

**The Impacts of Globalization on the Natural Environment: A
Case Study of *The God of Small Things*
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Abstract

This study attempts to point out the impacts of globalization, industrialization, and urbanization on the environment as mentioned by Roy (1997) in *The God of Small Things*. Roy (1997) has discussed several issues in the novel among which Ecocriticism is a central one. The study mainly deals with global, local, and government involvement in the devastation of the environment and its impacts on human life. Has Roy deliberately utilized such descriptions to point out the impacts of human actions on the destruction of nature? This question shall be answered in this study. Human greed for material progress, globalization, imperialism, and urbanization have destroyed the environment. This decay of natural resources results in the devastation of human life itself. This eco-suicidal tendency of human beings has been criticized by Roy. Various critics have highlighted this issue of the destruction of nature in the novel, but the current study delves deeper into the novel to point out this tendency of environmental destruction in detail. The study demonstrates how the author is haunted by local, national, and worldwide environmental destruction. Being a social worker her debt to environmental purity cannot be ignored. Roy (1997) has highlighted these issues in the novel.

Keywords: globalization, natural environment, urbanization, industrialization.

Introduction

Ecocriticism is the study of the environment and literature and their interconnection with each other. It is, to use the words of Cheryl Glotfelty (2007); “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. . . It takes an earth-centred approach to literature” (p. xviii). Due to the development of globalization and industrialization, the environment has gained greater significance. It is currently a topic for several academic fields, literature being one of them. Bandyopadhyay (2011) discusses the role of ecocriticism in her essay Arundhati Roy: *Environment and Literary Activism.*; “Ecocriticism studies, literary works to search for literary traces and ways of relating the state of the environment and ecology or nature with that of the culture.”(p. 6). This dimension has broadened the

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scope of literature and an essential issue of the environmental crisis has been addressed similarly. In today's globalized world environment is affected by various things like overpopulation, pollution, burning fossil fuels, deforestation, the development of industrialization and urbanization and is causing several problems in the world. This devastation of the natural environment by human beings has caused a great depression among sensitive people and they have addressed the issue in their concerning fields. As Glotfelty, & Fromm (1996) has highlighted in the introduction of their book, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*; "Most eco-critical works share a common motivation: the troubling awareness that we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging to the planet's basic life support system". Among such eco-critics, Roy (1997) is the one, who has raised her voice against the decaying process of the environment by human beings. Roy (1997) has addressed the issue of environmental degradation in Kerala, which is the representation of the global annihilation of the natural world. Due to the development of industrialization and urbanization, the environment has suffered from devastating influences. As Bandyopadhyay (2011) writes; "Roy points out how both farming and factories pollute nature and also hinted at the unholy nexus between globalization, greed, and lack of far-sight in post-colonial India. And added to this was pollution of the cultural environment, the hotel called 'Heritage' . . ." (p. 16). Roy (1997) has addressed this issue from various dimensions; she has highlighted the values of living in close affinity with nature.

Research Methodology

The research methodology employed in the present study adopts the 'qualitative content analysis technique'. The available data on the novel is analyzed using a qualitative design rather than a quantitative manner. As a literary theory "Ecocriticism" is the theoretical framework of the study. The environmental issues shown in 'The God of Small Things' will be investigated in the light of Ecocriticism. The term "Ecocriticism" is frequently used to refer to any element of the humanities that tackles environmental considerations, but it largely serves as a literary and cultural theory. Meeker (1972) first proposed the concept of "literary ecology," which Rueckert later coined the "-ism" of ecocriticism (1996). By the early 1990s, with the establishment of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE) at the Western Literary Association, Ecocriticism had become a generally accepted literary and cultural theory (1992). Through the intersection of literature, culture, and the surrounding environment, literary and cultural researchers can look into the ecological issue on a broad scale.

Discussion

Roy (1997) as an ecocritic precisely deals with Ecocriticism as highlighted by Glotfelty, & Fromm (1996). As he writes that ecocritics ask the questions like; "How is nature represented in this sonnet? In what ways and to what effect is the environmental crisis seeping into contemporary literature and popular culture?" (p. xix). As a keen observer of natural landscapes, the author has dealt with the environmental crisis effectively. She has emphasized the factors contributing to the environmental disaster and how people are responsible for the environment's decline and, ultimately, the quality of human life. She gives us a vivid and graphic picture of the natural surroundings. At the very beginning of the novel, she describes the environment of Ayemenem in a picturesque way. It is healthy and unaffected by various corruptions in the early times. The rural environment with its green landscape, rivers, fish, moths, other insects and trees is a place that attracts everyone. It is a health resort, unadulterated by the devastating influences of globalization, industrialization, and urbanization. As Roy (1997) observes; "It (the river) was warm, the water Grey-green. Like rippled silk. With fish in it with the sky and trees in it. And at night the broken yellow moon in it" (p. 123). But later on, this river was turned into a ghastly one, having no beauty and attraction.

In order to highlight the impacts of globalization on the natural world, Roy (1997) mentioned the condition of the natural world twenty-three years earlier in nineteen sixty-nine and then twenty-three years later in nineteen ninety-three. The lapse of twenty-three years and the assault of globalisation during this time have significantly harmed the ecosystem. As Roy (1997) mentions at the return of Estha to Ayemenem; "Some days he walked along the banks of the river that smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with the World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils" (p. 13) so the river which was clean and appealing at the time of his boyhood has now turned into a stream and is the cause of spreading various diseases. It has been turned into a place unfit even for the fish living in it by the brutality of human beings and due to the advent of globalization. This place has been turned into hell by global politics. The World Bank an international organization is the cause of all this destruction. Thus, globalization has brought havoc to the natural world. The environment has been affected in various ways by global powers. Roy (1997) wants to point out this issue that the environment should be taken care of. Therefore, globalization has been criticized by Roy for these reasons.

Similarly, industrialization has also caused great damage to the natural world and the natural surroundings have been affected

badly. The toxic effluents from the mills and factories have brought pollution and human life is in constant danger of various diseases. This environmental pollution is the cause of some contagious diseases. Roy (1997) observes in the novel that; “Upstream clean mothers washed clothes and pots in unadulterated factory effluents. People bathed” (p. 125), this was the state of the river after the establishment of industries and the advent of industrialization. It caused the rottenness of the water and the environment was full of smell arousing from this dirt. The whole Ayemenem town was in trouble due to this smell. Roy (1997) observes in the novel that; “On warm days the smell of shit lifted off the river and hovered over Ayemenem like a hat”(p.125) it all resulted in ill health for the town-dwellers and they had to suffer for this. So Roy (1997) mentions to the reader that human beings are themselves sowing the seeds of their devastation. The destruction of nature is the direct cause of the devastation of human existence from the surface of the earth. The author points out that before the emergence of industrialization, the river was very much powerful and attractive. It was the cause of awe and possessed great power, which produced enthusiasm among human beings. She writes; “Once it [the Meenachal river] had had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It has been just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its vicious, weedy surface like subtropical flying flowers”(P. 124). This is due to the carelessness of human beings in the natural environment that has caused such a great loss to nature. This is not only a local problem, but it causes the destruction of the environment for the whole world. The author has highlighted this global issue through local examples. She has also highlighted the problem of environmental devastation on the global level. This destruction occurs due to imperialism and war guilt.

Roy (1997) describes the issue of war guilt and its impact on the natural landscape in an effective manner. She has portrayed the calamity caused by the imperial powers in Vietnam. This imperialism has replaced natural greenery with several inches of lead and destructive chemicals. It has not only destroyed the lives of human and non-human living beings but has also rendered the place unsuitable for the coming generations to live there. It is a cause of environmental pollution in the whole area. Roy (1997) writes in the novel; “Further east, in a small country with similar landscape (jungles, rivers, rice-fields, communists), enough bombs were being dropped to cover all of it in six inches of steel” (p. 35). So this neo-colonialism and imperialism have brought havoc to the natural world and are making the world uninhabitable. War in flames along with humans lives in the natural landscape as well.

Apart from this Roy (1997) has also pointed out the local government's involvement in the destruction of the environment. The tourism department of Kerala also encroaches upon natural objects and devastates the rural surroundings. This department establishes hotels and cuts short the landscape by confining the river to a limited place and also destroying trees and greenery. The author has lamented the conversion of history house into a hotel and the confining of the Meenachal river to a limited place. She writes; "Years later, when Rahel returned to the river, it greeted her with ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed . . . Even though it was June and rain, the river was no more than a swollen drain now"(P. 124). So, cutting short this river and the land surrounding it increased pollution. It affected the lives of the fish and other water organisms.

Conclusion

Roy (1997) has depicted the environmental crisis in the modern world. There are so many reasons for this catastrophe to natural objects. The environment is being devastated by the global race for economic growth, the use of various chemicals for different purposes i.e. war, and pesticides and insecticides. It is also affected by the introduction of industrialization and urbanization. All these things combine to destroy the harmony of the natural world and render this globe an uninhabitable place for human beings to live in. Roy (1997) criticized all these crises in her novel. She has greater concerns about the use of these disastrous ways of dealing with the environment.

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