



Exploring the human-nature relationship in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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Abstract

An ecocritical reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* will bring out the connections between humans and their surroundings. It is aimed at examining critically the portrayal by Roy of nature as a living entity that affects the lives of the characters as opposed to just being a backdrop. Set in the picturesque landscape of Kerala, the story captures the dual nature of the environment as nurturing and destructive, a reflection of the intricacies of social reality and human life. Roy illustrates nature's active role in the story through its symbolic elements such as the Meenachal River, the Ayemenem landscape, and the tropical setting, which affect relationships, memories, and human development. Using eco-critical theory, the paper studies the relations of Rahel, Estha, Ammu and Velutha with nature, where the natural world provides comfort, freedom, resistance and healing and at the same time shows the effect of social oppression, caste discrimination and patriarchal domination. It argues that Roy challenges the dichotomy between humanity and nature, presenting them as interconnected and interdependent. Besides social consciousness, the study promotes the development of ecological sensitivity among readers and appreciation of the intrinsic value of the natural environment. Nature symbolizes resilience, emotional solace, and the silent battle against the inflexibility of social structures and reiterates the novel's primary themes of love, grief, identity, and freedom. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that strengthening the human-nature connection is critical in fostering environmental sustainability and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Eco-criticism, human-nature relationship, environmental sustainability, ecological consciousness

Introduction

The God of Small Things is a creative work that touches upon a variety of subjects, such as chauvinism, misogyny, inter-caste love and societal boundaries. As we can see, the book subtly critiques these societal problems that are common but have not yet been heavily addressed in our culture. Each character's narrative is presented in such a way that it leaves a lasting impression on readers, prompting them to reflect on their own lives and evaluate the injustices society has inflicted upon them.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy was born on 24 November 1961. Her mother was Mary Roy, a noted social activist. They were from a Syrian Catholic family. Roy's father Rajib Roy was a Bengali tea planter who married Mary Roy. Some of her works are *Power Politics*, *The Cost Of Living*, *The Book of Dissent*, *The God of Small Things*, *War Book*, *Listening To Grasshoppers*, *The Checkbook And The Cruise Missile*. *The God of Small Things* is the first novel of Arundhati Roy. It is a semi-autobiographical novel which is about the childhood experience of the author in Ayemenem. The novel is set in a small village called Ayemenem in Kerala. An Indian novelist Arundhati Roy, who is not an expatriate, received the 1997 Booker Prize for his novel *The God of Small Things*. Arundhati Roy is an Indian author famous for this book. Roy portrayed the beauty and cruelty of nature in his paintings. Nature's fury and man's frailty in front of nature are presented there. Nature has been described as having both forceful and beautiful aspects owing to the evil acts of mankind. There exists a parallel connection between humans and nature in the plot. There exist many parallels drawn between man and nature in the story. Arundhati Roy has convincingly demonstrated the importance of nature in human life to the

readers. The relationship between the twins and their mother and the river exists on a parallel plane in the novel where Ammu takes the place of the river and twins take that of the frogs. River is a powerful and sometimes dangerous force of nature. It can be destructive (flooding) as well as nurturing (providing water). Ammu is a strong and passionate woman who is capable of bursting out in rage and love. Frogs need water to live; similarly, the twins are dependent on their mother for love and security. Twins can be compared with frogs with regard to their energetic behavior and requirement of attention from their mother as they are noisy creatures. It is because the behavior of twins towards the river mirrors their attitude towards Ammu; the twins can behave frivolously and playfully with the river like they do with Ammu. When the river behaves threateningly, people fear and show reverence to it, just like they would when Ammu is enraged and unpredictable. The application of nature as a parallel plane in the story helps add to the depth of characters and enhances the emotional quality of the fiction.

In the novel, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, the connection between nature and human beings is much interwoven, and nature plays a considerable part in shaping both the theme and the life of characters in the novel. In this novel, which takes place in Kerala, the complex connections that exist between human beings and nature are examined against the beautiful tropical background of Kerala. Nature regards humans as her children even if they do not care about the environment.

Related Works

As per Roy, the oppression of humans and non-humans (nature) occurs in the context of patriarchal dualism. It is the

same patriarchy that determines the interiorization of women and nature. She holds that there is a relation between naturalization/animalization of women and dualistic patriarchal ideology behind it. If the civilized mind is male because of its dualism? Then, it becomes essential to subdue both women and nature, and this is why we find the destruction of nature and the oppression of women. The representation of women, nature, and outcasts can be found at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Through her depiction of nature that is humanized and capable of eliciting feelings from us and presenting an eco-critical perspective, Roy makes it justifiable to name the novel in the manner she did. Efforts to break down the barriers between nature and human beings not only serve as a literary technique but also speak to the sensibilities and feelings of the readers. The author of the research paper "Interconnectedness of Man and Nature in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" has used eco-criticism as the theory of study. It is intended to conduct an analysis of the portrayal of Kerala, God's own country, by Arundhati Roy, along with the characters of Ammu, Velutha, and children of Ammu.

Ambiguity, in this case, is evident in the pursuit of sustainability itself, implying that unlike what many people believe, our environmental consciousness is based on our innate and historical relationship with nature. This is the claim made by Helen De Burgh-Woodmen in her paper titled "Sustainability and the human/nature connection: a critical discourse analysis of being "symbolically" sustainable." In the article titled "Extinction of experience: the loss of human nature interactions," Masashi Soga and Kevin J. Gaston assert that the lack of nature connections reduces some health and well-being advantages of human beings while also preventing them from holding positive attitudes, emotions, and actions towards the environment, suggesting that there is a vicious cycle of detachment from nature. These dire consequences indicate the significance of bridging human relationships with nature again and directing efforts towards solving the problem of experience extinction through research and policies.

Objectives of the Study

- To comprehend the human - nature relationship as portrayed in *The God of Small Things*.
- To emphasize the significance of cultivating empathy towards nature.
- To investigate the link between human and nature which can be better understood in order to assert that both can support and coexist in harmony.
- To provide readers with a new perspective regarding the significance of the human - nature relationship through a critical examination of the representation of this theme in the novel.

Methodology

- The main source of information is the text *The God of Small Things*.
- The backup sources are scholarly articles taken from internet resources.
- Majority of the existing literature serves as a basis for qualitative research.

Human-Nature Relations Highlighted in *The God of Small Things*.

Interaction of man and nature is very much part of the plot of the novel *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy.

Nature plays a vital role in determining the course of life of the characters as well as the themes of the novel. The story is set in Kerala, and the novel discusses complicated interaction of man and nature amidst the backdrop of the natural beauty of Kerala. Whether one likes or dislikes the environment, nature still welcomes him/her as her child.

1. Rahel and Estha

Rahel and Estha are twins who have been bonded with nature since childhood. Nature affects them greatly and helps them to find serenity and tranquility. Nature liberates them from all the restrictions that they face at home and within society.

One of the main aspects of their connection with nature is Meenachal River. The River symbolises threat and freedom. The twins are fascinated with the river since it is the place where they feel that they can hide, but the river is also the place where something tragic happens to them – their cousin's death takes place there. The river becomes a symbol of resilience. Although they experience sorrow, they are strong enough to perceive beauty of little things – sound of flowing waters, play of light on its surface and even stone skipping. That which is called the "God of Small Things" by the locals – happiness and beauty of little things – is what they are trying to find within nature.

2. Ammu

Ammu, the mother of Rahel and Estha, too has a complex association with nature. She is an eccentric woman who finds peace amidst the wonders of the natural world. Her love affair with Velutha, an untouchable and social outcast, is indicative of going against social norms and boundaries, similar to how nature ignores the limitations of the human world. The love affair of Ammu and Velutha finds a safe haven in the serene environment of the pickle factory, which is an escape from the highly structured world.

3. Velutha

Being a carpenter, Velutha, an untouchable, has formed an intimate association with the natural world around him. The love he has for nature and wood shows the sensibility he has for the wild and untamed things in life. The greater conflict between the social hierarchies established by humans and the natural world that has no such hierarchy is represented by Velutha's life and early death.

4. The Ayemenem House

The Ayemenem House, where most of the novel takes place, is located in a garden as well as on a river. The setting of the house greatly influences the characters. The dual nature of the human relationships theme of the book is expressed through the beauty and horror of the surrounding environment. The house and the surrounding setting are not only a symbol of the complicated history of the family and time but also of the past and the present.

5. The Landscape

The author frequently depicts the landscape of Kerala in beautiful and poetic language. Being rich in its tropical vegetation, wildlife, and monsoons, it is described as a nurturing but unpredictable place. It helps to illustrate the turmoil of the characters' inner worlds and the turns that take place in their lives. It is essential that the protagonists of the book are deeply connected with nature, revealing

their connection with it and the dependence on it in order to survive. Nature can be called the mother that is always ready to help her children. Our body gets rid of free radicals due to the fact that when we walk barefoot on the ground, it makes contact with electric charges from the earth. Recently, people started to use this approach called "earthing" or "grounding" in order to relieve stress. Nowadays, there is a tendency towards more grounding due to the high stress level that people have at the moment. Coming back to nature helps to solve both external and internal problems. It shows that nature is essential for human life. That is why nature protection is good for us.

Conclusion

The link between humans and nature in *The God of Small Things* is diverse and multifarious. Nature in the book is not just a backdrop but a partner in crime. It offers solace, independence, and chance for the individuals to defy societal norms. On the other hand, nature can prove to be brutal, and just like human beings; it has a dual personality as highlighted in the book *The God of Small Things*. The interaction between the characters and nature helps in bringing out the bigger issues of love, loss, and freedom from a restrictive society full of regulations and norms. The novel engages with the emotional side of the readers. The interaction between the characters and nature in the novel brings out the big issues of struggle, loss, and love of independence within a restrictive society of rigid norms and regulations. The study on the human-nature relationship done in this paper creates a new understanding among the readers regarding the importance of building this relationship for the benefit of creating a harmonious relationship between man and nature.

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