

## ECOPSYCHOLOGY: ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIENCE IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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### Abstract

This paper elaborates "Ecopsychology", a branch of learning of Ecocriticism. Ecopsychology, a term made popular by Thersskey Kuzsak's *The Voice of Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology*, addresses both the suffering of the earth by the misbehavior of people and the subsequent suffering of the people due to the suffering of the earth (Harris, 1993). The relevance and significance of ecopsychology is all the more undeniable in the COVID era. During the pandemic, the environmental alienation was felt by the people when their access to the environment was restricted by the government to contain the spread of the virus. The physical and psychological impact of the environmental alienation on human minds reverberated across the world. While the bond between human and environment has to be mutual and healthy, it is parasitic and destructive. The trauma is predominantly seen in the access now. Thus, the purpose of the paper is to explain the emerging traumatic condition through ecopsychological elements like environmental alienation and biophilia supported by the characters of *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy.

**Keywords:** Ecopsychology, Environmental alienation and Biophilia

Ecopsychology is a form of psychology that studies the integration of humans with the natural world. It studies the relationship between humans and the environment and the interaction they tend to have with each other. Ecopsychology explores humans' psychological interdependence with the rest of nature and the implications for identity, health and well-being. Ecopsychology topics include emotional responses to nature, the impacts of environmental events such as natural disasters and global climate change; and the transpersonal dimensions of environmental identity and concern. Mary Gomes (1998) wrote that "ecopsychology... seeks to understand and heal our relationship with the Earth. It examines the psychological processes that bond us to the natural world or that alienate us from it." The concerns of ecopsychology are the role of our actions in the global ecological crisis and the effects of our ecology (including the crisis) on our psychology. The practical utility of ecopsychology gained momentum during post-COVID era. Everyone witnessed how nature affected the lives of millions. The human psyche got impacted when physical access to nature was restrained by the Governments to prevent the spread of the virus. The human world was subjugated by the world of nature. The human world was alienated by the environment.

The relationship between humans and the environment got deteriorated. Even today the relationship between humans and the environment is under mutual scepticism. Only time can reveal whether the relationship between humans and nature can ever gain the lost trust. In a contemporary situation like this, the study of 'Ecopsychology' becomes highly relevant in the field of literature. Ecopsychology in literature can be studied under the subheadings such as (1) Biophilia, (2) Environmental Ethics, and (3) Environmental Alienation. According to Merriam-Webster, the meaning Biophilia is a hypothetical human tendency to interact or be closely associated with other forms of life in nature, a desire or tendency to commune with nature. Natalie Angier wrote Biophilia is the term coined by the Harvard naturalist Dr. Edward O. Wilson to describe what he saw as humanity's "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes," and to be drawn toward nature, to feel an affinity for it, a love, a craving. According to a paper on Environmental Ethics published by Andrew Brennan and Norva Y. S. Lo, Environmental ethics is the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its non-human contents. In the literature, on environmental ethics, the distinction between instrumental value and intrinsic value (in the sense of "non-instrumental value") is of considerable importance. The former is the value of things as means to further some other ends, whereas the latter is the value of things as ends in themselves, regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends.

Fromm (1947) explains that humans experience alienation not only in the economy but also in the relationship between humans. Modern humankind is uprooted from a sense of togetherness and sensibility with other humans. Humans prefer private things rather than communal ones. The effects of alienation turn modern



humankind into "selfishness," "self-love," and "self-interest" (Fromm 1947, 119). In Environmental alienation, we can observe that the human completely alienates the environment and is detached from it. Humans who experience environmental alienation live obliviously in the natural world and the human world.

This paper aspires to investigate the elements of Ecopsychology engraved in the novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. Suzanna Arundhati Roy (1961-) was born in Ayemenem, a village in Kerala. Arundhati Roy, a writer, an environmentalist and a social activist, is rightly recognized as a multifaceted personality by her compatriots. This paper will elaborate on how Roy's characters in the novel exhibit the elements of ecopsychology like Biophilia and Environmental alienation throughout the book. Roy uses the character of Velutha to portray the longing of humans to achieve oneness with nature. Velutha exhibits the characteristic of Biophilia throughout the novel. Velutha has an emotional bond with nature. He makes many "small things" from nature. Roy describes him as making "tiny wind mills, rattle, minute jewels boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts." (74) and "The rosewood dining table that Velutha made" (15).

He is a man of nature and for him the most trustworthy companion is nature. He trusts nature because anybody in this world can betray you but nature will never betray you. When he is thrown out of his house by his mother, he takes shelter in the realm's lap of nature near the bank of the river Meenachal. He catches fish from the river and cooks it in an open fire and he sleeps on the bank of the river. He enjoys swimming in the river and when he is convicted in a false case and betrayed by his family and Communist leader Pillai, he seeks refuge near the bank of the river. His thirteen-night physical relationship with Ammu starts and progresses near the bank of the river. Nature is the witness of their relationship. Roy states "Behind them the river pulsed through the darkness, shimmering like wild silk. Yellow bamboo wept." (156).

The author allows the character of Ammu to model her character with that of nature. She represents the character of the wilderness of nature. She made the "unthinkable" with the "untouchable" in the novel which is making love with Velutha. When nature desires it takes. When a river decides to engulf its banks when a volcano decides to erupt it does when clouds decide to rain it does. Similarly, when Ammu desires love with Velutha, she makes it. No human can stop the desire of nature. Likewise, humans in the novel could stop their desire for Ammu. Roy portrays nature to reciprocate the psyche and the mental set of the characters. When Rahel returns to Ayemenem after twenty-three years river greeted her with a ghastly trickle of water. The flow and fluidity of Meenachal got curtailed and its

glow vanished. Though it was June and Raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now just like a thin ribbon of thick muddy dirty water that tapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver of a dead fish. It ferried garbage to the sea now.

The novel is embedded with events that showcase the burning issue of environmental ethics. Roy employs the characters to do the work of highlighting the environmental and ethical issues in society. Roy portrays the characters of Baby Kochamma and Pappachi to spotlight the anthropocentric mental set of human society. Baby Kochamma is shown to have a passion for gardening which is encroached by her new pastime of watching TV when a dish antenna is installed, a seedling of modernisation. Twenty-three years ago she had a wild passion for gardening which even led her to apply for a diploma in ornamental gardening. "Like a lion-tamer she tamed twisted vines and nurtured bristling cacti, she limited bonsai plants and pampered rare orchids. She waged war on the weather. She tried to grow edelweiss and Chinese guava". (26- 27). But after twenty-three years it has grown knotted and wild, like a circus whose animals had forgotten their tricks. This shows that Baby Kochamma is involved in gardening only for the utility value it holds for herself and not for the plants themselves. She saw the plants not as ends but as means to her ends.

Another event in the novel is the discovery of an unknown species of a moth by Pappachi, who is an imperial Entomologist at the Pusa Institute. The discovery occurred when a moth falls into his drink accidentally. The moth dies and he dries it, to check its species. It is a new species which have not been discovered yet. Even though he discovers it, he is angry, because it was only after his retirement that the moth was described as a discovery and is named after his junior whom he disliked, now acting Director of the Department of Entomology. Here Roy describes the anthropocentric human nature which thinks only of personal utility and extrinsic value of nature.

The man and animal conflict which is a contemporary issue in environmental ethics are dealt with in the novel. It is said that a temple elephant dies due to electrocution due to the fall of high tension electric wire on his body. "Near Ettumanoor they passed a dead temple elephant, electrocuted by a high-tension wire that had fallen on the road. An engineer from the Ettumanoor municipality was supervising the disposal of the carcass. They had to be careful because the decision would serve as precedent for all future Government Pachyderm Carcass Disposals.

Not a matter to be treated lightly". Roy did not mention whether this is the first incident but she subtly mentions that such an

incident of electrocution will occur in the future. Once again, the anthropocentric mindset of humans is showcased.

Environmental alienation is a recurring theme in the novel. The character of Estha is used by the author to exhibit environmental alienation. Estha was a happy seven-year-old kid but the event at Abilash Talkies changed him permanently. He thought that "Anything can happen to anyone and It's best to be prepared". Estha "prepared" by alienating the natural world and human world alike. When he could not alienate he detachedly attach to the organic and the inorganic world. Roy expresses this "Over time he had acquired the ability to blend into the background of wherever he was – into bookshelves, gardens, curtains, doorways, streets – to appear inanimate, almost invisible to the untrained eye. It usually took strangers a while to notice him even when they were in the same room with him. It took them even longer to notice that he never spoke. Some never noticed at all. Estha occupied very little space in the world. (Estha, 10). His alienation is further described as "A quiet bubble floating on a sea of noise"(10).

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