

## A Critical Discourse of Ecology and Gender from Indian Contexts

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**Article Received:** 02/6/2022,

**Article Accepted:** 10/06/2022,

**Published online:** 12/07/2022,

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2022.4.7.04

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### Abstract

This research investigates the connection between nature and ecology in Indian texts after the two World Wars and focuses on gender portrayal. The critical discourse will aim to comprehend the relationship between various literary texts and the growth of the ecological disaster in terms of gender. The paper would also reflect on the contradiction between gender relations and nature and highlight concerns about the world's deteriorating ecology. The research would also examine the numerous variables in how Indian English novels look at ecological crises and disintegration. The study will attempt to project a constructive perspective on the control, violence, and social linkages between Mother Earth and gender oppression through a close reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*. Based on urbanization and development, the study also aims to highlight the threat and deterioration of the climate and the involvement of men and women in it.

**Keywords:** Ecology, environment, gender, nature, women, Earth, politics.

### Introduction

The period we live in has witnessed many environmental problems, from ozone depletion to loss of biodiversity and climate change. The concern of gender from the ecological studies and the various adaptations reveals the dynamics of the society and the plethora of factors that cater to the changes in the geographical and climatic aspects. An eminent German Zoologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term ecology, which states the relation of an animal to its organic and inorganic environment. Our entire ecosystem is interdependent on one another. On a broader level, the whole framework of the ecosystem clearly states how the social injustice after the post-colonial rule has led to various environmental crises. There's a continuous struggle and a clash between the human population and the species, both endangered and extinct, because it throws light upon how various human conditions have led to the damage of living and even furthermore caused rift and a sense of marginalization. Ecology and gender or human lives are connected, and the dynamic ecological changes clearly state the fragility of

human beings at the hands of nature. We live in a natural system, and hence we rely on nature for a harmonious balance to maintain a proper balance; it is essential to take measures for ecological stability to sustain life on Earth.

The feeling of concern for nature and awareness is vital to develop and nourish in human beings, and literature paves a way to understand the fears of nature and also the scientific study of it through extensive use of the works. Various ecological issues, destruction, and annihilation like global warming, deforestation, the disappearance of species, climate change, deforestation, and other crisis meted out by Mother Nature gives us a more profound and poignant overview of the brutal conditions being created in the name of civilization development and advancement of economy and the race of upliftment. The literary texts examine and alleviate the long environmental plight and the ecology exploration through various narratives and gender lenses. It also envisions devising possible solutions to amend the current ecological disturbances of the entire world.

From the domination of various lands and emerging politics, it becomes visible how the oppression and tyranny of the environment lead to ecological intimidation and violence. From a detailed investigation and examination of literary works, we can delve deeper into the personal avarice of humanity and the shallow practices of continuous exploitation. It also helps us to measure how the prevailing flora and fauna are facing a long catastrophe because of scientific and economic advancement. Human settlements and habitats have become a fundamental reason for the dangers to the environment, and similarly, the role of gender plays a massive part too.

Women, in particular from fiction and non-fiction, are used as exponents to depict the age-old domination with a significant link to nature. Also, we find the other voices are marginalized, and from the lens of the men, we see how they become victims of the ecological crisis and wrath and decompose in avarice and selfishness. Humans and the natural biosphere are essential if we observe from an ecological perspective and the environmental cycle. The crisis paves the way into the lives of the world of men too. With environmental problems, the ecosystem's balance needs to be preserved. People need to be more conscious of utilizing natural resources because it impacts innocent human victims and animals. On a large scale, men and women should be much more sympathetic toward nature which is now on the verge of perils, to maintain harmony between ecology and gender.

### **The Perspective Of Ecology And Gender In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide***

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* explores the concerns related to the ecocritical aspects and the role of gender throughout. A sense of relatedness between humans and the environment forms a significant part of the storyline. From the distinguished core of Ghosh's omnipresent narrative, a profound and much deeper psychological impact concerning gender roles could be determined, which tries to voice the plight of women in the entire novel like Piyali Roy, Nilima, and Moyna. From the aspect of a feminist lens, the women represented in

the story are a voice of subjugation and terror for decades now. The geological background of the novel hints at the aspect of women's empowerment where the dubious mischief of the environment corresponds to the lives of the notable characters. Kanai's deceased uncle showcases how the ecosystem of the Sundarbans has immensely changed from what it was before. The living survivors are women who coincide with Mother Nature despite all the Anthropocene activities meted out to her by humanity. The undertone presented in this novel sets a ground or root in the revolutionary role of women as an individual struggle against patriarchy. When the men went fishing, the women had to be ready to face nature's wrath. There's an immense journey of self-discovery for these women, from silent dependents to raging a voice through their actions. To Nilima, "the challenge of making a few little things better in one small place is enough," while for Nirmal, "it had to be all or nothing."(Ghosh, 2006, 387).

Through the characters of Ghosh's women, we see how the stereotype projection of gender disparity challenges them and how self-realization, self-fulfillment, and self-achievement encompass a different kind of atmosphere in the novel. Piyali Roy resembles a strong personality who tries to fathom through the tide country for her research work, and through her narrative, we find her zeal and enthusiasm, and her extreme bravery gives her a voice as a "second sex" prevalent role among the masculine entities who were trying to submerge her thoughts into the tidal waves. The man had assumed she had no choice but to follow his orders that she would put up with whatever demands he chose to make. From the start, she had sensed a threat from the guard and his friend: she knew that to return to the launch in these circumstances would be an acknowledgment of helplessness. (Ghosh, 56). Fakir's untainted friendship toward Piya resembles how the natives were still beyond the consumption of urbanization and kept themselves intact in the rustic ecology of innocence and protection compared to the forest guard's malign intentions.

Piya's character resembles a woman who is a trustworthy agent, an evolving storm of femininity. She is not the "tasty young morsel" as Kanai claims and derogates her in terms of being a prey of the tiger, but she is a complete human-like goddess to the barbarity and savagery of manhood. "Her courage and her determination render her unyielding, who would not stop at any condition until she reaches her destination. Her deviation from norms is marked at the very beginning of the novel, which starts in a crowded Indian railway station where her "neatly composed androgyny of her appearance seemed out of place, almost exotic" (Ghosh, 3). Piya does not resemble the so-called enchanting heroine of romantic fiction; rather, she is identified by "the unaccustomed delineation of her stance."

What is more striking is her worldview- at such an early age, she has embraced solitude. She does not need companionship or assistance from others but prefers to be alone. "It's easier to slip through the net if you're on your own." (Ghosh 12)" (Chakraborty, 2018).

Nilima's existence and survival after her husband's demise show unparalleled strength to survive widowhood. "In their family, Nilima was legendary for her persistence- her doggedness and tenacity had built the Badabon Trust into what it was, an organization widely cited as a model for NGOs working in rural India." (Ghosh 19). She is not a rebel like Piyali, but her voice doesn't remain silent from the depth of the novel too or an outrageous idealist even but her subtle presence shows her as a much a figure much relevant to Mother Nature herself- her resilience, staunch beliefs, her education, her survival is a story of the environment today and the struggles of the domain from the perspectives of the demolition being carried out. To quote the words of Nathaniel Rich: "Because in the decade that ran from 1979 to 1989, we had an excellent opportunity to solve the climate crisis. The world's major powers came within several signatures of endorsing a binding, global framework to reduce carbon emissions — far closer than we've come since. During those years, the conditions for success could not have been more favorable. The obstacles we blame for our current inaction have yet to emerge. Almost nothing stood in our way except ourselves" (Rich, *Losing Earth*).

Over the years, Nilima's experiences of the world and men clearly state that her representation brings strong protection to women like her. She is a living example, a metaphor, and a picture of women losing their husbands to the waves of nature. But she refuses to submit, exploit or even let her wounds define herself; the various deaths of the men in the novel signify a sudden death and the engulfment of nature, but the women are left to die slowly. In this context, J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, set in the Aran Islands, is a classic example where Maurya, the protagonist, is knocked off her sentiments by the Dead Sea and loses each male member of her family in this eventual process. Instead of becoming bitter, Maurya, much like Nilima, recognizes that the Sea can do no more harm to her because she has lost everything. Nilima's maturity and nobility of spirit enabled her to see the good, which can be compared to the characteristics of Maurya in the *Riders to the Sea*. There is no anxiety, but there's more peace in the character of Nilima. To quote Maurya's words, "There's no more the sea can do to me...it's a great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely...they are all together...no man at all can be living forever, and we must be satisfied" (Synge, *Riders to The Sea*).

From all the social distinctions, Kusum is an embodiment of fate, much like nature. Yet, her intense humanity fueled with world views doesn't let her compromise her opinions about herself as an individual. Even after the death of Fokir, her husband, she remains ambitious and bright, a staunch believer in herself, and doesn't let fate empower her ambitions at even one point in life. Her survival is visualized as greater hope for humanity. It resembles dauntlessness, her efforts, and her firm intelligence, and she is a distinguished individual who is marked as a woman of a new era.

### **Portrayal of Trauma through Gender and Nature in Anuradha Roy's the *Folded Earth***

The novel, *The Folded Earth* evokes and arises from the folded memories of Maya. She is the protagonist in the book and showcases her plight and disasters from the lens of the narrative. The story portrays and highlights the distressed life of Maya at the hands of society

after she loses her husband to a mountain trekking incident. What follows is how her father abandons her after her second marriage to Michael, a Christian origin. Maya's loneliness is reflected through her various dialogues in the novel. She also mentions how her father's societal reputation played a pivotal role in disowning her as his daughter and leaving her on her terms. In one of the narrations, she states, "I had been out all day on scorching streets, walking at random, getting onto buses without looking where they were going, pausing at parks, shops, then walking on, until shops shut and the traffic thinned, and the streets grew too empty for a woman alone" (*The Folded Earth*, 10-11). Throughout the novel, with the help of Maya's voice, Roy uncovers and locates the immense gravity of nature, and the ambiance follows in detail; she mentions the disharmony between Maya and her father, which reflects a patriarchal mindset and outwardly rebukes how nature is also a victim at the hands of the men.

In the name of globalization, invasions, and development, there has been a constant climate crisis in the world where even if we take a look at world history, we would have an understanding of how ecological crisis accounts for the voices of women's liberation too and also how men fall victims at the hands of the rage of nature. The environmental disturbances and the contemporary crisis give us an outlook on how gender and ecology are interconnected to one another, not just on the levels of discrimination but also provide us with a glimpse of how gender issues can be questioned and analyzed from various events, perspectives and also prevalent taboos and especially in countries like India where hegemony rules. Authors like Anuradha Roy, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair, and Mahasweta Devi and their literary works advocate the concept of gender to ecology in an urban or rural setting. In this novel, *The Folded Earth* Ranikhet is a remote village where the people and the residents share a good relationship with nature. Still, political tensions and modern ways of life influenced their way of thinking and also their actions in eventual days and times.

The novel unfolds the tension between the times of now and then, the continual struggles of urban and rustic life, and the interference and movements of men and women in this space. There's a continuous mention of the seasonal changes corresponding with sorrow, joy, remorse, fear, and so on. Maya being Roy's mouthpiece, helps us understand how environmentalism becomes a phenomenon in the novel, and the characters eventually develop with the novel's progress. Maya's life is criticized and targeted by the civil society continuously for her marriage which produces a thematic structure of the book followed by the traumatic and interrelated events, and the novel is filled with visuals of scenic beauty, natural surroundings, and deeply ingrained with the biological concepts and the embrace of the environment too. The foremost vital of the novel parallels between the wild green Earth and the characters leading the narratives.

If we consider Maya's father, there is continuous domination of his, which eventually regulated the life of Maya. Maya mentions and condemns her father's actions in her life "From the day my father had found out about Michael; he had become as watchful as an animal waiting to pounce...He said nothing but no longer allowed me to leave the house, not even to

go to college...He stopped friends, outings, telephone calls" (13). Dominance is a feeling of autonomy where the sense of sovereignty and liberty is lost. The continuous interference of Maya's father strongly deals with the characteristic of patriarchal dominance, which can be correlated to the grey life of a city where nature and the people are absent are most likely dependent on technology and, making their lives utterly dominant by the usage of urban ties. The continuous empowering of Maya's father shows a culture of ruling over and even how it hurts the sentiments of not only the character in the novel but also nature. In the words of Denise Delarosa Cummins, there is a theory related to dominance that helps us understand the concept of dominance. It says, "The core tenet of the theory is that social cognition (including the deontic advantage) was shaped by the continual need to survive within dominance (or status) hierarchies, the social organization that is ubiquitous in the societies of humans and nonhuman animals throughout evolutionary time. High-status individuals are essentially authorities in this type of social organization, monitoring and controlling the behavior of subordinates to maintain the priority of access to competitive resources (such as food and mating opportunities)." Cummins also indicates that there are five indicators of dominance, and she elucidates that "Dominance theory posits five main cognitive functions that were shaped by the exigencies of living within status hierarchies: rank discrimination, acquiring social norms, monitoring compliance with social norms, monitoring reciprocity, and flouting social norms through deception ." Maya's father, who continuously produces the terror of dominance, makes it quite relevant that he plays a cognitive function in overruling others regarding social status and empowerment.

This dominion can be associated with how nature falls prey at the hands of men and its dominance too. But, from another aspect, if we look into the psychology of Maya's father, who belongs to the opposite gender, Maya, it can be analyzed or anticipated that his character is a victim of loneliness. This critically low self-esteem man acknowledges power by dominion. How his uncompassionate nature bears his own daughter's life shows the terror of the natural environment at the hands of the dominion class or masses.

The novel also has a probable longing, need, and urge for freedom that takes continuous action. The male guidelines continuously evoke a sense of devaluation towards the feminine principle where women's liberation can be bestowed upon and looked upon. If we look at another context of the novel, we see that the contamination and the degeneration of the environment can't be ignored from a male perspective as well. Life in Delhi is depicted in the novel as a city of distress where climatic changes had already caused havoc in the biosphere, and the barrenness or emptiness prevails in the air of Delhi through the narration of Charu in the novel. To describe the atmosphere of Delhi, Charu mentions, "Here the sky was the slate grey color of village roofs, only dirtier. You could not see far at all until the next few towering pillars of buildings stood close together like walls with square holes... Beyond, there was a haze of smoke" (The Folded Earth, 214). The chaos, squalor, contamination, brutality, and darkness don't resonate with any peace or harmony and are a continuous hint towards the dreadfulness of city life, creating a mundane melancholy in the characters' minds. The various



symbols in Roy's novel that make sense of rejuvenation in the readers' minds and give recovery and freshness are through the vivid pictures of nature and landscape, which help restore positivity through the natural resources in our minds continuously. The various elements of nature project a free spirit in the characters.

Individuals and their ecosystems have new opportunities which get a spotlight through *The Folded Earth*. Hill tribes are depicted as simple, unpolluted, and serene, while Charu's experiences are described as tarnished, polluted, and dirt-strewn city life. People who live in the artificial conveniences and various governance are lacking in such rural hilly locations. Natural resources such as fresh air and pure water are scarce in cities. Country folk is known for their environmentally friendly ways of life, which are protected by a deep understanding of their environment and great thoughtfulness. The plebeians rely on to meet their everyday needs in the woods. The characters, both men and women, are projected on the autonomy of nature, and especially the women feel liberation.

### **Conclusion**

Through a critical reading of the texts, *The Hungry Tide* and *The Folded Earth*, we see how in the modern context of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century environment has become a significant concern, and it draws parallels to the crisis of gender and also a perpendicular angle how the activities of human itself are creating a demise of the beauty of nature. It also helps us to analyze that the joy of bonding with the wild is unsurmountable. The rich texture of nature, the spreading of love and visuals, and the connectivity follow through the novels' veins continuously. It also helps us to reconstruct the continuous patriarchal roles of the environment and the second gender. The stories constantly give us a realm of the flora and fauna where the interrelationship of man and nature are focused and fathomed. A serious concern for the environment is reflected through the voices of the various characters, which gives us a sheer understanding of the concern for the environment and humanity.

These novels create fresh insight into our lives, which makes us aware of the patterns of leading a good life with an advanced balance of ecosystems. The authors advocate how various ecological ratios can be obtained constructively. Defying the aspects of traditionalism, there's an aspect of the journey of self-realization that governs towards the end of the novel. The novels embark on the ecological concerns and the conservation efforts of the environment but also show how the significant problems get camouflaged under the modern decade. But these novels of the contemporary era help us to understand what infects the world and create reciprocal warmth for us to transcend into natural wealth and harmony.

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