INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Postcolonial Ecocriticism in Indian Writing in English

M. Catherine

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of postcolonial theory and ecocriticism within Indian Writing in English (IWE), challenging the conventional Western nature–culture binary. Drawing on foundational frameworks by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, the paper argues that British colonialism in India functioned as an inherently ecological project—evidenced by the Indian Forest Acts and the displacement of indigenous Adivasi communities—making ecological crisis and social injustice inseparable. In the Indian context, forests, rivers, and mountains are continuously inhabited and socialized spaces, reframing the environment as a contested socio-political site. Through an analysis of key literary works by Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai, this study traces how Indian authors critique capitalist resource exploitation, unplanned urbanization, bioregional disruption, and the displacement of marginalized populations. Finally, moving beyond canonical rural narratives, the paper identifies emerging frontiers for future scholarship in Indian ecocriticism, specifically highlighting urban political ecology in megacities, Dalit ecocriticism's interrogation of caste-based resource access, and climate pedagogy within contemporary South Asian speculative fiction.

Keywords: postcolonial ecocriticism; Indian writing in English; environmental justice; Dalit ecocriticism; urban political ecology; slow violence

1 Introduction

Postcolonialism prioritized the British legacy and partition, nationalism, hybridity, and the recovery of subaltern agency against Eurocentric hegemony. However, as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin observe in Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment (2010), the separation of human social justice from ecological survival is an artificial luxury. Colonialism in India was originally an ecological project: the British Raj systematically commercialized forests through the Indian Forest Acts, displaced forest-dwelling Adivasi communities. The Indian landscape is represented as a politicized site where ecological crisis and social injustice are mutually inherent.

2 Theoretical framework

The Traditional method had changed its direction and in the Indian context this binary is fundamentally flawed because forests, rivers and the mountains have been continuously inhabited, cultivated and socialized by local communities.

Postcolonial ecocriticism in Indian writing in English therefore rejects the nature–culture binary, viewing the Indian environment instead as a contested socio-political space where human survival, spiritual belief and ecological health are inextricably linked.

3 Literary turn

The shift in literary studies where scholars started to focus on ecological and environmental concerns within literature, especially through the lens of postcolonial theory.

- In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*, Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan unite postcolonial studies and ecocriticism, and also critique western development-colonialism and settler-society pastoral myths of ownership versus belonging through works by authors such as Arundhati Roy and J. M. Coetzee.
- Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) take as their theme cyclones in the Sundarbans, rising sea levels and the displacement of marginalized communities.
- Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Greater Common Good* (1999) critique the capitalist exploitation of nature, the pollution of the Meenachal River and the displacement of indigenous populations.
- Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) focus on environmental degradation and bioregionalism, political insurgency and unplanned urbanization, and satirize human alienation from nature.

4 Gaps and future directions in research

While foundational texts by Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy are heavily researched, emerging scholarship in Indian ecocriticism is shifting towards underexplored frontiers.

- **Urban political ecology:** moving away from rural and forest settings to examine toxic urbanism, waste management and climate inequality in Indian megacities (for example Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai).
- **Dalit ecocriticism:** investigating how caste dictates access to natural resources (such as water and land) and how Dalit literature refines environmental justice.
- **Climate pedagogy and speculative fiction:** analyzing contemporary Indian science fiction and climate fiction that imagines post-apocalyptic or drought-stricken futures in South Asia.

4.1 Overarching cross-cutting research question

How does shifting the critical lens from rural/forest landscapes to urban, caste-stratified, and speculative spaces transform the foundational frameworks of postcolonial ecocriticism in Indian Writing in English?

4.2 Primary corpus

1. *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha (2007): set in the fictionalized city of Khaufpur (a thinly veiled Bhopal) two decades after a catastrophic industrial chemical leak, this novel is foundational for examining "toxic urbanism" and Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence.
2. *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry (1995): while often read as political realism, Mistry's Mumbai narrative is rich for urban political ecology. It contrasts elite urban beautification drives with the spatial displacement of slum dwellers, highlighting how lack of access to clean water, sanitation and shelter turns metropolitan infrastructure into a site of ecological violence.
3. *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* by Manohar Mouli Biswas (trans. Angana Dutta and Jaydeep Sarangi, 2015): focusing on the Namashudhra community in Bengal's wetlands,

Biswas uses ecological metaphors—such as the water hyacinth—to explore flood-prone geographies, riverine survival and caste-based marginalization.