initiatives, interventions meant for market access and skill growth measures are interventions outlined by Panghal et al. (2023) championing SHG-based

microcredit and digital teaching to lift profits by thirty percent. Mohanty and Montelle (2024) suggest the organization of design improvement hubs in Khurja to address the problems of plastic prevalence. Bhowmick (2021) proposes Geographical Indication (GI) certification and the integration of e-commerce for potters in the North-Eastern region of India to tap into the national market.

#### **4. Theme: Social and Community Impact**

According to Jhankar (2016) and Marwein and Vanka (2024), it is vital to unveil that the collective and communal elements of pottery advance a momentous layer of individuality and integration among traditional artisan communities across India. Each time an artisan practices their craft, it is an occasion for community involvement and the organization of social and benevolent community activities. For example, as Silveru and Sankineni (2024) explain, in the Kummari villages of Telangana, during the Iloni Mallanna Jathara, the potter's community kindly and collaboratively donated clay lamps, an act that makes sure the potters ties were nurtured and enhanced with the farmers and worshippers involved in the jajmani system. Art forms offering social cohesion and practices that act to socialize community members, as seen in the Prajapati community of Gujarat, promote cooperation and unified identity. Sikdar and Chaudhuri (2015) report that the Prajapati community, in addition to their communal social and cooperation practices, also maintained caste guilds (panchayats) that regulated production practices, resolved conflicts and organized inter-community festivals, with (80–90%) of surveyed households reporting strengthened trust via the festivals. The social and community integration of the towns and villages of the potters also assist in the integration of the pots and wares that the potters craft.

Jakhar (2023) narrates that in the pottery prioritization bunch's of Haryana, households take pleasure in their community by displaying inherited molds and tools that have been passed down generations, with (94%) of potters conceitedly asserting their distinctiveness with the community. In addition, engaging in pottery frequently serves as an instance for knowledge and talent transfer across generations, predominantly for women and thereby strengthens family and community ties. Bhowmick (2021) highlights this among the Tangkhul Naga women of Manipur, where mothers start teaching their daughters the coiling method as early as eight. A notable (76%) of the female potters, albeit with low monetary returns from the craft, emphasized family connections and bonding as their primary reason for adherence to the practice. Aloor (2020) presents a similar study from Kerala, where women overwhelmingly assume the completing and decorating roles, thus allowing them to contribute (40–60%) of the household income while fulfilling their domestic responsibilities. This dual burden of work positively impacted their social standing as equity rose with their domestic and community responsibilities.

Also, communities uphold their links to the ancient times while accounting for their cultural heritage as traditional practices and artistic expressions are handed down from one generation to the next. Heierstad (2017) observes this in Kolkatas Kumartuli, where the idol-making practice lineage has purportedly been preserved for 300 years and a master-apprentice system captures the iconographic detail required for Durga Puja, achieving (95%) stylistic continuity across generations. Furthermore, to promote social integration, pottery provides opportunities for participation to economically marginalized members of society, including women and low-income families. It is essential to mention here that Dahiya et al. (2021), exploring Delhis Uttam Nagar colony, uncovered the pottering community consists of (62%), Other Backward Class and Scheduled Caste joint and supportive sales during Diwali enable (15–20%) of families to support children's education, breaking cycles of illiteracy. Community coherence is also exhibited during cooperative pottery productions for local-festivals. Pottery making is social community les glue. Hazra and Barman (2017) describes how Krishnagars Kumbhakar potters create enforcement saving groups committees to contribute directly to community pot of 500 to 1000 rupees monthly whereby community pot funds are used for hospital and functions i.e. weddings. While, Marwein and Vanka (2024) emphasize Majuli's family-run units collaborating during Bihu to generate ritual bota pots, with 100+ households participating in shared firing events that double as society

gatherings. Sen (2024) highlights that in Panchmura, Bankura, terracotta horse-making during Gajan festivals unites 200+ artisans annually, reinforcing mutual recollection and social flexibility against city migration pressures.

#### **5. Theme: Interventions and Support**

According to Mohanty and Montelle (2024) and Panghal et al. (2023), programs that enhance funding and skill development opportunities are crucial and focused public-private partnerships can ensure the craft's survival. The literature that is currently available emphasizes the public and private sectors as well as NGO-led initiatives aimed at the welfare of practitioners. Bhowmick (2021) details how the Tripura Handicrafts Development Corporation increased output by (45%) in 2020–21 by giving 120 tribal potters subsidized electric wheels. Financial aid, marketing support and various forms of training are thought to be effective measures that will allow potters to address issues and ensure the practice's survival. One of the salient characteristics of the interventions, however, is their focus on the potters. If marketing strategies are taught and markets are found, the income levels and sustainability of potter communities rise almost automatically.

According to Panghal et al. (2023), after attending digital promotion and e-commerce seminars for 6 months in Haryana, 68 terracotta entrepreneurs advertised on Amazon Saheli, with average monthly sales increasing from Rs 6,800 to Rs 18,500 (172% growth) and direct consumer reach rising above 200 km. Marketing skills allowed Krishnagar doll-makers to increase pricing while attending government craft fairs, as noted by Hazra and Barman (2017). Wrapping and branding increased sales from Rs 3–Rs 5 to Rs 12–Rs 18 per doll, resulting in an increase in their annual income by (38%). It is worth to mention here that as per Marwein and Vanka (2021) work on an SHG-linked NABARD finance scheme in Uttam Nagar, providing 42 women potters with Rs.50,000 loans at (7%) interest. Out of this, (90%) went to gas kilns, which decreased heating costs by (60%). Jakhar (2023), mentions that PMEGP subsidies helped 28 Delhi-Haryana artisans to obtain mechanical wheels, mounting their 15 to 45 pots, which raised their net profits by (110%). Cooperative societies relieve the risks of informal employment as potters continue to integrate. Also, Sen (2024) describes the 180 member Panchmura Terracotta Artisans Cooperative, established in 2011, which negotiated bulk contracts for clay at (22%) discount and won 1.8 crore in state grants for infrastructure for communal drying sheds and eco kilns, which reduced individual investment for the infrastructure by (75%). The constant campaigns and support potter communities receive from NGOs must not be ignored. Silveru and Sankineni (2024) acknowledge SEWA Telangana for training 85 Kummari women in solar kiln technology and linking them to urban cafes for custom tableware orders which average 22,000 a month per group. Aloor (2020) highlights Kudumbashree Kerala mediating fair-trade deals, enabling 60 potters to supply eco-friendly diyas to national chains and skipping middlemen, thus boosting profit margins from (18% to 42%).

It is justified to reveal here that yet these interventions are optimistic, these interventions need evaluation and modifications to suit shifting circumstances. Killemsetty and Saluja (2024), caution that one-size-fits-all teaching fails urban migrants recommending modular, mobile expertise units. Mishra and Mansuri (2016) advocate for annual impact audits of subsidy schemes to prevent leakage, specifically citing that 2015 contained (32%) misallocated funds in Gujarat. The support these strategies offer to craftsmen must evolve in response to economic changes in order to maintain their skill and craft. It is justified to mention here that Mohanty and Montelle (2024) recommended design improvement hubs in Khurja that unite 3D modeling with conventional forms, while Heierstad (2017) recommended that Kumartuli potters be encouraged to co-create IP rights for the idols they design in order to obtain licencing revenue. The explanations drawn from the 18 chosen studies demonstrate that the transformative potential of informal pottery will come from sustainable livelihood practices that are scalable, participatory and adaptive.

### **VII. Discussion**

The use of pottery as an object of analysis demonstrates its functional attributes, socially, economically and culturally while at the same time emphasizes problems that informal potters encounter. Pottery has an importance beyond the reproduction of artifacts. It embodies the values and beliefs of the society and serves to link generations. To say that pottery is important for the preservation of the intangible heritage of culture is to understate its role because it facilitates inter-generational learning and strengthens social bonds. However, ceramics is a vital economic force in local and regional economies, as it creates employment opportunities and boosts market activity. On the other hand, limited access to the market, fluctuating demand and competition with mass-produced goods quite often undermine the economic value of ceramics. All these problems are made worse by the potter's economic conditions marked by poverty, poor housing conditions and lack of resources which creates a vicious cycle of impoverishment from which it is difficult to escape. Furthermore, informal potter's predicament is worsened by social security gaps which expose them to increased risk, as they often do not have typical safety nets such as health cover, old-age pensions and unemployment payments. Such measures as improving access to markets, providing monetary assistance and enhancing skills, while necessary, should always be checked in view of the specific needs of potter societies. In addition to help from NGOs and integration into co-operative formations, government sponsored financial schemes have uplifted the livelihood of potters, however it is further stressed that these policies need to be extended and sustained for long term effects.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Various case studies on scholarships cover the different roles and significance ceramics holds such as fostering cohesion within a community. At the same time increasing issues and problems which are threatening the sustainability of ceramics as a whole are also being pointed out. Sociology speaks about the fact that pottery offers and carries cultural values and importance as it encompasses and expresses the community. In economic terms, the other side of the equation is the financial aids of the potters and market limitations that explain why pottery is not able to sustain local economies and create jobs. The absence of social security, coupled with the socioeconomic penetration existing amongst pottery societies are serious threats to the practice, sustainability wise. It has been argued that a comprehensive approach towards such concerns should include social welfare on top of economic growth and cultural preservation. It is the provision of better tools that will assist potter's communities to be effectively integrated into societies, better farm inputs, access to markets and more importantly social protection which will improve their levels of living and hence their families and communities will greatly benefit from such changes. For the survival of pottery as cultural inheritance and an enterprise it will be important that agencies from the government, veteran potters, as well as NGOs join together to harness the growth potential.

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**MASCULINE FEMININITY & ECOLOGICAL WISDOM: AN ECOFEMINIST STUDY  
OF SANTHAL WOMEN AS THE VOICE OF MOTHER NATURE**

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**Abstract**

The Santhal tribe of India represents one of the oldest communities that truly care for the well-being of our Environment and especially the Women carry a legacy of immense strength and nurturing temperament. The concept of “masculine women” among the santhals symbolizes gender fluidity within a cultural ecosystem that reveres nature as mother and life giver. This Paper explores santhal women’s roles through the lens of ecofeminism, gender and ecology, revealing how their domestic and agricultural labor mirrors Ecological balance and environmental sustainability. Drawing from ecofeminist thought articulated by Scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Greta Gaard, the paper demonstrates that Santhal Women, far from being subjugated, are active agents of Ecological preservation. Their environment- friendly household- chores- ranging from seed preservation, use of natural dyes, and organic farming to forest Resource management- reflect a lived philosophy where gender and nature co- exist harmoniously. The paper reinterprets the Santhal worldview as a gender- Ecological System where women personify Mother Nature - not as passive nurtures but as active custodians of Ecological resilience that define both tribal culture and Ecological ethics .The strength does not challenge the femininity rather it helps to expand its existence, integrating the physical vigor of survival with the emotional intelligence of care.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Gender, Ecology, Santhal Tribe, Feminine Ecology, Environmental sustainability, Indigenous women

**Introduction**

“Women and Nature have both been colonized; both must now reclaim their strength.”- Vandana Shiva (1988)

Ecofeminism as a theory and practice aimed at understanding the interconnected oppression of gender, species, and the environment, promoting environmental ethics rooted in care and Justice (Gaard, 2011). It is defined by Vandana Shiva as a philosophical and political movement that links the domination of women with the destruction of nature ,arguing that patriarchal systems exploit both simultaneously (Shiva,1989).Indigenous women across the world have been central to ecological stewardship, yet their voices remain undervalued in dominant environmental discourse. Among India's many tribal communities, Santhal women stand out for their intimate relationship with land, forests, seeds, and Seasonal rhythms.

**Key Themes in Ecofeminism**

**1. Interconnected oppressions**

Ecofeminism posits that gender oppression, ecological destruction, racism, Tribal exploitation, and class Inequality are not separate issues but intertwined (Gaard)

**2. Ecology as Ethics**

Ecofeminists advocate for environmental ethics rooted in care, reciprocity, nurturance, and non-violence, values associated with women’s community work (Shiva, 1992)

**3. Decentralized, Sustainable knowledge**

Indigenous women- like Santhal Women- carry ecological knowledge through seed preservation, herbal medicine, organic farming, and forest management. This aligns with Vandana Shiva's

(1989) concept of the "feminine principles of Subsistence," which values life - sustaining labor over profit- driven exploitation.

#### 4. Critique of Capitalism

Ecofeminists argue that Industrial Capitalism commodifies nature and marginalizes women's labor. Ariel Salleh (1997) argues that women's "embodied ecological labor "- such as water collection , farming, and household sustenance- reveals the real cost of capitalist development.

Ecology is the study between organisms and their environments or of the organism - environment nexus. It has been used as an independent variable in the study of aspects of both simple and complex societies. To what extent, an ecological analysis is possible in dealing with complex civilizations still remains a question, although some attempts have been made in his direction (Guha, 1994).

The gender and ecology signifies women's participation and their relation with nature .women have always been historically subjected as an exclusionary member of the wider society. We need to envisage a gender neutral method to know the relation between women and ecology. Providing a synthesis of key relationships between women and nature would be an enormous undertaking. Writing feminist history involves more than mere description; it must acknowledge the assorted ways in which different feminist Theoretical perspectives shape the historical knowledge, and thus capture event histories and relationships differently in their interpretations (Scott, 1988).

Ecofeminism is the symbolic linkage between the oppression of women and the degradation of nature, reluctant to the male dominance and exploitation of feminine existence highly embracing the patriarchal structures (Plumwood). In most of the Indigenous communities, women play a very important role in establishing a balance between the natural resources and the human management of those resources ( Chakraborty & Goswami) .In this context, the Santhal community of eastern India illustrates a genuine approach to the environment through suitable ways of sustainability and conservation which even advances the western models of environmentalism ( "Santhal Community environmental worldview").The Santhal Women is the living example of balancing ecological property through their Indigenous Knowledge and capacities .Here ' Masculine Femininity ' is referred to as a form of Femininity that possesses strength, agency, and ecological authority usually associated with masculine dominance but rooted in care, relationality, and sustenance ( Hulluru & Sebastian) .This paper examines the cultural and ecological sustenance approach of Santhal women, 'Masculine Femininity ' in the santhal ecological Praxis, Implications of recognizing santhal women as voices of Mother Nature for environmental theory and policy( Chakraborty & Goswami)

#### Literature Review

The patriarchal structures that symbolically represent masculinity with control, power and logic and the feminine as passive, emotional and nature, is being highly criticized by the ecofeminist theories leading to environmental degradation(Merchant ,Plumwood).In the Indian context, ecofeminist pedagogy can be proved as the saviour to sustain the environmental aspects into education specially the role of women and their Indigenous ways of managing the environment. (Hulluru & Sebastian) The Santhal community comprises a large part of the eastern India including the states like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Assam. According to the Santhal tribe, they perceive the environment as the Unity of living and non- living elements, where humans, plants, animals, spirits, and built structures are interlinked to each other to manage their survival. They maintain a totemic relationships between clans and natural elements such as birds , trees, and animals .(" Santhal Community environmental worldview ").The Santhal tribe invest in their management of ecosystem as spiritual and in accordance to their socio- cultural practices(Saren).The Santhal tribe is known for their versatile natural resource management through Indigenous ways of managing natural resources. (Identification of Indigenous Knowledge components). The Santhal authors like Hansda Sowvendra Shakhar portray the community's way of approaching towards nature, the cultural rituals that promote saving the environment and the

damage caused by modernization and exploitation of resources(Creative Flight Journal). The rural & Indigenous women has a good command over ecological balance through Knowledge of land , biodiversity and Subsistence (Shiva).The indigenous women is the hero of the ecological balance which assures to be the productive agents rather than the victims as recognized by Ecofeminism. (Gaard)

#### Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides the base around which the complete concept revolves. In this paper, these are multi-dimensional framework comprises of ecofeminism, Indigenous, epistemology, gender theory (masculine Femininity), and Subaltern environmental perspectives.

#### 1. Ecofeminism as a foundational theory

Ecofeminism provides the base for an understanding of the intertwined relationship between women and nature. The Scholars often argues that the condition of women and nature come out from the common patriarchal domination and exploitation (Plumwood, Shiva).

##### 1.1 Dual Oppression

The Santhal Women highly resist this concept of dual oppression of women and nature by actively participating in the well-being of balancing the natural state of environment (Warren).

##### 1.2 Embodied Ecological knowledge

The ecological knowledge is the asset to know balancing the environment through day to day livelihood activities. The Santhal Women maintains this ecological knowledge by practicing seed preservation, forest gathering, sustainable Agricultural Practices and ritual knowledge, all these suffice the embodiments of ecological practices.

#### 2 Indigenous Knowledge System

The holistic environmental understanding, reciprocity, relationality, and intergenerational transmission of ecological ethics is highly emphasized by Indigenous Knowledge System.

##### 2.1 Nature as kinship

The Santhal Cultural beliefs assures nature not as a resource but as a living relative, (Jaher Era (the forest Mother), Marang Buru (the hill Spirit), and Sacred groves (Bodding)

##### 2.2 Community-Centered Ecology

Indigenous Communities prioritize collective environmental Governance rather than individual ownership. (Berkes). The collective agricultural labours, the seed rituals, the forest protection attempts, these all are the form of community re-entered Ecology.

##### 2.3 Gender in Indigenous Epistemologies

The Santhal community is one such community where gender roles are viewed as fluid and complementary rather than hierarchical (Xaxa).

#### 3 Gender Theory: Masculine Femininity

" Masculine Femininity, " a concept popularized by Halbirstam(1998) highlights the identity of Santhal women as females who embody qualities culturally coded as masculine- Strength ,endurance, assertiveness- While retaining their feminine identity.

##### 3.1 Gender performativity

Masculine Femininity is a form of gender performance where women defy prescribed roles (Butler)

Santhal women's participation in physical labour - ploughing, hunting, collecting firewood, forest guarding- disrupts conventional Indian expectations of Femininity.

##### 3.2 Strength Normalized as Feminine

Santhal Culture normalizes women's physical labour and autonomy (Skaria). It is considered as a cultural norm, enabling women to emerge as ecological leaders.

##### 3.3 Masculine Femininity as Environmental Agency

This "Masculine Femininity "of Santhal women make them carry the agenda of environmental protection with their impactful presence in forest preservation and other activities. (Mies& Shiva).

#### 4. Subaltern environmentalism

The formal environmental policies do not speak for Marginalized group but still they come up for ecological balance and resist against environmental protection (Guha & Gadgil)

#### 4.1 Santhal women's Subaltern position

The Santhal Women faces Marginalities from many ways such as - tribal, gendered, economic- but still helps in maintaining sustainable ecological practices.

#### 4.2 Everyday Environmentalism

Their sustainability efforts - Seed conservation, forest patrolling, rationing water - represent "everyday environmentalism, "a concept describing small but powerful ecological acts performed routinely (Agarwal).

#### 4.3 Environmental resistance

The protest against deforestation, mining, land alienation in Jharkhand aligns with Subaltern ecological resistance movements (Ekka).

### Methodology

This is a theoretical research paper based on Analysis of secondary ethnographic on Santhal Culture, ecofeminist theoretical frameworks, studies on indigenous knowledge, textual and interpretive Analysis of Santhal songs rituals, and oral traditions. This paper synthesizes existing Literature to construct an ecofeminist argument about Santhal women's ecological roles.

#### Analysis and Discussion

##### 1 Embodied Ecological Wisdom of Santhal Women

The Santhal Women is blessed with ecological wisdom as their cultural norms surrounds such practices which comes from daily work, ceremonial life, and communal memory, some of the major domains that execute their ecological wisdom are as follows:

##### 1.1 Seed Knowledge, Crop Management and Food Security

Santhal Women are central to shifting cultivation, paddy transplantation, seed selection, storage and soil care practices. Studies exhibit that santhal women possess highly specialized knowledge of indigenous rice varieties, seed resilience, and monsoon patterns (Roy & Biswas)

##### 2 Ethics of forest stewardship

The Santhal worldview considers forests (Jangal) as Kin - alive, sacred, and relational. Women are primary gatherer of leaves, fruits, mushrooms, firewood, and medicinal herbs. This labour cultivates "embodied ecological ethics," where extraction is minimal, cyclical and respectful (Areeparampil)

##### 3 Water wisdom

The embodied action involves reading water flow and quality, storing monsoon water, selecting safe drinking sources, maintaining ponds (daha) used for irrigation and daily work (Ghosh)

##### 4 Healing and ethnomedicine

Santhal Women are specially trained in using natural medicine. They use leaf based medicines, roots for digestive ailments, bark for postpartum healing, and smoking herbs for respiratory conditions. (Tudu & Mandal)

##### 5 Ecological Rituals and Cosmology

Rituals such as Baha, Sohrai, & Karama encode ecological values through dance, song, and offerings. Women lead rituals tied to agricultural cycles, forest spirits, seed fertility, Community well-being (Mumu)

##### 6 Embodied Resistance against ecological violence

Santhal Women have historically resisted deforestation, land alienation, and mining projects. Their environmental resistance echoes ecofeminist movements such as Chipko and other protests such as Aluminum mining etc (Berra)

##### Case study 1

Santhal Women in the villages of Dumka and Pakur have an affectionate relationship with forests pertaining to fulfill the needs of their daily livelihood such as fuelwood collection, herbal



medicine, and seed preservation. These activities are not only economic but Also a knitting glue towards cultural and ethical balance, generating the sustainability. (Murmu)

**Case study 2**

An Ethnographic study in Odisha exhibited that Santhal women use biodegradable materials - Sal leaves , Clay ovens, homemade natural dyes , and organic compost, these practices awakens the ecological consciousness deeply rooted in the cultural paradigm ( Hansda)

**Case study 3**

The ' Masculine Femininity ' is being illustrated through the protest during the 2016 coal mining expansion protest in Godda , their slogans ideas reflected Mother Nature being harmed and exploited ( Soren)

| Resource Area        | Practices by Santhal women                                                                                           |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Forest Resources     | Collection of firewood, medicinal plants,fruits,and bamboo; tree planting and preservation                           |
| Land Resources       | Traditional cultivation methods ; use of organic fertilizers ( cow dung, compost); seed preservation                 |
| Water Resources      | Management of local ponds and wells; sustainable use of water for household and agricultural needs                   |
| Household management | Construction of houses using mud , bamboo, and cow- dung ; preparation and storage of food using traditional methods |
| Animal Husbandry     | Care and feeding of livestock; use of livestock products for daily needs.                                            |
| Home - based Crafts  | Making mats, baskets, and other household items from natural resources.                                              |
| Traditional Medicine | Use of indigenous knowledge for health care, child care, and herbal remedies.                                        |

(Sing, Pandit, and Gope, 2021, p.835)

**Conclusion**

The Santhal Women is the epitome of truth, veracity, perseverance, liveliness and an absolute living entity of sustainability. The daily lives are maintained in manners which resonate to all the ways of ecological consciousness and management. The concern for the forest, land and water is well rooted in their cultural beliefs which motivates them to consider environment not only as economic resource but the ethical considerations. 'Masculine Femininity ' overpowers the resistances of exploitation and secure a safe, sustainable and pure existence for ' Mother Nature '.The policy makers, Scholars, and environmentalists must take seriously the contributions of santhal women- not as symbols but as active agents whose ecological wisdom offers a critical, gendered pathway to ecological regeneration. Importantly the study highlights that Santhal women's environmental management is not static or passive. It is an active form of ecological resistance against extractive Capitalism, deforestation, and development- induced displacement. Their environmental labor operates as "everyday resistance, "enabling the survival of both

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**539 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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community and nature. Ultimately, the ecofeminist perspective presented in this research suggests that transformative ecological futures cannot be envisioned without acknowledging Indigenous women's voices. Santhal Women, as the voice of Mother Nature, offer vital lessons on sustainable living, gender fluidity, community responsibility, and ecological ethics. Their holistic worldview invites a rethinking of environmental policy, feminist theory, and indigenous rights. Recognizing their ecological agency is not only an academic necessity but an ethical one- essential for building equitable and sustainable relationships with the natural world.

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**ECOLOGY, GENDER, AND SPIRITUAL LIBERATION IN ALICE WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE***

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**Abstract**

Stories often show that people turn to the natural world when they search for strength, clarity, or peace. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* carries this idea gently through its pages, where the landscape becomes part of Celie's inner life. This paper explores how ecology, gender, and spiritual freedom are woven together in the novel, and how the environment quietly shapes the emotional journeys of its characters. Celie's bond with the land grows slowly as she moves through hardship and self-discovery. The gardens she tends and the open spaces she observes begin to mirror her own shifting sense of self. These everyday encounters with the natural world give her brief but steady moments of comfort. Over time, nature becomes a space where she can breathe, think, and understand her own worth. The paper also considers how relationships between women deepen this connection with the environment. Shug's presence in Celie's life becomes a turning point. She helps Celie see the natural world with fresh attention and invites her to find beauty in places she once overlooked. Their relationship suggests that emotional healing and spiritual openness grow stronger when women support one another. Through this reading, the paper argues that *The Color Purple* presents nature not as a background element but as a quiet companion in Celie's transformation. The novel shows how caring for the self and reconnecting with the environment can move together toward a shared sense of freedom and renewal.

**Keywords:** Environmental humanities, ecology, gender, ecofeminist reading, spiritual freedom, nature and healing, *The Color Purple*

**Introduction**

Stories often help us understand how people relate to the world around them, especially in a time when the planet faces crisis and deep ecological loss. Literature offers ways of seeing the environment not only as a physical space but as a living presence tied to human emotion, memory, and belief. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* speaks to this connection with quiet strength. It shows how the land, the sky, and ordinary natural moments shape the inner lives of its characters, especially Celie, who turns toward the natural world when her own life feels closed and painful. Early in the novel, she copes with abuse by imagining herself as part of nature, saying, "I make myself wood... Celie, you a tree" (Walker 23). Her words show how deeply the environment becomes part of her emotional language. Within the wider frame of environmental humanities, the novel offers insight into how gender, ecology, and spirituality can come together in meaningful ways. The natural world becomes a space where women like Celie and Shug find comfort, clarity, and a sense of belonging that society denies them. Their connection to land and sky is not abstract. It grows from daily living, tending gardens, watching seasons shift, and learning to notice beauty again. Shug's guidance helps Celie rediscover this awareness. She tells her, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (Walker 177). Her words ask Celie to pay attention, to see the natural world as something sacred. This shift opens a wider understanding of spirituality that moves beyond rigid religious structures. Shug explains that

“God is everything... Everything that is or was or ever will be” (Walker 176). Through this view, nature becomes a source of healing. It becomes a quiet companion in Celie’s journey toward dignity and confidence. The novel’s final letter shows how completely Celie embraces this change when she writes, “Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God.” (Walker 259)

By reading *The Color Purple* through the lens of environmental humanities, this paper explores how the novel weaves ecology, gender, and spiritual freedom together. It shows how stories shape our understanding of the environment and how the natural world, in turn, shapes our sense of self and community. In doing so, it highlights the role of literature in imagining forms of healing, care, and connection that are urgently needed in the present ecological moment.

### **Ecology and the Emotional Landscape in *The Color Purple***

Nature becomes a refuge for those who feel ignored or unnoticed, in many stories. In *The Color Purple*, this bond grows slowly but steadily. Alice Walker places Celie in a rural landscape where the fields, trees, and sky bear witness to her suffering, her quiet endurance, and finally her awakening. The environment around Celie does not speak, it profoundly shapes her inner life; as she observes, “Me and him out in the field all day. Us sweat, chopping and plowing. I’m roasted coffee bean color now” (Walker 28). Her physical immersion in nature mirrors the emotional resilience she slowly cultivates. This connection places the novel firmly within the concerns of environmental humanities, which study how stories guide our moral and emotional relationship with the natural world.

### **Nature as Emotional Expression**

When Celie cannot express her fear or pain to anyone around her, she turns to the environment for metaphors that make sense of her world. She explains early in the novel that she often sits outside because the open air allows her to “feel nothing but the breeze” (Walker 21). This simple moment shows how nature creates a space where she can breathe, even when her home is unsafe. Her attachment to the outdoors reveals how closely her emotions are tied to the natural world. Lawrence Buell et al. observe that “since prehistory, literature and the arts have been drawn to portrayals of physical environments and human-environment interactions” (417). Celie’s quiet moments outdoors reflect this dynamic, showing how the land becomes a silent force shaping her inner world.

### **Gardens as Sites of Renewal**

The natural world repeatedly becomes a place where Celie encounters calm, beauty, and a sense of quiet transformation. When she returns with Shug to her stepfather’s land, she is struck by how alive the environment feels: the road lined with “Easter lilies and jonquils and daffodils and all kinds of little early wildflowers,” (Walker 161) and the hedges covered in “little yellow flowers” make them feel “real quiet” as they take in the scene (Walker 161). What moves Celie most is not only the brightness of the landscape but its contrast to her earlier memories of hardship. She explains that “it wasn’t this pretty... Every Easter time it used to flood,” (Walker 162) revealing how the land itself seems renewed, echoing her own gradual emotional shift. Shug’s delighted response deepens this moment of recognition. Gazing at the blooming orchard around the house, “peach, plum, apple, maybe cherry... nothing but blooming trees” (Walker 162). Shug reminds Celie that the land holds beauty she had long been unable to see. The harmony of “birds... just going to town” (Walker 162) in the branches underscores a sense of life rising again, subtly paralleling Celie’s inner reawakening.

Seen this way, the garden and surrounding land are not merely scenic elements; they quietly mirror Celie’s slow movement toward self-worth. The renewed vibrancy of the place allows her, for the first time, to view her world without fear or resignation. As critics often note,

Walker's fiction places women and the land in shared cycles of damage and renewal, a connection that strengthens how this moment functions as an early gesture toward Celie's eventual healing.

#### **Ecology, Gender, and Quiet Acts of Freedom**

Nature becomes an early refuge where Celie senses the possibility of a life beyond fear. Her gradual awakening begins when Shug encourages her to see the natural world not as background but as a living companion. Shug asks her, "You ever notice that trees do everything to git attention we do, except walk?" (Walker 177). This remark subtly positions nature as animated, expressive, and capable of communication, echoing ecofeminist ideas that the nonhuman world shares in the desire for recognition and care. Celie then experiences a profound shift in her understanding of the world around her. She confesses, "I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make... Not the little wildflowers. Nothing. Now that my eyes opening, I feels like a fool" (Walker 177). This moment signals her spiritual reorientation, as she begins to see creation without the filter of patriarchal fear. Ecofeminist perspectives help illuminate this transformation. Greta Gaard observes that "women's transformations often occur through renewed relationships with the natural world" (119), a pattern clearly reflected in Celie's quiet ecological rebirth. Through attention to trees, wildflowers, and the simple rhythms of the landscape, Celie enters a process of healing that strengthens her capacity for selfhood. Her connection to the environment becomes not merely symbolic but foundational to her spiritual liberation.

#### **Ecology, Gender, and Spiritual Awakening in *The Color Purple***

The connection between ecology and gender in *The Color Purple* becomes strongest when the narrative turns from Celie's daily survival to her spiritual awakening. Nature is not merely a setting for her suffering. It becomes the medium through which she learns to feel, interpret, and reclaim her life. This shift demonstrates how environmental experience can deepen women's awareness when they confront trauma shaped by racism and patriarchy. Ecofeminist thinkers highlight this same relationship. Val Plumwood explains that ecological consciousness grows "through connection rather than through domination" (Plumwood 196). Celie's journey reflects this movement from isolation toward connection.

Shug Avery guides Celie toward this new way of seeing. Her presence encourages Celie to pay attention to the world around her and to feel that nature itself offers companionship and meaning. Shug's influence is not rooted in doctrine but in nurturing Celie's ability to perceive beauty as a form of truth. This awakening becomes clearer when Celie reflects on her loneliness after Shug leaves. Standing before the mirror, she realises how deeply Shug had taught her to read the world with feeling: "Even thought you had the trees with you. The whole earth. The stars. But look at you. When Shug left, happiness desert" (Walker 235). This confession reveals that Shug had opened Celie's senses to the living world, teaching her that nature could hold her when human love falters. Learning to observe the earth, the sky, and the silent companionship of natural things becomes part of Celie's inner healing and her movement toward spiritual independence.

Celie's relationship with the land becomes a sign of her emerging sense of self. In her early letters, nature barely appears because her emotional life is suppressed. As she begins gardening, sewing pants, and shaping her own home, she moves toward what scholars describe as an ecological identity. Celie's garden grows alongside her confidence, and every season mirrors a change within her. Her spiritual awareness deepens as she begins to recognise her place within a living community. Celie reflects, "Everything want to be loved. Us sing and dance and holler, just trying to be loved" (Walker 177). Ecofeminist thinker Ynestra King similarly argues that "the healing of the planet and the healing of women are deeply interconnected" (King 129). Celie's understanding of mutual longing and mutual vulnerability echoes this view of shared renewal and healing.

Nettie's letters deepen the novel's exploration of ecology, gender and spiritual awakening by placing Celie in contact with a culture where land and belief exist in harmony. As



Nettie enters the Olinka village, she experiences a communal worldview shaped by the environment. Nettie is welcomed under “a leaf roof,” (Walker 137) where songs, food and ceremony connect the community to the land. The story of the roofleaf teaches her how ecological disruption is tied to moral imbalance, especially when she writes that during the devastation “half the village was gone” (Walker 138). The restored roofleaf, carried toward them as “a large brown spiky thing as big as a room,” (Walker 138) becomes a symbol of renewal. When Joseph explains, “We know a roofleaf is not Jesus Christ, but in its own humble way, is it not God,” (Walker 139) Nettie realises that spiritual meaning can emerge from ecological reverence. She admits that “all that Joseph said made perfect sense to me,” (Walker 139) revealing a moment of awakening that aligns with Walker’s larger vision of harmony among land, community and spirit. Through these insights, Nettie helps Celie understand that healing and identity are inseparable from the natural world.

Celie’s awakening parallels the spiritual vision Alice Walker describes in her Preface. Walker writes, “This is the book in which I was able to express a new spiritual awareness, a rebirth into strong feelings of Oneness” (Walker x). Celie’s journey reflects this same sense of unity. Barbara T. Christian notes that Walker’s fiction imagines spiritual growth arising from “interconnected systems that shape the social, the natural, and the personal” (Christian 67). Celie’s liberation is grounded in this recognition of belonging. Through the intertwined forces of ecology, gender, and spirituality, *The Color Purple* offers a vision that aligns closely with ecological humanities. Celie’s awakening becomes a form of deep sustainability. She learns to value, nurture, and coexist with the living world. Her freedom grows through connection rather than separation.

#### **Nature as Emotional Refuge and Ecological Consciousness**

Celie’s earliest connection with the natural world is instinctive and emotional rather than conscious. She does not yet name what draws her to it, but when fear, grief, or weariness weigh on her, she finds herself seeking nature’s quiet presence. Celie’s earliest relationship with the natural world is instinctive rather than articulated. She does not yet understand nature’s significance, but she gravitates toward it in moments of fear, exhaustion, or silent grief. In those early days, nature becomes a silent listener, offering solace without judgment or expectation. Later, when Shug Avery enters her life, Celie begins to shift from passive identification with nature toward active ecological awareness. Shug’s influence helps Celie recognise that the natural world is alive, connected, and spiritually charged. As Shug explains her own awakening, she tells Celie that “my first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people” (Walker 176). Her words reveal a path of healing that begins with returning to the earth and learning to feel part of a larger living web.

Under Shug’s guidance, Celie slowly awakens to a different way of seeing the world. Shug’s spiritual lesson helps her replace the image of the distant, punishing white male God with a more intimate, earth-rooted understanding of the divine. Celie admits, “Well, us talk and talk bout God, but I’m still adrift. Trying to chase that old white man out of my head. I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn (how it do that?) not the color purple (where it come from?). Not the little wildflowers. Nothing” (Walker 177). This moment marks the turning point in her ecological and spiritual consciousness. What Shug offers Celie is not instruction but a way of being- a spiritual clarity grounded in the natural world. As Celie begins to see nature as vibrant, alive, and worthy of attention, she also begins to see herself as worthy of love, dignity, and joy. In this emerging relationship between woman and landscape, ecology, gender, and spiritual awakening merge into a single movement of healing.

Ecological consciousness thus grows from emotional awareness. The more Celie reconnects with her feelings, the more she perceives the land as a living, responsive entity. Ecofeminist critic Vandana Shiva notes that “environmental perception deepens when marginalised subjects begin to reclaim their senses, their agency, and their capacity to name the world” (Shiva 54). Celie’s emotional recovery is inseparable from her ecological vision: she sees

more of the world because she is slowly seeing herself. By the time Celie establishes her own home and garden, nature becomes not merely a refuge but a collaborator in her independence. She cultivates the land not only for sustenance but as an act of self-definition. Through the land, Celie learns patience, care, and the power of creation— qualities previously denied to her. Her ecological consciousness becomes a quiet rebellion, a way of affirming life in the face of structures that attempted to diminish it.

### **Female Solidarity, Sacred Ecology, and Spiritual Selfhood**

Celie's spiritual identity unfolds through the women who surround her. *The Color Purple* presents female relationships not only as emotional support systems but as channels through which ecological and spiritual understanding circulates. These bonds help Celie experience the natural world as a sacred presence— something that heals, teaches, and restores her sense of belonging.

Shug Avery's influence is the most transformative because she redefines God in terms that honour connection rather than fear. Instead of a distant, punitive figure, Shug offers Celie a vision of divinity rooted in the living world. When she recalls her own awakening, she tells Celie about the day she felt herself "part of everything, not separate at all" (Walker 176) a moment so powerful that she "laughed and cried and run all around the house." Shug explains that if she ever "cut a tree, my arm would bleed" (Walker 176) capturing the deep ecological kinship she feels with the natural world. Her theology insists that God "love everything you love— and a mess of stuff you don't" (Walker 177) and that God's presence is woven into creation itself. Critic Linda Abrahamsen observes that Walker's spiritual vision "rests on recognizing the sacred in ordinary, earthly experience- particularly through relationships among women and with the natural world" (203). Shug embodies this insight, guiding Celie toward a spirituality rooted in touch, colour, and connection rather than submission.

Nettie's letters expand Celie's understanding even further. Through her descriptions of Africa, Celie encounters ways of living that honour land as a shared inheritance rather than property. Nettie writes Olinka "sing to the earth as if it were alive" (Walker 156) revealing a spiritual intimacy that links land, community, and daily ritual. Her observations about Dakar— its "shining, blueblack" people in "brilliant blue robes" that leave her "seeing black for the first time" (Walker 126) show how environments shape identity and vision. Her sense of home in Africa deepens when she writes, "I wish you could see my hut, Celie... It is all colorful and warm and homey," describing a space made vibrant with cloth, mats, pots, and dyed fabrics created from "berries, clay, indigo and tree bark" (Walker 143). Nettie's letters teach Celie that beauty, place, and belonging are forms of spiritual knowledge.

These women also guide Celie toward a spirituality rooted in reciprocity. Sofia's strength and Mary Agnes's determination show her that survival requires voice, agency, and mutual care. Patricia Hill Collins writes that Black women's spiritual traditions arise from "lived experiences of survival, community, and creative resistance" (Collins 112). Celie embodies this tradition as she learns from each woman who supports her. Spirituality becomes inseparable from the shared struggle for dignity and selfhood. By the end of the novel, Celie's spirituality is grounded, expansive, and fiercely tender. She finds divinity in colour, movement, human connection, and the living earth. *The Color Purple* proposes spiritual liberation becomes meaningful when it affirms life in all its forms— human, animal, vegetal, and elemental. Celie discovers this sacred ecology through her relationships with women and with nature that gradually teaches her how to feel alive.

### **Ecological Spirituality in *The Color Purple***

Celie's ecological spirituality develops gradually as she begins to observe the natural world around her and question the rigid religious framework she once accepted. Her healing unfolds through contact with living things, through conversation with women who see the world

differently, and through a growing capacity to notice beauty. In linking Celie's inner life to the rhythms of the earth, Walker suggests that spiritual freedom requires a reconnection with the environment and with one's own embodied presence.

At the start of the novel, Celie directs her prayers toward an authoritarian God and feels spiritually mute. She cannot perceive the divine in the world around her because fear has narrowed her vision. Critics note that Walker's characters often begin their journeys feeling "cut off from the vitality of the earth and from their own bodies" (121). Celie's emotional and spiritual distance echoes this pattern.

This separation begins to dissolve as she opens her senses to her surroundings. The shift becomes visible in her attention to natural details—an awakening Shug helps her articulate. Shug tells her, "I been so busy thinking bout him I never truly notice nothing God make. Not a blade of corn... not the color purple... nothing" (Walker 177). This confession prompts Celie to understand that seeing beauty requires letting go of fear. When nature becomes something, she can notice and name, her spiritual world expands. As Celie learns to pay attention, the land begins to feel like a companion rather than a backdrop. Scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes that Walker's landscapes "carry healing possibilities that restore the characters' faith in themselves and in life" (77). Celie's quiet moments outdoors—sitting in fields, watching seasons shift—become spaces where she feels her own spirit returning.

Walker presents ecological spirituality as something that grows through small acts of care. Celie plants, tends, sews, and builds, discovering that the earth responds to human attention with steadiness and renewal. Rita Felski describes this kind of transformation as "an awakening to the world's small details that had long gone unnoticed" (84). Each act of tending the land mirrors Celie's growing sense of self-worth. By embracing a God who lives in nature and in human connection, Celie finds a spirituality that is neither abstract nor distant. It emerges from daily life, from paying attention, and from allowing beauty to shape her understanding of belonging.

#### **The Natural World as a Space for Inner Renewal**

Celie's earliest spiritual perception is shaped by fear, but nature offers her a quiet sense of companionship long before she fully understands it. The fields, sky, and small plants she tends give her moments of calm reflection. Barbara Smith argues that Walker "uses the environment to mirror the internal lives of Black women, allowing the land to hold their grief until they can transform it" (42). Celie's early interactions with nature follow this pattern: she does not articulate her pain, but she feels steadier in the presence of things that grow.

Her renewal unfolds slowly through ordinary acts. Gardening, observing seasons, and tending small spaces help her trust her perceptions. Instead of praying for escape, she begins to sense support in a living world that responds to her care. Tanisha Wallace notes that Walker's landscapes "create spaces where Black women reclaim a sense of belonging, both to themselves and to the earth" (64). Each time Celie notices beauty—whether in a leaf, a colour, or a quiet morning—her sense of belonging deepens. Nature becomes a steady partner in her healing. Ecological spirituality here is grounded in presence, attention, and the willingness to see oneself as part of a larger living world. Celie's relationship with the environment helps her rebuild the emotional strength she once believed she lacked.

#### **Shug Avery and the Reimagining of the Divine through Nature**

Shug Avery reshapes the entire spiritual landscape of Celie's life. Her worldview blends feeling, ecological insight, and embodied joy, offering Celie a path out of fear and into relational spirituality. Shug teaches Celie that the divine is not a distant authority but a presence woven into everyday experience. Mae Henderson writes that Shug "opens a pathway for a spirituality rooted in experience and pleasure, rather than guilt or obedience" (29). This pathway allows Celie to imagine a God who celebrates life rather than punishes it.

Shug's understanding of God grows directly from her relationship with nature. Her recognition that she felt "part of everything, not separate at all" (Walker 176) reveals a spiritual ecology that honours connection. The moment she tells Celie, "God love all them feelings" (Walker 176) she shifts Celie's understanding from fear to acceptance. Nature becomes a teacher, revealing a divine presence available to anyone willing to look.

Scholars note that Shug's philosophy dismantles the distance between humanity and divinity. According to Chanequa Walker-Barnes, Shug's perspective "suggests that God is found in the intimacy of lived experience" (53). Through Shug, Celie learns to trust her senses, embrace pleasure, and see beauty as spiritually meaningful. As Celie begins to see the natural world with new clarity, she also begins to see herself differently. Her growing ecological awareness supports her self-recognition and strengthens her belief in her own worth. Spiritual freedom, in this sense, arises through connection—to people, to land, and to the sacredness of ordinary life.

### **Conclusion**

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* shows how deeply human lives are shaped by the natural world, especially for those who live with silence, loss, or emotional strain. Celie's journey reveals that spiritual strength often grows in small, quiet exchanges between a person and the environment. The land becomes a place where she can breathe, think, and find the courage to move forward. This relationship between ecology and healing is subtle, yet it forms the emotional core of her transformation. Critics have noted that Walker's writing "weaves the inner life of Black women with the earth that surrounds them" (Christian 34). Celie's growth reflects this weaving, where nature supports her long before she learns to support herself. The presence of other women, especially Shug Avery, deepens this ecological awakening. Shug's way of seeing the world invites Celie to look again at the sky, the trees, and the colors she once overlooked. Through Shug's influence, Celie discovers a spiritual language that feels honest, gentle, and freeing. This shift marks a movement away from fear and toward connection. As one scholar observes, Walker "opens a spiritual horizon in which the divine is felt through the rhythms of everyday life" (Gates 51). Celie steps into this horizon as she learns to trust her place in the world. The novel reminds us that the environment is not simply a backdrop for human activity. It is a companion, a witness, and sometimes a guide. Celie's letters grow more expansive as she begins to see herself as part of a larger living world. Her final sense of peace reflects a kind of ecological spirituality that values attention, care, and belonging. The story suggests that healing becomes possible when individuals recognise that their lives are connected to the land, to other people, and to a larger spiritual presence that moves through all things.

In this way, *The Color Purple* speaks directly to the concerns of Environmental Humanities. It shows how stories help us rethink our place in the world and how relationships with nature can shape resilience, identity, and liberation. Celie's journey invites readers to consider how landscapes hold stories of struggle and renewal, and how the natural world can help carry us toward a more open and hopeful understanding of ourselves.

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**WU WEI AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL IDEA: A TAOIST PERSPECTIVE ON LIVING LIGHTLY**

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**Abstract**

The research paper aims to examine *Wu Wei*, a key concept in Taoist philosophy as a helpful way of looking at environmental issues in the present world. *Wu Wei* can be translated as non-action still it doesn't indicate passivity but staying in sync with the natural flow of the universe. The world today is dealing with a lot of struggles related to climate change, ecological imbalance, over-consumption, here the concept of *Wu Wei* comes as a breath of fresh air which would require humans to transform their way of interacting with the environment; it offers humans with a subtle transformative shift. The main motive behind this principle is to help humans understand that instead of dominating nature by intervening with it consistently, they need to be mindful and respond to only the situations which highly demand it; and leave the rest to its natural course of action. By reframing environmental responsibility as living lightly the research paper argues that *Wu Wei* encourages and cultivates ecological humility and awareness. It helps people understand the evil of overconsumption, interfering with the natural systems and nature's way of keeping things in order. Taoist foundational texts like *Tao-Te-Ching*, emphasize the importance of balance and simplicity while also the dangers of forcing things on nature; the ideas which resonate deeply with the current debate on sustainability. Through a philosophical analysis and interpretation the paper demonstrates how *Wu-Wei* can function as an ethical guide for environmental friendly behavior. It includes Taoist worldview as a valuable contribution to environmental humanities, revealing how ancient wisdom can contribute to current ecological debate. Ultimately *Wu Wei* offers a reminder that living lightly, that is living with restraint, awareness and being in tune with the rhythm of nature can be considered as one of the most sustainable approach to fostering harmony between humans and nature.

**Keywords-** *Wu Wei*, Taoism, Environmental ethics, Sustainability

**Introduction**

The twenty first century is going through an environmental crisis, which has led to a widespread global debate regarding the human-environment relationship. This crisis has compelled scholars and activists to rethink the relationship humans share with the nature. The catastrophe of climate change, loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, excessive pollution is a consequence of human domination, interference and over-consumption of natural resources. In the midst of such environmental challenges the ancient philosophy of Taoism offers one with a fresh perspective towards leading a sustainable lifestyle. Taoism, one of the oldest Chinese philosophy proposes a mode of existence that emphasizes the importance of simple living, harmony, balance and being in rhythm with the natural cycle without interfering with it.

The concept of *Wu Wei* lies in the core of the philosophy of Taoism, which is often misinterpreted as the practice of inaction, while it is much more than that. While the literal meaning of the term would be non-action, *Wu Wei* is the practice of actions in alignment with the natural course of the universe. It teaches humans to not interfere or try to dominate the nature forcefully for their own benefit but learn to show empathy and be sensitive towards nature by responding appropriately and



let nature run its course of action. The idea promotes establishing mindful restraint, which is useful in dealing with contemporary excessive, ecological exploitation and interference with the natural rhythm. According to Daisaku Ikeda, "To prevent trouble, it is important to make a conscious effort within each person. It is necessary to change oneself and change one's attitude towards nature" (qtd. in Lazorevych 29). This aligns with the idea that sustainable action starts with self-awareness and that is how one progresses forward towards establishing a sustainable life.

This research paper aims to explore the environmental connection of the Taoist concept of *Wu Wei* which argues that it provides humanity with a framework for living lightly. By drawing relationship between Taoist classics like *Tao-Te-Ching*, *Zhuangzi* and modern environmental thoughts this research work aims to show how *Wu Wei* can serve as a practical, ethical guide for environmental responsibility.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Foundational Taoist Texts and Interpretations**

Taoism is an ancient Chinese philosophical tradition that emerged during the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BCE), and Warring States period of China (475-221 BCE). These two periods are marked by political chaos as a response to the war and corruption Taoism came into existence. "Taoism is an early folk religion native to China. Originating from Taoist thought during the Spring and Fall, and Warring States periods, the overall teachings and concepts revolve around the Huang Lao doctrine, the religion is based on Lao Tzu's Five Thousand Texts of Lao Tzu" (Ding and Luo 1). The origin of this doctrine lies in *Five Thousand Texts of Lao Tzu* which is another name for *Tao-Te-Ching*. Lao Tzu is among the founding father of Taoism as a philosophy, he is the author of *Tao-Te-Ching* one of the foundational texts of Taoism. Lao Tzu *explains* Taoism as a philosophy that stresses on the importance of a balanced and simple living by being attuned with the nature; a life lead according to the way of the Tao. Tao is the pattern that guides the universe, it is a dynamic and living pattern rather than a rigid law that restricts, therefore it is also known as an "intelligent rhythm" (Watts 40). Alan Watts commentary on Taoism in *Tao The Watercourse Way* provides insightful discourse as his work talks about several concepts and principles of Taoism such as Tao, *Wu Wei*, the Yin Yang polarity and so on.

The concept of *Wu Wei* is consistent throughout *Tao-Te-Ching* as it is a principle guiding people to live a life surrendering to the way of the nature instead of resisting. *Zhuangzi* is another foundational text of Taoism attributed to the author of the same name; he is responsible for deepening the understanding of *Wu Wei* by linking it to intuition, spontaneous and effortless living, as a way in which one could align oneself with the way of the Tao. His work consists of dozens of examples of several men who had achieved mastery in their respective skills by living accordance with the nature, rather than resisting and trying to dominate the course of the universe. These two texts provide enough matter to explore the concept of *Wu Wei* as an idea that promotes ecological well-being.

### **2. Environmental Ethics and Eastern Philosophical Thought**

Environmental ethics deals with the moral and ethical relationship between environment and humanity. Western philosophical and belief systems like anthropocentrism, eco-feminism, and deep ecology offers various lenses in order to explore the human-nature relationship. Similarly, Eastern spiritual traditions like Taoism, Buddhism provide a worldview that every being on the planet is interconnected and the importance of co-existence and harmony. Previous research work of scholars like Iryna Lazorevych and James Miller shows that there has been established links between sustainable living and Taoism which demonstrates the relationship between simplicity, minimalism, sustainable living and the Taoist principles of living life. Taoism tackles the anthropocentric mentality of the modern world which states that a man is superior to the nature; it promotes the ideal that every other living being that is part of the nature is equally important as a human. It is spreading this worldview that human is in fact a part of the ecological system not superior to it. Even though there has been ample literature linking Taoism to sustainable living yet

there seems to be lacking much research linking Wu Wei and ecological living which portrays Wu Wei in an environmental framework. Therefore, this research paper aims at addressing this gap.

### **The Concept of Wu Wei in Taoism**

*Wu Wei* in Chinese philosophy directly translates to non-action or better understood as effortless action. Alan Watts states “*Wu Wei* is thus the life-style of one who follows the Tao, and must be understood primarily as a form of intelligence- that is, of knowing the principles, structures, and trends of human and natural affairs so well that one uses the least amount of energy in dealing with them” (Watts 76). Watts clarifies the meaning of *Wu Wei* as he states, *Wu Wei* is not actually inaction but it indicates an effortless, intelligent way of responding to life. He calls it as a form of intelligence which means the practitioner is so in tune with the natural rhythm and way of the life that he goes on responding to life with harmony and minimal efforts.

In contrast, the Taoist concept of *Wu Wei*, as elucidated in *Dao De Jing* (chapters 37 and 48) by Laozi, also emphasizes non-coercive action. This presents a radical departure from the Western patterns of pursuing happiness. This philosophical concept does not advocate idleness, blindness, or the pursuit of external possessions. It is not passive inertia. Rather, *Wu Wei* refers to natural, harmonious, and spontaneous action that emerges from the inherent rhythm of the universe (Gong 5).

Rather than worrying about forcing outcomes, one aligns with the natural flow of the circumstances and performs an action effectively and smoothly. Thus, *Wu Wei* is seen as a principle of spontaneous and skillful action that is attuned to the Way of the Tao (intelligent rhythm).

In context of environmental ethics, *Wu Wei* stands as a guide for people to act only when very necessary and promotes minimal, timely and proportionate action that is responding only as much as the situation truly requires. This attitude promotes attentiveness, sensitivity and alignment with the environmental processes. *Wu Wei* advises humans to develop attunement to the rhythm of nature rather than trying to control or dominate it.

In *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu recommends the rulers to not govern through force or interference “True mastery can be gained by letting things go their own way. It can’t be gained by interfering” (Mitchell 48). “If you want to be a great leader, you must learn to follow the Tao. Stop trying to control. Let go of fixed plans and concepts, and the world will govern itself” (Mitchell 57). The above verse from *Tao Te Ching* advice a ruler or a leader to operate in accordance to the Tao, and do not try to control the course of nature and stresses on the importance of practicing the principle of non-action or *Wu Wei*, then only one will be able to lead effectively.

Another such example is seen in this research article where the *laissez-faire* of Austrian economics shares similarities with *Wu Wei* in Taoism. In that context the article states that Lao Tzu asserts the importance of a muted and muffled government in order for them to lead effectively and develop a nation of honest people. “Along these lines, Lao-tzu says, “If government is muted and muffled / People are simple and honest. / If government investigates and intrudes, / People are worn down and hopeless” (sec. 58). We need government, but an intrusive and overly active government hurts the people, kills their spirit, and diminishes their creativity and their *Te*” (Irwin 69).

It also teaches that forcing outcomes and manipulating circumstances to have your way would only lead to unintended consequences. Environmental degradation is a prime modern example of this, as it is caused due to over interference of humans into nature leading to ecological imbalance.

### **Environmental Crisis of the Modern World**

Humans have pushed the planet way beyond its ecological limits. Burning fossil fuels, deforestation, pollution, plastic pollution, industrial and agricultural waste have contributed to environmental degradation and climate instability. Overconsumption remains a central problem of contemporary society caused by industrial growth, capitalism, market expansion. This environmental crisis reflects a disconnection between human desires and ecological realities.

Taoist philosophy particularly through his idea of simplicity and balance offers an important perspective on the consequences of excess.

Below is an excerpt from the speech of China's Vice Minister of Environmental Protection

He continues, "Human beings obtain materials and energy from nature, and they must return them to the circulating system and do their best to reduce waste and destruction. Such an energy circulating system operating in line with the law of as nature is exactly what was put by ancient Chinese as 'round and round goes the divine order of things.'" This is a paraphrase of chapter 16 of the classic Daoist text, *The Way and Its Power* (Miller 9)

This paragraph talks about chapter 16 from Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* which states

Be completely empty. Be perfectly serene. The ten thousand things arise together; in their arising is their return. Now they flower, and flowering sink homeward, returning to the root. The return to the root is peace. Peace: to accept what must be, to know what endures. In that knowledge is wisdom. Without it, ruin, disorder. To know what endures is to be openhearted, magnanimous, regal, blessed, following the Tao, the way that endures forever. The body comes to its ending, but there is nothing to fear (Le Guin, ch. 16).

It describes nature as operating in cycles of arising and returning, everything that arises eventually returns to its source. Harmony comes from accepting the way of the natural process instead of resisting it, true understanding comes from realizing that changing of cycles and balance remains constant in nature and meddling with it will lead to chaos.

The world today is shaped by the ideology of anthropocentrism, which is the belief that humans are central or the most important being in the nature and everything else is secondary to them, which justifies humans taking advantage and exploiting nature for their gratification and pleasure. This has caused long term ecological instability just to satisfy short term needs and make profit humans have been very selfish in ignoring the devastating environmental degradation their actions have been causing. Taoism challenges this by places humans as one of the many elements that are equally important within a vast interconnected universe. According to Taoist viewpoint sustainable living requires restraint, recognition of nature's innate values and humility.

#### **Introducing Wu Wei as an Environmental Framework**

Living lightly is a concept that in contrast to today's materialistic lifestyle which focuses on following the natural rhythm which basically means acting without force and leading a lifestyle by practicing mindful consumption; while not unnecessarily interfering with the nature. In terms of environmental ethics it means living in a way that reduces waste by adopting low impact lifestyle lowering consumption rate; basically avoiding actions that disturb the ecological balance of an ecosystem.

The principle of *Wu Wei* teaches that not all situations require intervention and when it is applied to ecological systems it means letting nature take its own course and not interfering with the natural cycle until and unless its deemed very necessary for instance in order to restore completed degraded ecosystems. *Wu Wei* insists people to practice humility and realize that nature possesses its own self-regulating capacity if it is left undisturbed. The forests are capable of regenerating itself, the water found in the ecosystem naturally can purify itself, the ecological balance will always be maintained if there is no alien interference with the ecosystem. *Wu Wei* teaches one to respect this natural rhythm rather than trying to manipulate it. Basically a lifestyle centered on the principle of *Wu Wei* promotes consuming less, wasting less, using the natural resources mindfully, appreciating and respecting the nature. This aligns closely with the slow, minimal and sustainable living practices.

### **Comparative Analysis of Wu Wei with Western Environmental Ethics**

Western environmental philosophies like Deep ecology deeply resonate with the principles of Taoism. Deep Ecology emphasize on the importance of nature and every other living being that is a part of it, it focuses on biocentric equality of all living beings unlike anthropocentrism.

The most important part, however, is that every living being, human and nonhuman, has its own inherent value, and thus has its own right to live and flourish. Essentially, everything has an “own” to it, and therefore has its own irreducible right to live, to blossom, to reach its own fullness in existing and reproducing. In its own right, each living thing is independent and separate of its “usefulness” to any other thing, specifically of humans. Lastly, these all mean that deep ecology is really about ecocentrism, and not anthropocentrism, in that it is against seeing everything in terms of its beneficial usefulness (or lack thereof) to humans (Ambrosius 2).

Deep ecology and Taoism stresses on the importance treating all beings in nature with equality, and the importance of ecological harmony. “Taoists view all kinds of species on earth as siblings, based on the basic Taoist belief that ten thousand beings (meaning all beings) were all generated from Tao. Taoism persuades people to care about wildlife with compassion, respecting them as human beings’ siblings or relatives, even if they are tiny insects or invisible living things” (Yang et al. 8).

While both resist human interference and dominance simultaneously advocating sustainable and mindful living avoiding overconsumption. Deep ecology’s guiding principle can be interpreted as living simply so other beings are also allowed to live and exist freely, this resonates deeply with Taoist lifestyle of minimalism by practicing the view of *Wu Wei* which basically tells one to establish happiness based on the natural flow of life and not base it upon accumulating material goods. “In contrast, the Taoist view of *Wu Wei* offers an escape out of this struggling against the ceaseless pursuit and proposes that to live life by following the natural order to gain the genuine fulfillment is preferable, but not to live life by accumulating endless and unnecessary resources or try to get validation by contending with the external reality” (Gong 4). Both the perspectives challenge the modern idea of basing progress upon endless material growth while pointing it towards living a balanced and sustainable life.

### ***Wu Wei* as an Ecological Solution**

The environmental crisis the planet is going through right now is also a philosophical issue as it stems from the mindset that prioritizes control, domination and profit over coexistence and practicing restraint. *Wu Wei* proposes living effortlessly acting according to the natural rhythms and limits making it a very powerful philosophical response against current ecological degradation. Effortless living also encourages humans to reduce waste generating habits and adopt renewable energy resources and promote environmental restoration projects.

One of the root causes of this degradation is excessive human intervention in the natural systems which resulted in deforestation, extinction of species and ecosystems. This happens when human activity overrides the ability of nature to self- renew and regulate itself. “Taoists holds that the universe already works harmoniously following its own laws—the Tao. Hence, Tao seekers should maintain being natural, without disrupting the harmony that already exists in the universe, in nature, in society and in the personal inner-world and all will be done without effort” (Yang et al. 6-7 ). *Wu Wei* advocates for non-interference where interference is unnecessary, which doesn’t mean inaction but practicing intelligent restraint by realizing where interfering does more harm than good; allowing ecosystems to exist in isolation following their own natural course of balance. Another major factor that contributes to this ill of ecological degradation is that of overconsumption while Taoism emphasize on the importance of a simple living, practicing moderation, encouraging people to lead a sustainable life not a life of excess. *Wu Wei* helps counter the culture of overconsumption by promoting moderation, which naturally would reduce

waste generation and resource depletion. It helps cultivate a shift in values which support sustainable living.

“Wu Wei,” often understood as “effortless action” or “non-doing,” advocates for a natural, spontaneous and harmonious interaction with the ideal world that arises from inner tranquility and alignment with natural rhythms. This concept is totally different from the consumerism’s emphasis on external acquisition and absolute control, showing that true contentment can only stem from detachment from desires and an acceptance of simplicity. Conversely, failure to adopt this life approach risks perpetuating a Sisyphean cycle of incessant desire fulfillment, an endeavor analogous to a futile, self-defeating pursuit (Gong 2).

*Wu Wei* also supports ecological humility that negates the mindset that humans are superior species. It promotes ecological equality of all the beings and stresses on the equal importance of each and every being in the nature and that humans just like every other being are participants in the ecological system not the masters. Thus *Wu Wei* offers a philosophical solution to the current problem of ecological degradation by offering a mindset transformation. It positively encourages humanity to shift from domination to harmony, from excess to moderation and from interference to respect. By doing so it offers an ethical foundation for environmental sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

The every growing environmental crisis demands internal transformation of human beings mindset regarding how they understand their relationship with nature. This research article has argued that Taoist philosophy specially its principle of *Wu Wei* offers a valuable ecological vision embedded in restraint, balance and harmony rather than control and domination. By referencing ancient Taoist foundational texts like *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuangzi*, it is seen that nature is seen something having its own self regulating practices a living entity deserving of respect rather than a resource to be exploited and manipulated for their own benefit.

The idea of *Wu Wei* challenges the anthropocentric worldview that has lead to environmental degradation. Instead of constant interference it promotes selective and mindful action based the limits of nature. In an age of climate change, ecological degradation and overconsumption this philosophy invites society to reevaluate the definition of growth and progress. The concept of living lightly in Taoism isn’t just an act of being lazy or irresponsible but infact it is a commitment to ecological well being. It is a shift from material overconsumption, exploitation to sufficiency and coexistence of all living being.

Modern environmental discourse only focuses on external solutions Taoism reminds the society to look within for a solution; by addressing the spiritual and moral dimensions of environmental responsibility of the society; as lasting change only begins with transformation in values and consciousness. Ecological harmony cannot be achieved through technical solutions alone, it requires humility, patience and dedication for life.

Ultimately, the practice of “Wu Wei” culminates in an authentic self-connection. When we are finally silent in the world of Tao, when the external noise subsides, we discover a profound truth: the true self is inherently good enough, whole, and complete. There is no intrinsic need for outward adornments or material possessions to validate or “decorate” this true nature. If we allow this true nature to function unimpeded, it naturally brings forth wisdom and a profound understanding of life’s fundamental truths, enabling us to shed the distorting “lenses” through which consumerism encourages us to view ourselves and the world. This profound self-acceptance, rooted in the effortless integration with the Tao, is the bedrock of genuine and eternal happiness, liberating individuals from the fleeting and ultimately unsatisfying pursuit of artificially stimulated desires (Gong 8).

In conclusion, *Wu Wei* isn’t just an ancient philosophical idea but an environmental ethic. It provides with a framework for fostering a deep ecological awareness and developing sustainable practices that work in sync with the rhythms of nature. As environmental threats continue to rise

the wisdom of the philosophy of Taoism provides the society with a hopeful reminder that its survival is based upon living in harmony with nature rather than conquering it.

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**HAUNTED ECOLOGIES AND NECROPOLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY IN *METRO 2033***

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**Abstract**

This paper reads Dmitry Glukhovski's *Metro 2033* (2005) as a paradigmatic ecogothic narrative in which environmental catastrophe and sovereign power over life and death are inseparably intertwined. Moving beyond familiar bunker or vault motifs in post-apocalyptic fiction, the novel's Moscow Metro is framed as a necropolitical arena where survival is conditioned by uneven access to resources, differential exposure to radiation, and the normalization of certain populations as expendable. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's necropolitics and Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence, the paper argues that the novel dramatizes how power operates not only through overt coercion but through the incremental toxicity of environments, the attrition of bodies, and the psychological burden of living amid ongoing ecological ruin. Ecogothic theory and Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality illuminates how radioactive fallout, fungal growths and mutant life forms transform the tunnels into a space of abjection, where human bodies are revealed as porous, contaminated and materially continuous with the broken world they inhabit. Finally, the paper examines the post-apocalyptic surface world as an ecology of estrangement, where ruined yet recognisable Moscow streets render environmental loss as a permanent condition rather than a temporary crisis. Rejecting both dystopian nihilism and utopian restoration, the novel insists on a unique approach to post-apocalyptic ethics of survival, responsibility and multispecies coexistence under the conditions of irreversible ecological transformation. In doing so, it demonstrates the function of speculative fiction as a crucial site for inquiries into power, embodiment and haunted ecological futures.

**Keywords:** Ecogothic, Necropolitics, Objection, Transcorporeality, Post-apocalyptic fiction, Environmental Humanities

**Introduction**

Dmitry Glukhovski's *Metro 2033* (2005) represents a crucial touchstone in post-apocalyptic fiction, rendering humanity's subterranean survival in the Moscow Metro system following nuclear catastrophe. Published in the post-Cold war context of contemporary Russian literature, the novel synthesizes science fiction, gothic atmosphere and philosophical meditation to explore the intricately entwined nature of ecological devastation and sovereign governance over life and death. The post-apocalyptic bunker or vault is a familiar motif in contemporary dystopian fiction, yet *Metro 2033* departs significantly from the normative interpretations of an underground refuge. Rather, Glukhovsky's underground shelter unfolds into what Achille Mbembe terms a "necropolitical arena" – a space where sovereignty is exercised through the capacity "to dictate who is able to live and who must die" (Mbembe 11). As the narrative unfolds, Glukhovsky presents a spectacle of environmental catastrophe where the living and the dead are inseparably entangled and where sovereignty over life and death is perpetually contested. The ecological crisis that permeates the very being of the survivors fundamentally alters the very categories through which humanity identifies itself as a separate entity in relation to the non-human world.

The present paper thus makes an attempt to argue that Glukhovsky's novel is a quintessential ecogothic text where environment and power are embroiled in an interplay of necropolitics, abjection and spectral haunting. Rather than serving as the backdrop of the story, ecological catastrophe is depicted as a constitutive force in the emergence of new forms of biopolitical and spatial sovereignty. The ruins and the tunnels of the metro system are not simply

sites of terror and death. Rather, they are unstable frontiers between the human and the non-human, the living and the dead, the sovereign and the abject. Through close textual analysis and rigorous engagement with ecocriticism and posthumanism, the present paper makes an attempt to explore how Glukhovsky's ecological imagination speaks to both – the horrors of contemporary environmental crises, as well as the urgent yet challenging task of exploring post-apocalyptic ethics. By foregrounding necropolitics as a key analytical perspective, the paper highlights how power operates through not just overt domination but also through the regulation of death and environmental toxicity. The ecogothic framework, in turn, illuminates how the mutated environment acts not simply as the backdrop, but a force that disrupts anthropocentric narratives.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The convergence of ecocriticism and gothic studies is an area of significant dynamic scholarship within the domain of environmental humanities. At its core, the ecogothic is “an interrogatory discourse which problematizes human fears concerning the edge of the human and non-human agency” in which “nature is seen as a contested site – a space of crisis, where human and non-human ecologies interact and coproduce meaning” (Ambroży 62-63). Ecogothic criticism recognizes environmental forces as possessing agency, intentionality and the power to disrupt human ontologies. Writing on the ecogothic, David Del Principe emphasizes its central corporeal focus, arguing that “the EcoGothic examines the construction of the Gothic body – unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid – through a more inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation of environmental and species identity” (Del Principe 1). This corporeal focus is vital: the ecogothic is thus not merely about fearful encounters with untamed nature or ecological disasters. Rather, it facilitates an exploration of the ways in which bodies – human and nonhuman – become sites where ecological crises take hold and new forms of entanglement are negotiated across blurred boundaries.

Additionally, Ambroży draws upon Alaimo's concept of “transcorporeality”, noting that “the body is a transversal onto-epistemological continuum in which various agencies and semiotic processes, including non-human ones, interact and communicate” (Ambroży 62). This framework disrupts the notion of the autonomous, bounded human subject, revealing the ways in which “the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (Ambroży 62). In the novel, transcorporeality operates not just as an abstract philosophy but as a tangible, lived terror. Survivors in the metro are not safely isolated from radiation and contamination; rather, they are porous vessels transformed by the poisons that pass through and accumulate within them. This transcorporeal entanglement forms the cornerstone of the novel's ecogothic vision, implying the threat of internal ruin and contamination alongside the widespread external catastrophe.

Furthermore, Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* introduces a crucial framework for thinking about sovereign power as not merely the right to govern life, but as “the right to expose some populations to death and to let others live” (Mbembe 11). Necropolitical control is enacted through the regulation of life, death and disposability within the underground system, determining whose deaths are mourned and whose suffering can be rendered invisible. Throughout the narrative, necropolitical power structures are evident in the skewed rationing of resources, the isolation of marginal populations as well as the perpetuated creed that certain lives were expendable in the service of collective survival. Rob Nixon's concept of “slow violence” complements this necropolitical framework by foregrounding “a violence that is incremental and accretive, unfolding invisibly across time and space, and rarely dramatized as spectacle” (Ilas 234). Slow violence includes the build-up of toxins and radiation in the habitat and the psychological trauma caused by the perpetually degraded environments and their resultant illness and loss of life. This slow violence manifests in the novel not just in the form of the overt threat of radiation from the surface but also in the form of the increasing deprivation of the underground survivor communities, suffering from malnutrition, disease and the mental burden that arises from confronting the irrevocable collapse of the surrounding world.

Lastly, the “spectral” or ghostly dimension of environmental crises has also become a major motif in contemporary ecocritical theory. Keetley and Silvils argue that “the ecogothic casts its net still further back than does the gothic into the era of prehistory, into our prehuman and nonhuman origins” and that “the return of the repressed and the attendant ambiguous affects” are central to ecogothic interrogation (Keetley and Silvils 6). This framework asserts the existence of ecological trauma and horror as a timeless entity, often haunted by the forgotten and unacknowledged parts of humanity. Ecological catastrophe therefore acquires a spectre-like quality, persisting and appearing in forms that are at once familiar yet petrifying. Within this framework, the novel’s depiction of fungal ecologies, mutant creatures and the blurred boundaries between human and nonhuman life goes beyond the scope of speculative flourishing. Rather, these elements exemplify an “entangled futurity” that is not simply a speculative fantasy but a tangible reality rendered through environmental transformation. In this sense, the ecogothic text becomes a medium for articulating the unease of living in a damaged world, where the environment is not simply altered but transformed into something that demands its own individual recognition.

### **Analysis**

#### *The Ontologies of Post-Apocalyptic Existence*

The opening of the novel establishes widespread environmental catastrophe with sudden totality: a nuclear holocaust which has destroyed the surface world and driven human survivors into Moscow’s subway system seeking refuge. Yet, from the very beginning, this tunnel system is characterized not as a refuge, but as a necropolis – a site of the dead, a mausoleum where survival is increasingly ambiguous. Glukhovsky describes the metro stations as “cathedrals of emptiness... beautiful in the way that tombs are beautiful – cold, silent and full of the weight of something irretrievable” (Glukhovsky 23). The linguistic choices establish the aesthetic texture of the novel as fundamentally gothic, invoking the uncanny familiarity of a space that has become a crypt. The heterogeneity of life in the metro further contributes to its necropolitan character as human survivors occupy these underground spaces along with mutated creatures, fungi and other forms of life that have emerged as a result of radiation contamination and ecological transformation. The metro thus emerges as a purgatorial space marked by the uneasy coexistence of incompatible ontologies that resist synthesis, struggling for resources, survival and dominance. This mixing of the living and the monstrous, the human and the nonhuman disrupts normative hierarchies while generating anxieties about human existence in a world where humanity no longer possesses primacy.

Nuclear radiation, throughout the novel, functions as an unseen gothic presence – widespread on the surface and influencing all social relations and bodily experiences despite being imperceptible to the senses. Glukhovsky writes: “The radiation was like a ghost haunting the world... you could not see it, could not hear it, could not smell it, yet it was there in every breath, every drop of water, every crust of bread” (Glukhovsky 147). This description of radiation as a spectre haunts throughout the narrative via absence and the uncanny persistence of effects without apparent causes. The invisible nature of radiation generates a unique species of environmental anxiety documented by Lawrence Buell who states, “self-identified victims of environmental illness are often left oscillating between implacable rage and uncertainty, as the legal and scientific complexity of an investigation in such cases often results in the failure of ecojustice” (660). In the novel, survivors in the tunnel systems live under perpetual suspicion of contamination, never certain whether the water they drink, the air they breathe, or the food they eat will prove lethal. This ambiguity, born of the inability to determine whether a threat exists, generates a distinctly gothic form of dread that exceeds any situational encounters with danger. Moreover, radiation operates as an environmental force, indifferent to the desires and intentions of the human survivors, accumulating in their bodies and their habitats resulting in widespread ecological transformations. This agency is conveyed in the novel through descriptions of the razed surface world, now hostile to life not through intention but through ecological transformation: “The surface was no longer

ours. The grass had turned to ash. The trees have become sculptures of charred wood. The sky was the colour of lead" (Glukhovsky 189).

*Power, Death and Biopolitical Ecologies in the Necropolis*

The social structure of the novel's underground society operates according to necropolitical logistics, where power is exercised not merely through direct coercive force but also through control and regulation of life-sustaining resources. Various metro stations are organized in a hierarchical manner, with some stations privileged and well-resourced while others wither away in deprivation. Access to water, food and even breathable air is disparate, with this inequality being justified through appeals to military necessity and limited technological capacity. Through the synthesis of such elements, the novel repeatedly documents how power operates through the management and regulation of death and survival. The narrative's protagonist, Artyom, gradually comes to realise that his home station of VDNKh is increasingly marginalized within the metro's sociopolitical structure, due to its sympathetic and communal nature. Meanwhile other stations, often controlled by fascist and authoritarian factions, accumulate widespread power through the hoarding of resources and the strategic cultivation of fear. This skewed power dynamic is best highlighted by Mbembe's theorization of necropolitics, arguing that necropolitics involves "the capacities and the decisions to dictate who may live and who must die" and that this power is distributed unequally across populations (Mbembe 11). The novel treats certain demographics of the surviving population, such as the very young, the elderly, the ill and those from marginalized stations, as inherently expendable. Starvation and disease run rampant as a result of ruthless hoarding of resources and the deaths of these affected populations are accepted as necessary costs of survival rather than collective challenges to be addressed. The core necropolitical tenet – that some lives are worth saving and others are not – becomes embedded in their daily sociological fabric.

Beyond the overt regulation of resources, the metro is further controlled through what Michel Foucault termed "biopolitics" – the strategic management of populations and life itself. As the narrative unfolds, biopolitics becomes conspicuously pronounced given the constraints imposed by the shifting ecology of the world: the need to monitor radiation, regulation of scarce resources and govern reproduction itself as a matter of ideology. The novel also hints at eugenic discourse among some of the more radical factions, highlighting their preoccupation with for genetic purity, their fear of mutation and escalating anxieties about the very future of the human race. Glukhovsky articulates these biopolitical anxieties through the figure of the "Dark Ones", described as mysterious creatures that some speculate to be human survivors who have undergone total mutation as a result of ecological transformation. The apprehension that humans might evolve into something other generates much of this biopolitical anxiety and becomes the justification for hostile and genocidal action against this new species. However, while the novel portrays such biopolitical dynamics and violent encounters, the greatest horror is derived from the slow violence enacted by the posthuman ecological elements of post-apocalyptic Moscow, as seen in the gradual accumulation of poisons in the body, the chronic illness that devastates entire populations and the psychological dread of contamination. Glukhovsky writes of the "creeping sickness" that affects many inhabitants of the metro: "It was not a disease that killed you quickly. It took years. It hollowed you out slowly, cell by cell, until you were nothing but a husk" (Glukhovsky 165). This description aptly captures the gothic temporality of ecological slow violence, one that unfolds unnoticed and is often attributed to personal shortcomings rather than structural or environmental factors.

*Abjection and Kinship in the Mutated Metro*

Among the most distinctly gothic imagery in the novel is the proliferation of fungal and quasi-organic growths that line the tunnel systems, creating an ecosphere that is neither clearly natural nor completely artificial, neither dead nor living. Glukhovsky describes the walls that appear as "alive with growth... not mold exactly, but something else, something that fed on radiation and moisture, something that had evolved in the darkness and poison to become a new form of life" (Glukhovsky 203). This ambiguous materiality embodies what Julia Kristeva and

Mary Douglas term abjection: matter that “does not respect borders, positions, rules” and therefore provokes horror by resisting classification into stable anthropocentric ontologies such as clean/unclean, living/dead and human/nonhuman (Kristeva 4; Douglas 44). Within the underground shelters, such growths mark nature’s transformation beyond recognition as a result of nuclear fallout. Nature no longer remains a passive remnant of the old world waiting to be restored, but assumes manifestation in the complex necropolitical ecology where decay and radiation become conditions conducive for emergent forms of life (Ambroży 65). Rather than representing a return of “pure” nature after human hubris, these quasi-organic life forms enact what Stacy Alaimo calls a transcorporeal materiality, in which “matter, the vast stuff of the world and of ourselves, has been subdivided into manageable bits or flattened into a blank state for human inscription” only to return in forms that “resist such emptying and flattening” (Alaimo 12). These ambiguous life forms exert an agency of more-than-human matter, articulating what Timothy Morton describes as the “strange stranger”: a nonhuman presence that cannot be fully known, domesticated or assimilated into human frameworks of interpretation (Morton 41). *Metro 2033* portrays such strange strangers as more than just neutral background, creating an affective atmosphere of disgust, fear and fascination by compelling survivors into close proximity with ecologies that exceed their comprehension and their control. The abjection of these ecologies is intensified by the narrative’s repeated emphasis on the eroding boundaries between humanity and their toxic surroundings. Survivors belatedly come to realise that the nuclear fallout and contamination is not something that can be kept at bay, having already become part of their very being. As one reflection by Glukhovsky elaborates “We thought of ourselves separate from the poison, but we were wrong. The poison was inside us, in every cell, in every breath. We were becoming the contaminated world, and it was becoming us” (Glukhovsky 211). The dissolution of boundaries unfolds in a dual register, on one hand marking the horror of being unable to defend against environmental threats; on the other, exposing the modernist fantasy of an impermeable sovereign human subject which environmental humanities critiques as foundational to anthropocentric politics (Clark 19-21).

At the same time, the novel refuses to categorize all mutation as pure loss or pathology. Certain nonhuman entities, most notable the Dark Ones, appear as evolutionary adaptations to the new ecological regime. While humanity clings to increasingly unsustainable niches within the tunnels, various mutated species exhibit a capacity to inhabit and sometimes even thrive in irradiated spaces. Measured on a purely ecological axis, humanity may thus be read as less successful than these creatures whose physiologies now match the demands of the poisoned environment. This unsettling shift underpins the novel’s most explicit exploration of the kinship of humanity with the monstrous, evolving ecology of the post-nuclear world. Initially figured as terrifying invaders that threaten the last strongholds of humanity, these hybridized species are described through tropes that echo Simon Estok’s notion of ecophobia: the “irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world” projected onto nonhuman entities (Estok 36). They are imagined as absolutely other, occupying the role that is often assigned to the racialized, colonized or the feminised other in gothic tradition (Ambroży 68; Loring 12). However, as the narrative unfolds, the ontological status of the mutations becomes increasingly ambiguous as the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman are blurred. The protagonist Artyom reflects, “We had come to the deep tunnels prepared for war, certain that we faced a soulless enemy. But what we found was something stranger and more troubling: the possibility that we faced not an enemy but a mirror, that the Dark Ones were what we might become, or what we had already become without recognizing it” (Glukhovsky 289). The horror thus goes beyond the simple prospect of physical annihilation but the recognition of kinship with the ecological horrors. By reframing mutated ecologies and contaminated bodies through the linked lenses of abjection and kinship, the novel articulates an ecogothic vision where survival in the post-apocalyptic wasteland demands more than simple fortification against externalized nature. It demands acknowledgement that human bodies are already inextricably entangled with the nonhuman world and that the line between “us”

and the monstrous other is historically, materially and ethically unstable. This recognition opens up a space for imagination of posthuman forms of coexistence with an increasingly agential ecology.

*Ecologies of Estrangement in the Postapocalyptic Surface*

Whereas most of the narrative remains confined to the underground tunnels, the few brief excursions to the postapocalyptic surface function as the most visible ecological register of estrangement, depicting a world which has moved irreversibly beyond human scales of perception and belonging. These expeditions above ground are not framed as heroic returns to a damaged but recoverable homeland. Instead, they dramatize an encounter with an environment that has become, in effect, an alien ecology, hostile to human life and comprehensible only as a space of exclusion and ruin. In this sense, the surface does not simply signify environmental damage, becoming the privileged site where the severed relation between human and the more-than-human world is made visible. This estrangement is sharpened by the way the surface environment violates inherited expectations of nature as either resource or refuge. Ecogothic critics such as Andrew Smith and William Hughes note that within this mode, “the more nature is attacked... the more frightening the environments become” as the natural world is rendered as an uncanny agent rather than a passive backdrop (Smith and Hughes 5-6). Glukhovsky writes: “The sun shone through a haze of dust and ash. The familiar Moscow streets were barely recognizable. The buildings were skeletons of concrete and metal. Where there had been gardens, there was only black earth. Where there had been water, there was only poison” (Glukhovsky 243). The frozen ruins, irradiated air and proliferating mutant life of Glukhovsky’s surface world exemplify this inversion: the sky, soil, snow and wind no longer promise renewal or cyclical return but unending exposure and death.

The novel further intensifies this environmental estrangement by framing the surface as a site of uncanny familiarity. Survivors recognize buildings, streets and monuments, yet these recognitions now fail to provide orientation or comfort; instead, the continued existence of such recognizable forms in an uninhabitable world highlights the permanence of the loss. The city above is not erased, but petrified and preserved as an open-air citywide mausoleum whose visibility intensifies grief and dislocation. This dynamic aligns with Fred Botting’s claim that gothic spaces are defined by “an absence of the light associated with sense, security and knowledge” replacing the promise of intelligibility with a mood of uncertainty, dread and disorientation (Botting 12). The postapocalyptic surface world in the novel operates exactly in the same register: it is fully there, endlessly legible as a ruin, and yet no longer available as a place where human life, memory or narrative can meaningfully be anchored. The surface expeditions foreground the limits of comprehension and mastery that define ecological estrangement in the novel. Even when equipped with gas masks, filters and weapons, Artyom and his companions confront a world governed by forces such as radiation gradients, mutational vectors, atmospheric toxicity that remain fundamentally beyond their control. In Glukhovsky words, the recognition that “the world we had known was gone forever” marks not only a plot point, but also highlights the universally relevant epistemological turning that environmental estrangement is no longer a temporary interruption but the permanent condition under which any postapocalyptic existence must be imagined.

### **Conclusion**

Through its depiction of ecological collapse, necropolitics, slow violence and the haunting persistence of toxins and mutated life, *Metro 2033* provides a paradigmatic text for environmental humanities in an era of climate anxiety and planetary crisis. The novel exemplifies the vital role played by speculative fiction in shaping contemporary consciousness and ethical frameworks for confronting environmental degradation and social injustices. Rather than being a portal of escapism, the novel demands a confrontation with the reality of ecological ruin, recognition of complicity in the systems of dominations and exploitation, and a reckoning with the difficulty of ethical action under the conditions of perpetual existential crisis. The ecogothic framework serves to illuminate how the environment is not merely a setting or concern but a force



that fundamentally shapes human ontologies, social relations and the possibility of meaning-making. The return of the repressed environment, in the form of radiation, mutation, fungal growths and nonhuman agency, cannot be domesticated through technological mastery or moral clarity. Rather, it demands cognition of what has been destroyed, what cannot be recovered and what new forms of kinship and coexistence might become possible in a world radically transformed by human action.

The novel's treatment of necropolitics reveals how power operates through not only overt domination but through the management of life and death, through the regulation of resources and through the rendering of certain lives as marginal and disposable. More importantly, the novel highlights the inextricable role of nonhuman entities and ecological elements in the power dynamics of such necropolitical structures. Yet, the novel also suggests that these structures are not inevitable; rather, they result from choices, from the way survivors organize their communities and how they distribute the benefits and burdens of collective survival. Most significantly, *Metro 2033* refuses both apocalyptic despair and utopian redemption. The novel does not end with the restoration of the lost world or the successful adaptation of humanity to the new conditions. Instead, it insists on the necessity of ongoing struggle, on the commitment to survival and justice despite overwhelming obstacles and on the recognition of kinship with those who are other, monstrous or strange. This stance of ecogothic solidarity seems necessary and urgent for environmental humanities in the Anthropocene. As climate change accelerates and ecological crises spread across the planet, the narratives told about these crises become increasingly consequential.

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**DOCTOR FAUSTUS PLAY AN ECO-CRITICAL WARNING OR THE FUTURE OF  
ANTHROPOGENIC ACTIVITIES?**

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**Abstract**

The paper will try to draw an eco-critical parallel between Doctor Faustus's transgressions & the decisions of the human race in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that lead to Catastrophe. The paper will try to highlight that Dr. Faustus represents the Modern Man (The Waste Land) or the Collective Consciousness of the Human Race or Mechanical Solidarity (Emile Durkheim) of Contemporary times to exceed the limits of power, knowledge, and a thirst for desires which will not be quenched until Mephistopheles/Lucifer (i.e., Science, Progress, Rationality) trade in a Machiavellian Manner with entire human race to sell their soul (i.e., to exhaust natural resources or to disturb the balance of ecology, at the cost of satisfying the psychological needs created by the 'Culture Industry'). The paper will also take into account different incidents – cloud burst in Saudi Arabia, heat waves in Canada, floods and landslides in India, overflow of rivers in China, coral bleaching, wars, nuclear threats, etc. to draw attention towards the warnings given to the Faustus and now it is before the entire humanity. Humanity may have to settle for the distinction of being the first species ever to understand the causes of its extinction (Meeker). Therefore, the paper will try to conclude that the Future of the Human Race can become entirely similar to the Ending of Doctor Faustus if the human race doesn't choose between Progress and Survival.

**Keywords:** Transgression, Subversion, Eco-criticism, Science and Environment

**Introduction**

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes the perilous ambition of a scholar who, dissatisfied with the conventional limits of knowledge, turns to necromancy—an art culturally associated with black magic and forbidden power. Faustus's tragic journey culminates in the signing away of his soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of absolute knowledge and pleasure. Although opportunities for repentance repeatedly arise, Faustus's spiritual paralysis makes it impossible for him to utter divine words such as "God," "Mercy," or "Faith," signifying his gradual moral disintegration. His bargain with the devil reduces salvation to a mere transaction—he becomes a merchant of his own soul, seeking profit in the form of worldly excess. The play thus stages the deep tension between Renaissance humanist ambition and Christian theological boundaries, revealing the internal conflict between science, reason, and religion that characterized the era.

**Methodology**

This paper adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach, combining literary analysis with eco-critical and sociological perspectives to examine the parallels between Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and contemporary human behavior. The study follows textual analysis as its primary method, close-reading key passages from the play to interpret Faustus's transgressions, moral dilemmas, and the symbolic role of Mephistopheles as a Machiavellian agent. Literary evidence is critically evaluated in conjunction with secondary theoretical frameworks, including Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry, Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, and T.S. Eliot's reflections in *The Waste Land*, to contextualize Faustus's ambition within broader human desires for knowledge, power, and progress.

To establish the contemporary eco-critical parallel, empirical and secondary data on environmental crises were incorporated, including climate change indices (CCPI 2024), Doomsday Clock predictions (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists), and reports on coral bleaching, heatwaves, floods, and other global ecological threats (UNEP, Ocean Agency). These data were used as case studies to draw correlations between Faustus's hubris and humanity's unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.

The methodology also incorporates a comparative analytical framework, linking the ethical and moral lessons of Marlowe's text with modern technological, scientific, and societal practices. The study employs conceptual mapping, juxtaposing instances of Faustus's transgression with contemporary examples such as AI, space exploration, industrial projects, and climate mismanagement. This approach allows for an integrated analysis that is simultaneously literary, sociological, and ecological.

Finally, the research emphasizes interdisciplinary synthesis, situating literary interpretation alongside environmental ethics, technological critique, and philosophical reflections on free will and collective responsibility. This framework ensures that the study captures both the symbolic dimensions of the text and the material realities of 21st-century ecological crises, highlighting the relevance of classical literature to contemporary global challenges.

### **Objective**

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the eco-critical parallels between Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and the decisions of the human race in the 21st century that have led to ecological and societal crises. By analyzing Faustus's transgressions, ambition, and moral failings, the study aims to situate the play as a symbolic representation of modern humanity—driven by unquenchable desire, technological ambition, and the pursuit of knowledge and power without ethical restraint. The paper seeks to explore how Mephistopheles functions as a metaphor for science, progress, and the culture industry, offering immediate gratification while obscuring long-term consequences for both the individual and collective ecological systems. Additionally, the study aims to link Faustus's irreversible damnation with contemporary global challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation, and technological risks, emphasizing the moral and ecological responsibilities inherent in human choice. Ultimately, the paper intends to demonstrate that, without conscious intervention and sustainable decision-making, humanity risks a denouement analogous to Faustus's tragic end, thereby reinforcing the ethical and ecological relevance of classical literature to contemporary global crises.

### **Literature Review**

Scholarship on *Doctor Faustus* has extensively examined themes of ambition, transgression, and the conflict between knowledge and morality. Greenblatt (1997) highlights Marlowe's portrayal of Faustus as a Renaissance figure torn between the desire for worldly power and the constraints of divine law, emphasizing the moral consequences of overreaching. Dollimore (1985) situates the play within the broader cultural and political tensions of early modern England, noting that Faustus's hubris exemplifies the dangers inherent in human attempts to transcend natural and ethical limits.

Eco-critical readings of literature have increasingly explored parallels between literary transgression and environmental crises. Meeker (1972) argues that humanity's awareness of ecological consequences mirrors literary depictions of irreversible moral error, suggesting that texts like *Doctor Faustus* offer cautionary frameworks for understanding contemporary ecological threats. Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) theorize the culture industry as a mechanism that produces desire and manipulates consumption, drawing parallels with Faustus's susceptibility to Mephistopheles's promises—a framework that illuminates the intersections of technological progress, desire, and environmental degradation.

Recent interdisciplinary scholarship also situates human ambition and ecological crises in a global context. Reports by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Germanwatch (CCPI 2024), and the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists illustrate the escalating consequences of climate change, nuclear threats, and ecosystem disruption. Studies of coral bleaching, floods, and heatwaves provide empirical grounding for eco-critical analyses, offering contemporary evidence for the parallels between Faustus's moral failings and modern humanity's environmental overreach. Collectively, this literature foregrounds the relevance of Marlowe's text in understanding the ethical, psychological, and ecological dimensions of 21st-century human behavior.

### **Analysis**

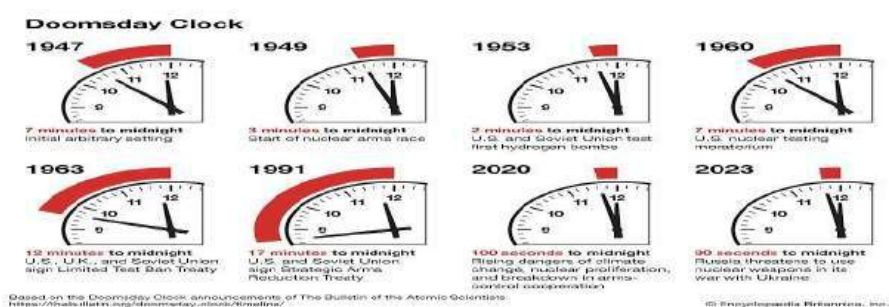
#### **Title and Thematic Significance**

The full title—*The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*—immediately underscores the inevitability of Faustus's downfall; neither his life nor his afterlife promises peace. While alive, he relentlessly chases material gratification and supernatural supremacy. His expectations of instant power are reinforced by Mephistopheles's persuasive promises:

“The iterating of these lines brings gold;  
The framing of this circle on the ground  
Brings whirlwinds, tempests, thunder, and lightning;  
Pronounce this thrice devoutly to thyself,  
And men in armour shall appear to thee,  
Ready to execute what thou desir'st.” (Marlowe 5.160–165)

This portrayal of magical command mirrors modern consumerist behavior, where humans continue to run behind pleasure produced through industrial and capitalist systems. Roland Barthes, in his essay “Wine and Milk” from *Mythologies* (1957), critiques this seductive cycle of consumption, asserting that even products considered culturally refined—like wine—are deeply embedded in capitalist structures: “For it is true that wine is a good and fine substance, but it is no less true that its production is deeply involved in French capitalism” (Barthes 61). Faustus's desire is thus not merely personal but reflective of a collective human impulse toward limitless acquisition.

From the beginning of civilization, humankind has pursued progress—scientific, technological, and intellectual. This quest has led to remarkable advancements that improve life, but also to inventions capable of catastrophic destruction. Contemporary cultural texts such as the film *Oppenheimer* starkly expose the dangers inherent in human innovation when guided by pride rather than responsibility. The Doomsday Clock currently warns that the world is closer than ever—just 90 seconds—to apocalyptic devastation, as geopolitical tensions and nuclear threats escalate (Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists). Like Faustus, humanity stands at a crossroads where ambition risks overwhelming moral restraint.



**The image shows pictorial graphics of Doomsday Clock and its prediction with respect to changing scenarios of the world. Credit – The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist**

The play foregrounds the fundamental conflict between science and religion, reflecting the intellectual tensions of the Renaissance period—a time characterized by exploration, empirical discovery, and the rise of rational thought. The emergence of thinkers such as Francis Bacon and René Descartes championed logic, skepticism, and scientific inquiry, fostering a growing belief that human intellect could transcend traditional theological limitations. In *Doctor Faustus*, this ideological shift manifests in Faustus's internal struggle: an insatiable desire for transcendent knowledge and power leads him to violate spiritual boundaries, ultimately binding himself to a diabolical contract. His tragic end underscores how ambition, unrestrained by moral conscience, results in inevitable ruin.

Faustus begins with the arrogant assumption that he has command over infernal spirits, believing Mephistopheles to be a subordinate bound by his magical conjuration. His misguided confidence appears when he commands the devil to change form: "I charge thee to return, and change thy shape; Thou art too ugly to attend on me" (Marlowe 1.3.25–30).

However, Faustus soon learns that neither his book nor his magical skills are responsible for the devil's appearance. Mephistopheles reveals the truth: "No, I came hither of mine own accord" (Marlowe 1.3.40–50).

Evil, the play warns, is drawn to the soul who willingly rejects divine authority. Mephistopheles makes this explicit: "Abjure the Trinity, And pray devoutly to the prince of hell" (Marlowe 1.3.55–60). This realization exposes the vulnerability of human pride—when one denies the sacred, one opens the door to destruction.

A strong contemporary parallel emerges here. Much like Faustus, modern humanity's pursuit of progress often disregards natural and moral boundaries. While certain catastrophic phenomena—such as asteroid impacts or unexplained mass extinctions—cannot be prevented, many ongoing environmental disasters result from reckless human advancement: accelerating global temperatures, coral reef depletion, extreme heatwaves, floods, and escalating pollution. As Joseph W. Meeker warns, "Environmental crisis is the most recent symbol of apocalyptic expectations, and it may be the most pervasive and powerful threat yet recognized." (Meeker 26)

Thus, Marlowe's warning transcends its era. Humanity's existential crisis is not the result of intelligence itself, but of ambition unchecked by ethical responsibility—an issue as urgent today as it was in the Renaissance.

#### **False Promises of the Devil or the Culture Industry?**

Mephistopheles promises absolute service and gratification, fueling Faustus's illusion of mastery:

"And I will be thy slave, and wait on thee,

And give thee more than thou hast wit to ask" (Marlowe 5.40–50).

Faustus believes that serving Lucifer grants control over infernal forces—a fatal misunderstanding. The illusion of power that enslaves Faustus mirrors the mechanisms of the modern culture and technology industries. Like Mephistopheles, they offer extraordinary advancements while masking profound dangers:

- **Metaverse** — marketed as a limitless virtual space, yet risks include psychological harm and virtual assault ("Virtual gang rape reported in the Metaverse").
- **Starlink** — promises global connectivity while potentially harming Earth's magnetic field and contributing to atmospheric pollution ("Starlink satellites could be harming Earth's magnetic field").
- **Neuralink** — designed to empower differently-abled persons, yet has produced harmful side effects including bleeding and tissue damage (Levy).
- **Bayraktar Drones** — invaluable for medical transport, but simultaneously heighten risks of surveillance, warfare, and air-space threats (Cohen).

Adorno's critique perfectly encapsulates this pattern of seduction: "A cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly...technology is gaining power over society [through] the power of those whose economic position is strongest" (Adorno 91).



The culture industry manufactures needs only to satisfy them temporarily, sustaining a continuous loop of dependency. Any desire that lies outside this system, Adorno warns, is swiftly suppressed: “Any need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness” (Adorno 91). Just as Faustus is manipulated by Mephistopheles’s promises, humanity is tempted by progress that trades ethical and environmental well-being for temporary convenience.

#### **Faustus Being Tempted, or Warnings to Stop?**

Throughout the play, Faustus receives persistent warnings about the consequences of his choices. The Good Angel repeatedly urges him toward repentance:

“Lay that damned book aside,  
And gaze not on it,” (1.70–80)  
“Leave that execrable art,” (5.10–20)  
“Think of heaven and heavenly things,” (5.10–20)  
“Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.” (6.10–20)  
“Never too late, if Faustus can repent.” (6.70–80)  
“Repent, and they shall never raze thy skin.” (6.80–89)

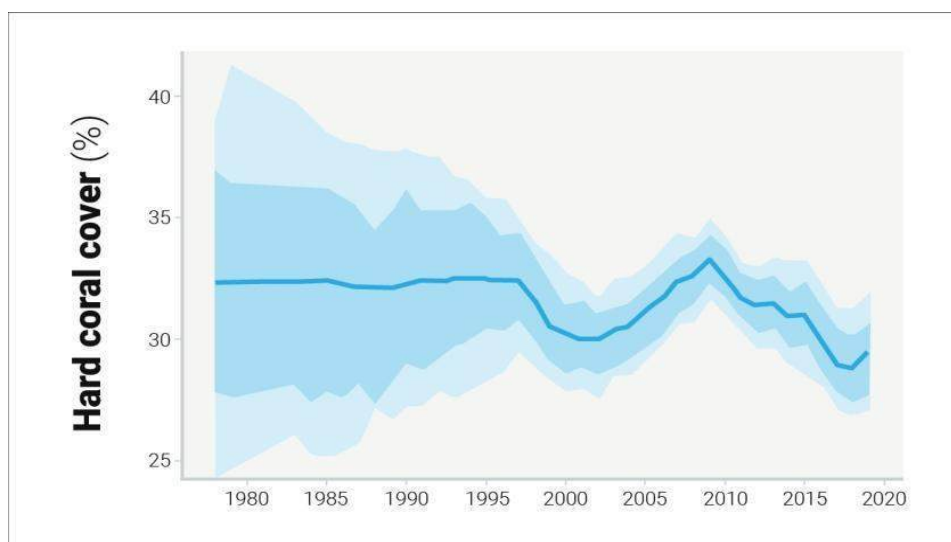
Yet Faustus remains bound by Mephistopheles’s alluring promises—a predatory contract that resembles the dangerous bargains of modern development. A stark example is India’s Act East Policy, tied closely with strategic island development: “Enhancing naval presence and infrastructure has become a priority due to geopolitical necessity” (“*An Expert Explains*”).

While essential for national security, such projects jeopardize indigenous communities and fragile ecosystems: “Academics warn the plan could be “a death sentence” for the Shompen community” (*Shagun*). Humanity continues to exchange environmental security for short-term progress—exactly the fate Faustus suffers. After the Second World War, human disillusionment with the grand narratives of reason and progress intensified. T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* reflects the spiritual barrenness produced by destructive modernity. Adorno similarly observes: “In wrong society laughter is a sickness infecting happiness and drawing it into society’s worthless totality” (Adorno 112).

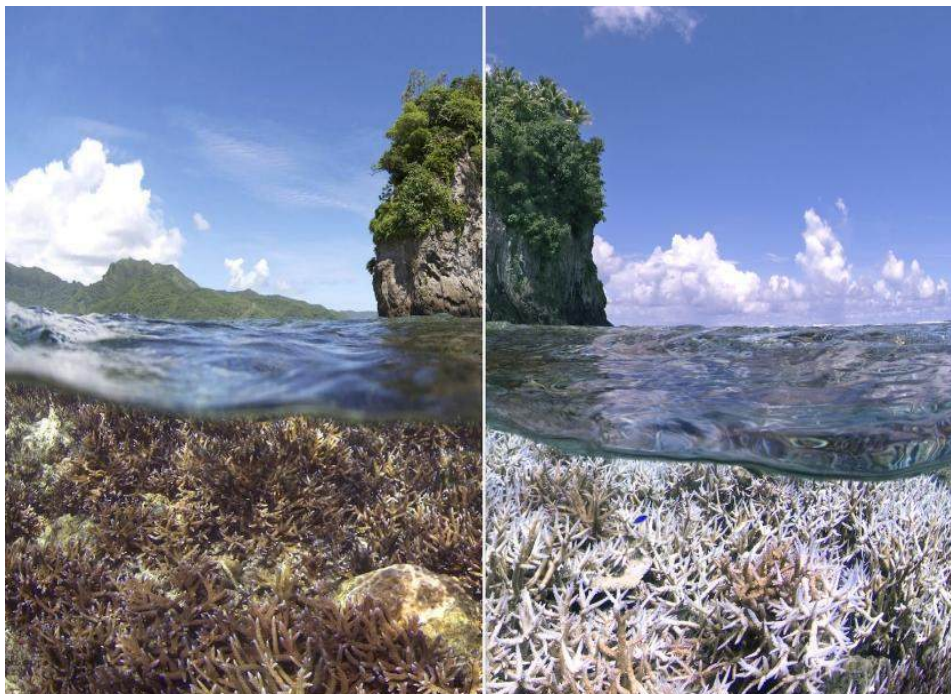
Current global crises make these warnings tangible: Deadly heatwaves in India during the 2024 summer (Bont et al.), Wildfires in Canada linked to climate extremities (Kumar), and Rising global calamities aligning with Doomsday Clock warnings. Bertrand Russell’s caution resonates chillingly with our present: “A clear choice must be made...between Reason and Death. I fear that mankind may choose Death” (Russell). Environmental threats are not limited to the land. Coral bleaching, caused by warming waters, foreshadows irreversible marine collapse: “Corals...turn a bony white when they are under stress, which can be a precursor to their death.” (UNEP) And yet, denial persists: “We know the catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not believe it will really happen” (Žižek 328). Humanity—like Faustus—has been warned repeatedly. The question remains: Will we repent before it is too late?



**Distribution of warm water corals. Credit: UNEP**



**This graph shows the percentage of tropical reefs that are covered in live corals. Coverage was stable until a series of mass bleaching events began in 1998. Credit: UNEP**



**The images show corals before, during and after bleaching events. If water temperatures remain too high for too long, corals will die, becoming a muddy brown. Credit: The Ocean Agency/The Ocean Image Bank**

#### **Further Warnings of Consequence**

Mephistopheles functions as a usurer—one who seeks Faustus’s soul in exchange for a temporary service—reducing salvation to a transactional commodity: “So he will buy my service with his soul” (Marlowe 5.30–40). The contract benefits Lucifer alone; Faustus gains only the illusion of power, not anything truly useful or enduring. Manipulative temptations and carefully crafted deceptions coax Faustus into sin, blinding him with fleeting pleasures. These desires, rooted in materialism and pride, are transient—much like the contemporary pursuits that accelerate ozone depletion and global warming. Ambition without restraint proves disastrous, damaging not only Faustus’s soul but his physical body as well. To secure Faustus’s eternal damnation, Mephistopheles demands: “Write a deed of gift with thine own blood; For that security craves great Lucifer” (Marlowe 5.30–40). A deed of gift is irrevocable in legal terms; once given, it cannot be reclaimed—comparable to the Hibanama in Muslim law, which is unconditional. As a learned scholar, Faustus should have recognized the predatory nature of such a contract. Even when his blood congeals—nature’s warning—he ignores the omen: “My blood congeals, and I can write no more” (Marlowe 5.60–70). Every possible sign urges him to stop, but his unchecked ambition leads him toward inevitable ruin. Faustus does not seek money; he seeks dominion over nature and knowledge beyond the limitations of science. The moment he acquires supernatural power—passing through walls, defying the boundaries of his era—he finds momentary joy in

achievements that are trivial compared to the price he pays. His fate becomes a cautionary allegory.

Modern humanity mirrors Faustus: comfortably enjoying air-conditioned spaces while ignoring the broader environmental damage we contribute to. As Richard Kerridge observes: “Progress is terribly elusive, whether in reaching international agreements or changing the everyday priorities of individuals” (Kerridge 363). The Climate Change Performance Index reveals stark global failure:

“No country performs well enough in all index categories to achieve an overall very high rating...even the frontrunners’ efforts would be insufficient to prevent hazardous climate change” (CCPI).

Environmental warnings continue to intensify—yet complacency persists. Media attention increasingly highlights crises at the core of human survival, such as agriculture and food security: “Environmental protesters have thrown soup at the glass-protected Mona Lisa in France, demanding the right to “healthy and sustainable food” (Slow). Like Faustus, we repeatedly overlook caution. We trade sustainability, human welfare, and the planet’s future for comfort, convenience, and accelerated progress—walking willingly toward our own damnation.

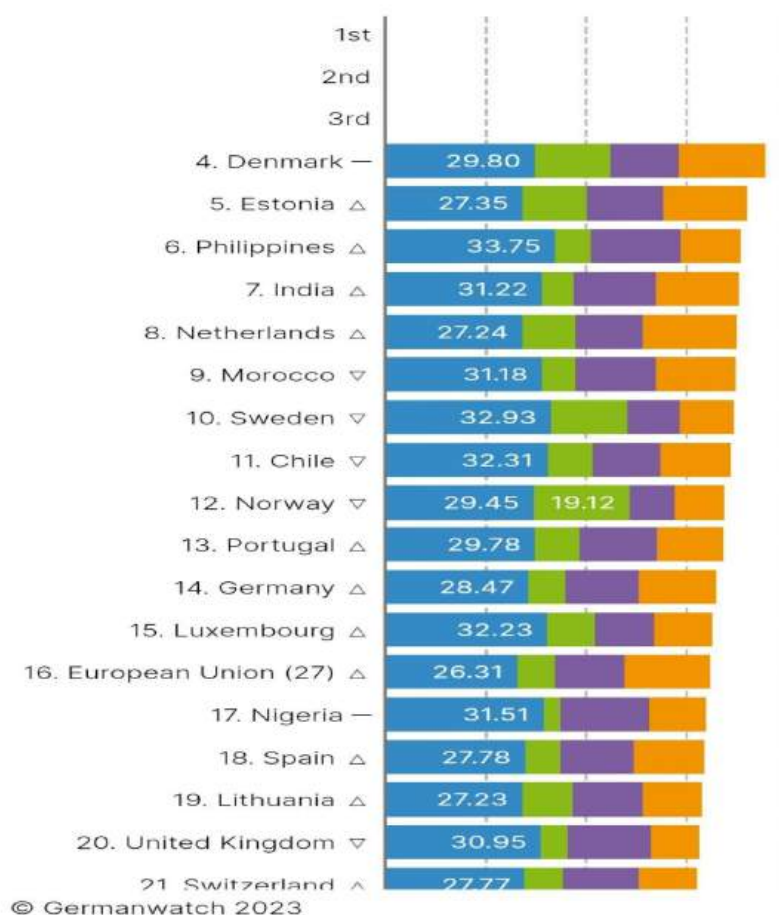
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The image shows the performance of countries with respect to climate change. Credit - CCPI

#### Climate Responsibility and Everlasting Suffering

In the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2024, only three G20 countries/regions—India (7th), Germany (14th), and the EU (16th)—achieve high performance, while fifteen G20 members receive an overall low or very low rating. This is particularly alarming as G20 countries are responsible for over 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Canada, Russia, Korea, and Saudi Arabia remain the worst-performing nations within the group (CCPI). The stark failure of major industrialized nations highlights the urgent consequences of collective inaction, much like the irreversible consequences faced by Faustus.

The play depicts Faustus's inexorable suffering: "Such fearful shrieks and cries were never heard: / Pray heaven the Doctor have escaped the danger" (Marlowe 20.1–10). Despite warnings, his earlier choices are irrevocable—his suffering cannot be undone. Similarly, modern humanity confronts consequences that cannot easily be reversed: extreme floods, rising sea levels, heatwaves, and a global average temperature increase approaching 1.5°C. The results of unchecked ambition and desire, whether individual or collective, are often permanent.

Even if Faustus had attempted repentance, he faced threats from Lucifer, emphasizing the peril of his transgressions. The Old Man warns him of the spiritual cost of his actions, yet Faustus persists in his quest to transcend human limits: "O, but I fear nothing can reclaim him" (Marlowe 3.10–41); "Nay, then, I fear he has fallen into that damned art" (Marlowe 3.10–41). He is repeatedly cautioned that: "Hell hath no limits" (Marlowe 5.120 -- 125).

#### Permanent Damnation

Milton's reflection on free will underscores that salvation is contingent upon human choice: "[God] made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, and free to fall...freely they stood, fell who fell" (Milton).



Faustus's failure is thus self-inflicted: his boundless ambition and transgression leave him permanently damned. Even at the brink of death, his desire for limitless power prevents genuine repentance: "Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years, / A hundred thousand, and at last be saved!" (Marlowe 19.160–165), "Let me breathe a while! / Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books!" (Marlowe 20.170–179), "No end is limited to damned souls!" (Marlowe 20.175–179). His sin is so profound that, unlike the serpent who tempted Eve, Faustus cannot be redeemed.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Faustus and the Psychology of Desire**

Doctor Faustus's tragic downfall can be understood not only as a moral failure but as an insight into the psychology of human desire. His relentless quest for knowledge and power reflects a broader pattern in which humans are drawn to instantaneous gratification, prestige, or superiority, despite repeated warnings. In the modern context, this desire manifests in technological and scientific pursuits—AI, genetic engineering, and virtual realities—that promise limitless possibilities but conceal long-term consequences. Just as Faustus ignores the counsel of the Good Angel, humanity often overlooks ethical or ecological concerns in pursuit of momentary satisfaction. This interplay between desire and consequence highlights how ambition, if unchecked by moral reasoning, can catalyze irreversible harm both to the individual and to society at large.

### **2. Technology as Modern Mephistopheles**

Mephistopheles, in Marlowe's play, serves as the Machiavellian figure who lures Faustus into a Faustian bargain, offering immediate power at the cost of his eternal soul. In the 21st century, technology functions as a similar agent, promising solutions and advancements while exacting hidden costs. Projects such as Neuralink, Starlink, or the Metaverse offer unprecedented opportunities for connectivity, accessibility, and progress, yet they also bring ethical, environmental, and social hazards. Like Faustus, modern society engages in a Faustian contract: trading long-term ecological balance, personal privacy, and social well-being for short-term gain. Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the culture industry is especially relevant here, as these technological promises manufacture desire while masking their ultimate consequences.

### **3. Climate Change as Divine Retribution**

Faustus is repeatedly warned about the consequences of his transgressions, yet he persists, ultimately suffering eternal damnation. A parallel emerges when we consider climate change as a form of contemporary "divine retribution." Floods in India, heatwaves in Canada, coral bleaching across oceans, and rising global temperatures serve as unheeded warnings to humanity. Much like the inexorable suffering of Faustus, these phenomena result from collective disregard for natural limits. Environmental crises, therefore, can be interpreted as both symptoms and consequences of humanity's unrestrained ambition—an ecological echo of the moral universe depicted in Marlowe's tragedy.

### **4. Warnings Ignored: Lessons from History**

Throughout Doctor Faustus, the protagonist receives repeated warnings from the Good Angel, the Old Man, and even subtle signs from nature, all of which he ignores. Modern society mirrors this failure, disregarding scientific and ethical advisories regarding climate change, nuclear threats, and environmental degradation. International agreements, scientific reports, and climate indices often function as these "Good Angel" interventions, yet humanity's collective inaction highlights a persistent inability to act responsibly. As Faustus's choices illustrate the personal consequences of hubris, history reveals that ignorance or neglect of systemic warnings amplifies global catastrophe.

### **5. Free Will, Choice, and Human Responsibility**

Milton's insight that "freely they stood, fell who fell" underscores the principle of free will—a choice that ultimately determines the course of Faustus's fate. The eco-critical parallel suggests that humanity similarly possesses the agency to mitigate or exacerbate environmental crises. Each policy decision, technological adoption, or unsustainable practice reflects a conscious choice with

long-term consequences. Faustus's failure serves as a cautionary tale: while knowledge and power are available, ethical restraint and moral responsibility must govern their use. Humanity's survival depends on the deliberate exercise of this freedom to choose between progress and sustainable coexistence with the natural world.

#### **6. The Culture Industry and Manufactured Desire**

The culture industry, as theorized by Adorno and Horkheimer, produces desires that sustain consumerism and reinforce systemic power. Faustus's longing for immediate gratification mirrors this phenomenon: he believes that power and pleasure can be acquired without enduring consequences. Modern media, technological platforms, and global industries operate similarly, promising solutions and pleasures while encouraging overconsumption and environmental exploitation. From climate-damaging lifestyles to the technological temptations of AI and virtual worlds, these manufactured desires perpetuate a cycle of exploitation analogous to the Faustian bargain: humanity's collective "soul" is mortgaged for fleeting satisfaction.

#### **7. Catastrophe as Denouement: Faustus and Modernity**

Faustus's final descent into hell serves as a literary denouement, illustrating the culmination of unchecked ambition and moral failure. Contemporary humanity faces a similar trajectory if environmental, technological, and societal choices continue without restraint. Rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, and global conflicts function as early signs of a potential ecological and existential catastrophe. Just as Faustus experiences irreversible consequences, the modern human race may confront outcomes that are avoidable only through urgent and collective action. This parallel reinforces the eco-critical argument: knowledge and power without ethical constraint inevitably lead to destruction.

#### **8. Eco-Critical Reading of Power and Knowledge**

Faustus's ambition reflects humanity's enduring tension between the desire for mastery and the limitations imposed by ethical and natural laws. An eco-critical reading reveals that the pursuit of knowledge and power is intertwined with environmental consequences. Every technological or scientific advancement carries potential for benefit and harm. In the contemporary context, efforts to manipulate ecosystems, exploit resources, or dominate nature echo Faustus's attempts to transcend human limitations, demonstrating that hubris, when coupled with ignorance or neglect, threatens both moral and ecological stability.

#### **Implications**

The findings of this study underscore the interconnectedness of literary, ethical, and ecological analyses. Faustus's transgressions are not merely moral allegories; they resonate with the contemporary human condition, demonstrating how ambition and desire, if unmoderated, can produce irreversible consequences. The eco-critical parallel suggests that unchecked technological and industrial progress, akin to Faustus's dealings with Mephistopheles, risks the degradation of ecosystems, climate destabilization, and social inequities.

From a cultural perspective, the study emphasizes the role of literature as a mirror of human aspiration and folly, illustrating enduring patterns of overreach and moral compromise. Socially, the research highlights humanity's collective responsibility in shaping ecological futures, emphasizing the need for ethical decision-making and sustainable practices. Politically, the study reinforces the urgency of coordinated global action, as evidenced by G20 performance indices and environmental crisis reports, suggesting that governance, policy, and ethical accountability are central to averting large-scale catastrophe. Aesthetically, the work demonstrates that classical literature, when read through an eco-critical lens, offers profound insights into contemporary crises, enriching both literary scholarship and environmental discourse.

#### **Future Research Directions**

This study opens multiple avenues for further inquiry. Future research could:

1. Conduct comparative studies across literary traditions, analyzing how transgression and ambition are portrayed in texts from different cultures and historical periods, and correlating them with contemporary ecological or technological challenges.
2. Integrate quantitative ecological data more systematically with literary analysis, employing GIS mapping, climate modeling, or statistical visualization to deepen the eco-critical argument.
3. Examine the psychological dimensions of human ambition, incorporating insights from cognitive science, behavioral economics, or environmental psychology to better understand why societies persist in unsustainable practices despite awareness of consequences.
4. Explore media, technology, and culture industry impacts on environmental behavior, focusing on social media, virtual realities, and artificial intelligence as modern “Mephistopheles” figures shaping desire and action.
5. Investigate policy and ethical interventions, linking literary warnings with actionable strategies for sustainable development, climate adaptation, and global governance, to provide a bridge between textual analysis and real-world solutions.

### **Conclusion**

This paper establishes an eco-critical parallel between Faustus’s choices and the contemporary environmental crisis. Just as Faustus’s unchecked ambition leads to eternal suffering, humanity’s disregard for ecological limits and environmental responsibility is steering the world toward irreversible destruction. The modern scenario—climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution—reflects a collective denouement, where failure to make deliberate, sustainable choices may produce consequences far more catastrophic than anticipated. Only through concerted efforts to adapt, innovate responsibly, and act with foresight can humanity avert a fate akin to Faustus’s eternal damnation.

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**NATURE/CULTURE AND ORAL TRADITION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF  
AMITAV GHOSH**

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**Abstract**

In contemporary literary studies, Amitav Ghosh's narratives offer a compelling reconfiguration of the lines separating nature and culture. His novels tend to present the shadowy and porous boundaries between nature/culture continuum, foregrounding hybrid ecological spaces. The present paper focuses on to examine Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* from an ecocritical perspective, demonstrating how the worlds of humans and nonhumans are in a constant flux. The three-pronged approach to local ecologies, global environmental issues, and mythic-oral dimensions provides a thorough framework for comprehending today's climate challenges which emerged as a result of anthropocentric activities. This study primarily deals with how these novels portray different landscapes as interconnected hybrid ecological spaces between humans and nonhumans, forming an environmental consciousness based on ethical care. Ghosh makes effective use of the oral tradition and these mythic spaces as cautionary tales to reflect the great derangement and the urgent need to shed light on the anticipated crisis. Ghosh's ecological consciousness is based on many epistemologies that challenge the prevalent Western views of nature as being separate or inert. This research paper also examines how these novels delve into the idea that environment is not static settings or distinct from human activities, but rather dynamic, complex spaces which influences and influenced by intricate relationships involving migration, indigenous ecological knowledge, and current climate crises.

**Keywords:** Hybrid, Ecology, Anthropocentric, Environmental consciousness, Climate crises, Mythic

Long before writing was invented, oral tradition originated in the earliest human cultures. Stories, laws, histories, cultural values, and practical information are primarily passed down from one generation to the next through this oldest mode of communication and transferring knowledge. Oral traditions were crucial for maintaining collective memory in preliterate societies, particularly in small, remote settlements where spoken word constituted the majority of the cultural framework. There is evidence that some oral traditions have been passed down for thousands of years, and their origins can be found in the earliest days of human language. For instance, Australian Aboriginal legends have been passed down orally for up to 30,000 years, preserving knowledge about the environment, survival, and important occasions. The Central Desert region's indigenous legends describe how the gods from the north brought palm tree seeds to Palm Valley. This story is consistent with scientific research that indicates people carried these seeds to the region approximately 30,000 years ago. This striking agreement between scientific data and oral tradition shows how Aboriginal oral histories can be reliable sources of historical environmental shifts and human migrations. In a similar vein, Aboriginal myths concerning volcanic eruptions, such the tale of the Budj Bim volcano in southwest Victoria, may go back up to 37,000 years. Recent geological research indicates that the Gunditjmara people's oral narrative, which describes an ancestral creator-being changing into the flaming volcano, may be a true account of two historical volcanic eruptions in the area. In addition to preserving ecological knowledge, these oral traditions offer important archaeological data that aids scholars in comprehending Australia's lengthy history of human occupancy and environmental change.

Before being recorded in writing, ancient epics like the Epic of Gilgamesh, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and the Indian Ramayana and Mahabharata were all oral traditions. Before being engraved on clay tablets, the Epic of Gilgamesh, for example, was passed down through generations of storytellers over thousands of years. Its narrative style reflects the oral practices used to assure correctness and memorability. For centuries, the Vedic scriptures of India, such as the Rigveda, were written and passed down orally using exacting techniques that guaranteed the exact preservation of words and knowledge. Oral narratives were the primary source of information for ancient historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, and the style and organization of oral storytelling are frequently reflected in the earliest records. Oral traditions flourished despite the development of writing systems, adjusting to new situations and technological advancements without compromising their fundamental purpose of cultural preservation. In fact, India's incredible collection of myths, legends, and folktales, which have been maintained in and passed down through this nation's oral tradition, is a lively and vibrant source from which modern Indian writing, in any form, so easily draws. In the words of a researcher Divya Joshi, "orality and storytelling are the two most dominant features of the Indian narrative culture and tradition and a rich repository for the preservation of ever dynamic Indian collective consciousness" (17).

As a repository of ecological knowledge and sustainable practices, oral tradition is closely linked to the environment which provide footprints regarding land ethics, resource management, seasonal cycles, and animal and plant behavior among Indigenous groups. John Miles Foley in his "Introduction: What's in a Sign?" remarks that "oral tradition stands out as the single most dominant communicative technology of our species, as both a historical fact and, in many areas still, a contemporary reality" (1-2). Indian writing in English has its roots in oral tradition, particularly when it comes to how it addresses environmental and ecological issues. Indian English literature frequently draws directly from rich oral traditions—folk tales, mythology, epics, and community histories using them to explain views toward nature and interaction with it. Indian writers like Mamang Dai, Amitav Ghosh and others combine oral traditions and folklores in order to present the global environmental issues, and how nature and culture interact. It frequently emphasizes how oral traditions retain important knowledge about land, water, forests, and, biodiversity.

Amitav Ghosh, one of the internationally recognized advocates and champions of Indian descent in the field of eco-critical writing, has promoted and captured the various regional and worldwide environmental challenges and concerns. Ghosh frequently highlights the close relationship between oral tradition and the environment in his larger literary and critical works. He contends that oral traditions, including folktales, local folklore, and communal histories, are essential sources of ecological knowledge and wisdom rather than just cultural objects. These customs provide insights into sustainable practices, environmental care, and the interdependence of humans and nature by encoding generations of experience in coexisting with and adjusting to the natural world. Through his stories, settings, characters, and folklore, he aims to make these issues apparent and palpable. Ghosh's involvement with these oral traditions is an urgent need to elevate the voices of groups that have historically been ignored by prevailing conceptions of progress and development, rather than merely an act of literary preservation. In light of the climate change and planetary instability, he calls attention to how oral traditions include cautionary teachings about greed, ecological imbalance, and calamity. In order to reimagine ecological ethics and face the impending crisis with humility, inventiveness, and a feeling of shared responsibility for the planet, Ghosh believes that reestablishing a connection with oral tradition and mythic imagination is essential.

Most of Amitav Ghosh's novels are eco-critical narratives with the main focus on the Sunderband of West Bengal such as *The Hungry Tide*, *Gun Island*, and *Junglenama*. This study deals with the novels *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* by Ghosh from an ecocritical perspective showing how Ghosh uses the different types of hybrid ecological and mythical spaces in order to



show the blurring boundaries between humans and non-humans. By using the mythical spaces and oral tradition, he critiques the anthropocentrism. In *The Hungry Tide*, the benevolent symbol of Bon Bibi and Dokkin Rai's myth is key to the story. In *Gun Island*, he deploys the extremely rich symbolic concept found within the mythology, Manasa Devi and the Bonduki Sadagar, or the Gun Merchant. The folklore of Bengal that Ghosh grew up being told becomes an enriching and logically developed leitmotif in the narrative.

In his 2004 novel *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh has shown a deep concern for the environment, particularly to the Sundarbans. This novel carefully brings together two related stories. The first is the suffering and displacement experienced by a group of Bangladeshi refugees; the second is the intricate and perilous interactions between humans and the animals that inhabit the Sundarbans' ecosystem. Ghosh depicts this transitional area as an ecological microcosm where everyone's survival depends on coexistence rather than mere geographical proximity. The Sundarbans, according to Ghosh means a "beautiful forest" (8), as he notes in the novel, "interposed between the sea and the plains of Bengal, lies an immense archipelago of islands...stretching for almost three hundred kilometers..." (6). The tide country, a place where thousands of acres of forest are submerged and exposed every day, characterized by a continual ebb and flow. Because of this fluidity, boundaries are always changing, and neither humans nor animals can claim permanent prominence. The fleeting nature of life and ownership is symbolized by the environment itself. A prime example of a hybrid ecological space is the Sundarbans region as a whole, which continuously blurs the lines between land and water, human and non-human life, and traditional wisdom and modern science. The novel's small cast allows for a focused yet in-depth analysis of how humans interact with their surroundings. Three of the main characters, Kanai, Piya, and Fokir, come from very different backgrounds and have divergent opinions about the Sundarbans' ecological and cultural significance. Piya is a marine biologist who exemplifies a conservationist and scientific outlook. Her research on Irrawaddy dolphins is commendable, demonstrating an extensive understanding of the biodiversity of the area. However, her methods frequently clash with the real-life experiences of residents like Fokir, a fisherman whose destiny depends on the abundance of the natural world. In the novel, the fisherman Fokir's traditional knowledge and the empirical, scientific viewpoint of Piya, a cetologist, converge in a hybrid space of understanding. An integrated approach to ecological awareness is suggested by Fokir's profound sense of the tides and seasons, which Piya's modern, methodical approach frequently falls short of when navigating the unpredictable local environment. Piya is aware of global migration and species classifications. Her early strategies include tracking animals using technology and conducting systematic surveys. In the immediate, local reality of the Sundarbans, Piya is initially powerless despite her experience. Her dependence on scientific knowledge and abstract maps is insufficient to comprehend the subtleties of the regional tides or to forecast an abrupt tide change. Her "scientific map" of the area does not match the lived reality, as she quickly discovers. On the other hand, Fokir exemplifies a profound, tangible understanding of the environment. His understanding stems from decades of lived experience; his capacity to read the water's surface and decipher animal behaviour. As Fulvio Mazzocchi in his article titled "Western Science and Traditional knowledge: Despite their variations, different forms of knowledge can learn from each other" identifies that "traditional knowledge has developed a concept of the environment that emphasizes the symbiotic character of humans and nature. It offers an approach to local development that is based on co-evolution with the environment, and on respecting the carrying capacity of ecosystems" (463-464). In this regard, this novel dramatizes numerous situations in which Piya needs Fokir's advice. Fokir's close connection to the local ecosystem makes her research successful even when she adds GPS equipment and scientific precision. Their cooperation creates a hybrid model in which indigenous knowledge receives fresh validation from qualified scientists, while scientific knowledge is only enhanced and made useful when combined with local abilities. As an outsider with urban sensibilities, Kanai serves as a link between these viewpoints. Additionally, he overcomes his Western, post-industrial prejudice and starts to

comprehend the subtleties of human-nature entanglement in the Sundarbans through his relationships with Piya and Fokir. His shifting perspective highlights the need for empathy and adaptability in the face of ecological crises, reflecting the reader's journey toward understanding. Ghosh implies that an integrated approach is necessary for both human and non-human existence in the Sundarbans by refusing to favor a particular way of knowing over another. The idea that ecological wisdom is plural, embodied, and collaborative is advanced by this interdisciplinary synthesis, which also challenges colonial ideas regarding "primitive" knowledge.

Sunderbans is the place where the legend and oral tradition of Bon Bibi belongs to. The myth has been investigated to provide answers to the queries posed by contemporary society. To put it another way, understanding myths starts an ongoing conversation between the past and the present, which leads to the creation of a new elemental reality. Myths must be repeatedly reinterpreted in order to convey a new truth because new contexts and horizons lead to new interpretations. The myth of Bonbibi is crucial from the perspective of environmental concern because Ghosh looks to ancient myths for a solution. In daily life, boundaries and borders are crucial. Amitav Ghosh is also aware of the significance of boundaries and borders. The concept of borders and boundaries is present in nearly all of Amitav Ghosh's works. *The Hungry Tide* is no exception to it, but Ghosh presents a multifaceted notions of borders and boundaries. First, idea is that there should be clear demarcation between the human world and natural world, in order to regulate the needs of humans and their sense of exploitation. This makes the boundaries and lines as essential. The legend of Bon Bibi that has been passed down in the form of oral tradition from one generation to other generation, aligns with the perspective that boundaries are crucial, serving as moral and spiritual guidelines that control how humans interact with the environment. A large-eyed woman wearing a sari is referred to as the "Bonbibi" or "Bandevis" in Ghosh's story. He transforms into a literary "lady of the forest" who is a guardian spirit of the Sundarbans forest, akin to Yoruba culture in Africa. Bengal is home to a sizable population of Muslims and Hindus, and its forests are home to a variety of spices. It's interesting to note that the Goddess Bonbibi, who is revered by both communities in the dense Sundarbans forest, has served as a symbol of their coexistence. The myth establishes a line between the wild forces of the forest, symbolized by the forest demon Dokkhin Rai, and human beings. This boundary is not only geographical but also symbolic and moral; it serves as a warning to people to respect the power of nature and acknowledge its agency in order to maintain a sustainable relationship with the environment. Bon Bibi's story emphasizes the value of boundaries for coexistence by educating and cautioning the people about the repercussions of exceeding their ecological bounds. Therefore, the legend functions as a cultural tool to control human behaviour, representing a line that safeguards both people and the environment and maintains a precarious equilibrium that is essential for survival. Ghosh writes "thus did Bon Bibi show the world the law of the forest, which was that the rich and greedy would be punished while the poor and righteous were rewarded" (105). On the other hand, in order to highlight the dependence and interdependence within the Sundarbans ecosystem, the boundaries between humans and non-humans (nature) are purposefully blurred. The Sundarbans are portrayed in the book as a hybrid, constantly changing habitat where human life depends on recognizing and understanding the agency of non-human animals like dolphins, tigers, mangroves, and tides. By demonstrating that humans are interwoven with intricate ecological networks rather than distinct from or superior to nature, this blurring contradicts traditional anthropocentric narratives. With these dual approaches of boundaries and borders, Ghosh forms an ecological conscious that is based on the epistemologies of ethical care for environment and non-humans.

The idea of using oral tradition as a medium of cautionary tale is not only limited to the novel *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh makes an extensive use of this oral tradition in his novel *Gun Island* as well. The book is divided into two parts. The Gun Merchant is the title of the first section, and Venice is the title of the second. The Sundarbans are the focus of part one, and immigration and Venice are the subject of part two. Ghosh highlights the same process of environmental destruction that has been occurring all over the world and shows the effects of the

ecological collapse that had occurred in the Sunderbans. There are clear parallels between Venice's anthropogenic deterioration pattern and the Sunderbans. The rapidly shifting environment in Venice brought on by global warming is similar to the Sunderbans' destruction. The main focus is on how marine life, human living conditions, and climate conditions are changing. This novel can be considered a powerful example of the revival of myth in contemporary fiction. A crucial structural component of *Gun Island* is Ghosh's juxtaposition of the seventeenth-century Bengali legend of the Gun Merchant (Banduki Sadagar) with the contemporary tale of migration and climatic upheaval. Alan Dundes in his article "Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview" states "by 'folk ideas,' I mean traditional notions that a group of people have about the nature of man, of the world, and of man's life in the world. Folk ideas would not constitute a genre of folklore but rather would be expressed in a great variety of different genres" (95). By employing this idea of folk tales and oral tradition, Ghosh reimagines the myth of the Gun Merchant, who is cursed by the goddess of snakes, Manasa Devi, in order to address contemporary concerns about migration, displacement, and climate change. She represents the interdependence of all natural life. Each aspect of nature, including water, stone, tombs, caves, animals, birds, snakes, fish, hills, trees, and flowers, reflects her power. There isn't a single documented record of the Gun Merchant story; instead, it has been passed down through the years in the villagers' memory. This indicates how myths persist through recounting and adaption rather than through rigid documentation. Deen, the protagonist of the novel, discovers that myth is both a current cultural practice and a part of the past as he witnesses the Sunderbans locals recount the story. The protagonist acts as a catalyst in the book, dramatically illustrating the disparity in the man-nature relationship, through his interactions with Moyna, a single mother whose husband was killed while assisting Piya in her efforts in the tides, and her son Tipu, who is described as having "the probing eyes and darting movement of a hungry barracuda," (Ghosh 58). He visits an old temple tucked away in the Sunderbans' mangrove wetlands as a result of the unexpected recounting of the folktale. The events that transpire during his voyage effectively depict the current state of climate change and the disruptive migratory patterns that it causes for both humans and animals. Ghosh reveals how folklore and oral traditions hold profound knowledge about humanity's relationship with the natural world by using myth as a tool for comprehending ecological collapse and forced migration. This myth serves as an allegory for ecological consciousness, reminding readers of how vulnerable humans are to the force of nature. Similar to how a goddess' wrath drove the merchant into exile, rising sea levels, storms, droughts, and fires can drive modern communities into exile. The fable turns into a metaphor for how disobedient humans are to nature. In the beginning of the story, Deen travels to Kolkata at the start of the novel to get away from Brooklyn's harsh winter. A distant relative approaches Deen at a gathering in Kolkata and tells him a unique rendition of a story that Deen is quite familiar with. Manasa Devi, the goddess of snakes and other dangerous creatures, and Chand Sadagar, a trader, are the subjects of this ancient Bengali folktale that has been passed down through the generations. In contrast to Chand Saudagar, who represents patriarchy and is motivated by profit, Manasa is the embodiment of femininity and nature. The novel depicts Manasa Devi's struggle to convert Chand Sadagar into her follower and his steadfast refusal to honor her. His voyage reveals a sequence of events that eloquently depict the current state of climate change and the disruptive migratory patterns it has caused in both humans and animals. For example the increasing oceanic dead zone areas, stated in the novel:

They're these vast stretches of water that have a very low oxygen content-too low for fish to survive. Those zones have been growing at a phenomenal pace, mostly because of residues from chemical fertilizers. When they're washed into the sea they set off a chain reaction that leads to all the oxygen being sucked out of the water...And those zones have now spread over tens of thousands of square miles of ocean... (Ghosh 95)

The readers are made conscious of how these zones can span distances equivalent to those of medium-sized nations, and that a dead zone can even appear in a river, especially where it meets the sea. Further, Ghosh has discussed the most vulnerable part of the Sunderbans when it comes to

climate change. This region is “the frontier where commerce and wilderness look each other directly in the eye; that’s exactly where the war between profit and nature is fought” (Ghosh 8). The Sundarbans’ location next to a tsunami-prone coastal region makes it suitable for them to be held accountable for climate change. In the Sundarbans, natural disasters such floods, cyclones, sea level rise, and erosion of coastlines are frequent occurrences. As life in the Sundarbans grows more challenging and unpredictable, many people are being forced to migrate. As Moyna said “it seemed as though both land and water were turning against those who lived in the Sunderbans” (Ghosh 49). People had no choice other than migrating to the foreign lands that “making a life in the Sunderbans had become so hard that the exodus of the young was accelerating every year: boys and girls were borrowing and stealing to pay agents to find them work elsewhere. Some were slipping over the border into Bangladesh, to join labour gangs headed for the Gulf” (Ghosh 49). Tipu and Rafi, residents of the Sundarbans, are thought to have grown up in a technologically advanced environment and are adept at using modern devices like cell phones and personal computers. They are also drawn to the prospect of a better life abroad because of the internet. *Gun Island* shows that even in the most remote and destitute coastal regions of India, this tendency may be seen.

Oral tradition allow myths to change with every generation and provide new meanings to age-old frameworks, they help keep myths open to new interpretations. Because of this, even though the *Gun Merchant*’s tale is centuries old, it nonetheless speaks to contemporary issues of displacement, environmental degradation, and migration. Another way to interpret the story of Manasa Devi’s curse is as an ecological allegory. The merchant’s disdain for the goddess is a symbol of human conceit in disregarding the demands of nature for harmony and respect. As Ghosh writes the “*Gun Merchant*’s misfortunes were due to his own arrogance, and his conviction that he was rich enough, to avoid paying deference to the forces represented by the goddess of snakes”(55-56). His penalty of being sent into perpetual exile is reminiscent of the ecological repercussions that humanity currently faces. Like the cursed merchant, entire communities are uprooted by rising seas, cyclones, and wildfires and forced to roam. Manasa Devi employs Tipu as a tool to remind people of the repercussions of their actions. Tipu becomes more conscious of the impending catastrophe after his meeting with the snake. He explains the notion of greed and its effects to Deen when he says:

It’s nothing. Just a metaphor for greed. An imaginary thing.’ ’Y’think greed’s imaginary? He chuckled. ’Hey Pops, I got news for you: greed’s real, it’s big. You got greed, I got greed, we all got greed. You want to sell more books. I want more phones, more headphones, more everything. If that’s what a demon is then there’s no way it’s imaginary. Shit no! We’re all demons. (Ghosh 111)

This human greed turned the Sundarbans into a battlefield. The urge to exploit the natural resources has put life on Earth in a grave danger. Ghosh keeps bringing up the myth of Manasa Devi, presenting her as a true eco-feminist who uses the yellow-bellied serpent to warn of the effects of global warming. While concentrating on the movement of sea snakes and spiders, the displacement of dolphins and whales, and the shifting of ecosystems, Ghosh claims that the declining natural landscape has caused a significant displacement of people. Humanity seems to be being warned by a voice from the past about the limitations of human intervention and the rapid, unpredictable passage of time. The snake appears frequently in the book as a symbol. It is a symbol of nature’s ecological balance. Using this myth, Ghosh makes a direct plea to capitalists and industrialists to stop the planet’s devastation before it becomes irreparable. The myth of *Gun Merchant* and the journey of Tipu and Rafi’s modern journey from the vulnerable Sundarbans to Venice are two parallel narrative arcs that highlight the similarities between early modern climate shocks and ecological precarity in the twenty-first century. By drawing strong connections between these paths, Ghosh situates migration at the intersection of globalization, climate change, and technological mediation. As a result, *Gun Island* transforms from a book about displacement

into an analytical work that examines the discursive and material forces that drive human mobility in times of crisis.

According to Ghosh's eco-critical fiction, the environment is a living, porous continuum where human and nonhuman identities are intertwined through migration, myth, and oral tradition rather than a static backdrop. His novels show that oral traditions, such as the myths of Bon Bibi, Manasa Devi, or the Gun Merchant, are essential epistemologies that uphold sustainable land ethics, record ecological shifts, and challenge the prevailing paradigms of modernity. Ghosh challenges the division, hierarchy, and resource extraction that characterize Western conceptions of nature by dramatizing the meeting point of scientific and indigenous knowledge and promoting collaborative ecological wisdom. Ghosh highlights the "great derangement" the cultural and epistemic gap that hides climate realities and moral obligations—through myth, migration, and ecological crisis. His fiction encourages readers to embrace humility, adaptability, and shared responsibility by reimagining boundaries as interdependent sites for negotiating survival rather than as rigid demarcations. Therefore, in an era of climate change, Ghosh's engagement with oral tradition, mythic imagination, and hybrid landscapes constitutes an urgent literary and ethical response, calling for reconfigured relationships based on empathy, care, and planetary stewardship.

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**BENEATH THE VICTORIAN SMOKE: THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION FUELLED  
GENDER INEQUALITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION**

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**Abstract**

The Industrial Revolution transformed Britain in the nineteenth century into a setting of mechanized labor, rapid urbanization, and an accelerated pace of economic growth. However, under the advancement and wealth discourses, human, environmental, and ideological crises emerged. This paper argues that industrial capitalism has stimulated gender inequality and caused environmental damage, with both based on the patriarchal logics of control that underlie Victorian industrial modernity. Using an ecofeminist theoretical framework and through close readings of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, this study reveals how Victorian literature exposes the interconnected oppression of women and Nature. Dickens portrays Coke Town as a polluted, mechanized dystopia in which human life and ecological vitality are equally suffocated. Eliot interrogates patriarchal structures that confine women's intellectual, moral, and emotional potential, revealing how gender norms operate as ideological extensions of industrial rationality. Drawing on the ecofeminist writings of Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Karen Warren, the paper demonstrates that both women and the natural world were conceptualized as passive resources to be controlled, exploited, and disciplined. Through this integrated analysis, the study argues that Victorian literature not only critiques its own historical moment but also anticipates contemporary intersections of climate crisis, environmental injustice, and gender inequality.

**Keywords:** Industrial Revolution, Gender Inequality, Environmental Degradation, Ecofeminism, Victorian Literature

The Industrial Revolution altered both the economic conditions and the ideological foundation of Victorian society. It holds a privileged place within modern historical consciousness as the era that ushered in mass mechanization, technological innovations, and economic expansion. Factories increased in number, cities expanded, and railroads spread out over the rural areas, and industrial rationality became associated with the daily life rhythms. However, under this celebrated narrative of human advancement was a story of exploitation; exploitation of Nature, exploitation of labour, and exploitation of women. While industrial capitalism reconstituted Britain as a world economic power, it produced heretofore unprecedented environmental destruction-polluted rivers, blackened skies, felled forests-and legitimized rigid gender hierarchies confining women to the domestic sphere while devaluing their labour. The Industrial Revolution did not just rearrange economic systems but re-ordered the moral imagination of an age. According to Raymond Williams:

The very air of these towns proclaimed a rupture from organic human relations. Pollution itself became the emblem of a society that had forgotten its ties to the land, replacing community with commerce, and reciprocity with production. The transformation was not only material but moral, reshaping how Victorians understood themselves in relation to one another and to Nature (204).

Williams's portrayal of the disconnection of human beings from the environment is similar to the ecofeminist understanding of patriarchal disconnection. The age that glorified "progress" was also an age of systemic domination. Industrial modernity transformed ecological and gender relations through mechanistic rationality and hierarchical dualisms, and the literary



works of Dickens and Eliot witness to the Victorian world, thereby inscribing these tensions into their narratives and characters. Modern critics were increasingly recognizing the Industrial Revolution not as an economic transformation, but rather as a cultural and ideological formation of control, abstraction, and domination. The logic that made industrial expansion possible was deeply patriarchal: in elevating masculinity, rationality, and productivity, it marginalized femininity, Nature, and emotional life. Ecofeminism is one of the branches of feminism that emerged in the late twentieth century, offering a distinctive perspective on understanding the interconnected system of oppression. *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens is undoubtedly one of the strongest fictional representations of industrial modernity. The symbolic industrial city in the novel, *Coke Town*, stands for ecological devastation: "spouting chimneys giving off tons of smoke," polluted rivers, mechanized factories, and human beings reduced to mere "Hands." Dickens foregrounds the moral and emotional consequences of industrial rationality, suggesting that domination of Nature goes hand in hand with the repression of human empathy and imagination. His sketch of Louisa Gradgrind's emotional devastation captures the psychological costs of a worldview that exalts utility over relationality. Although George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is set in a rural community rather than an industrial city, the novel explores ideological formations similar to the patriarchal logic that underpins industrial capitalism. Eliot uses Dorothea Brooke's limited aspirations to highlight how Victorian society restricts the intellectual and moral development of women. Dorothea's frustrated longing for meaningful engagement reflects a larger cultural system that denies women agency as much as industrial modernity denies agency to Nature. Eliot's focus on moral interdependence, social ecology, and ethical interconnection resonates with the ecofeminist perspective on a grand scale. Dickens and Eliot both show that environmental degradation cannot be isolated as a malady but rather is a symptom of patriarchal rationality, which is intrinsically linked to the suppression of gender as well. Victorian narratives demonstrate that capitalism constructs Nature and women as objects, that is, resources that can be controlled, quantified, and consumed. This paper, therefore, argues that the social and ecological evils caused by the Industrial Revolution were ineluctably interconnected, and that Dickens and Eliot offer penetrating insights into the patriarchal ideology of mastery at the core of industrial modernity.

### **Literature Review**

The interdisciplinary field of ecofeminism offers the richest critical framework for understanding the intersection of environmental degradation and gender oppression that emerged in the Victorian era. Different ecofeminist theorists—Val Plumwood, Karen Warren, and Carolyn Merchant, among others — have demonstrated that human relations with Nature and women have been historically governed by patriarchal rationality. These thinkers argue that the same hierarchical dualisms—reason versus emotion, culture versus Nature, and masculine versus feminine —organize relations of domination across ecological and gendered realms. Val Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* is particularly formative in this arena. Plumwood identifies a "master model" of rationality in Western thought that legitimizes domination by presenting itself as superior to the feminized Other. She then argues that this epistemological framework legitimizes the oppression of women and the exploitation of Nature. Her work constitutes an essential theoretical framework of this paper and correlates strongly with the works of Dickens and Eliot in illustrating Victorian society. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* makes this argument on a historical level by explaining the changing metaphors of the Earth from a nurturing mother to a mechanistic system in the course of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions. Such a transformation provided ideological groundwork for the exploitation of the environment and directly parallels the ways that Victorian norms redesigned the roles of women as passive, domesticated, and emotionally regulated. The merchant's analysis is indispensable in understanding the cultural shifts that enabled Victorian industrialism. Karen Warren, in the introductory statement of ecofeminism, argues that:

The domination of women and the domination of Nature are not two separate oppressions but two faces of a single conceptual framework that privileges hierarchy, abstraction, and mastery. Patriarchal culture constructs women and the natural world through the same logic of objectification, defining both as passive, silent, irrational, and therefore legitimately exploitable. Ecofeminism reveals that the structures that sanction environmental devastation are the same structures that sanction gender inequality (6).

Karen Warren's contributions add the ethical aspect to ecofeminism. She states that patriarchal logic legitimizes domination because it naturalizes hierarchy. Warren's stipulation that structures of domination overlap and reinforce one another offers the conceptual clarity that makes it possible to analyse Dickens and Eliot jointly. Her insights have been used to frame Victorian industrialism as a system that exploits and takes for granted ecological systems and the lives of women. Victorian literature critics have constantly reviewed gender and industrialization issues separately. Critics like Peter Brooker take into account Dickens's attack on utilitarian industrialism through themes of mechanization, alienation, and capitalism as a demonic force. Brooker observes that Dickens employs realism to explore the moral shortcomings of industrial society, and his reading of *Hard Times* highlights Dickens's protest against reducing human life to economic value. Similarly, feminist scholars, including Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, have highlighted the subtle manner in which George Eliot reveals the imprisonment of women's intellect and feelings. In "The Moral Imagination in Victorian Literature," Ermarth presents Eliot's realism as a moral exploration of how patriarchal codes restrict the scope of moral agency for women. These analyses offer some very critical points of entry toward understanding Eliot's figuration of Dorothea Brooke as a symbol of repressed female potentiality. However, relatively few scholars combine these strands of gender, ecology, and critique of industrial society under an ecofeminist framework. Dickens and Eliot reveal complementary themes of the patriarchal structures of the Industrial Revolution, with Dickens emphasizing the theme of environmental ruin, while Eliot highlights the theme of gendered oppression. Synthesizing those views, this study fills the gap within Victorian studies, providing a synthesized ecofeminist reading. Cultural materialist works by Raymond Williams, another pillar of this discussion, rely on the symbolic comparison of rural and urban landscapes in British literature. His work offers historical context in analysing Dickens's interpretation of the 'Coke' town as a symbol of industrial decay.

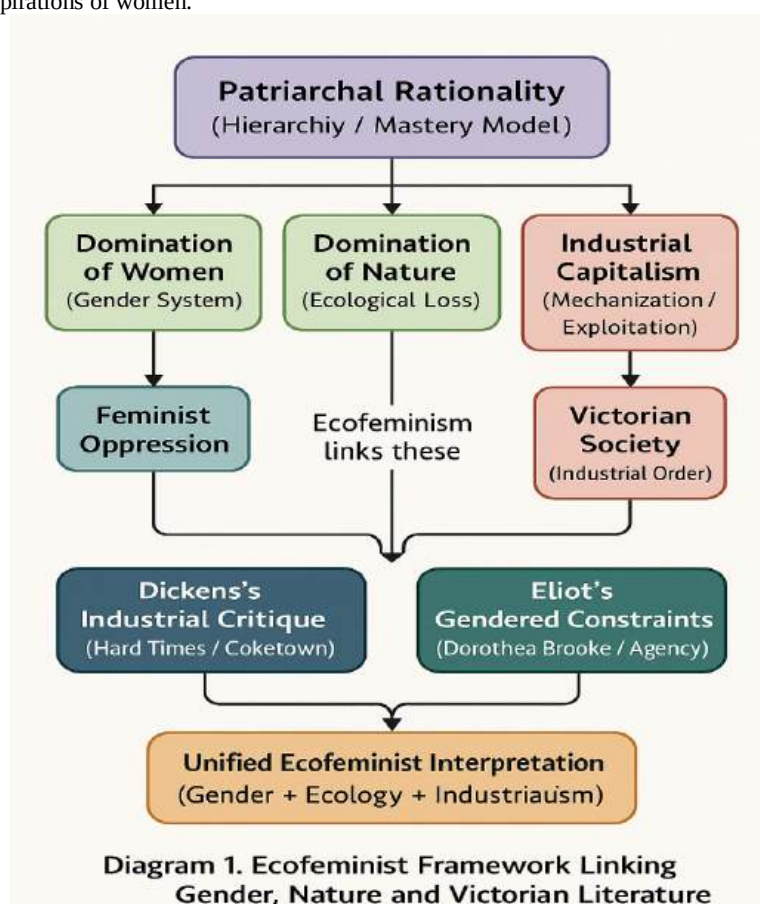
#### **Theoretical Framework: Ecofeminism and the Patriarchal Logic of Industrial Modernity**

The philosophical backbone of the theoretical framework identifies the precise thought structure—patriarchal dualism—that fueled industrial capitalism and its treatment of women and Nature. It explains why Victorian society viewed both as inferior entities to be controlled. Val Plumwood outlines the "master model of reason" through which Western patriarchy has historically justified domination:

The master rationality positions itself as transcendent, detached, and superior to all it defines as other—women, Nature, animals, the body, and emotion. These are rendered inferior through a logic of dualism that constructs the master as autonomous and the subordinate as dependent, chaotic, or irrational. This framework naturalizes exploitation by disguising domination as order and hierarchy as the natural condition of the world. The ecological crisis and the persistence of gender oppression are both rooted in this same denial of interdependence (41).

The intertwined issues of gender inequality and environmental degradation in Victorian literature, explored in this paper, are based on the theoretical frameworks of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism rose as a theory in dealing with and analysing environmental degradation and the global oppression of women. Dickens critiques industrial capitalism's mechanization of Nature and emotional repression of its citizens. Eliot critiques the moral and intellectual confinement of women under the patriarchal norms. Ecofeminism serves as the theoretical link between such seemingly disparate critiques. Its central claim is that these crises are a result of the same

patriarchal conceptual framework. According to Val Plumwood, Western rationalism is based on a series of hierarchical dualisms- mind/body, man/woman, culture/Nature, and reason/emotion, which privilege the first term in the dual relationship at the expense of the second term. This "logic of dualism" enables systems of domination by rendering the subordinated term inferior, irrational, and natural. This form of dualistic thinking is at the base of industrial capitalism, which treats Nature as inert matter and women as naturally fit for emotional and domestic labor. Victorian industrial society replicated these dualisms in social and ecological realms. Dickens's Coke town embodies these hierarchies through its mechanical, polluted landscape and its disregard for emotional intelligence. Eliot's patriarchal Middlemarch imposes similar limitations upon the intellectual aspirations of women.



This diagram shows the logic of patriarchal rationality — a hierarchical logic that privileges masculine reason and power — that leads to three interrelated systems of domination in Victorian society: domination of women, domination of Nature, and industrial capitalism. These forces produce feminist oppression, ecological degradation, and a mechanized labour system that are interconnected through ecofeminist theory. The diagram illustrates Dickens's and Eliot's Hard Times critique of industrialism (Coke town's polluted environment) and exploration of gendered constraints (Dorothea Brooke's limited agency) that stem from the exact patriarchal blueprint.

Finally, the flowchart illustrates that the two authors present different perspectives on the same issue, ultimately leading to a comprehensive ecofeminist reading of gender, ecology, and industrialism in Victorian literature. Carolyn Merchant shows that industrial modernity changed the definition of Nature:

The image of the Earth as a nurturing mother, alive and sustaining, gave way during the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions to an image of Nature as a vast machine. No longer had a living organism with inherent value, Nature become an assemblage of parts to be analysed, quantified, manipulated, and exploited. This mechanistic worldview displaced the feminine principles of renewal, organic balance, and interconnectedness, replacing them with masculine ideals of power, prediction, and control (2).

Carolyn Merchant's historical explanation in *The Death of Nature* shows how early modern science and industrialization displaced organic metaphors of Nature with mechanical ones. Nature was no longer regarded as a living mother but as a machine – predictable, controllable, and exploitable. Merchant argues that this metaphorical shift allowed for unprecedented exploitation of natural resources, as she writes that Nature, which was once conceptualized as a living organism – a mother that cared for her creations – was re-conceptualized as a machine. This mechanization parallels Victorian constructions of femininity. Women's labour—mainly domestic and emotional work—was naturalized, invisible, and bound by morality. The Industrial Revolution thus depended on two silent and unpaid labour forces – The Earth and women. Karen Warren broadens ecofeminism by exploring how the patriarchal conceptual frameworks naturalize hierarchy. She argues that the subordination of women and the domination of Nature are "mutually reinforcing" and come from the same logic of control and objectification. Therefore, Warren's work offers an ethical understanding of the Victorian literature's frequent association of moral sensitivity with feminine and natural imagery. In *Hard Times*, Sissy Jupe represents an ethic of interdependence and compassion—values that patriarchal rationality associates with femininity and therefore considers inferior. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke's moral and intellectual aspirations are frustrated by a patriarchal system that equates value with authority and mastery. Ecofeminism makes such configurations not contingent but structural. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* stands out as the most graphic fictional condemnation of the pollution and environmental degradation associated with the Industrial Revolution, as well as its human costs. The novel's portrayal of Coke town serves not only as a setting but also as a model for ecological devastation and mechanized existence. Coke town is depicted as; "A town of unnatural red and black... where the piston of the steam engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness" (Dickens 21).

This striking imagery captures the unnaturalness of industrial life- a landscape where Nature seems twisted and where industrial machines seem to have more agency than the human beings that tend to it. The ecological degradation of the town of Coke is not incidental; Dickens presents it as a direct manifestation of industrial rationality. The "serpents of smoke" rising endlessly are a representation of environmental poisoning that is never-ending. The river, stained purple by the dye, symbolizes industrial capitalism as a violation of the natural order for the sake of profit. Dickens's atmospheric descriptions directly correspond to ecofeminist apprehensions that patriarchal rationality results in the domination of Nature through processes of abstraction, mechanization, and extraction. Ecofeminism posits that the exploitation of the environment is a result of the same way of seeing the world that led to the subordination of women and that this way of seeing disrespects relationality, embodiment, and emotional ways of knowing. Dickens illustrates this worldview through the philosophy of Mr. Gradgrind, whose obsession with facts and utility represents patriarchal rationality as criticized by ecofeminists such as Plumwood. Imagination is dangerous, empathy is irrelevant, and the environment in Gradgrind's world serves as a resource for industrial expansion. The emotional alienation of Louisa Gradgrind reflects the ecological desolation of Coketown. She is raised to bottle up her emotions, to scorn imagination,

and to control her inner life on utilitarian grounds. Dickens's criticism of patriarchal rationality is embodied in Louisa Gradgrind:

She was quiet and trembling now and then, but she sat rigidly, her face composed into the calm of resignation. It was the face of a woman who had been taught from childhood that feeling was dangerous and imagination a weakness, until her heart seemed turned to stone within her. She had learned to hide every spark of emotion, as though natural affection were a crime against the philosophy of facts (162).

This emotional paralysis is symptomatic of a society that values rationality (masculine) over emotional life (feminine). It is in this context that Dickens's critique assumes an ecofeminist dimension: industrial capitalism, like ecologically it mechanizes the environment, it also mechanizes the human heart. Louisa's emotional repression mirrors the patriarchal repression of intuitive, empathetic, and imaginative qualities of women. Ecofeminists argue that these qualities have been devalued because the patriarchal structures associate them with femininity and therefore regard them as inferior. Gradgrind's educational philosophy embodies the patriarchal logic of abstraction, as identified by Plumwood, which is integral to Western domination. In contrast, Sissy Jupe epitomizes an alternative epistemology characterized by relationality, compassion, and an innate way of knowing. Sissy's experience with the circus, which is a place of imagination and communal living, contrasts with the rigidity of Coke town, which is mechanical. Dickens thus positions her as a moral counterforce to Gradgrind's utilitarian rationality. Through Sissy, the novel implicitly adheres to the ecofeminist principle of interdependence. Sissy's role exemplifies the "ethic of care," a key concept in ecofeminism. Her emotional intelligence, which Gradgrind deemed unscientific, becomes the moral center of the novel. Through Sissy, Dickens implies that an alternative to patriarchal rationality is possible and necessary for social and ecological healing. Coke town's workers are described as "so many hundreds of Hands," thus reducing them to mechanized limbs of industrial production. This dehumanization is in parallel with the treatment of Nature as a passive resource. Ecofeminist theory demands that the commodification of human labour and the commodification of the ecological system are the same patriarchal logic of control. Dickens's representation of working-class suffering, therefore, validates the ecofeminist claim that domination is systemic and interrelated. Dickens's use of animalistic and mechanistic imagery exposes the failure of human and natural boundaries in industrial capitalism. Like the polluted river, the workers are changed by a system that prioritizes extraction over well-being. The novel's industrial environment is thus physically toxic as well as morally toxic—an externalization of patriarchal domination.

#### **Gender and Ecological Domination:**

The parallels between the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment are not parallel lines of themes but realities. Dickens reveals Victorian industrial capitalism as a system that constructs women and Nature as its domains to be dominated. Louisa's emotional suppression and Coke Town's pollution are two sides of the same industrial coin. According to ecofeminist theorists, the logic of patriarchy is such that control is enforced by creating a dominant subject, the rational masculine self, and a subordinate other, which includes Nature, women, and emotions. Dickens's representation of industrial society reveals this dualism. Coke town is run by a logic that underprices what the ecofeminists call the "feminized sphere": Nature, affect, and relationality. Even Bounderby's lies of having risen from poverty and obscurity to his present place in society is a patriarchal narrative of mastery that denies interdependence (eco feminist concern). Dickens critiques this ideology by showing Bounderby's dependence on the same woman he claims to have defeated. Thus, Dickens's industrial landscape becomes a metaphor for patriarchal delusion about autonomy and mastery. Dickens is more direct in industrial settings, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is an understated but deeply critical commentary on patriarchal conventions that restrict the intellectual and ethical domains of women. *Middlemarch* has less obvious industrial landscape concerns, but it addresses the moral consequences of patriarchal domination,

which are at the core of ecofeminist theory. Eliot's famous meditation on the interconnectedness of life, which posits that if we had a keen vision and feeling for all the everyday, ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow, expresses an ecological sensibility in keeping with ecofeminist ethics. According to Eliot, moral perception involves recognizing the interdependence of all forms of life, which is the underlying principle in ecofeminist philosophy. Dorothea Brooke's arc exemplifies how patriarchal structures limit women's dreams. Dorothea's character is intelligent, idealistic, and morally earnest; however, Victorian society confines her within the traditional roles of wife and mother, which stifle her intellectual aspirations. Her marriage to Casaubon is an embodiment of personal disappointment as well as the cultural castration of women's agency. Eliot uses an ecological metaphor to depict the limited power Dorothea has at her disposal.

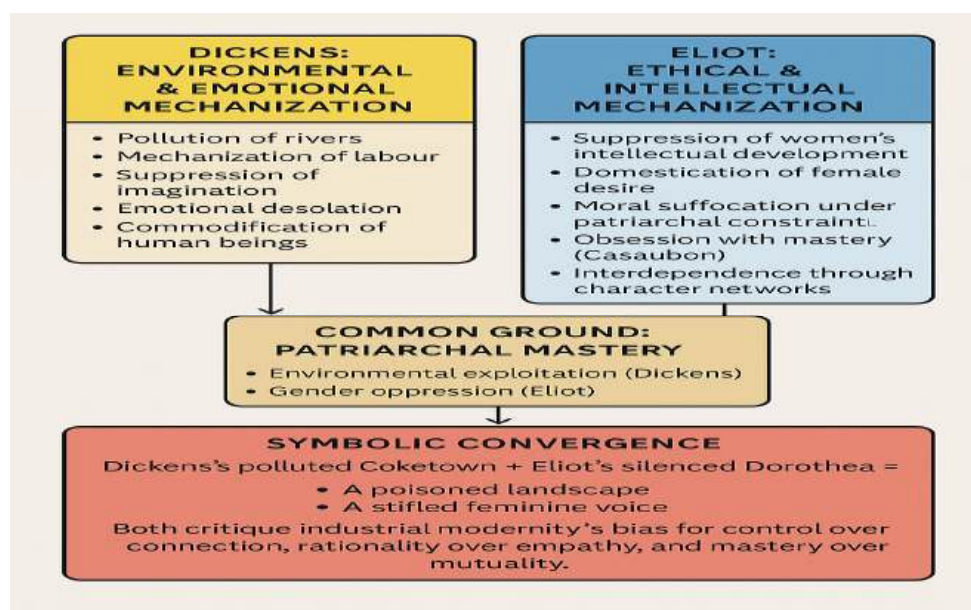
Her whole Nature, like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the Earth. Her soul, longing for some great purpose, for some tasks that might align her will with the vast currents of moral life, was forced into narrow human arrangements that suffocated its natural course. She was made to feel the bondage of a system that prized obedience over thought, and convention over any deep stirring of the heart (24).

She invokes ecological imagery to describe Dorothea's stunted development. Dorothea's potential flows like a river diverted from its natural course. This metaphor captures the ecofeminist idea that patriarchal structures disrupt natural forms of growth—whether ecological or human. Casaubon embodies the patriarchal desire for mastery. His endless cataloguing of knowledge mirrors the industrial impulse to dominate and systematize. He seeks to classify the world, much like early modern scientists sought to mechanize Nature. His treatment of Dorothea as an intellectual accessory parallels the treatment of Nature as an object to be studied, controlled, and exploited. Eliot's ethical vision anticipates ecological interdependence:

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. For the quickest of us walk about well-wadded with stupidity, incapable of perceiving how deeply each life vibrates with the life of another, bound together in the unseen web of human sympathy and suffering (194).

Eliot's narrative structure underscores interdependence; the lives of characters intersect like nodes in a fundamentally ecological system. This relationality resonates with the premises of ecofeminist ethics, which emphasize both interdependence and mutual determination. The moral intelligence and empathetic powers of Dorothea become a catalyst for change within the community, suggesting that values conventionally coded as feminine and long dismissed by patriarchal systems that have conferred moral authority are, in fact, essential to moral flourishing. Furthermore, Eliot's emphasis on humility and mutuality contrasts sharply with the ethos of industrial mastery. Those characters who, like Lydgate, pursue ambition at the expense of community suffer from the same illusion of autonomy that ecofeminists critique. Dorothea, on the other hand, personifies an ethic that is relational and grounded in care and connectedness. Eliot's use of pastoral imagery underlines this connection between environment and morality. She commonly figured the landscapes of *Middlemarch* as a living system wherein social and ecological health were inextricably intertwined. When Eliot writes that the town and the countryside were like two chambers of the same heart, she offers something akin to an ecological vision wherein human life is not conceivable apart from its larger environment. Where Dickens writes satire, and Eliot writes moral realism, an ecofeminist frame reveals how each critique converges on the same ideological structure of patriarchal rationality.





**(Diagram–2: Ecofeminist Intersection between Dickens and Eliot)**

This flowchart visually maps how Dickens's critique of industrial capitalism and Eliot's critique of patriarchal intellectual structures converge within an ecofeminist framework. The upper level shows their distinct modes of mechanization—environmental/emotional in Dickens and ethical/intellectual in Eliot. Both strands lead downward to a shared core: the patriarchal logic of mastery. The lower levels illustrate how ecofeminism unifies these critiques by revealing the interdependence between environmental exploitation and gender oppression, demonstrating that both arise from the same hierarchical dualisms. The final panel, "Symbolic Convergence," highlights how Dickens's polluted landscapes and Eliot's stifled feminine subjectivity reflect parallel consequences of modernity's drive for control, rationality, and domination.

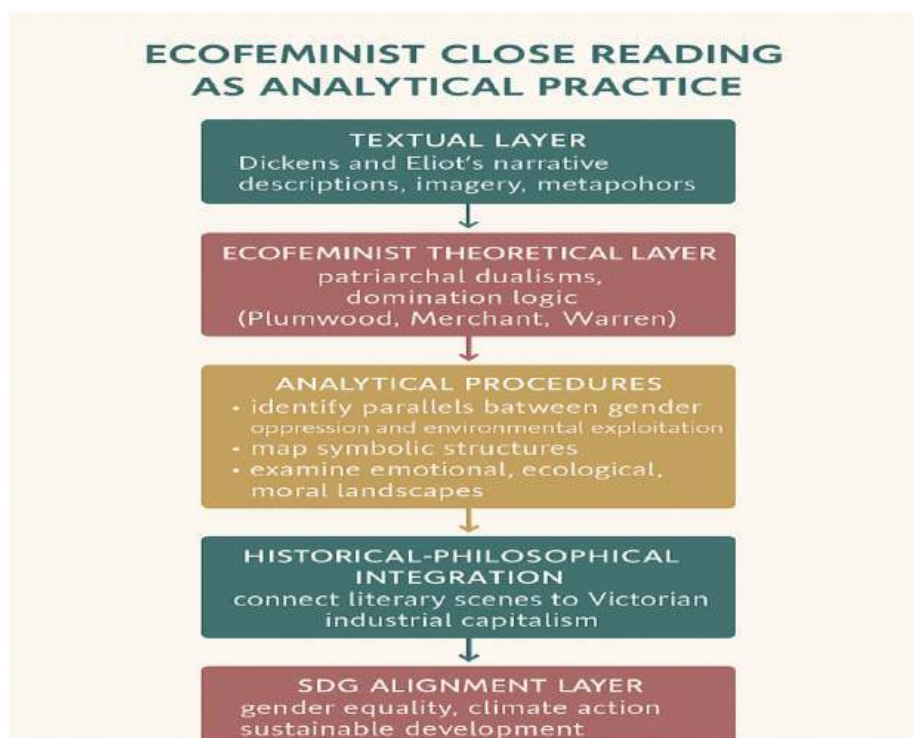
### Discussion

The intersection of gender oppression and environmental degradation during the Industrial Revolution reveals the deep entanglement of patriarchal ideologies within Victorian society. Both uploaded drafts emphasize this argument: the first traces the philosophical and ecological roots of patriarchal rationality, and the second shows how Dickens and Eliot transform these structures into literary critique. The unified paper will demonstrate that Victorian literature not only reflects the conditions of its time but also anticipates the insights of ecofeminism that would emerge a hundred years later. Victorian industrialism was characterized by a worldview that prioritized mastery, abstraction, and domination. Dickens exposes this worldview as harmful to both the environment and humanity; Eliot reveals it as stifling ethical and intellectual development. Ecofeminism demonstrates that these harms are structurally interconnected, rather than incidental. Longstanding patriarchal assumptions—about rationality, about autonomy, about hierarchy—materialized in industrial exploitation, in gender inequalities, and in moral failures. Consider this convergence in light of one of Dickens's most powerful descriptions of Coke town.

The streets were hot and dusty; the chimneys belched forth constant smoke that seemed never to clear but lay upon the town like a poisonous cloud. The river ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and the air was thick with particles that grated the throat. Everywhere was

the sense of machinery labouring with ceaseless motion, as though the town itself had become a living engine breathing smoke and exhaling misery (Dickens 27).

This passage reveals a shared logic- the very same mindset that constructs Nature as dead matter constructs women as passive and domestic, confined to roles defined not by their potential but by patriarchal utility. This study employs ecofeminist close reading as its primary methodological approach, integrating textual analysis with environmental and gender theory to examine how Dickens and Eliot construct interconnected systems of domination.



**(Diagram 3: Ecofeminist Close Reading)**

Ecofeminist close reading moves beyond traditional literary analysis by foregrounding the structural parallels between women's oppression and environmental degradation. The method involves identifying patriarchal dualisms—such as man/woman, culture/Nature, and reason/emotion—embedded in narrative descriptions, character development, metaphors, and symbolic imagery. In *Hard Times*, the analysis focuses on how Dickens's industrial landscapes, polluted atmospheres, and mechanized labour expose forms of ecological violence mirrored in Louisa Gradgrind's emotional suppression. In *Middlemarch*, close reading attends to Eliot's relational ethics, ecological metaphors, and depictions of constrained femininity, revealing how patriarchal moral codes restrict both women's agency and communal ecological harmony. This methodology also situates textual insights within historical and philosophical frameworks drawn from Val Plumwood, Carolyn Merchant, and Karen Warren, allowing Victorian literary scenes to be read as reflections of larger ideological structures. Finally, the study aligns these textual patterns with contemporary sustainability concerns, showing how ecofeminist interpretation transforms literature into a diagnostic tool for understanding the persistent entanglement of gender

injustice, capitalist exploitation, and environmental harm. Thus, ecofeminist close reading serves as both an analytical method and an ethical practice, revealing the profound interdependence of social and ecological systems in Victorian fiction.

### **Conclusion**

Victorian literature, notably Dickens's *Hard Times* and Eliot's *Middlemarch*, offers crucial insights into how patriarchal industrial modernity simultaneously oppressed women and destroyed the natural environment. The Industrial Revolution reshaped Britain not only economically but ideologically, embedding patriarchal dualisms into the fabric of social and ecological systems. Ecofeminist theory brings these interconnections into sharp focus by showing how the domination of women and the domination of Nature are grounded in the same hierarchical logic. Dickens exposes this logic through powerful depictions of industrial pollution, mechanization, and emotional suppression. Eliot exposes it through her portrayal of women whose moral and intellectual potential is thwarted by patriarchal constraints. Together, their works reveal the social and ecological costs of a worldview that elevates control over care, rationality over empathy, and mastery over mutuality. This resonates with Dickens's defence of emotional wisdom and Eliot's insistence on relational ethics. Their novels foreshadow contemporary struggles against the climate crisis, environmental injustice, and gender inequality. The Victorian smoke may have dissipated, but the ideological structures that produced it persist. Reading Dickens and Eliot through an ecofeminist lens not only enriches Victorian studies but also provides invaluable guidance for addressing the interconnected crises of the twenty-first century.

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**GENDERING GREEN POLITICS: WOMEN, ECOLOGY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN INDIA**

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**Abstract**

This paper investigates the deeply gendered nature of environmental governance in India by examining the disjunction between women's extensive ecological labour and their persistent marginalisation within formal decision-making institutions. Drawing on ecofeminist theory, feminist political ecology, and intersectional governance studies, the research situates women's environmental engagement within the broader political economy of natural resource management. It traces how historical forest policies, patriarchal social norms, unequal land rights, and caste-based hierarchies shape women's access to forests, water, and land, while simultaneously restricting their participation in community forestry institutions, Joint Forest Management committees, and the Indian Forest Service. Through case studies such as the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the paper highlights how women's activism emerges from material dependence on natural resources and embodied experiences of ecological degradation, revealing the critical but often overlooked role women play in grassroots environmental movements. This analysis foregrounds women not only as resource users but as political actors whose ecological knowledge has long informed local environmental stewardship. It further interrogates the limited translation of women's presence in local governance mandated through political quotas into substantive influence over environmental decision-making. Recent scholarship demonstrates that despite their central role in sustaining forest-based livelihoods, women, especially Dalit and Adivasi women, remain systematically excluded from executive positions within community forest institutions and face entrenched bureaucratic and technocratic biases. By synthesising theoretical insights with empirical studies, this paper provides a comprehensive account of how gender, caste, class, and institutional design intersect to shape women constrained agency in ecological governance. It underscores the need for critical engagement with the structures that continue to masculinise environmental governance and marginalise women's ecological knowledge and political voice.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Gender, Patriarchy, Environmental Governance, Ecology, Green Politics, Environmental Movements, Representation

**Introduction**

The long and evolving history of human engagement with the natural environment has been fundamentally shaped by gendered roles, expectations, and responsibilities. Across different regions and historical periods, women and men have interacted with ecosystems in distinct ways, informed by social norms, division of labour, and cultural meanings attached to nature (Agarwal 123-125). Building on this scholarship, in India, these gendered relationships with the environment acquire particular urgency due to deep socio-economic inequalities, widespread dependence on natural resources, and persistent patriarchal structures shaping access to land, livelihoods, and political institutions. Women, especially rural, tribal, Dalit, and economically marginalised groups, remain among the most vulnerable populations, disproportionately bearing the burdens of ecological degradation, climate change, and resource scarcity (Agarwal 51). Their marginalisation reflects broader failures to achieve gender equality, a principle enshrined in multiple international frameworks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Beijing Platform for Action ("UN Women"; "Beijing Declaration").

Climate change intensifies these pre-existing inequalities, making the intersection of gender and environment a critical field of study. Long-term shifts in global temperature and climatic patterns driven by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have generated significant disruptions worldwide, albeit with uneven impacts across regions and social groups. (IPCC 5-6). South Asia, and India in particular, is among the most vulnerable regions due to its climatic variability, agrarian dependence, and widespread socio-economic disparities (IPCC 12-18). Within this context, because women disproportionately rely on natural resources for household provisioning, small-scale agriculture, water collection, and fuel gathering, they confront the immediate impacts of ecological change more acutely than men (UN Women). Furthermore, persistent gender inequalities such as limited access to land, restricted mobility, exclusion from decision-making, and significant time poverty undermine women's capacity to adapt or participate effectively in environmental governance (FAO 23; Antonopoulos 5). These intersecting vulnerabilities position women at the frontline of climate risks and limit their ability to shape the policies and governance structures that determine environmental outcomes (Malik 12; Malik 19).

This paper examines the intersection of gender, ecology, and governance in India through an ecofeminist lens. Ecofeminism, which foregrounds the parallel between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, offers a critical theoretical framework for understanding the structural roots of gendered environmental vulnerabilities. At the same time, feminist political ecology and gender-and-governance scholarship, particularly the work of Bina Agarwal, provide empirical insights into the systemic exclusion of women from environmental decision-making, despite their substantial ecological knowledge and labour. While women have historically played prominent roles in environmental mobilisations from the Chipko Movement of the 1970s to the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)—their participation within formal governance institutions remains largely symbolic rather than substantive (Shiva 69; Agarwal 125).

In this context, "gendering green politics" requires a deeper interrogation of how patriarchal power structures shape access to natural resources, determine who speaks in community institutions, and influence whose knowledge counts in shaping environmental decisions. This paper argues that women's exclusion from green governance is neither incidental nor accidental; rather, it is embedded in longstanding socio-cultural norms, institutional design, and the political economy of natural resource management. The following sections trace the conceptual foundations of ecofeminism and feminist ecological thought, analyse women's environmental activism through key case studies, and assess the ways in which Indian governance structures continue to marginalise women's ecological agency.

#### **Ecofeminist Perspectives and Environmental Governance**

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s as an intellectual and political response to dual crises: the subordination of women and the degradation of the natural environment. Coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, the term captured the argument that patriarchal domination manifested in gender hierarchies, capitalist accumulation, and scientific rationality was at the root of ecological destruction (Öztürk 707; Suresh 116-135). Ecofeminist thinkers argue that patriarchal societies construct dualisms—man/woman, culture/nature, reason/emotion in which the second term is consistently devalued. Just as nature is treated as a passive resource to be controlled and exploited, women are relegated to subordinate roles within households and societies (Hoque 133-135).

Ecofeminism evolved in diverse strands. Among these, liberal ecofeminists, typically from relatively privileged backgrounds, advocate for integrating gender concerns into environmental policy frameworks, emphasising participation, access, and equality (Parameswaran 47-48). Radical ecofeminists challenge the structural foundations of capitalist society, arguing that the same profit-oriented, male-dominated systems driving ecological devastation also produce gender oppression (Suresh 116-135). Indian ecofeminism, shaped by the experiences of rural and tribal women, emphasises the material realities of subsistence, labour, and resource dependence rather than abstract philosophical notions (Agarwal 78). This strand foregrounds how gendered divisions of

labour, unequal property rights, and everyday struggles over forests, water, and land shape women's ecological knowledge and political engagement.

One of the central contributions of ecofeminism lies in exposing how capitalist expansion, technological modernisation, and state-led development have often exacerbated gendered inequalities. Large-scale production and consumption, mechanised agriculture, intensive extraction, and industrial pollution hallmarks of capitalist economic systems have accelerated ecological degradation (Swaroop 300-310). As technological systems expanded, they consolidated the authority of patriarchal institutions and further marginalised women, undermining traditional ecological knowledge and local control of natural resources (Parameswaran 48).

Several ecofeminist scholars highlight these linkages. Rachel Carson's classic *Silent Spring*, although not explicitly ecofeminist, demonstrated how industrial agriculture and pesticide use produced systemic ecological harm (Joshi 15-25). Vandana Shiva, one of India's foremost ecofeminists, critiques modern science and biotechnologies as patriarchal tools that displace local knowledge systems and threaten biodiversity (Singh 50-60; Singh 442-455). Her concept of "seed democracy" underscores how global agribusiness undermines women's control over seeds and subsistence agriculture (Tasis 3). Shiva's work, however, has faced critical scrutiny. Scholars such as Bina Agarwal argue that essentialist ecofeminism often romanticises women-nature relationships, overlooking the socio-economic inequalities that shape access to resources and the fact that not all women share equal ecological dependence or environmental interests (Swaroop 300-310).

Agarwal's feminist political ecology provides a corrective by grounding analysis in property rights, gendered labour, institutional design, and collective action. She emphasises that gender differences in environmental experiences arise from structural inequalities, not inherent feminine traits. For example, women's restricted land ownership—only 14 percent of rural women own land in India limits their decision-making power in agriculture and forestry (Joshi 15-25). Gendered divisions of labour mean women spend disproportionate time collecting water, firewood, and fodder, exacerbating their exposure to environmental risks (FAO 23; Ferrant et al. 18). These constraints are institutional rather than biological and therefore require structural solutions (Malik, 20).

Ecofeminism also intersects with India's deep cultural associations with nature. Traditions in which Earth is personified as a mother figure reinforce the symbolic connection between women and environmental stewardship. However, these cultural associations do not necessarily translate into empowerment. Although some matrilineal communities such as the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya grant women land inheritance rights, women's political authority and mobility remain shaped by broader patriarchal norms (Palliyalil & Mukherjee 13).

Climate change brings renewed urgency to ecofeminist debates. As erratic monsoons, droughts, floods, and extreme weather events disrupt agricultural productivity and food security, women face intensified workloads and reduced adaptive capacity (IPCC 36). The feminisation of agriculture—where increasing numbers of women shoulder farming responsibilities due to male migration reflects both expanded agency and structural distress (De Schutter 14). Limited land rights, time poverty, and restricted access to technology further constrain women's ability to respond to climate uncertainties (FAO 23). These dynamics affirm ecofeminist critiques: women bear disproportionate environmental burdens while remaining excluded from sites of environmental governance.

Despite its limitations, ecofeminism remains a powerful framework for analysing the gendered nature of environmental crises. Its emphasis on interconnected oppression, structural inequality, and ecological ethics provides an entry point for examining women's activism and their struggle for environmental justice in India.

#### **Women's Environmental Activism in India**

People's environmental movements in India are not only motivated by growing ecological degradation and the urgency of protecting natural resources but also grounded in a broader ethical



claim that communities possess legitimate rights over their local environments. These movements emphasise that access to land, forests, and water should be distributed fairly and used sustainably. As Sangvai observes, such mobilisations have introduced concerns of distributive justice into environmental politics by asserting that equitable control over natural resources is essential for achieving socio-economic equality (Sangvai 113). Their critique extends beyond the unequal allocation of resources to include the dominant technological and developmental models that prioritise top-down planning. In doing so, these movements call for transforming existing power structures by shifting decision-making authority from centralised institutions to decentralised, community-based frameworks. Unlike many environmental campaigns in the West, Indian environmental movements are rooted primarily in the survival struggles of economically marginalised rural populations, whose livelihoods depend directly on access to natural resources.

Environmental movements in India are therefore not exclusively concerned with 'green' and 'clean' earth, or with saving endangered species and preserving the 'land ethic' as in the West. Such movements are motivated above all by the concern for the very survival of the local poor. (Misra 138)

India has witnessed some of the world's most influential grassroots environmental movements, many of which have been shaped by women's leadership and participation. These movements—rooted in subsistence struggles, ecological knowledge, and resistance to disempowering development models—demonstrate how women mobilise not only for environmental protection but also for social justice, resource rights, and community autonomy. Two landmark movements, the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, illustrate the depth and complexity of women's environmental activism.

### **The Chipko Movement**

The Chipko Movement, which began in the 1970s in the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, remains one of the most iconic examples of women-led environmental activism. Although often mythologised as a spontaneous uprising of women embracing trees to prevent commercial logging, the movement's deeper roots lie in the everyday hardships faced by women in a subsistence economy (Agarwal 51). Women in the Garhwal hills bore the brunt of deforestation: longer distances to collect firewood and fodder, soil erosion affecting agriculture, and reduced water availability (Jain 1788). Their immediate material dependence on forests allowed them to recognise the profound link between ecological disruption and their own survival, making them early and decisive participants in the movement.

Jain argues that while men supported the protests, women perceived the crisis as existential, shaped by their responsibilities for cultivating crops, managing livestock, and maintaining households (Jain 1788). For these women, Chipko was not merely an environmental protest but a struggle for livelihood security and community well-being. Gaura Devi, an elder village woman, became a central figure in the movement when she led a three-day, three-night vigil in March 1974 to prevent logging contractors from felling trees. Her leadership marked a significant break from customary gender norms that excluded women from public decision-making. Under her guidance, women confronted armed guards, protected trees, and reframed forest conservation as a community-centred responsibility (Mallick 47).

The Chipko Movement also catalysed institutional change. Traditionally, *van panchayats*—community forest councils—were male-dominated bodies that systematically excluded women (Mallick 47). However, as women's activism intensified, members of the Mahila Mangal Dal, a local women's organisation, progressively took over day-to-day management of village forests, reducing male monopolies over forest governance (Sarin 346). This shift was not without tension. Women later expressed frustration that men had shifted forest protection responsibilities onto them while retaining authority over decision-making. Even so, their increased visibility and engagement helped break the myth that community institutions were gender-neutral spaces.

Chipko's legacy extends beyond forest conservation; it reshaped gender relations. Men began acknowledging women's ecological knowledge and leadership capacities, albeit unevenly. Women gained new public identities, became spokespersons for community concerns, and questioned the patriarchal structures that governed forest access (Mallick 48). Although the movement eventually lost momentum by the early 1990s, it opened pathways for women's participation in subsequent environmental activism and inspired broader ecological movements across India and the world.

### **Gender, Displacement, and the Narmada Bachao Andolan**

If Chipko symbolised women's ecological stewardship, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) revealed how large-scale development projects generate gender-specific vulnerabilities. The construction of large dams along the Narmada River particularly the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) resulted in widespread displacement of tribal, rural, and marginalised communities. Scholars have extensively documented the social, economic, and environmental impacts of large dams (Scudder 623; Cernea and Guggenheim 1-10), but gendered experiences of displacement remain understudied.

Feminist scholars argue that development-induced displacement affects women and men differently due to unequal social positions, property rights, and livelihood roles. Treating the "community" as a uniform category obscures these differences, leading to flawed assessments and inadequate compensation policies (Elson 155). Mehta observes that displaced women face a "double bind": patriarchal norms marginalise them within households, while institutional biases overlook their rights and needs (Mehta 25).

The impacts of dam-related displacement extend beyond material losses. The uprooting of communities disrupts kinship networks, alters gender relations, and reshapes everyday life. Young married Adivasi women, whose well-being depends on close ties with natal families, face heightened vulnerability. Resettlement sites expose women to new forms of insecurity, including violence and restricted mobility, while offering limited livelihood options compatible with their skills (Mehta 26-28). Such gendered consequences rarely find adequate expression in official rehabilitation frameworks.

Kurian's research underscores that the SSP is embedded in a masculinist development discourse that excludes displaced communities from decision-making and dismisses alternative perspectives on development and equity (Kurian 842-846). Gujarat's rehabilitation policy granted compensation primarily to men, assuming male household heads, which further entrenched women's economic dependence. Single women—including widows and divorced women—were particularly disadvantaged, denied recognition as independent claimants to land rights.

The NBA challenged these structures by foregrounding the rights and dignity of displaced communities. Led by Medha Patkar, the movement mobilised women to articulate their demands, challenge patriarchal rehabilitation policies, and contest the dominant development model driving dam construction. Patkar and writers like Arundhati Roy drew attention to the loss of fishing rights—women's primary source of protein in tribal communities and the erosion of customary land rights (Misra 137).

The NBA also exposed contradictions within environmental and feminist activism. While Patkar championed displaced women's rights, she did not necessarily challenge patriarchal norms within her own family or movement networks (Krishna 323). Similarly, Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism, influential within global environmental discourse, was critiqued for linking women's biological capacities to environmental stewardship, thereby replicating essentialist assumptions (Krishna 323-324). These debates underscore the complexity of linking gender justice with environmental justice.

Despite its contradictions, the NBA pushed gender to the forefront of environmental politics in India. It highlighted that gender justice requires more than welfare-oriented measures; it demands recognising women as rights-holders, co-beneficiaries of land compensation, and full participants

in decision-making (Mehta 28–29). The movement demonstrated that environmental struggles are also struggles over power, representation, and social justice.

#### **Women in Local Governance and Green Governance in India**

Women's participation in local governance in India has been shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, structural exclusions, and recent institutional reforms. While formal political representation has expanded considerably since the early 1990s, women's engagement with environmental governance remains constrained by enduring patriarchal norms, unequal power structures, and limited institutional support (Mallick 45). To understand this dynamic, it is necessary to examine the trajectory of women's political inclusion within India's decentralised governance framework and analyse how these transformations have translated often inadequately into green governance.

Historically, women were not part of decision-making bodies at the village level (Mallick 45). Governance institutions such as caste panchayats, *khap panchayats*, or even early forms of local councils were dominated by elderly men with social authority (Agarwal 37–40). Even though women played crucial roles in sustaining subsistence economies collecting fuelwood, managing water, tending livestock, and maintaining biodiversity, they remained outside the institutional structures that determined resource access and allocation (Mallick 46). Colonial forest laws further undermined women's customary resource rights, replacing community-managed systems with state-controlled forestry regimes that valued timber over local needs (Guha 137). These policies formalised exclusion and entrenched gendered inequalities in forest governance.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1993 marked a watershed moment by mandating one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) and urban local bodies. These reforms dramatically increased the numerical presence of women in local governance, often described as the world's largest experiment in political gender quotas. Yet, as several scholars note, numerical representation alone does not ensure substantive influence. Women's formal presence in elected bodies has not automatically translated into meaningful participation in environmental decision-making, largely because forest governance committees, Joint Forest Management (JFM) bodies, and community forestry institutions (CFIs) often lie outside the scope of constitutional reservation requirements (Agarwal 76–79).

Within PRIs, women elected representatives often face multiple obstacles: limited mobility, lack of training, resistance from male colleagues, and deep social norms that discourage them from voicing concerns. Moreover, environmental issues particularly those related to forest conservation, biodiversity protection, water scarcity, or climate adaptation are frequently perceived as “technical” or “male” domains. Women themselves may internalise these assumptions, avoiding topics that are likely to be dismissed as “women's issues” (Agarwal 141–43). Concerns such as drinking water access, fuelwood shortages, and sanitation are critical environmental issues, yet they are trivialised because they align with women's domestic responsibilities.

Still, regional variations exist. In Himachal Pradesh, studies show women *pradhans* are more confident in addressing environmental concerns, partly because social norms in the region permit higher mobility and greater acceptance of women's public roles (Agarwal 147). In Kerala, women's engagement in Kudumbashree groups and watershed development projects demonstrates how supportive institutional structures can empower women to influence environmental governance (Nandan et al 125–132). In contrast, many northern and central Indian states where patriarchal norms are stronger show limited evidence of women's substantive environmental leadership (Khandker et al).

Ultimately, participation in local governance cannot be understood separately from women's access to land, their social capital, and their location within caste, class, and tribal hierarchies. These structural factors shape not only whether women enter decision-making spaces, but also whether their voices carry weight within those spaces.

### **Institutional Barriers to Women's Participation in Green Governance**

Institutional barriers represent some of the most persistent obstacles to women's engagement in environmental governance. Although gender quotas have helped integrate women into formal political structures, no parallel provisions exist for the institutions governing forests and other natural resources (Goetz 1-49). This gap between political representation and environmental governance results in women being structurally excluded from key decision-making arenas.

First, patriarchal norms severely restrict women's participation in the meetings of JFM committees, forest protection groups, and CFIs. Even when women are formally listed as members, they may hesitate to speak, attend irregularly, or be represented by male household members (Agarwal 119). Scheduled meeting times often clash with women's heavy domestic workload, preventing their full participation. Furthermore, the public speaking norms that characterise village assemblies often privilege male voices, silencing or marginalising women's concerns.

Second, institutional rules often reproduce gender biases. In many CFIs, membership is tied to land ownership or to the recognised "head of household"—almost always a man. Consequently, even when women are heavily dependent on forest resources, they lack formal voting rights or representation within executive committees (Agarwal 110–12). Tokenistic representation requirements—such as reserving one-third of general membership seats for women—do not ensure meaningful participation unless accompanied by executive-level inclusion.

Third, bureaucratic and technocratic biases within India's forest administration create additional barriers. Historically, the forest department has prioritised timber production, revenue generation, and conservation goals that undervalue community needs, particularly those of women. Women's knowledge of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), fodder cycles, water flows, and biodiversity management is seldom recognised within official forestry frameworks. The Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006 attempted to correct this by mandating joint titles for forest dwellers and requiring women's membership in Gram Sabhas. Yet implementation remains uneven, especially in areas with strong patriarchal norms or contested forest claims (Singh 159-166).

Fourth, the barriers faced by Dalit and Adivasi women are far more severe. These women often lack land rights, face mobility restrictions, and experience discrimination both within their communities and in state-run institutions (Rege 39–46). Studies of forest governance bodies reveal that while upper-caste women may occasionally access leadership positions, Dalit and tribal women are overwhelmingly relegated to general membership roles or excluded altogether (Mukherjee 136). This intersectional exclusion demonstrates that gender cannot be analysed without caste and tribal identities.

Finally, the broader political economy of resource management impedes women's participation. State policies that prioritise commercial forestry, hydropower projects, or mining often exclude local communities especially women from decision-making. Market-driven conservation, eco-tourism, and carbon credit schemes have similarly displaced women from their customary resource rights while offering few alternative livelihood options (Dubey and Chitkara). Such interventions often reinforce existing power asymmetries by privileging state agencies, private investors, and male elites over women's knowledge, labour, and claims to land and forests (Malik 22).

Thus, institutional design matters. Without explicit provisions ensuring women's voice, voting power, and executive-level representation, environmental governance structures will continue to reproduce gender inequalities.

### **Caste, Class and Tribal Dimensions in Women's Environmental Engagement**

Gendered environmental experiences in India cannot be understood without addressing caste, class, and tribal identities. Women's dependence on natural resources varies significantly across social groups, shaping their vulnerabilities as well as their modes of environmental engagement (Gupte 365). Adivasi women, for instance, rely heavily on forests for subsistence—collecting fuelwood, medicinal plants, wild fruits, fibres, and NTFPs that support household economies.

Because their livelihoods are intimately tied to forest ecosystems, environmental degradation directly threatens their survival. Yet forest governance institutions have historically marginalised tribal women, denying them formal representation and limiting their access to forest resources through restrictive bureaucratic practices (Sundar 142–45; Agarwal 110–12).

Similarly, Dalit women face systemic barriers within their own communities and in state institutions. Even when forest resources are communally managed, caste hierarchies determine who may speak, enter certain spaces, or claim leadership roles. In many villages, Dalit women cannot participate in joint committees or speak in mixed-caste public meetings without facing ridicule or hostility (Rege 39–41; Still 87–90; Jayal 114–16).

Class also shapes environmental engagement. Middle-class women, although active in urban environmentalism, do not share the same ecological dependence as rural women. Their environmental concerns often revolve around urban cleanliness, pollution, or lifestyle changes rather than livelihood-related resource access. Meanwhile, wealthy landowning women may have formal authority in village institutions but lack day-to-day interaction with forests, limiting their ecological knowledge. Thus, gender interacts with caste, class, and tribe to create differentiated vulnerabilities and capacities. Any attempt to strengthen women's environmental participation must therefore be intersectional in approach (Agarwal 59–60).

#### **Women in the Indian Forest Service (IFS)**

Representation within the Indian Forest Service reflects another dimension of women's exclusion from environmental governance. Although the first women officers joined the IFS in 1980, their numbers have grown slowly (Bahuguna). As of 2021, women constituted only about 9 percent of the total IFS cadre. Recent reporting suggests that by 2025, the total number of women in IFS and allied forest services may exceed 350 (Hindustan Times). This marks progress, but women remain a small minority, particularly in senior positions where policy and administrative decisions are made.

Women officers often encounter gender bias within the department, including scepticism about their physical abilities or leadership capabilities. Field postings may be restricted, promotions delayed, and workplace harassment inadequately addressed (Kelkar 59–66). For Dalit and Adivasi women, these challenges multiply due to caste discrimination and limited professional networks.

Furthermore, the presence of women in the IFS does not automatically translate into gender-sensitive policy outcomes. As feminist environmental scholars argue, institutions remain shaped by organisational cultures that often privilege technical expertise over community knowledge, and masculine norms over collaborative approaches (Bahuguna). Therefore, increasing the number of women officers is necessary but insufficient without organisational reforms that recognise gendered ecological knowledge.

#### **Recent Research Trends on Women and Green Governance**

A growing body of recent scholarship provides empirical evidence on the gaps and possibilities in women's participation in environmental governance. Women's empowerment in community forestry remains weak across decision-making, leadership, income control, and time-use. Caste and class hierarchies continue to limit women's influence even when they are formally included in CFIs (Baral et al. 4–7). Jagati emphasises that tribal women's ecological knowledge is indispensable to forest protection and household subsistence. Yet institutional frameworks seldom acknowledge their contributions or grant them decision-making power (Jagati 213–215). A study of JFM committees in Northeast India shows that women constitute 65 percent of those collecting forest produce but only 18 percent of leadership roles (Bagra 44–66), underscoring the persistent gender gap in governance despite women's ecological labour. Sengupta highlights that although women have been allowed into the forest service since 1980, their representation remains extremely limited, reducing the likelihood that gender concerns will shape forestry policies. Jattan documents that cultural norms and village-level hierarchies have historically excluded women

from participatory forest management, reinforcing patterns that continue today. These recent studies reaffirm Agarwal's long-standing argument: women's ecological contributions remain undervalued, and their governance roles remain severely constrained by patriarchal institutions.

### **Strengthening Women's Roles in Green Governance**

Improving women's participation in environmental governance requires a multifaceted approach grounded in institutional design, social support, and structural reform. Bina Agarwal offers some of the most compelling insights into what effective gender-inclusive governance might look like.

One strategy is linking women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with forest governance institutions. SHGs have empowered millions of rural women by providing financial autonomy, collective solidarity, and decision-making confidence. When connected to CFIs or JFM committees, SHGs can enhance women's bargaining power and improve their ability to articulate ecological concerns (Agarwal 122). Another innovation is the formation of *mahila sabhas*—women-only assemblies held prior to gram sabhas. These assemblies provide safe spaces for women to deliberate, articulate concerns, and prepare agenda items for broader community meetings (Agarwal 411-412). Evidence from states like Odisha and Maharashtra shows that *mahila sabhas* significantly increase women's participation and help shift deliberations towards issues such as water conservation, biodiversity management, and fuelwood access (Agarwal 86-87).

Civil society organisations also play a vital role in strengthening women's environmental participation. NGOs in Gujarat, Uttarakhand, and Jharkhand have successfully mobilised women to engage in forest protection, assert their rights under the Forest Rights Act, and demand inclusion in JFM committees (Nanavaty 9). These groups provide training, legal awareness, and platforms for collective action that counteract patriarchal restrictions.

Finally, Agarwal identifies the importance of "critical mass." Her studies show that substantive influence emerges only when women constitute at least 25–33 percent of executive committees (Agarwal 165–67). When women remain tokens, they face marginalisation; when they achieve critical mass, norms begin to shift, and women's ecological knowledge becomes central to community decisions. Ultimately, strengthening women's roles in environmental governance requires transforming not only institutions but also gender norms, property rights structures, and the broader political economy that shapes access to natural resources.

### **Conclusion**

Gendering green politics reveals that environmental governance in India is deeply intertwined with social hierarchies, institutional structures, and historical inequalities. Women, especially those from tribal, Dalit, and economically marginalised communities, bear disproportionate ecological burdens while remaining excluded from decision-making spaces that shape environmental outcomes. Although women have played transformative roles in grassroots environmental movements such as the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, their participation in formal governance structures remains limited. These contradictions highlight how environmental stewardship by women is recognised symbolically but undervalued institutionally.

Ecofeminist frameworks illuminate the interconnected oppression of women and nature, while feminist political ecology emphasises the need to address structural inequalities in property rights, resource access, and institutional design. Decentralisation and gender quotas have expanded women's formal representation, but substantial barriers persist in forest governance, community forestry, and the Indian Forest Service. Recent scholarship confirms that women's ecological contributions are significant, yet institutional biases prevent them from exercising leadership or influencing policy. Strengthening women's roles requires linking SHGs with forest institutions, establishing *mahila sabhas*, mobilising civil society, and ensuring critical mass representation in executive committees.

In essence, environmental sustainability and gender justice are inseparable. Without women's meaningful participation, green governance will remain incomplete, and India's ecological future



will remain uncertain. By transforming institutions, challenging patriarchal norms, and valuing women's ecological knowledge, India can move toward a more equitable and sustainable model of environmental governance.

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**COMMODIFIED INDIGENOUS ECOLOGIES: ECOSPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE  
INDUSTRY IN SELECTED INDIAN FICTIONS**

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**Abstract**

This research situates itself within Ecocriticism, examining the commodification of indigenous eco-spirituality through three contemporary Indian fictions. It analyses how sacred ecological traditions and tribal spiritual knowledge are aestheticised into consumable experiences through cultural commodification and market colonialism. Drawing on the Frankfurt School's concept of the Culture Industry, the study explores whether these narratives honour the sacred or repackage it for commercial appeal. Rather than viewing Indian fiction solely as a site of resistance, the research argues that literature can itself become a medium through which eco-spirituality is branded and sold. The study interprets three primary texts: *Termite Fry* (Zai Whitaker, 2023), *The Island* (Sujit Saraf, 2024), and *Saraswati* (Gurnaik Johal, 2025), to trace the capitalist appropriation of tribal knowledge systems. Despite extensive scholarship on ecocriticism, indigeneity, and environmental justice in Indian fiction, no major academic work examines these narratives through Culture Industry theory. Existing approaches focus on voice, resistance, or ethics of representation but rarely question how eco-spirituality itself becomes commodified within elite literary circuits or digital influencer ecologies. The research is timely in a context where eco-spirituality is increasingly deployed as cultural branding, soft-power strategy, and eco-tourism commodity. Sacred forests become meditation retreats, tribal chants become digital soundscapes, and ecological meaning is transformed into purchasable tranquillity marketed to privileged consumers. These processes mirror market colonialism and reproduce hegemonic structures under the guise of cultural representation. The hypothesis proposes that contemporary Indian fiction simultaneously invokes and commodifies eco-spirituality, revealing how tribal cosmologies are circulated as marketable cultural capital. The project shifts the critical gaze from "what is lost" in ecology to "how what is lost is packaged," questioning whether these texts critique ecological exploitation or risk turning eco-spirituality into a commercial spectacle.

**Keywords:** Cultural Commodification, Eco-spirituality, Culture Industry, Capitalist Appropriation, Hegemony, Tribal Knowledge Systems

**Introduction**

Across the last two decades, Indian writing has shown a renewed interest in tribal ecologies that are shaped not only by land and community but also by belief, ritual, and spiritual belonging. Eco-spirituality has emerged as a significant component of this literary engagement, offering ways of understanding nature that are rooted in reverence, interdependence, and ethical responsibility. Yet, in the contemporary cultural economy, such spiritual ecologies are increasingly drawn into new ideologies. They are marketed, repackaged, and transformed into consumable cultural products. This study examines this tension through the concept of commodified ecology: the process through which authentic eco-spiritual practices get linked into the culture industrial marketplace.

The three selected novels, Zai Whitaker's *Termite Fry*, Sujit Saraf's *The Island*, and Gurnaik Johal's *Saraswati*, bring forward distinct ecological worlds shaped by Indigenous knowledge, local cosmologies, and deep spiritual relationships with land and nature. While these texts foreground the sacredness embedded in ecological life, they also reveal how such sacredness is continually threatened by forces of capitalism, tourism, conservation politics, and state intervention. The

representation of eco-spirituality itself becomes a site where authenticity intersects with commodification.

This study uses the Culture-Industry framework proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer to examine how cultural production converts spiritual and ecological meaning into a commercial spectacle. The Culture Industry offers a lens to understand how Indigenous ecological knowledge, sacred rituals, and spiritual symbolism are transformed into images that serve the needs of tourism, entertainment, digital humanities, and the expanding cultural marketplace. Also, the framework helps reveal how literature participates in the process of eco-spiritual commodification, even when it seeks to critique them. By narrating eco-spiritual worlds, the research aims to find the role of literature in representing indigenous ecology, whether it just claim to critique the commodification, or indirectly becoming the part of this trend for the elite satisfaction.

Through close reading of the three novels, the focus is not only on how Indigenous ecologies are represented but on how eco-spirituality is shaped by the mechanisms of the Culture Industry within the narrative. This approach foregrounds the complex role of literature in the age of market colonialism, seeking to understand whether contemporary Indian fiction genuinely challenges the commodification of eco-spirituality or whether it, too, becomes part of the same aesthetic marketplace it critiques.

### **Literature Review**

Existing scholarship on contemporary Indian ecological writing has grown steadily over the last two decades, but most studies continue to put prime focus on either environmental issues or marginalisation without interrogating how eco-spirituality itself becomes shaped by market forces. Critics such as Gunnel Cederlöf and Madhav Gadgil discuss the vulnerability of ecological cultures under developmental pressures, yet their work rarely addresses how spiritual or sacred ecological practices are repackaged for circulation within global consumer networks. Similarly, studies on indigenous traditions by writers like Pankaj Sekhsaria and Annu Jalais illuminate the cultural richness of tribal epistemologies, but do not consider how narratives of purity, harmony, and sacred ecology increasingly become cultural products consumed by a mainstream readership. Existing ecocritical work by scholars such as Amitav Ghosh, Rob Nixon, and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee focuses on slow violence, environmental injustice, and colonial ecological disruption. Though these frameworks are valuable, they do not fully address the transformation of ecological knowledge into symbolic capital within the cultural marketplace. The emergence of popular climate fiction and indigenous eco-narratives has further intensified this tension, since contemporary publishing frequently depends on the circulation of vivid tribal images, spiritual motifs, and ethnographic detail as consumable literary elements. This raises a critical question that has not been adequately theorized: when eco-spirituality becomes aesthetically packaged for literary consumption, does literature resist commodification or participate in it?

Culture Industry framework is usually applied for the study of cinema, digital culture, and popular media, but its application to ecological writing in India remains limited. A few scholars have used it to examine wildlife documentaries and tourism discourse, yet the intersection of eco-spirituality and commodification in literary forms remains largely unexplored. This gap is significant because Indian eco-literature frequently positions itself as ethically superior or spiritually authentic, even as its production and circulation rely on the same global networks that turn nature into a marketable aesthetic.

Recent scholarship on the Andaman Islands, forest-dependent communities, and indigenous ecologies acknowledges the ongoing pressures of tourism, conversion, conservation policy, and resource extraction. However, very few studies explore how fictional narratives about these spaces become part of a cultural economy that packages ecological intimacy for urban readership. Likewise, critical studies on spiritual ecology by writers such as Vandana Shiva highlight the philosophical depth of eco-spiritual traditions but seldom consider how contemporary narratives reproduce these themes in polished, simplified, or idealized forms shaped by market logic.



This research enters this critical gap by analyzing three recent Indian novels that foreground eco-spirituality within contemporary socio-political contexts. The study situates *Termite Fry*, *The Island*, and *Saraswati* within the expanding field of commodified ecology, examining how each text negotiates the tension between ecological sacredness and its circulation within a profit-driven literary culture. By reading these works through the Culture-Industry framework, the study contributes to a nuanced understanding of how literature simultaneously critiques and participates in market colonialism, revealing the ambivalent role fiction plays in shaping the cultural meaning of eco-spirituality in the twenty-first century, thereby influencing the ecocritical perspectives of society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present study is grounded in the idea of the Culture Industry as developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Their argument states that anything considered sacred, pure or unique gradually becomes transformed into a packaged cultural product when placed within systems of mass production and mass consumption. When applied to contemporary ecological contexts, this idea helps explain how eco spirituality, once rooted in lived experience and community traditions, increasingly becomes a commercial product that can be consumed, displayed or circulated for economic profit.

Eco spirituality refers to a way of understanding the natural world as a living presence that is connected to human life through ethical responsibility. Many indigenous communities in India have long practiced forms of eco spirituality that link their identity, rituals, memory and livelihood with the land. Forests, rivers, hills and animals are not separate entities but extensions of collective life. These traditions were historically shaped by intimate relationships with the natural world.

In today's world, where digital media and tourism have become so intertwined, the concept of eco-spirituality faces a real threat of becoming just another product on the shelf. The culture industry takes genuine spiritual experiences and ecological wisdom and wraps them into flashy packages designed to sell. Take, for example, how some tourist companies push forest areas as magical spots, transforming sacred natural sites into mere attractions for entertainment. Eco-resorts pop up in delicate ecological areas, advertising tranquility and spiritual wellness while simultaneously harming local wildlife and disrupting the environment. This shift from authentic spiritual connection to commercial spectacle- shows how deeply the culture industry influences our understanding of nature and spirituality.

The same pattern plays out in the digital world. Many online platforms capture tribal rituals, dances, and ceremonies, often without the participants' consent, just to attract views and advertising dollars. What was once a cherished cultural memory is now a spectacle, stripped of its original meaning and intention. This commodification undermines the spiritual essence and context that once surrounded these practices, transforming them into mere entertainment.

Even the literary world isn't exempt from this trend. Novels that draw inspiration from indigenous ecologies, forest landscapes, or spiritual traditions may genuinely aim to address ecological concerns. Yet, once these stories are published, they become part of a commercial landscape that often favours aesthetic portrayals of nature or oversimplified views of tribal communities. In this commodified space, the line between genuine critique and appealing packaging blurs. Literature that seems to resist this trend may still succumb to it by relying on market-friendly themes or idealised visions of tribal life.

Delving into the selected contemporary Indian novels, this research studies, how each novel becomes a battleground between two opposing forces. On one side, there is the authentic, lived eco-spirituality of communities that perceive nature as an integral part of their identity. On the other side are the commercial forces of the culture industry that reshape ecological significance, turning spiritual experiences into marketable goods. The novels we examine may critique and question this process or, perhaps unwittingly, become part of it themselves. To grasp this tension, it's vital to pay attention to how these texts depict forests, tribal communities, spiritual rituals, and

ecological relationships, in the era of growing digital entertainments, social media platforms and influencers aestheticizing tribal world and rituals, where the focus will be more on photography, and overall quality for some views, clicks, and likes, rather than how they genuinely portray their lived experiences.

Moreover, the culture industry shows us how the sacred can be reshaped for consumption. When eco-spirituality is marketed as a theme of healing or wellness, it becomes part of a global commercial flow. Spiritual experiences shift from something to be felt and lived to something to be bought. Staged forest walks, meditation retreats, eco-friendly resorts, and choreographed cultural displays create sanitized environments where visitors can momentarily treat nature as a product rather than a profound connection. This process illustrates how the sacred is rearranged to cater to consumer expectations, changing the essence of what it once meant.

At the same time, contemporary literature itself becomes a field where this rearrangement takes place. Novels may draw attention to ecological loss, spiritual disruption or the exploitation of communities. Yet they may also participate in the emotional appeal of mystical forests, exotic tribes or harmonious nature. The research, therefore asks whether the selected novels genuinely challenge the commercial transformation of eco spirituality or whether they unintentionally reinforce the culture industry for some elite appeal and monetary benefits. This theoretical framework finally enables the study to examine how meaning itself is shaped by economic and cultural forces, showing how the literary imagination participates in or resists this transformation.

#### **Eco Spirituality in Contemporary India and the Pressures of Commercialisation**

Eco-spirituality in India has historically grown from the intimate relationships various communities have maintained with forests, rivers, agricultural lands and seasonal cycles. These relationships are rooted in practices of gratitude, ritual observance and collective responsibility. Many tribal communities view the natural world not as external matter but as a living presence with which humans share interdependence. Trees, hills, rivers and animals are understood as kin, teachers and protectors. Their spiritual traditions are woven into daily practices such as seed preservation, medicinal knowledge and communal ceremonies. This eco spiritual worldview is not symbolic or ornamental but an integrated way of living.

In today's world, shaped by consumerism, tourism, and digital culture, traditional practices are facing significant challenges. Sacred groves that once held deep meaning for communities are now being transformed into tourist hotspots. The forests that were once accessible through communal rituals are increasingly becoming commercial spaces designed to enhance visitor experiences. This shift changes the essence of the sacred from genuine practice to a commodified experience, highlighting how economic interests can often eclipse spiritual and ecological values.

Tourism is a major contributor to this transformation. Although eco-tourism initiatives claim to support conservation and sustainable development, they often lead to construction projects in sensitive ecological areas. Resorts popping up near forests promise peace and spiritual renewal but frequently disrupt wildlife habitats, alter local plant life, and produce waste. Visitors take photos of wildlife and local communities, turning them into digital content, often without permission. This behaviour transforms cultural practices into mere spectacles aimed at gaining social media visibility. In this way, digital media amplifies the culture industry, turning rich ecological and spiritual experiences into endless streams of consumable images.

Moreover, there is a growing commercial appetite for handcrafted goods, traditional medicines, and tribal artifacts. These items are often marketed as authentic representations of eco-spiritual heritage. However, the production and sale typically benefit external buyers far more than the communities that create them. The true symbolic meaning of these eco-spiritual practices gets overshadowed as they are circulated through commercial channels, marginalising the cultural connections that originally gave them significance. This situation creates a conflict between the desire to preserve these traditions and the push for profit, juxtaposing lived spirituality with its commercial portrayal.

The literary sphere also exists within this environment of commercialisation. Contemporary Indian novels that explore ecological themes often position themselves as interventions that raise awareness about environmental imbalance. However, these texts operate within publishing markets that prioritize themes appealing to readers seeking emotional connection, cultural authenticity or exotic landscapes. Representations of forests as mystical spaces, tribal communities as custodians of ancient wisdom or rituals as colourful heritage may attract readership but can also reproduce simplified images. Instead of challenging the culture industry, literature may sometimes be shaped by it, carefully arranging cultural elements to achieve narrative appeal and market relevance.

At the same time, literature holds the potential to expose the contradictions of commercialized eco spirituality. Some novels portray the displacement of communities, the intrusion of tourists into sacred spaces and the fragmentation of ecological memory due to economic exploitation. These narratives challenge the idea that ecological awareness can be created through aesthetic consumption or commercial spectacle. They highlight the conflicts between lived ecological knowledge and the external forces that appropriate it.

The selected novels in this study are situated within this broader context. They engage with landscapes that have become sites of contestation where eco spirituality is not only practiced but negotiated, reinterpreted and sometimes exploited. Each text illustrates different dimensions of this encounter, revealing how spiritual traditions interact with contemporary forces that reshape meaning through commercial value. By examining how these novels represent forests, rituals, community relationships and environmental disruptions, the study seeks to understand how literature participates in or resists the cultural commodification of ecological knowledge.

#### **Textual Analysis of Zai Whitaker's *Termite Fry***

Zai Whitaker's *Termite Fry* presents a sensitive portrait of the Irular community whose identity is anchored in a long standing eco spiritual relationship with the forest. The narrative gives attention to the everyday practices through which the community affirms its connection with the natural world. Women draw strength from the forest as they collect herbs, gather food and engage in rituals that honor the soil, trees and animal spirits. These practices reflect an ecological consciousness that is not theoretical but lived through labor, memory and spiritual reciprocity. Eco spirituality emerges as part of an intimate and ancestral knowledge system rather than a symbolic idea.

Yet this thoughtful representation is continuously disrupted by external forces that approach the forest not as sacred ground but as a profitable resource. Visitors arrive without understanding the codes of respect that guide the Irular relationship with the environment. They enter sacred groves, touch ritual objects and follow women into gathering zones without permission. Their behaviour reveals a consumer attitude in which the forest is perceived as an open site of entertainment rather than a spiritual space. The presence of these visitors illustrates an early stage of the culture industry where ecological experience is reduced to a recreational event.

The most striking tension in the narrative appears when commercial groups propose the establishment of resorts and eco-tourism projects near the community. These plans promise development and cultural visibility but in reality they aim to transform the forest into a marketable attraction. The so called natural tranquillity offered to tourists is produced through infrastructural interventions that disrupt animal paths and unsettle the fragile ecological balance on which the Irulars depend. Such projects demonstrate how eco spirituality is stripped of meaning and reframed as a consumable experience packaged to satisfy tourist expectations. The sacred becomes a commodity that can be enjoyed, photographed and circulated.

Digital influence intensifies this commodification. Influencers arrive with cameras to record Irular rituals, food traditions and forest knowledge. These visual fragments are uploaded to digital platforms where algorithms reward exotic imagery. The community becomes content, and their spirituality becomes a form of aesthetic material arranged for online engagement. The circulation of these images, often without consent, shows how the culture industry operates through digital

systems that fragment and repackage cultural knowledge for rapid consumption. Viewers encounter the community not as an ecological collective but as an exotic spectacle designed to entertain.

Whitaker's narrative offers a series of moments in which the cultural damage caused by these intrusions becomes visible. Sacred rituals that require silence and communal concentration are interrupted by tourists seeking photographs. Women who depend on forest produce face scarcity as outsiders pick plants for novelty and curiosity. Elders express anxiety that their spiritual teachings will be misunderstood when removed from communal context. These disruptions reflect the shift from lived eco spirituality to market spirituality where meaning is determined by the expectations of external audiences rather than by community values.

At the same time, Termite Fry demonstrates how the culture industry reshapes ecological identity through narratives of authenticity. Tourists and media figures search for the most authentic symbols of Irular tradition, such as termite fry, medicinal roots or ritual dances. Their desire to encounter an unspoiled tribal culture reflects the market fascination with purity. However, in trying to preserve these elements as static cultural products, they overlook the dynamic and evolving nature of their life. The community becomes frozen in an imagined past that aligns with market fantasy rather than with lived experience. This distortion is a crucial mechanism of the culture industry which simplifies complex cultural worlds to create easily consumable images.

The novel also portrays the internal conflicts that arise from this pressure. Younger members of the community feel curiosity about the modern world and economic opportunities, but they also sense the fragility of their ecological heritage. Whitaker does not depict this tension as a moral failure of the community but as a consequence of external economic structures that reshape value systems. When a ritual is performed for visitors instead of for the forest, meaning shifts subtly yet significantly. Spirituality becomes a performance rather than a relationship. This transformation marks the point at which eco spirituality enters the sphere of the culture industry.

Despite these challenges, the narrative also hints at forms of ecological resistance. Characters who protect sacred spaces, refuse staged performances or challenge exploitative outsiders demonstrate an attempt to reclaim the integrity of their eco spiritual world. Their resistance is not dramatic but rooted in the quiet insistence that the forest is not a backdrop but a living presence with intrinsic value. Through these acts, Whitaker suggests that eco spirituality can still function as a mode of critique against commercial appropriation.

Termite Fry therefore becomes a crucial text for understanding how contemporary Indian fiction participates in conversations around the commodification of ecological knowledge. The novel neither romanticises nor simplifies the community. Instead, it exposes the processes through which eco spirituality is transformed into a consumable resource by tourism, digital media and the broader culture industry. At the same time, it illustrates the resilience of ecological traditions that continue to affirm their meaning in the midst of commercial pressure. The novel aligns closely with the purpose of this study by showing how literature can reveal the subtle movements through which sacred ecological relationships enter global circuits of consumption.

#### **Textual Analysis of Sujit Saraf's *The Island***

Sujit Saraf's *The Island* centers its narrative on a remote space whose ecological abundance and spiritual aura make it an object of curiosity for outsiders. The island exists as a cultural and ecological enclave shaped by long standing traditions in which land, water and spiritual memory are deeply connected. For the island's original inhabitants, these spaces are not natural resources waiting to be used but sacred presences that regulate conduct, define community identity and guide their sense of belonging. Their ecological practices are spiritual in essence. They take only what is needed, follow rituals that honor the sea and maintain a rhythmic relation with the environment.

This world remains stable until external explorers and commercial intermediaries arrive, viewing the island as an opportunity for adventure, profit, and spectacle. Their focus is not on the ecological ethics that guide the community but rather on the novelty of the environment. The

island is perceived as untouched and, therefore, desirable, a perfect setting for curated experiences aimed at attracting urban audiences. This shift in perspective signifies the entry of the culture industry, which transforms spiritual landscapes into consumable attractions.

Tour groups, media teams, and investors begin to swarm the island. They document its ceremonies, sample its traditional foods, and observe communal activities. In most cases, their presence disrupts the intimacy that the islanders share with their surroundings. Rituals that were once private and contemplative turn into spectacles meant to entertain observers who lack an understanding of their significance. The soundscape of the island changes as drones, digital cameras, and lighting equipment intrude into sacred spaces. Canoe festivals and sea rituals are captured and uploaded online, where they circulate as exotic content. These visual narratives are valued not for their accuracy but for their entertainment appeal, reflecting the workings of the culture industry.

The more digital attention the island receives, the more it becomes shaped by external expectations. Outsiders praise its authenticity, but their praise is tied to a desire to consume a version of island life that appears pure and organic. In response, local practices begin to shift. Festivals are scheduled to match tourist calendars, sacred chants are shortened to fit time constraints and traditional practices are simplified for clarity. These small adjustments reveal how eco spirituality is gradually adapted to suit the needs of consumption. What was once a shared act of devotion becomes a public performance intended to match the desires of external viewers. Commercial investors further intensify this transformation. They propose beach resorts, curated heritage walks and controlled viewing areas for rituals. Their plans are framed as development, but they frame the island as a product with market value. Natural spaces that once required quiet reverence become advertised attractions. The island is narrated as a peaceful escape marketed to visitors who seek spiritual calm. This translation of eco spirituality into leisure demonstrates how economic forces reframe the sacred. Spiritual intimacy becomes a commercial package that offers serenity while detaching the ritual from its communal roots.

Saraf also foregrounds the tension that arises when community members confront these changes. Older inhabitants worry that their ecological memories are becoming diluted, while younger members see opportunities for education and economic stability. The conflict is not presented as a rejection of progress but as a concern that the island is being reshaped according to external fantasies rather than collective values. When rituals appear in brochures or tourism websites, the islanders realize that their identity is being curated by those who do not fully understand it. The novel further illustrates how environmental spaces are affected by commercial expansion. Sea routes become crowded with boats carrying tourists. Coral formations face damage from constant human traffic. Quiet cliffs are disturbed by the noise of entertainment activities. These disruptions reflect the extension of the culture industry beyond cultural practices into natural ecosystems. The environment is reorganized to fit market desires, collapsing the separation between ecological stability and commercial display.

Despite the challenges present in the narrative, Saraf does not depict the islanders as passive figures. Many characters actively engage in efforts to protect sacred locations, negotiate with investors, and confront the inappropriate use of their cultural knowledge. Their resistance stems from a commitment to uphold the ethical foundations of their ecological existence. They contend that the island cannot be fully comprehended through orchestrated performances and curated imagery, but rather through a genuine engagement with the land and sea. This steadfast insistence offers a significant critique of commercial encroachment.

Through these narrative dynamics, "The Island" emerges as a pertinent text for analyzing the appropriation, staging, and dissemination of eco-spirituality within the frameworks of the culture industry. The novel illustrates how ecological spaces are commodified through tourism, digital media, and commercial interests. Furthermore, it underscores the subtle transformations that take place when rituals lose their communal significance and devolve into spectacles intended for

consumption. Saraf's representation effectively demonstrates how literature can illuminate the delicate intersection at which sacred ecology begins to intersect with market imperatives.

#### **Textual Analysis of Gurnaik Johal's *Saraswati***

Gurnaik Johal's *Saraswati* unfolds in a landscape shaped by the presence of the sacred river and the cultural memory attached to it. The river functions not only as an ecological space but as a spiritual force woven into the daily life of local communities. It nurtures their livelihood, sustains their seasonal rhythms and provides symbolic meaning to their rituals. The ecological and the spiritual remain inseparable. For generations, the river has been treated as a manifestation of the divine, approached with reverence and protected through collective care.

Johal illustrates a river-based spirituality through various small rituals, seasonal gatherings, and community practices that stress the importance of reciprocity with nature. In this context, the river is perceived not merely as a resource to be exploited but as a vital living entity. Elder characters in the narrative often share stories that highlight the river's purity and its role as a sacred guardian of the land. Through these recollections, Johal reimagines a world that values ecological balance and spiritual humility.

However, this equilibrium is disrupted with the arrival of external groups who perceive the river not as a sacred presence but as an opportunity for development and commercial expansion. Investors, tourism promoters, and cultural entrepreneurs identify the river as an appealing site for festivals, curated experiences, and promotional campaigns, driven primarily by market-oriented motivations. Consequently, the river transforms into a picturesque backdrop designed to attract visitors, increase revenue, and create appealing imagery for digital platforms.

This shift marks the entry of the culture industry into the narrative, where sacred spaces are reinterpreted as venues for curated experiences. Traditional river festivals undergo significant changes to accommodate larger audiences, leading to alterations in timing, abbreviation of rituals, and simplification of their expressive depth. Johal demonstrates how the once serene river ceremony, typically conducted at dawn within an intimate circle, begins to incorporate amplified music and curated lighting to enhance its visual appeal. Although the changes may appear subtle initially, the community soon recognizes that the ritual is no longer a reflection of their traditions but rather is influenced by external expectations.

As digital media teams begin to record the ceremonies, the river is turned into a visual commodity. Its spiritual aura becomes content for online circulation. Captions praise the purity of the river and the authenticity of the traditions, but these representations serve the demands of the algorithm. The images are consumed by viewers who do not understand the cultural context. Online attention accelerates tourism, which intensifies pressure on the riverbanks. Waste accumulates after festivals. Boats crowd the water. The river's ecological rhythm is disrupted by the constant presence of outsiders seeking spiritual experiences that are packaged according to commercial logic.

Johal underscores this transformation through the perspectives of characters who witness their heritage being reshaped. Older members of the community sense a change in tone. The river feels more distant even though it flows in the same path. What worries them is not the presence of tourists but the fact that the ritual has become a performance. They lament that the offering of flowers, once made in silence, now occurs under the direction of event coordinators who time the action for the best visual effect. Their discomfort reveals the widening gap between spiritual intention and commercial display. Meanwhile, younger members see opportunities within the system. They hope to secure jobs, improve visibility and attract support for the region. Johal presents their position with empathy. They view the commodification of spirituality as a pathway to development. This tension between tradition and aspiration makes the narrative more complex. Johal does not reduce the debate to a simple conflict between old and new. Instead, he reveals how communities negotiate the demands of the culture industry while trying to protect their ecological and spiritual identity.



The novel offers a critical examination of the broader forces that validate these intrusions into sacred spaces. Government entities often promote cultural festivals purportedly for the preservation of heritage; however, their strategies tend to emphasize attraction over actual protection. Private organizations sponsor riverfront events under the pretense of ecological awareness, yet their initiatives frequently prioritize visibility over genuine ecological stewardship. Through these portrayals, the author, Johal, elucidates how institutional narratives obscure the commodification of sacred ecological sites. The river is rendered a symbolic asset employed for branding, even as its spiritual significance is diminished.

Johal enhances this critique by illustrating the ecological repercussions of commercial festivities. Artificial decorations disrupt nesting habitats along the riverbanks, while boats transporting visitors damage aquatic vegetation. Additionally, floodplains are cleared to make way for makeshift performance stages. Although each action may appear inconsequential, collectively they disclose the gradual transformation of eco-spirituality into eco-spectacle. The culture industry appropriates the sacred river and reinterprets it as a consumable attraction. Despite these disruptions, Johal also emphasizes the resistance present within the narrative. Community members engage in river cleanup rituals, advocate for restrictions on commercial festivals, and strive to restore traditional practices. Their efforts underscore an ethical struggle, as they acknowledge that spirituality cannot be sustained in isolation from ecological responsibility. Their resistance serves as a form of agency that challenges the dominance of the culture industry and seeks to reestablish equilibrium between devotion and ecological care.

Through its nuanced portrayal, *Saraswati* emerges as a compelling narrative for analyzing how eco-spirituality is redefined by commercial imperatives. Johal captures the critical juncture at which sacred practices, grounded in ecological ethics, begin to dissipate into curated performances. The novel effectively demonstrates how literature can illuminate the subtle tensions between authentic cultural memory and the forces that seek to commodify it. In this regard, *Saraswati* enriches the central theme of this research by illustrating how contemporary fiction enhances our understanding of commodified ecology.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to examine how contemporary Indian novels represent the commodification of eco spirituality through the framework of culture industry, and whether these texts resist or reproduce this process. The analyses of the three selected novels demonstrate that literature both exposes and critiques the mechanisms through which Indigenous ecologies, tribal spirituality, and sacred landscapes are appropriated, packaged, and circulated for consumption.

Across the texts, the culture industry operates by transforming sacred ecological practices into staged performances, digital spectacles, and tourist attractions that prioritize profit over cultural integrity. The novels reveal how tribal rituals are recorded, aestheticized, and circulated by media platforms for visibility and algorithmic gain, how fragile forest terrains are opened for tourism through artificial eco resorts, and how communities are pushed into representational stereotypes that satisfy external expectations while erasing their lived realities. These narratives consistently illuminate how eco spirituality is reduced to a consumable image and how Indigenous people become symbolic resources without receiving material benefits or social recognition.

At the same time, the novels resist this commodification by reclaiming Indigenous agency through narrative voice, memory, and ecological belonging. By foregrounding the emotional, cultural, and spiritual ties that tribal communities maintain with their environment, the texts unsettle the extractive gaze of the culture industry. They expose the fakeness behind commercialisation and challenge the assumption that ecological sacredness can be owned, displayed, or monetized. Through counter-narratives by autonomous indigenous self-representations that emphasize reciprocity, ancestral knowledge, the novels gesture towards a decolonial understanding of eco spirituality.

The study ultimately highlights that modern Indian fiction not only mirrors but also critiques the increasing commercialization of eco-spirituality. The novels chosen for this analysis delve into how cultural and ecological identities are reshaped into marketable concepts. At the same time, they emphasize the importance of safeguarding Indigenous ecological wisdom against the forces of the cultural industry. These literary works powerfully illustrate how fiction can serve as a vital space to explore and challenge the conflicts between spiritual ecology and the drive for commodification, encouraging readers to reflect on and resist these pressures.

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**STORIES OF PRECARITY: NONHUMAN AGENCY AND ECOCRITICISM IN THE  
TOMB OF SAND AND ANIMAL'S PEOPLE**

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**Abstract**

In recent years, writers have shown great concern and awareness regarding the quickly degrading ecosystem. Their writings shed light on the environmental harm brought by human hands and depict the growing environmental precarity. Humans have come to believe that they are the only living things in the universe that matter; hence, they cater only to themselves. People are busy fulfilling their own needs, which, in fact, will only increase with time. There's no end to the wishlists. The rise of technology and the Industrial Revolution has led to an increase in the neglect of ecology. This is where the need to address the ecological crisis emerges. Ecocritical writings establish a relationship between human beings and the environment. Ecocriticism showcases how humans not only inhibit the environment but also respond to it, interact with it, and benefit from it. The problem occurred when they started neglecting it. The environment and the elements do not have a language that humans can understand, but they surely do give signs. This paper explores the concepts of ecomemory and nonhuman agency, in Indira Sinha's *Animal's People* and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, examining how both authors depict the prevalence of environmental injustice, the rise of rebellion among vulnerable groups in society, and the people's reactions to it. Both works attribute agency to nonhuman living creatures and highlight to readers the irrevocable, beneficial actions that humans are hardly grateful for.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Precarity, Ecomemory, Environmental Injustice, Nonhuman Agency

**Introduction**

The injustice done to the natural scape has been neglected for quite some time now. The primary reason for this neglect is that humans consider themselves the most important entities on earth. Ecocriticism seeks to resist anthropocentric ideas, serving as a reminder that humans have been endowed with a responsibility towards Nature. Failing to fulfil this responsibility carries grave consequences for humanity. Ecocritical writers try to make people realise the fact that the environment has a right over them, just like they have rights over the environment and the things in it. Materialism has played a significant role in the destruction of the environment. It has blinded men and robbed them of all empathy. The novels under consideration shed light on man's attitude towards nature. They carry a warning that if man doesn't act, nature's wrath will be unbearable. Humans need to work both individually and collectively to calm the chaos they have created.

**Environmental Degradation in Indira Sinha's *Animal's People***

"Rocks keep their promises. They behave like rocks. Water boils at one hundred degrees. The sea rises and falls, that's the sea and the moon keeping their own kind of promises. To have the world work for you, you've got to make your own promises right back" (Sinha 262). Indira Sinha rightly portrays the Bhopal gas tragedy and its disastrous aftermath in his award-winning fiction *Animal's People*. The novel illustrates how the chemicals from the Union Carbide factory released tons of toxic gas on the night of December 1984. It killed humans, animals, and plants. The sudden explosion gave rise to a never-ending environmental hazard. The factory owners didn't hire well-

educated staff for the sake of cost-cutting. To save some amount of money, they put the lives of millions of people and even the next generations at risk. It did not even spare the soil, sucking its nutrients and leaving it barren. The most heartbreaking part of this reality was that people were left to fend for themselves. The worst affected by this chemical disaster were the poor who live near the factory. There's a culture that develops around any factory in the world - factory workers, slum dwellers, rag pickers, tea sellers, cleaners, and sweepers start living around the factory walls. Plants and animals also find their way. The rich people who own and set up the factories never give a second thought to the poor living conditions of these people. They are the first ones to meet any disaster that occurs. Animal, the protagonist of *Animal's People*, was one such person who became a victim of the tragedy as well as had to live through the poisonous aftermath of the disaster. The fictional city of Khaufpur is actually Bhopal - the name of the city rightly echoes the fears that will not leave the hearts of city-dwellers for decades. It's a city, but also a wasteland; it carries within it the scars of the disaster, thus not letting the people forget about that night. At one point in the novel, when the suffering and the fight for justice had almost broken Nisha's spirits, she confessed to Zafar that she'd like to have kids, but she'd not want her kids growing up in a city that is ruined inside out. These subalterns hardly fight back, and even if they do, they are ignored and lied to. Interestingly, Sinha gives voice to the subalterns in his work. Zafar was a well-informed human rights social activist; his presence was reliable for the poor. He was their leader who had built a team of concerned individuals, and together they raised funds to bring relief to the lives of those affected by the poisonous gas. Zafar employed Animal to gather information regarding the actions of the authorities, which he called "namispond jamispond". Zafar tried hard not to let the elites of the society aid the *Kampani* in any way.

The very fact that Sinha made a victim of the tragedy his protagonist shows that he has given agency to a 'parahuman', named Animal, a 20-year-old boy who narrates the story. He says in the novel, "Most people round here don't know their age, I do, because I was born a few days before that night, which no one in Khaufpur wants to remember, but nobody can forget" (Sinha 11). Animal had a deformity that compelled him to walk on all fours, using both hands and feet. He couldn't walk upright. Children his age used to tease him, and one day, during a game, he bit another kid in the leg. This led the other children to call him "animal, wild animal". His views on journalists who come to interview him reflect a sense of detachment from the very get-go. He did not associate himself with humans, although he was human. But just because the tragedy hit him so hard physically, his detachment from the human world almost became psychological. He had internalised the fact that people around him didn't see him and that the world didn't care about victims - it only reports the tale, and doesn't care about the teller. He was indifferent towards the interviews that he gave to the journalists, as he doubted whether his reporting would ever bring about a change. Animal has a shifting identity - he is a human but also an animal. Through Animal, the reader is informed about the *Kampani*'s role in the disaster, its effects on the poor, the struggle for justice, the lack of proper treatment, the lasting effects of the poisonous gas, and the authorities' neglect. Elli was an American doctor who cared for the sufferers. At one point, she explained why she wanted to help those who fell prey to the gas tragedy. It stemmed from the kind of childhood she'd had. Elli's mother was ill and her father realised that the illness was because of the city life, where the air was artificial, spaces cramped, and people hard-hearted. So he built their house all by himself; her mother became well with the fresh air and living near the beach amidst nature. The steel factory, the city life, the hustle and bustle of a world that never stops, was driving her crazy. The importance of nature can be seen here,

"This house of my childhood stood on land that once had been fields. The backyard was ridged by generations of ploughs. Two homes away was a small farm that raised horses and if the wind was right it brought sweet, rich gusts of manure. Of the old forest there still remained patches of woodland, mainly maples and oaks. Honeysuckle, wild raspberries and blackberries climbed on the fences. At night, the stars were brilliant, you could hear frogs and crickets, and the wind running like a river in the trees." (265)

Elli's description of her surroundings leads the reader to acknowledge that deep down, all humans crave a close connection to nature. Her mother was delighted by the wilderness that now surrounded her. There are people who are selfless and find happiness only in the betterment of others; Elli is one such character. She wanted to treat Animal, and her efforts made Animal hopeful about being able to walk upright one day. He was so deeply affected by the trauma that, in his bitterness, he wanted to accept his reality, not wanting to fight it. He used to express out loud that he no longer wanted to identify as a human being. What's painful was that he knew his reality, he knew why people were curious about him, what exactly they would want him to talk about - the same story all over again. His very existence had a negative connotation. "When you saw me, your eyes lit up. Of course, you tried to hide it. Instantly you became all solemn" (Sinha 15). This is a comment to all those who witness tragedy from afar and are never able to understand the pain and psyche of the victims. People hear but don't listen, their eyes watch but their hearts don't. Like a passive consumer saying 'what next', other people's tragedies paralyse them, and they no longer know how to react or help. This breeds apathy. But Sinha somehow really sharply rids the reader of apathy. Talking to the *jarnalis*, Animal says, "You were like all the others, come to suck our stories from us, so strangers in far-off countries can marvel there's so much pain in the world" (Sinha 16). Why should tragedy bring fame? What happens when people read about disasters? Animal is disillusioned because people cannot stop another disaster of a similar magnitude from taking place. Sinha's narrator is a rebel. He has used foul language throughout the narrative. Once Zafar asks him not to swear, he ends up swearing himself. The swearing shows Animal's bitterness with the stinking reality of the lives of Khaufpuris. It also suggests that he's street-smart. The whole narration, as well as the ending, carries a sense of resistance. In the end he says, "All things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us" (Sinha 470). The rise of neoliberalism has ignored the downtrodden of society, people like Animal, so he warns that there's no end for the poor. Muhammad Manzur Alam, in his article, "Ecological Rifts as Disaster in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*", points out,

"The depiction of a toxified ecosystem and deformed human body in *Animal's People* offers a significant new dimension of "eco-material rifts" as an example of postcolonial disaster, which explains the catastrophic event of 1984 Bhopal chemical explosion as not only an outcome of a history of systemic material exploitation but also as a cause of another round of prolonged ecological hazard for the poor." (19)

The novel portrays the slum areas of the city, highlighting how the places inhabited by the poor are dirty and unhygienic, including the eateries. Postmodern people are often careless and tend to litter indiscriminately at any time and in any place. The land, nature, its animals and birds pay the price for the carelessness.

The novel subverts the very definition of 'power'. It shows that the environment that seems voiceless is actually endowed with power and resistance. Life emerges in and around the dangerous, burnt-up factory. This is how the environment fights back. Through Animal's narration, the reader gets to know that the land around the factory was visibly alive. The power of zero, the power of not having anything or anyone on one's side, is too great to suppress. Zafar knew that the *Kampani* thought of the sufferers as 'voiceless', meek citizens who wouldn't ever fight back. But the people had lost everything, and so they had nothing else to lose. This power of having nothing to lose made them invincible. Not only were they aware of their rights, but they were also ready to speak against the *Kampani*'s wrongs. The marginalised people and the non-human living beings will keep on resisting, multiplying, and rising in the face of capitalism. As the novel proceeds, one senses that Animal had a knack for interacting with the environment. For instance, his friend, Kha-in-the-jar—an unborn, undeveloped embryo—communicated with him and shared how much he wanted to be born. In this way, Non-human characters carry the plot forward. In the last pages, Animal was also able to listen to the plants and animals in the forest. This quality makes him unique and one of a kind. "Since I was small, I could hear people's thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus I'd get en passant comments from all types of things,

animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day. What are these voices, no good asking me” (Sinha 20). He’s an advocate of everything that doesn’t have a language similar to that of humans. He doesn’t undermine or neglect such creatures who don’t speak in a familiar tongue. Similarly, he’s the only one who understands Ma Franci - an intriguing character who seems to have lost her comprehensive tongue in serving Khaufpuris. All non-human living beings have a voice, a distinct language, and it seems that Animal tends to understand them. Sinha writes,

“Look throughout this place a silent war is being waged. Mother Nature’s trying to take back the land. Wild sandalwood trees have arrived, who knows how, must be their seeds were shat by overflying birds. That herb scent, it’s ajwain, you catch it drifting in gusts, at such moments the forest is beautiful, you forget it’s poisoned and haunted. Under the poison-house trees are growing up through the pipework. Creepers, brown and thick as my wrist, have climbed all the way to the top, tightly they’ve wrapped wooden knuckles round pipes and ladders, like they want to rip down everything the Kampani made.” (46)

#### **Non-Human Agency in Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand***

Another work where non-human agency is best portrayed is the International Booker awardee, *Tomb of Sand*. Geetanjali Shree brings life to non-human living beings, and in doing so, a touch of magical realism can be sensed in her work. She says that even when human beings are not present in the scene, there are other things that carry our stories forward, like dogs, crows, butterflies, ants. Not just them, but also the doors, windows, borders, and grand trunk roads- they all play their roles in our lives and witness our experiences. The doors and windows witness the children of a house grow up, escape with friends, the daughter of the house leave out of rebellion, grandchildren coming back from abroad, and every incoming and outgoing action. Ma’s cane comes to life when we see how many things it can do - it’s like a living, breathing partner to Ma. “Bade wrongly imagined that Amma was talking to the sky when she waved her cane around. In fact, she was talking to the crows, in a menacing tone, after their gang had suddenly flown in, cawing above her plants and trees” (263). The novel makes one aware of the nonhuman presence around. Bade, who is a retired government officer, is oblivious to any such presence. The narration employs a sarcastic undertone for those with a materialistic mindset. Whereas people whose personalities are softer, who are not so self-engrossed, notice the nonhuman living beings. Ma feels at peace when she’s on Beti’s balcony or in the garden. She knows the plants intimately. Animals and birds too have a special place in the narrative. Shree dedicates a whole chapter to crows in which they have their own “crowments” (i.e. garments) and “crowlect” (dialect). They had gathered to discuss “the problem of the spread of pollution in the name of science” and ended up also talking about Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, El Niño, feminism, women’s rights, environmental degradation, problems faced by them due to climate change, their dreams, and more. Imagining birds discussing geography, history, and politics is visionary. It is a wakeup call that every living being has a mind of its own. It’s also food for thought- what if the roles were reversed? What if it were not human beings but actually plants and animals who exploited the gifts of nature selfishly? To whom and where would man go to register his complaints? When humans spread filth and chase the birds away, they cannot stop them from doing so. They are the vulnerable beings of nature. If this disrespect towards the vulnerable creature continues, they will retaliate. Shree writes, “The crow meeting was underway. Regarding the horrific problems they were experiencing due to climate change and the science-worshipping humans” (264). Crows discuss philosophy and act as observers. They say that there was once a time when they “knew a person just by seeing their face, which crook will snare you and gobble you up, which yogi will give a quaff from his water pouch” but how, after being more developed, “men have destroyed our capabilities by interfering in the natural environment, they rush about with their stethoscopes and telescopes croaking wrathfully, and we can’t even be sure of providing for our children any more”. One rowdy young crow talks of upholding patriarchy. Slogans like ‘black is beautiful’ are read aloud. They are taking notes as Bade dreams on. Shree constantly talks



about how humans live a selfish life and don't consider the effects of their actions on the environment. In her article, "The Uncanny in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*: Subverting the Reality", Nabanita Chakraborty observes, "Social custom demands old women to be responsible, worldly wise, inactive and conventional. But Shree's old widow unburdens herself of all her responsibilities towards the family and instead fulfils all her hidden desires and wishes, kept repressed and silenced by custom" (84). Often, elderly family members are left without a voice. Nobody wants to sit near them or spend time with them. They are a depressing sight, and don't have a say in family matters either. Here, Shree turns the tables and gives voice to an octogenarian character, who is not only her protagonist but also the hero of her own story. She is the master of her life - after her husband's death, she undergoes a transformation. She befriends whoever she wants, does whatever she fancies, goes to reclaim her past life, and even reunites with her past lover. Towards the last chapters, Ma talks to a crow in the prison garden, telling it about her lover and family back in India. The presence of the crow during Ma's meeting with Ali Anwar emphasises the fact that there are other entities apart from human beings who take the story forward. There's an uncanny sense of heroism in every action Ma does. Like practising not to fall face down when the bullet hits her. Neither abiding by any prison rules nor taking the guards seriously.

#### **Mistreatment of the Transgender community**

Two people who try to cross the border in the novel - one is an old woman who nobody takes seriously; the other is a transgender person whose very existence is ignored. The indifference towards the third gender is shown in the novel through the character of Rosie/Raza. "She (Rosie) says, what do people like me need a passport for? There are advantages to not existing" (Shree 345). Rosie expressed the plight of her community to Ma and mentioned that people even averted their gazes when they saw her and didn't care whether she lived or survived. But later Rosie dies, and so it was Beti who accompanied Ma to Wagha. Ma's befriending Rosie is an act of resistance. It is through their friendship that the reader gains a profound insight into the lives of the *hijra* community. After her death, it was only Ma who cared where her body might be; her concern for Rosie surprised the whole family. Even Beti, who's supposed to be Ma's partner-in-crime type of confidant, was frustrated by their friendship as she was too conscious of all the stereotypical images of a transgender person that society created. Ma accepted Rosie the way she was—a human being with the capacity to think. Rosie is a vulnerable character because society has attached many prejudices against her. She represents the voiceless class. Her vibrant existence is dulled by society just like that of plants, animals, and birds. The language that is used to describe her is usually tangible, just like her character. She belongs to a vulnerable group who, complains Rosie, are just "a vile invisible afterthought". The society remains inconsiderate towards their feelings to this day. She further adds, "There are no films for us, no literature, no art, no clothing. We wear what you discard. We count for nothing. Toss me away in the lake, Baji, and no one will notice there's one less" (Shree 347). There's confusion regarding her real gender and identity; however, it never seemed to bother Ma. This transformation and shifting identity defined Rosie, who was also Raza. In Rosie's presence, Ma became a young person once again. For instance, the constraint of traditional attire is removed by Rosie when she suggested that Ma replace her sarees with long gowns. Rosie shared various home and skin care remedies with Ma, which she followed willingly. Beti was annoyed after she saw the two of them hang out together, but she couldn't really curb Ma's freedom as Ma was the one who gave her wings when the rest of the family wanted to cut them. Ma played the greatest role in providing Beti the life she dreamt of.

#### **Eco-Memory in *Tomb of Sand***

The novel also features the concept of "eco-memory", which posits that the land bears witness to the events that take place over it, remembering what has occurred and serving as an eyewitness to history. Chakraborty, in her article, says that this novel "interrogates the relevance of borders and

boundaries; not only the geographical and psychological borders in post-partition India but borders defining gender identities, human and non-human worlds, familiar and strange” (Chakraborty 81). Throughout the story, Shree keeps the reader conscious of the environment, sometimes through her characters or through direct commentary. “Serious Son got up and left. The world, wrecked by destructive humans, rematerialised all about him. The sand, defiled with beer cans and plastic bags, the earth, colonised by white people...” (60). Khyber’s landscape is depicted, both before and after partition. “The lake peered out, black and murky, from beneath a highly noxious white haze. Into which drained sewage and factory waste from cities all around. A toxic stew of oil and phosphorous bent on combusting, which it soon would. Flames would leap up, twelve feet high, and another apocalypse would come to Pass” (Shree 348). The word ‘apocalypse’ is in both novels. This indicates habitat destruction, which is the last concern on a human’s mind. Humans are only concerned with using the habitat for their benefit. When the environment is polluted, it is non-humans that are affected first. Partition was just a teaser of the apocalypse that the ecocritics are pointing at. History only records the plight of humans, but India’s Partition destroyed the landscape on either side of the border. The destruction of the environment is never taken into consideration. Humans take it for granted because the land replenishes itself; the renewable sources of energy are not used in moderation as they seem to be in abundance at all times. However humans continue to be careless, even such the earth would retaliate. Sikha Mohanty writes in her review:

The many doors, the golden cane with its butterflies, the pathetic attempts of Overseas Son, Bahu’s Reeboks, Sid’s narrator friend, the crows, Delhi’s environmental crises, the precarious lives of individuals occupying the margins of both state and gender, young boys of Pakistan wielding guns; enmesh with one another within the narrative. They aren’t mere digressions; as Nikhil Govind suggests in his review of the novel in *The Wire*, these digressions allow Shree to deal with the seriousness of Partition with “both distance and intimacy, empathy, and a (rightfully) cultivated alienation.” (3)

The Partition and its horrors are highly serious subjects. Geetanjali Shree weaves her saga around them by incorporating a range of experimental writing styles and diverse characters into her text. This enables her to convey the stories of Partition in a way that has never been done before.

### **Conclusion**

As is the case in *Tomb of Sand*, the crows are concerned about the deteriorating landscape. Their discussion hints at the fact that humans are selfish and wouldn’t care if anything happened to animals and birds around them. The future generations would pay the price for such a reckless attitude. Similarly, Animal doesn’t want to identify as a human, he’s too scared to even hope to walk upright. It seems that a kind of hatred for the selfish humans has made a way into Animal’s heart - a hatred which is irreversible - that he doesn’t want to associate with them. He is a living testimony to prove that when the environment is affected, it takes down the most vulnerable class with it. Human actions have triggered a violent response from nature. The contemporary Indian scenario is a living proof of such a response from the natural world. In the past few months, Indians have witnessed hundreds of acres of forests being cut down for corporate reasons. The people who live in close proximity to those forests were affected the most, and hence they rebelled the most. Things would begin to change only when the cries of the poor are heard, when protests turn into laws, and the business class witnesses the negative impacts of harming the environment firsthand. When nature is ignored for too long, the environment forces one to notice it, coaxing them to take action for the better, to mend their ways, to cut down wastage, and to let go of extravagance. Every individual step counts. The authors under consideration have made a point that, although they are writers and not environmentalists, they are still shedding light on the reality taking place around us. Likewise, people from any profession or background can and should play their role and fulfil their duty towards nature.

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**AN ECOPSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LOUISE ERDRICH'S THE ROUND HOUSE**

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**Abstract**

Indigenous people around the globe perceive nature as a living relative with life rather than a resource to utilize or take advantage of. This worldview is portrayed in the novel *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich, in which the natural world is an important factor affecting the memory, power, and recovery of the Ojibwa people. The paper presents an eco-psychological interpretation of the novel that claims emotional healing in the text to occur through new relationships with the natural world instead of institutional structures that continue to fail the Ojibwa community. The paper employs the concept of ecopsychology to demonstrate that land plays a proactive role in supporting characters such as Joe and Geraldine to overcome psychological trauma and emotional conflicts. In compliance with the main idea, the paper also relies on the idea of Robin Wall Kimmerer who argues that the land can be a healer of its own. The paper also emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and Indigenous ecological knowledge when psychological healing takes place through nature. Placing the narrative in the context of Environmental Humanities, the present paper argues that the novel presents a world in which land is not a passive observer but an active subject of the healing process. Thus, the study highlights the deep psychological and cultural significance of the natural world in the lives of the Indigenous people, through its depiction of the land-based resilience.

**Keywords:** Ecopsychology, Eco-spiritual Healing, Human–Nature Relationship, Indigenous Ecocriticism, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Ecocriticism is the approach to literature that examines the interaction of human beings and the natural environment. It has gained greater significance due to environmental issues of global concern and the fast advancement in technology. To Indigenous people, this relationship is an embodied one. Their religious beliefs and daily activities are a representation of the worldview whereby the land does not exist as an independent resource but rather it is an essential aspect of human existence. According to Lawrence Buell, place and environment are never mere background settings in literature, but they are tightly intertwined with human history. The Indigenous communities of the world have maintained this knowledge more than any other culture in the world and have continued to demonstrate that land and life cannot be separated.

The indigenous ecological thought interprets nature as a living being the depository of stories and the ancestor to transmit the memory between generations. The land is regarded as a healer, a witness, and a guide, and a human being associates with it responsibly, with care and with reciprocity. The worldview does not assume healing is attained by going into seclusion. It is the result of a re-establishment with the land, hearing its silent rhythm, and the sense of its spirit. This perspective is presented by the American writer Louise Erdrich who belongs to the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewas and includes them in her novel *The Round House*. The novel is set on a reservation whose form is influenced by loss, customs and strength; it demonstrates that the emotional state of people is closely linked with their connection to the natural environment.

Despite a long-standing scholarly interest in *The Round House* as portraying issues of trauma, gendered violence, and the ineffectiveness of colonial law, little critical attention has been given to its ecological aspect, in terms of how nature is used in psychological healing. A large portion of the existing literature resides on legal injustice or family trauma but seldom addresses the role of a sense of belonging to the land in helping the characters recover emotionally or the way the natural world helps the characters heal. This gap demonstrates the necessity of an interpretation that brings out the relationship between the human mind and the places where it is grounded.

The paper discusses the way the reconnection with the natural world turns into the way of emotional healing in *The Round House* and how the ecopsychology developed by Theodore Roszak can be used to interpret the treatment of trauma, land, and Indigenous survival presented in the novel. The concept of an ecological unconscious proposed by Roszak, which is a natural human desire to find inner harmony by communicating with nature, offers a valuable approach to interpreting the fact that Joe is drawn instinctively to forests, water, and sacred sites. This perspectives of Indigenous ecological wisdom, particularly the concept of the land as a healer provided by Robin Wall Kimmerer, also indicate that healing in the novel becomes possible through care relationships and reciprocity with a more-than-human world.

This paper demonstrates that a sense of ecological belonging is intertwined with emotional well-being, justice, and cultural memory in *The Round House* by considering the novel in the Eco psychological framework. This view contributes to Environmental Humanities and Indigenous literary studies by illustrating that the healing within the context of Erdrich is not provided by the institutional systems, as these fail the Ojibwa community time and again. Rather, it develops by reconnecting with the land, ceremony, and continuity with nature. Thus, the present study claims that the Eco psychological reading addresses a significant gap in the existing scholarship and shows how the novel by Erdrich affirms the land as the key factor in the resilience and survival of the Indigenous people.

#### **Literature review**

The previous scholarly work on Louise Erdrich's *The Round House* has been dominated by concerns about genderized violence, legal injustice, and tribal and federal jurisdiction constraints. Laura Roldan-Sevillano in her article *From Revenge to Justice: Perpetrator Trauma in Erdrich's The Round House* explores the perspective of perpetrator trauma that caused a huge stir in the life of the protagonist. In *Genre reconsidered in Louise Erdrich's The Round House*, Aitor Ibarrola emphasize the author's decision to hybridise different genre in a novel.

Liandra Skenandore in her article *Stories of Pain, Stories of Healing: Confronting the Violences Against Women in Louise Erdrich's The Round House* moves a step further and focuses on the healing from the perspective of indigenous feminist literary framework. The issue of the novel being interested in Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) has also been addressed by critics and so has the problem of how the novel examines the issue of trauma within Indigenous communities. These perspectives focus only on the political and social significance of the narrative on the surface but focus primarily on the institutional structure present in the novel. This leaves a significant gap to focus on ecological ones.

Although few research has conducted on the acknowledgement of Erdrich's consistent attention to land, very little attention is given to the natural world which functions as an active agent in the characters' emotional recovery. They neither focused on the healing through the characters' reconnection to land, sacred sites, and the more-than-human world nor addressed the relationship between trauma and ecological space. Thus, the present study fills a significant gap by focusing on the ecological dimension of healing in *The Round House*.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

To investigate how the novel introduces the theme of healing as an ecological process as opposed to a purely psychological or institutional one, the current paper relies on two interrelated frameworks. The main paradigm applied to the analysis is the concept of Ecopsychology, expressed in the most powerful way by Theodore Roszak in his book *The Voice of the Earth* (1992). Through this lens, the paper argues that the psychological wellbeing of an individual depends on the continuity of human relationships with the natural world. He states that psychological wound is not merely internal, but it also reflects the disturbance caused in the ecological system that supports emotional stability.

Complementing this perspective, the paper employs Robin Wall Kimmerer's view of Land as a living one which acts as a healer. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she talks of the land as a living relative which can give care and restoration as well as having human care and responsibility. She states that healing comes through reciprocal relationships both between human and land as opposed to a passive receiver. The combination of these frameworks introduces the perspective that ecological relations cannot be separated when it comes to trauma and healing.

### **Analysis**

The primary source used for the present study is the National Book Award-winning novel *The Round House* by Louise Erdrich. It is an insightful disclosure of the dynamics of trauma, identity, and justice through the prism of an Indigenous ecological world. The novel takes place in an Ojibwa reservation in North Dakota during the late 1980s, and it chronicles the events of the Coutts family when their lives are forever changed by a violent crime. The novel begins with the rape and attempted murder of Geraldine Coutts, an Ojibwa female who disappears just as her son Joe and her husband Bazil are engaged in uprooting saplings outside their house. After being raped and assaulted in the round house, a sacred place of ceremony, she eventually comes back, extremely wounded and emotionally devastated. This event turns out to be the trigger that sets out the narrative of the unfolding story and predetermines the ways of all three family members.

The novel situates its characters in a natural environment where trees, water, and holy places are not merely objects of view. These natural elements play an active role in the emotional and spiritual lives of the characters as they confront fear and trauma. Erdrich demonstrates that trauma is not merely a matter of a personal challenge but of an extended ecological and cultural framework that entangles the Ojibwa people to their land. Through depiction of nature as animated and responsive being, the story is reminiscent of the Indigenous ideology that the land, memory, and the more than human world have a significant role in the well-being of a person. Thus, the novel portrays that healing occurs only by reconnecting with the natural world, particularly when the institutions are ineffective, using concepts of ecopsychology and the ecological thought of the Indigenous people.

The novel expresses the perspective that man is in symbiotic relationship with his surrounding and that exploitation of the natural world disrupts the equilibrium or harmony of the human existence. Erdrich presents this point of view in the beginning of the novel, when the little trees that are invading the foundation of the house of Joe can be compared to a larger scene that is going on elsewhere. This concomitant scene of Joe and Bazil grappling with the removal of a sapling and the raping of Geraldine in a holy site creates a calculated ecological-human analogy that constructs the interpretation of the novel concerning trauma. The act of forcibly uprooting the young plant serves as a symbolic parallel to the rape happening in the woods, which implies that ecological trauma and human suffering come into view on the same spectrum of evil. Erdrich emphasizes the difficulty and violence of the act through Joe's narration:

They had grown into the unseen wall and it was difficult to pry them loose. My father wiped his palm across his forehead and damned their toughness. I was using a rusted old dandelion fork with a splintered handle; he wielded a long, slim iron fireplace poker that was probably doing more harm than good" (1).



This incident brings out an environmental disruption that indicates the violence Geraldine goes through. The juxtaposition of these events creates an impression that destruction of the nature and harm of an individual are interrelated, and one can influence another. The disappearance of Geraldine leads to confusion and fear in the family, which demonstrates that the disruption of the natural world and the disruption of emotional stability are closely interconnected.

The destruction of the sapling also signals the breaking of the family's harmony because Geraldine's violent assault disrupts the stable life they once had at home. This idea connects well with Theodore Roszak's ecopsychological theory, which helps explain the symbolic link between ecological and emotional damage. In *The Voice of the Earth*, Roszak says that the human mind is connected to the life of the earth and supported by the same ecological system that sustains all living things. He also explains that any harm done to nature will eventually affect the human psyche, showing that emotional imbalance arises when our relationship with the environment is damaged. The fact that Erdrich attributes the uprooted sapling to the crisis of the family corresponds to the opinion of Roszak who thought that psychological anxiety is a reflection of an ecological disturbance. Geraldine's disappearance during the uprooting is therefore not accidental. The disappearance articulates what Roszak describes as the ecological unconscious, the profound association between the human feeling and the natural environment.

After this rupture, Geraldine begins to pull away from her family and the world around her. She withdraws into herself as she struggles with the weight of her psychological trauma. The violence of the assault and the gasoline used against her leave her deeply shaken, and she stops speaking or allowing anyone to touch her. She locks herself in her room by distancing from the outside world by even refusing to let the outside light enter her room presenting the embedded fear and trauma that Geraldine goes through. Joe describes her loneliness as:

"she wouldn't want the shade drawn up, light to pour through the window. Before I could touch the switch, she gripped my arm. Her face was a pale smudge in the dim air, and her features were smeared with weariness. She'd become weightless, all jutting bones."  
(87)

As Geraldine's trauma deepens, she begins to show clear signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, including withdrawal from everything she loved to do in the past. Her relationship with the natural world has sharply changed in this emotional retreat. Prior to the attack, Geraldine had found solace and a sense of security in her garden, where she attended it with care and love. Because of the trauma, she is unable to enter or attend the area which gave her peace. Erdrich highlights this change through Joe's observation:

WHEN THE WARM rain falls in June, said my father, and the lilacs burst open. Then she will come downstairs. She loves the scent of the lilacs. An old stand of bushes planted by the reservation farm agent bloomed against the south end of the yard. My mother missed its glory. The flimsy faces of her pansies blazed and then the wild prairie roses in the ditches bloomed an innocent pink. She missed those too. (85)

The lilacs, pansies, prairie roses are flowering without her, and the distance between Geraldine and the cycles of renewal she so once loved. This relationship between environmental insensitivity and psychological deterioration shows a major theme in ecopsychology. When trauma disrupts the inner balance of a person, it also impairs his or her ability to maintain contact with the rhythms of nature. Geraldine loses her ecological belonging through her separation with her garden. The land which used to comfort her is no longer accessible, not due to the changes in the land, but due to the trauma which has curtailed her capabilities of absorbing its healing essence. The fact that she stopped gardening, touching the soil, and taking care of plants demonstrates the destructive nature of trauma on the ecological and emotional level of relationships.

From an ecopsychological point of view, the paper demonstrates the way in which trauma not only interferes with the interior equilibrium of the individual, but it also disconnects him/her from the natural flow of nature surrounding him/her. The weakening state of the garden turns out as a tangible mark of the emotional breakdown of Geraldine which, again, gives credence

to the theory expressed by Roszak that emotional and ecological systems can be destroyed concurrently when the connection between the people and the land is corrupted. Caring about the land is associated with continuation, accountability, and harmonious relationships in Indigenous traditions. The fact that Geraldine cannot get back to her garden can thus be seen as a not just loss of principle with nature, but also loss of connection with cultural rhythms that aid in maintaining identity.

Her shunning of nature also has some cultural implications. According to the Indigenous belief systems, the land care is related with continuity, memory, and a reciprocal care. Robin Wall Kimmerer describes land as a living relative which is involved in healing by establishing reciprocal relationships. Geraldine's absence from the garden therefore reflects more than emotional numbness. It depicts disruption of cultural rhythms which aid in the development and preservation of identity. The trauma that she carries alienates her from the ecological belonging that previously gave her life a foundation. This perspective presents the view that the decline of the garden in the novel is not simply a detail in the background. It becomes an outward sign of Geraldine's inner collapse and a clear indication of the family's growing difficulty in restoring balance after the trauma.

As Geraldine withdraws, Joe begins to carry the emotional burden created by her silence. Home is no longer the place where he feels safe but is now full of fear and uncertainty, which drives him to spend more time in the woods, where he feels a sense of grounding that he cannot experience inside. His wandering into the realms of nature, which include the forest, the lake shore, and the silent course of the reservation, is indicative of a roaming about in search of steadiness. Nature does not demand explanations, as the home or the legal system would do. It only provides him the presence, stability, and a relaxing physical setting. These scenes demonstrate the concept of ecopsychology that re-establishing connection with nature is an experience that enables the ecological unconscious mind to be activated and allows people to regain emotional balance. Joe's continual returns to the woods to show the beginning of ecological healing even before he fully understands the depth of his own emotional turmoil.

Erdrich shows the healing power of nature through Joe's actions. The woods provide him room in which to think and not to feel overwhelmed. The lake turns into a location where he can release his fear and anger. Even simple things as walking alone across the reservation demonstrate how he naturally needs grounding. They are not mere movements without a purpose. They demonstrate the ecopsychological concept that emotional healing is initiated by individuals regaining connection with the natural rhythms and nature that nurtures them.

During one of these walks, Joe discovers the Round House, the sacred Ojibwe structure where the assault took place. The building is not just a physical space as it has ancestral memory, community identity, and ritual meaning. The shape is circular, which symbolizes the concepts of completeness and continuity within ecological ideas. Geraldine's body becomes a site of violence, and at the same time the Round House, which is deeply holy for the community, also becomes violated. This renders the attack as both a personal injury and an ecological one. The Round House serves as a living museum, which contains the history of the people and thus destroying it is a way of destroying the spiritual and environmental support mechanism of the people. The location itself appears to recall the violence and becomes an ecological wound to the landscape.

Ecopsychology helps explain why the damage done to the Round House makes the community's suffering even deeper. According to Roszak, places of spiritual significance and ecological significance enter the inner world of a person and damaging of the places disrupted the emotional and cultural balance. The novel shows that trauma that takes place on sacred land cannot be healed by institutions that are not connected to these relationships. The failure of law enforcement and medical systems is not only due to legal complications but also due to their lack of awareness of the ecological and spiritual strata of the injury. The attack is an act of violence against the individual, and the land and real healing can only be initiated when the ecological connections that have been damaged are mended.

The concept of the land as a healer, which was introduced by Kimmerer, further clarifies this meaning. She describes that healing is a two-way process. The land supports and grounds humans, and in a way, it is their duty to provide care back. This realization is consistent with the perception of the novel that healing occurs when one builds relationships instead of isolating. Both Geraldine and Joe are reconnecting gradually with these ecological interdependences, in the way that Joe moves as naturally towards the woods as Geraldine returns to her garden. The land is not a mere background in the novel. It plays a proactive role in the healing process by providing a sense of stability, sensuousness, and cultural continuity.

Ecological restoration becomes the way the novel shows emotional recovery beginning to take shape. When Joe and Bazil bring Geraldine's garden back to life, it becomes a gentle but powerful method of helping her slowly come out of her isolation. The process of bringing back the garden is also a symbolic representation of their struggle to rebuild the broken ecological and emotional bonds in the family. Erdrich described the revival through the character Joe as:

We were going to put in my mother's garden. Now. He'd bought expensive bedding plants from a tum-bledown hothouse twenty miles off the reservation. Cardboard flats and plastic trays were set out in the shade. There were red, purple, pink, and striped petunias. Yellow and orange marigolds. There were blue forge me-nots, Shasta daisies, lavender calendula, and red-hot poker flowers. Dad gave me directions. I set the plants one by one into the flower beds. She had a tractor tire painted white and filled with dirt, and matching rectangles of dirt beside the front steps. I added lobelia and candytuft to the pansies in the narrow beds that lined the driveway. (85-86)

As the garden begins to bloom again, Geraldine slowly starts to re-enter the outside world that she once eliminated. These hues, smells and symbols of new life are subtle invitations to her to re-define herself with the rhythms of nature that she was formerly fond of. Her little steps of returning to the everyday reality march in time with the restoration of the garden, demonstrating that emotional healing tends to develop with the restoration of the natural world. The garden is not only a reflection of her personal healing, but also a silent agent that succeeds it, providing her with the physical and emotional solidity that the trauma had stripped her of. By this collective renewal, Erdrich demonstrates emotional healing and ecological restoration co-evolve in a way that supports each other to revert to a state of balance.

This demonstrates that this novel is solidly anchored in an Indigenous ecological worldview which recognizes the land as a living life force, with significance in terms of cultural survival, emotional balance, and collective memory. Erdrich does not present nature as the silent background under which things just occur. Rather, the environment acts as an active collaborator in the experiences of the characters in terms of trauma, decision making, and healing. She shows the interconnectedness of land, story and identity through sacred places, important landscape and relationships with the natural world.

Healing in *The Round House* does not come from institutions, legal action, or psychological treatment. Instead, Louise Erdrich shows recovery as an ecological process created through renewed connection with the land, sacred places, and the more than human world. This idea fits with the main belief of ecopsychology, which states that emotional balance and inner strength return when people reconnect with nature. Throughout the novel, Erdrich portrays the environment as a place of retreat, reciprocal relationship and spiritual guidance where healing is built by being in ecology and not by using psychological means alone.

Erdrich shows the environment as a living presence with emotional and spiritual importance. The Round House, the woods, the garden, and the lake influence the way that the characters traumatize, make decisions, and progress towards recovery. This perception is parallel to the Indigenous ecological knowledge, which recognizes the land as living and as one that preserves memory and identity. In situations where this relationship has been torn apart by trauma, the only way to heal is by repairing the relationship. Through the integration of ecopsychology and Indigenous ecological thought, the novel reveals that the land is an important source of emotional

recovery and not institutions. The feeling of increasing stability of Joe and gradual process of Geraldine returning to life as well as the revitalized garden all demonstrate that healing occurs due to strong attachment to place. The novel makes clear that trauma harms the land as well as the body and that the land plays an active role in the healing process. Erdrich introduces ecological reconnection as the primary means through which her characters endure suffering, re-strengthen, and gradually come back to the feeling of wholeness.

### Conclusion

The Round House by Louise Erdrich demonstrates that the process of healing of the Indigenous life is very much tied to the land. The novel does not treat trauma as a private or individual issue. Rather, it demonstrates the impacts of the trauma on the land, the culture, and the entire community. Institutions and legal systems fail since they are unable to act on a wound that is bound to the land itself. By linking Geraldine's assault with the harm done to a sacred place, Erdrich reveals how trauma breaks the deep relationship that connects people to the more than human world.

Ecopsychology helps explain why Geraldine and Joe cannot heal through institutions alone. It refers to the significance of the ecological unconscious and the grounding that accrues when one goes back to nature. Kimmerer perspective contributes to this realization by demonstrating that the land actively participates in the healing process by caring about each other. The experience in the woods of Joe, the slow process of Geraldine getting back to her senses, and the attempt of the family to revive the garden all illustrate that recovery occurs when people reconnect to relationships of balance and belonging with the natural world.

Ultimately, the novel portrays the view that psychological wounds can be healed only through an individual's relation with the land. This recovery is presented because the land is the memory, the place that bears the damage, and the support in case of a breakdown of the human systems. By showing ecological reconnection as necessary for emotional survival, The Round House brings forward Indigenous ecological knowledge, which understands that humans are a part of nature, not separate from it. Erdrich closes the story with the reminder that true healing begins by returning to the land that has always supported the community.

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**CASTE, RACIALIZATION AND ENVIRONMENT: REFLECTIONS ON  
ENVIRONMENTAL CASTEISM IN INDIA**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the intricate relationship between caste, race, and environmental justice in the Indian context. The primary objective is to examine how the caste system, deeply ingrained in Indian society, intersects with issues of racialization, leading to discriminatory environmental practices and injustices faced by marginalized communities. By drawing parallels between caste-based discrimination and racism, the study challenges the conventional narratives that seek to separate these intertwined social stratifications. It highlights how both caste and race operate as systems of hierarchy and exclusion, perpetuating structural inequalities that manifest in environmental injustices. Through an empirical analysis of environmental casteism in India, the paper suggests that, while the oppressive structure and system of environmental racism remains the same, groups that experience these injustices are different and primarily comprise of lower castes and tribal communities. Therefore, caste system and casteism through their reinforcing of social inequality serve as prominent illustrations of “racism without races” in India. This study emphasizes the importance of understanding environmental justice within the unique socio-economic and political framework of India and enhance our understanding of the interplay between racialized caste and class-based prejudice and environmental injustice in the country.

**Keywords:** Caste, Race, Racialization, Environmental Justice, Marginalization, India

**Introduction**

India, a nation celebrated for its diversity, is also a crucible of social and environmental disparities. It is impossible to think of India without taking the caste system into consideration, for caste is the hard-bound reality of Indian social structure and the core of social organisations for centuries (Keane). According to the Supreme Court of India, caste system is fundamentally rooted in the concepts of purity and pollution and is therefore a “curse on the nation,” (*Lata Singh vs State of U.P. & Another*). It is intricately linked with various other socio-economic structures such as power regimes, labour relations, and kinship, thereby sustaining and reinforcing social inequality. There exists a substantial body of research that highlights the prevalence of caste-based discrimination in India. Equally noteworthy is the growing and well documentation of the environmental pollution and degradation in India. However, studies studying the interlinkage between the caste and the environmental issues is relatively sparse compared to the literature on environmental racism in the United States (US). Also, there is dearth of comprehensive empirical studies that specifically investigate the role of caste as a significant determinant of environmental discrimination albeit a few significant efforts have been made in the recent past (Ranganathan; Sharma). Although mostly indicative such studies have highlighted the intertwined nature of caste and environment in India.

In the realm of Environmental Justice (EJ), the issues of caste, race, and discrimination are often examined through separate lenses, each defined by its own unique historical and cultural context. However, to fully grasp the intricacies of environmental inequality and discrimination in the Indian landscape, it is imperative to acknowledge the complex interplay of caste, race, and environmental justice. This paper seeks to explain the manifestations of caste, race, and environmental justice through the lens of racialization, emphasizing the significant parallels between the experiences of marginalized communities in India and racialized groups worldwide.



While the concept of race as understood in the Western world does not find a direct translation in the Indian context, the process of racialization occurs, whereby certain communities are subjected to categorizations that are akin to racial discrimination. In India, these dynamics often manifest within the realm of environmental justice, wherein marginalized communities face disparities in access to a number of environmental benefits and burdens. The discriminatory environmental burdens borne by these communities mirror those experienced by racialized groups elsewhere, leading to a critical inquiry into the concept of racialization within India.

This paper further undertakes a reflective examination of the environmental injustices faced by these communities, acknowledging the need for a comprehensive understanding of the inequalities that they confront. The aim is to investigate environmental prejudice against certain sections of the society, subject that is lately gaining some attention in the mainstream environmental discourse in India. It also aims to highlight the interrelated nature of environmental issues and emphasizes the importance of promoting fair environmental policies and practices, raising awareness, and advocating for change in India's efforts to achieve environmental justice. The paper prospects to reveal the complexities of caste, race, and environmental justice in the Indian context, opening doors for discourse, reform, and a more inclusive approach to addressing environmental disparities.

#### **Caste, Class and Environment**

The term "caste" does not have its origins in the Indian etymology, rather its roots can be traced to the Portuguese word "casta," which denotes the concept of race or pure stock (Keane 37). It was initially employed by western settlers to better understand the intricate social structure of Indian society (Ketkar 12). The caste system in India has a rich old history that spans around the last 3000 years. In the ancient Hindu society, a well-defined social structure, called "Varna system" existed, which was characterised by the division of the population into four distinct and exhaustive Varnas such as *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas*, and *Sudras* (Deshpande 131). These Varnas were hereditary in nature, practised endogamy and were occupation specific. However, as the socio-economic landscape evolved, the Varna system underwent notable transformation, giving rise to the "Jati system," which subsequently developed into the caste system. However, the *Jatis* of today (castes) do not fully represent the classical varnas and there are notable differences in their regional evolution (Srinivas).

In India, castes are broadly grouped into four main categories: *General Caste*, *Other Backward Class* (OBC), *Scheduled Caste* (SC), and *Scheduled Tribe* (ST). While there is considerable diversity within each category, these classifications are employed for population-based monitoring to assess the effectiveness of government programs (Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste* 25). The General caste serves as a default group that includes individuals who do not belong to any of the other three caste groups. They are also referred to as advantageous and forward castes and enjoy a higher status in the caste hierarchy. OBC is a diverse group comprising intermediate castes that were considered low in the traditional caste hierarchy but held a higher status than SC, who occupy the lowest position in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. They are often referred to as untouchables or *Dalits* and face significant social and economic segregation and disadvantages. Lastly, ST encompass communities typically residing in geographically isolated areas with limited social and economic interaction with the broader population. They maintain ethnic distinctiveness, and their physical isolation remains a primary criterion for their classification as STs.

To conceptualize environmental justice in India, it becomes imperative to comprehend the intricate ways in which the environment and its associated advantages and disadvantages interact with social, economic, and political power structures. The earliest account of EJ research in the West emerged within the context of the "environmental racism" framework, which centred on the distribution of hazardous waste disposal facilities and its correlation with impoverished and racially marginalized communities. The study delineated the circumstances in which race served as

a determining factor in the manifestation of negative environmental externalities. When we discuss environmental racism in an Indian context, the oppressive structure and system remain the same, but the groups that experience these injustices are different and primarily comprise of lower castes and tribal communities. This is because, caste holds greater significance than race as a determinant of social categorization in India.

This study proposes the concept of “environmental casteism” corresponding to the phenomenon of “environmental racism” that exists in the United States. At first site, it may appear that such a lexical preference treats caste as identical to race. However, that is not the claim staked by this study, rather it uses racialization concept to assert that the underlying oppressive structures and system in both race-based and caste-based discrimination remains the same. Developed first by Frantz Fanon in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* in 1967, racialization refers to:

...those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities. The characteristics signified vary historically and, although they have usually been visible somatic features, other non-visible (imagined and real) biological features have also been signified. The concept therefore refers to a process of categorisation, a representational process of defining an Other, usually, but not exclusively, somatically (Miles and Brown 101).

In simple terms, it is the process of categorization in people by assigning them specific attributes that are widely perceived to be innate biological characteristics, but that are significantly shaped by the disproportionate distribution of power, resources, and knowledge across different sections of society. This builds up the argument that, while caste and religion are the primary determinants of group identities in India, it would be wrong to assume that racialization and racism is non-existent in India.

This complex yet interconnected nature of race and caste in India has been a subject of serious academic deliberations, more explicitly after the 2001 United Nation’s *Conference against Racism Racial Discrimination Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* held in Durban, South Africa. Since then, important debates have emerged about racism in India that have shaped conversations about citizenship, migration, justice among other things (Baruah; Debbarma; McDuié-Ra). A number of scholarly accounts argue that caste is a unique system of social stratification that cannot be equated with race (Beteille 49; Gupta 53). Their argument is based on the premises that race is based on the phenotypical and biological differences between different groups, while on the other hand, caste is a cultural construct based on occupation and birth. Also, while race is a global phenomenon, caste as a system of social organization is unique to India. Contrary to this view, a new perspective has emerged in the caste-race dichotomy that challenges the rigid understanding of race and racism. The proposition suggests that there are significant parallels between caste-based discrimination and racism, including the use of physical attributes to distinguish between groups, the perpetuation of biases and stereotypes, and the deliberate marginalization and exclusion of particular groups (Baber 241; Das 280). Also, the issue of caste has now transcended geographical boundaries and has become a global concern, particularly within the South Asian diaspora worldwide (Jodkha and Shah 99).

Caste-based discrimination has also started getting recognition in North American municipal councils, business organizations and educational institutions, with steps being taken to prevent this discrimination (Dave; Venkatraman; Singh). This indicates that the impact of caste is no longer limited to its traditional context but has expanded to affect individuals and communities globally. Comparing the experiences of Dalits facing caste discrimination in India with the racism endured by African Americans in the United States, Gidla observes:

In Indian villages and towns, everyone knows everyone else. Each caste has its own special role and its own place to live. The Brahmins (who perform priestly functions), the potters, the blacksmiths, the carpenters, the washer people, and so on – they each have their own separate place to live within the village. The untouchables, whose special

role – whose hereditary duty – is to labor in the fields of others or to do other work that Hindu society considers filthy, are not allowed to live in the village at all. They must live outside the boundaries of the village proper. They are not allowed to enter temples. Not allowed to come near sources of drinking water used by other castes. Not allowed to eat sitting next to a caste Hindu or to use the same utensils. There are thousands of other such restrictions and indignities that vary from place to place (Gidla 7).

These pervasive acts of caste violence operate under the guise of caste impunity (Kikon 278), where perpetrators from upper castes grant themselves legal immunity while attacking and harming low-caste people such as Dalits and Adivasis (Geetha 15). These practices reinforce the caste and class divide, with caste norms forming the bedrock of Indian culture. The present study delves into the complex and contested views on race and caste within the Indian context, employing Goldberg's theoretical framework of "racial regionalization," which states that, race is not a fixed construct, rather a fluid term that takes on diverse interpretations and expressions across different geographic regions (Goldberg 333). It conceptualizes race as a socially constructed phenomenon that is significantly impacted by political, economic, and cultural factors, ultimately determining an individual's societal status. Other critical and cultural studies have also theorized race as both a structural formation and a lived social identity that encompasses cultural meanings beyond skin colour (Hall; Omi and Winant).

The utilization of the concept of racial regionalization offers a valuable lens through which to comprehend the ongoing discourse surrounding caste and race in India. In the context of environmental casteism in India, scholarly research posits that discrimination based on caste constitutes a manifestation of racialization that serves the purpose of maintaining systemic inequity. This has been described as "racial Indianization," which supports the claim that in India, race lives through the category of the caste (Das 278). It presents a promising opportunity to comprehend the fundamental role of race in the caste system. The study further articulates that:

not only is the Indian nation racialized through the extant naturalization of upper caste rules via subordination of lower castes and Dalits, but the powerful government officials and scholars also played a role in racialization through the dominant discourses of rejection of any association between race and caste, and thereby diverted any attachment of racism with the caste system (Das 278-279).

This suggests that the prevalent discourse regarding the interrelation between caste and race in India relied heavily on discursive repertoires and literary devices to support the denial of any association between caste and racism (Goldberg 332). That is there has been the smart use of the literary techniques to support the assertion that caste discrimination and racism are not same. This discourse of denial has been employed to undermine the racist structure of the caste system and reject any relationship between these two significant aspects of social stratification (Das 269). However, the presence of phenotypical differences does not necessarily serve as the basis for the formation of distinct racial groups or the emergence of racism. Rather differences in other specific characteristics like material conditions, social class and power, religion, region, and language, etc. can all be utilised to racialize different human groups. Therefore, in India, caste system and casteism through their reinforcing of social inequality serve as prominent illustrations of "racism without races" (Baber 246). This signifies that people belonging to the lowest stratum of the caste hierarchy, are frequently confronted with discriminatory practises based on their physical attributes and are subjected to diverse forms of oppression and maltreatment.

Additionally, it has also been observed that particular castes tend to be linked with specific professions or sectors that pose environmental risks, such as the management of waste, manual scavenging, production or tanning of leather goods, mining, etc (Deshpande, *The Grammar of Caste*). This serves to reinforce the belief that particular castes are born for such labour and thus sustaining social disparity. The caste culture in India influences various aspects of public life, including governance matters. For instance, initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), a flagship programme aimed at national cleanliness is discriminatory and casteist, since

initiatives like this often rely on the labour of Dalit individuals (Teltumbde 11). Moreover, in a caste-ridden society, practices of upper-caste purity-pollution dictate labour, mobility, and consumption behaviours, with the material manifestations of pollution and filth often associated with the tasks and roles assigned to Dalits (Guru 111). In this sense, environmental casteism would therefore refer to situations in which members of lower castes suffer from disproportionate environmental burdens and risks or have limited access to environmental resources and opportunities. It also manifests in the form of the non-recognition and exclusion of such castes and communities from environmental decision-making.

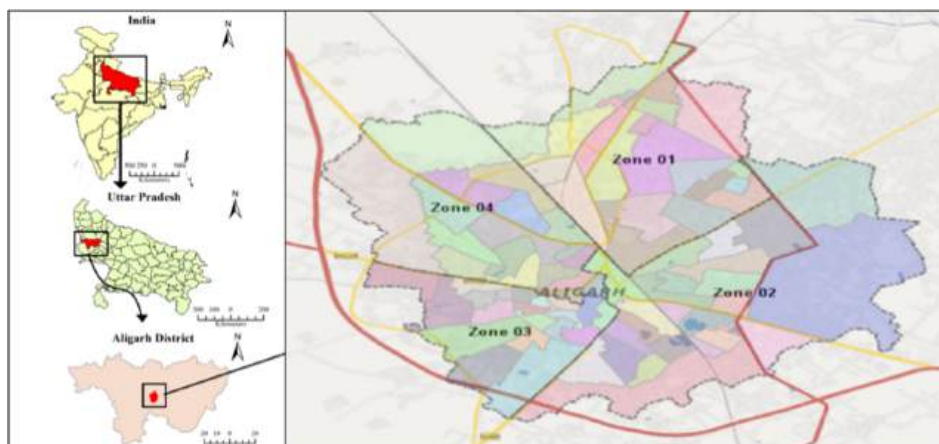
A recent Bengaluru-based study has introduced a unique concept of “environmental unfreedoms” to describe how socio-ecological detriments limit the freedom and welfare of individuals or communities (Ranganathan, “Caste, Racialization, and the Making of Environmental Unfreedoms in Urban India” 258-259). This concept highlights that the adverse effects of environmental disadvantages extend beyond ecological harm, significantly impacting human well-being and dignity. The shift from “environmental injustices” to “environmental unfreedoms” is intentional, aiming to decolonize the conceptualization of environmental justice. It seeks to move away from Western juridical frameworks and challenge liberal assumptions about justice. The present study is in line with this decolonial push, which emphasizes the importance of understanding environmental justice within the unique socio-economic and political framework of India. The use of both the frames, “environmental casteism” and “environmental unfreedoms” steers attention towards the idea that environmental degradation and its consequences violate people’s fundamental rights and dignity and limit their freedoms.

#### **Disproportionate Exposure and Environmental Casteism in Aligarh**

Aligarh city, with a population of about 1.3 million is among the fastest growing non-metropolitan cities in India. Located in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the city is recognised as one of the National Priority Cities and a promising urban growth centre in India. The city of Aligarh exhibits two notable features: the historical division between the old city and the new city, and the significant levels of caste and religious segregation. First and foremost, Aligarh’s morphology is categorized into two distinct areas that align with the city’s growth and development across various time periods. The old city, which flourished during ancient and mediaeval times, is primarily inhabited by a Muslim working and middle-class community. The city area showcases a dense population, with congested roads, overcrowded houses, and narrow alleys and streets. The primary economic activities of people in this area are based around domestic enterprises, specifically the production of locks, dyes, biscuits, etc. As opposed to this part is the new city area developed during the British era of the nineteenth century. The area exhibits a low population density and is home to various prominent establishments such as the Aligarh Muslim University, Court complex, railway station, government offices and the residences of the ex-zamindars, elite, and affluent businessmen. Further, the city consists of the recently developed areas in the periphery of the city that lacks a distinct spatial demarcation. Developed in post-independence period, these localities were previously rural settlements characterised by underdeveloped infrastructure. The urban sprawl resulted in the integration of these localities into the city area.

Another notable characteristic of Aligarh city is its division along caste and religious lines, which contributes to its spatial distinctiveness. Based on religious affiliation, Hindus constitute the largest community, accounting for 55.35 percent of the total population. The city has a significant Muslim community, making up 42.64 percent of the total population, with the remaining 2 percent practicing other faiths (*Census of India*). The city of Aligarh with an area of 63.81 sq. kms is divided into four zones (see Figure 1) distributed across 70 wards with 443 mohallas and 1,47,363 households. There is a noticeable division of city population based on religion, with Zone 1 and Zone 3 having a predominantly Muslim population, while Zone 2 and Zone 4 are predominantly Hindu. Moreover, the current developmental arrangement of Aligarh

reflects its divided character, with one area striving to realise the aspirations of its elite citizens (primarily in the new city area), largely ignoring the unsanitary and unsettling living conditions of its lower-class residents (in the city's old part and periphery areas). Further, modern urban initiatives, especially the Smart City Mission, are mostly concerned with city beautification. On the other hand, displacement of slum dwellers as a result of urban redevelopment and city's expansion into neighbouring rural areas remain unaddressed.



Source: [gis.nnaligarh.in](http://gis.nnaligarh.in) (2024)

**Figure 1: GIS based map of Aligarh city showing different zones**

Overall, Aligarh is divided into distinct areas based on income and social categorization. On one side, there are lower-income neighbourhoods with a predominantly low-caste population. On the other side, there is a newer eastern part of the city where higher-income groups and people from the majority religion reside. It appears that urban areas in India are experiencing a growing division along class lines, which is further influenced by specific caste and religious differences, indicating a shift away from mixed income neighbourhoods (Basu and Chakraborty 177). The examination of whether these divisions emerge in terms of exposure to environmental hazards will be the focus of the remainder of this article.

This study uses the neighbourhoods as the unit of analysis, where inhabitants share and consciously embrace a number of common attributes such as race, ethnicity, occupation, mutual experience. For the environmental justice analysis of Aligarh, the 70 administrative wards of the city were grouped into ten neighbourhoods based on the four main characteristics: income dominance, population density, household density, and proportion of lower castes. Data on income levels, ward-wise population and ward-wise households has been collected from the Aligarh Nagar Nigam (Aligarh Municipal Corporation) and Census of India, 2011. It is noteworthy that the government does not publish caste-based data in its decadal census estimates; only data related to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) is released. Consequently, in Hindu-dominated wards, consideration was given to the proportion of SC population, while for Muslim-dominated wards, the proportion of a particular caste group was determined based on the perception of the ward head.

The study employed a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule/questionnaire as a tool for data collection with a sample of 1650 households. The study estimated the environmental vulnerability of different neighbourhoods based on eight identified environmental problems: inadequate water supply, water quality problems, dilapidated housing conditions, indoor air pollution, inadequate drainage, waterlogging problem, waste accumulation, and inadequate waste

collection. In addition, Chi-Square test has been used to look at the association of environmental vulnerability with socio-economic characteristics of the population under investigation.

**Table 1: Association between environmental vulnerability and socio-economic characteristics of sampled households in Aligarh city, 2022-23.**

| Socio-Economic Characteristics | $\chi^2$             | <i>df</i> | p-value | $\phi$ |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Caste                          | 234.041 <sup>a</sup> | 2         | <.001   | 0.37   |
| Income                         | 377.993 <sup>a</sup> | 3         | <.001   | 0.48   |
| Religion                       | 119.205 <sup>a</sup> | 2         | <.001   | 0.27   |

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

The results of the statistical analysis reveal that environmental vulnerability has a strong positive association with income ( $\phi = 0.48$ ) and caste ( $\phi = 0.37$ ). These findings indicate that individuals belonging to lower income groups and marginalized castes face a greater risk of being exposed to environmental challenges in their neighbourhoods, which in turn makes them more vulnerable. This aligns with the recent studies on environmental justice in India, which demonstrated strong evidence of an unequal distribution of risk from hazardous industries among socially disadvantaged groups (Basu and Chakraborty; Chakraborty and Basu). With respect to religion, the associated phi-score ( $\phi = 0.27$ ) suggests that religious identity plays a role in influencing vulnerability, but the association is not as strong as with caste or income. Environmental vulnerability of these people is also associated with insufficient infrastructure and services, absence of a legal framework, discrimination, and limited political influence, rather than solely being attributed to a lack of income (Satterthwaite 73). The comprehensive analysis of the association between the environmental vulnerability and social positioning of the individuals and communities provides clear evidence that the city of Aligarh is both environmentally vulnerable and environmentally unjust. There is an evident disparity in the distribution of environmental goods and services in Aligarh city, with socially and economically disadvantaged communities, as well as minority population groups facing greater environmental risks compared to the general population.

### Conclusion

The concept of racialization manifests within the domain of EJ in India through the categorization and discrimination faced by certain communities based on their social status, particularly caste. In India, caste plays a significant role in determining social categorization and access to environmental benefits and burdens. Marginalized communities, such as lower castes and tribal groups, often experience environmental injustices due to their social status. These communities are subjected to discriminatory environmental burdens, similar to the experiences of racialized groups in other parts of the world. This phenomenon of environmental casteism mirrors the experiences of racialized groups worldwide, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the interrelated nature of these issues. Therefore, in India, caste system and casteism through their reinforcing of social inequality serve as prominent illustrations of racism without races.



This study additionally advocates to also recognize the impact of class in shaping institutional racism and racial disparities. The objective, of course, is not to establish any equivalence, let alone merge the concepts of caste or race with that of class. This is because while racialization and racisms may display some level of independence in their practises and outcomes, they are not entirely disentangled from class and the broader societal structures within which they operate. Therefore, while examining the influence of racialized caste on social dynamics, it is equally important to recognize the importance of class and the larger capitalist economy in producing and organising both material and cultural disparities. This is because, in the contemporary Indian context, akin to other regions, certain classes of people are subject to disproportionate impacts caused by systems of domination, subjugation, exclusion, and exploitation. This raises concern regarding the potential for environmental policies and initiatives to reinforce established power structures and perpetuate environmental casteism and classism. This is particularly discernible in the examination of environmental protection policies that may have a disparate impact on particular communities and implementation of these policies may potentially result in their marginalization and exclusion from participating in decision-making procedures.

In conclusion, the intricate interplay of caste, race, and environmental justice in India reveals a complex web of inequalities and disparities that affect marginalized communities. By acknowledging the impact of caste, race, and discrimination on environmental well-being, it becomes clear that addressing environmental inequality in India requires a holistic approach that considers the social, economic, and political dimensions at play. The recognition of environmental unfreedoms and the consequences of environmental degradation on fundamental rights and dignity further highlight the need of promoting fair environmental policies and practices. Further, raising awareness, advocating for change, and promoting inclusive approaches to addressing environmental disparities are essential steps in advancing environmental justice in India. By looking deeper into the complexities of caste, race, and environmental justice, this study facilitates meaningful discourse, reform, and a more equitable future for all communities in their pursuit of environmental well-being and sustainability.

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**TOPOPHILIA: COASTAL ECOLOGY AND THE EMERGENCE OF  
ECOLOGICAL SELFHOOD IN JENNIFER SCOULLAR'S *TURTLE REEF***

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**Abstract**

Australian Eco fiction blends the awareness of the environment with the questions of identity, belonging and moral responsibility. The fiction of Scoullar shows a deep concern with the Australian landscapes. In Jennifer Scoullar's *Turtle Reef*, the marine ecosystem appears as an active subject in the story. Topophilia is not just a poetic metaphor but a phenomenological fact: the living power of the coastal world that creates the consciousness as such. Ecological phenomenology claims that human perception is a form of mutual engagement with the living Earth. Coasts are seen as a place of liminality where identities are disintegrated and reconstituted.

**Keywords:** Topophilia, Ecology, Phenomenology, Self-hood, Identity

**I. Introduction**

Over the decades, Australian Eco fiction has become a strong narrative form, which blends the awareness of the environment with the questions of identity, belonging and moral responsibility. Tim Winton, Kate Grenville and Jennifer Scoullar are among the authors who have used landscape not only as a setting context, but as a living entity that builds upon human feeling and moral understanding. Scoullar has a unique place in this generation: she balances romance and realism with an ecological conscience in her novels. An example of her narrative ethos is the 2015 film, *Turtle Reef*; it serves as a tale of personal redemption and as a tribute to the ecology of the coast on which human existence exists woven together with a delicate but strong marine ecosystem. In the plot of her main character Zoe King, Scoullar imagines the coast as a place of change, where the boundaries between self and place are gradually blurred during a healing and reconnecting process.

The fiction of Scoullar shows a deep concern with the Australian landscapes, especially with liminal areas of the country riverbanks, wetlands and coasts where land meets the sea. These environments sum up the multidimensionality of ecological interdependence, but also reflect emotional and ethical echoes that shape her characters in their self-awareness. In *Turtle Reef*, the marine ecosystem appears as an active subject in the story, a living creature providing the lead character with empathy, attention, and concern. The merging of the ecological and emotional interior in the novel is reminiscent of Greg Garrard and his concept of the ethical turn in modern environmental fiction- the need to portray nature as a scenery to reflect on how it can be a part of moral imagination. To Scoullar, to write about the sea is to write about the future of human renewal in terms of a new reinvigorated sense of place.

This paper questions *Turtle Reef* by using the two ideas of spirit of place and ecological selfhood, and the novel can be viewed as an imaginary expression of how human identity is developed through close interaction with the more-than-human world. According to the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, the spirit of place is the affections, cultural and moral connection between individuals and their places of residence and work; it is the sense of belonging caused by the experience of the senses and memory. In the Scoullar story, the spirit is made alive in the landscape of the coast giving it life and righteousness. However, the novel is not merely about

place attachment, but rather dramatizes the way in which it changes the self. The increasing compassion that Zoe develops towards the marine ecosystem, sea turtles and the sound of the tides and storms, is the means by which the girl finds the emotional completeness and morality. Her development is not solely psychological or solely ontological it is an ecological self, a creature that sees herself as a component of the living web that she had taken as her external world.

The article relies on ecological phenomenology of David Abram, especially on his claim that human perception is a form of mutual engagement with the living Earth. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) and *Becoming Animal* (2010), Abram suggests that human consciousness is created by direct sensory experience with the more-than-human world. Perception in this perspective is not a remote viewing but is a reciprocal process in which body and breathing landscape exchange. The meaning is an outcome of this dynamic interaction with nature where man is not independent of nature but rather a part of it-listening, reacting, and being influenced by its existence. This model can explain what happens to Zoe in *Turtle Reef*: as she hears more of the reef, she becomes more self-aware, as she becomes sensitive to the sounds, textures, and silences of the reef. This sea, as understood by Abram, becomes a phenomenological companion, a teacher that displays porous boundaries between self and environment.

Arne Naess developed deep ecology, which is a complement of this approach and suggests that self-realization is greatest when people broaden their identity to include living beings. The ecological self-developed by Naess opposes human/nonhuman duality and instead promotes a relational, dynamic, and ethically oriented identity. Zoe develops similarly to the expansion of her emotional state: her compassion to the animals, especially the injured dolphin and the healed turtle, can be seen to represent her transition between her closed, human-focused self and her awareness of being interdependent. Her emotional healing, similar to that of the reef itself, is an indication of the birth of a self that identifies kinship over dominance.

In this regard, it is possible to say that, in this sense, the subjectivity of the *Turtle Reef* engages in what Val Plumwood terms the ecofeminist re-visioning of subjectivity a shift toward mastery and separation to care, reciprocity, and embodied knowing. According to Scoullar, ethical place membership demands a disposition towards its vulnerability and agency. The sea itself, with its energy of destructive power, and of healing, is a reflection of the passions of the main character. The novel therefore itself accomplishes what Deborah Bird Rose terms an ethic of connection: an understanding that human life is supported by ties of responsibility in the wider ecological community.

By using this interpretive scheme, the article contends that Scoullar in his article *Turtle Reef* presents a highly Australian explanation of ecological selfhood where the coasts are seen as a place of liminality where identities are disintegrated and reconstituted. Topophilia is not just a poetic metaphor but a phenomenological fact: the living power of the coastal world that creates the consciousness as such. Following the journey of Zoe King between alienation and attunement, the novel proves that personal and environmental curing cannot be separated. Finally, according to *Turtle Reef*, ecological and ethical requirements of the modern environmental crisis are the re-enchantment of both self and world the reconstruction of the human as a member of the living rhythms of the Earth.

## **II. Topophilia and the Spirit of Place: Landscape, Belonging and Ethics of Dwelling**

*Turtle Reef* by Jennifer Scoullar is deeply sited to the Australian coastal terrain, not only as a passive landscape but as an active and constitutive element. The fictional setting of the novel, a fictional town called Kiawa on the coast of Queensland, is a typical example of the idea of the spirit of place (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1977) the sensuous and emotive agency exercised by environments upon its residents. In the case of Tuan, place is the result of experience, which is space, filled with meaning by an experience of living, memory, and affection. This transformation of space into place is brought out vividly through the prose of Scoullar, whose descriptions of mangroves, tidal estuaries, coral reefs are not, as such, picturesque but phenomenological, and invites the reader to

get into the perception of the protagonist, and to experience the coastal world as something living and breathing.

The concepts of Topophilia and spirit of place has an ecological and moral impact in *Turtle Reef*. When the protagonist marine biologist, Zoe King, comes to Kiawa to introduce a new stage of life, the coast is transformed into a point of contact, on the one hand, of the human with the more-than-human, on the other hand, of the science and the intuition, and the alienation and the belonging. Sensory imagery is overloaded in the opening scenes of Zoe arrival, the smell of the salt, the beating of waves and the beating light on the water. These components work as gateways to a different form of being, what phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau -Ponty would describe as the communication of the lived body with the world. By embodied perception, Zoe comes to realize the landscape as it is not as an object of study since it is a moving field of relationship that communicates with her and it also constructs her consciousness.

The imagery of the coastline by Scoullar is full of symbolism. The reef, the estuary and the tidal flats are areas of incessant movement and change neither entirely land nor entirely water. This borderland is also analogous to the internal state of Zoe: she comes in with the emotional dislocation and professional uncertainty and the process of getting used to Kiawa is like a psychic reorientation. The novel in a way belongs to the long Australian literary tradition in which landscape is seen as a teacher, which is also present in such names as Patrick White and Tim Winton. However, the work of Scoullar is unique in its combination of ecological realism and moral self-reflection. The reef is not an analogy of human emotion; it is an interlocutor, which requires attentiveness, humility, moral responsiveness.

This reciprocity is projected by David Abram in his ecological phenomenology. In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), Abram claims that human perception is never passive- it is a conversation with body and earth and that conversation occurs through the senses. The ecological crisis of modernity, in the case of Abram, is the result of the failure to remember this reciprocity, of the attitude of treating nature as dumb matter, instead of recognizing that it is a communicative presence. The book by Scoullar is a re-enactment of this lost dialogue. The first interaction between Zoe and the world of marine biology is represented by an impassive look: she sees, quantifies and categorizes. However, later on in the story, her experiences with the reef, seeing a turtle hatchling trying to move to the sea, saving a stranded dolphin, awaken something more instinctive in knowing. The wonder pours into her science and the contemplation is replaced by compassion. The sea stops functioning as a field of data and enters as a field of meaning.

This change of perception is what the phenomenologist Edward Casey (1993) has called dwelling in place. To live means to be mindful and caring of the world Casey is asking and to recognize the agency of the world in creating the human identity. The increasing sensitivity to the rhythms of Kiawa, which is a coastal region, tides, winds, and nonhuman residents, is an ethical way of dwelling by Zoe. She hears the voice of the sea and she realizes that she belongs to a community that is not just composed of people but of dolphins, dugongs, turtles and mangroves. This extended community is what forms the basis of what Arne Naess terms later as the ecological self. Before this self-arises, the human has to be taught to reside - to be silent, to hear, to fit in.

The setting in *Turtle Reef* and the teacher then, is spirit of place. It maintains the memory and narrative of human and ecological worlds. Scoullar also highlights the interdependence of species over and over again: the seagrass beds, which support the turtles, the delicate balance of coral and water temperature, the process of death and regeneration which is the backbone of the reef. The human relationships in the narrative are reflected by these ecological networks. The relationship between Zoe and Quinn Cooper, her employer and partner is not built on an abstract discourse but rather through their mutual care, when they take injured marine animals to the hospital, maintain their breeding grounds, and recover the ecological balance after disruptions. Love here is an ecological practice, a kind of care that is concerned with the interdependent nature of the natural world.

Elaboration of this interpretation can be seen through the ecofeminist philosophy by Val Plumwood. Feminism and the *Mastery of Nature* (1993) is a critique by Plumwood of the Cartesian dualisms between mind and body, human and nature, and male and female, and a proposal of an ecological self-hood based on mutuality and care. The course of Zoe is a representation of this change. Her scientific rationalism, which historically is known to be masculine and detached, becomes an embodied and intuitive empathy and is not described by Scoullar as anti-intellectual but as a more whole form of knowing. When taking care of marine life, Zoe gets to know that agency is more than human, and her closeness to place is an ethical lesson that informs people of interdependence instead of control.

The ethical meaning of such a change is also strengthened by the way Scoullar portrays society. The inhabitants of Kiawa have opposing approaches to the environment: some of them abuse it, using the environment to achieve immediate profit, and others treat it as a common heritage. The fact that Zoe corresponds to the latter group is an indication that she is a part of the social and environmental life of the place. She belongs but it is gained not forced, but through ethical behaviour, through being a part of what Deborah Bird Rose calls reciprocity, a care principle that maintains ecological communities. With the introduction of personal healing into a collective stewardship, Scoullar proposes that personal identity cannot be separated out of place health.

Therefore, *Turtle Reef* recaptures the Australian coast as a moral geography - a border zone in which human and nonhuman histories intersect. This liminal space that Scoullar creates confronts the anthropocentric reasoning of modernity and proposes a different interpretation of the world being created in the interstices, in the constant movement between land, land, and consciousness. The spirit of place is not an absolute substance but a continuous conversation, a dance of giving and taking which holds life forms together. This rhythm, as it is enacted, creates the identity of Zoe. Her ecological selfhood is initiated in the understanding that belonging does not mean possessing, but being involved.

### **III. Ecological Selfhood: Emergent Ecology and the Politics of Attunement**

The metamorphosis of Zoe King in the *Turtle Reef* by Jennifer Scoullar illustrates the ecological self what Arne Naess (1989) terms; the self that goes beyond the limitations of individualism and goes into the connectedness of life. The story by Scoullar follows this development in an emotional and ecologically exact way, thus placing the personal development of Zoe in a broader framework of environmental ethics and a sense of community. It is a slow experiential process, which is characterized by revelation, empathy and embodied interaction with the coastal world. A change of perception the shift in how she sees nature - the background to the kin is dramatically caused by her experiences with the sea and with the creatures that inhabit it.

#### **1. The Modern Self and Alienation**

At the beginning of *Turtle Reef*, Zoe is the modern alienation of nature. She comes to the Kiawa with the legacies of emotional trauma and career confusion. She is disillusioned after working as a marine biologist in a bureaucratic and exploitative system before. The coldness of the scientific distance, which was her main identity, is empty. The estrangement of contemporary humanity with the natural world results to the abstraction of perception, in other words, where the perception is mediated by instruments, the data, and representations, and not through direct sensory perceptions (Abram, 1996). This state is the same situation that is manifested in the preliminary attitude of Zoe toward her setting. She quantifies salinity, notes the bleaching of coral, and tracks the movements of turtles, but she is not yet in a position to feel the reef.

This feeling of alienation reflects the wider contemporary division of the self and the world which phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty attempted to transcend. To Merleau-Ponty, the body is not a container of consciousness but rather the means of knowing the world; the perception is a carnal discourse between the self and the world. The disembodied scientific vision of Zoe slowly yields to embodied perception - to a revival of the



senses as tools of relation. This transition is also sensually graded in the novel: the saltiness of her lips, the heat of the pools of the tides, the coarseness of the shell of a turtle in her hands. These facts distinguish her steps, no longer as a spectator, but as an actor, no longer as alienated, but as one attuned.

## 2. Topophilia and Encounters of Transformation

This is the point of departure in the development of Zoe, which is derived in her interaction with nonhuman beings. Scoullar gives these encounters emotional and moral seriousness in his narrative. Probably one of the most symbolic scenes is the act of Zoe as she rescues an injured dolphin caught in fishing netting. The agony of the dolphin as it struggles to keep up its thrashing body and desperate look breaks the rationality of Zoe. When she is tending to the animal, she shares what ecofeminist philosopher Josephine Donovan (2006) calls an ecofeminist philosophical form of responsibility, participatory empathy, which is based on the feeling-with and not the acting-for. Dolphin is not something to study but something suffering, its plight does not require analysis, but sympathy.

This is the episode which marks the beginning of the moral awakening of Zoe. It is through care she finds a connection again the primal pulse of ecological selfhood. This sensibility is enhanced later on her work at the marine centre rehabilitating sea turtles. The old symbol of plodding and weakness, the turtle, is transformed into a symbolic reflection of Zoe herself when it comes to the process of healing. Scoullar narrates about the creature with reverence, the slow motions bring to mind the time outside human measures. When they put the turtle back into the sea, Zoe acknowledges that she is part of the reef, and that she is part of the cyclical nature of life and death. This act of releasing - of giving the animal back to its stream - symbolizes her abandonment of the human-in-the-middle. She is involved, though on a limited scale, in what deep ecologists call biocentric equality: the acceptance that all living beings possess intrinsic worth whether they are used or not.

## 3. The Interpersonal and the Ecological

Scoullar helps to strengthen the inner change in Zoe by making her change her relations with people. The relationship she develops with Quinn Cooper, a local farmer and conservationist, serves as an interface through which she gets to know all the ethics of care that were inculcated in the life of the rural community. The admiration that Quinn shows towards land and sea is in direct opposition of the exploitative nature of industrial developers and bureaucrats. His stewardship is an example of what philosopher Holmes Rolston III (1988) describes as the ethics of place an appreciation that moral responsibility does not just cease with the human community but with the ecological one as well. With the help of Quinn, Zoe is informed that belonging is not possessed but acts. Their love affair is therefore a kind of ecology-restoration miniature: a marriage of confidence, reliance, and mutual respect towards nature.

Within this meaning, *Turtle Reef* interweaves the emotional and the ecological such that it questions the Western dichotomy on nature and culture, reason and emotion. The healing of Zoe and her reconnection to the ecological state are indistinguishable. Her growing capacity to love people, animals and place is not sentimentalism but moral maturity. Love becomes a way of seeing, a perception of the life of other people. Such modes of ecological thinking, according to the caring interaction that the environment offers, focus on situated knowledge, as feminist ecologist Lorraine Code (2006) suggests: knowledge of which is produced by the caring interaction between oneself and the environment. When Zoe leaves abstract knowledge to embodied knowledge, the state starts to change and she becomes relationally aware.

## 4. Topophilia, Ecological Selfhood and Deep Ecology

The philosophical basis of the transformation of Zoe can be established with references to the concept of the ecological self-developed by Arne Naess. To Naess, the self is not a localized ego, but a broadening of identity encompassing other beings and ecosystems. The action of self-realization, which is the main element of deep ecology, comes when a person acknowledges the fact, that the care of nature is not a form of altruism but rather a form of self-expression, since a

self is ecological. The meaning of Zoe is broadened, when she starts to perceive her activity not only as environmental activism, but as being part of a living whole. She is happy to see coral regenerating or saving marine life not because it is her responsibility but because it is her. She has joined what Naess defines as the ecological field, where the well-being of all entities is bound up.

This expanded selfhood is implicitly compared and contrasted with anthropocentric worldviews of the secondary characters in the narrative by Scoullar. The profit-seeking developers and bureaucrats who aim to exploit the reef to be used as a tourism site or aquaculture are the narrow self Naess criticizes, the ego which is not linked to ecological outcome. Their spiritual blindness highlights the awakening of Zoe as a personal, as well as a philosophical one. Her ecological selfhood begins to be a resistance to the reductionist modernity. By identifying with the beats of the reef, she is a performer of what Naess calls ecological maturity and that is, the understanding that the well-being of the self cannot be separated with the well-being of the world.

#### 5. Phenomenological Attunement.

The moral background is offered by Naess whereas the phenomenology offered by David Abram offers the sensual texture of the awakening of Zoe. The idea expressed by Abram of reciprocal perception whereby the world itself contributes to the development of human consciousness is also highly dramatized in Scoullar sensory prose. The narrative view is slowed down and widened when Zoie submerges into the depths of the reef. The sea is around her, and the text reflects the fluidity of her impression: the play of light on coral, the changing color of fish, the movement of the current on her flesh. In such instances, the place of self and sea turn into each other. Abram states that perceiving is also to be swept up in the wave of living and the feeling of being submerged in a river given by the author to Scoullar is exactly this feeling of being involved.

One can interpret the change of Zoe, then, as a phenomenological realization - a re-discovery of the self as embodied, porous, and situated. This is ecological since in her relational view, it is based on reciprocity. She hears the world and does not force anything onto it. This responsiveness has ethical consequences: when we listen to the voice of the sea, we acknowledge its frailty, we feel the pain of pollution and neglect. By this sense engagement Scoullar dramatizes what Abram describes as the moral aspects of perception - the concept that the way we look at the world is what makes us behave in it.

#### 6. Dimensions of Ecofeminism Care, Healing and Reconnection.

The ecological self in *Turtle Reef* is also gender-specific. Scoullar makes Zoie waking up to act in line with the ecofeminist ideologies where the oppression of nature is associated with the patriarchal relations of power. The masculinist logic of control promoted by characters that manipulate the reef to derive economic benefits is condemned by the novel against the feminine ethic of care that the characters of Zoe and other women represent. This identification does not inherent femininity but restores femininity as a place of relations. The empathy, intuition and caring of Zoe is epistemological virtue ways of knowing that oppose the instrumental rationality of modern science.

According to ecofeminist philosophers like Val Plumwood and Carol Gilligan (1982), caring ethics are relational and responsive as opposed to hierarchical. The moral awakening of Zoe is therefore the same as the environmental message of the novel: the healing needs a payback. Her sympathy towards sea creatures is not the one of pity but of collaboration. Suffering and redemption are those of the sea that she makes her own. The incorporation of emotional and ecological healing by Scoullar brings into practice what theologian Sallie McFague identifies as embodied theology - the realization that it is not transcendence but communion with the living world that achieves salvation, or wholeness.

#### IV. Ecological Coastal as Narrative Ethics and the Reef as Character and Moral Agency

*Turtle Reef* by Jennifer Scoullar is not a simple environmental story, but an ethical work that is organized according to the principles of ecology. The coastal environment of the novel is not an abstract backdrop on which human action takes place but a personage whose presence

determines rhythm, tone and moral disposition. Scoullar, using narrative point of view, descriptive patterning and symbolic interaction, turns the reef into a mediating agent of moral meaning a voice that goes between the human and more-than-human worlds. This literary device is the type of storytelling that ecocritic Scott Slovic (1992) calls narrative ethics in which the act of telling a story becomes itself an act of ethics towards the nonhuman world.

#### 1. The Reef as a Talking Body

Scoullar gives the reef a sensual life starting with the first pages. The water breathes, and the wave talks, and the coral flashes like love. These metaphors are not figurative but actual: they declare that the reef is not only living, but also communicative. Describing the marine world as animated, Scoullar engages in what Jane Bennett (2010) terms vital materialism - the understanding of the agency and the agency of matter. In this definition, however, the reef is not a setting but a co-narrator, having a determining influence on the events due to its moods and changes. The storms, bleaching and regeneration are not mere plot devices but moral commentaries on the human ability to damage or heal.

This aesthetic practice has a phenomenological reciprocity that is similar to that of David Abram, when he states that, language itself emerged due to the voice of the earth. The rhythms of the sea are frequently aped in the lyrical prose of Scoullar - sentences moving in the rhythm of the tide, the dialogue halting to allow the senses to be dipped into. Allowing the land to breathe the story, she re-enchants the relationship between the reader and the land and the world alike. The voice of the reef is not readily communicative in an anthropomorphic sense: in the silence of post-destruction silence, in the beat of bioluminescence, in the factual communion of the diver and the ocean. The story is thereby a process of listening, a literary process of ecological sensitivity.

#### 2. Beyond-Human Agency of Morality

The concept that the reef is a moral agent questions an anthropocentric belief that only human beings have the capability of acting in an ethical manner. Stacy Alaimo (2010) and Donna Haraway (2016) are ecocritical theorists whose idea of agency has extended to encompass the material and biological agency that determines life. Moral consequence works in a manner in which it works in *Turtle Reef* through ecological process. Whitening of the corals, the dying of the water animals, and the slight changes in the temperature of the waters all serve as the narration consequences of the people. When the developers in the area dispose their waste in the estuary, the environmental degradation is reflected in a morally degraded society. On the contrary, when Zoe and others recover ruined habitats, gradual recovery of the reef is compared to the emotional and moral revival. The justice of the sea, which is not vindictive but curative, happens when it comes to balance, reciprocity and interdependence.

This nature ethic is close to the land ethic of Aldo Leopold, which redefines right action to be that which is likely to maintain the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. The storytelling of Scoullar reflects this ethic because it creates a narrative resolution that goes in line with the ecological restoration. The emotional closure of the novel is tied to the well-being of the reef: Zoe is peaceful and the community is harmonious with the well-being of the reef. The human narrative will not end just yet as long as the nonhuman world is not healed. Scoullar disrupts the anthropocentric rationale of plot, whose history has been to focus on the fulfilment of humans, and substitutes it with an ethic of interspecies continuity when she links narrative satisfaction to ecological healing.

#### 3. Narrative Perspective and Ethical Vision

This ecological vision is supported by the decision of narrative perspective. *Turtle Reef* is narrated in a close third-person limited voice which is still conscious of Zoe but often slips into the description of surroundings. Such a change of focus reflects the same shift that Zoe undergoes towards the eco-centric instead of the ego-centric consciousness. The contrast of inner thinking and outer ecology is an enactment of what literary theorist Lawrence Buell (1995) terms as dual accountability a type of narrative according to which human and nonhuman worlds receive moral and imaginary force.

The focalization enables Scoullar to make the reader see the world the way Zoe sees it, but as she gets to see it in a new way, the reader does as well. The descriptions are objective and cold when she first looks at the reef: a catalogue of the species and the water conditions. Her eyes are closed later; the same reef is described as a living tapestry, and the prose is lyrical, rhythmical and reverent. This change of style reflects the main idea of the novel ecological consciousness is not a theme which should be declared but something which should be experienced. The narration voice in itself is a phenomenological tool that brings the readers to the empathy with place.

#### 4. Narrative Ecology and Temporal Cycles

The other important aspect of Scoullar ethics of narrative in the Scoullar narrative is that she uses cyclical time. The Turtle Reef does not have a goal-oriented, linear structure found in realist fiction, but it does talk in natural ways, with the flow of tidings, seasons, and the breeding cycles. This time structuring coordinates human feeling to ecological procedure. The rhythm of the novel, slow, immersive and sensuous, calls the reader to what Abram refers to as the tempo of the breathing Earth. The repetition and repetition back the story make it resistant to the capitalistic temporality of progress and productivity that produces the exploitation on the environment. Rather, it is a representation of a period of nurturance: time to observe, to heal, to be patient.

The final element of the novel a storm which endangers both human population and aquatic life represents an ecological kairos, the moment of crisis and rebirth. It reveals the vulnerability of the world created by people and the persistence of nature. The story does not end with the triumph after the storm but with silent continuity: the reef grows, and life continues in a new manifestation. This is a non-anthropocentric temporality which is enacted through this cyclical resolution and which asserts that human narrations are short term pauses in the greater ecological cycles.

#### 5. The Reef as Moral Mirror

The reef as represented by Scoullar serves as an ethical mirror of the human feeling and societal morals. Once in the hands of greed and negligence the reef becomes sick; once the state is such that care and humility are the order of the day, the reef thrives. This reflection is not mere allegory but is an ontological interdependence. The emotional instability of Zoe is equivalent to the vulnerability of the reef, both of which are hurt by exploitation and both of which are in need of healing. This form of parallelism plays out what philosopher Timothy Morton (2010) refers to as the mesh, the tangled system of existence of all beings. The story by Scoullar is therefore anti-anthropocentric in terms of symbolism, instead providing what Morton describes as a dark ecology: a recognition of connectedness that is sensitive to weakness and decline alongside beauty and life.

#### 6. Environmental Ethics, Style and Language

Her ethical vision is also played out by the linguistic choices made by Scoullar. She is precise in her prose, using the language and tone of science, but her ecological knowledge is, in a way, dual: scientific and emotional. Science, as it is spoken through nomenclature, observation, and statistics, exists alongside the language of miracle and amazement. Such a style hybridity threatens the traditional distinction between objectivity and emotion. Environment critic Serenella Iovino (2014) states that environmental narratives are material-discursive practices, i.e. they do not describe ecological thinking; they do it. The combination of scientific and poetic registers used by Scoullar shows that ethics is not born by division, but by the union.

#### 7. The ethical involvement of The Reader

Lastly, the narrative ethics by Scoullar is not limited to the page as it involves the reader. The sensual, embodied nature of her writing encourages what ecocritic Cheryl Glotfelty (1996) terms ecological literacy - a perceived sense of systems, interdependence, and consequence. Being sucked into the world of sensations of Zee, the reader feels the reef as a part of him or her rather than as a far-off landscape. This experience of participation in reading reflects her phenomenological awakening of Zoe. Having made the emotional identification with the story and

the ecological consciousness meet, Scoullar has turned the process of reading into an ethical one - one that creates a gap between fantasy and environmental accountability.

#### **V. Conclusion: Topophilia and the Ethics of Ecological Selfhood**

The vision of belonging that is achieved by Jennifer Scoullar in *Turtle Reef* breaks down the lines of self and environment, human and nonhuman, narrative and place. The spirit of place, the vital, sensuous intelligence of the coastal ecosystem, turns into the setting and the moral axis of the novel throughout the novel. With the combination of character consciousness, ecological process, and narrative rhythm, Scoullar creates a fiction that achieves what David Abram would call a phenomenology of perception in the natural world: a re-awakening to human consciousness of the living presence of the world. The novel is an ecological phenomenological work of exemplary quality, dramatizing the ways in which selfhood can be achieved not in solitude but through place immersion.

##### **1. The Ecological Consciousness of Spirit of Place**

The spirit of place, a theme of landscape writing that has been repeated by D.H. Lawrence and Barry Lopez, acquires a fresh definition in the setting of Scoullar, the coastal area. Place in *Turtle Reef* is not a passive vessel of events, but rather an agent that defines human identity as well as moral wisdom. The moods of the sea, the breathing of the reef, the rhythm of the waves all develop into narrative forces, which direct the emotional progression of Zoie. It is impossible to discuss her path of ecological selfhood without referring to the vitality of the reef; two together grow and heal.

##### **2. Ecological Otherness: Ego to Eco**

The anthropocentrism to ecocentrism is a question of philosophical change in which the ecological selfhood in *Turtle Reef* is based. The ecological conversion that is suggested by the deep ecology of Arne Naess is also reflected in the transformation of Zoie - a process of breaking the fetish to the human ego and acknowledging the biosphere as the unity of self. This transformation in the novel is experienced in the material sense: in the experience of touch, in the experience of loss and recovery, in the practices of attending to her.

The sympathy of Zoie towards sea animals, her sorrow about pollution of the environment, and her intention to recover evidences are gradual identity expansion. The self becomes permeable, inter-subjective and moral. When the nonhuman is incorporated into the concept of the self, the environmental care stops being a moral responsibility and a matter of self-expression, as Naess points out. Scoullar reflects this principle in terms of narration: moral behavior is intuitively part of love of place, and not of duty.

In this regard, *Turtle Reef* brings to drama the ecological self as a vital combination of feeling, sense, and accountability. It practices what Val Plumwood (2002), terms the ecofeminist form of the philosophical animism that moral life must be based upon reciprocity with the living Earth. The ecological self of the protagonist is feminine and planetary: caring, intuitive and relational, but material, caring.

##### **3. Narrative as Environmental Praxis**

Another way in which storytelling can be environmental practice can also be seen in the fiction of Scoullar. The technique of narration its time-cyclical nature, sensual immersion, and the lyrical tone resemble ecological process and help the reader enter a participatory consciousness. Reading itself is then made an ethical involvement, a training of the imagination to be attentive.

Ecofiction as practiced by Greg Garrard and Scott Slovic, as they note, is not only a method of representation but a form of praxis: a form of developing ecological sensibility by way of narrative. *Turtle Reef* does this by blurring the aesthetic border between the subject and object of human beings and the nature. The form of the text is rhythmized in the reef; the absence of the text influences the pace of the story. By means of this stylistic ecology, Scoullar re-defines literary form as ecological pedagogy, as teaching readers to listen, to slow down, and to see interconnection.

It is this aesthetic humility, this hearing place, which is the moral core of the environmental vision of Scoullar. The final image of the novel the reef slowly rejuvenating in the moonlight reflects the concept of continuity: the idea that life, though delicate, recreates itself through the relationship. The spirit of place is thereby not a mystical abstraction but the ethic of care based on the sensuous world.

#### 4. Topophilia as Ethical Revelation

Finally, the revelation of relational being is the spirit of place in *Turtle Reef*. It educates that ethics is neither a form of abstract principle but a form of lived reciprocity with the more-than-human world. The health of the reef, the turtle surviving, and the constancy of the tide, demonstrate a moral order that is based on and not determined by hierarchical relationships.

Ecological selfhood in this vision is not the selflessness of individuality but rather the enrichment of the same by involvement. An ecological self is to experience the heartbeat of something other than human, to experience difference continuity. It is worth noting that perception, as Abram observes, is an ethical act; this is what Scoullar wants his protagonist to learn.

Through combining both phenomenological insight and narrative empathy, Scoullar is bringing the role of storytelling as moral ecology, as represented in ancient times, back to the fiction. Her writing is not preaching but a wake-up call; she breaks down the distinction between the reader and the world, creating a silent awareness of the fact that the very breath one draws in is that of the sea.

In this way, spirit of place is the principle of aesthetics and the ethical paradigm. It grounds the story on place and exposes it to universal song. In this sense, Scoullar makes the ecology of the coast not only Australian but global in its appeal to recall the fact that the Earth is not landscape but community.

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**SHAPING INDIA'S HEALTH FUTURE: POLICIES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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**Abstract**

The effectiveness of a nation's healthcare system has a significant impact on the country's overall health and economic success. India's very big population is a source of problems for the country, but at the same time, it is a source of tremendous potential for a healthier and more prosperous future. This debate will examine the policies necessary to nurture India's growth, while also examining the present and envisioning an even better future. The Indian healthcare system is plagued with a serious lack of access to medical care, an insufficient number of healthcare professionals, and a situation where many diseases are easily preventable but still have a high occurrence rate. The outbreak of COVID-19 has not only highlighted the challenges that healthcare systems were facing, but it has also made it urgent that these problems be addressed. To improve the health of people in India, it is indispensable to take a multi-pronged approach. One of the major objectives to achieve first is Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which means healthcare access without financial hardship for everyone. Additionally, it is crucial that money is invested in healthcare infrastructure, as it forms the foundation of the healthcare system, and without it, the goal will not be achieved. The plan focuses on building the necessary structure, training staff in hospitals and clinics, and providing services to communities. A qualified healthcare workforce should be developed if healthcare in India is to be improved, while at the same time, healthcare workers can be offered incentives to practice in various areas. Equally important is having a good health information system, as making decisions based on the collected data is the most efficient way to manage and allocate healthcare resources. Besides that, the main objectives of preventive care and health education should be to improve people's quality of life and reduce the ever-growing incidence of non-communicable diseases. To raise living standards in India, a comprehensive plan should be implemented. It is necessary to include in this program not only measures for the mental health awareness raising, but also for the better management of non-communicable diseases and for providing stricter regulations over the drug and medical device industries. Along with innovation and research, public awareness programs are central not only to achieving but also to maintaining progress over time. It is an ethical issue to take steps to help the most disadvantaged and, simultaneously, address the problem of health inequities. In fact, a well-thought-out plan of healthcare strategies must take into account not only pandemics, but also episodes of natural or man-made disasters. India's move towards improved health and well-being needs a clear, yet somewhat futuristic approach to policies. Above all, it is essential that the Indian authorities recognise that the health of the people is at the very core of their well-being and a major factor in social and economic progress. If the proposed policies are implemented effectively and without interruption, then India's population will be the primary beneficiaries of these changes, with their health improving over time. This certainly indicates a bright, vibrant future that will be accessible not only to the urban elites but to all segments of the country's population as well.

**Keywords:** Policy, COVID-19, Healthcare, Universal Health Coverage, Innovation

### **Introduction**

The healthcare industry in India finds itself at a crucial point where the recommendations of policies have the capacity to influence the health and overall well-being of a population exceeding one billion individuals. In a nation as diverse and populous as India, healthcare extends beyond being a mere public service; it is, instead, a fundamental entitlement of every human being, a driving force in the economy, and a pivotal gauge of societal progress. The necessity for well-informed, strategic, and forward-thinking policies in the healthcare sector has never been more apparent.

The healthcare system in India has undergone significant advancements over the last several decades. The National Health Policy of 2017, the National Rural Health Mission of 2005, the AYUSHMAN BHARAT PRADAN MANTRI JAN AROGYA YOJANA 2021, and other health-related initiatives and policies are updated periodically to ensure accountability and transparency in governance, improve service quality, and encourage local responsiveness. The burden of infectious and non-communicable diseases, as well as unequal access to healthcare services, are only two of the many challenges it still faces. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the healthcare system. An extensive range of policy solutions is necessary to address these issues and foster a healthy India.

This paper presents several policy recommendations that address the current state of India's healthcare system, while also outlining a vision for a more balanced and healthier future. A wide range of healthcare issues are covered by these recommendations, such as universal healthcare coverage, enhancing primary healthcare services, training the healthcare workforce, promoting the use of digital health technologies, establishing effective health insurance policies, promoting public-private sector partnerships, regulating pharmaceuticals and medical devices, addressing mental health issues, fostering innovation and research, raising health awareness, fostering equity, and disaster preparedness.

In the subsequent sections, we will examine each of these policy recommendations, analysing the current state of the healthcare industry in India and outlining the strategies necessary to drive progress. The ultimate objective of these policy recommendations is not solely the provision of healthcare but the augmentation of the overall well-being and quality of life for every citizen of India. A healthier India is not merely an ambition; it is imperative for the nation's sustainable development and the realisation of its demographic potential.

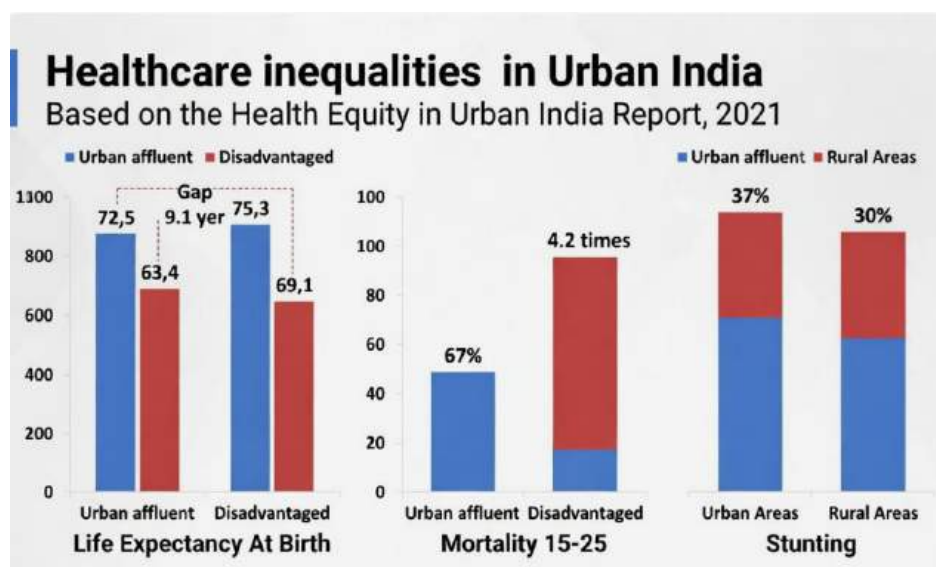
India's pursuit of a robust nation necessitates an all-encompassing policy outlook that recognises the existing circumstances while simultaneously envisioning a salubrious future. This manuscript aims to address the fundamental policy outlooks necessary to tackle the health challenges faced by India, with a focus on both the current state of healthcare and the aspiration for a healthier India.

### **The Reality of Indian Healthcare**

**Healthcare Inequalities:** India faces notable healthcare access inequalities, where individuals residing in rural areas and those who are economically disadvantaged often encounter limited access to high-quality healthcare services. The entitlement to receive high-quality healthcare services is an essential right that should be granted to every individual. Nevertheless, considerable disparities persist in India, particularly among populations residing in rural areas and those economically disadvantaged. These communities frequently confront significant obstacles when attempting to access the healthcare services they desperately require. This issue not only affects the welfare of individuals but also presents a substantial impediment to the nation's overall progress and advancement. It is of utmost importance that we confront and rectify these disparities, striving to ensure equitable access to high-quality healthcare services for all Indian citizens, regardless of their geographical location or socioeconomic status.

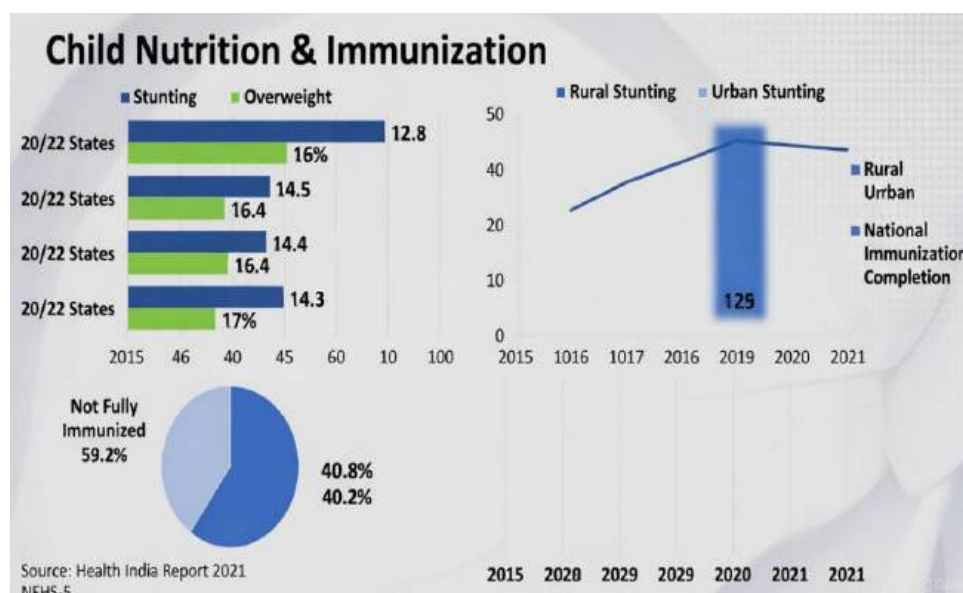
According to the recent report on Health Equity in Urban India, the life expectancy of individuals in the most economically disadvantaged stratum is reduced by 9.1 years for males and 6.2 years for females, compared to those in the most affluent socio-economic bracket residing in urban localities

(Mishra et al.). Moreover, individuals aged 15-20 and 20-25 face an increased susceptibility to mortality, with respective risks of 4.2 times and 5.5 times. This phenomenon may be attributed to limited accessibility to maternal healthcare services, along with a comparatively elevated prevalence of "adolescent pregnancy" and the ensuing "reproductive health hazards" among economically disadvantaged and migrant households residing in urban areas.



NFHS-5 data reveal a significant decline in the nutritional status of children under the age of five, spanning the years 2015-16 to 2019-20 (*National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) 2019-21*). During this time frame, the prevalence of stunting, characterised by a diminished height-for-age ratio, increased. Between 2019 and 2021, children in rural regions had a higher percentage of stunting (37%) compared to those in urban areas (30%). The report further highlights that 20 out of the 22 states and union territories observed in this study witnessed an escalation in the percentage of overweight children below the age of five.

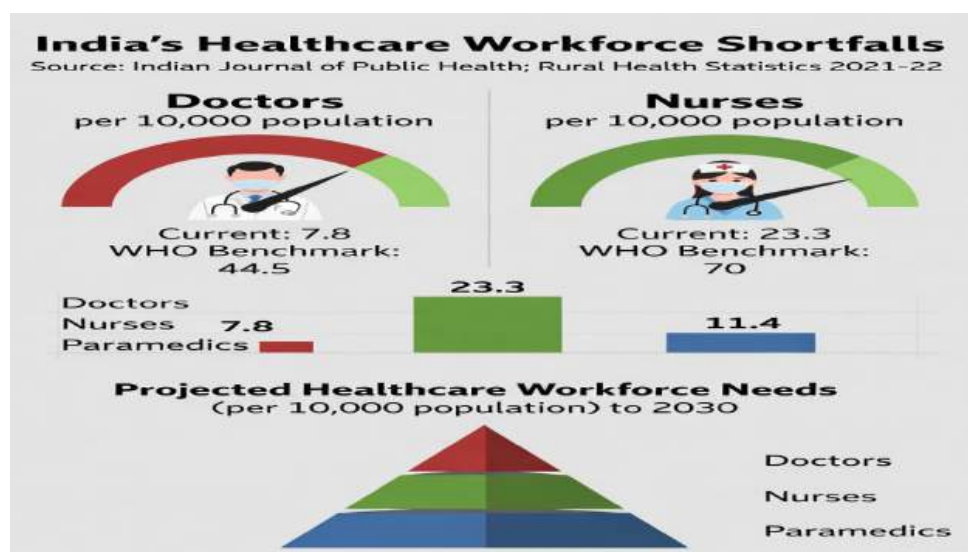
The **HEALTH INDIA REPORT 2021**, published by the National Statistical Office under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, showcases that merely 59.2% of children under the age of five throughout the nation have completed their immunisation regimen (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation). This implies that approximately two out of every five children fail to complete their prescribed immunisation schedule. Nationally, close to 97% of children receive at least one vaccination, primarily the BCG vaccine or the initial dose of the oral polio vaccine administered at birth. However, only 58% receive the polio booster dose, while merely 54% receive the DPT booster dose. In Delhi, less than half of all children are fully immunised. The alarming surge in malnutrition and the escalating prevalence of anaemia among women and expectant mothers strongly indicate that children born between 2015 and 2019 may be experiencing various deficiencies.



### Shortage of Healthcare Professionals

India is a nation characterised by vast heterogeneity and a profound cultural legacy. However, regrettably, it confronts an urgent concern: a shortage of healthcare practitioners. The shortage of physicians, nurses, and paramedical personnel has led to an inequitable allocation of healthcare resources, particularly in rural areas. This predicament has precipitated numerous communities contending with restricted access to superior medical assistance and jeopardised health consequences. The scarcity of healthcare practitioners in India presents a multifaceted issue. The rapid expansion of the population, combined with substandard infrastructure, has placed a substantial strain on the existing healthcare framework. In rural regions, where a substantial portion of the population resides, the situation is even more dire. Constrained educational and professional advancement prospects often prompt skilled practitioners to relocate to urban hubs or even foreign countries.

One of the most pressing issues is the disparity in the ratio of doctors to patients. According to the Indian Journal of Public Health, India is expected to require a total of 2 million doctors by 2030 (Potnuru et al.). Presently, a physician in a public hospital tends to approximately 11,000 patients, surpassing the World Health Organisation's suggested ratio of 1 doctor for every 1,000 patients. The doctor-population ratio in the country is estimated to be 1:834, taking into account the assumption of 80% availability of registered allopathic doctors and the presence of 5.65 lakh AYUSH doctors. Furthermore, there exists a total of 2.89 lakh registered dentists, 32.63 lakh registered nursing personnel, and 13 lakh Allied and Healthcare Professionals within the country. The nurse-to-population ratio is 2.06:1,000, which falls short of the global benchmark of 3:1,000.



India's ongoing battle with a shortage of medical practitioners, including physicians, nurses, and paramedical personnel, particularly in rural areas, is a pressing concern that requires prompt attention. By harnessing the power of technology and implementing effective policies, we can strive to provide accessible and equitable healthcare for the entire population.

#### **Infectious and Non-Communicable Diseases:**

The healthcare system is currently confronting an unparalleled predicament as it grapples with a dual burden of infectious ailments and the escalating prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and heart disease. This intricate quandary necessitates immediate attention and innovative resolutions to alleviate the strain on healthcare providers and ensure the well-being of individuals.

Infectious diseases have long been a concern for healthcare systems worldwide, necessitating prompt responses to contain outbreaks, administer timely treatment, and prevent the further spread of infections. However, in conjunction with these enduring challenges, we are witnessing a notable increase in NCDs, which pose equally significant threats to public health.

The escalating occurrence of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease not only exposes individuals to potential harm but also imposes a substantial strain on healthcare infrastructure. NFHS 5 data have shown that 12.4% of women and 13.6% of men were found to have diabetes, while 23.1% of women and 24.4% of men were found to have hypertension. The requirement for specialised treatment, diagnostic procedures, pharmaceuticals, and long-term supervision has recently experienced a significant upsurge. This sudden increase in instances has depleted resources and rendered it progressively challenging for healthcare practitioners to adequately address the demands of all patients.

#### **Healthcare Infrastructure:**

The unequal distribution of healthcare infrastructure is a pressing issue that continues to widen the gap between urban and rural areas. While urban regions boast cutting-edge medical facilities and advanced technologies, rural communities often struggle to access essential healthcare services. This evident disparity further aggravates healthcare discrepancies, placing individuals in rural regions at a significant disadvantage when it comes to receiving timely and high-quality medical

care. It is imperative that we confront this issue directly and strive for a more equitable allocation of healthcare resources to ensure that every individual, regardless of their geographical location, has equitable access to the healthcare they deserve. India has only 0.9 beds per 1,000 people, with 30% of those beds located in rural areas, according to the National Health Profile.

According to the Rural Health Statistics 2021–2022, the availability of medical experts and the sufficiency of facilities remain two major issues facing India's rural healthcare system. The lack of surgeons is 83.2%, obstetricians and gynaecologists are 74.2%, physicians are 79.1%, and paediatricians are 81.6%, making the shortage very severe. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of physicians working at Primary Health Centres (PHCs) decreased from 31,716 in the previous year to 30,640. Less than half of the Primary Health Centres, however, are open twenty-four hours a day ("Rural Health Statistics 2021-22").

#### **Policy Prescriptions**

Policy recommendations for promoting the well-being of India should encompass a broad spectrum of healthcare domains to effectively address the complex and diverse health challenges that the nation faces. Presented below are key policy prescriptions aimed at enhancing the health and overall well-being of India's population.

#### **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) has become a subject of great interest in recent years, and this is entirely justified. It embodies the notion that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, should have access to high-quality healthcare services without incurring any financial burdens. In other words, no individual should have to make the difficult choice between receiving vital medical treatment and enduring severe financial hardship. UHC plays a pivotal role in a nation's overall progress by alleviating poverty, enhancing productivity, and fostering societal harmony. Individuals with access to quality healthcare can lead healthier lives, thereby making valuable contributions to economic growth and stability (McKee et al.).

Thailand was among the few lower-middle-income countries to make such changes in 2001, when it introduced extensive coverage adjustments. According to the WHO, the government of Thailand covered 65% of healthcare spending in 2004, with the remaining 35% coming from private sources. Thanks to its strong public healthcare system, Thailand became the first nation in Asia to eradicate HIV transmission from mother to child in 2016 (Teerawattananon and Russell).

#### **Primary Healthcare Strengthening-**

Strengthening primary healthcare is a vital element in enhancing global healthcare systems. Allocate resources to the expansion and enhancement of primary healthcare services, encompassing the training and retention of healthcare professionals in rural regions, with the aim of facilitating early detection and management of diseases. Enlarge the network of primary health centres (PHCs) in underserved and rural areas to ensure proximity to healthcare services in terms of geographical location. Upgrade the existing PHCs by equipping them with state-of-the-art facilities and technology, rendering them well-prepared to address prevalent health concerns. Ensure that the PHCs offer a comprehensive range of healthcare services, including maternal and child healthcare, vaccinations, family planning, and the management of prevalent diseases. Foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among the community by encouraging their participation in the management and operation of PHCs. Implement accreditation mechanisms and conduct regular quality assessments to uphold exemplary standards of care and ensure patient safety.

#### **Health Workforce Development and Quality Assurance-**

Develop strategies to tackle the insufficiency of healthcare practitioners, promote engagement in underserved regions, and simplify the licensing process for healthcare workers who have received their training abroad. Establish accreditation and quality control measures to uphold exemplary



healthcare norms. Promote collaborations between the public and private sectors to enhance access to and quality of healthcare. The Japanese healthcare system is a prime example of the quality of healthcare systems. Japanese citizens have a longer life expectancy because of excellent healthcare delivery. We can observe a rural-urban divide in many countries, but physicians in Japan tend to prefer serving rural areas over urban ones.

#### **Health Insurance Expansion-**

To ensure comprehensive healthcare coverage for a broader segment of society, it is essential that health insurance schemes be expanded and improved. By doing so, it will be possible to protect families from the exorbitant expenses associated with medical care. The concept of the Health Insurance programme can be effectively elucidated through the examination of Taiwan's healthcare system. In 2017, Taiwan's overall national health expenditures accounted for 6.4 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with the National Health Insurance (NHI) constituting 53.7 per cent of this total, equivalent to approximately 3.4 per cent of the country's GDP. The primary responsibilities of the National Health Insurance Administration (NHIA) encompass the collection of premiums, risk-pooling, and remuneration of healthcare providers, as well as the supervision of healthcare utilisation, expenditures, and quality (Cheng).

#### **Digital Health and Telemedicine**

To bridge the healthcare delivery gap between urban and rural areas, digital technology and telemedicine can be leveraged to enhance access to healthcare services for individuals residing in remote locations. Establishing telemedicine centres in these remote locations is essential to achieving this. These facilities would be essential in providing thorough consultation services and facilitating required follow-up actions, enabling people in isolated areas to access the proper medical treatment they need. The Chunampet Rural Diabetes Prevention Initiative uses direct care and telemedicine to deliver complete diabetes screening, prevention, and treatment in rural India. During Maha Kumbh melas and other festivals, the Uttar Pradesh government also makes use of telemedicine.

#### **Preventive Care and Health Education**

To reduce the incidence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and lifestyle-related illnesses, it is crucial to implement comprehensive initiatives that encompass health education, preventive measures, and vaccination campaigns. These programs should be meticulously designed and executed to comprehensively address various aspects of health, thereby effectively targeting the root causes of these diseases. Furthermore, it is crucial to prioritise mental health services and the management of NCDs, as these are becoming increasingly burdensome due to the prevalence of lifestyle diseases in modern society. By placing emphasis on mental health and implementing well-structured NCD management programs, it is possible to alleviate the growing burden associated with these diseases and enhance overall public health. Run public awareness campaigns on various health issues, including family planning, nutrition, and vaccination.

#### **Public Health Surveillance**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Bank both acknowledge the significant role that public health surveillance plays within a comprehensive public health system, as highlighted in the World Bank's 2001 report. By integrating surveillance information with policy and program units, the overall performance and impact of health services can be significantly enhanced, leading to improved efficiency and effectiveness. This integration enables the identification and prioritisation of specific interventions tailored to address the population's needs, thereby increasing the likelihood of positive health outcomes. Furthermore, the documentation and evaluation of these interventions, along with their subsequent effects on the population, provide valuable insights into the overall effectiveness of the public health system. By continuously monitoring and analysing surveillance data, health authorities can make informed decisions and implement evidence-based strategies to better allocate resources and target interventions, ultimately resulting in a more responsive and impactful public health system. However, it is essential to recognise that the success of public health surveillance relies heavily on the availability and quality of data, as well

as the capacity and expertise of the individuals involved in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Therefore, investments in strengthening surveillance systems and building the necessary skills and infrastructure are crucial to ensure the continued effectiveness and sustainability of public health surveillance efforts. Brazil and Argentina deliberately decided to utilise financial assistance from the World Bank to enhance their ability to monitor and assess various aspects of their respective countries. In a similar vein, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) underwent a comprehensive overhaul of its surveillance approach, with a renewed emphasis on leveraging data to enhance the efficacy and impact of public health interventions.

#### **Research and Innovation**

Promoting medical research and fostering innovation are of utmost importance to advance the development of cost-effective healthcare solutions and treatments. By engaging in rigorous scientific investigations and explorations, researchers and scientists can make significant strides towards improving healthcare systems and discovering groundbreaking treatments and therapies. This not only benefits patients but also contributes to the overall progress of the medical field as a whole. Additionally, it is crucial to emphasise the development of robust healthcare systems that are capable of efficiently and effectively managing health emergencies and pandemics. By implementing comprehensive strategies and protocols, healthcare providers and policymakers can mitigate the impact of these crises and ensure the well-being of the population. This includes the establishment of effective communication channels, the provision of adequate resources and support, as well as the implementation of preventive measures to minimise the spread of diseases. Promoting medical research and innovation, as well as developing robust healthcare systems and strategies, are essential for advancing healthcare and improving public health outcomes. The primary areas of involvement under the EU's current research and innovation financing initiative, Horizon Europe, are Personalized medicine and health care systems are among the tools, technology, and digital solutions for health and care; non-communicable and rare diseases; infectious diseases, especially those linked to poverty and neglected diseases; and health across the life course (Rechel and McKee).

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the development and implementation of effective policy recommendations in the healthcare system field are crucial for achieving equitable, accessible, and high-quality healthcare services. The multifaceted nature of healthcare necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses the distinctive challenges and prospects within a particular framework.

Whether in India or any other region around the globe, the objectives remain constant: to enhance the health and well-being of the population, reduce disparities, and establish a resilient healthcare infrastructure. This entails a commitment to addressing immediate healthcare requirements and envisioning a healthier future that safeguards against emerging challenges.

The policy recommendations delineated whether concentrating on universal health coverage, strengthening primary healthcare, developing the healthcare workforce, digital health, preventive care, or other aspects collectively contributes to the overarching goal of a healthier society. These recommendations acknowledge the present realities while charting a course towards a more equitable and prosperous future.

It is essential to recognise that healthcare policy is an ever-evolving field. As new challenges arise, policies must adapt to meet the changing landscape of healthcare. Furthermore, the successful execution of these policies necessitates the involvement and collaboration of diverse stakeholders, including governmental bodies, healthcare professionals, civil society, and the private sector.

The Singaporean healthcare delivery system model offers valuable insights for India. A hybrid finance structure has enabled Singapore to achieve universal healthcare. It consists of a substantial private health sector enterprise and a publicly funded universal healthcare system run by the government. Medical expenses are covered through a combination of cost-sharing arrangements,

national healthcare insurance, mandatory comprehensive savings programs, and direct government subsidies. Singapore's national health spending was 4.47 per cent of GDP in 2016. Between 2009 and 2016, the government's share of health spending increased from approximately 32% to 41% due to expanded public subsidies aimed at reducing out-of-pocket expenses. Consequently, the out-of-pocket percentage of medical costs dropped from 43% to 31%. While the national average inflation rate for all goods and services was 2.3% between 2007 and 2017, Singapore's average annual inflation rate for healthcare was 2.6% ("MOH | Singapore's Healthcare System"). Ultimately, the effectiveness of healthcare policy recommendations is assessed based on the health outcomes, well-being, and quality of life of the population they serve. As these policies are implemented, their impact can be profound, not only on individual lives but also on the broader societal and economic fabric. A nation's health reflects its dedication to the welfare of its citizens, and well-crafted healthcare policies serve as the foundation of that commitment.

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**HUMAN, THE CO-INHABITANT OF NATURE IN JACK LONDON'S *JERRY OF THE ISLANDS***

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**Abstract**

From time immemorial, humans have tended to believe themselves to be superior and a replication of a divine entity. This sense of superiority helps humanity to sustain itself through the hardships and perils that prevailed down the ages. But the same ideology is reflected in their dominance over 'others'. The self-centered superior attitude of humans, which can be termed as anthropocentrism, creates hostility among humans and their relationship with nature. Climatic changes, hostile environment, depletion of resources, and sudden natural disasters are the ripple effects of humans' selfish attitude towards nature. Many corrective measures are undertaken in numerous fields to restore the forgotten amicable relationship with nature. Religion is a major instrument that contributes to constructing social, cultural, and traditional inputs of a society as well as a nation. Ecotheology is a branch of literary study that focuses more on humans' relationship with nature. Ecotheologians reassure humans that religion projects humans as caretakers or co-inhabitants of nature. This dogma may be widely seen in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, and all major religions of the world. All religions promote humans' role as caretakers and not the owners of the World. Eco critics warn humans not to inculcate human-centeredness in their relationship with nature. This paper tries to analyse the seminal concept of 'ecotheology' that states humans are the co-inhabitant of nature and its significant change in the human-nature relationship in Jack London's classic novel *Jerry of the Island*

**Keywords:** Anthropocentrism, Stewardship, Dominion, *Avatars / Incarnation*, Stewardship, Ecotheology

God has created a beautiful universe where everything is coherently connected. There is a great chain being followed by an order: God, nature, and humans. When the order is disrupted, there will be chaos. There should be respect for each living being can be rendered to each creature, starting from small to big. Care should be given to all animals and birds because all creatures help the natural cycle to maintain the equilibrium of the earth. Human and nature share the same environment for their period of existence. The bond between them is a peculiar one and a perennial issue of all time. The history of early times witnessed the intrinsic bond between humans and nature in all forms. It is evident in history that they shared a sacred space where everything is connected for the welfare of all things. It is very difficult to demarcate lines between nature and humans of early times because they lived in a congenial relationship with each other. In history, humans' amicability and intertwined life with nature are evident from early civilizations.

After civilization and the Renaissance, people tend to focus more on mankind. Their life slowly marched towards the welfare of mankind. Ancient philosophers and Judaic traditional ideologies led humans to a surreal state, where they believed that they were the superior race in the world. Humans tend to believe that they have 'intrinsic value' which is not found in nature. This superior attitude is the *hubris* of mankind that creates catastrophic effects in the harmonious relationship between humans and nature. The result is evident in all the sufferings that humans undergo in the present world, which include natural disasters, sudden climatic changes, depletion

of resources, scarcity, and changes in the atmosphere. The hostile reaction of nature creates an ominous effect in the minds of humans, where a lot of fruitful measures have been undertaken in all fields to renew the lost amicable relationship with nature. The major predominant field that aids in creating harmonious living with nature is religion.

Religious dogmas and belief systems act as a major contributing factor, which is more evident in shaping and formatting the lives of mankind throughout the ages. The lovers of nature turn towards the sacred Scriptures like the *Vedas*, the *Holy Bible*, and other religious texts to show how religion promises an interconnected relationship and harmonious life between humans and nature. This branch of learning is termed Ecotheology, a sub-branch of Ecocriticism, which is the study of humans and their relationship with nature. Ecotheologians insist that people should reread the Scriptures to understand how religion promotes sustainable and happy living. Ecotheology denies the fact that humans are the superior entity in this world. It condemns the so-called false notion that humans are a superior entity. Humans' superior attitude results in a dystopian state, which is evidently seen in the present world. All religions strongly affirm that God is the ultimate Creator and owner of this universe, in which humans are his creations. It is quite astonishing that these visionary religious ideas are seen in literary writers of all times, and one such writer is Jack London.

John Griffith London, who is fondly termed Jack London, is a prolific and unforgettable writer in the annals of early American literary tradition. He has written more than fifty novels in a short span of time. He is celebrated as a prolific writer beyond time for his lovable fictions, *The Michael Brothers of Jerry* and *White Fang*. His works are set in Northern California, and the quest for Klondike Gold Rush is the major drive of his stories. London's writing style is vividly encrypted with realistic aspects of his time. *Martin Eden*, *Valley of the Moon*, *Sea-Wolf*, and other novels proclaimed his faith in realism and survival. It is quite astonishing that a person who is an ardent follower of Darwin and Naturalism has depicted some religious ideologies in his writings. London has been widely recognised for his novels and short stories that are highly read for his artistic touch of the life of Northern California. The crux of London's novels is humans and their relationship with nature in terms of 'survival.' His *magnum opus* writings, *The White Fang* and *The Call of the Wild*, are evergreen classics of all time.

*Jerry of the Island* is a well-read and recognised novel by Jack London, which is known for the diminutive and artistic description of the relationship between humans and an Irish terrier named Jerry. This novel focuses on Jerry's life journey, the hardships and peril he encounters at the hands of strangers that shape his life. This novel is loved for the way Jerry relates to humans. The novel exposes the life of Jerry from a puppy to a mature dog. London depicts the transformation of Irish Terrier Jerry based on its relationship with humans in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, one can witness the happy life of Jerry in the hands of Mr. Haggins. Later, the dog gets passed into the hands of numerous people, which creates a major impact and transformation in the life of Jerry.

Jack London shows how humans' approach to the environment is reflected in the behaviour of Jerry. Many philosophers tend to believe the fact that humans and nature have a *quid pro quo* relationship with each other. The term *quid pro quo* is a Latin phrase that means reciprocal and mutual exchange of things. 'Domestication' is the practice and outcome of this concept. It is quite evident from the early histories that humans take care of nature, and they benefit from nature. Humans take care of cattle, horses, and sheep by feeding them; in return, they get benefits out of them. Later, this concept is interpreted in many forms. This sense of exchange, positively created for the benefit of both nature and humans, gives rise to human selfishness. Mankind starts to exploit nature and the resources they get from nature. The mutually respected beings are turned into a state of commodity, which results in disharmony, misuse of resources, and exploitation because of humans' self-centered nature and attitude. William, in his essay *Christianity, Western Philosophy and the Environment*, highlights the famous saying from Immanuel Kant as "so far as animals are concerned. We have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are merely a



means to an end. That end is man” (Sweet125). This concept expands to a state where humans tend to expose their superiority, which results in the exploitation of nature. Many Ecologists condemn humans for their selfish and exploitative nature towards nature. London’s *Jerry of the Island*, through its characters, shows how the greed and exploitative deeds of humans affect their harmonious relationship with Jerry.

Ecologists and Ecotheologians strongly oppose the idea of anthropocentrism, which arises from human selfishness and superiority. They strongly condemn the preconceived false notion acquired from early religious dogmas that humans are the superior race in the world. All religion states that the relationship between humans and nature should be based on God’s ownership. It is evident and implied in all religions that the supreme power that governs the cosmos is God. The *Holy Bible* states, “In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things have been created through him, and for him” (Colossians 1:16). God’s sovereignty is not only seen in Christianity but in all religious doctrines of the world. Though humans are focused on religion, they are not projected as the superior and highest entity. Religion affirms the three-tier relationship of God, human, and nature, which is widely seen in both the Eastern and Western religious principles and dogmas of all times. All three entities, God, humans, and nature, are intertwined with each other to form a harmonious environment is the core principle of ecotheology. It is an underlined fact that all things share their own space and role in the smooth functions of the Cosmos. The creation of God shows unity, and each entity is mutually connected in God for the well-being of the others.

The Hindu theology also believes and reiterates that all entities are united in God and share the same power and equal status among themselves. This idea is highly embedded in the *Vedas*. Hinduism proclaims the core idea that God is omnipresent and that everything in this world carries the aura of God. All beings, from amoeba to humans, have to be treated equally because they carry the identity of God is one of the doctrines of Hinduism. This idea of unification in God is strongly rooted in the ‘incarnation’/ *avatars* of God. God took all forms to save humans in different ages to highlight the core truth that he presents in all beings, and all need to be treated equally, irrespective of their state and role in the world. In *Human Responsibility and the Environment: A Hindu Perspective*, Dwivedi expresses this ideology as “He first incarnated Himself in the form of a fish, then a tortoise, a boar, and dwarf his fifth incarnation was a man-lion. As a man he was closely associated with monkeys, and as Krishna, he was always surrounded by cows; thus other species are accorded reverence” (22). This universal and moralistic idea is accepted by all religions around the world. It is irreproachable that all creatures in this world need respect and space to live because they carry the essence of God in them. It is undeniable and evident that all religions highlight and affirm the presence of God in all entities, from a tiny single-cell species to man. Religion believes that God, humans, and nature are intertwined with the divine order and respect. This theological core idea instructs and reiterates that all things in this world, from a single cell to humans, are formed in God and carry his reflection in them. Religion proposes the concept of ‘interconnectedness’ between nature and humans.

Ecologists strongly question humans’ ownership over nature in all aspects. They insist on the fact that humans are one of the species in the environment, and it is a fallacy that humans consider themselves superior to nature. Human beings are the co –co-inhabitants of nature who share the same ambience or world for their mutual survival and the benefit of each other, which is the major argument of the environmentalists. They insist that humans re-interpret their ethical stance in their relationship with humans.

This Ecotheological concept of co-inhabitant ideology is highly seen in London’s *Jerry of the Island*. The novel begins with a note that Jerry lived a comfortable and amicable life with humans. London provides a beautiful picture. The opening scene or the background aesthetically etched in a note where one can witness the harmonious and fullest happiness enjoyed by humans and nature. In London’s words,

Not until Mister Haggin abruptly picked him up under one arm and stepped into the sternsheets of the waiting whaleboat, did Jerry dream that anything untoward was happening to him. Mister Haggin was Jerry's beloved master and had been his beloved master for the six months of Jerry's life. Jerry did not know Mister Haggins as "master" for "master" had no place in Jerry's vocabulary...dogs think of their masters and love their masters more than the fact warrants. (London 01)

Jerry lived a happy and comfortable life in the place of Higgins. The relationship between Haggin and Jerry is not a master and dog relationship, but a kith and kin relationship. Jerry enjoys warmth and comfort in the hands of Haggins. The novel opens in a beautiful and aesthetic note where one can witness the harmonious and fullest happiness enjoyed by humans and nature. This passage alludes to the lost Edenic experience of human and nature, which can be seen in scripture. That utopian relationship is described in the Bible as:

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together; and a little child will lead them...The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD AS THE waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11: 6-9)

The same image and interconnected living are witnessed by the readers in the opening passage of the novel, which insists on the harmonious living of humans and nature.

Another character in the novel who strengthens his relationship with Jerry as a kin is Van Horn. The relationship between the two is not an ordinary one. Jerry loves Captain Van Horn beyond all measures. Jerry has a kind and loving heart towards Van Horn. Van Horn is a captain of a ship who is assigned to take care of Jerry by Mister Haggin. At first, Jerry considers Van Horn as a strange entity. Later, by his love and kind gestures, Van Horn wins the heart of Jerry. The main reason for his intimate affection with Jerry is that he never treats Jerry as a dog or an Irish Terrier. Jerry never sensed any uncomfortable feeling or strangeness in the hands of Van Horn. When the ship is about to wreck, Jerry's heart longs for Van Horn, who is fondly called as skipper. This strange, intimate relationship between a dog and a human is expressed by the writer as;

And he swam, not to save his life, not with the fear of death upon him. There was but one idea in his mind. *Where was Skipper?* Not that he had any thought of trying to save skipper, nor that he might be of assistance to him. It was the heart of love that drives one always towards the beloved. As the mother in catastrophe tries to gain her babe, as the Greek who, who, dying, remembered sweet Argos, as soldiers on a sticken field pass with the names of their women upon their lips, so Jerry, in this wreck of a world, yearned towards Skipper (London 29).

Jack London shows the interconnected relationship between Jerry and Van Horn. It is quite surprising that animals' love towards humans is selfless in nature. Despite its suffering, Jerry longs for the safety of the Skipper. London, through this incident, shows the value and need of interconnectedness between humans and nature through Van Horn and Jerry.

Humans' interconnectedness with nature happens only when they realize they are the co-creation of nature. This interconnectedness lasts long between humans and nature. There is evidence in a story where Jerry hates the leader of the clan because he murdered Skipper. Jerry lost Skipper and missed his presence in life. Jerry's love for Van Horn is explicitly seen in an incident where Jerry comes across the mortal remains of Van Horn. Its unfailing love is expressed in the words of the writer as,

Last of all, sharpest of bite in his thought, was the head of Van Horn. And it was the head of Van Horn. And it was the head of Van Horn that lay on his knees under his contemplation when Jerry, who possessed the freedom of Somo, trotted into Bashti's grass house, wailed first in woe over it, then bristled into rage. (London 89)

Jerry's love for Van Horn was so intimate and beyond time because of his relationship with Jerry.

Another idea that supports the concept that nature is a co-creation with humans is reflected in the same incident when Jerry mourns the death of the Skipper. London did not show any demarcation between the emotions of Jerry and humans. It is quite evident through Jerry's emotional attachment to Skipper London, reiterating the idea of treating nature as a co-creation. He subtly questions the so-called rooted humans' notion of belittling nature based on a lack of intrinsic value. London, through Jerry's love and longing for Van Horn, shows the important key idea that animals too have feelings and emotions towards humans, and like humans, they have some emotional attachment towards them as quite nature as humans do. This is etched by the words of London as:

It was like man. It knew hunger and pain, anger and love. It had blood in its vein like man that a thrust in a knife could make redly gush forth and denude it to death. Like a race of man it loved its kind, and birthed and breast- nourished its young. And passed. Ay, it passed; for many a dog, as well as a human, had he, Bashti devoured hey -dey of appetite and youth. (London 89)

It is quite evident that humans and nature share the same sort of emotions among themselves. As a man of scientific and realistic mindset, London stresses the importance of treating animals as a co-creation by understanding their feelings and emotions. He subtly comments that humans' superiority over others hinders their relationship with nature.

The major reason for today's ecological crisis is humans' lack of understanding that they are not a superior entity. Humans' superiority results only in a dystopian state. Humans should rethink their ideology that the world is solely created for their life and sustenance. They should realise they are the co-inhabitants and co-creators of nature. The lack of this awareness results in disharmony.

Anthropocentric attitudes of humans resulting in disharmony are highly evident in Jerry's relationship with Agno. Agno is a master of a clan. His attitude towards animals and fellow humans is rude in nature. Jerry fell into the hands of Agno when he killed Van Horn. Jerry sensed a kind of strangeness in the hands of Agno. Agno's attitude is reflected in his behaviour towards Jerry. London shows that this enmity is the result of a human-centered attitude.

But he bore no love for his masters. Agno, who had ruled by fear so long in the house of mystery, did not know love. Nor was affection any part of him, nor was geniality. He had no sense of humour, and was as hostile as an icicle. Next to Bashti he stood in power, and all his days had been embittered in that he was not first in power. He had no softness for Jerry. Because he feared Bashti he feared to harm Jerry. (London 86)

The attitude of Agno towards Jerry differs based on circumstances and people. This made Jerry not to show love towards him. Jerry can sense the double-standard attitude of Agno by the way he behaves in front of Jerry. The relationship between Jerry and Agno is not a good one because it lacks integrity and is coated with selfishness.

The other character that strengthened the idea that anthropocentrism ruins human-animal relationships is Bashti. He is projected as an arrogant and selfish man by London. He assists Agno in all affairs of their clan, and he is one of the deciding members of the spiritual affairs of the clan. Bashti's crooked behaviour is highly seen in the way he changes the religious dogmas of the clan. He changes the law to suit his own benefit. In order to have an egg of a rare species, he made the bird a sacred being, and the eggs belong to him, who is more spiritual in nature. In the case of Jerry, Agno decides to kill it and make it as *kai- kai* means to eat it. But Bashti decides to keep the dog alive for his selfish motive. He strongly believes that white men's dogs are more courageous and resist anything compared to other dogs. He considers Jerry a reward for his long thirst for creating a breed that surpasses every animal of the clan. He decides to keep Jerry for breeding purposes. Jerry sensed a kind of strange and fishy attitude in Bashti. Throughout the novel, it hates Bashti because of his selfish and greedy nature towards Jerry. London record this incident as

Since all black men's dogs were cowards, all the breeding of all black men's dog would produce cowards. White men's dogs were courageous fighters. When they were bred

they produce courageous fighters .Very well, and to the conclusion, namely, here was a white man's dog in the possession. The height of foolishness would to eat it and destroy for all time that courage resides in it ...the wise thing is to ws to regard it as a seed dog, to keep it alive so that in the coming generations of Somo dogs its courage would be repeated over and over and spread until all somo dogs would be strong and brave. (London 84)

This intended motif of Bashti is sensed by Jerry. Bashti's selfish approach results in disharmony because in all incidents Jerry hates Bashti for his hypocritical attitude towards him. London strongly emphasis the idea that animals can sense the motif of human towards them. The end result of selfish relationship of human with nature is only disharmony.

God has created a beautiful universe where everything is mutually connected and intertwined with each other. There is a great universal cycle of beings in an orderly manner: When the order of the universe gets disrupted, there will be chaos. There should be respect for each living being in the cosmos. Importance should be given to all flora and fauna, including animals and birds, because all creatures help to maintain the equilibrium of the Earth. Man helps animals, and animals in turn. From the history of all ages, animals have been given important roles in literature as well as in reality. Wild animals are very ferocious in nature, helping nature to recycle its conventional process.

Domestic animals, on the other hand, live in harmony with humans. Though the animals are sans sixth sense, they can assist humans in many ways. They can do all sorts of duty rendered to humans. But humans, in turn, disrespect the creatures in all ways. They brutally murder animals to feed their stomach. They kill them in abundance; as a result, there should be a depletion in the life cycle. Humans are facing an inevitable ecological crisis now. The reason is the overwhelming greediness of humans who destroy natural orders to mint money. Human are the only creatures that can destroy all to satisfy their egotistical sustenance. They have no scruples to kill animals and birds because they think that animals are not the cohabitants of humans. Though Jack London has little belief in religion, he underlines an important aspect in handling the crisis that has been facing by ego-centered humans. He follows the path of Darwin, who stresses the importance of cyclic evolution. According to Jack London the evolution is a progress of civilization and not an annihilation of insignificant animals and other creatures.

Though religion teaches morals and values, humans are unaware of what they practise in reality. They disregard what God says and teaches. The plea of Ecotheologians and religion is to create a healthy environment where nature and humans live freely and amicably. The realization of the human state as a co-creation is not a band-aid solution to the ecological crises and a move towards sustainable and harmonious life. Through his work *Jerry of the Island*, London reiterates the idea that humans' realisation of their role as a co - co-creation will create a huge impact on the life of nature. And humans play a major role in nature. It is prudent on the part of humans to consider nature as a co -co-inhabitant to form a sustainable living for future generations. It is undeniable that human stewardship creates a world which is described in the Bible as

He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; And wine that makes the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart. The trees of the LORD are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted; where the birds make their nests: as for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies. He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth he is going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they

gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. O LORD, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. (Psalms 104 - 11-24)

This paper underscores the importance of humans and their relationship with nature. It urges humans to reconsider their role in the world, not as selfish and superior beings but as cohabitants to preserve the future of nature and humans. Through ample evidence from the scripture and *Jerry of the Islands*, it is undeniable that the only thing that evades the present ecological crisis is human stewardship and their recognition of animals and nature. This will restore the lost paradise that humans dreamt of, and to live a sustainable life with nature and animals in a harmonious and organic way. It is prudent on the part of humans to choose the right path to build a better future.

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**RIGHTS OF NATURE AS STORY: USING ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES TO  
RETHINK LEGAL PERSONHOOD**

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**Abstract**

The Rights of Nature (RoN) movement defies human-centered paradigms by extending legal persons to non-human entities such as rivers, forests, and mountains at a time when ecological disasters call for new legal models. Employing narrative patterns to anthropomorphize the non-human and foster ethical relationality, this research recasts RoN as a narrative strategy in environmental humanities, as opposed to merely being a theological instrument. Through an examination of paradigmatic cases, including Ecuador's 2008 constitutional acknowledgment of Pachamama and New Zealand's 2025 personification of Mount Taranaki, we explore how family and indigenous discourses reimagine legal persons as a biocultural imperative instead of a contractual chimera. The 2017 Whanganui River Te Awa Tupua Act, which utilizes Māori whakapapa (genealogy) to enact riverine agency, is an instance of how such narratives in turn dismantle colonial legacies of extraction from the perspectives of environmental humanities, e.g., ecocriticism and multispecies ethnography. Nonetheless, there are still ambiguities: To align legal fictions with living ecologies, a 2025 study suggests "fuzzy" applications in which conflicts of communities arise from required guardianship. To promote Earth-centered governance, this work suggests a "narrative jurisprudence," which requires hybrid courts that engage literary and oral testimony while grounding the positivism of law in the poesis of the humanities. Finally, RoN becomes a storytelling ethics that dares legislators to adopt constitutions that would hear the voice of the land and transform legal personhood into a planet stewardship ethic.

**Keywords:** Environmental Humanities, Nature's rights, Narrative Jurisprudence, Legal Personhood, Decolonial Storytelling, Ecocriticism

It is environmental crises that have led to a radical recontextualization of the anthropocentric nature of law. Over the last twenty years, a worldwide Rights of Nature (RoN) movement has emerged which provides rivers, forests, and mountains with legal personhood status. As an example, *the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador* acknowledges the rights of Pachamama (also known as Mother Earth) and ecosystems per se. In 2017 and in 2025, the Whanganui River and the Mount Taranaki were recognised in New Zealand as an indivisible and living whole and a legal person respectively to treat it as a sacred Maori site. In India, even the sacred Ganges was a momentarily personified being in 2017 (only to be overturned). These changes are not just the policy fads but reflect the new paradigm of Earth-centered or ecological governance. Whereas industrial modernity viewed nature as an object of property or commodity, in RoN initiatives nature is the subject of law.

However, much discussion of Nature's rights has been technical or theological, e.g. debates about standing and guardianship, and has paid less attention to the deeper *cultural and narrative dimensions* of this shift. In this paper we draw on Environmental Humanities to recast Rights of Nature as a narrative strategy. Environmental Humanities (EH) is an interdisciplinary approach that bridges ecology, literature, history, and culture. It emphasizes storytelling, ethics, and "more-than-human" perspectives. From this viewpoint, granting personhood to a river is a way of *telling a story* about kinship and obligation, not merely creating a legal fiction in the usual sense. We show how RoN cases worldwide invoke *indigenous and family narratives* to transform



legal personhood into a biocultural imperative. Then we analyze the limits of current RoN law, for example, conflicts among multiple guardians or the state's slow follow-through and propose a bold "*narrative jurisprudence*" that integrates art, oral tradition, and empathetic storytelling into environmental law.

Our argument proceeds in four parts. First, we outline how EH theory and legal scholarship frame rights of nature (relying on leading cases and literature). Second, we examine key RoN cases through an EH lens: Ecuador's Pachamama clause (2008), New Zealand's Whanganui River Act (2017) and Mount Taranaki law (2025), and India's Ganga/Yamuna rulings (2017). Each case illustrates how *narrative frames*, often rooted in indigenous worldviews, animate legal personhood. Third, we discuss emerging problems: the "fuzzy" boundaries and guardianship dilemmas identified in recent studies. Fourth, we propose an EH-inflected reform: hybrid courts and *story-driven* processes that explicitly honor oral histories and ecological imagination. Throughout, we emphasize original analysis of how storytelling reshapes legal categories. By the end, Rights of Nature emerges not merely as a legal novelty but as a *call to reimagine law itself as story*, hearing the voice of the land and redefining personhood as *planetary stewardship*.

*Environmental Humanities and the Rights of Nature*

The idea of the Rights of Nature has become increasingly viral: as of 2024, scientists identify close to 500 nonhuman law-definitive efforts around the globe (such as bills, judicial decisions, and policy act declarations). These rights are in the form of rivers and forests to extensive ecosystems. They are a product of an ecological justice ethos: according to one commentator, RoN paradigm tries to prioritize Nature and its demands over human demands, subjugating human actions within the constraints of Earth. The extension of legal personhood and guardianship changes the form of governance to one that is more ecological, where humans are not necessitating of nature.

It is worth noting that most of the reforms of the Rights of Nature are thoroughly grounded in indigenous cosmologies. An example is that the constitutional framers of Ecuador relied on the Andean local myths of Pachamama and *sumak kawsay* ("good living"). The preamble of the Constitution of 2008 states the promise to live in harmony with the nature, to realize the right of nature to live and regenerate. In that Constitution, article 7 then provides ecosystems with a similar right to legal persons. According to scholars, this is a deliberate abandonment of extractivist models, which preconditions earth-centered governance. Effectually, nature was anthropomorphized, it was brought into the narrative by the law: the law invites citizens to perceive Pachamama as the life-bearing subject, but not an object.

In its turn, the environmental humanities offer means of perusing such legal texts and events as narratives. Ecocriticism and associated disciplines are the investigation of the impact of narratives on ecological thought. Saying that law is narrative, we acknowledge the fact that legal change is premised on metaphors and myths. As an example, the theorists state that the transformation of the perception of nature as property into the perception of nature as kin entails re-storying law imaginaries. One current study reveals that rights of nature tend to be introduced by narratives humanizing the nonhuman: climate litigants and activists, as an illustration, construct a narrative to help give moral and emotional appeal to otherwise technical law. On the same note, the environmental law academics are calling on striking a balance between cold precedent and poetic justice to address the voices of the marginalized and the more-than-human communities.

To put it briefly, EH implies that the Rights of Nature should be viewed as a sort of narrative law: they transform natural objects into characters of the law with ancestry, rights, and fates. Instead of the abstract environment, these reforms bring living protagonists (rivers, forests, mountains) and their cultural narratives and sacred lineages. Not entirely romanticism: as the U.S. environmental jurist Christopher Stone has long contended, the environmental ecosystem, as with corporations, may acquire legal standing in order to protect their interests. But EH shows the manner in which such fictions are appealing: they address fundamental human impulses to anthropomorphic thinking and kinship. Numerous native and local histories imagine rivers and

mountains as either ancestors or part of the community. One Maori value, such as states, proclaims "Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au" that is, I am the river and the river is me. These cases re-establish the concept of personhood as a biocultural necessity by narrating the story of the law of nature, rather than a fictional contract.

*Case Studies: Narrative Paradigms in Law*

**Ecuador's Pachamama (2008-Present)**

The best constitutionally entrenched RoN experiment is found in Ecuador. That Nature, or Pachamama, in which life is reproduced and takes place, was entitled to an integral respect to its existence and that its life cycles should be sustained and regenerated was enshrined in its new Constitution (Chapter 7) in 2008. It was a provision unprecedented in the world, that was clearly of an indigenous nature: it referred to *sumak kawsay* (good living), and promised the state to coexist with nature. Placing ecosystems on par with rights-holders, the Ecuadorian lawmakers altered the legal basis of development to the Earth-centered ethic rather than the regulation.

The Pachamama provision had a bearing in many cases. The constitutional court of Ecuador decided in 2021 in the Los Cedros cloud-forest case, to cancel mining licenses, claiming the constitutional rights of nature. The Court said that exploratory mining would infringe the rights of the forest to exist and to regenerate through healthy life cycles and therefore interfered with the right to a healthy environment and infringed the rights of the forest itself. Such a story of justice actually had its implications: a month after the decision, the entire mining practice came to a halt in Los Cedros, and there is no mining infrastructure left. This has seen the forest being a cradle of biodiversity and water flourish. Because of this ruling, Los Cedros, as activists state has continued to serve as the source of water and life to both the nonhumans and humans.

Nonetheless, the Ecuador experience has its tensions, as well. There has been an uneven implementation, which hints that the process of calling nature person may be conflicting with the current governance. The decision of Los Cedros was not followed by a new management plan, and the inclusion of local communities was slow in the government ministries, which placed an unequal responsibility on scientists and local stewards. Practically, the expenses were transferred to NGOs and villagers instead of the state, a fuzzy and weak result that can happen to law as anthropologist Elizabeth Grosz cautions when an abstract personhood of law is implanted onto living ecologies. According to one of the reports, the advantage of the strategy adopted by Ecuador was that essential mining ceased in an instant, whereas its disadvantage was low-quality systemic reform: corporate and governmental compliance proved incomplete, and local communities were left to become *de facto* custodians.

Ecuador narrative experiment is still strong, however, in EH perspective. It appealed to Ecuadorians by appealing to the concept of Pachamama and *buen vivir* to reconsider economic choices in terms of family and spirituality. The success at Los Cedros, despite its flaws, demonstrates that calling the forest a person with name and rights is an effective technique that can help to prevent the destruction in a manner that the usual regulation system failed to do. Within the context of EH, the model of Ecuador provides the country with a unifying narrative concerning its land: a continuing drama, with the forest as protagonist, man as kin-guardian, and development as renewing itself instead of being conquered. In our application, Ecuador implies that the legal fictions based on cultural narrative may be translated into the actual protection, when the state is supportive of the new stewardship functions.

**Whanganui River and Ngā Tangata Whenua (2017)**

The Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017 of New Zealand is commonly recognised as a successful river personhood law. The river of the mountains to the sea identified by the Act as an indivisible and living whole, and consisting of the Whanganui River... and the physical and metaphysical components of the river, is given under the Act all the rights, and duties and liabilities of a legal person. This broad language is a Maori concept of the river

being an ancestor as well as a member of the community. In fact, Nga iwi (tribes) of the Whanganui River had a long history of using the whakatauki (proverb) "Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au" that is, I am the River, and the River is me.

The politics behind the case is very important: this legislation was a treaty settlement with Whanganui Maori that was aimed at repairing centuries of dispossession. The settlement provides the river with a legal personality, which recognises the mana (authority) of rivers and their entrenchment in the iwi whakapapa (genealogy). It is worth noting that this act of transforming Whanganui River into a legal person was in part simply a technical mechanism: it solved a problematic ownership dilemma by establishing a new non-ownership. The Act renders the river out of the ordinary relations of property, not discussing who owned it, but permitting co-management. The river in effect lacks ownership by the Crown or Maori of the river, but has rights over the river.

These implications are tangible results of this reinterpretation of narratives. The status of a river as a legal entity must now be acknowledged and accommodated by the decisionmakers under the New Zealand resource management act. In reality, the Act formed a council of government and iwi representatives to represent the river. Te Awa Tupua as a legal person is also able to file law suits in its guardians, but this would have been impossible with a simple resource. These new rights are based on cultural significance: Whanganui Maori consider the health of the river and part of themselves and their wellbeing. According to one commentator, the Act changes the relationship among questions of ownership and governance, which is responsive to Maori notions of personhood.

The case of the Whanganui is a prototype, through the EH perspective: the narrative that the river is related to humans and vice versa is set clear. The law adds more than just imitating the social norms by legally adopting the Maori proverb that states that the river is me. Whanganui is made law person with whom Nga iwi are obliged to exercise care, the way a parent is to a child, or a child to an ancestor. This is in sharp contrast to Western environs law instrumentalism. The narration technique in this case is evident: personhood is employed to re-introduce indigenous epistemology into legislation. It also aims at helping the broader society to consider Whanganui not as a fragment of infrastructure but a relative common good.

*Mount Taranaki / Taranaki Maunga (2025)*



Another use of the story-driven approach is the Grant of Legal Personhood of Mount Taranaki in New Zealand in 2025. Parliament enacted a settlement act which acknowledges the fact that there is deep connection between Maori and their ancestral land. The law gives Taranaki a similar right and responsibility under the law as an individual. Political speeches with which the bill was accompanied, the leaders described the move as the release of the Maori people out of the vise of colonial injustices, e.g. one Maori parliamentarian declared that today Taranaki would be released out of the shackles... of confiscation. Concretely, the mountain interests are now shared by a council of representatives (a replication of the Whanganui model).

The legislature acknowledged the status of Taranaki as a sacred ancestor by making it a legal person. The description in the story is instructive: the Act does not call Taranaki an object, but considers it to be able to hold rights. This gives credence to the notion that Taranaki possesses its own moral and legal force. Environmentalists observe that this will be precedent in other locations, which will contest the traditional legal principles that historically perceived nature as a property.

The Taranaki law specifically uses the image of family and kinship as viewed through an EH angle. The position of Taranaki is not received on contractual or utilitarian basis but rather on its ancestral value. The personhood of the mountain is directly associated with grievances over stolen land and broken covenants by the officials. Narratively, the mountain is the eldest son coming back with his honor. It is powerful story telling: to the greater part of Maori, Taranaki is not some dead land, but a living creature with a mauri (life force). The form of personhood, as law is a legal act, is the enactment of that belief in law. Once again, the genre of personhood is a fiction, though based on precolonial narrative, it is story made statute.

### **Indian Rivers and Hindu Cosmology (2017)**

In India, which is much closer to home, there have been comparable moves, laced with religious-cultural narrative. In 2017 the Uttarakhand High Court shocked the observers by ruling the river Yamuna and Ganga to be alive. The court adhered to Hindu imagery of deity: it referred to Ganga as Ganga Mata (mother) and life-giving to one half of the people and focused on religion and cultural affiliation. The rivers were given all the right, duties and liabilities as a person and the top officials of the state government became their protectors. This turned the sacred rivers into targets of the law in a manner that normal pollution laws had never done.

But this story-offering decision did not last long. India appealed and within months, the Supreme Court overturned it, stating that the conversion of status of rivers could not be done through judicial prerogative but through legislation. There were also critics on the question of attaching blame to floods or pollution in case rivers are persons. However, the Uttarakhand decision is a kind of indigenized storytelling event: it re-constructed the Ganges not as a resource but as a respected family member, internalized in the mind of the population in the form of Ganga-ji. Although the method of the court was juristically refuted, it demonstrates the power of the Indian case of framing nature as a relative in an Indian environment. It also prefigures the continuing arguments regarding who is actually representing these spirits (the state, pilgrims, ecologists), which is also essentially narrative.

Overall, these cases (along with other cases across the world) show that there is a tendency: the rights-of-nature laws tend to rely on another narrative of the natural world. Instead of bringing individuals closer together in their atomized state, they appeal to community, ancestry and duty. Family and identity are metaphors of post-legal personhood.

#### *Analysis: From Contracts to Kinship, Tensions and Ambiguities*

The juxtaposing image brings out prospects and risk. On the one hand, the narratives of Mother Earth, "I am the river," of the mountains of ancestors, all lead to legal ethos of reciprocity and respect. The rights of nature in the present case have an ethical relationality they articulate that humans and nonhumans belong to an interdependent web. According to one of the geographers, RoN law is based on the belief that people are related to Nature, and not Nature as a source of a hoard of natural resources. That is to say, such stories require compassion and sympathy rather than abstraction.

Conversely, when the abstract story is subjected to hard governance, it becomes hard. Most critics observe that the existing RoN programs are still stuck in positivist law: the law code acknowledges personhood, yet current bureaucracies and courts are unable to fit the new story. Indeed, the Whanganui Act has to continue working alongside the current resource legislation of New Zealand, and the officials must identify and safeguard the status of the river. On the same note, the Constitution of Ecuador provides that nature may possess rights, but the rights remain liable to statute and regulation. The hybrids grow messy and hairy. According to a recent interdisciplinary study, RoN tends to be a so-called boundary object: individuals tend to assign various, even contradictory meanings to it.

Multiple guardianship is an acute issue. In the creation of a nature-person by law, human guardians or trustees are often appropriated. But who guards? In Ecuador, compliance was monitored by a government ministry under the name Los Cedros decision where much of the responsibility was placed on scientists and activists. The case in the Ganges River in India set up the state officials as custodians of the river but the state appealed. In other places, there are plans to grant lawful rights to Godavari, Tagus or even the atmosphere; but who will defend them, the finance minister or the environment ministry? The story of the guardian may be in opposition to the bureaucratic reality without well-defined institutional frameworks. This, we could say, is the Fuzzy Guardianship paradox, the law narrates of a proactive guardian, but the contemporary state is often passive, so the agents of the community must step in, often with a heavy price.

Other issues include oral or indigenous testimony translation to court. The EH lens is there to make us remember that much of the important story of nature lies in oral tradition or

visual, rather than written briefings. Present day courts (Stevenson 2025 hearsay exceptions excepted) normally require written evidence, omitting much indigenous knowledge. As an example the Whanganui Act drew on centuries of tribal lore, yet will be enforced through legal language and science. This, in practice, can push aside the very narratives which are what justified personhood to begin with. According to legal scholars of indigenous law, respectful engagement must include new evidentiary practices (story gathering, cultural hearings) and open-minded judges who will take the time to listen beyond the usual witness evidence. Otherwise, the judicial application of RoN rights can just push the indigenous narratives to an afterthought at the price of their transformative strength.

Lastly, there is a clash of values. Cases of rights of nature tend to call on obligation rather than freedom, which is ecological embeddedness. What one law review article hints us may be true is that we may even come to substitute rights-talk by duties-talk, as obligations are more capable of expressing our entanglement in the natural world. This is implicitly done under the law in Ecuador and New Zealand, in which nature is granted rights with human duties to take care. Most legal systems are however still founded on liberal rights ideas and agreements. The appeal of RoN is narrative, so it fails when it is just a legal fiction and not accompanied by a corresponding change in values. Opponents are concerned that absent such a change, personhood rights can be formal, rhetorically effective but practically impotent. We do not need to agree that fate, however, it demands the incorporation of narrative on a deep level in institutions.

*Toward Narrative Jurisprudence and Earth-Centered Courts*

Based on these insights, what could be the way law could evolve? We would propose a narrative jurisprudence or story based law, as an addition to standard courts. It would entail, on the one hand, the development of hybrid adjudicatory spaces in which narratives and oral testimony can be given a sense. Consider situations when tribal elders, poets, or local storytellers might give an account of the meaning of a mountain, together with scientific reports. Such narrative hearings might add to the cultural and spiritual depth of knowledge of the judges. In indigenous land courts or truth commissions, which handle evidence in similar ways, similar methods exist. A narrative environment court could sit on request whenever there was a RoN dispute and perhaps anthropologists or ethicists would be consulted. The point is to base the positivism of statute on the poesis of humanistic interpretation.

Secondly, literary and artistic sources could become actively involved in the law. An example of this is that a court would be required by a constitutional amendment to consider indigenous tales and ecological narratives when adjudicating on environment cases. This could entail practical steps such as judges reading founding stories (such as Pachamama myths) and using them to pass judgment as some use religious or philosophical texts. It could also include legislative storytelling, such as environmental agencies publishing annual reports, such as the Story of the River, which are health-focused, but which are stories, told by people, rather than by statistics. These would not weaken legal certainty to the extent of expansion of the fabric of what is considered to be a fact.

Third, we also promote reforms in education. Ecocritical literature and multispecies ethnographies would be able to enter law schools and juries. Creative writing about law, as Patricia Williams and other legal academicians have been demonstrating, can show how our law fictions structure reality. In case judges, lawyers, and policymakers can be trained to think in narratives it is possible that the fuzzy dissonances of the RoN law can be resolved.

These recommendations are idealistic, yet they indicate a direction of an ethical narrative responsibility. Rather than simply apply contractarian ideas to nature in a dry manner, a narrative jurisprudence would force the law to interrogate the moral of a story: who is the speaker, who is the hearer, what are their duties, etc. We are not suggesting science or environmental economics be abolished, instead we are suggesting that it be supplemented with poetic justice. Within the finest tradition of environmental humanities of ecocritical fiction to New Materialist philosophy law would be more of a collaborative narrative project.



### **Conclusion**

Rights of Nature has often been cast as a fringe idea, a utopian legalism inspired by religion or sentiment. We have argued that, at its heart, it is a storytelling ethic. When Ecuadorians reconceived Pachamama as a constitutional person, or when Māori leaders declared “*I am the river*”, they were not naively confusing myth with law. Rather, they were daring the legal system to change its story. They wove kinship into the cold fabric of jurisprudence. Those stories bear a question: will legislatures and judges listen?

The environmental humanities insists they should. Climate change and biodiversity collapse are as much crises of imagination as of physics. If law cannot hear the voices of the wild, it will never truly protect them. This means retooling our concept of personhood to include *the more-than-human*. The cases we have seen tell us that constitutions *can* be rewritten to “hear the voice of the land.” But it will take narrative courage: respecting ancient legends, inviting novel legal forms, and imagining a citizenry that includes mountains and rivers. In practice, this may look like new constitutional provisions, innovative statutes, or even international recognition of nature’s standing. It may look like courtrooms that convene elders and artists to testify as experts on forests and reefs. And it may look like communities that celebrate environmental jurisprudence through ceremonies and stories. This *planetary stewardship ethic* is the story we hope law will tell next, one where humans learn to be relatives rather than conquerors. After all, as one Māori proverb warns, if we do not listen to the river’s story, we may drown in our own.

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**SACRED LANDSCAPES AND TRIBAL ECOLOGIES: INDIGENOUS  
ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS IN THE KANTARA FILMS**

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**Abstract**

Environmental Humanities has emerged as a vital interdisciplinary field that examines how cultural narratives, artistic expressions, and collective imaginations shape human relationships with the natural world. Within this framework, Environmental Aesthetics in Arts, Film, and Media offers a powerful lens to explore how visual and narrative forms represent ecological consciousness and environmental ethics. When these representations intersect with postcolonial histories, they reveal deeper tensions surrounding land, identity, and power, especially in regions marked by exploitation and environmental violence.

This paper examines the environmental aesthetics of the Kannada films *Kantara* (2022) and *Kantara: A Legend Chapter 1* (2024) through the lens of Environmental Humanities, foregrounding how cinema shapes ecological consciousness, cultural memory, and ethical relationships with land. Both films, rooted in the ritual traditions of the Tuluva region, employ myth, folklore, and visual poetics to articulate an indigenous environmental philosophy that counters dominant postcolonial narratives of land ownership and resource extraction. By centring the *Daivas* Panjurli, *Guliga*, and *Chavundi* as guardians of the ecosystem, the films present the environment not merely as backdrop but as a sacred, sentient entity whose well-being is inseparable from that of the community. The narratives emphasise marginalised tribal perspectives, highlighting how indigenous communities negotiate threats from feudal lineage, state power, and developmental policies. In *Kantara*, the conflict between the villagers, the forest department, and the feudal landlord along with the community's ecological ethics through ritual performance (*Bhoota Kola*) and oral history, frames resistance as both spiritual and environmental. *Kantara: A Legend Chapter 1* extends this discourse into a myth-historical framework, depicting ancient struggles over spice resources, territorial control, and cosmological order, demonstrating how environmental aesthetics serve as modes of political expression for marginalized tribes.

By analysing cinematography, myth-making, and narrative structure, this study argues that both films challenge anthropocentric worldviews and articulate a relational ecological vision grounded in indigenous epistemologies. Ultimately, the *Kantara Universe* demonstrates how arts and media can mobilise cultural imagination to address contemporary questions of ecological justice, sustainability, and the rights of marginalised communities over land and heritage.

**I. Introduction**

Environmental Humanities has emerged as a crucial interdisciplinary field that re-examines the ways humans conceptualize, inhabit, and aestheticize the natural world. In recent years, cinema; with its immersive sensory potential, has become a significant medium for articulating ecological anxieties, indigenous epistemologies, ritual ecologies, and the politics of land. Within Indian cinema, *Kantara* (2022) and *Kantara: A Legend Chapter 1* (2024), directed by Rishab Shetty, stand out as powerful eco-cultural texts that weave myth, folklore, ritual performance, and ecological memory into compelling visual narratives. Both films are rooted in the Tuluva region's ritual traditions and employ the performative aesthetics of *Bhoota Kola* and *Daiva Nema* to articulate an indigenous environmental philosophy.

The landscapes presented in the films are not just mere backdrops but as living, sentient entities with agency. Through its culturally embedded portrayal of forests, land rights, and the divine-

human relationship, the *Kantara* universe becomes an ecological chronotope; interweaving time, myth, and place. The present study examines the environmental aesthetics of these films through the lens of Environmental Humanities, and explores how cinema shapes ecological consciousness, ethical relationships with land, and embodied forms of environmental knowledge. It further investigates how indigenous cosmologies challenge dominant postcolonial narratives of development, state authority, and resource extraction.

This paper analyses the films through ecocritical, postcolonial ecological, and aesthetic frameworks to understand the cinematic representation of nature, myth, power structures, and tribal cosmologies. By associating *Kantara* within broader discourses in Environmental Humanities, this research foregrounds the significance of South Asian eco-cinema in narrativizing environmental histories and cultural memory.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **1. Environmental Humanities**

Environmental Humanities is an interdisciplinary field combining philosophy, literature, anthropology, history, political ecology, and cultural studies to understand human-nature relations. Scholars such as Ursula Heise, Timothy Morton, Stacy Alaimo, and Dipesh Chakrabarty emphasize planetary interdependence, ecological vulnerability, and the need to rethink anthropocentric narratives. The discipline highlights indigenous knowledge, environmental justice, and the cultural dimensions of ecological crises. Its emphasis on narrative, memory, and representation directly informs the study of eco-cinema.

Within Indian contexts, Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil explore environmental conflicts as deeply rooted in colonial land policies, caste hierarchies, and developmental paradigms. Scholars have increasingly emphasized the need to foreground subaltern ecological knowledge systems to counter state and corporate environmental violence. The Tuluva region's ritual ecology, central to *Kantara*, aligns with this scholarly movement.

### **2. Environmental Aesthetics in Art, Film, and Media**

Environmental Aesthetics studies how artistic forms represent, construct, and evoke ecological sensibilities. Allen Carlson and Arnold Berleant emphasize that aesthetics is not merely visual beauty but an embodied, multisensory, ethical engagement with place. In cinema, environmental aesthetics includes cinematography, soundscapes, spatial design, and narrative atmospheres that reveal ecological relationships. Scholars of visual culture argue that films create environmental imaginaries that shape public perceptions of nature, sacred landscapes, and environmental degradation.

In cinema, environmental aesthetics shape audience perceptions of ecological ethics through cinematography, sound, narrative rhythm, and visual symbolism. Scholars have analyzed how landscapes can act as characters, agents, or spiritual forces; as in Terrence Malick's films or Hayao Miyazaki's ecological animations. These frameworks apply strongly to *Kantara*, where forests, sacred spaces, and Daivas embody agency rather than serve as mere background settings.

### **Indian and South Asian Eco-cinema**

South Asian eco-cinema, though less theorized than Western eco-films, includes rich traditions of environmental storytelling; rooted in indigenous ecologies, spiritual cosmologies, and land-based identities. Films such as *Nainsukh*, *Ship of Theseus*, *Super Deluxe*, *Kadu*, *Veyilmarangal*, and *Kantara* have contributed to a growing discourse on environmental aesthetics. Scholars note that Indian ecological films often foreground the entanglement of caste, development, land rights, and indigeneity. The relationship between myth and ecology particularly distinguishes South Asian contributions to eco-cinema.

South Indian cinema, in particular, has foregrounded tribal worldviews and environmental struggles, from Kerala's *Pulimurugan* to Tamil Nadu's *Kaala*. *Kantara* participates in this tradition but distinguishes itself through a uniquely Tuluva cosmology, ritual performance aesthetics, and mythic environmentalism.

#### **4. Critical Scholarship on *Kantara***

Existing academic discussions on *Kantara* highlight its portrayal of tribal ecologies, its critique of land dispossession, and its performative aesthetics. Scholars emphasize the film's unique blending of folklore, ritual performance, and eco-politics. Critics also note the film's ability to visually and narratively render the tribal cosmology, positioning nature as a sentient, moral force that resists exploitation. However, there remains limited scholarly work comparing the two films or situating them explicitly within Environmental Humanities and environmental aesthetics; creating space for this study.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

This research draws from **five interconnected theoretical frameworks** that collectively illuminate the cultural, political, ecological, and aesthetic dimensions of *Kantara* (2022) and *Kantara: A Legend – Chapter 1* (2024). These frameworks; Environmental Aesthetics, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Indigenous Ecologies, Eco-phenomenology, and Political Ecology, create an interdisciplinary foundation that allows for a deeper analysis of how the films represent environment, power, ritual, and cultural memory. Together, they provide a critical lens through which the narrative, visual style, and environmental imagination of the films can be understood.

#### **1. Environmental Aesthetics**

Environmental Aesthetics provides the first major lens, offering conceptual tools to understand how cinema constructs ecological sensibilities through visual and sensory design. Scholars in this field argue that environments are not passive backdrops but active participants in shaping meaning. Through elements such as colour grading, sound design, rhythm, visual composition, and the overall sensory texture of the frame, films can evoke ecological consciousness and emotional engagement with nature. In *Kantara*, the forest is rendered through earthy tones, shifting shadow-light patterns, and naturalistic soundscapes, transforming the landscape into a narrative agent. The ritual scenes are marked by heightened chromatic intensity, dynamic camera movement, and rhythmic editing that further demonstrate how aesthetic choices cultivate ecological empathy. Environmental Aesthetics thus enables an interpretation of the film's landscapes as emotionally charged, symbolically layered, and central to narrative progression.

#### **2. Postcolonial Ecocriticism**

Postcolonial Ecocriticism provides the second theoretical foundation, examining the entanglements between environmental degradation, colonial histories, land dispossession, and systemic violence. Scholars like Rob Nixon, with his concept of "slow violence," and Graham Huggan, with his work on environmentalism and postcolonial identity, argue that ecological oppression often mirrors historical patterns of colonial dominance. Using this framework, *Kantara* can be read as a critique of modern state power, bureaucratic authority, and extractive developmentalism. The conflict between the tribal community, the forest department, and feudal landowners reflects larger postcolonial tensions in South Asia, where indigenous land rights are systematically undermined. Postcolonial ecocriticism illuminates how the film exposes the ideological and structural violence embedded in state-led conservation policies and capitalist expansion, foregrounding ecological injustice as a continuation of historical colonial practices.

#### **3. Indigenous Ecologies**

Indigenous Ecologies form the third pillar of the conceptual framework, offering insights into relational, spiritual, and place-based environmental worldviews. Anthropologists such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and environmental scholars like Kyle Whyte argue that indigenous ontologies conceptualize land as sacred, animate, and deeply intertwined with cultural identity and collective memory. These perspectives reject the Western binary between nature and culture, instead emphasizing interdependence and kinship with non-human beings. In *Kantara*, the depiction of the Daiva, the Bhoota Kola ritual, and the ancestral pact between humans and land exemplify indigenous ecological epistemologies. The Daiva's role as mediator and guardian signifies a cosmological system where environmental stewardship and spiritual responsibility converge. This

framework enables an understanding of how the films represent indigenous ethics of reciprocity, ancestral belonging, and the sacredness of place.

#### **4. Eco-phenomenology**

Eco-phenomenology contributes a fourth dimension by foregrounding embodied, sensory, and experiential relationships with landscapes. Rooted in phenomenological philosophy, this framework examines how individuals perceive and inhabit environments through bodily encounter rather than abstract idea. The films' choreography, especially in the ritual performances, creates a kinetic ecocriticism where movement, breath, and dance translate ecological connection. The soundscape which combines drums, chants, wind, forest ambience, and ritual instruments, generates a multisensory ecology that immerses viewers in the lived environment of the characters. Eco-phenomenology thus helps interpret the films as sensory experiences that evoke the texture, pulse, and rhythm of the landscape, highlighting the inseparable bond between body, ritual, and environment.

#### **5. Political Ecology**

Political Ecology forms the fifth and final framework, analysing how power operates in relation to land, resources, and environmental governance. This field argues that ecological conflicts are inseparable from social, economic, and political inequalities. In the context of *Kantara*, political ecology is essential for understanding the tensions between state institutions (such as the forest department), local communities, feudal families, and external agents seeking control over land. The disputed forest terrain becomes a site of overlapping claims and competing interests, illustrating how environmental governance often marginalises indigenous voices. Through political ecology, the film's conflicts can be read as manifestations of broader struggles over land sovereignty, resource allocation, legal authority, and cultural survival.

### **IV. Methodology**

This paper uses a qualitative, interpretive methodology informed by ecocritical and postcolonial approaches. The aim is to read *Kantara* (2022) and *Kantara: A Legend – Chapter 1* (2024) not merely as cinematic texts but as cultural artefacts embedded within indigenous ecological worldviews, historical memory, and political tensions surrounding land. The following methodological components collectively enable a multidimensional analysis of environmental aesthetics, mythic structures, and socio-political ecologies depicted in the films.

#### **1. Visual-Textual Analysis**

A close visual-textual analysis forms the foundation of this study. Both films are examined through detailed readings of their narrative structure, cinematography, mise-en-scène, sound design, and symbolic imagery. Particular attention is paid to the framing of landscapes, colour palettes, lighting schemes, and camera movements, as these visual strategies construct a sensory ecology that reflects the films' environmental themes. Sound design, including ritual music, ambient forest acoustics, and silence; is analysed as an aesthetic tool that produces embodied environmental experience. Through this method, the films are approached as multilayered texts where visual choices carry ethical, ecological, and cultural meanings.

#### **2. Ecocritical Reading**

The second methodological component employs an ecocritical framework to foreground themes related to environmental ethics, land rights, ecological violence, and sacred geographies. Ecocriticism enables a reading that prioritises the relationship between humans, nonhumans, and the environment, allowing the analysis to address how the films portray forest ecosystems, tribal lifeworlds, and spiritual relationships with land. Through this approach, environmental degradation, displacement of indigenous communities, and the destruction of ritual spaces are interpreted as not merely narrative conflicts but ecologically significant acts that disrupt the moral and cosmological balance of the landscape.

### **3. Postcolonial–Political Ecology**

A postcolonial–political ecology lens is used to interpret land conflicts, forest governance, and feudal oppression within the films. This method situates the cinematic representation within the historical and socio-political contexts of Karnataka's coastal region, particularly the Tuluva belt. By examining how colonial legacies, caste hierarchies, state interventions, and modern conservation policies shape the struggles depicted in the films, this approach highlights the entanglement of environmental injustice with political power. It emphasizes how indigenous land rights are violated through bureaucratic authority, extraction practices, and feudal claims, revealing the films' critique of structural violence embedded in resource politics.

### **4. Myth-Critical Method**

A myth-critical method is employed to interpret the mythic structures, Daiva cosmology, and ritual embodiments; especially *Bhoota Kolas*, ecological epistemologies rather than mere cultural symbolism. Myth is treated as a form of environmental knowledge that encodes ethical relationships with land, ancestral memory, and cosmological justice. Through this method, the Daivas are analyzed not only as spiritual beings but as embodiments of ecological order whose presence enforces kinship between humans, nonhumans, and sacred landscapes. Ritual performance, divine possession, and the narrative of the land pact are thus read as expressions of ecological law that guide communal living.

### **5. Contextual and Cultural Analysis**

Finally, a contextual and cultural analysis anchors the study within the historical, ritual, and tribal traditions of the Tuluva region. This method involves drawing on ethnographic, historical, and cultural scholarship to interpret how the region's indigenous practices inform the films' environmental meaning-making. Elements such as the *Bhoota Aradhane* tradition, matrilineal customs, forest-based livelihoods, and oral histories are used to contextualise the narrative and aesthetic choices of the films. This approach ensures that the reading remains faithful to the cultural specificity of Tuluva ecology, recognising the films as extensions of a living cultural ecosystem rather than isolated artistic works.

## **V. Environmental Humanities and Environmental Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections**

Environmental Humanities contends that ecological crises are never merely scientific or material problems; rather, they are deeply rooted in cultural narratives, historical memory, and social power structures. The discipline argues that the way societies imagine, narrate, or symbolise nature directly shapes their environmental behaviours and political decisions. Within this framework, Environmental Aesthetics complements the argument by examining how sensory, symbolic, and affective forms which are visual, sonic, performative; mediate human experience of the environment. Cinema becomes a particularly powerful site of ecological meaning-making because it constructs immersive worlds where landscapes, soundscapes, bodies, and myths converge to shape viewers' ecological imaginations. When films portray indigenous relationships with land, they do more than offer cultural representation; they reveal ethical frameworks that challenge modern, extractive, and anthropocentric systems. Through such portrayals, cinema can critique developmental violence and foreground alternative ecological philosophies embedded in ritual, community cosmology, and lived experience.

In *Kantara*, the environment is not positioned as a passive backdrop or picturesque scenery; it operates as an ontological and active force that shapes the narrative, the characters, and the moral universe of the film. The forest possesses a form of agency; it shelters, judges, and punishes; reflecting the indigenous worldview where nature is animate and spiritually inhabited. Rituals such as *Bhoota Kola* embody ecological contracts between humans and divinity, functioning as performative reaffirmations of the sacred obligations that bind communities to their land. Within this cosmology, the central land dispute is not simply political or legal but profoundly metaphysical, for the violation of land becomes a violation of cosmic order. Environmental aesthetics offers a valuable framework to understand how this worldview is visually and



sensorially constructed in the film through stylistic choices such as low-angle shots of towering trees that evoke sacred verticality, chiaroscuro lighting during rituals that heightens spiritual intensity, rhythmic drumming that mirrors the pulse of the forest, and earthy colour palettes that respond to seasonal shifts. Both *Kantara* films rely on such aesthetic strategies to generate ecological affect, inviting viewers not merely to observe the landscape but to feel and inhabit its sacred ecology.

#### **VI. Landscapes, Rituals, and Indigenous Epistemologies in *Kantara***

The Tuluva landscape forms the foundational backbone of *Kantara*'s narrative identity. Rather than serving as a mere backdrop, the dense forests, expansive paddy fields, laterite-rich soil, and saline coastal winds act as living ecological agents that shape the rhythms of community life. In the film, environment, ancestry, and spirituality are inseparable; every element of land carries stories passed down through generations, binding the people to an inherited ecological consciousness. Within this worldview, the deity Panjurli emerges not simply as a mythic figure but as the symbolic guardian spirit of the terrain, embodying ecological justice and enforcing a cosmic reciprocity wherein human conduct must align with the ethical obligations of the land. Through this divine presence, the film asserts that the landscape possesses its own agency, authority, and moral order.

Rituals such as *Bhoota Kola* and *Nema* function as sophisticated ecological governance systems within the community. More than expressions of religious devotion, these ceremonies reaffirm the sacred covenant connecting people to their land. In these ritual spaces, the Daiva becomes the ultimate adjudicator, resolving disputes, blessing the soil, protecting the forests, and punishing those who violate the ancestral pact. The ritual performer's body embodies ecological memory, carrying knowledge, trauma, and blessings accumulated across generations. Cinematically, the film immerses viewers in this sensory and performative world: prolonged ritual sequences depict the gradual transformation of the performer into the Daiva, vibrating drum beats echo the heartbeat of the forest, flame-lit night scenes blur human and divine presence, and elaborate costumes invoke animality, ferocity, and ancestral authority. Together, these elements present divine possession as a lived, ecological phenomenon that sustains the moral and spiritual balance between humans and their environment.

#### **VII. Postcolonial Ecologies: Land, Power, and Resistance**

Both films portray land as a contested site where indigenous rights, cultural memory, and ecological belonging confront the forces of state authority, elite power, and inherited hierarchies. In the *Kantara* universe, land is never a passive geographical space but a living archive containing ancestral agreements, ritual duties, and cosmological justice. The colonial legacy of land classification is visible in forest acts, cadastral surveys, property deeds, and bureaucratic categories and continues to shape postcolonial governance, imposing rigid and abstract definitions of ownership that overlook indigenous modes of inhabiting space. As these frameworks prioritise legal mastery over relational belonging, ecological conflicts emerge when the state attempts to enforce technocratic conservation models. The forest department's fixation on boundaries, documentation, and formalised ecological zones embodies a rationalised environmentalism that stands in stark contrast to indigenous ecological sovereignty, which rests on spiritual reciprocity, communal stewardship, and ritual authority.

Within this broader tension, feudal legacies, state developmentalism, and indigenous ecological resistance operate as intertwined forces shaping the narrative conflicts of *Kantara*. Characters like Devendra in the present timeline and Kulashekhara in the mythic past reveal how hereditary power continues to assert dominance through forged documents, manipulative legalities, and coercive authority, exposing the persistence of feudal ideologies disguised as modern governance. Similarly, the bureaucratic environmentalism represented by Murali reflects a postcolonial state's technocratic conservation logic that marginalises indigenous ecological knowledge, even when

framed as ecological responsibility. Against these forces, the villagers' resistance; embodied by Berme in the past and Shiva in the present; emerges as an eco-political assertion of identity, survival, and sacred responsibility. Their struggle affirms land as a spiritual inheritance rather than mere property, framing ecological resistance as an act of cultural continuity and environmental guardianship that preserves the balance between humans, land, and the divine across generations.

#### **VIII. Marginalisation and Tribal Perspectives**

The *Kantara* films draw attention to the historical marginalisation of forest-dwelling and Adivasi communities whose worldviews and ecological relations are often erased within dominant developmental narratives. The films place the tribal community at the centre of the narrative, presenting them not as passive victims but as custodians of ecological knowledge. Through their rituals, oral traditions, and embodied relationship with land, the community safeguards an environmental ethic rooted in reciprocity and respect.

The conflict with state authorities and external actors; forest officers, landlords, and commercial entities; mirrors real-world tensions where indigenous communities resist displacement. The films critique the bureaucratic logic that prioritises conservation or commercial extraction over ancestral belonging. Here, ecology, identity, and survival are inseparable. The representation of the community's emotional and ritual investment in land becomes a critique of the homogenising violence of modernity.

#### **IX. Myth, Folklore, and Cosmological Aesthetics**

Myth in the *Kantara* universe is not merely a narrative device or folkloric embellishment; it functions as a deeply rooted ecological philosophy encoded within cultural memory. The mythic elements in the films articulate worldviews in which land, humans, and divine beings participate in a reciprocal, ethical relationship. These myths serve as frameworks through which the community interprets environmental stewardship, justice, and cosmic order. In the *Kantara* cosmos, myth does not entertain; but it instructs, regulates, and sustains ecological ethics across generations. Through ritual performance and oral transmission, myth becomes a living ecological doctrine that informs how the community interacts with land, wildlife, and one another.

##### **A. (1) Panjurli: Benevolent Fertility Daiva**

Panjurli, the benevolent wild-boar spirit, stands at the centre of *Kantara*'s ecological cosmology. As a fertility Daiva, Panjurli represents abundance, protection, and the flourishing of land-based life. His blessing ensures agricultural prosperity, environmental stability, and communal wellbeing. In the film universe, Panjurli's presence signals a harmonious ecological relationship where humans recognise the sacredness of their environment. His benevolence is conditional: the community must uphold ethical guardianship of the land to receive his protection. Panjurli thus embodies a moral ecology, reminding the people that fertility, crops, and survival are inseparable from responsible care for the earth. Cinematically, Panjurli's appearances are framed with luminous colours, rhythmic choreography, and ritual reverence, illustrating his role as a sacred ecological guardian.

##### **(2) Guliga: Fierce Justice Daiva**

If Panjurli embodies benevolence, Guliga represents the fierce face of ecological justice. Guliga emerges when moral or environmental balance is threatened; when greed, land theft, or violation of the sacred pact disturbs cosmic harmony. As the Daiva of retribution, Guliga is not malicious; rather, he enforces accountability within the ecological order. His wrath is directed toward those who violate ancestral contracts or exploit the land for personal gain. In the films, Guliga's visual portrayal, with intense colours, dramatic soundscapes, and rapid movement; emphasises the urgency of ecological correction. His presence communicates that environmental ethics are not optional but law-like principles governed by divine oversight. Guliga's interventions serve as metaphors for nature's retaliatory forces, reminding viewers that ecological imbalance inevitably yields consequences.

### **(3) Chavundi: Feminine Eco-Spiritual Power**

Chavundi introduces the feminine dimension of eco-spirituality into the Kantara mythos. She embodies dual energies: creation and destruction, nurture and regeneration. Her presence signifies the cyclical rhythms of nature; fertility, decay, renewal; that structure ecological time. As a feminine Daiva, Chavundi stands for the deep-rooted spiritual power of the earth itself, reflecting indigenous understandings in which land is often conceptualised as a mother figure. She represents both protection and purification, intervening when ecological cycles are disrupted. The visual language associated with Chavundi, earthy tones, fire and rhythmic trance, situates her as a force that restores environmental equilibrium. Through her, the films acknowledge the indispensable role of feminine energy in maintaining ecological harmony.

### **B. Folklore as Ecological Memory**

Folklore in the *Kantara* universe functions as a reservoir of ecological memory, preserving the community's environmental ethics across generations. These stories record histories of land gifting, ancestral justice, spiritual mediation, and cosmic retribution. Central among them is the legend of the king who surrendered his land to the Daiva, establishing a sacred contract that binds rulers, villagers, and the landscape in mutual responsibility. This pact underscores a foundational theme: land is not a commodity but a sacred entity, and its possession entails moral obligations. Violating this pact invites divine and ecological consequences. Through such narratives, the films articulate how indigenous communities embed environmental law within mythic structures. This cosmological aesthetic translates ecological ethics into cinematic language, enabling viewers to experience the spiritual and environmental dimensions of the landscape not as symbols, but as living forces.

### **X. Cinematographic and Sensory Aesthetics of the Kantara Universe**

The environmental aesthetics of the two films rest heavily on their sensory and visual design.

#### **1. Visual Aesthetic**

The visual aesthetic of the *Kantara* films relies on a carefully curated cinematic language that foregrounds the relationship between humans and the environment. Wide-angle shots are frequently employed to emphasise ecological scale, allowing the landscape to dominate the frame and situate human characters within vast natural surroundings. In contrast, handheld shots during forest sequences generate a sense of intimacy and immediacy, mirroring the characters' physical closeness with the terrain. Low-light settings recreate the atmospheric depth of ritual spaces, evoking the mystery and sanctity of spiritual performance. Daytime scenes often use natural lighting to preserve the authenticity of landscapes, enhancing the organic feel of the environment. Across the films, earthy tones; browns, deep greens, and warm ambers; form a distinctive chromatic palette that visually evokes forest density, soil textures, and the glow of ritual fire. This visual strategy grounds the films in a tactile, immersive ecological reality.

#### **2. Soundscape**

The soundscape functions as a phenomenological bridge that draws the viewer into the sensory world of the forest and its spiritual energies. The rhythmic beat of drums operates like the heartbeat of the wilderness, establishing a primal and resonant connection with the land. Ambient insect sounds and the gentle rustling of leaves reinforce the presence of non-human life, creating an auditory environment that feels alive and constantly in motion. During ritual sequences, the sonic crescendo of *Bhoota Kola* intensifies the emotional and spiritual stakes, merging human performance with atmospheric sound. Ritual chants blend seamlessly with the natural acoustics of the forest, erasing the boundary between culture and ecology. Through this layered auditory design, the films cultivate a visceral ecological experience that extends beyond narrative and becomes an embodied sensory encounter.

#### **3. Choreographed Embodiment**

The ritual performances in the *Kantara* films are choreographed to reflect an ecological symbiosis between the human body and the natural world. These sequences function almost as environmental dances, where movement, rhythm, and gesture mimic the dynamic energy of the forest and its

sacred forces. Slow-motion shots emphasise the gravity and spiritual intensity of possession, while close-ups capture the minute physical details like sweat, breath, trembling muscles; that signal the merging of human and divine presence. Through these cinematic techniques, the body becomes a microcosm of the environment, embodying the power, vulnerability, and vitality of the land itself. This aesthetic of choreographed embodiment underscores the film's ecological philosophy, showing divinity not as distant or abstract but as something lived, felt, and physically enacted through human interaction with nature.

#### **XI. Close Analysis of *Kantara* (2022)**

The 2022 film centres on Shiva, a reluctant inheritor of ritual guardianship, who becomes the vessel through which divine justice manifests. The narrative is anchored in the community's sacred relationship with land; land once gifted to them under divine protection. This land, however, becomes the site of contestation as landlords and state authorities attempt to reclaim or control it. Shiva's journey, therefore, becomes not merely personal but ecological and communal, binding human destiny to the fate of the land itself.

##### **1. Narrative Ecology**

In *Kantara*, the forest is not merely a background setting but a central narrative force that shapes character and conflict. It serves as both refuge and adjudicator, sheltering the community while also determining moral outcomes. Shiva's wild, untamed energy reflects the forest's own instinctive vibrancy, aligning his identity with the landscape he inhabits. When he finally embodies the Daiva, this transformation represents the awakening of ancestral ecological memory. The climactic possession reinstates the sacred authority of the land and reaffirms the cosmic order disrupted by human greed.

##### **2. Conflict and Power**

The film exposes layered forms of conflict and exploitation that operate through political, economic, and institutional systems. It critiques the persistent issue of land grabbing, where powerful actors attempt to seize community land for personal gain. Feudal exploitation is shown to continue through generational dominance and coercion. In addition, the film interrogates state conservation policies that, while framed as protective, often marginalise indigenous people by denying them access to ancestral spaces. Bureaucratic procedures become tools of oppression when legality is weaponised to disguise structural violence.

##### **3. Ritual as Justice**

Ritual in *Kantara* functions as a mode of ecological jurisprudence. The divine possession sequence is not merely a spiritual event but a cosmic trial in which the land itself delivers judgement. Unlike human legal systems that may be corrupted by power or partiality, this ritual embodies an unmediated form of justice rooted in ecological balance. Through the Daiva's intervention, truth is revealed, moral order is restored, and violations against the land are confronted with divine consequence.

##### **4. Environmental Aesthetic**

The film's environmental aesthetic emerges through carefully crafted visual and sensory experiences that draw viewers into the rhythms of the natural world. The forest fire sequence heightens the vulnerability and power of the landscape, while the hunting scenes underscore themes of survival, instinct, and ecological hierarchy. The ritual performances, with their dynamic choreography and intense sound design, fuse human and environmental energy. Together, these elements generate a form of ecological spectatorship, inviting audiences not just to watch nature but to feel its pulse and presence.

#### **XII. Close Analysis of *Kantara: A Legend – Chapter 1* (2024)**

The prequel, *Kantara: A Legend – Chapter 1* (2024), deepens the mythic foundations of the *Kantara* universe by exploring the origins of the land pact and the divine forces that govern it. Set in an earlier historical period, the film portrays the king's interaction with the Daiva, the spiritual

significance of land gifting, and early conflicts between dynastic authority and divine environmental law, rendering the landscape with heightened mythic grandeur that blends realism with epic symbolism. Rituals are depicted as emerging ecological institutions, embodying a sacred contract that binds communities to sustainable living and ritual responsibility. Cinematographically, the prequel expands upon the visual style of the 2022 film through grander landscape shots, deeper contrasts between sacred and mundane spaces, and more stylised colour grading that evokes the aesthetics of origin myths. Furthermore, the narrative foregrounds how violations of the divine pact produce generational ecological and moral consequences, linking past and present through environmental memory and reinforcing the enduring significance of the sacred covenant.

### **XIII. Comparative Analysis of the Two Films**

The two *Kantara* films differ significantly in narrative orientation and aesthetic approach, yet together they construct a holistic vision of indigenous environmental philosophy. *Kantara* (2022) is grounded in a contemporary rural context, where land disputes, state intervention, and the lived realities of indigenous communities drive the central conflict, focusing on the violation of an ancestral ecological covenant and the struggle to defend sacred land from modern political and bureaucratic forces. In contrast, *Kantara: A Legend – Chapter 1* (2024) turns toward the mythic past, dramatizing the origins of the covenant itself and offering a genealogical explanation for the ecological ethics that govern the later narrative. Aesthetic tone further distinguishes the two works: the 2022 film employs gritty, grounded realism to foreground the material conditions of tribal life, the textures of forest terrains, and the socio-political pressures shaping the community, intensifying the urgency of environmental injustice, whereas the 2024 prequel embraces an epic, mythic aesthetic rooted in folklore and cosmological storytelling, using stylized visuals, heightened colour palettes, and symbolic imagery to evoke the aura of an origin myth. The environmental concerns portrayed in each film also diverge, with the 2022 film foregrounding postcolonial ecological issues such as displacement, land alienation, restrictive conservation policies, and bureaucratic violence, while the prequel focuses on the origins of ecological guardianship, illustrating how divine authority establishes a sacred moral order that governs land protection and presents ecology as an inherited responsibility passed down through ancestry and ritual. Ritual functions differently across the narratives: in the 2022 work, Bhoota Kola serves as a mechanism of restorative justice, allowing divine authority to intervene in human wrongdoing and restore ecological and moral balance, whereas in the prequel, ritual represents the foundational institution of ecological covenant, demonstrating how the Daiva's early interactions with the king establish the original divine contract for ethical land stewardship. Likewise, landscape plays a varied yet complementary role; in the 2022 film, the forest is a living agent embedded within political conflict, a witness to exploitation, a refuge, and the site where ecological justice is enacted, while the prequel presents the landscape as a cosmological stage for divine and ancestral events, emphasizing mythic time and sacred narrative space. Together, the two films create a cyclical structure in which mythic beginnings and contemporary ecological struggle are intertwined, demonstrating how ancestral cosmology and present political realities coalesce into an enduring indigenous environmental ethic.

### **XIV. Environmental Aesthetics in Arts, Film, and Media: Broader Implications**

The *Kantara* films significantly enrich global conversations within Environmental Humanities by demonstrating the capacity of cinema to serve as an aesthetic, cultural, and ethical medium for ecological thought. Through their immersive narratives, the films foreground indigenous ecological knowledge systems that are often marginalised in dominant environmental discourses, while visually articulating land-based cosmologies in which nature, divinity, and community co-exist in reciprocal relation. By depicting the forest as a living agent and ritual space rather than a mere resource, the films resist anthropocentric environmental narratives and challenge postcolonial

development models that prioritise extraction, bureaucratic control, and profit over ancestral belonging. The aesthetic intensity of their landscapes, soundscapes, and ritual performances promotes a form of ecological ethics grounded not in abstract theory but in sensory and affective experience. In doing so, *Kantara* resonates with international eco-films such as *Princess Mononoke*, *Embrace of the Serpent*, and *Ten Canoes*, which similarly illuminate indigenous cosmologies and environmental conflict. The widespread acclaim and cultural impact of *Kantara* underscore the transformative potential of regional cinema in shaping global environmental consciousness and expanding ecological imagination across cultural boundaries.

#### **XV. Conclusion**

By situating the *Kantara* films within the frameworks of Environmental Humanities and environmental aesthetics, this study demonstrates how cinema becomes a powerful medium for preserving ecological memory and representing cultural relationships with land. The films transform landscapes, rituals, and indigenous cosmologies into aesthetic experiences that invite viewers to recognise the historical depth of human–environment connections. In doing so, they show that visual storytelling can document ecological histories, critique the violence of modern development, and foreground the knowledge systems of marginalised communities.

The *Kantara* universe further reveals how regional narratives can speak to global environmental concerns by translating local cultural practices into universally resonant ecological ethics. Its portrayal of sacred relationality between humans, ancestors, deities, and land; underscores that environmental stewardship is rooted not only in policy or conservation science but also in cultural identity and spiritual responsibility. Through this fusion of myth, ecology, and aesthetics, *Kantara* demonstrates that sustainable futures emerge when communities honour the moral, emotional, and sacred ties that bind them to their environment.

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**FILM AND INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS**

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**Abstract**

Anthropocentric viewpoints are ever present in nature and its aesthetics. The aim is to skim through its prevalence in art, film and social media providing an emphasis on movies. The Renaissance, AI and forms of Ghibli art are influential. This subfield considers an appreciation of the world at large including non-art objects and the larger environments in which they reside. The best means of ensuring environmental protection is debated about places blending the nature and human, such as gardens and urban spaces too along with places and activities of everyday life.

**Keywords:** Renaissance, AI, Ghibli, Movies, Social, Nature

**INTRODUCTION**

AI is the future of all such suppositions. With Ghibli art, Gemini trends and Grok too fulfill our virtual dreams. Cherry blossoms are now available to be sighted all year long. Culture and media are analyzed to spot representative patterns in relation to humans and the environment. The importance of non-human objects in an artwork like plants and animals is recognized in paintings and sculptures. 'Piranha' speaks volumes of a destructive nature while 'I am Greta' and '2040' address it. Roles of photography, journalism and digital media in framing environmental stories, shaping public opinion and potentially inspiring environmental action is scavenged. Countering anthropocentrism, this interdisciplinary approach promotes solutions. The Yellow Brick Road and Emerald City of Oz are 'magnificent' in bedazzling us than Kansas. Re-examining the past through present-day concerns reveals more about our own anxieties than those of the Renaissance period itself. 'The Chronicles of Narnia' reimagine this agency. The Queen of Hearts exploits the world. 'Iyobinte Pusthakam' has forest as a driving force. Let's dive into the world of Chemmeen and fisheries...

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**1. Features of Environmental Aesthetics**

Environmental aesthetics in art explores how people experience their surroundings through their sensory organs. It throws weight on landscapes, ecosystems, urban spaces, and everyday environments, not just traditional artworks. Artists see nature and cityscapes as active elements in the creative process which inspire their work.

Materials from nature or urban areas are often incorporated into artworks, making the environment a part of the art. The movement encourages viewers to see familiar places in novel ways and appreciate their significance. Environmental themes such as sustainability and ecological respect are commonly integrated.

Artists use recycled materials or focus on environmental issues to promote awareness and remarkable change. The overall goal is to create a sensory and emotional connection between people and their environment. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing nature and human-made spaces as active partners in creation of art. This perspective broadens the idea of inspiration and beauty whilst highlighting the environment's role in our creative and emotional lives.

The aesthetic value of nature resonates with our emotional responses to beautiful landscapes. This concept is part of the broader study of the aesthetics of nature within philosophical ethics. It examines how natural objects can evoke feelings and emotes.

**2. Features Especially in Film**

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

**689 Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)**

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The Gaia hypothesis proposes that all organisms and their inorganic surroundings on earth are closely integrated to form a single and self-regulating complex system, maintaining the conditions for life on the planet. (Arora) The opening scene sings for the mingling of the two kingdoms of the humans and the moors, "...worst of neighbors... only a great hero or a terrible villain might bring them together." Stefan attempts to capture *Maleficent* in his rage of vengeance saying, "how does it feel like to be a fairy creature without wings, in a world where you don't belong?"

"In *Wonderland*, Alice's surroundings do not stick to a single style - the background changes depth, becomes either flat or projected into the distance, blurs in and out of focus between scenes fading from a place to the next." (Rigamonti) The film employs a plurality of techniques to represent backgrounds, ranging from watercolors to pencil-line textures in an experiment with multidimensional aesthetic perception. The choppiness of characters like the Cheshire Cat and Queen of Hearts along with the Mad Hatter are portrayed with differing techniques, exacerbating their peculiarities in contrast to the drawn movements of Alice. Roses are to be painted red by card shaped gardeners and there are talking flowers along with the rabbit hole, timepieces and checkered patterns. The idea of closeups meddle with being immersed in an ever-changing reality which alter its elements and the appearances of all that enter it. Disney's Alice is surreal while Klevnauchfilm's Alisa is earnest with its Soviet aesthetic animation.

*The Wizard of Oz's* color transition was more than visually stunning, immersing audiences in Dorothy's adventure. Kansas had muted, dreamlike brown hues being ordinary and familiar while Oz symbolizes discovery and the extraordinary with its burst of color. "By making Kansas look dreary and Oz look magical, the filmmakers heightened the emotional impact of Dorothy's journey. It reinforced the idea that she had truly entered another world, making her experiences- and the audience's- more vivid and memorable." (Martinez)

Nature is a moral barometer in *The Chronicles of Narnia* with degradation brought upon by Jadis the White Witch but restored by Aslan. Pevenise children and other protagonists are educated by their immersion in the world of Narnia as derived from the studies of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, which Uncle Andrew deems to be an opportunity for commercial exploitation. As a pastoral ideal, nature plays a crucial role in driving good's triumph over evil. Lewis substitutes English school systems and educational philosophy with natural images ranging from the transformation of pupil desks into rose bushes in Prince Caspian to Aslan's emergence from the forest and subsequent abolition of Experiment House in *The Silver Chair*, linking nature's role in children's moral role to their formal education.

### 3. Analogical Theory

Historically, appreciation of nature's beauty is linked to this idea of disinterestedness, which refers to enjoying beauty without personal or practical interests influencing our feelings. Three main dimensions of nature's beauty have evolved: the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque. The beautiful are well-maintained environments, like gardens. The sublime encompasses awe-inspiring phenomena such as mountains that evoke wonder and fear.

The picturesque combines elements of both beautiful and sublime, featuring in it varied and irregular scenes. Environmental aesthetics has gained prominence, shifting focus from art to the beauty of natural and human-influenced environments. This perspective argues that every part of nature can be commemorated for its beauty.

Aesthetic value can inspire the protection and conservation of nature. Recognizing aesthetic values enhances our understanding of nature's ecological significance. Aesthetic considerations influence environmental decisions, aligning with ecological values like diversity and harmony. Valuing nature's beauty altogether fosters a connection that encourages environmental care and ethical responsibility.

Environment refers to our surroundings with its biotic and abiotic elements including physical, chemical and other natural forces. Aesthetic has come from the Greek word *aesthesis* which means 'perception by senses'. Apart from the sensory awareness, to the mind, 'aesthetic' is the cognitive act of describing and explaining the evidence, either positive or negative. So, aesthetic value is

assigning a value to an object on the basis of its appearance and emotional effect. Though there were discussions and descriptions on the aesthetics of nature centuries ago, only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century did environmental aesthetics begin to deal with the aesthetic values of the environment and its role in diving deeper into environmental travails.

In North America and Europe, wild nature was often feared rather than appreciated for aesthetic qualities before the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Immanuel Kant talked about the disinterested pleasure that lays at the root of appreciating the aesthetic qualities of nature with emphasis on its beauty and sublimity. His ideas influenced romanticism and the nature worship expressed through the literature, music and visual arts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This aesthetic theory elucidates that the beauty of nature is associated with delightful, pleasing perpetual qualities and tranquil contemplation whereas the sublime is associated with a 'negative pleasure' on one's seeing towering cliffs, raging seas and vast deserts. The poetry of William Wordsworth is notable for its deep aesthetic engagement with nature. John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* expands about the aesthetic scientific and spiritual sensitivity shown for nature in landscape paintings.

William Gilpin influenced the conservation movement with his theory of the picturesque in the United States in the nineteenth century. The transcendentalist aesthetic of Henry David Thoreau conferred reverence to wilderness worship. His 'Walden' that narrated his experiment of living close to nature at Walden Pond grew receptively to untamed landscapes. Transcendentalists stood against the dehumanizing effects of technology and urban civilization. Wild nature became a source of spiritual regeneration and messenger of profound moral truths. This environmental aesthetics is also found in Aldo Leopold's 'A sand County Almanac', where he juxtaposes ecological knowledge and aesthetic sensitivity in valuing environments.

Henceforth, the discussions of philosophical aesthetics, landscape theory, practice and early conservation literature together form the historical foundation of environmental aesthetics. Environmental philosophers like Rolston go deep into the principles of aesthetics and ethics with his argument for environmental education. His two questions include the subjectivity or objectivity of natural beauty- is natural beauty in the eye of the beholder or in the world..., and of positive aesthetics which exclaims that all of nature is beautiful.

It promotes a responsibility for well-informed aesthetic appreciation and will encourage people to care for the environment. Thus environmental aesthetics has brought philosophical attention to issues in aesthetics as they relate to environments, natural objects within environments and natural phenomena and processes.

The principal aim of environmental aesthetics is to seek a philosophically informed understanding of aesthetic value and judgement; it has had and will have its significant role in environmental disciplines and practices.

"With increasing impacts of climate-change blurring this distinction, philosophers have recently begun to grapple with the changing character and role of environmental aesthetics in the so-called "Anthropocene Era". "The rural landscape was a conventional setting for the Pastoral tradition in poetry, and painters had always rendered landscapes as part of their work. In these artistic traditions, however, landscape played a subsidiary role, typically serving as a backdrop for exploration of historical, religious and moral themes." (Carlson)

An early break with this relegation was brought about by the work of seventeenth century painters like Lorrain, Rosa and Dughet through the positioning of the landscape interesting in its right core. Philosophers pushed the traditional concept of the beautiful away from its classical associations with love, possession and desire, emphasizing instead its disinterested character. In practice the term "picturesque" often meant "picture-like" and picturesque appreciation typically equated the experience of a landscape with the experience of a set of views, rather as if it were a set of large, out of doors paintings. Nature is of no less aesthetic interest than art and ought to be appreciated based on principles appropriate to it, rather than principles arbitrarily imported from the Arts. The appropriate appreciation of a work like Picasso's *Guernica* require that that we experience it as what it is- a cubist painting. Arnold Berleant's "aesthetics of engagement" stresses

the contextual dimensions of nature and our multi-sensory experiences of it. Of all humanized environments, the one with the most profound resonance is the role of a garden as in the Garden of Eden or Islamic art. Large-scale artworks like Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* and Christo's *Running Fence* raise pertinent issues including environment as a part of the work.

The different understandings of the aesthetic meaning and value of land can have really political and economical implications like the dispossession of land used by indigenous North Americans to facilitate the creation of parks where nature's beauty is preserved and enjoyed. The Picturesque is often castigated as the fountainhead of the problematic scenic aesthetic. Popularity and influence of artistic genres like wildlife painting, wildlife and nature photography and nature film alongside high speed and time lapse cinematography allow to perceive events that unfold too rapidly or slowly for humans to witness in unmediated experience as the strike of a chameleon's tongue or the recession of a glacier. A more recent form of such generative mediation is digital astrophotography. The way we treat our environment is heavily influenced by the aesthetics we attribute to her.

"But with the introduction of concepts such as the Anthropocene, Capitolocene, or Chthulucene and the assumption that there is no pristine, untouched nature left, it has become even harder to separate nature neatly from culture." (Hanich)

The gently rustling wind as a long-standing and enduring motif of natural beauty is found in the Romantic poetry of Ludwig Uhland, Annette von Droste-Hu-Lshoff and Joseph von Eichendorff. We encounter it too in Adolph von Menzel's 19<sup>th</sup> century realist paintings as well as impressionist art by Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir but also in 20<sup>th</sup> century figurative paintings by Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth or Edward Cucuel. Harun Farocki views it in computer games where it functions as a beautiful object within the game's world.

There is an *anemophilia* in cinema identifiable in fictional films as well as other modes such as documentaries, experimental films or essay films. Three modes of appreciating natural beauty in film include contemplation, connection and imagination.

A film is made as an artefact from its operational aesthetics. A long tradition in film theory ascribes to film an ontological potential to reveal the world to us in unknown ways beyond our optical conscious and we get to easily adjust these to make room for the experience of natural beauty it thus enables. It enables a novel look at stale and overly mundane beauties by granting us the break in participation.

#### 4. Examples

An Inconvenient Truth (2006) features former US Vice President Al Gore presenting a slideshow that warns of rising global temperatures, melting ice caps and intensifying storms delivering a prescient message. He illustrates that tackling corporate negligence is a marathon rather than a sprint with his personal narrative of the trauma of losing his sister to lung cancer caused by the usage of harmful products. The film's clarion call for political involvement invites each viewer to become a policy influencer by voting, lobbying or sharing resources in one's own community. It's emblematic of the kind of "edu-tainment" that can spark real-world action.

Produced by National Geographic and fronted by actor and environmental advocate Leonardo DiCaprio, *Before the Flood* (2016) focuses more on solutions and the urgent necessity of global cooperation. Diverse communities from the sinking atolls in the South Pacific to the smog-choked streets of Beijing are visited. A particularly poignant scene takes place in India, where local renewable energy products aim to uplift entire villages by installing small-scale solar power, shining a spotlight on intersectionality and emphasizing on policy instruments like carbon taxes and green energy subsidies. Activism essentially demands both collective passion and institutional change.

Directed by Jeff Orlowski, *Chasing Coral* (2017) zeroes in on coral reefs as the "rainforests of the sea". This is a successor to *Chasing Ice* (2012) documenting disappearing glaciers. The focus is on vibrant coral ecosystems and how climate change, especially warming ocean temperatures lead

to threatening bleaching events. Typical Orłowski documentaries end on a note of action and hope. A testament to the thriving of environmental activism when anchored in scientific evidence, personal storytelling and ethical accountability; innovative reef restoration projects, policy changes aimed at curbing CO2 emissions and community-driven volunteer programs get to be in the spotlight.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

A poignant take on the struggles of climate refugees in high ranges, in *Bhoothalam*, the protagonist Joy deals with difficulties in a harmonious life with nature. Rightly mentioned at the end, the balance between nature and humans should never be crossed. Joy and his neighbours can never part with their land in Mundakkai which is always a part of them as cracks form in his house. The film aptly displays precautions and guidelines to follow in the case of such events like landslides and floods. Recurring motifs of sin as a catalyst for human destruction is prominently depicted in the religious background of Madan Thullan. Even the form of Virgin Mary trembles as an earthquake approaches them and frightens their elderly dad. The soul of their deceased daughter hovers over all the places they go to. Indrans as Joy bends down with his head on the rock to feel the vibrations of mother earth.

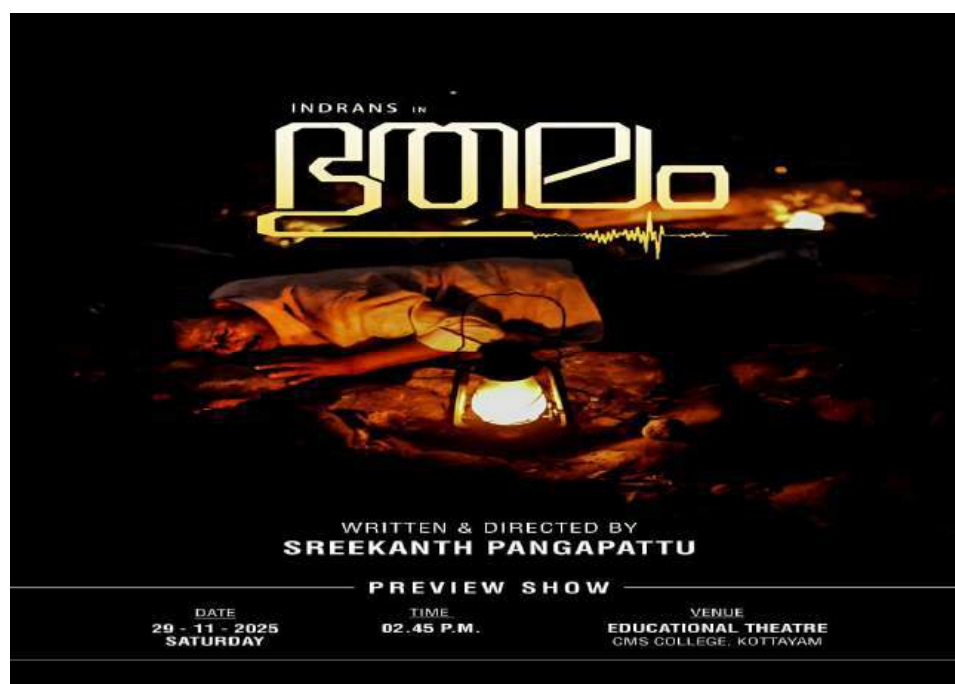




**Fig. 1:**

**With crew members at the screening of *Bhoothalam* at CMS College Kottayam on 29/11/2025**



**Fig.2 Interview with Dr. Aswin David Joy of the Department of Cinematography at KRNNIVSA, Thekkumthala**

I got the opportunity to interview Dr. Aswin David Joy from the department of Cinematography at KRNNIVSA, Thekkumthala for the same and these are the responses I received.

*Define environmental aesthetics and what role it should play in art, film and media.*

“For me, environmental aesthetics is the use of wildlife, nature and mostly the colour palettes of the same in film and art. We learn a lot from nature, especially in cinematography we have the Golden Circle which is derived from the environment and our surroundings. The colour palettes that I mostly use inspired from the environment is green. Different shades of green in frame is art in its own form”.



*Illustrate the relationship between the pursuit of aesthetic beauty in nature and the ethical responsibilities of environmental protection.*

“In specific, I would mention about wildlife Documentaries that we see on National Geography and Discovery Channel, Animal Planet and so forth. The use of wild animals in pursuit of aesthetic beauty is a bit concerning. Many BTS shows the animals starved, staged and abused for commercial video/ media purposes.”

*Describe the evolution of representation from earlier movements (like Picturesque / Land Art) to current approaches and their key differences.*

Agnes Denes is recognized as a pioneer of ecological and land art and other art forms. Her visionary work deals with environmental, socio-cultural issues immersed in philosophy, history and psychology, addressing the challenges of global survival. *Wheatfield-A Confrontation*, which the scholar and curator Jeffrey Weiss has called “perpetually astonishing... one of Land Art’s great transgressive masterpieces” is her best-known work. This was created during a four month period in the spring and summer of 1982 when Denes, with the support of the Public Art Fund, planted a field of golden wheat on two acres of rubble-strewn landfill near Wall Street and the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. *Tree Mountain-A Living Time Capsule* is a monumental earthwork reclamation project and first man-made virgin forest situated in Finland.

Rose 11

Agnes Denes is also known for her innovative employment of metallic inks and other nontraditional materials in creating a prodigious body of exquisitely rendered drawings and prints that delineate her explorations in mathematics, philosophy, geography, science and other disciplines.

*How does one balance artistic vision and expression with technical/ practical constraints of incorporating sustainable practices in this line of work? State an example each of art, film and media in your work. How can one use cinematography, sound design and narrative structure in film to do the same?*

“So, in cinematography, there are a lot of rules that we teach, such as rule of thirds, Golden ratio, framing, exposure, composition, colour theory etc. which are taught so these rules can be broken in a creative space by minds of artists and their vision. When it comes to environmental aesthetics these rules and its form are inspired by nature within. In this ever-progressing digital landscape coping with old school practices is a challenge. From analog to digital to a now encore AI oriented space is definitely challenging and can hurdle creativity.

In the case of my works, I tend to use animals a lot to symbolize various visual conditions. In my upcoming film “Dear Alice”, I’ve used a rooster to symbolize a guardian protector from a mythical folktale. I’ve used doves to symbolize peace as mentioned and referred from the Scriptures. I’ve used a honeybee showcasing how it doesn’t affect a ‘Touch-me-not’ plant, and so forth.”

Sound Design involves the use of the sound of leaves, water, wind; animal calls; human inspirations with nature such as music using instruments like flute and drums with the narrative structure symbolizing elements through iconographs.

For instance, in Malayalam Cinema a Yakshi is introduced with perhaps thunder, wind, (sound), lighting (cinematography) and sconographs such as black cut or owls and the like.

*Elaborate on the unique opportunities and challenges of using social media for the same. How do you stay updated on the trends?*

“A unique opportunity using social media is to generate financial benefits. Challenges are the hurdles creative minds face. But use of social media in today’s or recent times is AIgenerated content and artworks. This can be benefitted if channelled correctly. Since AI

is not to be feared but to be used for human assistance. Art cannot be invented or brought to life by AI, but can be only supported and developed using existing content. Staying updated on these trends is using AI websites and genuine online news sources. Do not depend on social media as they are mostly man-made AI generated false content. Clickbaits can cause dilemma and confusion whilst using social media platforms. It's a waste of time.'

*Justify some examples from Malayalam and global cinema.*

"Devadoothan (2000), directed by Sibi Malayil has a recurring iconography of a Dove." A symbol of peace and message that was a reference from the scriptures in *The Salt of the Earth* by Wim Wenders showcases landscapes and human emotions in different worldwide scenarios exhibiting beauty and suffering all in the same frames. "At the end of the day, I would like to mention about how films and art use various colour palettes from nature to express emotion. The sky when its light blue shows calmness and a gentle atmosphere. When it's dark, grey and cloudy, we feel gloomy and sad. Similarly, filmmakers use this strategy/trick in cinema."

#### **ANALYSIS**

Environmental aesthetics continue to gradually evolve as time passes. It is our duty to spot these patterns and adapt accordingly as the times change forever. Be it art, film or media innovation never fails to surprise. The rich body of history is truly educative in this field. Theories become unimportant as people fish for content fresh off the boat like Ghibli art or Gemini selfies.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Various forms of expression depict the multifaceted aesthetics of nature in several manners. Paintings, movies and social media never fail to entertain us with the same. Add some precautions to this novelty which is not so new, content can be relished for a long time.

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**INTERSECTION OF ECOLOGY, MEMORY AND TRAUMA: INVESTIGATING THE  
ROLE OF NATURE IN SORAYYA KHAN'S NOOR**

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**Abstract**

War and trauma mirror each other, destructing both the physical environment and the soul of the victims. In a war-ravaged land, ecology participates, witnesses and suffers along with human beings. Set against the backdrop of 1971 Bangladesh Liberation war, Sorayya Khan's *Noor* employs memory, dreams, remembering and forgetting with the help of environmental landscape. In the novel, ecology is not just a passive sufferer of the devilish act of violent wars but also a participant and repository of memory and trauma. The landscape, in the artwork of the character Noor, rekindles the suppressed memory of the other characters in the novel. This paper is an attempt to unfold the parallel between the ecology and war-ridden trauma and memory. This reading demonstrates how *Noor* expands the boundaries of memory beyond human realms investigating character's fragmented recollections through the environmental landscape. This paper examines the role of nature in shaping war-torn memory in the novel through an eco-critical perspective. The study argues that the natural world in *Noor* functions as an active witness of war and its repercussions. The paper explores how both human consciousness and the environment bear the imprints of violence, revealing a shared process of remembering and mourning.

**Keywords:** War, Memory, Trauma, Ecology, Nature, Environmental landscape

**Introduction**

Memory oscillates and survives between the process of remembering, forgetting and reconstructing. Memory and literature have a significant connection. Memory often functions as tool, narrative structure and tropes in literature. Fictional texts frequently reveal the memorial process of their characters (Milevski and Watenkamp 199). As a theoretical field, memory is multi-dimensional and "multi-directional" (Rothberg 4). Omid Shams contends that literature, "tells the story of vanished voices and forgotten faces" (Shams 2). Memory holds the seemingly insignificant details which history forgets. Likewise literature records whatever is omitted by the history. "Literature is memory because it deals with the details and rejects the incompleteness of historical generalized chronology" (Shams 4). Memory therefore is individual as well as cultural and collective.

Memory is popularly understood as a process of detaining information in the brain. Scholar Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands rejects the brain-centric model arguing that "memory does not reside solely in the brain". Apart from the brain and internal forces, the landscape, the ecosystem, the body itself can perform as storehouse of memory (Sandilands 274). There are several ways of knowing and remembering. While landscape "stores" and "depict" personal memory also encompasses the larger political and economic history (Bridges and Osterhoudt 1-2). From the perspective of ecological memory, ecological elements "interact and engage with each other to define and redefine the past" (Coraiola et al 4). Ecological memory emphasizes on the connection between the individual and the collective through environment where "remembering and forgetting takes place" (Hoskins 353). It can be related to material eco-criticism, which focuses on looking at the environment "dis-anthropocentrically" All elements of the world are "storied matter", being connected in a vast network to perform their agency. These storied matters are readable or interpretable (Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction" 5-8). Having agency of their own, ecological elements, landscape, non-human bodies can preserve stories. They constitute memory and reciprocally memory constitutes them (Bridges and Sterhoudt 1). Ecological memory

can be defined as a memory where ecological elements play a pivotal role in shaping and creating the process of remembering and forgetting. In ecological memory, “the storied matters” ignites and preserve memory of an individual as well as a community.

Trauma can be described as the “wound of the mind” and unlike the wound of the body, it affects the individual’s understanding of “time, self and the world”. Trauma however is not the event rather it is the afterlife of the event. “Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather the way it’s very unassimilated nature.....returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth, “Wound...” 4). Trauma is not inseparable from memory. It persists amidst the processes remembering, reconstructing, suppression of the memory of a traumatic event. “A traumatic analysis is both constructivist and empirical. It pays closest attention to the representational means through which an event is remembered”. From ecological perspective the environmental elements such as landscapes, trees, rivers, ruins, climate seasons, atmospheric condition can serve as “the representational means” for not only an individual but also collectively for a community. Some of such representational means are equally victim of the traumatic event. Disturbance in ecology such as polluted landscape, nature and suffering of animals, can also be termed as “trauma” (Woolbright 2). They encompass and represent human trauma within themselves.

War literature often intertwines memory, trauma and environment. Such literature uses personal as well as collective memory and trauma and environmental elements, landscape to foreground the facts history have not recorded. War literature is “variously and often simultaneously, moral, psychological and social”. The intention of modern war literature chiefly is to “demystify” the war through the poignant exploration of trauma, memory and environmental landscape (Brosman 86- 89). *Noor* (2003) is a novel written by Pakistani writer Sorayya Khan. Bangladesh Liberation of 1971 sets the backdrop of the novel. *Noor* is an exploration of the “silence and forgetting that accompanies war” (Khan, “Silence...” 121). The civil war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan is the consequence of the constant neglect and prolonged colonialist behavior of West Pakistan. Like any other war, 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War is also loaded with atrocities, violence, rapes. Sorayya Khan states in her article “Silence and Forgetting that Wrote *Noor*”:

One of the defining characteristics of the 1971 war is the West Pakistani Army’s treatment of thousand of East Pakistani Bengalis. The army’s atrocities include rape, execution, murder, and arson. Some classify the war as genocide, on par with some of the other genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Khan, Silence... 123).

In *Noor*, Khan foregrounds the horror of war through using the tools of memory, trauma and forgetting and remembering. Natural landscape and elements play pivotal role in the narration of the novel. According to Bridges and Osterhoudt, “landscapes encompass wild, cultivated, urban, floral, and fallow species, as well as the human and non-human entities who inhabit and shape them” (1). Although the research follows this idea, it does not include humans in its understanding of landscape. The non- human natural entities constitute the “landscape” in this research. They perform the role of witness and storehouse of information, scenes, facts which were repressed, forgotten both intentionally and unintentionally. This paper will analyse the importance of nature in the narrating and mirroring the war and their active participation in war. It will be an attempt to explore the intersection of memory, trauma and ecology in the novel.

### **Literature Review**

Scholarship on Sorayya Khan’s *Noor* remains rich in trauma theory, gender studies, psychoanalysis, and narrative memory, yet limited in its engagement with ecological frameworks. Most critics read the novel through the psychological repercussions of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, drawing heavily on trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, and Marianne Hirsch. These studies interpret the novel as a narrative of unclaimed trauma, intergenerational hauntings, and suppressed wartime guilt. However, despite the novel’s

striking reliance on landscapes, atmospheric conditions, environmental violence, and natural imagery, no existing research has approached *Noor* through the lens of ecological memory, leaving a significant gap in current scholarship.

Early scholarship focuses primarily on psychological fragmentation and traumatic silence. F. Syeda's work on the dissolution of the masculine self and the unspeakable trauma of war uses trauma theory to examine how violent memories destabilize identity. Similarly, psychoanalytic studies by Maqsood, Anwar, Butt, and Iqbal foreground repression, neurosis, and unconscious drives as central to character formation. These readings illuminate internal psychic conflict but restrict memory to a purely psychological domain, with minimal attention to environmental cues or ecological contexts. Archetypal and feminist readings further broaden the field. A. B. Dsouza's analysis of the triple-goddess archetype situates *Noor* within mythic female lineage and symbolic renewal. An influential scholarship on memory in *Noor* is F. Ishtiyaque's study on narrative suturing of Liberation War memories. This work examines how the novel integrates silence, testimony, and fragmented recollection. These analyses foreground textual memory and narrative ethics but overlook the role of natural landscapes, floods, monsoon rains, ruined terrain, or atmospheric heaviness as memory-bearing entities.

A small but notable strand of research addresses ecology and ecofeminism, though not ecological memory. Safa Mir's study, "Exploitation of Women and Land in Sorayya Khan's *Noor*", is among the first ecological readings. Using ecofeminist theory, Mir argues that women and land suffer parallel exploitation in a postcolonial society shaped by militarization and development. The study unveils how patriarchal violence, ecological degradation, and female oppression mirror each other. While valuable, the analysis remains centered on eco-oppression, not on how landscapes or ecological elements might store or transmit memories of trauma. Mir's work treats environment as a site of domination, not as a mnemonic archive.

A more recent ecological contribution is by Neelam Kedia and Archana Kumari, whose paper, "Echoes of Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Noor*", merges ecofeminism with Donna Haraway's concepts of sympoiesis and tentacular thinking. Their study examines nature as both comforter and devastator, interpreting natural imagery from the Bhola cyclone and postwar landscapes as reflective of female emotional states. They also argue that *Noor*'s art functions as environmental activism. Although this work deepens ecological perspectives on the novel, it remains grounded in ecofeminism and symbolic environmental representation. It does not address how nature functions as a carrier of memory, how ecological systems record violence, or how environmental processes mediate intergenerational trauma.

Thus, this review identifies a substantial gap in the scholarship: the absence of ecological memory studies in readings of *Noor*. A memory ecology approach, one that theorizes memory as distributed across human and non-human systems, embedded in material environments and ecological processes offers a new and necessary framework. Such an approach reveals *Noor* not only as a narrative of human trauma but also as a text where nature itself becomes a witness, a participant, and a repository of wartime memory. This gap provides the foundation for the present study, which aims to reposition the novel within the emerging field of memory ecology.

#### **Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive methodology based on close reading and thematic analysis of Sorayya Khan's *Noor*. The Analysis examines how the novel represents memory, trauma, and ecological agency by identifying key motifs in landscapes, weather, animals, and other non-human elements. Primary data is drawn from the novel itself, while the secondary materials include theoretical works on memory studies (Erll, Hirsch), trauma studies (Caruth), material ecocriticism (Iovino and Oppermann) as well as ecological memory (Bridges and Osterhoudt). Utilizing these concepts and theories, the research paper investigates the intersection of ecology, memory and trauma in *Noor* focusing on the vitality and agency of the non-human ecological elements.



### **Discussion**

War occurs amidst the nature. The nature thus is not a passive sufferer of war but also participates and plays the role of active witness. The ecological landscape, natural elements reside in the mind of the victims of the war. They carry the war-torn memory, violence inflicted upon both the human and non-human beings and nature. They rekindle, remind and revive the memory. They even participate in the trauma of the sufferer. Most importantly they encourage expression against forgetting and repression of the memory. The novel *Noor* is prominently about bringing the suppressed and forgotten memory back to the surface and about confrontation and communication between two war victims within a family. Although Ali was a Pakistani army, he too is a victim of the atrocity and the violence of war. He is a victim as he had to witness things he never later could express and because of the trauma that has haunted him long after the war had ended. The family in the novel shows the transnational experience of a war. The novel extends the notion of victimhood transgressing the boundary of nation as well as human realm. Sajida is a Bangladeshi child victim of war and cyclone and Ali adopts her and returns to Pakistan. The “cyclone” becomes the alternative term to express the violence of the war. Ali brings Sajida home and explains it to his mother by uttering the word “cyclone” (Khan 13). The cyclone in the novel refers to the deadliest Bhola cyclone of 1970. According to many scholars this cyclone is one of the major factors that ultimately led to the liberation of Bangladesh. The cyclone exposed not just environmental vulnerability, but long-term structural neglect and proved the need for absolute autonomy (Islam et al 237; Biswas and Daly 1407). Since the independence from the British Raj, West Pakistan had treated the citizens of East Pakistan as “culturally and ethnically inferior” (Boissoneault). French journalist Paul Dreyfus stated, “over the years, West Pakistan behaved like a poorly raised, egotistical guest, devouring the best dishes and leaving but the scraps and leftovers for East Pakistan” (as qtd in Boissoneault). East Pakistan was nothing more than a place for extracting natural resources for the benefit of West Pakistan. West Pakistan was the colonizer in disguise. The neglect towards the plight of East Pakistanis was evident during the Bhola Cyclone. The cyclone was not just a natural disaster but also a political event. The relation and interconnectedness between human and non-human elements is very much visible through this event. This event can be seen as an example of Astrid’s “relationality”, which refers to integrated “bio-psycho-socio-cultural as well as material and more than human process” (Erl “Transcultural” 28). Here the ocean is an active participant in the political scenario of East Pakistan. West Pakistan’s response was sluggish despite the huge loss of people. Approximately 3000000 people got killed in the cyclone. Sajida blames the cyclone for killing her family members. For her the cyclone and the war became one. In her memory both the events are entangled making the memory fragmented and complicated. This can be understood as intersection of politics, memory and “waterscape ecology”. The field of waterscape ecology helps us study and investigate the environment in more than one way. “When hurricane, tsunamis, or floods occur, the evoked place-based memories related to the waterscape can help people navigate the inflicted damage and permanent changes to both physical environment and the related social system. (Bridges and Osterhoudt 11-12).

The memory of the ocean and the cyclone continues to unravel the storyline of the novel. Noor, Sajida’s daughter, who is a differently able child, becomes the medium through which the images of natural elements amidst the war get their agency to rekindle the memory of both Sajida and Ali. Noor inherits the memory of her mother’s childhood the way Sajida inherits the sewing lesson from her dead mother. “Her dreams of her long dead mother emerging from under the ocean and memories of her past that have been stored in her sub-conscious mind made Noor a link between the two worlds: the past and the present” (Kedia and Kumari 116). Similarly Hamza Rauf Awan and Fatima Sayeda argue that her mother’s memory is transformed to Noor and thus “the hidden meaning in her paintings acts as a mode playing an imminent role in connection to her mother’s past. It aggravates the invocation of trauma and conspicuously provides the transferability of maternal trauma to new offspring” (131). It can be related to Hirsh’s idea of “postmemory”, referring to inter and trans generational transmission of trauma and experiences

which ultimately results in creation of memories by themselves (106-107). The colour of the ocean becomes Noor's favourite colour and during her initial days of her artistic talent she fills the pages only with blue colour. This is the first stance taken by Noor towards digging up the memory and trauma of both Sajida and Ali. "Sajida saw Noor's blue was a movement" (Khan 30). Bandana Chakraborty argues:

The blue colours of the drawing make the characters confront their suppressed past in order to fill the void within themselves. Water is also symbolic of the destructive cyclone which struck East Pakistan in 1970 in which Sajida's family and many others had drowned. It also reminds Sajida of the "wall of water" that ripped her apart from her family. (93)

The image of water itself becomes powerful enough to participate in the process of remembering. In her memory, the sea for Sajida is a horrific place which killed her family. Her conversation with Noor exposes that she does not like the sea because it is "Big, Loud" (Khan 84). On the other hand Noor is soothed by water as she is "a fraction of Sajida's subconscious mind (Kedia and Kumari 117). Noor's paintings of the sea and other such war-torn images will gradually help her to come out of the trauma and join the disjointed and fragmented pieces of memory. "Sajida felt relief that her beginning, at least, was crystal clear" (Khan 122).

Noor's paintings encourage communication and expression against the act of forgetting and repression. Sajida's forgetfulness is due to her process of growing up in a different geographical area. The ocean and the river of Bangladesh were soon replaced by familiar landscape of Margalla hills and the associated memory of it (Khan 104). Sajida's attempts to trace her childhood in her children and her desire to name her first son after her brother's name and the inability to do so showcase the unintentional forgetfulness. She forgets her mother tongue and her brother's name but remembers the tsunami and the war in the image of ecological elements. These elements and objects become alternative for language. While her first two boys hindered her from looking back on "what she once had been" (Khan 12), Noor, on the other hand, from the point of conception, evoked her memory. "Sajida's dream grew more vivid than they had ever been. She pictured the landscape of East Pakistan- Bangladesh now- and her long ago childhood in greens, each different last: rice, paddies, banana leaves, palm trees, limes, the sails of fishing boats" (Khan 5). When Sajida revisits her childhood, she does it with the help of images of non-human elements of nature, not in terms of language. The landscape and natural elements are crucial in the reconstruction of her memory. These are the unofficial "sites of memory"<sup>1</sup> against the historical monuments, history books and archives. These can also be extended as ecological sites of memory.

Ali's forgetfulness was an intentional act, which can be understood as a part of the process of healing or more so as an ineffective process of healing. "He imagined his story, the sum of horrible details, so neatly stored away, he'd done away with reason to retrieve it". This suppression and silence is deliberately produced as Bridges and Osterhoudt have discussed about the deliberate silence and gap due to trauma (10). However Ali could not erase the memory since the trauma haunts him as "it imposes itself again repeatedly, in the nightmares and the repetitive action of the survivor" (Caruth, "The Wound..." 4). Ali's trauma is evident in his incapability of sleeping during the monsoon. The monsoon season carries the horrible memory of the war time. The trauma also comes in terms of images of environmental elements. "Whenever the monsoon arrived, planting a roar inside his head, he lay awake in his bed recalling the symmetry of falling sheets of rain, the pounding of the drops, the sinking mud" (Khan 93). His action of avoiding God and meat is another instance of his unburyable memory and trauma (Khan 171). His trauma can be understood as an "incomprehensible act of surviving- waking into life – that repeats and bears witness to what remains un-grasped within the encounter with death" (Caruth, "Parting.." 23). His

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<sup>1</sup> "Unofficial sites of memory" (liux de mémoire) to describe places, objects, events, symbols, practices, or texts where collective memory is preserved, especially when real, living memory is fading.

sleeplessness and his changed behaviour and action become the voice through which Naanijaan understands subtly the horror of the war. In a conversation with Sajida and Noor, Naanijaan reveals that Ali used to like sweets before the war:

‘He did’? Sajida asked. ‘When?’

‘Before’

‘Before what?’

‘You’ (Khan 64).

Noor forces Ali to dig out the suppressed or “stored away” memory again and leads the path towards the confession he never thought he needed. “His past had arrived. Soon it would be its own gallery, for all to see. However faint, there was a measure of relief in that.....he knew he’d been wrong in the scalding bath on his homecoming to think he could pack it all away” (Khan 141).

From the blue waves to the sand, mud, rain, fog and river, Noor gradually builds up the story by enabling Sajida and Ali to reflect on their past. Iovino and Oppermann termed the non-human elements as “storied matter”, which invites us to acknowledge “polyphonic story of the world that includes the vital materiality of life, experiences of non-human entities, and our bodily interactions with all forms of material agency as effective actors” (Iovino and Oppermann, “Material” 88). Seeing the first drawing of Noor having traces of her past life, “Sajida suddenly recognized the shape. It was the staple of a previous life she’d lived on the edge of a sea, a different country now, miles away” (Khan 81). Noor drew “fishboat”, which reminds her of the word “fisherman’s boat” which they used in a different language in a different region (Khan 81). Her next drawing was a development of the first one as “Noor’s latest drawing was brimming with dead and rotting fish” and “Sajida was again staring at the dead, rotting fish in silver fishing net as she had seen as child wound around a tree” (Khan 83). The lived experience of her mother’s past comes to Noor, through dreams which she understands as real. The dreams (transferred past) also come in terms of ecological landscape and waterscape:

“That one night Noor had a dream of a tree of a tree with two fingers that rose into the heavens, a boat dreached in silver nets perched in the shadowed crook in between. Upon waking, Noor rushed from her bed into the bathtub. ....she scrubbed and scrubbed her feet, because the grains of sand between her toes tickled when she walked.” (Khan 82)

The sand from the dream is real and so the memory and the past. For Vanessa Agard-Jones the sand remembers the history of queerness in Caribbean Island. The sand is the material metaphor which serves as a repository of “feeling and of experience, of effect and of history” (Jones 325). Likewise, the sand here is a non-human element which participates in the process of construction of memory, an archive for the past experience of war and the natural disaster. In *Noor*, “the sand remembers” the war.

Greg Gerrard argues that “animal” along with the “wilderness” and “pastoral” often serves important trope in literature (104). In *Noor*, animals are presented both as alive and dead. In both form, animals participate in the war scene, gets imprinted as memory in the human sufferer. A parallel is shown between the suffering of human and the animals as repercussion of war. The difference between “animality” and “humanity” is erased portraying both violence and suffering in the war. Upon asking by Noor whether he has seen buffalo like this, Ali confesses Noor, “People like this” (Khan 95). John Berger forwards the idea of animal’s observing capacity (Qtd in Garrard 139) which can be related to the active participation of birds, flies and other such animals in war. In *Noor* the crows and the flies observe “the bloated buffalo” and feed on it (Khan 94). In one drawing Noor draws her mother (as a young girl), “in Noor’s drawing Sajida saw a young girl, clothes ripped from her, clumps of hair plastered to her forehead and her neck”, along with a dead buffalo, “grotesquely bloated, his head that of a different, more kindly beast”. The drawing reminds her of her baby-brother whom she lost in the tsunami – “the baby was wrenched from her arms. Flailing, her hands struck something solid. She dug into the hardness while her body, desperate for air, was swallowed by the sea. When she awoke she was holding on to a dead

buffalo. Swollen, floating like a boat” (Khan 89). The dead buffalo here plays a primary role in the creation of memory. Sajida revisits the tsunami and her baby brother seeing Noor’s drawing of the dead buffalo. According to Jane Bennet such elements and beings possess a “thing-power” or “vitality”, having power to “make things happen, to produce effects” (Bennet 5)

The mud is recurrent in almost every drawing of Noor, showcasing the intrusiveness of war and the related incomparable suffering of humans, animals and environment alike. Noor’s drawing of a “shaded plane of mud” makes Ali recall how once he “stood in mud which seeped into his socks and clothes and the hidden crevices of his then young body” (Khan 198). Noor’s drawings make them realize the collectiveness of their memory and trauma. The fragmented piece of memory was joined through Noor’s drawing. They have shed light on the hidden information which was required for Ali to finally confess and seek forgiveness. Ali’s memory of the war is entangled with Sajida. He remembers the “bathtub of mud” which made him return to Pakistan unknown of the fact that Sajida was in the group of Bengalis who “walked along a path swelling with water and mud”, unknown of the fact that he could have killed her as well along with the other people, “enemies” (Khan 211). Ali confesses, “Removed, again, he watched himself. He pulled his trigger. He wasn’t the first or the last, but he did it nonetheless. He aimed ahead, into chaos, where some of the Bengalis stood at the rim of the pit” (Khan 212). He remembers a girl child (Sajida) in the pit who screamed the name “Mukhtiar”, the name Sajida struggled over the years to recall. The “bathtub of mud” as described by her father makes Sajida vividly remember the day, “including details he didn’t share”, Sajida remembers, “the mud was inside her cheeks, high in her nostrils, deep in her ears, her eyes, her mouth, her throat, between her teeth, her legs, her toes. She choked on the mud and, simultaneously, she vomited” (Khan 217).

The river is another natural element having its own “vitality”, its own power that commands “attention in its own right”. Noor draws the river “Sitalakhya” and hints Ali that it goes with the letter “s”. The river is so vivid in Ali’s memory that “he needed only the briefest of glances to recall the way the river had sounded” (Khan 140). Noor separates the river drawing two parallel streams- pink and grey. Sajida remembers the bodies floated through the river. The river bears the violence and atrocities of the war for everyone to see. Noor’s menstrual blood reminds Ali of the river that flows behind the officer’s house and the violence inflicted upon the women body by the armed officers. The river along with the animals did not allow the violence to be hidden. Unlike the armed forces who tried to bury the people they killed, the animals and the river actively participated in showcasing the raw truth:

The river, in the sun, without haze, was dark. With dead bodies, not just that day, but the whole time we were there. They floated like paper boats.....dogs swam out to pick at them. Birds flew low. Digging the grave took a long time because we had to dig a grave deep enough to the body from the animals. We did it twice. The first time a dog dug at the grave and stood still while we threw stones at it. Then we dug the grave again and covered it with rocks. (Khan 129)

In another event in his memory, when Ali and others were burying a “non-breasted” woman, a symbol of violence inflicted upon women’s body, the crows presented themselves in the scene being witness of violence. “a swarm of crows, thousands of them wings flapping in a loud hum as they circled lower and lower, in unison, above the stinking water of the river” (Khan 140).

Sajida and Ali’s memory is not just individual affair, they remember “in socio-cultural context” (Erl “Introduction” 4). Their “social-framework” of memory extensively constitute of the environment and non-human elements alongside humans and they inhabit in “patterned ways of framing the flow of remembered actions, images, sounds, smells, sensations and impressions” (Hoskins 348). Like Sajida, Ali’s memory of the cyclone is also integrally connected with his experience with war. Noor’s drawing of “the brown-black of the background, the images of torn, upside down trees and shattered boats”, makes Ali recognize the monsoon of East Pakistan forcing him to revisit the “lush and green” land of the war, “snaking rivers”, and “fields”. (Khan 92-93). The land and the rivers become “storied matter”, portraying inseparableness of the people and the

landscape. “*The land is black like the people*” (Khan 94). Sarah Osterhoudt and Ben Bridges state that land have agency and it takes prominent role in the creation and narration of memory (2). The Bengalis Ali remembered rose from the “fog” while it was heavily raining. They forwarded when there was a “thunderclap” in the sky. Ali and Sajida cannot erase the non-human elements of rain, fog or the thunderclap. These elements have formed their memory. Latour calls such elements “actors” and propagates that things not only serve as “backdrop of human actions” but also can “authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on” (72). These elements while forming the personal aspects of memory “writ small” is nevertheless intersect with the “writ large”, the larger political and economical history (Bridges and Osterhoudt 2).

Thus, memory, in *Noor*, emerges as a dynamic, multi-directional process shaped not only by information stored in the brain, but also circulates through landscapes, storms, rivers, mud, animals etc. These ecological witnesses carry what humans repress, stitching together fragmented histories of Sajida and Ali until the past resurfaces through Noor’s art. In this convergence of memory, trauma, and ecology, nature becomes the novel’s most persistent storyteller.

### **Conclusion**

Sorayya Khan’s *Noor* reveals how memory and trauma extend beyond human consciousness and become embedded in landscapes, animals, weather, and the material world. Through an ecocritical and trauma-theoretical lens, the novel shows that ecological entities act as witnesses, archives, and agents that preserve histories silenced in official narratives of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. The recurring presence of the sea, rivers, mud, monsoons, and dying animals demonstrates that trauma is not confined to individuals but circulates through the environment as ecological memory. By foregrounding these more-than-human agencies, *Noor* reconstructs forgotten or unspoken pasts and challenges anthropocentric understandings of violence, remembrance, and healing. Ultimately, the novel emphasizes that the land itself remembers, carrying traces of violence that future generations must confront, interpret, and transform. This study highlights the importance of integrating ecological perspectives into trauma and memory discourse, opening pathways for further exploration of eco-trauma and eco memory in South Asian war literature.

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**THE WORLD-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LEGACY OF CULTURAL  
HERITAGE, ECONOMIC AND TRADE ROUTES IN MANIPUR, SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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**Abstract**

Northeast India, historically described as an economic, cultural, and political- diplomatic corridor, holds a distinctive place in the broader context of Manipur and Myanmar within the ancient historical processes of South and Southeast Asia. This paper adopts a world-historical perspective to explore cultural heritage, Silk Route trade connections, and the deep-rooted Socio-economic and political structures that define the region. Focusing on Manipur, the study examines how traditional knowledge systems and trans-regional trade shaped not only local economies but also the foundation of a culturally embedded and historically sustained socio-economic system regional political identity- rooted in cultural traditional economic autonomy. By situating Manipur within border trans-regional historical frameworks, the study challenges narrative that portrays it as isolated. Instead, it presents the region as an active participant in long standing exchange networks. In lights of threats from globalization and cultural erosion, Manipur remains unstable after its postcolonial merger with India. The study is crucial because it links global political – economic forces to reclaiming historical legitimacy, strengthening identity, and fostering indigenous transformation.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, Silk Route, Southeast Asia, Historical Legacy, Indigenous Rights

**Introduction:** Northeast India often referred to as a cultural and economic corridor between south and Southeast Asia holds a significant history, often overlooked its position in world history. The regions premeditated location made it an integral part of Trans regional exchange system that pre dates modern political borders. “Historically, North East India and south East Asia were connected through land routes as well as maritime links. Historical records testify the prevalence of various migratory and trade routes that connected both the regions” (State Innovation & Transformation Aayog, 2023, p.2). Northeast state, regional based Indian History, trade and economic lifeline, like silk routes have mentioned Assam history clearly about the silk worm rearing and fabric production during trade in Silk Road, Tai Ahom and others community of Tai’s group are distinctly recognized in the past. However, within the Northeast region, Manipur silk route have not mentioned clearly even the name of this Kingdom and veiled inside the narrative. It’s questionable indeed of the negligence inside the history of north east India; whether Manipur had not involved actively to the silk route history being an imminent Kingdom able with geopolitical ties with bordering countries? In almost of the Northeast development research project, Ancient and Modern history with Educational journal have not mentioned details about the ancient trade route history of Manipur kingdom. According to the silk route history origin and its definition, “The Silk Roads were an inter connected web of routes linking the ancient society of Asia, the Subcontinent, Central Asia, Western Asia, and the Nearest East, stretching to about 7,500 km east to west but covering over 35,000 km...” (Mishra, 2020, p.3). In most history text of Northeast state based on colonial era had unseemly supplemented Manipur as part of Assam and Bengal thereby the trace of Manipur Kingdom’s trade route and of Silk Road history was unfortunately not inked as of importance. Manipur was not part of Assam even though Colonizers for their political convenience asserted as region of Bengal eastern frontier. Manipur before the pre colonial eras were not under any force of Northeast kingdom as such Tripura or Assam. Manipur as one of the mighty kingdoms in South East Asia had significantly played powerful administration as well as

trade route connectivity. To say, truth should reveal by time and exposed the reality of the past through cross examining of how Manipur had directly engaged in the silk route to the study on its socio-economic, culture and political status. So, to the researchers, scholars, educationalist, policymakers and historian of the region may I ask the question that whether Manipur had not participated to the silk route, global trade evolution? Why Manipur is disguised as a poor state of the Northeast region without a vision to revive literal gap of the past and with contemporary policies on opening trade routes in the region? The present policy makers must rely with reasons on the study of trade route values prevalent in the past Manipur history rather than investing idea on new connectivity of Trans Asian route as geopolitical ties of the past Manipur witnesses' being well established through history. Moreover revivalism of the ancient gateway and global silk route to promote in borderland trade policy with participation of indigenous communities belonging to Manipur would bring fruitfulness in future.

Among the lesser-known southern Silk Route - an overland branch of the broader Silk Road network, through China, Burma via Assam and Manipur had played a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic and cultural used fabric of these places. The paper would explore the historical legacy of trade, economy, and culture & identity established among the northeast India through the lens of world history and heritage studies.

While the central and western Silk Road routes have long been recognized as symbols of cross – continental exchange, and the southern Silk Route remains under represented in both academic discourse and heritage recognition. Yet, this route facilitated significant interaction between China, Myanmar, and India particularly through Manipur revisiting the region's vibrant diplomacy, trading and enthusiasm of traditional knowledge from artisanal skills prevalent before 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Through the highlight of the World-Historical Perspective on the Legacy of Cultural Heritage, Economic and Trade Routes in Manipur of Northeast India, the study focus Manipur not only as a peripheral frontier but as a historical & dynamic region deeply connected to Southeast Asia's cultural and commercial networks. Also a blend of historical legacy, perception analyses on the cultural heritage, economic and trade routes are elucidated in the study. The paper argues that the region's rich heritage-religion, culture, economy histories and political relationship thus reflected a long standing legacy of interactions shaped by the flow of the Silk Route. The Silk Route can be seen as a historical account of values and this research contributes to an inclusive understanding of Trans Asian trade networks, diplomacy of the past and aims on the need of reviving it. To guide the research, the study presents the problem statement, objectives, and methodology below.

**Problem Statement:** Manipur's sustained decline in its indigenous socio-political, economic, and trade systems has weakened its cultural identity and disrupted its traditional social structures, with the erosion of these routes, contributing to long-term instability, and demanding urgent reflection on its historical legacy.

**Objective:** This paper highlights conserving tangible and intangible heritage, especially the Moreh-Tamu trade and Southern Silk Roads, as a vital to indigenous knowledge, ethics, justice, identity, peace and sustainable development in relation to Manipur.

**Methodology:** This research uses a mixed-method comparative approach, drawing upon Meitei Puya (Primary Sources), historical records, and academic literature (Secondary source), within political, cultural, and sociological frameworks to legitimize the status of Manipur's economic and trade routes' in Southeast Asia.

#### **Ancient Manipur and Trade Route before the 18<sup>th</sup> Centaury**

Manipur existed as a key highland passage and there was trade connectivity with the South and Southeast Asia until British India intervention in the administrative system. Located in traditional zone between the Indian subcontinent and the Indo Chinese world, Manipur acted as viaduct connecting the Brahmaputra valley (to the west) with the Irrawaddy basin (to the east), and

further toward Yunnan and beyond. This location places it within broader networks of overland trade corridor that formed essential links in the pre-modern global exchange system – albeit outside the dominant maritime silk roads. During the reign of King Khagemba around 1536 ten new markets were established. This move was significant as it reflected the Kingdom's growing socio-economic and political strength, especially on supporting and regulating both internal and external trade exchange. The Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur, briefly recorded in the line, *Meidingoo Khagembana Keithel Tara Hong-ee* (Ebunghal and Khelchandra, 1967, p.35). This brief entry reflects not only the growing arrangement under king Khagemba, but also reminded of the administrative policy of providing trading sustenance during his reign.

The hilly kingdom connected Southwest-Southeast Asian trade and facilitated exchange of forest products, salt, iron tools, beads, textiles, and ritual items. The Indigenous community mainly Meitei shaped and played the control of the trade from Bengal and Assam too and traders connection from Burma, Shan states, and Yunnan also.

To the west, trade was carried along the Bengal-Assam corridor, linking with the Silk Road extensions into Central Asia and the Indian Ocean trade networks through the ports like Chittagong and Dhaka. These routes enable imports such as Central Asian horses, Middle Eastern glassware, Persian textiles, and Indian Cotton into Northeast India and onward. From the Brahmaputra Valley, caravans and river traders would pass through the Cachar plains and Barak river system, gradually ascending into the Manipur. Furthermore Inland trade route connects Manipur to Cachar and Assam from Lamlangdong Tongjei Maril which is also known as old Cachar road Manipur corridor is the only one way to connect Assam through Cachar, and later on Jiribam road have develop to adjoining with together at Rengpang alongside from Mongjarong Khullen. To the east, traders from the Manipur connected to the Irrawaddy –Salween trade system, which allowed goods to move between upper Burma and the larger Mekong basin. Through these networks, Chinese Silks, Burmese lacquer ware, and Southeast Asian spice reached the frontier of Manipur. The Kabaw Valley, bordering Manipur and Upper Burma functions as a vital trade zone and political buffer, with periodic exchange missions and tribute flows. The eastern route linked Manipur not only to Burmese Kingdoms but also to the wider Mainland Southeast Asian exchange network, including regions of modern – day Laos and northern Thailand. In the South, although not directly coastal, Manipur access the Chindwin River system eventually opened pathway toward Martaban and Pegu which were major maritime trade ports of Burma. These ports were deeply engaged in the Indian Ocean trade, connecting to the places like Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and East Africa. Thus through a series of land-based and revered links, Manipur's highland economic was indirectly tied into transcontinental routes of commodities, peoples, and ideas.

According to Kakati, D.(2022) and Yumjao,W.(1966) records, hundreds of Indo-Pacific beads (circular & tabular) excavated at the early historic site of Sekta in Manipur. The site of Sekta which flourished between 200 BCE to 600 CE was located at crucial crossroads of the traditional land routes. These Indo-Pacific beads at Sekta are the same as those produced at Arikamedu (Gupta, 2018: 9). These beads might have been a traded item through land and sea routes to India's northeast into Myanmar and to Southeast Asia. Moreover, Manipur was well advanced in exploring resources besides rich in religious philosophy and astrological science. Distance contact with parts of China had evidenced from history", in Burma too Manipur was known as Ponnas (Pouna). I.e Brahmins. (p, 96 ) and (p.23).

Further evidenced that there was influenced upon one another. Manipur, Shan and Burmese arts, ceremonial activity, and traditional court are somewhat similar and inter exchange of gifts as token of firm relationship. These are not signs of isolation, but of active regional engagement, indicating that Manipur was not peripheral, but a critical node in upland Asia's mobility networks. Even without seaports or imperial expansion, ancient Manipur was embedded in a dense web of inter-regional exchanges, connecting upland economic, indigenous political systems, and spiritual traditions with the global flow of goods and influence. This pre-18<sup>th</sup> century period represents a

time when global trade did not only flow along empire, and oceans, but through hills, forest, and valleys—places like Manipur that quietly held the world together.

**Manipur Economy and Trade before British rule.**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was a significant era in Manipur's history, marking a period of internal consolidation, expansion, and heightened engagement with neighbouring polities, all within a pre-colonial framework. During this time, the Manipur economy was shaped not by colonial institution but by its indigenous political systems, across-border relations with southeast and South Asia, and a deeply rooted cultural model of governance.

The profitable structure was vitally agrarian, with wet-rice cultivation, cotton, cocoon rearing for weaving raw material as the economic backbone in the central valley. However, agriculture alone did not define the kingdom's prosperity. The economy was supported by a vibrant network of local markets, regional trade route, and barter systems, often regulated through customary practices. Tributes were collection was common. Women played equal status in economic life activity. Women-led market called *Khwairamband Keithel* is a fine instance of equal footing towards the contribution of Manipur economy.

Trade in this period continued to be primarily overland, with Manipur serving as a strategic passage between the Brahmaputra valley in the west and upper Burma in the east. Goods moved across the Barak Valley, linking Manipur with the Burmese lowlands. From this connections, a wide array of goods were exchanged – including salt, iron tools, forest products, cotton fabrics, rice, livestock (notably ponies and elephants), medical herbal, and handicraft items. The Manipur pony, in particular, held both cultural and commercial value. It was not only a symbol of royal status and military strength but also a sought – after commodity in diplomatic relation and regional trade, especially with the Burmese and neighbouring hill State. Internally, the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw increasing centralisation of state power under ruler such as king Pamheiba (Garibniwaz), who expanded Manipur's influence through military campaigns and administrative reforms. These reforms was were not only reclaim ancestral land or forefather territory continue from Khagemba king; they were aim at securing trade routes, controlling tribute flows, and integrating economically vital regions like the hill tract and border valley into the central court's authority. Strategic outposts and garrison settlement were often placed along trade route to maintain security and surveillance over commerce and mobility.

Trade with neighbouring polities such as the Khaki, Shan States, Ahom kingdom, and Ava (Burma) was frequently formalized through gift exchange, tribute missions, and marriage alliance, blending political diplomacy with economic cooperation. While this interactions were not part of a formalized “international trade” system in the modern sense, they constituted a pre-modern regional trade order, govern by customary law, kinship diplomacy, and military power. In a study by Singha (2016),

The Rajas of Manipur gave numerous Manipuri's / Meitei ladies in marriage to the kings and princes of neighbouring kingdoms like – Ahoms, Kacharis, Tripurie's, pong etc, and vice-versa. Every marriage alliance was bucked by political motives. Furthermore, Reference speak of trade from Manipur visited not only Burma but also china on horseback. As the name “Manipur” is new nomenclature, in the early years the Burma called the Manipuris Kathe and the shans or Thore. Who inhabited the country east of the Ningthee or Khyendween River, referred to them as Cassay, of which the term Burmese word kathe is a corruption. To the Manipuri the kingdom of Burmese was known as Ava or Awa or Awaaa. The first instance of matrimonial alliances between the royal house of Manipur and Burma is recorded in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century by Mutua Bahadur, an eminent scholar of Manipur mentioning that the Pagan king kyan sit. Thar had a Manipur princess as his wife.” (pp,874,875)

Cultural transformation also shaped the economic system. The 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the institutionalization of Vaishnavism in the Meitei court, which influence social hierarchy, labour

organisation, and market ethics. Temples and royal patronage began to play roles in resource distribution and social welfare. However, despite the growing presence of Hindu court culture, indigenous practices including land stewardship under the Sanamahi belief system, communal labour, and ritual – based exchange – continued to frame the moral economy of the kingdom.

In short, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Manipuri economic was a hybrid of indigenous governance, ritual obligation, and regional trade diplomacy, built upon long standing local systems while increasingly navigating the political pressure of powerful neighbours. It was during this period, just before colonial contact integration that positioned it as a key node in the upland trade networks of south and Southeast Asia, rather than as an isolated highland kingdom.

#### **Colonial-Era Economy and Trade Route in Manipuri Society**

The colonial era in Manipur formally began in the aftermath of the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, which resulted in the kingdom's annexation as a princely state under the British indirect rule.

Research by Sinha, (2006.), shows that also the Anglo-Manipur war destroyed the sovereignty of Manipur and reduced her to the status of a tributary state by placing a "Raja" in the Person of Churchand Singh, the great grandson of Raja Nara Singh, on the Throne. This period cover the reign of Maharaj Churchand singh (1891 A.D. to 1941 A.D) and a part of the reign of Maharaj Budha Chandra Singh (1941 A.D to 1955 A.D) - (P, 99)

However, British economic influence had begun earlier, through expanding trade interest in the North-eastern frontier and the incorporation of Assam and neighbouring territories into the British India Empire. This Period transformed Manipur's economy from a locally governed, regionally rooted trade system to a colonial periphery aligned with imperial priorities. Key trade routes – linking Manipur with upper Burma, Assam, and Cachar-were reorganized to serve British interests. The pre-colonial upland-lowland trade model-once shaped by customs and kinship ties-was replaced by bureaucratic border controls and military outpost. British administrators further integrated Manipur into the imperial economy by extracting and exporting timber, agricultural products, forest resources, and labour.

Trade route are formalized along newly upgraded Imphal Jiribam (Tongjei Maril) road now National Highway 37(NH-37), which is connected to the Manipur. British engineers surveyed plans to expand railway network from Lumding in Assam, crossing the Barail Range through Imphal valley, and then continuing into the Kabaw valley cross the Chindwin River. However, the conversion work was not completed due to impractical expensiveness and Second World War. "Trade and Economic Integration with British India. Manipur economy grew progressively assimilated into the British colonial economy. The development of roads and railroads enabled the transportation of products and peoples, connecting Manipur to the border markets of British India". (Laiphrakpam and Singh, 2024, p.5)

These infrastructure developments serve not only military logistics but also the movement of British goods to the hill economy, and the outflow of raw materials. Trade with Burma, which have been an organic and ritualized process for centuries, was restricted or restructured, particularly after Burma's full colonization in 1885. The Kabaw valley, once a shared Zone of commerce and diplomacy, become a contested colonial frontier, administered under surveillance and used more for political leverage than reciprocal trade. Tedim / Teddim Road is name after the village/ town of Tedim in Myanmar. It's the historical British goods transportation route connects Manipur, Imphal via Teddim Village in the Chin Hills of Myanmar after crossing the border beyond Churchandpur, now designated NH-102, it was expanded and reconstructed by the colonial British.

The colonial authorities imposed new taxation systems, including land revenue, forest use fees, and market taxes, which disrupted the redistributive and ritual based economy of the Meitei kingdom. These taxes are monetized, requiring household to engage in cash-based transactions that previously held little importance. As a result, subsistence agriculture and barter-based market

practice gave way to cash cropping, especially of rice, mustard, and cotton-now cultivated for sale, not just for consumption or ritual exchange.

This economic shift deeply affects Manipur's women, who had historically dominated local markets like Khwairamband Keithel, faced increasing pressure from external commercial traders, taxation, and state regulation. Artisan group, such as blacksmiths and weavers, struggles arose as colonial goods flooded the market. Indigenous industries, which operated under customary protection and social obligations, now had to compete with cheap imports and bureaucratic regulations. The export of state commodities and the import of cheap goods disrupted local markets and customary practices, prompting widespread movements and agitations against colonial rule.

Furthermore, the British introduced labour extraction system, including conscription for road building, policing, and plantation work in Assam. Manipuri's were both displaced from traditional livelihood and recruited into new roles within the colonial economy-often marginal, poorly paid, and detached from their social and ritual contexts. In many cases, hill communities were especially vulnerable, as their forest rights were curtailed under new forest laws and their traditional trade networks served. As a result of these colonial policies, the first Nupi Lan and second Nupi Lan uprisings occurred, marking significant moments of resistance in Manipur's history.

While the British introduced modern education and administrative reforms, these were narrowly focused and often disconnected from indigenous knowledge and economic sustainability. As a result, colonial modernity in Manipur produced a dual economy: a formal, state-controlled system and an informal indigenous economy that persisted in marginalized or displaced forms.

Despite these challenges, resistance and adaptation remained strong. Local markets survived, women's economic roles remained resilient, and indigenous communities continued to engage in underground and formal trade across restricted border, particularly into Burma and Naga Hills. The preservation of Meitei identity and customary institutions during this era was not a passive survival, but an active negotiation with colonial forces, often expressed through economic defiance, cultural assertion, and political resistance – culminating eventually in the anti-colonial movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, colonialism in Manipur did not merely alter trade route – it restructured the economic foundations of society, introduced alien economic models, and reoriented the kingdom from a regional actor to a colonial dependency. Yet, throughout this transformation, Manipur society continued to find ways to assert indigenous values, local agency, and economic self-definition, even under the weight of imperial control.

#### **Post-Colonial Economy and Trade Route in the Present Day Manipur**

Following India's independence in 1947 and Manipur's controversial merger with the Indian union in 1949, the region's economic trajectory entered a new and complex phase. While the colonial state had already disrupted traditional trade pattern and integrated Manipur into an imperial framework, the post colonial state introduced its own set of bureaucratic, infrastructural, and geopolitical transformations, many of which have continued to marginalize indigenous economic systems and disrupt natural trade routes. One of the most visible changes has been the redirection and fragmentation of traditional trade routes. Manipur's historical connectivity with Burma (now Myanmar) through the Kabaw valley, once a vital link to Southeast Asia, remains severely restricted due to border militarisation, national security concern, and lack of diplomatic continuity. Despite its geographical position as a potential remains largely untapped due to bureaucratic obstacles, lack of infrastructure, and political instability both within Manipur and across the Myanmar border.

Internally Manipur has been integrated into the Indian national economy through a highly centralized model of supply and dependency. Good flow in primary from mainland Indian states through narrow and often fragile corridor such as the Imphal-Dimapur route (via National Highway two), and the Jiribam – Silchar route in the west. These highways serve as Manipur's



lifelines but are frequently disrupted by blockades, landslides, and political unrest, making economic stability highly volatile.

Local production and indigenous industries – including handloom, handicrafts, traditional medicine, rice cultivation, and farming product–continue to exist, but face growing pressure from external market forces. Cheap goods impetrate from mainland India and beyond, often through government schemes and private retailers, dominate local markets. These mass produced items undercut the value of local craft and erode the cultural economy that had been sustained for generations.

A key site of economic tension is the struggle over market influence, especially in urban centres like Imphal. Traditionally women-led markets such as Khwairamband Keithel (Ima keithel) continue to serve as powerful symbol of economic autonomic and cultural pride, but they face mounting pressure from both corporate retail chains and state-lead urban development projects. There is a growing sense that these market spaces are being targeted for gentrification and control, often without consultation with the women vendors or local communities.

In urban and hill regions, the post-colonial economy remains uneven. Poor infrastructure, weak road connectivity, and limited access to credit or technology marginalize tribal communities once reliant on forest trade and small farming. New land laws and development projects have disrupted traditional communal economies.

At the same time, attempts by the state to “develop” Manipur through special economic zones( SEZs), cross-border trade spots, and national highway projects have had limited success.

Farooqi and Teckchandani, (2024) provides evidence that. Through, imitative such as the India–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and infrastructure development project, India aim to deepen its economic ties with the region and strength its diplomatic presence Several factors contributed to the transition from look east to act east Policy.(p,2)

Act East policy holds challenges great promise, these are significant challenges. These include navigating the complex geopolitical rivalries in the region, dealing with non-traditional security threats such as piracy and terrorism, and overcoming the barriers to trade and investment integration. These imitative often prioritize strategic and security interest over local economic empowerment, and frequently fail to integrate indigenous knowledge system or ensure commonly participation. The global context has also added layers of complexity. With the growth of digital marketplace, informal cross-border trade, and rising interest in organic and indigenous products, Manipuri entrepreneurs and producers have begun to explore new economic spaces. Diaspora networks, social media, and cultural revival movements have opened alternative pathways, though it remain fragile and uneven.

In this contested economic environment, Manipur stands at a crossroads. On one side lies the promise of regional integration and cultural–economic revival through connectivity with Southeast Asia, on the other, the persistent struggle to resist economic dependency, preserve indigenous trade systems, and protect commonly–led market spaces from external domination. In conclusion, the post–colonial economic of Manipur is shaped by contradictions: state sponsored development versus grassroots resilience, national marginalization, and global market access versus local economic erosion. The future of trade and economy in Manipur depends not merely on infrastructure or policy, but on the recognition and protection of indigenous economic sovereignty, rooted in local culture, memory, and the right to define one’s own economic destiny.

**Discussion:**

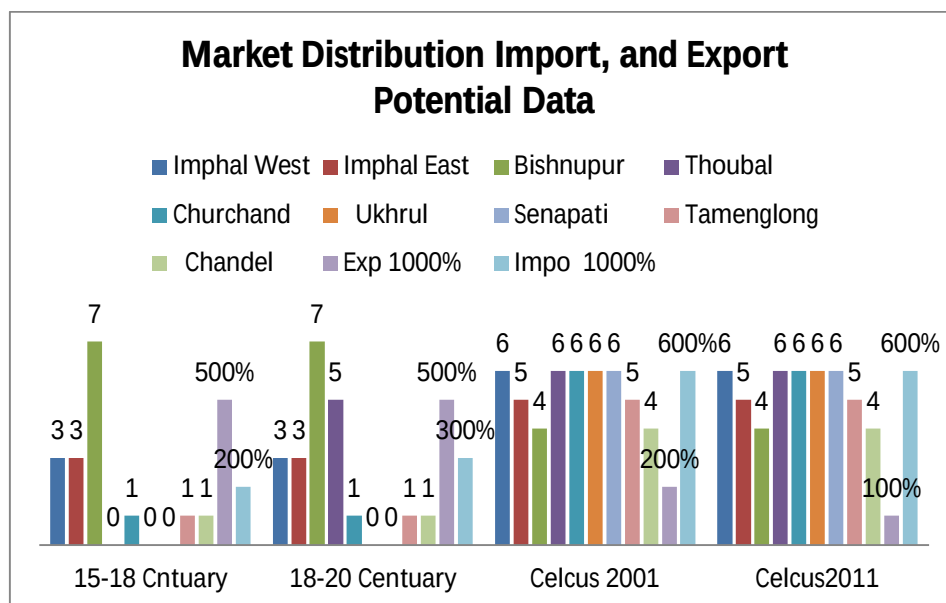


**Fig. 1.**

The paper examines and analyse the historical and cultural significance of market continuity in Manipur across generations. The Coolum chart Fig.1 presents a comparative historical overview of market distribution and trade continuity through the colonial era up to the modern period. In this dataset, one numerical value equals one market, which is set as 100% on the percentage scale to represent export and import data. Thus: 100%= 1 market, 200%= 2 markets, 1000%= 10 markets. This scale helps compare trade activity across areas, with percentages representing the number of markets rather than a traditional 0-100% range. Markets distribution, the number and location of markets – is used to analyze export and imports patterns. Instead of just market size or potential, it focuses on where markets are situated geographically. Markets are key trade hubs, so their distribution reveals:

- Regions with higher trade activity,
- Area better connected to supply chains,
- Zones with greater access to trade infrastructure.

Using market distribution data provides insight into regional export and imports flows based on market presence and connectivity. It draws on ancient manuscripts, oral histories, and field based interviews, particularly with market vendors, to highlight the long standing structure of local markets across various districts of the state. The early period, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,

reflects records based on oral traditions and ancient texts, where districts and decentralised open markets flourished in different regions. According to Naorem Bina Devi, a resident of Thanga Sable Maning Likai, Moirang historically had five independent market locations - 1. Aawun Keithel, 2. Khamnu Keithel, 3. Khoyol Keithel, 4. Khorl Keithel, and 5. Pasang Keithel, despite being unified under the single market name Moirang Keithel. These Market historically maintained their economic functions and scale, showing that traditional trading systems endured over time. (Personal communication, November 3, 2025) Moreover, during the time Meidingu Khagemba establish ten market across the Kingdom they are 1. Sana Keithel = Imphal west District, 2. Awang Keithel, = (Awang khul) Tamenglong District, 3. Kha Keithel, = Churhandpur District (Behiyang) 4. Phayeng keithel, = Imphal West District, 5. Moirang Keithel, = Bishnupur District, 6. Khuman Keithel = (Myang Imphal) Imphal West District, 7. Chairen keithel, = Imphal West District 8. Andro keithel = Imphal East District, 9. Sekta keithel = Imphal East District, and 10. Kontong Keithel, = (Moreh = Kontong Khul) Chandel District, since ancient time, it has been practiced. In ancient two markets name have changed in Burmese language during seven years devastation i.e Moreh and Behiang market.

In Bishnupur District near Moirang, two ancient market places are identified: Lamlangdong and Nambol. Lamlangdong was an important trade exchange site between hill and valley communities. Following religious and cultural shifts in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, especially with the building of the first Vishnu temple, the place came to be known as Bishnupur, through the market itself continued its function uninterrupted. Nambol market, originally called khorl keithel and located at khorl Leikai in front of the khorlphaba deity hill along the Laitonjam village road, still survives today as a small vegetable market, now known as Nambol Keithel. This demonstrates the unchanged nature of local trade routes and markets identities despite name changes and administrative transformations.

In Imphal, the central market known as Khwairamband Market functioned historically as a hub where traders from all corners of the kingdom came to exchange goods, often travelling through waterway and by bullock carts. The name itself signifies this convergence. During the colonial period, British trade companies such as Maxwell did not replace but instead integrated into the existing market structure, operating within Khwairamband itself. Today, this market is famously known as Ima Keithel, the women run market which continues the tradition of indigenous trade with strong cultural and gendered significance.

According to 2001 and 2011 census data, compiled from all nine District census handbooks: Marketplaces shown in the Table Fig No 2.

| District | Imphal East | Imphal west  | Thouba   | Bishnupur | Senapati    |
|----------|-------------|--------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
|          | Lamlong     | Lamsang      | Lilong   | Nambol    | Mao         |
|          | Kongba      | Khumbong     | Thoubal  | Bishnupur | Tadubi      |
|          | Lamlai      | Sekmai       | Yairipok | Moirang   | Maram       |
|          | Sagol-mang  | Myang Imphal | Kakching | Kumbi     | Kangpo -kpi |
|          | Jiribam     | Samurou      | Serou    |           | Saikul      |

|  |   |              |        |   |          |
|--|---|--------------|--------|---|----------|
|  |   | Khwairamband | Wabgai |   | Senapati |
|  | 5 | 6            | 6      | 4 | 6        |

| District              | Ukhrul   | Chandel      | Churcha-ndpur  | Tamenglong    |
|-----------------------|----------|--------------|----------------|---------------|
|                       | Ukhrul   | Chakpikarong | Singhat        | Noneh         |
|                       | Kamjong  | Chandel      | Santing        | Nungba        |
|                       | Phungyar | Pallel       | Churcha- ndpur | Khongsang     |
|                       | Litan    | Moreh        | Thnlon         | New Keiphundi |
|                       | Lambui   |              | Tuila          | Tamenglong    |
|                       | Marem    |              | Parbung        |               |
| <b>TotalNo<br/>48</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>4</b>     | <b>6</b>       | <b>5</b>      |

**Table Fig No. 2**

The Moreh Market trade route of Chandel District and “Kha keithel” at Churchandpur District (Behiangs) which is shown in the column chart represents one of the most important historical and economic border linkages of Manipur. This area, although a small town, played a major role in trade exchanges between different kingdoms and is believed to have been part of the extended Silk Road network. It connection Manipur to border Southeast Asian trading systems and continues to be a key economic gateway today. The chart indicates the strategic importance of Moreh not just as a border post but as a cultural and economic trade route with longstanding heritage value. In the final two groups of the column chart, the data indicates that the traditional markets across Manipur have continued without disruption into the modern period, the type and the source of commodities traded within them have drastically changed. Market-level data collected through vendor interviews shows that state-based production has sharply declined. Commodities that were once core to Manipur’s economy-such as cotton 100%, iron tools 100%, fabrics 80%, silk 100%, textiles 100%, salt 5%, rice 70%, vegetables 70%, and even fish 70%- are now mostly imported from outside the state. This marks a significant shift from a production-oriented economy to one dependent on external supply, even as the local markets themselves remain active. This contrast highlights a key finding: the structure and cultural continuity of Manipur’s markets have survived, but the economic productivity that once sustained them has weakened. Moreh, though still a vital trading post, lacks policy mechanisms to protect indigenous rights and promote local economic participation. Similarly, the absence of export policies for agro-based products and traditional crafts has prevented local producers from accessing market structure particularly in Imphal and surrounding towns, is the increasing occupation of wholesale trade by non-local dealers. From small stalls to large shops, the economic space is increasingly dominated by outsiders, which reduces the participation and benefit of indigenous traders and producers.

The column chart shows a shift in Manipur’s economy after its merger with India, with declining exports and increased imports. Historically, local markets thrived on indigenous products, but today they are dominated by external goods, revealing a shift from economic self-sufficiency to reliance on imports. It based on qualitative analysis and field observation. The chart instead emphasizes the resilience and continuity of market location and their potential. However,

the data from vendor reflects a deep disconnection of the survival and of the markets as a place, and the erosion of the state's economic self – sufficiency. This structural declination of indigenous production-underscores the urgent policy support to revive local industries and strengthen Manipur's exports capacity.

### **Conclusion**

Manipur's economic and trade history is not merely a local concern. It embodied cross region to region association and rooted from centuries of cross – border exchange of indigenous products and diplomacy. However various weaknesses in the state policy making have failed to recognize the potent of the past trade and economy value so the people of Manipur remains economically dependent and politically marginalized.

Despite its location at a key historic junction between south and Southeast Asia, Manipur's heritage economic and cultural trade routes-particularly the Moreh-Tamu corridor and Imphal Valley Khwairamband Women Market remain absent from comprehensive platforms that would promote cultural heritage and economic reformation. International frameworks such as UNESCO's heritage listings, WTO trade equity initiatives, and regional forums like ASEAN economic integration have yet to fully incorporate or acknowledge Manipur's indigenous trade knowledge, historical market systems, or its role in pre-colonial Asian connectivity. The post-colonial marginalization of northeast India, absence of institutional advocacy for indigenous trade systems, limited contribution to regional trade history must enhanced to the best level.

For a sustainable and equitable future, both academic and policy frameworks must recognized heritage trade route as legitimate and valuable components of historical and modern economic systems. Empower and invest in indigenous economic systems as viable alternative to mainstream development. Reformation national and regional curricula to include heritage – based trade historical and upland –lowland trade logistics. Actively include regions like Manipur in global discussions on unique cultural heritage, border trade reform, and indigenous economic rights. Only then Manipur can reclaim its rightful place as a cultural – economic bridge between south and Southeast Asia-not merely in historical reflection, but in shaping the future of sustainable regional trade.

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**LAND AS WITNESS: SPATIAL DOMINATION, OTHERING AND CLIMATE CRISIS IN  
ADIVASI LITERARY TESTIMONIES**

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**Abstract**

This paper engages in an intersectional study of climate crisis, environmental degradation and indigenous displacement through a close textual analysis of Mahua Maji's *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua*, Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, and U Victor G. Bareh's *U Tirot Singh*. Situated within the discourse of environmental humanities, the present work argues that climate crisis is not an abstract concept, rather a lived consequence from centuries of neglect, ecological exploitation and cultural othering. Drawing on Rob Nixon's notion of *slow violence* as well as Lefebvre, Soja's and Michel Foucault's spatial theories, this paper traces how environmental degradation is both a symptom and consequence of cultural displacement. Bareh's *U Tirot Singh* exposes the colonial foundations of ecological destruction. The British soldiers cleared forests and violated indigenous women in the process of developing roads, thereby pervading their physical as well as cultural space while asserting a hierarchy over their land and life. Shekar's *The Adivasi will not Dance* brings the problems of ecological degradation and cultural suppression in a postcolonial light, where Adivasi communities face dispossession, drought and industrial exploitation reducing them as victims of a modern climate crisis born from extractive government. Maji's *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua* is the prime example where radioactive pollution erases both environmental and spiritual balance, fusing ecological collapse with human suffering. On a close observation of the works, climate crisis emerges as an outcome of othering. It does not limit itself to othering of cultures and races, rather the separation of humanity from nature and the marginalization of those who co-exist with it. By tracing the array of events from colonial spatial invasion to contemporary ecological decay, this study positioned in Environmental humanities, stands as a climate testimony, exposing how the domination of land, gender, and culture under the guise of development has become the architect of environmental catastrophe.

**Keywords:** Environmental humanities, Adivasi Ecologies, Slow Violence, Climate crisis, Spatial Domination

**Introduction**

Climate crisis around the world has intensified with development and industrialization whose unchecked use has resulted in severe environmental imbalances. It has transformed the relationship between humans and environment from a philosophical question into a lived emergency. Over time, this has led to the emergence of interdisciplinary fields such as environmental humanities which serves as a platform for cultivation of perspectives and discourses. This area broadens the philosophical enquiry by its emphasizing that climate crisis not only affects society on scientific or economic level, rather concerns cultural, historical as well as political ecologies. Drawing on concepts of ecocriticism, cultural geography, post humanism and environmental philosophy, environmental humanities expand tradition environmental enquiry by implying that climate crisis is also a crisis of imagination, ethics and narratives. This field uses literary works to examine how we interact, respond and coexist in nature that often shapes our ecological futures.

Scholars like Rob Nixon, Amitav Ghosh, Val Plumwood, and Dipesh Chakrabarty have debated that contemporary ecological disasters are inseparable from the long decades of colonial extraction, capitalist expansion, displacement, indigenous marginalization and environmental injustice. India's ecological landscape is shaped by political regimes and their shifting

developmental visions. For years, environmental resistance always emerged from the Adivasi people of our nation. They live closest to nature and have a cultivated sense of co-existence. From Chipko Movement to Narmada Bachao Andolan, only they could figure out the flaws in our planning and decided to resist. Development and industrialization can be ecofriendly only when the gaze changes. Today, government, in sake of providing more materialistic facilities to the citizens are on a quest of extraction and exploitation that disguises as hard work and success while some unknown, impoverished labourer suffocate in coal and iron ore mines. These indigenous communities have always been burdened by exploitation, displacement, pollution or climate crisis, that too, provoked by urban industrialists.

This paper investigates that how do Indigenous literary narratives reveal that climate crisis is deeply rooted in the process of othering, spatial domination and slow violence enacted by colonial and postcolonial powers. Examining the three texts, U Victor G.Bareh's *U Tirot Singh*, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* and Mahua Maji's *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua*, the narratives create a trajectory that leads from colonial intrusions and violence against the indigenous communities, to a postcolonial depiction of displacement, imposed hierarchical orders and neglect regarding ecological exploitation leading to its culmination where we find, systemic slow violence, displacement and radioactive poisoning leading to the erasure of normal life or several generations. The climate crisis in these literary works usually never emerge from natural calamity but when political and economic structures prioritize extraction over coexistence. Although each text is grounded in a different geography, they share the same pattern of intrusion and environmental destruction. It starts with outsiders arrive invoking development and new opportunities, they reorganize their spaces through roads, industries and mining; and thus fracture the ecosystem of the area by neglect, deforestation, illegal dumping of industrial and even radioactive wastes thus rendering Indigenous lives expendable.

To explore the problem, this paper employs an interdisciplinary methodology rooted in the theoretical framework of Environmental Humanities. Here, Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence is essential for understanding how harm gradually surfaces in indigenous regions. It happens sometimes through radiation exposure, soil contamination, deforestation and altering agricultural cycles due to the other factors. "Disposable people," (Nixon 71) as he terms the indigenous communities, whom the slow violence disproportionately affects provide an important lens for analysing the invisible suffering in *Marang Goda Nilkanth hua* and *The Adivasi Will not dance*. In this work I have also employed Henri Lefebvre and Edward Soja's spatial theories, emphasizing on the idea that space is produced through power and thus becomes the site of domination which guides us how roads, mines, and industries reorganize Indigenous landscapes into extractive territories. Foucault's concept of governmentality, or the "conduct of conduct," elaborates how Adivasis are governed through promises of progress and development is not forced upon them; rather, their desires are shaped so that they accept exploitation as opportunity. And lastly, thinkers like Amitav Ghosh helped provide the understanding of climate crisis as a continuation of colonial violence in a way that they refuse to see ecological catastrophe unfolding in the lives of Indigenous people, and a systemic erasure of their culture and ecological knowledge.

The three primary texts- *U Tirot Singh*, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, and *Marang Goda Nilkanth hua* argues that climate crisis is neither abstract nor sudden but a cumulative outcome of the nature being othered, its oldest inhabitants being displaced, governed and exploited in the name of development. Through the analyses supported by environmental humanities scholarship, this paper is a testimony that destruction of forests, soil and rivers, emerges as destruction of culture, memories and bodies.

By reading these texts together, this paper contributes to the ongoing discourse of environmental humanities by presenting indigenous literary testimonies as sites of climate knowledge. It reminds the readers that climate crisis is more of a political phenomenon justifying that literature is not just a medium of representation but a form of resistance, possessing the ability to contest the deeply rooted prejudices of our society.

**The Breaking of Sacred Space: Systemic Invasion and Violence in U Bareh's U Tirot Singh**

U Victor G. Bareh's U Tirot Singh may not fulfil the category of traditional environmental text, but it is deeply rooted in Khasi Indigenous beliefs and customs in which people, land and spirits co-exist in a cohesive ethical order. The Khasis of Meghalaya stand among one of India's most enduring and culturally rich communities, their world-view fundamentally shaped by an ethical and intimate relationship with nature. Their cultural identity is deeply embedded in "Ka Niam Khasi", (Mawlong 452) the traditional faith and a tripartite spiritual system that connects *U Blei* (The Divine Creator), "U Ryngkew U Basa" (The Local Guardian Spirits of forests, lands, spaces and its people), and "U Briew" (Humans) forming a reciprocal and interdependent relationship where they maintain a continuous moral and ecological balance. Violating their land is like violating the community; and dishonouring their women is like dishonouring the whole motherland. For them, "Tip Briew-Tip Blei" (Mawlong 453) is the moral code of conduct, meaning to know humanity, is to know God. The dramatization of U Tirot Singh's rebellion against British invasion not only portrays political aggression, rather it becomes a systematic breaking of a sacred space.

The British proposal to construct a road amongst the Khasi hills initiates this rupture. For the colonizers, roads are instruments of administrative convenience such as surveillance tools, military mobility and efficient communication. But on employing an environmental lens, this road represents a complete space reconfiguration, implied as "production of space" by Lefebvre, where the dominant powers reshape the land, the space, according to their interests. (Lefebvre 3) In this play, the spatial production collides violently with Khasi conception of land as kin. The hills and forests have never been empty spaces, rather storied landscapes inhabited by communal identity, ancestral memory and spiritual resonance. The intrusion of colonial engineers acted as a fracture in their social and organizational hierarchy.

Bareh has been careful in presentation of this invasion. It was indirect, passive, yet powerful. U Tirot Singh believed the British representative and in an attempt of helping out as well as for the development of his region, allowed the British to build the road. But the act of surveying the hills, the movement of foreign troops and the presence of British officials signal a slow yet steady transformation of Khasi lived space into colonial administrative space. The transformation we witness in the play mirrors how Foucault terms "Governmentality": the extension of state logic into bodies' lands and ways of life, "a form of surveillance or control as attentive as that the head of a family over his household and his goods." (Foucault, 92) In U Tirot Singh, this logic becomes well-grounded when colonial soldiers violate the Khasi women, with an underlying conception of their bodies being extensions of the territory they seek to possess. This association between land and womanhood is interpretative as well as articulative within the Khasi literary conscious. Translated by Janet Hujon, U Soso Tham's *Tales of Darkness and Light: The Old Days of the Khasis* is a vibrant book that expands and acknowledges the rich oral tradition, history and memory of his motherland. He names two of his chapters as "Ka Iing Mei" (My Mother's Home) and Ka "Meirilung" (Gentle Motherland) (Tham, trans. Hujon 57,65) which establishes how land is conceptualized as a maternal presence which is nurturing, formative and protective. Therefore, the attack on Khasi women in the play collapses the boundaries between bodily and territorial violation emphasizing on the idea: to violate the woman, is to violate the land.

Tirot Singh opposes the violent ventures of the colonial regime when he hears about the assault of the labourer, U Koh Lehnoh and the Khasi girls by Monbhut. The physical assertion of authority over Khasi bodies and livelihoods exposed a new spatial order which signalled a sudden subordination of the community, a declaration that those who once moved freely around in their shared lived space now attain a lower, governable position. This shift becomes evident and explicit when the colonial soldiers openly threatened the local shopkeepers announcing that they will soon be ruling them. It is in response to such intrusions that U Tirot Singh planned to take down the British by force, to establish their order and thus generates a "Thirdspace-these lived spaces of representation are thus the terrain for the generation of "counterspaces," spaces of resistance to the

dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning.” (Soja 68) His resistance is perceived as an attempt to reclaim the hills as a space of Khasi authority, memory and relational ethics, countering the colonial attempt to redefine them. The terrain becomes not only the backdrop of rebellion but the medium of resistance against the environmental harm that would unfold as “slow violence” (Nixon 2) and social degradation of the Indigenous people.

Although Bareh crafted a short play, politically grounded in the politics of the incident, but beyond that, what makes Tirot Singh a reputed king till date is that he fought against the injustice that had been slowly spreading its roots within their land. Pushing the hills towards mass deforestation, destruction of cultivating lands and water bodies without any measures to compensate, and thus destroying their spiritual order usually leads to climate crisis which the Khasi hills is facing today. With the death of Tirot Singh in British capture, the colonialist regime ruled from 1835 up until the Indian Independence in 1947. The disruptions were slow, enough not to catch the normal eye. Many sacred groves that acted as buffer zones and protected spaces were considered as unused forests converting them according to commercial or administrative purposes. In 2025, we have news such as “Once the wettest place on Earth, Meghalaya is now facing a rainfall deficit. The state is facing an unprecedented rainfall deficit, with figures 56% below normal in 2025.” (Down To Earth Staff)

This has been the news for at least half a decade and through this it is simply implied that humans have marginalized the environment and the ones who are co-existing, eventually leading to climate crisis. All the indigenous people around India have been made vulnerable and othered, called Tribes by the colonialist regimes, wherein they are Adivasis, or the oldest residents of this land, the ones who survived because they nature as a part of themselves and not a commodity provided to exploit.

#### **Slow Violence and Ecological Collapse in Shekhar’s Adivasi Will Not Dance**

The postcolonial landscape depicted in *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* reveals how industrial extraction and state-led development transform Adivasi ecologies into expendable resource zones. Ecological degradation—manifesting through drought, land dispossession, and disrupted livelihoods—operates as a form of slow violence that disproportionately affects communities rooted in sustainable, place-based practices. Through this lens, the collection exposes how contemporary governance reproduces hierarchical power structures that marginalise both vulnerable populations and the environments they depend upon.

While Bareh’s *U Tirot Sing* reveals the symbolic and spatial rupture initiated through colonial intrusion, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* depicts the physical consequences of such disruptions in the contemporary moment, where the postcolonial state and industrialization transform natural and indigenous landscapes into commercial extractive territories. Similar to the Khasi spiritual order which connects land, community and cosmology to form an integrated ethical order, the Santhals too, lived in harmony with nature, grounded in reciprocity with their environment. But in Shekhar’s narratives, this order breaks down into explicit ecological degradation and climate precarity and the land becomes a resource frontier governed by profit, infrastructure and state-led development. This shift intensifies of what Rob Nixon terms “slow violence, that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2) yet with devastating environmental and social consequences. In this work, slow violence solidifies itself through drought, displacement and the erosion of ecological stewardship, revealing that the climate crisis is a cumulative outcome of poorly planned industrial ventures by the government as well as social exclusion of the Indigenous communities. In the title story, unchecked industrialization and spatial domination of indigenous lands guide the storyline. The narrative revolves around the Santhals, especially Mangal Murmu of Matiajore village, in Amrapara block of Pakur district. Murmu introduces himself as a musician but “No

wait...I am a farmer. Or... Was a farmer.” (Shekhar) They used to be farmers because most of indigenous lands were acquired by a coal mining company. And now they are all poor, fighting to make the ends meet. Not only the mining company but also the stone merchants captured their lands and drove them off to live in a small part with no material or natural facilities. What was once an agricultural land sustaining seasonal produce has now become a polluted landscape with blackness- deep, indelible- all along the Koyla Road. The trees and shrubs in our village bear black leaves. Our ochre earth has become black. Our children-dark skinned as they are-forever covered with fine black dust. When they cry, and tears stream down their faces, it seems as if a river is cutting across a drought-stricken land. Only our eyes burn red, like embers. Our children hardly go to school. But everyone-whether they attend school or not-remains on alert, day and night, for ways to steal coal and for ways to sell it. (Shekhar)

This shift illustrates how environmental degradation exposes its gradually and unobtrusively, aligning with Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence, where harm accumulates over time and remains largely visible until its consequences become irreversible. The capturing of the native lands was not only the single catastrophic event the Santhals go through, rather it was the start. The soot induced pollution mentioned above, hovered over the lives of the indigenous people as a knell who were forced to live in proximities to mining areas. The environment too suffered, with green shrubs turning black, and once fertile land turning into a barren one dismantles the ecological cycle of the area.

Shekhar justifies that this ecological collapse is caused structurally by policies and through spatial strategies of the state. When the land was acquired either by the government, or the coal and stone merchants, the indigenous people were promised better facilities and opportunities. But their life was reduced to nothing, no lands to farm upon, no job opportunities, as well as environmental degradation that makes them cough blood and severe other ailments. Here we can find that the intrusion of the mining company establishes a new spatial hierarchy in which the centre is occupied by the coal and stone merchants, while the Adivasi communities are pushed to the margins, both politically and geographically, and nature- the environment which man uses for mineral extraction lie objectified and exploited under the soot covered rubbles of its own wealth.

Although a short story, Shekhar successfully shows that climate crisis is not a natural phenomenon but manufactured through land acquisition, industrial expansion, state policy, corporate profit and spatial intrusion as well as marginalization of the indigenous communities who save the environment with their place-based activities. While the same land once sustained Adivasi life, making the community both the first victims and the most silenced witnesses of environmental change. Their refusal to dance in celebration of the development that destroys their ecological world becomes an act of resistance, of a community reclaiming dignity against slow violence of extractive state policies.

#### **The Slow Violence of Development and Othering in Mahua Maji’s Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua**

While Bareh’s *U Tirot Singh* navigates us through ecological and indigenous ruptures caused by colonial intrusions, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* shifts the perspective to the postmodern world where indigenous communities are displaced from their lands. Bereft of their ancestral land as well as unemployment makes them impoverished like the environment around them. Deprived of fresh air, their once fertile lands, and opportunities to make a better living, this short story stands as a testimony of othering and slow violence meted out to the ecological structure of the area. To complete the trajectory of slow violence, othering and environmental degradation, I have taken up Mahua Maji’s *Marang Goda Nilkanth hua*. This novel revolves around an ongoing radioactive tragedy in Jadugora, Jharkhand. Discussed as Marang Goda in the text, it represents a full-scale environmental and human catastrophe. What begins in the Khasi Hills as the breaking of a sacred moral ecology and continues in Jharkhand as coal driven spatial displacement, *Marang Goda*

engages in violence that is not only symbolic or spatial rather a crisis that is altering the climate of the region itself.

Mahua Maji's narrative embodies what Rob Nixon terms "slow violence, a form of destruction that environmentally embedded violence that is often difficult to source, oppose, and once set in motion, to reverse." (Nixon 7) Radiation, in this regard, precisely exemplifies the concept. It is odourless, sightless, and silent, yet devastating and since uranium contamination does not appear as an immediate spectacle, its destructive force remains unregistered by the state and invisible to those who suffer its consequences. The Indigenous communities of Sarang forest become victims, not of a sudden disaster but of an ongoing toxic exposure that gradually dissolves their culture, health, livelihoods and ecological future. The ongoing climate crisis, just as Nixon implies is difficult to reverse and until then, the ecological framework of the area shall be completely altered. Initially, the villagers encountered the idea of development with hope, the idea of modernity entering their lives full of opportunities, employment, schooling and new social horizons. This reflects what Foucault calls "the conduct of conduct," (Foucault 2) a governmental strategy in which populations are shaped not through coercion but through collective desire, aspiration and knowledge. Historically denied state resources, the Adivasi interpret these promises as a chance for intergenerational upliftment. But the innocence and trust that characterise Indigenous world-view become the conditions for their exploitation.

The "doctor of rocks," (Maji) an emblem of outsider knowledge, symbolizes the seductive power of scientific rationality. What the community views as miraculous expertise is, in reality, the scientific extraction of minerals that ultimately ruins their land. As uranium mining expands, the ecological balance of the Sarang forest begins to collapse. Rivers contaminated, fertile soil toxic and barren, "the seeds of the Kendu fruit were crooked or missing. The jaws, teeth and gums of the cows and the goats did not get infected and melt away." (Maji) The land of Santhals and Ho becomes unrecognizable to those who once lived in intimate reciprocity with it. The Adivasis ecological worldview rooted in care, balance and mutuality is displaced by a developmental logic that prioritizes national energy over local survival.

Although Climate crisis is not presented in global scientific terms, arises slowly in ecological instability. The contamination of soil compromises the agricultural cycles, poisoned water affects aquatic life, whereas deforestation alters rainfall patterns and microclimates. But in Mahua Maji's novel, this transformation is more political than environmental. It reflects how Nixon observes the states instrumental vision of land: "An official landscape-whether governmental, NGO, corporate, or some combination of those-is typically oblivious to such earlier maps; instead, it writes the land in a bureaucratic, externalizing, and extraction-driven manner that is often pitilessly instrumental." (Nixon 17) This idea exposes the logic driving behind the destruction in Marang Goda. Apart from seeing the forest as an ecological network, the government defines its purpose just as a uranium-bearing terrain awaiting industrial conversion. A land that was once home to various communities, natural species and a potential future, just reduced to a barren land radiating death. The inhabitants of the land are reduced to obstacles and even commodified to exploit.

The miners are always the impoverished and poverty-stricken. Majority of labourers working were from the Santhal, and Ho communities. While they worked to feed their families, little did they know it then that their very hands and sweat would become the causes of their untimely deaths. The men, exposed to radioactive dust in the Uranium pits without health awareness and protective gears, took radiation to everywhere they went. They radiated enough harm to contaminate families, and soils they touched. Since radiation seeps in slow but lethal, the symptoms surfaced gradually which ensured violence remains unregistered by both the victims and the state. The long-term consequences-reproductive disorders, chronic ailments, birth deformities, miscarriages, and genetic effects became a trend which is emphasized at the beginning of the novel. "Nobody carried a head that was abnormally large or unusually tiny. Nobody had his body full of oozing sores." (Maji) reflecting that such violence out of sight making it easily ignored by ones in power.



The fluid effluents flowing continuously from the mining mill, carried in large pipes to the dam, dried and encrusted into a white field. Sagen and his friends had discovered a new spot for their games. In the sandy soil of the waste, the children would keep playing, falling, jumping without getting hurt. All the time there would be sessions of football and kabaddi. Parents too were free from worry. People came from far off places to catch a glimpse of this snow-white field, and to play. The ground became an object of pride for the Marang Goda folks! (Maji)

One of the deadliest incidents of the novel is not just the seepage of radiation, but open dumping of radioactive waste in the dam. As Maji narrates that the white field became a local attraction where the youth spent most of their time. Apart from humans, to relieve their hunger, the cattle too came into contact with uranium radiation as when the “grass grew at one spot or another, cows and goats would graze merrily.” (Maji) Following ecological collapse, comes displacement, and the villagers are forced to leave the land that formed their identity, rituals, history, inheritance and the right to belong. Their displacement is a social, ecological and spiritual disaster.

The state's development narrative never acknowledges such losses. This is what Amitav Ghosh calls “The Great Derangement” – the collective refusal to see climate catastrophe even as it unfolds intimately. (Ghosh) For the government, Uranium mining seemed to be national progress but for the Adivasi community it came in as an intergenerational trauma and crisis. So, *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua* stands as a testimony to the fact that climate crisis can never be natural. Rather it's the product of extractive ambitions, political decisions and hierarchical governance structures that treat certain people disposable.

### **Conclusion**

Climate crisis is often presented as a concept that discusses our malfunctioning environment: rising temperatures, droughts, increased sea levels, or changing monsoons. But environmental humanities attempt to look beyond environmental outcomes to examine the historical, political, and cultural forces that produce such destruction. Therefore, by a close textual analysis of *U Tirot Singh, The Adivasi Will Not Dance* and *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua*, it is justified that the climate crisis we are facing today are just the ripples of what the indigenous communities of India way before. Rooted in structures of domination, othering and extractive governance, it has fractured the lives and lands of the oldest inhabitants of the subcontinents, physically, spiritually and symbolically. These texts clarify that ecological devastation is not accidental or sudden, rather it is a slow, delayed violence that seeps in way before it can be registered. This is set into motion by the ones in power who view Indigenous land as expendable and its people as peripheral.

On a close analysis of the texts, climate crisis does not emerge directly by environmental imbalance but deeper violations, of spaces, places and autonomy. *U Tirot Singh* exposes the consequences of British intrusion in their territories. Although they arrived with a peaceful offer, their violent actions rippled to the core of Khasi faith and spiritual order. The exploitation of their men and violation of the Khasi women created an ecological rupture that manifested itself as a collapse in the relationship between the people and the land that sustained them. This disruption foreshadows the contemporary climate emergencies the region is facing today.

Next, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* title story is narrated a member of the Santhal community. A poverty stricken and impoverished musician he has almost forgotten his real identity that not long before he used to be a farmer. Now displaced and deprived of their land, and false promises that the Industrialists committed to, their lives and the environment are just covered in the black soot of the coal being extracted for urban purposes. It is a postcolonial depiction of how Indian state's developmental claims reproduce forms of domination earlier enacted by colonial powers. Here, spatial reorganization occurs with mining projects, that reduces the Adivasi community to mere sources of labour. The natural environment, compromised due to mining activities, leaves them with no sources of sustainability. The story makes it clear that climate crisis is not simply experienced through heatwaves or water scarcity but through

dispossession, hunger, cultural erosion and dismantling of ecological practices that once sustained life.

Mahua Maji's *Marang Goda Nilkanth Hua* is one of the most important novels of contemporary India that articulates the plight of indigenous communities and natural environment shoved to the brink of erasure due to personal profits, negligence and atrocious policies framed by the governing powers. Slow violence caused by Uranium mining desiccates a whole community into an abyss of ailments, deformities and untimely deaths. Uranium mining and radioactive waste deposition in the Sarang forest compromises all the natural elements: rivers, soil and man. The plants and fishes become radioactive while the poor, unaware Adivasi made their white field of doom a local attraction. To be precise, in this narrative environmental destruction is inseparable from political negligence emphasizing that climate crisis is the long-term cost of a developmental logic that prioritizes energy goals over human survival.

The first step towards a change is acceptance. Until we do not realize the environmental crimes committed by the humankind in guise of modernity, urbanization, industrialization and development, climate crisis cannot be reversed. These works exemplify the injustice showing that the ones closest to nature are the first to suffer also illuminating a perspective that is often absent in the mainstream climate discourse that Indigenous ecological knowledge is not simply cultural heritage but a form of climate wisdom. The colonial gaze that looked down upon the Indians as dispensable is just the same in the contemporary period wherein the ones in power look at nature and Indigenous beings as objects of high value and commodities that can be easily extracted as if it belongs to them.

In conclusion, the play, short story and the novel helped assert the idea that climate crisis is not an event but a consequence. It is a result of spatial intrusions, slow violence, and government policies that valued minerals over forests, money over lives. Thus, *U Tirot Singh*, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* and *Marang Goda Nilkanth hua* asks its readers to rethink the concept of modernity and future we have created for ourselves. It should be a future where values are governed not by extraction but by coexistence, responsibility and care for everyone regardless of caste or creed.

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**STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES IN SHAPING JANE GOODALL AS AN  
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMUNICATOR**

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**Abstract**

Jane Goodall has been recognised for her pioneering research on Chimpanzees, but her role as an environmental communicator has contributed to helping shape the narratives for climate change, biodiversity, and ecological philosophy. This review article will critically examine how Goodall's contribution to environmental communication has spread global awareness through a qualitative analysis of existing knowledge from different sources, media studies, and biographical sources. It will also explore her storytelling tactics, especially her anthropomorphic language for describing animals, as well as her communication style, mainly using ethos, logos and pathos, which made the globe understand what she wanted to convey about the natural habitat and its inhabitants. Furthermore, it explores her documentaries, books, interviews, as well as her digital campaigns like 'ForeverWild' (Jane Goodall Institute). The findings show that Goodall emphasised protecting the environment through hope and responsibility rather than creating fear among the people and making it climate doomism. There were challenges from critics for this kind of communication, which is an emotional way to convey information about environmental protection, but with her simple yet astounding narrative techniques, she epitomises her role as an environmental communicator, which inspired millions to take precautions for the future. The study concludes that Goodall's storytelling power through her presence in media has fostered awareness for a mass global awareness for the animals and for the environment.

**Keywords:** Jane Goodall, Environmental Communicator, Storytelling techniques, Climate Change Narratives, Biodiversity Awareness

**Introduction**

Environmental communication has become an integral part of communication, especially in an age where biodiversity loss, climate change and ecological damage have become inevitable. The field of Environmental Humanities discusses how narratives and values can bring change to public awareness about environmental issues. Dr. Jane Goodall, in this evolving field of study, has played an influential role as an environmental communicator. She is best known for her groundbreaking primate studies in Gombe, Tanzania, where she closely studied the non-human animals with empathy. Her empathetic understanding of the environment, animals and her scientific rigour made her a global advocate for environmental and biodiversity awareness.

Beyond Goodall's seminal observations of chimpanzee behaviour, her role as a media communicator influences the globe regarding environmental consciousness. She redefined the way we look at environmental issues with her way of narrative storytelling. Environmental communication can be more effective when it is communicated with emotions and empathy. She balances scientific insights with her personal experiences, which makes it relatable for the public and gives people hope and compassion rather than eco-anxiety.

Within the field of mass communication falls environmental communication, and this type of communication can influence the formation of the climate change narrative for the public. Jane Goodall played an important role as an environmental communicator by raising awareness about biodiversity. She with her storytelling techniques communicated to the public through her books, documentaries, and worldwide talks. She intertwined the urgency to protect the environment and non-human beings with reason as well as emotions. This bridges the gap between science and spirituality and aligns closely with the structure of Environmental Humanities, which

seeks to merge humanitarian research such as ethics, philosophy and literature with environmental conservatism (Brennan and Lo).

Goodall's role as an environmental communicator and media advocate is remarkable because she tries to understand human psychology. Her storytelling techniques help in conveying the desired messages to the public about biodiversity awareness as she avoids fear-based messages. She understands that fear-mongering messages can create havoc in the minds of the public, and rather than working on protecting the environment, they will make people more prone to procrastinate and despair. Her idea of hope and collective responsibility is also mentioned in her book *The Book of Hope*, which she co-authored with Douglas Abrams, where it notes that every individual matters (Goodall and Abrams 119). Her unique storytelling narrative, which blends emotions with environmental protection, persuades people to make a change in their behaviour.

Goodall's storytelling narrative was influenced by her childhood experiences and shifted to scientific observation of animal behaviour to communicate with the public about environmental protection. It all started with her curiosity about animals, her father gifting her a soft toy of a chimpanzee, which she named Jubilee and her opportunity to study chimpanzees in Gombe. All this led her to convey to the public about chimpanzees' behaviour as well as biodiversity awareness.

In this review article, a qualitative analysis will be conducted by examining how Jane Goodall played her role as an environmental communicator via her storytelling narrative techniques, media advocacy and awareness campaigns. It will study existing journals and interviews and analyse how Goodall's anthropomorphic discussion on animals and her use of the rhetorical style of communication, which is 'ethos, pathos and logos', have persuaded the globe for environmental well-being. Further, it will also study how her way of environmental communication has helped bring hope to the people for climate change rather than climate doomism. Her hopeful narratives have changed the way climate change narratives have been perceived for years.

Lastly, the review will also argue how Goodall intertwined science with environmental humanities in her storytelling techniques. She tries to integrate environmental awareness with emotional stories, which helps build empathy and compassion among people for biodiversity.

### **Literature Review**

The role of an environmental communicator has evolved over time as it has entered into a multidisciplinary field which connects environmental science with media studies, rhetorical language and cultural theory. Its main objective is to understand how the rhetorical way of communication can influence the public to bring about a change in environmental issues. Environmental communication can help the public in shaping a particular narrative about nature and our collective responsibility towards environmental issues (Zhang and Sun). Therefore, it becomes necessary for us to study environmental communicators like Jane Goodall, who has reshaped the way we look at climate change narratives. Her messages balance the idea of biodiversity awareness with hope and optimism.

Storytelling has made a profound impact on the human minds of all ages. It can help build different perspectives among the minds of the people. Similarly, storytelling has played an integral role in the field of environmental discourse. Stories can help audiences understand environmental realities clearly, as they can connect the issues with personal experience. This fosters empathy and concern for the environment and builds the spirit of collective responsibility to solve the issues (Funk 1345).

Jane Goodall has used this storytelling technique, which has impacted the globe. She used to give names to the chimpanzees while describing their personalities during her research in the Gombe National Park, Tanzania. This shows how she used anecdotes, ethical appeal and anthropomorphic language to describe animals, which reshaped the public's perception of the

animals. Further, this idea fostered empathy and ethical concern among the people as it made them familiar with the animal's stories rather than look at it from scientific observation.

Environmental communication can be analysed by taking Aristotle's model of communication. This rhetoric model contains three important appeals, which are ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic). According to scholars like Matthew Nisbet, for an environmental message to be effective, it should be balanced with objectivity and emotions (Nisbet and Newman 325-38). And Jane Goodall's way of communication for the environment embodies this balance. Starting with ethos, which implies credibility, Goodall worked for decades in this field, and her role as a UN Messenger of Peace makes it compelling. Next, she urges the public about environmental awareness through her storytelling techniques and personal techniques, which imply emotion. Lastly, in logos, which suggests logic, she supports her arguments with verifiable data and appropriate reasons, which makes it compelling for the public to take action.

Goodall made a profound impact with this style of communication, making a balance of scientific rigour with emotional appeals that make it accessible to the public as a whole. Scholars and academicians criticise the discussion about "climate doomism," which creates pessimistic views about environmental issues. Maxwell Boykoff mentions how fear messages can make the public procrastinate on working on environmental issues as they lose hope for change (Boykoff 16). However, Goodall's media advocacy has changed this narrative of climate change as she emphasises hope and responsibility rather than creating panic among the public.

Goodall's works, like her book *The Book of Hope* and campaigns like "Roots & Shoots", help the public to shift their attention towards optimistic change and collective responsibility. This kind of approach matches with the hope-based communication, which emphasises that positive and hopeful messages can inspire people to work collectively for environmental issues. Boykoff mentions that climate communication, which inspires and gives hope to the people, has more power to motivate people than those that terrify them (Boykoff 17).

Goodall's storytelling technique has been applauded as well as criticised. Researchers note that conveying the messages with emotions may distort the scientific understanding of the animal's life (Zipple et al.). However, there are other researchers who value anthropomorphism as this helps the public empathise and work for the well-being of the animals and ecology.

Goodall's anthropomorphic language and her storytelling technique have helped the public to understand more about the environment as she uses simple emotional reasoning to bring awareness, which is different from traditional research. She helps in building positive consciousness among the public and motivates them to have collective responsibility for the environment.

Digital media has played a crucial role in environmental communication, especially in contemporary times. Researchers like Milstein mention how different kinds of communicative practices can help build communities with a common goal that aligns personal values with ecological well-being (Milstein 3-5). Goodall has also used digital platforms to communicate with the public. Her institute, which is "The Jane Goodall Institute," had digital campaigns like "ForeverWild" where they spread awareness about ecological well-being through photography and social media.

Goodall's use of digital media has shown the integration of both traditional and modern ways of communication, where her storytelling techniques blend with a huge global outreach. Her way has helped people to have hope and empathy in an era where information is overloaded, dominated by climate doomism.

#### **Beginning of Jane Goodall's role as an Environmental Communicator**

Goodall was born in 1934 in London, and her love and passion for animals started in her childhood. In her books, *Reason for Hope* and *In the Shadow of Man*, she notes how stories have helped her develop an understanding of the environment. Prior to the scientific understanding of



biodiversity, she felt a deep emotional connection with the animals and was impacted by childhood books like Tarzan of the Apes and The Jungle Book (Hirsh).

She started her journey as a primatologist in 1960, when she arrived at Gombe National Park to observe the behaviour of chimpanzees under the guidance of Louis Leakey. She had a different approach to studying the non-human beings, which made her unique. Her technique of giving names to the chimpanzees, such as Flo, Fifi, David Greybeard, Goliath and understanding their relations made her observation unique and inspiring for many, yet at times challenged the standard model of ethology (McKie).

Goodall observed the primates with patience, waiting for them to show up and understanding their behaviour made her become one of the profound environmental communicators. Her observations and studies highlight how she emphasised empathy and understanding for nature, which later showed through her environmental messages. She transformed her career from a scientific researcher to media advocacy by the late 1980s, as she was worried about the loss of the chimpanzee habitat. She started to raise her voice for the voiceless when she realised that she could no longer stay in the forest and only do the research when she saw the level of deforestation and man-animal conflict ("Jane Goodall").

Goodall's journey from a scientific researcher to an environmental communicator started from the foundation of the Jane Goodall Institute (1977) and the Roots & Shoots program (1991). She emphasised through her global talks and community awareness programs that biodiversity conservation is a collective ethical responsibility. Further, she and Abrams noted that ethical participation backed by scientific awareness is required to bring change in the environment (King).

Goodall's groundbreaking works, such as her documentaries Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees (1965), Among the Wild Chimpanzees (1984), Jane's Journey (2010), and Jane (2017), made her rise as an eminent environmental communicator and reach the global public. Her work, which emphasised empathy and understanding for the primates, has changed the perspective of the public and made them understand the emotions of the animals rather than alienating them.

Goodall's communication style is unique and differs from other communicators as she uses a compassionate and emotional tone while delivering her messages to the public, which gives hope and belief. She believed that every individual can bring a change to protect biodiversity. (The Ten Trusts, p. 157). Goodall's message becomes more globalised with the acceleration of the environmental crisis. Her storytelling techniques include messages about climate change, biodiversity loss and access to food. She intertwines ecological loss with broader social impact, which gives the perception that environmental well-being is for both humans and non-human beings.

Scholars like Boykoff mention how celebrity statements about the climate crisis can bring more attention to the public (Boykoff 19). Goodall, who was a prominent scientific researcher, made people more aware of ecological well-being and gave them hope. Goodall travelled continuously throughout nearly 300 days of the year to spread awareness about conservation and climate responsibility, which made her build a strong international network. With the passing of time, she has become a symbol and hope for environmental awareness for the public. Her calm and empathetic demeanour is presented through her rigorous media representation. Her media advocacy has made a significant impact on the large global public, where she describes ecological issues with emotional reasoning backed by scientific data.

Goodall, being an environmental communicator, proved that integrating personal narratives with scientific data can spread awareness about environmental issues across the globe, regardless of age or scientific background.

#### **Use of Jane Goodall's techniques and methods as an Environmental Communicator**

Jane Goodall has made a profound impact as an environmental communicator, where she uses a unique storytelling technique which fosters empathy and hope among the public to work towards protecting the environment. She conveys her messages with a rhetorical style of

communication which makes the global public comprehend the urgency of ecological well-being in a simple and relatable manner. Her three communication techniques, starting with anthropomorphism, the three elements of rhetorical style of communication (ethos, pathos, logos) and shaping positive narrative, which motivates people to work collectively for the environment, will be discussed in this part.

Goodall has practised anthropomorphism, which is one of her unique ways to describe and observe the primates. It was during her scientific observation in Gombe National Park that she began to understand the chimpanzee's behaviour by giving them names like Fifi, Flint, and David Greybeard. She explored the depth by describing their personalities and relationships with each other. This unique way made people closer to understanding the non-human being's behaviour with empathy and compassion.

Goodall's technique has redefined the standard way of observing by making space for the audience to understand the world of primates emotionally and ethically ("Five ways"). Her books *In the Shadow of Man* and *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* describe chimpanzees' behaviour as rational, which is separated from traditional scientific explanations. However, there are researchers who reject Goodall's method as they believe this will undermine the seriousness of the scientific observation. Yet, her method proved beneficial for the public in environmental awareness, and this is mentioned in the book *The Emotional Lives of Animals*, which states that anthropomorphism helps people understand the behaviour of animals among the people (Bekoff 153). Understanding the behaviours of primates like normal human beings helps build an empathetic and moral narrative towards them.

Goodall has communicated with the public by using a rhetorical style of communication which comprises ethos, logos and pathos. Her media advocacy is impactful to this day because of her integration of these three components. Ethos, which stands for credibility, has been one of the main components in Goodall's communication. Her journey started as a young scientific researcher, then later she established the Jane Goodall Institute, and her collaboration with different institutions, like National Geographic, made her credible to the public. Her tone was authoritative and empathetic because she had experienced everything related to the environment and animals, and her compassionate demeanour magnified her scientific ethos (Butler).

Another component is pathos, which implies emotions. Goodall adopted emotional storytelling techniques to foster empathy among the public. For instance, she will share stories of chimpanzees grieving for the loss of their mother. American Biologist, Bekoff, mentions that this type of compassionate conservation helps to understand the thorough emotions of animals (Bekoff 157).

Lastly, logos, meaning logic, which shows how Goodall integrates scientific data with emotions while delivering her messages to the public. She always backs her emotional narratives with scientific facts and observation. For instance, she makes the ethical responsibility of protecting the environment with credible data by linking ecological loss to deforestation and unsustainable consumption.

Goodall encompasses all the three components, which makes her a notable environmental communicator. She bridges the gap between complicated scientific discourse and public understanding for biodiversity awareness. She helps build empathy, compassion and hope among the people for the ecological well-being backed by scientific statistics and data. With the recent trend of getting overloaded information about climate change and environmental issues, people lose hope and motivation for a change. But Goodall consistently delivered her messages with hope and optimism. The public understood through her messages that saving the environment is a collective responsibility, and they believe there is still hope to change.

Goodall has actively participated in different speeches and campaigns like *Roots & Shoots* and *ForeverWild*, and encourages the younger generation to take meaningful actions. She asks them to avoid the victim mindset and wait for a good solution to appear. This statement can be backed by Maxwell Boykoff's view that climate doomism can create demotivation, but

pessimistic narratives can foster collective responsibility (Boykoff 16-17). Goodall's climate change narrative balances rationality with emotions, which gives ethical and moral responsibility to the public.

Goodall has used a mediated form of communication where she delivers her messages through documentaries, digital campaigns and public talks as well as interviews. Her strong sense of curiosity and commitment can be seen in her documentaries *Jane* (2017) and *Jane's Journey* (2010). Her presentation in the media via interviews or short videos amplifies her role as an environmental communicator. Her presence in digital media via her small clips of her sharing personal narratives or using imagery like her stuffed toy "Mr. H," who is a chimpanzee, delivers a positive message to the public. This method of sharing her messages on different platforms makes it accessible and relatable for the public.

Goodall's strategies were not accepted by some scholars. Scholars warn that her storytelling techniques may detach the complex environmental problems (Zippel et al.) This may make people feel less serious about nature's well-being. Some scholars believe anthropomorphism may challenge the representation of scientific data. However, her approach is accepted by many, as this has cultivated motivation for people to work for the environment. Her emphasis on empathy and ethical responsibility fosters people to work for biodiversity conservation rather than delaying work on it.

Goodall has outshone her role as an environmental communicator because she doesn't just dive into deep emotions while sharing her messages but also integrates her role as a scientific researcher.

#### **Jane Goodall's role as a media advocate in Environmental Communication**

Jane Goodall began her journey as a scientific observer in the Gombe National Park. Her role as an environmental communicator has since expanded across documentaries, books, interviews, and digital media. The different platforms have helped her accelerate her global outreach. In this section, it will explore how both traditional and digital media have played a crucial role in conveying her narratives about nature and ecological well-being.

Goodall began her role as a global communicator during the 1960s when she had to partner with National Geographic to conduct a scientific observation on the chimpanzees. Her observation was introduced by Hugo van Lawick's photographs and films to the global audience. In the 1965 documentary, "Miss Goodall and the Wild Chimpanzees", she describes and observes the chimpanzees. She observed their emotions and relationships with each other, and this made viewers have empathy for them and realise that it is not as complicated as the scientific texts describe them to understand them. All these early journeys of Goodall led her to be an eminent environmental communicator.

Goodall has communicated through her books about biodiversity awareness and environmental consciousness. Her books, such as *In the Shadow of Man* (1971), *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* (1986), *Reason for Hope* (1999), and *The Book of Hope* (2021), reflect how she balances scientific information with personal reflection and emotional reasoning. She had a different storytelling approach, fostering empathy and collective responsibility among the people towards the environmental issues (Tachino). Goodall, in her book *The Book of Hope*, co-authored with Douglas Abrams, emphasised that it is a moral responsibility to have hope and positivity for bringing a change in the environmental crisis (Goodall and Abrams). Her technique made human beings realise the need to build an understanding relationship between them and the natural world.

Documentary film has played a pivotal role in amplifying Goodall's environmental message. *Jane's Journey* (2010) and *Jane* (2017) offer intimate portrayals of her life by blending archival footage with reflective commentary. Brett Morgen's *Jane*, created from over one hundred hours of previously unreleased National Geographic footage, highlights her scientific achievements while also presenting her personal experiences of solitude, discovery, and transformation.

Goodall's documentaries, like Jane's Journey (2010) and Jane (2017), played a crucial role in conveying the messages. The documentaries portray her personal life by combining archival material with her own reflections. Jane (2017), which was directed by Brett Morgen, uses over 100 hours of previously unreleased National Geographic footage to convey her profound scientific observations with chimpanzees as well as her personal life, which shows she undergoes moments of solitude and discovery. This was inspiring and passionate for the audience.

Goodall actively participated in interviews, lectures and public speeches, which amplifies her role as an impactful environmental communicator. In her speeches, she balances humility with environmental urgency, which was seen in her 2002 TED Talk, "What Separates Us from Chimpanzees?" She started with a personal story before engaging them about the broader ecological issues, which made the listeners more interested in her speech.

Goodall's storytelling technique has a reflective and a hopeful tone, which makes her voice louder and reaches a mass audience despite their age, culture or political differences ("Why"). In the digital era, Goodall's communication strategy has expanded through the Jane Goodall Institute (JGI), which uses websites, social media, and multimedia storytelling to reach global audiences.

Goodall has made a strong representation in the digital media. The Jane Goodall Institute, for instance, uses social media and websites and uploads short videos to reach a larger audience. Further, the Roots & Shoots program, which was founded in 1991, empowers the youth to participate in environmental projects for the well-being of nature. The youth taking part in this program demonstrates participatory communication where they are contributing to the project for a change.

Lastly, the ForeverWild campaign (2019) launched by the Jane Goodall Institute raises awareness about illegal wildlife trade and habitat loss via photography and short videos. Digital campaigns for the environment can build communities to connect with each other who have common values and a concern for global environmental concerns (Boulianne and Ohme). Goodall has impacted a large audience with her strategic presence in the digital media via short videos that contain messages about an optimistic view of environmental protection.

Goodall's role as an environmental communicator has been amplified by her presence in both traditional and modern media. Her books, documentaries and her social media presence with her rhetoric style of communication contributed to strengthening her credibility and compelled the audience to work collectively towards nature.

#### **Impact and Critiques of Goodall's Techniques as an Environmental Communicator**

Jane Goodall has played an important role as an environmental communicator, where she not only made people realise the scientific reasons for biodiversity awareness but also their ethical responsibility to protect it. While her storytelling techniques have reached a large global public, her method was questioned by many. This part will explore how her communication techniques have been appreciated and questioned by academicians and scholars.

Goodall's prominent role as an environmental communicator can be seen from her messages, which focus not only on scientific findings but also on building ethical responsibility among the public. She makes people understand the idea of interconnectedness with all the living beings through her books, documentaries, interviews and campaigns. This kind of communication, according to Matthew Nisbet and Dietram Scheufele, has made people familiar with scientific discourse and urged them to work towards environmental protection (1767-78).

Goodall has promoted participatory engagement among the youth through the Jane Goodall Institute. For instance, the Roots & Shoots program, which operates in over 100 countries, helps youth to take part in environmental awareness initiatives. This method fosters people to have hope, empathy and be morally responsible for the biodiversity protection rather than climate doomism. She has consistently used compassion and positivity in her message. Her narrative technique has been included in the environmental curriculum, where she integrates science,

personal narratives and moral responsibility. This helps in building in-depth ecological knowledge among the students.

Goodall practices a mediated form of communication to deliver her messages about biodiversity awareness, according to media theorists. This made the public understand the ecological issues in a comprehensive manner through mediated communication, as this combines both narrative and visual representation, according to Hansen (Hansen 93).

There are notable contemporary figures like Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough who use both traditional and modern media to communicate their messages with the integration of scientific rigour and personal narratives. Goodall can be seen as a role model to deliver environmental issues as she can balance her messages with scientific facts and emotional engagement with the general public. Goodall's role as a media advocate can be seen in her documentaries and short clips on digital media. Her documentaries, such as *Chimpanzee* (2012) and *The Year Earth Changed* (2021), emphasise the emotional reasons for the protection of nature, which led to the foundation of a unique environmental conscious storytelling.

Goodall's rhetorical and anthropomorphic language made it accessible to the public to comprehend environmental issues; however, it has been criticised by academicians, stating that it detached the reality of the core issues of nature. Ethologists such as Robert Hinde question the connection between human-like emotions and primates, which may lead to misrepresentation of their behaviour ("Remembering").

However, her work as an environmental communicator is appreciated by many. Understanding the behaviour of animals is crucial as it varies from time to time in different social settings (Bekoff 157). Thus, understanding and recognising the emotions of animals shows ethical insight and is not sentimental or unreasonable. Goodall's messages of hope are not only based on positivity, but also evidence proves that even with the slightest of possibilities, there should be motivation for change. She describes hope as a stubborn commitment to make things work in her book *The Book of Hope* (Goodall and Abrams 38).

This kind of technique often gives the public hope and collective responsibility rather than pessimistic fear about climate issues. According to psychologist Maria Ojala, the narrative of ethical and moral responsibility for the environment fosters kindness and positivity rather than eco-anxiety among the public (Martinsson and Ojala).

Goodall's way of communication also converges with ecofeminism, where a link between the authorities of nature can be seen with the structural power of patriarchy. She conveys her messages with empathy, kindness, and respect for different species, which resembles the ethics of an ecofeminist (Gaard 28–35). Further, Goodall broke the stereotype of only male representation in science by playing a crucial role as a prominent female scientist and an environmental communicator who has influenced the globe with her unique communication style. She redefined the way environmental urgency can be represented by blending scientific research with emotional reasoning, which challenged traditional gendered norms. Thus, her work has been reaching people of all ages and cultures, which shows her inclusiveness towards every being.

Goodall's journey, over more than six decades, starting from her work as a scientific researcher to global media advocate, has shown how she bridges all her roles together. She gave a speech at the United Nations and collaborated with the World Health Organisation, which conveys how she combines local conservation insights with global policy conversations. According to political theorist Dryzek, a deliberative method, which integrates an environmental framework with open discussion, empathy and ethical reasoning, is a boon for green politics (Dryzek 236–238).

Goodall's way of teaching will live for eternity as she taught the public how to understand environmental issues. She taught how to understand nature's stories and have empathy and compassion for the environment. Her communication technique has inspired people of all ages and cultures and motivated them to take conservative measures for the well-being of the ecology.

### **Conclusion**

Jane Goodall's transformation in her career can be seen as more than a scientist, as she started work as a scientific observer to a media advocate who influences the globe. Her way of sharing ecological issues with personal narratives while backing scientific reasons across the globe suggests that environmental awareness can be shared in a more inclusive manner. Her method reached millions of people despite their cultural or age differences, where she intertwines scientific explanations with empathy and ethical responsibility.

Goodall uses a rhetorical style of communication. Her style combines the three pillars for a rhetorical type of communication, which are ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos can be derived from her work as a scientific researcher, logos implies her scientific reasons for biodiversity and common responsibility, and pathos conveys through personal narratives, which fosters empathy among the people for the biodiversity. Scholar John Dryzek says this kind of communication implies deliberative environmentalism, where open discussion and emotional reasoning help the public to take meaningful decisions in environmental issues (Dryzek 236).

Goodall's use of anthropomorphic language was one of her traits as an environmental communicator. She shows how non-human beings show their emotions and relationships with each other, which are similar. However, there were scholars who questioned her approach, saying this would detach the seriousness of environmental issues. Yet, in the book "The Emotional Lives of Animals", it mentions that animals show different kinds of emotions and understanding them is necessary as human beings can feel connected to them. Ecofeminist Greta Gaard also acknowledges that interdependence and empathy among the different species is an appropriate narrative approach (Gaard 28-35).

Further, there are critics who believe that showing positivity for ecology may hamper the structural causes of the environmental crisis. However, scholars like Maxwell Boykoff mention that messages that have hope and positivity can help solve the climate issues than those fear-mongering speeches, which may make people lose motivation (Boykoff 16-17). In fact, Goodall herself, in her book "The Book of Hope", highlights that every individual has the ability to make the environment better regardless of whatever the situation and this motivation is driven by hope and moral responsibility (Goodall and Abrams 232).

Goodall's storytelling techniques can be seen in various forms. Through her "Jane Goodall Institute" and the global "Roots & Shoots program," she made the public, especially the youth, take part in environmental issues. This kind of storytelling model, where there is public engagement, builds environmental consciousness (Yang et al.). Goodall has also used traditional and modern media like books, documentaries and digital platforms to share about ecological well-being, which made people familiar with her narratives.

Goodall's climate change narrative inspired many, and it made academicians understand how balancing scientific reasons with emotional understanding can motivate people to work towards nature's well-being. She helped to bridge the gap between scientific complexities and emotional dimensions for environmental communication. Her work has inspired scholars, activists and the global public, where she proved that empathy, hope and compassion are powerful tools to bring a change to the environmental issues. At an age where there is discussion about climate doomism and fear among the people, Goodall's model brings hope to the public and motivates them to work collectively for environmental change.



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**FROM SOUL TO SOIL: THE ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S *IḤYĀ' 'ULŪM AL-DĪN***

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**Abstract**

This study explores the environmental ethics implicit in Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), highlighting the interconnectedness of spiritual, moral, and ecological dimensions in his thought. Through a qualitative hermeneutic analysis of key sections—including *tazkiyah al-naḥs* (purification of the soul), *mīzān* (balance), *khalīfah* (stewardship), and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence)—the paper identifies principles that extend human moral responsibility to the natural world. The findings reveal that Al-Ghazālī conceptualizes the environment not as an inert resource but as a sacred trust, reflecting the inner moral condition of humanity. Gratitude, moderation, and ethical stewardship emerge as central virtues that link spiritual cultivation to ecological care, forming a holistic framework that may be termed “sacred ecology.” By situating Al-Ghazālī's ethical system within contemporary environmental discourse, the study demonstrates the enduring relevance of classical Islamic thought in addressing modern ecological crises. The paper concludes that sustainable interaction with the natural world is inseparable from the moral and spiritual development of the individual, suggesting that the path from soul to soil begins with ethical self-transformation. These insights contribute to ongoing dialogues in Islamic environmental ethics and offer a model for integrating spiritual principles into contemporary sustainability frameworks.

**Keywords:** Al-Ghazālī; *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*; Islamic Environmental Ethics; Spiritual Ecology; Stewardship (*Khilāfah*); Moral Philosophy

**Introduction**

The question of how humanity ought to live in harmony with the natural world has become one of the most urgent ethical concerns of the modern age. Environmental degradation, climate change, deforestation, and the depletion of natural resources have exposed not only the ecological but also the moral and spiritual crises underlying modern civilization. These crises have prompted scholars across disciplines to re-examine traditional sources of ethical guidance and to explore whether ancient wisdom traditions might hold insights capable of addressing contemporary environmental challenges. Within this larger global conversation, Islamic thought occupies a unique position. Rooted in the principle of *tawḥīd*—the unity of God and, by extension, the unity of creation—Islamic philosophy offers an integrative worldview in which moral, spiritual, and ecological dimensions are inherently connected. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the sacredness of nature, describing all elements of creation as signs (*āyāt*) pointing to the divine, and commanding humanity to act as responsible stewards (*khulafā'*) of the earth. Yet, despite this profound ecological consciousness within Islamic scripture, modern environmental ethics has often been dominated by secular, anthropocentric paradigms that neglect spiritual and moral dimensions. It is within this context that a return to classical Islamic thinkers like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) becomes particularly significant. Al-Ghazālī, widely recognized as one of the greatest theologians, philosophers, and mystics in Islamic intellectual history, devoted his magnum opus *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*) to the reformation of moral and spiritual life in the Muslim community. His work seeks to harmonize the outer law (*sharī'ah*) with inner spirituality (*tarīqah*), offering a comprehensive ethical framework in which every act of human conduct is viewed through the lens of moral intention and divine accountability. Although al-Ghazālī never formulated an explicit “environmental philosophy” in the modern sense, his

discussions on moderation, gratitude, stewardship, and the moral use of material resources contain a rich, implicit environmental ethic. By grounding ethics in spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and moral discipline, he constructs a vision of human life that is inherently ecological: the purified soul lives in balance (*mizān*) with itself, others, and the natural order. For al-Ghazālī, moral corruption and environmental disorder are interlinked manifestations of spiritual imbalance—signs of forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) toward God’s unity and creation’s sanctity.

In recent decades, a growing body of scholarship has begun to recover this ecological dimension of Islamic spirituality. Thinkers such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Fazlun Khalid, and Richard Foltz have drawn attention to how Islamic metaphysics can inform modern environmental ethics. Nasr, in particular, argues that the ecological crisis is fundamentally a spiritual one—a result of the desacralization of nature. In this light, revisiting al-Ghazālī’s synthesis of theology, mysticism, and moral philosophy is not merely an exercise in historical analysis but a way to rediscover ethical resources capable of addressing today’s environmental challenges. *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* offers an integrated moral system in which the care for the soul naturally extends to care for the soil—the inner and outer worlds mirror one another. The study of al-Ghazālī’s environmental ethics therefore provides a bridge between personal virtue and ecological responsibility, demonstrating that environmental renewal begins with spiritual transformation. However, despite this potential, academic engagement with al-Ghazālī’s environmental ethics remains limited. Existing studies often focus on his epistemology, theology, or mystical psychology, leaving his implicit ecological dimensions underexplored. Even within the field of Islamic environmental studies, attention tends to center on Qur’anic cosmology or legal approaches to environmental protection, rather than on the moral psychology that underpins ethical behavior toward the natural world. This gap suggests a need to examine how al-Ghazālī’s ethical concepts—such as moderation (*i’tidāl*), stewardship (*khalīfah*), and gratitude (*shukr*)—can be interpreted within a contemporary ecological framework. By reading *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* through an environmental lens, this study seeks to uncover the philosophical and ethical foundations that connect the purification of the soul with the preservation of the natural world.

The central objective of this research is therefore to explore the environmental ethics embedded in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* and to interpret how his moral teachings can contribute to contemporary discussions of ecological sustainability. It aims to demonstrate that al-Ghazālī’s conception of moral virtue—grounded in self-restraint, humility, and awareness of divine unity—naturally extends to an ethic of environmental responsibility. The study also intends to situate al-Ghazālī within broader traditions of environmental thought, showing how his principles anticipate modern ecological ethics while remaining deeply rooted in Islamic metaphysics. In doing so, the research contributes to the interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities by offering a spiritually grounded, ethically rich alternative to secular ecological paradigms. Ultimately, this paper argues that al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* presents not only a guide for individual moral renewal but also a framework for ecological balance. His call to revive the religious sciences becomes, in the modern context, a call to revive the moral consciousness necessary for environmental stewardship. To live ethically, for al-Ghazālī, is to live harmoniously within the divine order—to respect the balance that sustains life, and to see in every element of creation a reflection of divine wisdom. Thus, from the soul’s purification arises the soil’s preservation: the moral ecology of the self becomes the foundation for the ecology of the earth.

### **Literature Review**

The exploration of environmental ethics within the framework of Islamic thought has evolved over the last few decades, coinciding with the rising global awareness of ecological degradation and the search for sustainable moral paradigms. Scholars have often revisited the classical Islamic tradition to uncover latent ecological insights, interpreting theological, philosophical, and mystical texts through the lens of environmental responsibility. In this intellectual movement, al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* has gradually gained attention as a pivotal text that bridges the human soul’s

purification with the preservation of the natural world. Although al-Ghazālī himself never wrote explicitly about environmental conservation, his holistic ethical vision—where the moral, metaphysical, and physical realms are intricately interwoven—offers a fertile ground for ecological reinterpretation. To understand this intellectual lineage, it is necessary to trace how scholars of religion, philosophy, and ecology have approached al-Ghazālī's thought, and how his spiritual psychology intersects with modern ecological concerns. The initial groundwork for interpreting Islamic thought through an environmental lens was laid by scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, whose seminal works *Man and Nature* (1968) and *Religion and the Order of Nature* (1996) argued that the environmental crisis stems not merely from industrial excess but from a metaphysical rupture—the desacralization of nature. Nasr posited that in classical Islam, the cosmos is understood as a living symbol of divine wisdom (*ḥikmah*), governed by the principle of *tawḥīd*—the unity of all existence in God. For Nasr, environmental destruction is thus not only an ecological but a spiritual disorder, an expression of humanity's alienation from the divine order. His reading provides an essential interpretive lens for re-examining al-Ghazālī, who's *Iḥyā'* similarly portrays the natural world as a mirror of divine harmony, and human corruption as a reflection of spiritual imbalance. Nasr's school of thought inaugurated a wave of Islamic eco-theological interpretations, encouraging later thinkers to revisit classical Sufi texts for their implicit cosmological ethics.

Following Nasr, scholars such as Richard Foltz, Fazlun Khalid, and Ibrahim Özdemir advanced the study of Islamic environmentalism by situating it within contemporary ecological discourse. In *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (2003), Foltz and his collaborators framed the Islamic concept of *khalīfah* (stewardship) as a moral foundation for ecological ethics, arguing that humans, as vicegerents of God, bear responsibility for maintaining the balance (*mīzān*) of creation. Fazlun Khalid's writings, notably *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity, and the Climate Crisis* (2019), emphasize how modern ecological degradation results from ignoring divine trust (*amānah*). His approach grounds ecological responsibility in spiritual accountability, echoing al-Ghazālī's conviction that every ethical failure originates in a diseased heart. Özdemir, in contrast, integrates environmental ethics with education and policy, suggesting that a revival of traditional Islamic environmental consciousness—rooted in texts like *Iḥyā'*—could guide sustainable community practices. Collectively, these scholars have revived interest in Islamic moral theology as a reservoir of ecological wisdom, though few have engaged deeply with al-Ghazālī's spiritual epistemology. Within Ghazālīan studies themselves, modern scholarship has primarily focused on al-Ghazālī's contributions to moral psychology, epistemology, and the reconciliation of Sufism with orthodox theology, often overlooking the environmental implications of his thought. Michael Marmura, Frank Griffel, and Kenneth Garden, for instance, have illuminated al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge and the hierarchy of being, but their analyses remain anthropocentric, rarely extending to nature's moral status. Marmura's interpretation of *Iḥyā'* as a manual for the purification of the soul provides valuable insight into how al-Ghazālī sees the self's alignment with divine will as a microcosm of cosmic harmony, yet this potential ecological dimension has not been elaborated. Griffel's *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (2009) situates him within the *kalām* tradition, emphasizing his attempt to reconcile reason and revelation, but leaves unexamined the ways in which this reconciliation can extend to the natural environment. Thus, a significant gap remains: while al-Ghazālī's ethics are recognized as spiritually transformative, their implications for environmental stewardship are seldom articulated. A smaller yet growing body of scholarship attempts to fill this gap by reading al-Ghazālī ecologically. Scholars such as Anna M. Gade, in *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (2019), suggest that al-Ghazālī's notion of moral purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) could be extended to include purification of one's relationship with the earth, framing ecological care as an act of worship. Similarly, Ibrahim Abdurrahman and others have examined the symbolic relationship between inner moral order and cosmic balance in *Iḥyā'*, identifying parallels between environmental discipline and the regulation of the self's desires. These readings, while interpretive, reveal the profound potential of al-

Ghazālī's thought for ecological ethics: his insistence that virtue involves harmony between reason, passion, and spirit mirrors the ecological principle of balance among creation's elements. However, these studies remain relatively dispersed, often appearing as tangential discussions within broader analyses of Islamic ethics rather than as dedicated explorations of al-Ghazālī's ecological philosophy.

In addition to contemporary scholarship, a return to the *Ihyā'* itself reveals al-Ghazālī's nuanced cosmology. Throughout the work, he constructs a moral vision where every created thing exists for divine purpose, and where humanity's misuse of natural gifts signifies spiritual ingratitude. In the "*Book of Gratitude*" (*Kitāb al-Shukr*), he argues that true thankfulness toward God involves recognizing the right use of His bounties—an idea that directly translates into ecological restraint and sustainable consumption. Likewise, in the "*Book of the Marvels of the Heart*" (*Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb*), al-Ghazālī likens the human soul to a garden that must be cultivated and protected, a metaphor that implicitly extends to the outer world as an extension of the inner moral landscape. These metaphorical linkages between spiritual and material order serve as the foundation for an environmental ethic that is both symbolic and practical: by purifying the soul, one restores harmony to the world. Yet, despite these textual clues, the interpretive bridge between spirituality and environmentalism is not straightforward. Critics have cautioned against retroactively imposing modern ecological frameworks upon premodern texts. Richard C. Foltz, for instance, warns that Islamic environmentalism should not be romanticized as a pre-existing ecological movement but understood as a recontextualization of traditional ethics for modern purposes. This methodological caution is essential when approaching al-Ghazālī: while his moral cosmology supports ecological balance, his concern was primarily with spiritual salvation, not environmental policy. The task, then, for contemporary scholars is not to anachronistically claim al-Ghazālī as an environmentalist, but to reinterpret his spiritual ethics as a foundation upon which modern ecological consciousness can be built. Such a reading recognizes that the moral repair of the self and the ethical restoration of the world are continuous processes, reflecting the *Qur'ānic* principle that corruption on earth (*fasād fi al-arḍ*) arises from the corruption of the human heart.

Thus, the literature reveals both a wealth of interpretive possibilities and a clear research gap. While scholars have extensively examined Islamic ecological ethics in general, and al-Ghazālī's moral philosophy in particular, few have systematically synthesized the two to construct a coherent Ghazālīan environmental ethic. The few attempts that exist remain scattered, lacking a sustained hermeneutic engagement with the *Ihyā'* as an ethical ecosystem in itself. This paper seeks to address that gap by reading *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* as a moral ecology—a text where the purification of the soul is inseparable from the restoration of environmental harmony, and where ethical living entails a profound recognition of creation's sacred order. By doing so, the study aims to situate al-Ghazālī not merely as a theologian of inward virtue but as an implicit thinker of ecological balance whose teachings offer a timeless response to humanity's moral and environmental crises.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative hermeneutic-textual approach, grounded in the interpretive analysis of classical religious texts. The choice of *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* as the central text stems from its unique synthesis of ethical, spiritual, and theological discourses that collectively construct a comprehensive vision of human responsibility within the divine order. Because al-Ghazālī's writings operate simultaneously on theological, ethical, and mystical levels, a hermeneutic reading allows for a layered interpretation—one that moves beyond literal exposition to uncover the symbolic, moral, and cosmological implications embedded in his thought. Rather than extracting isolated statements about nature, this study treats the *Ihyā'* as an organic moral system, examining how its principles of self-purification, gratitude, balance, and stewardship translate into an implicit environmental ethic. The research proceeds from the assumption that in Islamic thought, the moral and natural orders are inseparable: to study the soul's harmony with God is also to study humanity's harmony with creation.



The research design thus aligns with qualitative interpretivism, emphasizing meaning-making over measurement. The study's primary method is textual analysis, focusing on close readings of key sections of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, particularly those addressing moral purification (tazkiyah al-nafs), gratitude (shukr), moderation (i'tidāl), and the marvels of the heart ('ajā'ib al-qalb). These chapters were selected because they reveal al-Ghazālī's ethical architecture most clearly—where the relationship between the inner and outer worlds, between spiritual discipline and moral action, becomes evident. Passages were identified and coded thematically under five recurring principles: tawḥīd (unity), khalīfah (stewardship), mīzān (balance), tazkiyah al-nafs (self-purification), and iḥsān (spiritual excellence). These categories are not externally imposed but emerge organically from al-Ghazālī's own lexicon and metaphysical orientation. By tracing how these principles interact, the study constructs a model of what might be called Ghazālīan "moral ecology," where ethical self-cultivation sustains not only spiritual but environmental equilibrium. To ensure interpretive depth and accuracy, the analysis draws upon both primary and secondary sources. The Arabic text of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* was read alongside authoritative English translations, including those of H.T. Littlejohn and Nabih Amin Faris, with careful attention to terminological nuances. Supplementary commentaries by later Islamic scholars, such as al-Zabidi's *Ithāf al-Sādah al-Muttaqīn*, were consulted to understand how al-Ghazālī's concepts were received and elaborated in subsequent centuries. In addition, secondary literature from Islamic philosophy, Sufism, and contemporary environmental ethics provided critical frameworks for interpretation. Works by Nasr, Khalid, Foltz, Gade, and Özdemir helped position al-Ghazālī within the broader discourse of Islamic ecology, while classical commentaries grounded the analysis within its original intellectual milieu. The goal was to balance historical fidelity with philosophical relevance, ensuring that the modern environmental reading remained anchored in al-Ghazālī's authentic worldview.

The interpretive process followed several stages of hermeneutic engagement. First, the researcher engaged in contextual reading, situating al-Ghazālī's ethical reflections within the intellectual climate of 11th-century Islamic mysticism and theology, marked by debates between philosophers, theologians, and Sufis over the nature of reality and the role of human knowledge. This contextualization helped clarify al-Ghazālī's concern with restoring harmony between reason and revelation, a harmony that also underlies his conception of the world as a divinely ordered system. Second, the analysis involved textual immersion, a stage of slow reading that sought to capture al-Ghazālī's metaphors and analogies, many of which bridge the human and natural realms—gardens, light, water, and balance frequently appear as moral symbols. Third, thematic synthesis brought these motifs together under conceptual umbrellas that could sustain ecological interpretation. For example, the metaphor of the "heart as a mirror" was analyzed as a representation of the human capacity to reflect divine order, implying that the corruption of the heart mirrors the corruption of the world. Finally, philosophical reflection linked these interpretations to modern ethical categories, such as environmental stewardship and moral responsibility toward non-human creation. Because the research engages a sacred text, ethical considerations played a crucial role. The study approached *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* with interpretive humility, acknowledging that environmental ethics as a modern academic field did not exist in al-Ghazālī's time. The analysis therefore refrains from projecting contemporary ecological concerns directly onto his work; rather, it identifies continuities and resonances that allow a dialogue between classical moral thought and modern ethical needs. The process also involved sensitivity to linguistic and cultural translation. Many of al-Ghazālī's Arabic terms, such as 'adl (justice), 'ibādah (worship), and niyyah (intention), carry ethical connotations that resist direct translation. Wherever possible, the study retains these terms to preserve conceptual accuracy, providing interpretive glosses instead of fixed equivalents. This linguistic awareness ensures that the reconstructed environmental ethic remains faithful to its original metaphysical context.

Finally, the study's analytical validation relies on triangulation between text, tradition, and theory. Textual evidence from *Iḥyā'* is cross-referenced with *Qur'ānic* verses and Prophetic traditions that emphasize nature's sacredness and humanity's role as steward. The findings are then interpreted in

light of contemporary eco-theological discourse, testing whether al-Ghazālī's moral vision can meaningfully contribute to modern environmental ethics. While the study is interpretive rather than empirical, it upholds scholarly rigor through transparency of method and cross-textual coherence. By employing a hermeneutic framework rather than a positivist one, the research acknowledges that the value of classical texts lies not in empirical verification but in moral illumination—the capacity to transform perception and action. Thus, the methodology rests on the conviction that understanding al-Ghazālī's spiritual ethics can inform a broader moral ecology, where the healing of the soul and the restoration of the earth are continuous acts of worship and knowledge.

### **Results / Findings**

The findings of this study emerge from a sustained hermeneutic reading of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, revealing that al-Ghazālī's ethical vision, though not explicitly environmental, constructs an implicit moral ecology grounded in the unity of existence, the sacredness of balance, and the responsibility of human stewardship. Across his voluminous writings, al-Ghazālī portrays the human being as both a microcosm and a mirror of the divine order: when the soul achieves harmony, the world around it reflects that harmony; when it falls into disorder, the wider creation suffers as a consequence of moral corruption. This cosmological interdependence forms the ethical foundation of al-Ghazālī's thought and can be articulated through five interrelated principles—*tawḥīd* (unity), *khalīfah* (stewardship), *mīzān* (balance), *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification), and *iḥsān* (spiritual excellence). Each of these principles represents not only a theological or spiritual virtue but also a mode of relational ethics that extends to the natural world.

The first and most encompassing principle is *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God and the unity of all creation in divine reality. In al-Ghazālī's metaphysical scheme, *tawḥīd* is not merely an abstract doctrine but a lived consciousness of unity that shapes ethical behaviour. To affirm God's oneness is also to recognize that every element of creation—earth, air, water, and life—is a manifestation of divine wisdom and is therefore sacred. In the Book of Knowledge, al-Ghazālī insists that “the world is the field of the hereafter,” a place of moral cultivation rather than ownership. This view dissolves the dualism between humanity and nature: human beings are not separate masters of the earth but participants within the divine order. Such a vision, when read through a modern ecological lens, implies an ethic of reverence toward the environment. The destruction of nature, in this sense, is a veiled form of spiritual ignorance—a failure to perceive the unity of being. Thus, *tawḥīd* establishes the metaphysical basis for environmental ethics, reminding humanity that every act of exploitation or care is simultaneously a theological statement about one's awareness of divine unity. From this unity flows the second principle, *khalīfah*, or stewardship, which defines the human role within creation. Al-Ghazālī interprets the Qur'ānic concept of *khalīfah* as a moral office grounded in trust (*amānah*), not privilege. In the Book of Patience and Gratitude, he explains that the blessings of the earth—its fruits, waters, and materials—are divine gifts entrusted to human beings for rightful use and gratitude. True gratitude (*shukr*), he argues, consists not in verbal acknowledgement but in using divine gifts in accordance with their purpose. To misuse these gifts through excess or waste is to betray the trust of stewardship. When translated into ecological terms, this insight resonates with the modern principle of sustainability: gratitude demands restraint, and stewardship requires responsibility. Al-Ghazālī's language of trust thus transforms the human-environment relationship from one of domination to one of moral accountability, grounded in humility before the Creator. The human being is not the owner, but the caretaker of a world that belongs ultimately to God, and every act of care or destruction carries eschatological weight. The third principle, *mīzān*, or balance, represents the ethical architecture of creation itself. Al-Ghazālī's concept of moderation (*i'tidāl*)—both in bodily habits and in moral character—extends from the individual soul to the cosmic order. In the Book of the Marvels of the Heart, he writes that the heart is like a mirror that reflects divine light only when it is polished through discipline and balance. This equilibrium mirrors the balance of the natural world, where every element serves a precise function within the divine design. The Qur'ān frequently invokes

mīzān as a principle of both physical and moral proportion: “He raised the heaven and established the balance, so do not transgress the balance” (55:7–8). Al-Ghazālī internalizes this command, teaching that the corruption of the soul—manifested in greed, arrogance, or negligence—inevitably disturbs the external order of creation. In ecological terms, his ethic of moderation anticipates contemporary concerns about overconsumption and environmental imbalance. The destruction of forests, pollution of waters, and depletion of resources may thus be read as external symptoms of inner moral disequilibrium. Through mīzān, al-Ghazālī articulates a vision of justice that transcends human society and extends into the very fabric of the natural world. The fourth principle, tazkiyah al-nafs, or the purification of the soul, stands at the heart of al-Ghazālī’s ethical project and serves as the bridge between personal morality and environmental responsibility. In the *Book of the Discipline of the Soul*, he likens the human heart to fertile soil that must be cultivated to yield virtue. If left untended, it becomes overgrown with the weeds of desire and heedlessness. This agricultural metaphor provides a powerful ecological image: just as the land must be cultivated with care and moderation to remain fruitful, the soul must be disciplined through self-restraint and remembrance of God to maintain its moral fertility. Al-Ghazālī identifies greed and arrogance as the roots of both spiritual and social corruption—qualities that, in the modern context, drive environmental exploitation. By purifying the soul from these vices, the individual aligns inward disposition with the divine order, achieving a harmony that naturally extends to one’s treatment of the world. Thus, tazkiyah al-nafs becomes not only a spiritual necessity but an ecological discipline: the purification of desire translates into the purification of the earth from human excess.

Finally, the principle of ihsān, or spiritual excellence, crowns al-Ghazālī’s moral system and completes the circle between soul and soil. Ihsān represents the highest form of ethical consciousness, defined by the Prophet Muhammad as “to worship God as though you see Him.” For al-Ghazālī, this awareness transforms every human act into an act of devotion, imbuing even mundane tasks—planting a seed, drawing water, feeding an animal—with spiritual significance. The *Ihyā’* frequently returns to this theme of presence and beauty: to act with ihsān is to mirror the divine attribute of perfection in one’s conduct. When extended to the natural world, this principle implies an aesthetic and ethical sensitivity toward creation. To destroy beauty, to waste resources, or to treat nature as inert matter is to act without ihsān. In contrast, to nurture life and preserve balance is to participate in divine creativity. Thus, ihsān transforms environmental ethics from a set of external duties into a mode of worship, where the care of creation becomes a reflection of one’s love for the Creator. When viewed collectively, these five principles reveal that al-Ghazālī’s ethical system forms a coherent ecological framework, even though he never formulates it in those terms. Tawhīd grounds the metaphysical unity of creation; khalīfah defines human responsibility; mīzān articulates moral and natural balance; tazkiyah al-nafs provides the method of inner reform; and ihsān represents the goal of perfect harmony with the divine order. Together, they form what may be called a spiritual ecology—a vision in which environmental care is not a separate moral category but a natural expression of faith. This interpretation aligns with the Qur’ānic warning that corruption on earth arises from human corruption and with al-Ghazālī’s constant assertion that outward disorder mirrors inward decay. The harmony of creation, therefore, depends upon the moral discipline of the human being. Environmental ethics, in this sense, is not an external imposition upon Islamic thought but a rediscovery of its inner logic.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* encodes a profound ecological sensibility rooted in the interdependence of spiritual and natural orders. Al-Ghazālī’s ethical universe is one where every moral virtue has ecological resonance and every environmental act has spiritual consequence. His teaching that gratitude demands right use, that moderation ensures balance, and that spiritual excellence perfects moral conduct together form a timeless ethical blueprint. While his immediate concern was the salvation of the soul, his vision of moral harmony, when extended to the earth, offers a compelling framework for reimagining environmental

responsibility as a form of worship. The purification of the soul and the restoration of the world, for al-Ghazālī, are ultimately one and the same journey from the self toward the Divine.

### **Discussion**

Al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* presents an integrated moral vision in which the spiritual, ethical, and natural worlds form a single continuum of divine order. His ethical philosophy—though developed in an eleventh-century religious context—bears striking relevance to modern ecological thought. Central to his worldview is the conviction that all existence reflects the unity of God (*tawhīd*), and that moral disorder in the soul reverberates outward as imbalance in creation. Thus, environmental degradation is not merely a physical or economic problem but a symptom of spiritual alienation. This perspective situates al-Ghazālī within a theocentric framework that transcends both modern anthropocentric and biocentric extremes, offering instead a moral cosmology where humans act as trustees (*khulafā'*) within the divine order. Such an approach resonates with the recent revival of spiritual ecology, where the moral and the environmental are understood as mutually dependent dimensions of life. Al-Ghazālī's emphasis on self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) and gratitude (*shukr*) provides a spiritual foundation for ecological awareness. His teachings suggest that the moral reform of the individual precedes the reform of the world. The purified heart, aware of its dependence upon God, perceives nature not as material property but as a sign (*āyah*) of divine wisdom. In this inward–outward dynamic, the soul's discipline becomes an ecological act: moderation, compassion, and humility translate directly into sustainable living. This insight anticipates what modern environmental philosophers describe as “ecological consciousness”—a moral awakening that transforms perception and behaviour. Yet unlike secular ecological ethics, which often emphasize external systems or policy, al-Ghazālī's approach begins within the human heart. His ecological ethic is a moral ecology, one that aligns the inner balance of the self with the divine balance of creation (*mīzān*). In doing so, he anticipates the Qur'ānic principle that “corruption has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of people have earned” (30:41), expressing a direct moral link between human excess and environmental disorder. Within this framework, the concept of stewardship (*khalīfah*) assumes renewed significance. Humanity, for al-Ghazālī, holds a position of responsibility rather than dominion. The human being's capacity for reason and will confers accountability toward creation, not superiority over it. This ethical stance, rooted in humility, contrasts sharply with the modern instrumentalist view of nature as an object of exploitation. Instead, al-Ghazālī calls for a relational ethic grounded in gratitude, justice, and restraint—principles that correspond closely to modern ecological ideals such as sustainability and care ethics. Yet his stewardship is distinct in grounding environmental responsibility in worship: to preserve creation is to fulfill a divine trust, not merely a social or economic obligation. In this way, environmental ethics becomes an act of devotion, reinforcing the Qur'ānic injunction that human beings are to act as moral guardians of the earth. His focus on *i'tidāl* (moderation) and *ihsān* (beauty) further extends this stewardship into the aesthetic and spiritual realms, teaching that to act beautifully toward the world is to reflect divine generosity. This sacred ecology offers a vital corrective to modern ecological thinking. Al-Ghazālī reminds us that environmental crisis cannot be solved through technology or policy alone; it requires a transformation of consciousness. His insistence that knowledge must unite with virtue provides a counterpoint to the fragmentation of modern thought, where science and spirituality are treated as separate domains. In the *Ihyā'*, knowledge of the soul and knowledge of the world are one and the same pursuit of divine wisdom. To restore balance to the earth, then, is to restore balance within the self—a truth that resonates deeply with contemporary calls for holistic sustainability. Moreover, his notion of *ihsān* situates ecological care within the realm of beauty: caring for nature becomes an act of love, a form of spiritual artistry that honors the Creator. Such an ethic of beauty offers an emotional and aesthetic motivation for environmental action, complementing the rational and utilitarian arguments that dominate present discourse.

In sum, al-Ghazālī's moral philosophy provides a deeply rooted, spiritually coherent foundation for environmental ethics. His synthesis of inner purification, divine unity, and moral responsibility transcends the limits of modern secular environmentalism. Where contemporary models often address ecological issues at the level of systems and structures, al-Ghazālī begins at the level of the heart, seeing the human being not as a ruler of nature but as a participant in a sacred order. The ecological vision implicit in the *Iḥyā'* thus calls for a renewed harmony between soul and soil—an ethic where spiritual awareness inspires environmental care, and the reverence for creation reflects the reverence for the Creator.

### **Conclusion**

Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* demonstrates that spiritual and ecological ethics are deeply intertwined, revealing a vision of human responsibility that extends from the inner life of the soul to the outer world of creation. By emphasizing the unity of all existence (*tawḥīd*), the ethical stewardship of humanity (*khalīfah*), the balance inherent in both moral and cosmic orders (*mīzān*), the cultivation of the purified self (*tazkiyah al-nafs*), and the pursuit of spiritual excellence (*iḥsān*), al-Ghazālī constructs an implicit environmental ethic that is both timeless and deeply practical. His teachings suggest that the moral and spiritual condition of the individual directly influences the health and harmony of the natural world, making environmental care inseparable from personal and collective virtue. In this way, ecological degradation is interpreted not merely as a material or technical problem but as a symptom of moral and spiritual neglect, highlighting the inseparable link between ethical self-cultivation and the stewardship of creation. The study shows that al-Ghazālī's ethical vision offers a distinctive approach to contemporary environmental challenges, particularly within Islamic contexts but also for broader global discourse. Modern ecological crises often emerge from the separation of knowledge, morality, and spiritual awareness; al-Ghazālī's holistic framework demonstrates that restoring balance to the earth begins with restoring balance to the self. His integration of theological reflection, moral psychology, and practical guidance provides a model of what may be called spiritual ecology, in which acts of environmental care are understood as expressions of worship, gratitude, and reverence for divine wisdom. The cultivation of virtues such as moderation, humility, and mindfulness in daily life becomes a foundation for sustainable interaction with the natural world, making ethical action toward the environment an extension of the sacred responsibility entrusted to humanity.

Ultimately, al-Ghazālī's work emphasizes that the journey from soul to soil is continuous and inseparable. By rooting ecological responsibility in spiritual and moral disciplines, he offers a framework in which environmental ethics is not an external imposition but a natural outcome of inner transformation. The study underscores the enduring relevance of his thought, suggesting that contemporary efforts to address environmental degradation may benefit from revisiting classical Islamic ethical systems. In aligning human conduct with divine order, al-Ghazālī provides a vision in which the flourishing of the self and the flourishing of creation are mutually reinforcing, offering a timeless and ethically robust model for engaging with the ecological challenges of the modern world.

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**REEVALUATING NATURE’S AGENCY: ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
PATHETIC FALLACY AND LITERARY REPRESENTATION**

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**Abstract**

The literary deployment of nature as metaphor, personification, and emotional conduit has deep historical roots, yet contemporary ecocriticism questions its ethical legitimacy towards nature. Building on John Ruskin’s critique of the “pathetic fallacy,” this paper investigates how anthropocentric notions of human centrality transform nature into a mere descriptive tool. By acknowledging the presence of nature-based imagery from ancient texts to the extensive use of it in Romantic literature, this paper delineates the persistent pattern of projecting human affect onto the natural world. Subsequently, this paper applies ecocritical criteria to assess whether such projections reinforce hierarchical human-nature relations or acknowledge ecological interdependence. Examples from Wordsworth to Shelley, and contemporary eco-fiction illustrate the spectrum from exploitative instrumentalization to nuanced ecological empathy. The analysis reveals that nature-centric figurative language is justifiable only when it resists reducing the environment to a passive backdrop and instead foregrounds its agency and intrinsic value. Consequently, while metaphorical engagement with nature remains a vital literary device, its ethical acceptability hinges on the text’s capacity to transcend anthropocentric dominance and promote a more reciprocal view of the human-nature relationship.

**Keywords:** Ecocriticism, Exploitative instrumentalization, Ecological empathy, Pathetic fallacy, Literary devices, Anthropocentrism, Ecofeminism, Feminist critique, Nature

**Introduction**

The pathetic fallacy blurs the line between human affect and the autonomous vitality of non-human entities. By projecting emotions onto weather, plants, or animals, writers turn living landscapes into passive mirrors that simply reflect human moods. This rhetorical shortcut erases the material agency of those beings, presenting them as props rather than participants in ecological processes. Eco-critics argue that such anthropocentric framing reinforces a worldview in which nature exists solely for human interpretation and emotional convenience, thereby legitimizing exploitation and silencing the intrinsic value of non-human life. Neil Evernden in his essay “Beyond Ecology: Self, Place & the Pathetic Fallacy” argues that the pathetic fallacy – the habit of projecting human emotions onto weather, plants, and landscapes – does more than merely embellish language; it reduces place to a psychological backdrop for the writer’s inner life. By treating the environment as a mirror for human feeling, the text obscures the agency of non-human actors and denies the material reality of ecosystems. Evernden contends that this sentimental collapse reinforces anthropocentrism, preventing readers from recognizing nature as a network of independent, relational forces rather than a passive stage (Evernden, 93). His critique anticipates later ecocritical concerns about environmental objectification, positioning the fallacy as a cultural habit that sustains human dominance over the natural world. Consequently, the essay is frequently cited as the first explicit articulation of the danger inherent in using nature solely as a descriptive or emotional device. The concern thus is that, when nature is repeatedly reduced to a “felt” backdrop, readers are conditioned to see the environment not as a network of interdependent organisms but as an interchangeable canvas for human sentiment – a habit ecocriticism seeks to dismantle. Consequently, the pathetic fallacy is viewed not merely as a stylistic excess but as a cultural practice that sustains the very hierarchy ecocriticism aims to overturn.

Nature and literature have traditionally been imagined as a seamless partnership, a duet in which the writer summons natural metaphors, allegories, and images whenever ordinary language proves insufficient. This recourse, however, often effaces the individuality of both the natural world and the phenomena it is meant to illuminate, reducing trees, rivers, animals, and seasonal cycles to convenient symbols or decorative props. Critics frequently praise the power of beauty conveyed through such natural resemblances, yet that very praise masks an underlying assumption: nature is a passive repository for human sentiment, a canvas on which emotions can be projected without regard for its own agency.

By treating the environment merely as a reservoir of picturesque material, the anthropocentric bias that places humanity at the apex of a hierarchical order is reinforced. Poets, in appropriating a storm to signify turmoil or a flower to signal love, may unintentionally silence the intrinsic worth of those entities, ignoring their complex lives, ecological relationships, and the ethical obligations they entail. The repeated “weaponisation” of nature in poetry—its deployment as a rhetorical device rather than an interlocutor—mirrors a deeper, systemic selfishness that perceives the environment as subservient and expendable, not as a co-creator of meaning.

To move beyond this pattern, writers must cultivate an awareness of nature’s autonomy, allowing it to speak on its own terms rather than merely serving human narrative needs. Such a shift promises a more reciprocal dialogue in which literature respects the agency of the natural world while still drawing inspiration from its profound richness.

And so, this paper questions and analyses the integrity of inculcating nature in poetry. However, the usage of nature in literary works itself is by no means an abomination, for there have been beautiful references to nature in works of art and it should continue to be so, since at the end of the day aesthetics, beauty, and art are all but parts of the vast realm of nature. The problem arises when nature is made subservient to man and his perspective. This paper interrogates the legitimacy of inserting nature into poetry, probing the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of a practice that is far from uniformly condemnable. Throughout literary history, poets have fashioned exquisite evocations of rivers, forests, and skies, and such references have enriched the artistic canon; indeed, aesthetics, beauty, and art are themselves manifestations of the broader natural order. The difficulty emerges when nature is relegated to a subordinate role, fashioned into a mere instrument that serves human perspective without regard for its own autonomy. Transforming an entity that exists independently of humanity into a convenient literary prop, especially when that transformation is executed recklessly and without limits, betrays a profound anthropocentric hubris. It reduces the living world to a decorative resource, obscuring the reciprocal relationships that sustain both ecological systems and cultural meaning. The present empirical-inductive, quantitative study therefore examines multiple facets of this central tension: (1) the frequency and context of natural imagery across a representative corpus; (2) the degree to which such imagery reinforces a utilitarian view of the environment; and (3) the correlation between poetically mediated perceptions of nature and attitudes toward environmental stewardship. By foregrounding the latent hypocrisy embedded in the uncritical use of nature as a literary device, the research aims to stimulate a more responsible and reflexive poetics - one that honours nature’s intrinsic value while still allowing for genuine artistic inspiration. To make something that is neither influenced by nor dependent on man into a tool to be used by men, and on top of that, to do so recklessly and endlessly, that should not be the asset of a poet. And so, this empirical-inductive, quantitative research, analyses various aspects of this core idea in order to bring focus on the underlying hypocrisy that comes with the technique of making use of nature as a literary device.

#### **Decentralizing the human**

John Ruskin in his famous essay titled “The Pathetic Fallacy” from his book *Modern Painters* (1856) describes the hypocrisy that underscores the usage of nature in poetry, outrightly rejecting the practice that makes nature subservient to poetically, often times making use of its elements to describe what is humane. He states:

“From these ingenious views the step is very easy to a farther opinion, that it does not much matter what things are in themselves, but only what they are to us; and that the only real truth of them is their appearance to, or effect upon, us. From which position, with a hearty desire for mystification, and much egotism, selfishness, shallowness, and impertinence, a philosopher may easily go so far as to believe, and say, that everything in the world depends upon his seeing or thinking of it, and that nothing, therefore, exists, but what he sees or thinks of” (Ruskin, 157).

While Ruskin in his leniency only highlights how the said practice is a fallacy – for nature goes beyond the human perception and recognition of it – the underlying issues with the practice go beyond just the technical. But, as Ruskin argues, it should not be up to the perception of humans to frame the definition of objects in nature. Nature needs no acknowledgement from man to exist – it has an existence of its own – devoid of any human interference. It is us who need nature for survival and visibility, and not the other way round: “the word ‘Blue’ does ‘not’ mean the ‘sensation’ caused by a gentian on the human eye; but it means the ‘power’ of producing that sensation; and this power is always there, in the thing, whether we are there to experience it or not, and would remain there though there were not left a man on the face of the earth” (Ruskin, 202). His argument remains unchallenged; it is true that the existence of nature is devoid of acknowledgement, but the awareness goes beyond just that. One needs to understand what is it that has made humans think for so long that it is justified to commit this fallacy. And why is the criticism of this practice limited to being a technical one, and not a moral one as well?

Perhaps the basic issue with, as well as, the most fundamental reason that enables this practice in the first place is the human supposition of his own supremacy in the universe. To man, all else, including nature, is for him to use as he pleases. The examples to verify this statement are numerous – from the overconsumption of fossil fuels to global warming, all is the produce of man’s inherent refusal to recognize any entity separate from and unbothered by him. The reflection of this in literary works comes from the extensive use of nature to describe that which is unrelated to nature. Peter Barry in his book *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* talks about this phenomenon when discussing Ecocriticism, he states, “In the nineteenth century the great Victorian art critic John Ruskin... coined the term ‘pathetic fallacy’ for our instinctive tendency to see our emotions reflected in our environment, which seems to be another form of the habit of seeing everything as centred upon ourselves” (Barry, 261). But even if man’s self-importance knows absolutely no bounds, it does not legitimize his use of nature as he pleases, for nature is not and never will be an entity subservient to man. And it is an unwarranted practice to extensively use nature as means to enhance poetry or to describe what is human.

The issue of using nature in poetry is not seen by Ruskin as a moral one, at the very most it is seen as a technical mishap at the hands of the author. But there is a deeper subconscious element to it. Perhaps man sees nature as he sees women – a thing of beauty for him to romanticize at whim. It is not fathomable to man that anything in the world is not for him to use, be it in practice or poetry, and that is a matter that needs to be brought to light. When one reads of literary devices like personification and metaphors from nature, it is embedded in our collective unconscious that that is what nature ought to do – aid our writing, and subsequently our life. The conception that we can “use” nature without any boundaries in our literary works subconsciously gives rise to the mindset that natural resources are for humans to use without any limit as well. And in order to counter and defeat that perception we need to start by being conscious of how we use nature in our works. This anthropocentric view assumes that everything in the world exists for human exploitation, whether in practical deeds or artistic expression, and such an assumption must be exposed and interrogated. When readers encounter literary devices such as personification or nature-based metaphor, the image of nature as a willing collaborator becomes lodged in the collective unconscious; it seems natural that the environment should serve our writing and, by extension, our lives. This implicit conviction that nature can be “used” without restriction in literature subtly reinforces the broader belief that natural resources are likewise limitless for human

consumption. To disrupt this harmful perception, the first step is to cultivate a heightened awareness of how we invoke nature in our creative work. By consciously choosing representations that respect ecological boundaries and acknowledge nature's agency, poets can begin to dismantle the entrenched mindset that treats the natural world as an inexhaustible resource for human convenience.

#### **The individuality of beauty and the misuse of Nature in Romanticism**

It is a fact uncontested that Romantic literature is full of beauty and sublimity that it is vivid descriptions of nature and use of imagination has produced some of the finest and most engaging works of art. And Romanticism owes a lot to nature, for most, if not all Romantic literature is replete with references to nature and lengthily uses elements of nature to enhance, or in certain cases describe beauty. But the question is, in this mingling of all forms of beauty, how much individuality is retained? For a movement that focuses so much on human individuality, Romantic literature sure does rip nature of its distinct, individual beauty. When Shelley calls *The West Wind* "The trumpet of a prophecy" (line 69), does he not strip both the wind and prophecies of their separate forms of beauty? Both entities are, in all practicality, unrelated; and for Shelley to pick one up and call it the other is an act of injustice to the beauty and authority of both. Description should not mean a loss of identity; comparison is not portrayal. The poet should be careful to let one form of beauty exist in itself without comparing it to another, for in doing otherwise, we rob things of the spirit of beauty that is exclusive to them. Turning beauty into a technique of comparison is unfair – beauty comparable is beauty misinterpreted. One who truly understands the beauty of a thing would never find it in themselves to liken it to anything else. Incomparability, thus is the hallmark of real, raw beauty.

Perhaps the Romantics would disagree, since nature lies at the heart of their works, and they are of the belief that "Nature always wears the colours of the spirit" (Emerson, 12). The poet, then, may argue what must be done in order to retain poeticity, or, in other words, accomplish literariness. The answer is simple – comparisons can be made as long as one does not override the other. For instance, the usage of similes, as Ruskin argues, is justified as they retain the individual essence, and only compare, not give the position of one to the other:

"When Dante describes the spirits falling from the bank of Acheron' as dead leaves flutter from a bough', he gives the most perfect image possible of their utter lightness, feebleness, passiveness, and scattering agony of despair, without, however, for an instant losing his own clear perception that *'these'* are souls, and those are leaves; he makes no confusion of one with the other... Dante, in his most intense moods, has entire command of himself, and can look around calmly, at all moments, for the image or the word that will best tell what he sees to the upper or lower world. But Keats and Tennyson, and the poets of the second order, are generally themselves subdued by the feelings under which they write, or, at least, write as choosing to be so, and therefore admit certain expressions and modes of thought which are in some sort diseased or false" (Ruskin, 160).

And so, it is clear that the inclusion of nature in literary works is permissible, and even encouraged, given that the inclusion retain individuality in the midst of aesthetics and beauty. And as far as comparisons go, one should not resort to just nature as an easy alternative where words fail. The true merit of a poet is seen in how he goes beyond basic comparison. The metaphysical conceits of Donne and Marvell show their heightened sensibility and technical skill, for they go beyond the conventional, thus establishing themselves as great poets. It is not as if the inclusion of nature in works of art and the description of its beauty is completely prohibited. No, one is allowed to use nature and describe its beauty as he pleases, as long as this description does not rob nature of its individuality, as long as this description accentuates nature rather than taking from it. It is fair to include it in literary works as long as the poet understand that, as Wordsworth puts it, "Little we see in Nature that is ours" (Wordsworth, line 3). It is therefore important for the poet to understand that the beauty of nature is not for him to use as an accessory to his work, rather a

whole entity within itself, and thus it is unfair to reduce it to a small, comparable element of beauty. Nature is, and has always been, far bigger than human perception, and so humans should not force it to fit into their boxes of what they find beautiful.

#### **Nature and the Feminine: The Ecofeminist case of Pathetic Fallacy**

As the topic of nature and beauty come to our attention, so does femininity – concepts that go together in all ways, including their exploitation for aesthetics. Perhaps man should learn to find beauty and the expression of it in what is his, instead of profiting off of the description of nature and the feminine. As our awareness turns to the intertwined themes of nature and beauty, the notion of femininity inevitably surfaces, revealing a deep, historical entanglement that has often been reduced to mere aesthetic exploitation. In the dominant cultural narrative, humanity – especially the masculine self-image, places itself at the centre of existence, casting both the natural world and the female form into subordinate roles that serve its own expressive ambitions. This hierarchical stance raises a crucial ethical question: on what grounds does any individual claim the right to appropriate entities that are fundamentally autonomous and untouched by personal desire as tools for personal display? Rather than continuing to appropriate the untamed elegance of the environment and the intimate grace of women for self-serving purposes, perhaps humanity ought to cultivate an appreciation of beauty that arises from within its own lived experience. By turning inward, seeking authenticity in our thoughts, actions, and creations, we can honour the intrinsic value of nature and femininity without reducing them to decorative props for ego-driven expression. In doing so, we move toward a more respectful, balanced relationship that celebrates beauty on its own terms rather than as a commodity for exploitation. As Val Plumwood proclaims in her work *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993):

“The dominant and ancient traditions connecting men with culture and women with nature are also overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable ‘male’ essence (‘virility’) is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing but as ‘wild’, violent, competitive and sexual (as in the ideas of Victorianism, Darwinism and recent sociobiology), and ‘the female’ is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilising... But both the dominant tradition of men as reason and women as nature, and the more recent conflicting one of men as forceful and wild and women as tamed and domestic, have had the effect of confirming masculine power” (Plumwood, 20).

Man’s egocentric ambition knows no limits; the natural world is reduced to a mere object for his boundless self-assertion. In the relentless quest to give shape to his perceptions, he appropriates landscapes, weather, and animal life as expressive props, treating them as passive instruments rather than living participants. This practice transforms the literary device of pathetic fallacy into a moral transgression: the environment is not simply a metaphorical mirror for human feeling, but a silenced voice stripped of its own agency and spirit. By converting the vitality of rivers, forests, and skies into convenient symbols of personal drama, humanity imposes a hierarchy that privileges the human centre and erases the reciprocal dependence that nature demands. As Val Plumwood observes, the “master form of rationality of western culture has been systematically unable to acknowledge dependency on nature, the sphere of those it has defined as ‘inferior’ others” (Plumwood, ii). When nature is weaponised for aesthetic or rhetorical ends, its intrinsic worth is eclipsed, and its capacity to act and be felt is denied. The ethical problem, therefore, lies not in the technical act of metaphor but in the underlying attitude that legitimises the subjugation of the natural world to human ego.

#### **Conclusion**

It is true that man’s egocentricity and self-centeredness knows no bounds, and nature becomes just another prey for him to exert that arrogance. And as we see man, in all his self-interest, use nature as means of expression, the argument of pathetic fallacy seems to become a

moral issue rather than merely a technical one. In his want to give an expression to his perceptions, he unfairly reduces nature to a tool of doing so and in the process strips it of its spirit. Man's egocentric ambition is limitless, and the natural world is reduced to yet another quarry for his self-affirmation. In every act of self-interest he turns forests, rivers, weather, and animal life into mere props for his own expression, treating them as passive material rather than as living participants. This habit turns the literary device of pathetic fallacy into a moral failing: the environment is no longer a neutral mirror of human feeling but a silenced instrument that serves only to amplify human drama. By appropriating the vitality of a storm to dramatize anger or the serenity of a meadow to convey peace, humanity imposes a hierarchy that privileges the human centre and erases the reciprocal dependence that nature demands. In doing so, it strips the natural world of its intrinsic agency, voice, and spirit, reducing it to a convenient canvas for human imagination. The ethical problem, therefore, lies not in the technical use of metaphor but in the underlying attitude that legitimises the exploitation of the natural world for personal ego, denying nature its own right to exist and be felt on its own terms.

The paper argues that the avoidance of pathetic fallacy is justified on two intertwined grounds. First, it is technically deficient: reducing a complex, autonomous environment to a mere emotional surrogate oversimplifies both the phenomenon being described and the literary craft itself. Second, and more fundamentally, the device exposes a deeper moral flaw in human consciousness. By habitually casting every external entity as a subordinate instrument for personal expression, we reveal an entrenched worldview in which nature, and, by extension, any non-human other, is perceived only as a resource to be bent to human will. This habit reinforces a hierarchy that denies the inherent agency and value of the natural world.

A genuine transformation requires a conscious break from this pattern. Instead of exploiting nature as a convenient literary prop, writers and readers alike must adopt an ethic of respect that recognizes the environment as a co-subject rather than a passive backdrop. As responsible citizens, we should be deliberate not only in our artistic choices but also in our everyday interactions with the natural world, refusing to appropriate it as a tool for self-centred narratives. By doing so, literature can model a more equitable relationship, encouraging broader cultural shifts toward ecological humility and moral accountability.

This paper thus justifies why pathetic fallacy must be avoided, not only because of its technical incompetency, but also because it goes beyond just technicalities. It is a revelation of the true nature of man and his unending habit of seeing every other entity as subservient to him. And a change in that approach will come only from abstaining from using nature as a literary tool. As conscious citizens, we must therefore be more deliberate in our usage of nature in literature as well as in practice.

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**ECOLOGICAL THOUGHT AND COLONIAL LANDSCAPES IN HENRY DAVID  
THOREAU'S WALDEN AND AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE GREAT DERANGEMENT***

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**Abstract**

The ecological crisis of the twenty-first century has compelled us to reassess the ways in which literature, culture, and history shape human understandings of the natural world. The present paper examines the intersections of colonial history, landscape, and ecological thought through the works of two seminal authors: Henry David Thoreau, an American transcendentalist whose writings clearly exhibit suspicion regarding technological progress. In texts like *Walden*, he repeatedly contrasts the purity of nature with that of mechanical civilization, positioning himself as a guardian of ecological ethics. He exposes how industrial fire was scorching forests, poisoning the air, and destroying the serenity of natural spaces. On the otherhand, Amitav Ghosh, an Indian novelist whose work foregrounds the environmental legacies of colonialism, highlights the deep interlink between ecological disaster and colonial history. In his work, *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh reframes climate change not as a recent ecological accident but as a continuation of imperial exploitation. Through comparative eco critical and postcolonial readings, the paper argues that Ghosh's decolonial imagination and Thoreau's transcendental naturalism both articulate urgent calls for reimagining humanity's place within the living world. Together their works reveal that the ecological crisis is not merely environmental but inherently moral & historical. By tracing the colonial roots of environmental degradation, this paper situates the works of Ghosh and Thoreau within the broader debates of the Anthropocene, an epoch marked not only by humanity as a whole but also by colonial and masculine patterns of domination.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Eco criticism, Postcolonial Ecology, Plantation, Anthropocene

**Introduction**

Ecological Thought in the twenty-first century is much more than environmental awareness; it is a profound reorientation of the way humans perceive themselves as part of the biosphere. The intersection of ecology and colonial history highlights the fact that the exploitation of the environment could not be separated in any way from imperial expansion. Colonialism, with its extractive economies and epistemic orders, altered landscapes as well as consciousness, producing what theorists such as Rob Nixon in the book, *Slow Violence and The Environmentalism of the Poor*, the delayed, often invisible devastation is therefore inseparable, as well as a product of historical forces and a point of resistance. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* (2016) stand as two monumental works that articulate ecological awareness with different historical and philosophical frameworks. Henry David Thoreau and Amitav Ghosh, though separated by more than a century and vastly different cultural contexts, show some striking and meaningful similarities in their works, especially when viewed through the lens of ecology, empire, climate change, and the relationship between humans and the non-human world. In interviews and in the work, *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh has cited Thoreau as one of the 19th-century writers who could still imagine the planet as a living, forceful entity- something the bourgeois realist novel of the 20<sup>th</sup> century largely abandoned. He sees his own project as trying to recover Thoreau's sense of awe and alarm in an age of climate breakdown. While Thoreau was writing in a pre-industrial New England that was just beginning to feel the effects of capitalist transformation, Ghosh writes in the midst of full-blown climate catastrophe and neo-imperial globalization, yet both see the crisis of the earth and the crisis of justice as the same crisis. Both

believe literature must wake up to address all these issues. Thoreau, a nineteenth-century American naturalist and transcendentalist, represents a pre-industrial consciousness rooted in the moral and spiritual value of nature. The relationship between human civilization and the natural world has been shaped by centuries of philosophical, economic, and colonial entanglements. Literature has played a significant role in both shaping and resisting perceptions. From the Romantic poets to contemporary climate fiction, the literary imagination has been trying to show the complicated interaction between the consciousness of humans and the nature around them. His withdrawal to *Walden*, 'pond', is literally and symbolically a withdrawal to capitalist modernity- a revolt against alienation by industry. The environmental philosophy of Thoreau is grounded in morality. The early sustainability can be seen in his criticism of material excess and industrial progress. He writes condemning a society that is a slave to its own inventions: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." Thoreau describes an ecological ethic of restraint by dismissing the life of commerce, which is "restless and nervous and bustling." Anthropocentrism is also challenged by Thoreau paying attention to non-human life. His careful studies of birds, plants, and insects- so sure and deft in their scientific accuracy, in the delicate sensitiveness of the poet- are indicative of a democratic perception of life. He means that all life has some value other than its usefulness to humans. Thoreau is a radical autonomy – a decolonization of the self in breaking with industrial society. His remote cabin on the pond is a place of release from the mechanical rhythms of modern life. The scenery of *Walden*, then, is not only some physical refuge, but also some moral border. *Walden* glorifies the purity of nature, which is also a sign of the contradictions of an emerging ecological awareness situated within a colonial country. Nevertheless, Thoreau remains a classic of the early environmental ethicists and an example of ecological introspection. On the other hand, Ghosh, writing in the context of climate change and postcolonial disappointment, wonders why modern literature and politics have not been able to reflect on the climate crisis, and this reveals the colonial traditions that impact ecological imaginations. This paper suggests that Thoreau and Ghosh use ecological thinking as an observance of the moral blindness of modernity and colonial environments of domination. The vision of the person in nature envisaged by Thoreau prefigures ecological ethics, whereas the postcolonial critique by Ghosh reveals the institutional causes of environmental collapse. Combined, their writings demonstrate some trans-historical connexion between the colonial dispossession of land and the contemporary anthropogenic crisis. Extreme weather events, toxic pollution, forced relocation, mass species extinctions and other ecological crises have become more prevalent in the twenty-first century, necessitating the development of new conceptual frameworks that can comprehend their complexity. Ecological disasters are frequently portrayed in traditional environmental discourse as abrupt, spectacular and universally felt, but this framing hides the profound structural disparities that determine who is most affected by environmental degradation. From early nature-writing techniques, eco criticism in the humanities has developed into a multifaceted field that considers politics, culture embodiment, materiality and interspecies relations.

Two intellectuals stand out in this broadened field for their significant contributions: Donna Haraway, whose research on kinship, multispecies entanglements and sympoiesis has radically changed environmental thought and Rob Nixon with his concept of slow violence. According to Nixon's 2011 book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, marginalized communities in the Global South are disproportionately affected by forms of violence that develop gradually and out of sight, such as radiation exposure, toxic drift, deforestation and ocean acidification. Haraway challenges human exceptionalism and promotes making kin envisioning humans as co-constituted with other species, technologies and ecological processes in works like *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), *When Species Meet* (2008) and *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). Nixon's diagnosis of structural violence ingrained in global capitalism and Haraway's proposal of relational practices capable of countering such violence through care, cohabitation and collaborative survival reveal resonances that are sometimes overlooked. In order to comprehend the mechanisms of environmental harm as well as the

potential for multispecies futures, this research paper contends that ecologies of violence and ecologies of kinship must be taken into consideration jointly. Their phenomenal research and contributions demonstrate how they support current eco-critical issues and emphasize how their frameworks allow for new perspectives on global responsibility, relational ethics and environmental justice. Rob Nixon made a significant contribution to environmental thought with his groundbreaking theory of slow violence. Nixon contends that because ecological harm is frequently subtle and scattered over time, it is challenging to mobilize or represent. Slow violence is incremental and accretive in contrast to explosions, war or abrupt disasters. Its victims are those who are already structurally vulnerable because of political marginalization, economic hardship or colonial legacies. The representational challenge of slow violence is a crucial part of Nixon's argument. It defies traditional narrative forms due to its lack of dramatic spectacle. As essential storytellers who make the invisible visible, Nixon looks to writers and activists like Indra Sinha, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Arundhati Roy. Nixon uses literary analysis to argue that narrative is crucial to environmental justice because it allows underrepresented groups to express harms that would otherwise go unnoticed. Nixon's work subtly alludes to multispecies consequences such as habitat destruction, poisoned rivers, collapsing fisheries and dying forests, even though his main focus is on human victims. Therefore, slow violence is both ecological and socio-political. It destabilizes long-term relationships between people, animals, plants and landscapes and is inflicted on the interwoven web of life. Because of this, Nixon's writings serve as an essential basis for connecting multispecies theory and eco criticism. Reading Nixon's theory of slow violence through the prism of colonial afterlives makes it even more nuanced. The extractive practices of empire—plantation, agriculture, mineral extraction, forced migration and toxic industrialization—are largely responsible for the long-term ecological damage that Nixon describes. The environmental aspect of colonialism is that it systematically restructured Nature towards economic and ideological control. The idea of ecological imperialism by Alfred Crosby (Crosby 23) explains the experience of the colonial authorities that changed the ecology through plantation economies, deforestation, and the introduction of species. According to the postcolonial eco critics such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, the ecological crisis is inseparable from the colonial past. According to them, "the environment has always been a colonial project" (Huggan and Tiffin 12). The Anthropocene criticism by Amitav Ghosh is therefore a broadening of this ecological discourse because it demonstrates the way the colonial exploitation of people and land forms the backbone of the current climate crisis. The concept proposed by Timothy Morton concerning "the ecological thought" continues the development of the fact that ecology is more than nature, but the relationship between all forms.

The interpretive approach to Thoreau and Ghosh is framed by such theoretical development since their writings are the best examples of ecological awareness in personal ethics and politics. *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, is a memoir and a philosophical manifesto by Henry David Thoreau. This piece of work denies materialism and glorifies simplicity as a way of environmental consciousness. The ethical position of Thoreau in opposition to industrial modernity is contained in the phrase "I went to the woods because I wished to live." The nature to Thoreau is not a medium through which human beings exist but rather an animate being that requires reverence. The seasons in *Walden* reflect the endogenous periods of the human soul, forming the metaphysical relationship between man and nature. The criticism of industrial progress by Thoreau anticipates contemporary ecological issues. His careful studies of flora and fauna show us the primitive environmental ethics. His perception of detail makes the natural world a text of Godly wisdom. Such instant concern with non-human life critiques anthropocentrism in favour of the ecological worldview that would be invoked by later authors such as Ghosh. The Pond is turned into a symbolic place of liberation- a place of uncolonized landscape where the consciousness of individuals and the environmental being merge. In this immersion, Thoreau imagines a separation of the imperialistic spirit of domination of the earth.

*The Great Derangement* by Amitav Ghosh is a reflection on the notion that the greatest failure of modernity is not a technological one but an imaginative one. He argues that the climate crisis has been largely marginalised in literature, and environmental catastrophe is “unthinkable”. The cultural blindness (when the art, politics, and economics cannot recognise the interrelatedness of world ecological systems) is called the ‘Derangement’. *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* faces a paradox here: although the reality of climate change is existential, the modern culture, in this case, the literature, has mostly not responded to it. Ghosh calls this failure “derangement,” a collective blindness to the magnitude of the crisis. The climate crisis, he writes, is also a crisis of culture and of imagination. Ghosh links this failure to the rise of the realist novel, which, by focusing on individual human experience, excluded the unpredictable forces of nature from its narrative scope. This exclusion reflects a broader epistemological blindness rooted in the Enlightenment’s anthropocentrism. Ghosh links the origins of the Anthropocene to the colonial encounter. Anthropocene is not just a geological epoch, the proposed name for the era in which human activity became the dominant influence on climate and the environment, but as a radical rupture in Earth’s History that fundamentally challenges the assumptions of modernity. Ghosh’s most famous claim in the book is that the modern literary novel (the bourgeois realist novel that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has been complicit in concealing the Anthropocene. Extreme weather, geological upheaval, non-human agency and collective fate were sidelined as belonging to genre fiction such as sci-fi, romance, fantasy rather than serious literature. Ghosh repeatedly points out the irony that the places most vulnerable to climate impacts today (South Asia, especially Bangladesh, the Sunderbans, for example were the very regions that were colonized and forced into the carbon economy. The Great Derangement is therefore also a derangement of empire and carbon imperialism. The work *The Great Derangement* is structured in three parts- Stories, History and Politics and together they form one of the most powerful works of ecological criticism in contemporary literature. Ghosh’s ecological thought is not a conventional green environmentalism but a radical, post-secular, post-humanist critique of modernity itself. The landscapes of the empire from the Indian Ocean to the Sundarbans bear the scars of ecological and cultural violence. Ghosh calls for a new literary form capable of representing the non-human and the planetary. He advocates for ecological post colonialism, which recognizes that the decolonization of the mind must also entail the decolonization of nature. In this sense, *The Great Derangement* functions as both a critique and a manifesto. It urges readers and writers to imagine beyond the anthropocentric frameworks of modernity, to restore the sacredness of the Earth as a shared home. In Ghosh’s writings, ecological concerns are often woven into political and historical narratives. *The Hungry Tide*, published in 2004, focuses on the delicate ecosystem of the Sundarbans. The mangrove serves as an example of the delicate balance between ecological preservation and human survival, endangered Irrawaddy dolphins’ forests and the tidal landscape. (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 221) Ghosh depicts nature as dynamic and sometimes violent, challenging idealized depictions of harmony. Cyclones, tides and animal attacks highlight the vulnerability of both human and non-human life. The novel also raises ethical concerns about conservation. Ghosh uses the conflict between preserving wildlife to criticize environmentalism that ignores social justice and uprooting communities on the margins. Thus, his ecological philosophy is consistent with postcolonial eco-criticism, which highlights the need for environmental policies that consider inequality, poverty and displacement. Similarly, ecology is a central theme in the Ibis Trilogy (*Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*) in the context of global colonial trade networks. These include the exploitation of labour and land, the production of opium and the transformation of rivers and seas into commercial routes, instances of the ways that imperial capitalism changed the natural world. In this case, Ghosh’s ecological vision is both historical and material, illustrating the nature of economic systems entangled with environmental deterioration. One of the distinctive aspects of Ghosh’s ecological philosophy is the focus he places on rivers, oceans and maritime regions. In contrast, his works highlight the sea as a location of historical violence, cultural interchange and ecological memory to the narratives centred round

land. In his fiction, oceans serve as living archives that hold traces of slavery, migration, colonial expansion and trade. In *Gun Island* (2019), where human displacement occurs, migration, climate change and myth are all intertwined. Driven by extreme weather, rising sea levels and ecological disruption, this work challenges the notion that climate refugees are a phenomenon of the past by portraying them as a contemporary reality. (Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 176) Here, ecological crises are inextricably linked to questions of borders, identity and belonging. Non-human entities are also given agency by Ghosh. Animals, plants, rivers and weather systems are forces that have an impact rather than being passive backgrounds. Ghosh's conception of the human is in line with post-humanist ecology and modern materialism, with ideas that question human dominance and emphasize connectivity. Another significant facet of Ghosh's ecological theory is his engagement with regional and indigenous knowledge systems. He contrasts and proposes that traditional ecological knowledge offers sustainable ways to live on Earth with the scientific logic of the West. An intrinsic awareness of nature that resists commercialization and control is embodied by characters such as Fokir in *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh portrays indigenous knowledge as a useful epistemological alternative that acknowledges the agency of nature rather than romanticizing it. His ecological philosophy opposes the dominance of modern science and the capitalist logic of several methods for comprehending the surroundings. According to Amitav Ghosh, moral reflection and collective responsibility are essential components of ecological philosophy. He rejects narratives that solely attribute environmental protection to individual lifestyle choices. Instead, he emphasizes political responsibility, historical consciousness and systemic change more. According to Ghosh, the Global South is disproportionately affected by climate change, which is caused by the consumption patterns of the Global North. Ghosh's work challenges a transition from human-centred ethics to a more inclusive ecological morality. Based on the possibility of reimagining humankind, his vision of the future is cautiously optimistic rather than utopian. Amitav Ghosh's ecological concepts are a powerful intervention in today's literary and environmental discourse. Ghosh challenges readers to consider the cultural factors that contribute to climate change and pushes the limits of environmental criticism. His writings emphasize the need for new imaginative frameworks that can represent global change and encourage environmental responsibility.

Thoreau's temporality is cyclical and seasonal. Living at Walden Pond for two years and two months, he experiences time through frost, thaw, bean rows and loon calls. This allows a phenomenological intimacy with non-human rhythms, but it also occludes historical time, which is the violent history that made his retreat possible. Ghosh's temporality is geological and catastrophic. The time scales of climate change are deep and are many times over that of human history, and the accelerations are mixed with the compressed and violent time of colonial extraction. The cyclone which hits Delhi or the Sunderbans is not something in the novelistically present, but a reaction of the Earth, centuries after carbon imperialism started in the 17th-18th centuries. Ghosh makes us see that the climate crisis is not another derangement but the derangement that was long overdue and has been precipitated by European imperialism beginning to treat the world as an unlimited resource. In order to surpass this derangement, the ecological thinking should decolonize the very landscape: realizing that there is no "wilderness" independent of histories of violence and that the most sensitive ears to planetary change now may not be in the woods of Concord but in the delta villages and atoll nations that are already inhabiting the future that the rest of us are still trying to think about. Thoreau and Ghosh intersect in their criticism of modernity being alienated from nature, although they have a temporal and cultural difference. They reveal the way in which rationalism and industrialization have broken the human connection with nature. In *Walden*, Thoreau moves to nature, which is a moral protest against industrial capitalism. The ecological thinking of his is based on the idea that simplicity and contemplation have the power to bring back the balance. In the case of Ghosh, resistance is in the form of narrative re-imagination, which is challenging the colonial myths that legitimised exploitation. But they are both united by a moral belief that ecological renewal demands moral and imaginative



rediscovery. Thoreau's ecological theories are unique because they combine science and literature. He maintained that moral accountability and scientific findings should be inextricably linked and moral contemplation based on empirical data. His approach challenges the distinction between objectives by encouraging an integrated ecological understanding, science as well as personal experience. Thoreau is regarded as a lone nature writer, but his ecological theories have clear ethical and political implications. His commitment to personal conscience as evidenced by Civil Disobedience includes environmental issues. Thoreau believed that leading an ethical life required fighting against unjust systems including those that put people in danger. His ecological philosophy is consistent with later environmental ethics that place a strong emphasis on moral obligations to future generations and non human life. When talking about environmental justice, Thoreau's emphasis on personal accountability is still relevant. Henry has had a significant impact on ecological philosophy nature writing and modern environmentalism. People like John Muir, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson were inspired by his writings. Thoreau's ideas about wildness, simplicity and climate change in the context of ecological crises; biodiversity loss and climate change. Thoreau challenges the dominant narratives of control and progress in his writings, inspiring readers to reconsider. In a time of environmental uncertainty consider how they relate to nature by respecting humility and attentiveness which are essential values in his ecological vision and thinking about sustainable futures. Henry David Thoreau's writings convey a philosophy that integrates literature, science, ethics and philosophy. By arguing for the intrinsic value of nature, Thoreau foreshadows many of the principles of contemporary ecological thought promoting wildness and simplicity while denouncing industrial modernity. His writings are still regarded as literary masterpieces and ethical guides for navigating the conflict. Ecology is a way of life, a way of looking at the world and a way of being according to Thoreau. A crucial part of Thoreau's philosophy is found in the essay, "Walking" (1862). Here, he argues that wildness is a vital force that supports both the natural world and human culture.

Thoreau's *Walden* and Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* frame the development of ecological thought over two centuries. The alienation of modern life has a remedy in the harmony, simplicity and self-reliance that Thoreau envisioned. It is this awareness that Ghosh brings to the political and historical world of global crisis, the conditions of ecological crisis that have been created by colonialism and capitalism. The most extreme part of the environmental thinking of Ghosh, perhaps, is that it is not a surrender to optimism but rather a denial of despair. *The Great Derangement* is not a book on climate change; rather, it is a book on the spiritual and imaginative impoverishment of a civilization that could only observe the Earth in its dead form and use it as raw material to be capitalised upon. The derangement is not that we did not predict the future, but accomplished the feat of making the world just like our stories had said would never happen. Ghosh reveals the colonial sceneries that, in some way, were already latent in the America of Thoreau, a nation that was founded on conquest and resource extraction. Their writings do not forget to remind us that environmental consciousness should not only struggle with ecological degradation but also with historical injustice. The process of healing the planet involves addressing the ethical wounds of both colonialism and capitalism. *The Great Derangement* by Ghosh and *Walden* by Thoreau shed light on the direction of environmental thinking. The transcendental ecology, as offered by Thoreau, aims at being harmonious using the simplicity of a person. In conclusion Henry David Thoreau's ecological theories remain highly applicable in the twenty-first century. His writings challenge readers to reconsider prevailing ideas of advancement, dominance and human superiority in favour of humility, interdependence, and respect for nature. By combining philosophy science ethics and literature, Thoreau presents a comprehensive ecological vision that continues to motivate environmental action and thought. His work ultimately shows how the development of moral and creative responsibility is inextricably linked to the preservation of the planet making him an important voice in the current ecological debates. They both reveal the mutual causes of moral and environmental crisis in the alienation of humanity from Nature. They both perceive the main mistake of modernity to be the commodification of the Earth. They include

non-human beings (ponds, ants, cyclones, cobras) in the moral and narrative world and do not accept technocratic and purely economic solutions. The colonial landscape is both symbol and scar: the memory of the fact that nature and man are indivisible. This means that the removal of colonisation, be it of thought, imagination and morals, by ecological renewal is necessary. Since the self is represented by the pond Thoreau resides in, the world is represented by the ocean Ghosh dwells in as a world threatened by its blindness. To restore it, mankind needs to redefine ecological and moral humility, which ties life up in one sustainable thread.

The ecological crisis is a historically produced condition with roots in colonial modernity capitalist extraction and moral alienation from the non-human world rather than a singular modern phenomenon or merely a scientific issue according to a comparison of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*. One of the key findings is that despite their disparate historical, cultural and geographical contexts Thoreau and Ghosh both acknowledge a similar split between humanity and nature exposing the moral failings embedded in popular narratives of progress. Thoreau's transcendental ecology first appears as a critique of industrial capitalism and anthropocentrism. It is characterized by moral restraint, simplicity and attentiveness. His emphasis on the intrinsic value of non-human life foreshadows later ecological ethics and contradicts utilitarian conceptions of nature. The study also notes that although Thoreau's ecological imagination was radical for its time, it is still situated within a settler-colonial environment that often conceals the historical violence that allowed for such wilderness retreats. However, Ghosh's postcolonial ecological critique highlights the histories of dispossession plantation economies carbon imperialism and unequal vulnerability that Thoreau's context mostly ignores. By linking literary cultural and creative failures to climate change, Ghosh considerably expands ecological thinking which is another significant finding. *The Great Derangement* shows that rather than being a universal human condition the Anthropogenic is a by product of specific colonial and capitalist histories that continue to affect global inequality. By exposing the realist literary forms complicity in marginalizing non-human agency and climatic catastrophe, Ghosh encourages new narrative modes that can depict planetary entanglements. Additionally, the study shows that both authors prioritize relational modes of co existence, moral responsibility and ethical imagination over purely economic and technocratic solutions to environmental problems. While Thoreau's ecological philosophy stresses individual conscience and simplicity Ghosh promotes collective political accountability historical reckoning and the decolonization of ecological thought. The analysis which demonstrates that ecological violence operates both visibly and invisibly—through both slow accretive processes of degradation and spectacular disasters—supports Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence and Donna Haraway's call for multispecies kinship. In addition to environmental reform this paper's conclusion makes the case that ecological renewal requires a thorough re-evaluation of history ethics, and creativity. By placing Thoreau and Ghosh in dialogue, the study demonstrates a trans-historic continuity between early ecological introspection and contemporary postcolonial environmental critique. Together, their writings argue that decolonizing the environment and consciousness is crucial to any sustainable future and that moral and historical injustice are intrinsically linked to the ecological crisis. The pond at *Walden* and the oceans in Ghosh's world become symbolic sites that serve as a reminder that humans are a part of a delicate web of interconnected life. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that literature remains a vital tool for addressing ecological disruption and imagining more sustainable, equitable and modest ways of living on Earth.

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ISSN: 2394-5567

01 January 2026



Impact Factor: 5.0 (IIFS)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18084725

# **DABEER**

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On

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