



International Journal of Advanced Academic Studies

E-ISSN: 2706-8927

P-ISSN: 2706-8919

www.allstudyjournal.com

IJAAS 2021; 3(1): 326-330

Received: 28-11-2020

Accepted: 25-12-2020

Dr. Ambika Sharma

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Sri Guru Hari Singh College,

Sri Jiwan Nagar, Haryana,

India

Exploring Ecocriticism in Indian English Literature: A Harmonious Discourse with Nature

Dr. Ambika Sharma

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/27068919.2021.v3.i1d.1147>

Abstract

In the realm of Indian English literature, an emerging and compelling discourse has taken root, weaving its narrative threads seamlessly into the fabric of literary exploration-Ecocriticism. This intellectual pursuit delves into the intricate relationship between literature and the environment, offering a lens through which one can scrutinize the ecological dimensions embedded in literary works. This exploration transcends mere analysis; it aspires to unravel the profound interconnectedness between humans and nature, and how this dynamic finds expression within the literary landscapes of Indian English literature. It signifies an intentional journey into the realms of literature where the natural world converges with human narratives, creating a harmonious discourse that reflects both the beauty and challenges of our symbiotic existence. This investigation is not merely an academic exercise; it is a conscientious attempt to foster a deeper understanding of ecological concerns and the human impact on the environment through the prism of literature. Through a harmonious discourse with nature, the readers seek to decipher the ecological messages embedded in the prose and poetry of Indian English literature. This article embarks on a journey into the realm of ecocriticism within Indian English literature, aiming to unravel the ways in which writers engage with environmental concerns, sustainable living, and the evolving dynamics between humanity and the natural world. This paper will explore how the historical tapestry unfolds in the works of contemporary authors, shaping narratives that echo the complexities of the environment and humanity's place within it. Through a nuanced exploration of key literary works, the paper will navigate the diverse terrain of Indian literature to understand how it contributes to ecological awareness, fostering a deeper connection between readers and the pressing environmental issues of our time.

Keywords: Nature, ecological, landscape, harmony, relationship

Introductions

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary field that emerged in the late 20th century, focusing on the intersection of literature and the environment (Trexler and Johns-Putra). In the context of Indian English literature, the relationship between nature and culture has been a recurring theme, reflecting the diverse landscapes and cultural tapestry of the subcontinent. This critical lens encourages the exploration of how literature portrays and engages with nature, and how it contributes to ecological awareness and activism (Buell). The intricate interplay between nature and culture in Indian literature has deep roots, dating back to ancient texts, and contemporary authors continue to explore and amplify this connection through their works. As we embark on this intellectual odyssey, we shall navigate through the works of renowned Indian English writers who have, knowingly or unknowingly, woven the ecological thread into the tapestry of their narratives. Authors like Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai and Vandana Singh traverse the various landscapes of India, offering narratives that mirror the complexities of societal development and its impact on nature. As these authors navigate diverse landscapes and cultural contexts, they provide readers with a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. While the readers traverse the diverse landscapes of Indian English literature, they hope to unravel the layers of meaning, symbolism, and reflection on the human-nature interface. Through this exploration, they aspire to contribute to a broader dialogue on ecocriticism, fostering a deeper appreciation for the environmental dimensions embedded in the rich tapestry of Indian English literature.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Ambika Sharma

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Sri Guru Hari Singh College,

Sri Jiwan Nagar, Haryana,

India

Objectives

How do the literary works contribute to our ecological consciousness?

Can literature serve as a catalyst for environmental change?

These are the questions that guide us to explore and prompt to consider literature not only as an artistic expression but also as a potent force in shaping our collective environmental ethos.

Historical Context

The roots of ecological consciousness in Indian literature can be traced back to ancient texts, where nature is not merely a backdrop but an integral part of the cultural and spiritual fabric. To appreciate the emergence of ecocriticism in the realm of Indian English literature, it is essential to delve into the historical context that has shaped the literary landscape of the subcontinent. In ancient Indian scriptures such as the Vedas and Upanishads, nature is venerated as sacred, with profound connections to the divine. The cosmic interplay of elements, the reverence for rivers, mountains, and the intricate balance of ecosystems are recurrent themes that emphasize the harmonious coexistence of humans and the natural world. Moving into medieval and pre-modern periods, poets like Kalidasa celebrated the beauty of nature in works like "*Shakuntala*" and "*Meghaduta*." The lush landscapes, flora, and fauna described in these classical texts exemplify an early appreciation for the environment, intertwining it with themes of love, longing, and transcendence (Kalidasa). With the advent of colonialism, the Indian literary landscape underwent a transformative phase. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore, often hailed as the 'Bard of Bengal,' used their literary prowess to emphasize the interconnectedness between humans and nature. Tagore's "*The Home and the World*" and "*Gitanjali*" not only critique the impact of colonialism (Tagore, *The Home and the World*) but also articulate a profound ecological sensibility (Tagore, *Gitanjali*). The influence of Mahatma Gandhi further heightened environmental awareness in Indian literature during the independence movement. Gandhi's advocacy for sustainable living, self-sufficiency, and the protection of village industries resonated with an eco-centric worldview. This period witnessed a surge in literature that reflected the Gandhian philosophy, emphasizing simplicity, sustainability, and a deep-rooted respect for the environment. The mid-20th century marked a turning point with the post-independence era, witnessing the exploration of urbanization, industrialization, and their ecological repercussions. Writers began addressing environmental concerns more explicitly, providing a platform for the nascent ideas of ecocriticism to take root. During navigation of the historical underpinnings of Indian literature, it becomes evident that the ecological consciousness embedded in ancient philosophies, reinvigorated during the independence movement, and evolving in response to contemporary challenges has paved the way for the incorporation of ecocritical perspectives in Indian English literature. In the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Indian English literature has witnessed a blossoming of voices that engage with ecocritical themes, weaving intricate narratives that explore the evolving relationship between humans and the environment.

Contemporary Voices

The authors, drawing inspiration from the rich ecological tapestry of India, contribute significantly to the discourse on

environmental awareness, sustainability, and the consequences of human actions on the natural world. Arundhati Roy, in her seminal work "*The God of Small Things*," paints a vivid picture of the Kerala landscape, intricately blending the social, political, and environmental dimensions (Arundhati Roy). Through her narrative, she exposes the ecological impact of human choices, reflecting on how the degradation of nature mirrors the disintegration of societal norms. The novel serves as a poignant exploration of the intricate web connecting humanity and the environment. Amitav Ghosh, a prominent voice in contemporary Indian literature, ventures into ecocritical territory with works such as "*The Hungry Tide*" and "*The Great Derangement*." The former delves into the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans, addressing the implications of climate change on both the environment and the lives of the inhabitants (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*). In "*The Great Derangement*," Ghosh takes a meta-critical approach, questioning the absence of climate change narratives in mainstream literature and urging writers to engage with urgent ecological issues (Ghosh, "The Great Derangement : Climate Change and the Unthinkable"). Vandana Singh, a physicist and speculative fiction writer, infuses her works with ecological themes that bridge the realms of science and literature. In "*Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories*," Singh explores the connections between humanity and nature through speculative and imaginative narratives (Singh). Her stories often draw on indigenous knowledge systems, showcasing the importance of traditional ecological wisdom in navigating the challenges of the modern world. Anita Desai's "*The Village by the Sea*" captures the tension between tradition and modernity, urbanization, and environmental degradation (Desai). Set in a coastal village, the novel portrays the struggles of a fishing community facing the consequences of industrialization and over-exploitation of marine resources. Desai's work serves as a microcosm reflecting broader ecological concerns related to economic development. Chetan Bhagat, known for his contemporary and relatable storytelling, Bhagat incorporates environmental themes in "*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*." The novel explores the ramifications of rapid urbanization and unchecked industrial expansion, offering a narrative that intertwines personal choices with broader societal and environmental consequences. These contemporary voices collectively contribute to the expanding field of ecocriticism in (Bhagat) Indian English literature. Their narratives not only reflect the ecological challenges faced by the subcontinent but also serve as catalysts for environmental consciousness, urging readers to contemplate their role in preserving the delicate balance between humanity and the natural world.

Diverse Landscape

One of the distinctive features of Indian English literature lies in its ability to reflect the rich regional diversity of the subcontinent. This diversity is not only manifested in the linguistic and cultural tapestry but also in the varied ecosystems and landscapes that serve as the backdrop for literary narratives. Authors, through their exploration of different regions, bring forth a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment. Such as Mamang Dai, hailing from the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, captures the pristine beauty of the Himalayan region in her works. In "*The Black Hill*," she provides readers with a glimpse into

the unique biodiversity of the Eastern Himalayas(Dai). The novel not only narrates a compelling story but also serves as a literary exploration of the fragile ecosystems and indigenous cultures in this region. Kerala, with its lush landscapes and coastal beauty, finds resonance in Benyamin's "*Goat Days*." The novel, while primarily addressing issues of migration and human exploitation, subtly reflects the ecological challenges faced by the state (Benyamin). The symbiotic relationship between the characters and the environment highlights the profound impact of ecological changes on human lives. Kiran Nagarkar, in "*Cuckold*," offers a historical narrative set against the backdrop of medieval Gujarat. While primarily exploring socio-political dynamics, the novel also delves into the ecological consequences of warfare and political upheaval (Nagarkar). The arid landscapes of Gujarat become a metaphor for the ecological cost of human conflicts and the resilience of nature. Indira Goswami, known for her socially relevant narratives, portrays the cultural and environmental ethos of Assam in works like "The Man from Chinnamasta." The novel reflects on the changing landscapes of Assam and the impact of industrialization on the region's ecology (Goswami and Goswami). Her storytelling intertwines environmental concerns with broader social issues, creating a holistic narrative that reflects the regional intricacies. Manohar Malgonkar's "*A Bend in the Ganges*" unfolds against the arid backdrop of Rajasthan. The novel, set during the time of the partition, explores the challenges faced by communities in adapting to changing environmental conditions (Malgonkar). The scarcity of water and the harsh desert landscape become central themes, symbolizing the struggle for survival in a challenging ecological setting. The regional diversity in Indian English literature not only adds layers of authenticity to narratives but also enables authors to spotlight environmental concerns specific to each region. From the misty hills of the Northeast to the arid deserts of the West, the literature mirrors the ecological challenges unique to each landscape. This exploration of regional diversity contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between literature, culture, and the environment in the Indian context.

Regional Diversity in Indian English Literature

India, with its vast and diverse landscapes, is a melting pot of cultures, languages, and ecosystems. This rich regional diversity is vividly reflected in Indian English literature, where authors draw inspiration from the varied geographies of the subcontinent. This exploration of different regions not only adds depth to literary narratives but also serves as a lens through which environmental concerns are uniquely articulated.

- **The Himalayan Region** - Ruskin Bond, a prolific writer known for his tales set in the picturesque Himalayan region, captures the essence of the mountains in works like "*The Blue Umbrella*" and "*The Room on the Roof*." Through his narratives, Bond not only paints a vivid picture of the natural beauty but also highlights the ecological fragility of the region (Bond and Stubble). The mountains, rivers, and flora become integral characters, emphasizing the delicate balance between human life and nature (Bond).
- **Western Ghats** - Shashi Tharoor's "*Riot: A Love Story*" takes readers to the lush landscapes of the Western

Ghats. While the novel primarily explores the social fabric of the region, the backdrop of the Ghats provides a canvas for environmental reflections (Tharoor). The interconnectedness of the characters with the dense forests and vibrant wildlife underscores the importance of preserving biodiversity in the face of urbanization.

- **The Gangetic Plains** - Upamanyu Chatterjee's "*English, August*" is set in the Gangetic plains, offering a satirical exploration of contemporary urban life. Amidst the bureaucratic and cultural challenges faced by the protagonist, the narrative subtly engages with the environmental transformations in the Gangetic region (Chatterjee and Sharma). The changing agricultural practices and the impact on the river's health serve as metaphors for the broader ecological shifts.
- **Coastal Regions** - Anita Desai, in "*The Village by the Sea*," transports readers to the coastal landscapes of India. The novel portrays the struggles of a fishing community, highlighting the environmental consequences of industrialization and over-exploitation of marine resources (Desai). The coastal setting becomes a microcosm reflecting broader ecological concerns related to economic development.
- **The Thar Desert** - Keki N. Daruwalla, through works like "*For Pepper and Christ*," explores the arid landscapes of the Thar Desert. The harsh desert conditions become a backdrop for narratives that delve into themes of survival and resilience (Daruwalla). The ecological challenges faced by communities in the desert region are intricately woven into the fabric of Daruwalla's storytelling. The regional diversity in Indian English literature not only showcases the geographical richness of the subcontinent but also allows authors to address region-specific environmental issues. Whether it's the verdant hills of the Northeast, the arid expanses of the West, or the fertile plains along the Ganges, each region becomes a character in the narrative, influencing the plot and shaping the environmental consciousness embedded in the literature. This nuanced exploration of regional diversity contributes to a more holistic understanding of the complex relationship between literature, culture, and the diverse ecosystems of India.

Urbanization and Ecological Discontent in Indian English Literature

The rapid pace of urbanization in India, marked by sprawling metropolises and burgeoning industrialization, has brought forth a complex interplay between human progress and environmental consequences. Indian English literature has been a potent medium for authors to articulate the challenges, conflicts, and ecological discontent arising from the transformative forces of urbanization. Amitav Ghosh in his speculative work "*The Calcutta Chromosome*," explores the impact of technological advances and urban development. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Calcutta, a city in the throes of rapid change. The novel delves into the consequences of unchecked urban growth and scientific pursuits, unraveling a tale that reflects on the ecological cost of modernity. Narrative of Chetan Bhagat's "*The 3 Mistakes of My Life*" is set against the backdrop of Ahmedabad and explores the dreams and challenges faced by the protagonists amid the changing urban landscape (Bhagat). The novel delves into the tensions between

tradition and modernity, economic aspirations, and the environmental repercussions of rapid industrialization. The author highlights how urbanization can lead to ecological imbalances and social discontents. Anuradha Roy's novel *"Sleeping on Jupiter"* is a poignant exploration of urban spaces, focusing on the town of Jarmuli. As urbanization encroaches upon the natural surroundings, the novel delves into the ecological disruptions and the displacement of traditional communities (Anuradha Roy). Roy's narrative raises questions about the toll that urban expansion takes on the environment and the cultural fabric of a place. Manu Joseph's *"Serious Men"* is set in the bustling city of Mumbai and explores the impact of urbanization on societal aspirations and ecological balance (Joseph). The novel reflects on the dichotomy of progress and discontent, revealing the environmental consequences of rapid urban development, including issues of waste management and pollution. Arvind Adiga in his novel *"The White Tiger"* provides a critical perspective on the disparities and conflicts arising from urbanization in India. Set in Delhi, the narrative portrays the stark contrast between the affluence of the urban elite and the hardships faced by those on the margins (Adiga). The ecological footprint of urban lifestyles is subtly woven into the broader socio-economic critique presented in the novel. These literary works collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of urbanization and its impact on the environment. The narratives navigate through the complexities of changing urban landscapes, depicting not only the glittering facades of progress but also the underlying ecological discontent and social inequities. Through the lens of Indian English literature, readers are invited to contemplate the environmental challenges arising from urbanization and the need for sustainable, ecologically conscious approaches to development. These narratives serve as a mirror to the evolving urban milieu in India, prompting critical reflections on the intersection of progress, ecology, and societal well-being.

Rediscovering Indigenous Wisdom in Indian English Literature

In the quest for ecological sustainability and a harmonious relationship with nature, Indian English literature has increasingly turned towards the wealth of indigenous wisdom embedded in the cultural fabric of the subcontinent. Authors explore traditional knowledge systems, folklore, and age-old practices to weave narratives that advocate for the preservation of indigenous wisdom as a key to ecological balance. Vandana Singh often incorporates elements of indigenous wisdom into her works. In her collection of stories entitled, *"Ambiguity Machines and Other Stories,"* she explores the intersections of science and traditional knowledge, presenting narratives that delve into the deep connections between humanity and nature (Singh). By blending speculative fiction with indigenous themes, Singh encourages readers to reevaluate their relationship with the environment through the lens of ancient wisdom. Amitav Ghosh's novel *"The Hungry Tide,"* set in the Sundarbans, delves into the ecological challenges faced by the region's inhabitants. Amidst the narrative, there is an acknowledgment of indigenous knowledge about the mangrove ecosystems and the ways in which local communities coexist with nature (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*). The novel subtly advocates for the recognition and integration of indigenous wisdom into contemporary

environmental discourse. The narrative of Arundhati Roy's novel *"The God of Small Things,"* set in Kerala, incorporates elements of traditional knowledge and cultural practices deeply rooted in the region. The characters' interactions with the natural world are intertwined with indigenous beliefs and rituals, offering a nuanced portrayal of the symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment. Through her prose, Roy prompts readers to appreciate the ecological insights embedded in indigenous cultures. Mahasweta Devi, a prominent Bengali writer, often brings attention to the struggles of indigenous communities. In *"Mother of 1084,"* she explores the ecological displacement of tribal communities and their deep connection to the land. Devi's work serves as a powerful commentary on the importance of recognizing and preserving indigenous wisdom, especially in the face of environmental challenges (Devi and Banerjee). Githa Hariharan's novel *"The Thousand Faces of Night"* reflects on the cultural and ecological dynamics of Indian society. The narrative, set against the backdrop of a traditional South Indian community, weaves in elements of mythology and folklore (Hariharan). By integrating indigenous wisdom into the storyline, Hariharan prompts readers to reconsider their relationship with nature and the enduring relevance of traditional knowledge. Through these literary explorations, Indian English literature serves as a conduit for rediscovering and celebrating indigenous wisdom. Authors draw attention to the inherent ecological insights embedded in traditional practices, urging society to recognize the value of age-old knowledge systems in the pursuit of sustainable living. By incorporating indigenous perspectives, these narratives contribute to a broader discourse on environmental stewardship, encouraging readers to embrace a more holistic and interconnected approach to the natural world.

Conclusion

Indian English literature, through the lens of ecocriticism, unveils a profound exploration of the intricate relationship between humans and the environment. The historical context, regional diversity, reflections on urbanization, and the rediscovery of indigenous wisdom collectively contribute to a tapestry of narratives that transcend the boundaries of fiction. These literary works not only entertain but also serve as powerful vehicles for environmental awareness, urging readers to contemplate their roles in the ecological challenges faced by the subcontinent. The historical roots of ecological consciousness in ancient texts, revitalized during the independence movement, lay the foundation for the contemporary exploration of environmental themes. Regional diversity emerges as a hallmark, allowing authors to showcase the unique ecosystems and cultural nuances of different parts of the country. From the Himalayan heights to the coastal plains, from the arid deserts to the lush greenery of the Western Ghats, each region becomes a character in the story, reflecting the challenges and beauty of its environment. The narrative exploration of urbanization highlights the consequences of unchecked development, bringing to the forefront the ecological discontent that accompanies rapid urban growth. As characters grapple with the changing landscapes, pollution, and displacement, these stories become cautionary tales, urging society to reassess the costs of progress.

Furthermore, the literature underscores the importance of rediscovering indigenous wisdom as a valuable resource for navigating environmental challenges. Authors like Vandana Singh and Amitav Ghosh weave narratives that bridge the gap between ancient traditions and contemporary issues, emphasizing the timeless relevance of indigenous knowledge in fostering ecological balance. In conclusion, Indian English literature, propelled by the currents of ecocriticism, serves as a powerful medium for fostering environmental consciousness. The narratives presented in these works transcend mere storytelling; they inspire readers to reflect on their relationship with nature, question prevailing paradigms of development, and consider the wisdom embedded in the cultural and ecological heritage of the subcontinent. As literature continues to evolve, so too does its potential to shape attitudes, inspire action, and contribute to a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence between humanity and the natural world.

References

1. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Atlantic Books London; c2008.
2. Benyamin, Benyamin. *Goat Days*. Univ of Chicago Press [S.I.]; c2020.
3. Bhagat, Chetan. *The 3 Mistakes of My Life : A Story about Business, Cricket and Religion*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi; c2015.
4. Bond, Ruskin. *The Room on the Roof*. Penguin Books [London], 2017.
5. Bond, Ruskin, Trevor Stubble. *The Blue Umbrella*. Antelope Books, Hamish Hamilton London; c1974.
6. Buell, Lawrence. *Ecocriticism: Some Emerging Trends*. *Qui Parle*, 2011;19(2):87-115. <https://doi.org/10.5250/quiparle.19.2.0087>.
7. Chatterjee, Upamanyu, Akhil Sharma. *English, August : An Indian Story*. Faber and Faber London, 2018.
8. Dai, Mamang. *The Black Hill*. Aleph Book Company New Delhi; c2014.
9. Daruwalla, Keki N. *For Pepper and Christ : A Novel*. Penguin Books India New Delhi, India; c2009.
10. Debī, Mahāśvetā, Samik Banerjee. *Mother of 1084*. Seagull Books Calcutta; c2014.
11. Desai, Anita. *The Village by the Sea*. New York Review Books Kids, New York Review Books New York; c2019.
12. Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement : Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures, Paperback, The University of Chicago Press Chicago [Illinois]; c2017.
13. *The Hungry Tide*. HarperCollins London; c2004.
14. *The Hungry Tide*. Houghton Mifflin Boston; c2005.
15. Goswāmī, Māmaṇi Rayachama, and Prashant Goswami. *The Man from Chinnamasta*. Katha Asomiya Library/Fiction, Katha New Delhi; c2006.
16. Hariharan, Githa. *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Women's Press London; c1996.
17. Joseph, Manu. *Serious Men*. 1st Americ, W.W. Norton & Co. New York; c2010.
18. Kalidasa. *Translations of Shakuntala and Other Works - The Original Classic Edition*. NV-1 onl, Emereo Pub. Dayboro; c2012.
19. Malgonkar, Manohar. *A Bend in the Ganges*. India Ink/Roli Books New Delhi; c2009.
20. Nagarkar, Kiran. *Cuckold*. HarperCollins Publishers, India New Delhi; c1997.
21. Roy, Anuradha. *Sleeping on Jupiter : A Novel*. Graywolf Press Minneapolis, Minnesota; c2016.
22. Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things : [A Novel]*. First Harp, HarperPerennial, a division of HarperCollinsPublishers New York, NY; c1998.
23. Singh, Vandana. *Ambiguity Machines & Other Stories*. First edit, Small Beer Press Easthampton, MA, 2018.
24. Tagore, Rabindranath. *Gitanjali*. NV-1 onl, SAI EPUBLICATIONS [S.I.]; c2016.
25. *The Home and the The World*. NV-1 onl, Start Publishing LLC Lanham; c2012.
26. Tharoor, Shashi. *Riot : A Love Story : A Novel*. 1st ed, Arcade Pub. New York; c2001.
27. Trexler, Adam, Adeline Johns-Putra. *Climate Change in Literature and Literary Criticism*. *WIREs Climate Change*. 2011;2(2):185-200.