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**Ecofeminism in Indian English Fiction: A Case of Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair****Farzana Kounser**

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**Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism is a philosophical framework that combines ecology and feminism. It is based on the understanding that various forms of oppression and exploitation are linked (Warwick, 1984). Ecofeminism fundamentally questions the dominant perspectives that prioritise human beings and men, by claiming the inherent worth of both nature and women, and calling for their emancipation from structural subjugation (Rao, 2012). Ecofeminism draws upon feminist theory, environmental ethics, and ecological consciousness to provide a comprehensive viewpoint that goes beyond conventional divisions and highlights the interdependence of all living beings.

Eco-feminist thought emphasizes the acknowledgment of the similarities between the mistreatment of women and the mistreatment of the environment. Similar to the historical subjugation and marginalization of women in patriarchal society, nature has been commoditized, exploited, and regarded as a resource to be managed and controlled solely for human objectives (Jackson, 1993). The acknowledgment of the interdependence of oppressions serves as the basis for Eco-feminist analysis, which questions prevailing frameworks that prioritize human control and exploitation at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equity (Birkeland, 1993).

Moreover, Eco-feminism offers a critique of the dualistic and hierarchical thinking that underpins systems of domination and exploitation (Rao, 2012). Ecofeminism aims to deconstruct oppressive systems by questioning the dichotomies of human/animal, culture/nature, and male/female. It envisions alternative ways of interacting with the natural environment and with each other. Ecofeminism places significant emphasis on empathy, caring, and connectivity as fundamental concepts for ethical and ecological lifestyles (Kings, 2017). In addition, Ecofeminism acknowledges the significance of intersectionality in comprehending the intricacies of oppression and privilege. Similar to how women encounter varying degrees of oppression based on criteria such as race, class, sexuality, and ability, the consequences of environmental degradation are also dispersed unevenly, disproportionately impacting marginalized areas and intensifying pre-existing inequities (Card, 1991). It aims to foster unity among social movements and achieve collective liberation by prioritizing the experiences and perspectives of individuals who are most impacted by intersecting systems of oppression (Kings, 2017). Ecofeminism provides a robust intellectual framework to comprehend and tackle the interrelated challenges of gender inequality and environmental degradation. Ecofeminism presents a vision of a fair and sustainable future by questioning prevailing beliefs,

adopting a comprehensive approach, and prioritizing the perspectives of marginalized people. In this world, humans coexist harmoniously with environment and each other.

### **Ecofeminism: Voyage into Indian English Fiction**

We now come to women writing Indian fiction in English and the environment (Agarwal, 1998). This section aims to explore the significance of examining postcolonial Ecofeminism in the works of Indian female authors. It seeks to understand the contributions of these writers to the ideology, theory, and lived experiences of women in relation to the environment. The novels considered range from early Ecofeminism to urban Ecofeminism: *Nectar in a sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandya, *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) by Anita Desai, *A Riversutra* (1993) by Gita Mehta, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, *The Madwoman of Jogare* (1998) by Sohaila Abdulali, *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* (2008) by Anuradha Roy and *Monkey-Man* (2010) by Usha K.R (Chanda, 2014). With the exception of Arundhati Roy, no other Indian female writer has been mentioned in the field of Ecofeminism (Bala, 2018). Starting with Roy then, the deterioration of the fictional village of Ayemenem emphasizes and reflects the moral corruption of the characters, especially of the Ipe family, in the larger narrative. The salient motifs of the pollution of the river Meenachal and the History House are focal points in depicting ecological abuse in conjunction with Ammu and Velutha's gender and caste discrimination in Kerala. If Ammu remains ever hopeful for a better tomorrow, tomorrow also being the word on which the novel ends, Baby Kochamma, on the other hand, becomes the strictest enforcer of love laws and social norms. Devastated by the priest's love and subsequent loss, Baby Kochamma responds with extreme negativity towards the inter-caste love affair (Kearney, 2009). Notably, she declares herself as an ornamental gardener, and her garden falls into a state of disarray as she starts living her life vicariously through television. Within this context, sibling incest occurs, serving as a recurring and disturbing motif utilized by Roy throughout the narrative. Prior to the extraordinary triumph of Roy's novel, preceding feminist authors like Kamala Markandya and Anita Desai have also explored the themes of women and the environment in their writings. These writers, in their exploration of the personal experiences of women, manage to convey profound political commentary on social matters and the broader Indian society (Chanda, 2014). India is frequently disregarded and not given due consideration under this area. Markandya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* both depict the sombre features of human nature and the simultaneous convergence of the negative attributes of the women involved. In Markandya's tale, Rukmini and her family face severe famine due to the capriciousness of nature and a drought, which nearly leads to their starvation (Desai, 1977). Rukmini acquiesces to the circumstances that are imposed upon her, while her daughter Ira is compelled to engage in prostitution as a result of their severe financial condition. The rape of Ila Das in Desai's novel occurs ruthlessly amidst the obscurity of the fields that are meant to nurture life. The acts of extreme cruelty experienced by women in Desai's story reach their climax with Raka, who ultimately ignites the forest. Contemporary works like Abdulali's *The Madwoman of Jogare*, Mehta's *A River Sutra*, Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, and Usha K. R's *Monkey-Man* explore the connections between women and urbanization, progress, and the city. The city offers women chances that reflect the rhetoric of globalization, advocating for equal opportunities for everyone. These interactions are not

compatible with the dichotomy of nature and civilization. The transition from rural to urban areas demonstrates that postcolonial Ecofeminism is a dynamic idea that extends beyond wilderness or countryside environments. These novels also explore the themes of urban paranoia and crazy, which are ways of dealing with the pressures of globalization and development. They emphasize that the urban environment can be a place for both creativity and destruction. Indian women's literature explores the connections between women and the environment, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on development theory and Ecofeminism. Specifically addressing the strain of cultural Ecofeminism and Vandana Shiva, the writings of these female authors challenge the idea that women and the environment can be easily defined and categorized. These articles present both positive and negative perspectives on the relationship between women and the environment (Shiva, 1994). The uncritical embrace of the connection between women and nature, particularly in the Indian setting or in the Third World as a whole, is not valid. The notion that women inherently possess favourable views towards the environment due to being disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation is challenged by these authors. The crucial aspect of achieving gender inclusiveness lies in the disruption and transformation of the fixed opposition between nature and culture, leading to a more dynamic and dialectical connection between these two realms. This shift is essential for recognizing women's material status as ecological citizens and acknowledging the value of women's care giving labour, which inherently connects them to the responsibility of caring for the environment (Gaard, 2010). Notions such as women's (ecological) citizenship and women's work arise as means to circumvent preconceptions of nature/culture and, in doing so, dismantle the binary opposition. The concept of the nature/culture dualism, which is one of many dualisms in theory and lived experience, fails to acknowledge the female citizen's ability to embody various identities and a diverse understanding of gendered ecological citizenship. Urban areas and the city have numerous consequences for women as residents of the urban environment and their entitlement to both that environment and the city. Ultimately, I have demonstrated the imperative of challenging the dichotomy between nature and culture that unquestionably associates women with nature (Plumwood, 1993). The disruption of dualism places women in an ambiguous connection with nature, as they navigate the intermediate space between the two opposing concepts. The Ecofeminism ideology and women-led activity strongly discourage the emergence of ambivalence. Female authors of Indian fiction in the English language emphasize the conflicting connection that women have with the environment, so offering a significant alternative perspective to both theoretical discourse and activist efforts (Shiva, 1989). This study is an intervention into a field in which women's writing has not been taken seriously, and Indian women's fiction resists and intervenes in dominant models of discourse and lived experience.

### **Roy's and Nair's Experience**

Highlighting the contributions of two distinguished authors, Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair. Drawing from Roy's iconic novel *The God of Small Things*, the study of their novels scrutinizes the intricate portrayal of the Kerala landscape as both a vibrant ecosystem and a witness to the struggles of its inhabitants, particularly the female characters. Roy's narrative

proress intertwines environmental degradation with the oppression of women, symbolizing how the exploitation of nature mirrors societal injustices. Through the lens of Roy's essays such as "The Greater Common Good," her scathing critique of large-scale development projects underscores the interconnectedness of gender, power, and environmental exploitation in India (Roy, 1999).

In parallel, Nair's novels *Ladies Coupé* and *Mistress* offer poignant reflections on the symbiotic relationship between women and nature. In *Ladies Coupé*, the train journey serves as a microcosm of Indian society, where women from diverse backgrounds share their stories, revealing the interconnectedness of their struggles and their intimate connection to the natural world. Meanwhile, *Mistress* delves into the psychological depths of its characters against the backdrop of a river, metaphorically representing the flow of life and the cyclical nature of female empowerment (Nair, 2004). Through an amalgamation of descriptive landscapes and compelling character narratives, Nair's works echo the Ecofeminism ethos by highlighting the resilience of women and the intrinsic value of nature in shaping their identities and narratives of resistance (Krishna and Jha, 2014). Through comparative analysis, this research paper illuminates the multifaceted dimensions of Ecofeminism in Indian literature, offering insights into the profound connections between gender, ecology, and societal transformation.

### **Comparative Analysis of Roy and Nair**

Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair are renowned Indian authors whose literary contributions have received global recognition. Their novels offer profound perspectives on Indian society, culture, and the human condition. This analysis will examine and contrast the thematic themes, narrative styles, and character development of both authors, emphasizing the parallels and variations in their storytelling techniques. Arundhati Roy's novels, notably "The God of Small Things," explore the complex social and political challenges of India. She examines caste inequality, societal inequities, and the intricacies of family interactions (Utomo, 2014). This tale depicts the calamitous outcomes of illicit love and societal prohibitions, situated amidst the picturesque scenery of Kerala. The narrative is simultaneously intimate and vast, adeptly portraying the minutiae of personal experiences that resonate across multiple generations. Roy's recent literary works, including "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," demonstrate her engagement in activism by tackling pressing concerns such as environmental deterioration, governmental malfeasance, and violations of human rights (Sehgal, 2017). This work encompasses a wide range of time periods and geographical areas, showcasing a varied ensemble of characters, including transgender individuals, marginalized populations, and political dissidents. Roy's portrayal of these characters serves as a critique of the current socio-political situation in India. She skillfully combines individual and social histories to create a narrative that is both emotionally powerful and thought-provoking.

Anita Nair's novels, such as "Ladies Coupé" and "Mistress," centre around the lives of women and their challenges in terms of self-identity, autonomy, and cultural norms. "Ladies Coupé" delves into the lives of six women who recount their experiences while travelling on a train, each recounting their individual struggles against male dominance and their pursuit of independence. Nair explores the societal positions of women in both traditional and contemporary Indian culture, emphasizing themes of empowerment and self-exploration (Sam,

2013). "Mistress," another one of Nair's highly regarded works, skillfully combines the art of Kathakali dancing with the lives of its protagonists, exploring themes of ardour, loyalty, and the conflict between conventional values and contemporary ideals. The artist frequently delves into human experiences and the influence of cultural ancestry on personal existence, seamlessly merging Indian cultural components with universal concepts of affection, grief, and self-exploration (Pandya, 2017).

Roy often utilizes a non-linear narrative structure, skillfully interweaving past and present events to construct a complex and multi-dimensional plot. In "The God of Small Things," the author used a non-linear narrative structure, oscillating between different time periods, to gradually unveil the sorrowful occurrences that have profoundly influenced the lives of the individuals (Needham, 2005). This framework enables her to delve into the profound emotions of her characters and the intricate nature of their experiences. The author's writing is renowned for its lyrical nature, characterized by vibrant depictions and poetic diction that intensify the emotional profundity of her narratives. The phrases "the Love Laws" and "the Heart of Darkness" have a lasting impact on readers even after they have completed the book. Roy frequently employs many perspectives to offer a comprehensive portrayal of the narrative, allowing different characters and their experiences to be heard (Comfort, 2008). The approach of several perspectives is clearly demonstrated in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness," since the story is presented from the viewpoints of various individuals, each offering their distinct outlook on the overall narrative.

On the other hand, Nair typically adheres to a conventional, sequential narrative framework, rendering her stories direct and readily comprehensible. The author's writing style is characterized by vivid and expressive language, skillfully capturing the intricacies of both physical environments and emotional states. In "Ladies Coupé," Nair skillfully portrays the Indian scenery, the train journey, and the inner thoughts of her protagonists, thereby engrossing the reader in their world. Nair's novels prioritise character development, delving into the inner worlds and personal evolution of her main characters. She thoroughly examines the inner workings of her characters' minds, investigating their motivations, fears, and wants (Mauli and Sarangi, 2008). The art of Kathakali in "Mistress" serves as a reflection of the characters' internal conflicts, as it utilizes dance and gesture to convey emotions.

Roy's characters have intricated and diverse qualities, frequently influenced by their socio-political surroundings. The novel "The God of Small Things" presents characters such as Ammu and Velutha in a manner that is rich in complexity and subtlety, as their lives become entangled with the inflexible caste system and societal conventions. The characters grapple with both internal and external challenges, rendering them relatable and authentic. The characters in her novels frequently function as representations of broader social and political concerns, so embodying the underlying themes of her works (Agarwal, 2003). Anjum in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" exemplifies the challenges faced by the transgender community in India, while also shedding light on more general topics of identity and acceptance.

Nair's characters exhibit empathy and are highly sympathetic, frequently mirroring the commonplace challenges and victories of average individuals. Akhila, the protagonist in the novel "Ladies Coupé," is a woman in her middle age that yearns for autonomy and personal satisfaction in a culture that imposes conventional expectations upon her. The narrative of her

trip strikes a chord with numerous readers who have encountered comparable predicaments. Nair's main characters commonly experience substantial personal development and change, emphasizing the themes of self-exploration and empowerment. In the novel "Mistress," Radha's contemplation of her ambitions and the constraints imposed by society and familial obligations leads to profound changes in her understanding of herself and her relationships with others (Nair, 2005).

Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair, although both strongly connected to Indian culture, present unique viewpoints and writing techniques in their novels. Roy's work exhibits a higher degree of political intensity and intricate composition, while Nair's narratives follow a more straightforward chronological order and emphasize individual and cultural exploration. Both authors offer interesting perspectives on Indian society, but from distinct perspectives and with distinct narrative voices. Roy's novels frequently instill in readers a compelling feeling of urgency regarding social and political matters, compelling them to contemplate and challenge the prevailing norms. Nair's literary works, although they also critique societal conventions, mostly focus on presenting personal and intimate depictions of human challenges and successes. Through this approach, Nair aims to foster empathy and comprehension among readers towards the characters' transformative experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Arundhati Roy and Anita Nair are not only finely interweaving various Eco-feminist and feminist theories in their novels, but also seeking possibilities and solutions for empowerment of women and environment. Ultimately, the comparison of literary works by both authors displays a complex and intricate narrative that combines concerns of social, political, and environmental importance with detailed character development. Roy's politically charged narratives, with their complex structures and powerful symbolism, compel readers to confront the intricate power dynamics and societal injustices. In contrast, Nair's more introspective depictions of personal development and cultural exploration provide a poignant examination of individual agency within established frameworks.

Although the authors have different methods, they both enhance our comprehension of Indian society and culture, encouraging readers to explore topics such as identity, inequity, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. Roy's audacious activism and eloquent writing style elicit a feeling of immediacy, driving readers to confront unsettling realities and imagine different possibilities. Meanwhile, Nair's compassionate portrayals of characters cultivate a profound understanding of the complexities of human existence and the search for personal growth.

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