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Ego Vs. Ecosystem: Rethinking Anthropocentrism through Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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PNGB Government Model College, Kakopather, Tinsukia, India***Abstract**

Arundhati Roy's exploration of anthropocentric ego versus the ecosystem challenges readers to reexamine their relationship with nature and each other. Her narratives blend rich imagery, complex characters, and ethical dilemmas, inviting introspection and dialogue about humanity's role in preserving planetary health and biodiversity. By confronting anthropocentric biases and advocating for eco-ethical frameworks, Roy's works inspire environmental stewardship and holistic approaches to sustainability.

Keywords: Ethical Dilemma, Environmental Stewardship & Interdisciplinary Collaborations.

Introduction

Anthropocentric ego manifests in various forms of exploitation and disconnection from nature. Industries exploit natural resources recklessly, leading to deforestation, pollution, and habitat destruction. Urbanization and consumerism further disconnect people from the natural world, fostering a mindset of domination rather than harmony. Arundhati Roy's characters grappling with anthropocentric ego mirror real-world struggles where economic, political, and social systems prioritize human interests over ecological integrity. The consequences, as portrayed in her narratives, include environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and social injustices stemming from resource conflicts.

Anthropocentrism places humans at the center of the universe, viewing other beings and the environment primarily through the lens of human needs, desires, and interests. This worldview often leads to exploitation, disregard for non-human life forms, and unsustainable resource extraction. In Roy's narratives, characters driven by anthropocentric ego embody the human desire for power, control, and material wealth at the expense of the natural world. Their actions reflect societal structures that prioritize short-term gains and individualistic pursuits without considering broader ecological implications. Roy's writing makes us think about how our actions

affect others and the environment, urging us to consider the bigger picture beyond our immediate desires and to find ways to live harmoniously with nature and each other. The clash between anthropocentric ego and the ecosystem lies at the heart of many contemporary environmental and ethical debates. Arundhati Roy's works provide a compelling lens through which to explore this complex interplay.

Review of Literature

In *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy*, Gary Steiner evaluates the history of anthropocentrism in western philosophy and its effects on the treatment of non-humans. David Abram also examines how anthropocentrism has shaped our perception of the world and our relationship with nature in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. In his *Environmental Status and Policy in India*, V.S. Ganesamurthy highlights the environmental issue as one of the recurrent issues of mankind and he opines that any development policy adopted by the Indian government should be sensitive towards disaster preparedness but he suggests that growing anthropocentrism has been encouraging humans to use and overuse natural resources dampening the chance of a sustainable future.

Literary depiction of environmental problems is one of the major themes of some Indian writers and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is a potent example of the critique of anthropocentrism but in his *A Tiger in Malgudi* R.K. Narayan overtly criticized anthropocentrism for the present day environmental crisis. But Arundhati Roy's Publication of *The God of Small Things* offers a compelling narrative to portray human-nature relationship and presents a subtle yet profound scope for re-thinking of anthropocentrism by weaving together themes of colonialism, social hierarchy and environmental degradation.

Methodology

In the present research work, descriptive research methodology is adopted. Gary Steiner's work *Anthropocentrism and Its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* serve as primary resource whereas different article, books and other documents on anthropocentrism constitute the secondary data of the work.

Discussion

A literary practitioner bears significant responsibility in addressing environmental issues, as their craft has the power to awaken readers to the perils of climate change. Through imaginative and thought-provoking fiction, writers can illuminate the urgency of the crisis, stirring awareness and inspiring action. By weaving environmental themes into compelling narratives, they not only entertain but also educate and motivate their audience to confront and mitigate the impact of climate change. This unique ability to blend creativity with advocacy makes literary practitioners pivotal in the fight for a sustainable future. Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Indra Sinha, Kiran Desai are some Indian authors who use their narratives to raise awareness about environmental issues, emphasizing the urgent need for ecological sustainability.

In his *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Amitav Ghosh observes a notable shift in recent decades, wherein literary writers have started to engage with environmental issues. Despite this positive trend, Ghosh argues that the efforts to these writers remain insufficient in the face of the escalating global environmental crisis. He asserts that much more is required from the literary community to address these urgent concerns effectively. Ghosh foresees a

future where upcoming generations may hold writers accountable for their perceived inaction or inadequate response to the environmental catastrophes unfolding around them. Ghosh puts onus on contemporary writers to leverage their platforms, compellingly narrating the environmental crises and galvanizing readers into action. His words are worth quoting:

And now, when we look back upon that time, with our gaze reversed, having woken against our will to the knowledge that we have always been watched and judged by other eyes, what stands out? Is it possible that the arts and literature of this time will one day be remembered not for their daring, nor for their championing of freedom, but rather because of their complicity in the Great Derangement? Could it be said that stance of unyielding rage against the official order' that the artists and writers of this period adopted was actually, from the perspective of global warming, a form of collusion? Recent years have certainly demonstrated the truth of an observation that Guy Debord made long ago: that spectacular forms of rebelliousness are not, by any means, incompatible with a 'smug acceptance of what exists...for the simple reason that dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity'. (Ghosh, 2016)

Arundhati Roy's literary prowess extends beyond her exploration of human complexities; she also emerges as a writer deeply attuned to nature. Her evocative descriptions, thematic explorations, and advocacy work converge to portray nature not just as a backdrop but as a vibrant and integral part of her narratives. Roy's narratives often unfold against richly detailed natural landscapes that play crucial roles in shaping characters and events. In *The God of Small Things*; the lush Kerala backdrop with its rivers, forests, and monsoons becomes a character in itself, influencing characters' moods, decisions, and interactions. Roy's vivid imagery and sensory language immerse readers in the sights, sounds, and smells of the natural world, enhancing the narrative's emotional depth and resonance.

Roy underscores the interconnectedness of ecosystems and human well-being, challenging anthropocentric hierarchies. Nature in her works is not just a backdrop but a dynamic force intertwined with human lives, cultures, and narratives. Characters' relationships with landscapes, animals, and natural elements highlight this interdependence, emphasizing the ethical imperative to protect and respect non-human life forms. Through her writing and activism, Roy advocates for ecological ethics rooted in respect, reciprocity, and sustainability. She critiques exploitative practices, corporate greed, and environmental injustices, urging collective responsibility and systemic change. Roy's narratives serve as cautionary tales, urging readers to confront anthropocentric biases and embrace more balanced, eco-centric perspectives.

Nature as Symbolism

Beyond its aesthetic appeal, nature in Roy's works carries symbolic weight, reflecting and amplifying thematic motifs. The river in *The God of Small Things* symbolizes both life and death, fluidity and stagnation, echoing the characters' struggles and desires. Similarly, forests, storms, and animals serve as metaphors for societal upheavals, inner turmoil, and the resilience of life amidst adversity. Roy delves into the tensions between human activities and natural ecosystems, highlighting conflicts arising from resource exploitation, pollution, and ecological imbalances. Characters' actions often impact local environments, reflecting real-world struggles over land, water, and biodiversity conservation. Yet, amidst these conflicts, Roy also portrays moments of harmony and interconnectedness between humans and nature, underscoring the potential for coexistence and mutual respect.

Beyond her fiction, Roy's non-fiction works and activism center on environmental justice, indigenous rights, and sustainable development. Her critiques of large-scale dam projects, corporate greed, and environmental degradation highlight the interconnectedness of social, political, and

ecological issues. Through her writing and public engagement, Roy amplifies voices advocating for environmental protection, community empowerment, and climate action.

Anthropocentrism and Tragedy of Commons

Arundhati Roy's writing delves deep into the complexities of human nature, power dynamics, and societal structures, offering nuanced perspectives on issues like anthropocentrism and the tragedy of the commons. Roy often portrays characters driven by personal ambitions or societal pressures that prioritize individual gain over communal well-being. In *The God of Small Things*; the characters' actions disrupt the delicate social fabric, highlighting the conflict between personal desires and the greater good. This mirrors real-world struggles where human ego and short-term gains often clash with sustainable ecosystem management.

A Shift towards Ecocentrism: Mitigating anthropocentrism in Society

Mitigating anthropocentrism necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses conceptual shifts, policy interventions, and behavioral changes to recognize and safeguard the intrinsic value of non-human entities and ecosystems.

Firstly, advancing environmental ethics is fundamental. This involves promoting ethical paradigms such as biocentrism and ecocentrism, which emphasize the inherent worth of all life forms and ecological systems beyond their utility to humans. By reshaping ethical frameworks, society can better appreciate the interconnectedness and value of all living beings.

Secondly, educational initiatives play a crucial role in raising awareness and fostering understanding. Developing and implementing educational programs across various levels can cultivate awareness about the ramifications of anthropocentrism, while also advocating for alternative viewpoints that prioritize biodiversity conservation and sustainable living practices. Education empowers individuals to make informed decisions and adopt behaviors that are conducive to environmental preservation.

Thirdly, legal recognition of nature's rights is essential for providing legal protections against exploitation and degradation. Advocating for legal frameworks that confer rights to nature ensures that ecosystems and non-human entities are afforded the necessary safeguards to thrive independently of human interests. This approach shifts the focus from viewing nature as property to recognizing it as a rights-bearing entity deserving of protection.

Fourthly, sustainable policy formulation is critical for aligning societal priorities with environmental conservation. By formulating and endorsing policies that prioritize sustainability and biodiversity preservation over immediate economic interests, governments and institutions can promote practices such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy adoption, and responsible resource management. Policy interventions provide the regulatory framework necessary to drive systemic change towards more environmentally conscious practices.

Fifthly, interdisciplinary collaboration is key to devising comprehensive strategies that integrate ecological, social, and ethical considerations into environmental conservation initiatives. By fostering collaborative efforts among researchers, policymakers, ethicists, and indigenous communities, it becomes possible to develop holistic approaches that address the complex interplay of factors influencing environmental sustainability.

Sixthly, cultural and social advocacy efforts are essential for challenging prevailing anthropocentric ideologies and promoting attitudes of empathy and reverence towards all life forms. Through cultural interventions, media campaigns, and public dialogues, it becomes possible to reshape societal norms and foster lifestyles that align with minimal environmental footprints. By elevating alternative narratives and values, advocacy efforts can contribute to broader cultural shifts

towards more ecocentric world views. Lastly, investing in research and technological innovation is crucial for identifying and mitigating anthropocentric biases across diverse domains. By allocating resources towards research endeavors and technological innovations that enhance biodiversity and ecological resilience, society can develop solutions that address the root causes of environmental degradation while also promoting sustainable development. From green technologies to ecosystem monitoring tools, innovation plays a vital role in advancing our understanding of and response to environmental challenges. By synergistically implementing these strategies, societies can work towards ameliorating anthropocentrism, fostering sustainable coexistence between humans, nature, and diverse ecosystems.

Conclusion

Roy's narratives frequently challenge anthropocentric views that place humans at the center of the universe, advocating for a more holistic perspective that values all life forms and ecosystems. Her environmental activism, reflected in essays and speeches, critiques exploitative practices that prioritize human interests at the expense of nature, indigenous communities, and future generations. Through her storytelling, Roy explores how unchecked human activities can lead to the depletion or degradation of shared resources, echoing the tragedy of the commons concept. She draws attention to issues like land exploitation, water privatization, and environmental degradation, emphasizing the need for collective responsibility and sustainable practices to prevent such tragedies.

By weaving these themes into her narratives, Arundhati Roy prompts readers to reflect on their roles within larger systems, encouraging empathy, accountability, and a reevaluation of anthropocentric paradigms in favor of more balanced, eco-centric perspectives. Think of this as a conflict between what individuals want for themselves versus what is good for everyone and the environment. Imagine a story where a character wants to build a big factory because it will make them rich, but this factory will also pollute the air and harm the local wildlife. The clash here is between personal gain (ego) and the health of the ecosystem.

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