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Nature's Voice: An Ecocritical Study of Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Desai's *Cry, The Peacock*

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INTRODUCTION

In many facets of our lives, the environment plays a crucial role. The majority of ecological topics can be investigated by literature and culture researchers through the interplay of literature, culture, and physical environments. As part of the multidisciplinary study of nature, literary scholars look at texts that highlight environmental concerns and the various forms of literature that address nature. Because they are complementary to one another, human environments and situations cannot be separated. Being socially conscious, Arundhati Roy shows concern for the environment. As a result, environmental concerns are constantly in the news. In her literature, uncontested writings, and conversations, she fervently expresses concern for the environment. According to her, environmental concerns are among the minor things that Indian society has long disregarded.

Roy expertly blends nature and her subject matter. She provides a detailed explanation of how people use nature to modernise themselves. She expresses the opinion that nature is being silently harmed by human greed and insensitivity, which has consequences for human life. In order to demonstrate to the readers how certain places were in the past and how they are now, the author employs flashbacks and flashforwards throughout the book. Thinkers Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai are very concerned about the environment and social issues. They are serious environmentalists who do more than just preach good ideas from an ivory tower, as evidenced by their award-winning novels, *The God Small Things* and *Cry, the Peacock*.

METHODOLOGY

The following essential elements are part of the eco-criticism methodology:

1. **Ecological perspective:** Eco-criticism uses ecological theory to analyse how literature both reflects and shapes our relationship with nature.
2. **Multidisciplinary approach:** Eco-criticism draws on a variety of disciplines for its analysis, including literary studies, ecology, environmental science, and cultural studies. This multidisciplinary approach enables eco-critics to analyse the complex relationships among literary texts, the environment, and society.
3. **Careful reading:** Eco-critics closely study literature to ascertain how it portrays the natural world. This is accomplished by closely examining the language, imagery, and subjects that have a naturalistic or environmental tone.
4. **Historical and cultural contexts:** Eco-critics consider the social, historical, and cultural settings in which literature is produced when assessing it. This means examining how cultural views of nature have changed over time, as well as how social, political, and economic issues have affected the environment.
5. **Advocacy and activism:** Eco-critics usually view their work as an expression of advocacy and activism, attempting to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote eco-friendly practices. This may mean engaging in public debates regarding environmental policy or communicating with environmental organisations.

In general, eco-criticism is characterised by a commitment to understanding the relationship between literature and the natural world as well as a desire to encourage more sustainable and ecologically friendly practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Text 1

In his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell explores the growing field of environmental criticism and forecasts potential future advancements. Buell asserts that environmental criticism is a relatively new and quickly expanding field that still has a long way to go before realising its full potential.

One of the book's central themes is the notion that environmental criticism ought to take a more multidisciplinary stance and move beyond its present emphasis on how nature is portrayed in literature. Buell argues that environmental critique should engage with fields such as ecology, environmental science, and environmental history to understand the complex relationships between humans and nature.

According to Buell, environmental criticism ought to adopt a more activist stance and concentrate on topics other than literary analysis, like promoting environmental causes and increasing public awareness of environmental issues. He counsels those who criticise the environment to become more active in social and political campaigns that promote environmental preservation and sustainability.

All things considered; Buell's book provides an intriguing examination of the potential advancements in environmental criticism in the future. Buell argues that by encouraging a more activist and multidisciplinary approach, environmental criticism can improve its capacity to raise environmental awareness and further environmental goals.

Text 2

The book *Walden, or Living in the Woods*, by American author and philosopher Henry David Thoreau was initially published in 1854. The book is a reflection of Thoreau's two years of independent and simple living in a cottage he built himself near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, between 1845 and 1847.

In the book, Thoreau discusses his everyday activities, his thoughts on society, the economy, and politics, as well as his observations of nature. He argues that living simply in nature could provide a richer, more satisfying lifestyle than the fast-paced, materialistic life of society.

Thoreau also explores the concepts of autonomy and self-sufficiency, suggesting that readers should choose their own paths instead of simply following social conventions. The negative effects of industrialisation and the separation from nature are also criticised by him.

Walden is now considered a classic of American literature and a foundational work of the environmental movement. It keeps making readers think about their own lives and the ways that society impacts the environment.

Text 3

Ecology Without Nature, written by British philosopher Timothy Morton, was published in 2007. The book challenges traditional ecological thinking and argues for a fresh approach to ecology that considers the interconnectedness of all things and the complexity of the natural world. Morton argues that "nature" is a static, idealised idea that is separate from people and their actions. He argues that instead of viewing nature as a dynamic, ever-changing entity, this idea has produced a false dichotomy between humans and nature and encouraged the idea that nature should be preserved.

Rather, Morton proposes an ecological viewpoint focused on the interdependence of all things and the complex relationships between different species and their surroundings. He argues that we have to develop a new language and new ways of thinking about the natural world if we are to better understand and manage the environmental challenges we face.

Ecology Without Nature, taken as a whole, challenges readers to question their assumptions about nature and to embrace a more complex and subtle knowledge of ecology.

1. Exploring criticism in *The God of Small Things* and *Cry, the Peacock*

Renowned environmental critic Lawrence Buell looked at *The God of Small Things* from an eco-critical perspective. Buell believes the book to be a vital record for the development of environmental criticism. Buell's study focusses on the three main topics of environmental devastation, the value of traditional knowledge, and the politics of environmentalism in the book.

"An environmental text is any writing in which nonhuman nature—not just human interest—is a presence sufficiently articulated to affect the human—or humanly imagined—course of events." (*The Future of Environmental Criticism*, p.7, Buell, Lawrence).

To start, Buell notes that the book shows Kerala, India's declining natural scenery. The book strongly emphasises how human behaviour influences the natural world; Buell claims this focus reveals the need of a more thorough and long-term environmental conservation plan. By showing how environmental deterioration directly affects the characters' lives, Buell argues the book emphasises the need for a more humanitarian approach to environmentalism.

Second, Buell highlights the importance of traditional knowledge in preserving the environment. The book presents the traditional knowledge of the indigenous people, which is based on a deep understanding of nature. Buell claims that this subject highlights the importance of acknowledging the role that local knowledge plays in protecting the environment and integrating indigenous knowledge into environmental laws.

Buell concludes the book by talking about environmentalist politics. Because the novel illustrates the unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of development programs, he contends that this highlights the necessity of environmental justice. According to Buell, the novel emphasises the need to address the social and political facets of environmentalism and ensure that environmental policies are developed to benefit all facets of society.

All things considered, Buell's ecocritical analysis of *The God of Small Things* highlights the book's significance to the evolution of environmental criticism. The book can be a helpful tool for raising public awareness of important issues like environmental degradation, traditional knowledge, and environmentalism politics.

Several of the main themes of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* can be analysed in light of the direction that eco-criticism is taking, even though Lawrence Buell hasn't specifically looked at the book.

Maya, the main character in the book *Cry, the Peacock*, has a mental breakdown as a result of her obsession with the idea that the world is ending. Her sense of suffocation can be seen in these lines: "*The summer heat lay heavy and still, like a shroud, muffling the cries of the birds, the rustle of the leaves, the hum of life.*" (*Cry, the Peacock*, p 95) Human suffering, environmental degradation, and societal collapse are all topics covered in the book. From an ecocritical perspective, the novel highlights the significance of understanding the relationships between human behaviour and the environment as well as the impact of environmental degradation on human well-being.

One of the main themes of the book is the devastation of the natural world caused by human activity. Maya is acutely aware of the environmental destruction taking place all around her and is appalled by the idea that the planet is ending. The story illustrates how the environment deteriorates in urban areas and how pollution and industry affect the natural world. This issue highlights the importance of understanding the complex relationships between human behaviour and the environment as well as the pressing need to address environmental degradation.

Another major theme of the book is its examination of the ways in which social disintegration and personal crises fuel environmental degradation. According to the novel, Maya's mental breakdown is a result of the social and personal stressors she encounters, and environmental disaster and emotional crisis are linked. This topic highlights the significance of understanding the psychological and social facets of environmental degradation and the necessity of addressing these issues as part of environmental preservation initiatives.

The book also highlights the necessity of a longer-term, more thorough approach to environmental preservation. Maya's obsession with the end of the world reflects her desire for a more sustainable and meaningful life. *As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian-Nights...*" (*Cry, The Peacock*, p. 41) This quote highlights the need to replace a narrow focus on economic development with a more compassionate approach to environmental conservation.

All things considered, *Cry, the Peacock* makes a substantial contribution to the development of environmental criticism. The novel highlights the need for a more thorough and long-term approach to environmental conservation, the significance of understanding the interdependence of human behaviour and the environment, and the role that individual crises and societal disintegration play in environmental degradation. The book might be a potent tool for raising awareness of these issues, which are essential for addressing the contemporary world's environmental problems.

2. Analysis of Natural landscape

Ecocriticism is the term for literature that evaluates the relationship between literary works and the natural world. It examines how our cultural perspectives on the environment are reflected in, challenged by, or represented in literature. The portrayal of nature in Arundhati Roy's book *The God of Small Things* and its relationship to Henry David Thoreau's writing can be examined using an ecocritical lens.

Henry David Thoreau was a mid-nineteenth-century American author and naturalist. His most well-known piece is "*Walden*" which is a reflection on his two years of living by himself in the woods. Thoreau advocated independence, thrift, and a deep appreciation of nature. Many people attribute the current environmental movement to his work.

The novel *The God of Small Things* heavily relies on the natural world. The novel is set in a small village in Kerala, India, surrounded by a sea and rivers. The natural world plays a vital role in *The God of Small Things* novel. In a little village in Kerala, India, where there are rivers and a sea, the novel's setting is where the characters can be found. The narrative eloquently depicts the natural world, from the sound of the monsoon rains to the scent of the river. The author highlights the significance of nature in the story and uses it as a backdrop for the characters' lives.

One way to analyse the book through an ecocritical lens is to look at how it portrays the relationship between people and the natural world. Thoreau believed that people should live in harmony with the environment while also protecting and preserving it. For their own purposes, however, the characters in *The God of Small Things* often mistreat or destroy nature. For example, the construction of a dam on a river in the novel results in the eviction of the local population and the destruction of the river's ecosystem.

Another way to read the novel from an ecocritical point of view is to look at how it depicts the interconnectedness of all living things. Thoreau believed that humans were a part of nature and that all living things were interrelated. It is implied that the characters in *The God of Small Things* have a close bond with the natural world. "*Velutha's deep connection with nature is evident in his craftsmanship, using natural materials to create objects, symbolizing harmony between humans and the environment.*" (*The God of Small Things*, p. 183)

Lastly, an ecocritical examination of *The God of Small Things* in the context of Henry David Thoreau would examine the book's portrayal of the interconnectedness of all living things and the interactions between people and the natural world. The novel envisions a future in which nature is regularly destroyed or exploited for human benefit, despite Thoreau's advocacy of coexisting with it. The novel also demonstrates how the characters are influenced by the cycles and rhythms of nature and are intricately intertwined with it.

The 1963 book *Cry, the Peacock*, written by Indian author Anita Desai, tells the story of Maya, a young woman trapped in an unhappy marriage and tormented by visions of her own death. Among the topics covered in the book are the pursuit of meaning in life, the conflict between tradition and modernity, and the oppression of women in patriarchal cultures. An ecocritical reading of *Cry, the Peacock* would look at how the book depicts the relationship between humans and nature and how it connects to Henry David Thoreau's views on the subject.

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." (Chapter 2, "Where I Lived, And What I Lived For", Walden, David, Henry).

Thoreau emphasised the importance of respecting and living in harmony with nature. In "*Walden*," he describes his experiences living in a hut in the woods and becoming fully immersed in the cycles and rhythms of nature. He believed that people should be motivated to live sustainably and in balance with the environment by the restorative and healing qualities of nature.

In *Cry, the Peacock*, the natural world is central and is often used to symbolise the characters' inner selves and issues. In her descriptions, Maya is often compared to animals or natural phenomena, like peacocks in the rain or birds in cages. Maya's sense of entrapment and her longing for freedom and escape are captured in these images. In the book, the natural world is presented as a source of wonder and beauty as well as peril and uncertainty.

The focus of an ecocritical reading of the book can be on how Maya's interactions with nature reflect her emotional state. She often links her death predictions to natural events, like the sound of rain on the roof or a bird soaring overhead. These incidents hint at Maya's awareness of nature and her quest for life's meaning and purpose.

The book also demonstrates how easily individuals can misuse and destroy nature to achieve their own goals. Maya's architect husband Gautama wants to build a modern home on her property, but doing so would destroy the natural landscape. The conflict between tradition and modernity, as well as between humans and the natural world, is a recurring theme in the book.

To sum up, an ecocritical examination of *Cry, the Peacock* in the context of Henry David Thoreau would examine how the novel portrays the relationship between humans and the natural world as well as how it mirrors the characters' inner lives and challenges. The book argues that although people can find meaning and purpose in nature, they can also misuse and destroy it to further their own agendas. In the end, the story examines the harmony between tradition and modernity, as well as between the natural and human worlds.

3. Understanding relationship between Nature and Human

Ecocriticism is a branch of literature criticism that emphasises the relationship between literature and the natural world. It examines how literary works tackle environmental issues and aid in our understanding of the interactions between people and the natural world. An ecocritical analysis of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* can reveal how it tackles ecological issues and themes.

In his book "*Ecology Without Nature*" Timothy Morton argues that the concept of nature is problematic because it upholds the notion that it is something beyond our control and should be used for our own purposes. Rather, he suggests that we should accept that humans are not separate from nature and concentrate on understanding how everything is interconnected.

An ecocritical work called *The God of Small Things* challenges the notion that nature exists apart from humans. The novel, which takes place in Kerala, India, examines the complex relationship that exists between the local population and the environment. In addition to being the story's setting, the Keralan landscape is an important part of it. The book's characters demonstrate how all living things are interconnected by both influencing and being influenced by their environment.

The narrative also looks at how human actions impact the environment. A dammed river serves as the story's backdrop, resulting in both ecological degradation and human eviction. The forces of capitalism and modernisation often thwart the efforts of the novel's characters, who are portrayed as attempting to live in harmony with their surroundings.

"Ecology is profoundly about coexistence." (Chapter 1, p.15, Ecology Without Nature, Morton, Timothy).

The complex relationships between humans and non-human animals are also explored in the book. Velutha, a gifted and untouchable carpenter, has a deep connection to nature, particularly the river and its inhabitants. It is shown that he is able to communicate with animals and understand their needs and desires. Because it is perceived as a challenge to the established social order, his close friendship with Ammu, a wealthy member of the upper caste, ultimately leads to his demise.

An ecocritical analysis of *The God of Small Things* can be used to look at how Arundhati Roy handles ecological themes and issues. The book challenges the notion that nature exists independently of humans and illustrates how all living things are interdependent. It also looks into the complex relationships between humans and non-human animals as well as how human activity affects the environment.

The book *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai explores the complex interpersonal relationships that exist in the context of a rapidly urbanising and developing India." Indian ecocriticism, a literary movement that emphasises the interdependence of humans and their environment, has been exemplified by the book.

One of the core concepts of eco-criticism is "*Ecology without Nature*" which argues that the separation of humans from nature is an untrue dichotomy. Instead of the traditional view of nature as a subject to be governed and utilised by humans, this concept emphasises the interdependence of all living things.

Desai portrays nature as a source of both beauty and fear in *Cry, the Peacock*. She emphasises the importance of preserving a relationship with the environment and how urbanisation and modernisation have caused people to become more disconnected from their natural surroundings. The protagonist, Maya, has a deep bond with nature and often seeks solace in it. Gautama, her husband, is disconnected from nature and attempts to control it with his garden. This contrast highlights the tension between humans and the environment in a rapidly changing world.

The novel's destruction of the peacock's habitat is another example of Desai's criticism of the exploitative relationship between humans and nature. "*Do you not hear the peacocks' call in the wild? Are they not blood-chilling, their shrieks of pain? 'Pia Pia', they cry. 'Lover, lover. Mio, mio. I die, I die ...'*" (*Cry, the Peacock*, p. 95) The peacock, a symbol of the elegance and beauty of nature, is killed by the protagonist's spouse, Gautama, in a fit of rage. This incident echoes the novel's broader criticism of how modernisation has harmed the natural world and highlights how violent and destructive human interaction with the environment can be.

Finally, by highlighting the importance of the connection between humans and nature as well as the detrimental effects of modernisation on the environment, Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* serves as an example of eco-criticism. The concept of "*Ecology without Nature*" which highlights the interdependence of all living things and challenges the widely held belief that nature should be governed by humans, is supported by the book's themes and motifs.

CONCLUSION

An example of eco-criticism, a literary technique that examines the relationship between humans and their environment, can be found in Arundhati Roy's book *The God of Small Things*. The novel, which is set in Kerala, India, highlights the negative impacts of environmental exploitation and neglect on the planet while examining the complex relationships between humans and nature.

One of the main themes of the book is the destruction of the environment caused by the expansion of industry and development. Roy's portrayals of Kerala's rivers, forests, and landscapes are tinged with a sense of loss and regret as a result of human activity's gradual destruction of these natural features. The story highlights how the natural world is often overlooked and undervalued, leading to its destruction.

One of the main themes of *The God of Small Things* is the interconnectedness of all living things. The importance of recognising and comprehending the relationships among humans, animals, and the environment is emphasised throughout the narrative. This interdependence is reflected in the novel's structure, which intertwines multiple plot lines to create a web of connected relationships.

Roy also criticises how human exploitation of the environment frequently leads to inequality and social injustice. The story's characters are impacted by environmental degradation, which disproportionately affects the weakest and poorest populations. Thus, the narrative highlights the importance of comprehending the connections between social and environmental issues.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, which explores the complex relationship between humans and their environment and highlights the detrimental effects of human exploitation and neglect on the natural world, is therefore a powerful example of eco-criticism. Through its examination of social justice and interconnection, the novel emphasises the need for a more thorough approach to environmental issues, one that acknowledges the importance of protecting and preserving our natural world.

One literary work that exemplifies eco-criticism—a method that examines how humans interact with their surroundings—is *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai. The novel highlights the detrimental effects of urbanisation on the environment and is set in a modernising and rapidly urbanising India. The main theme of the book is how people have disconnected from nature. While her husband, Gautama, is more concerned with trying to control nature through his obsession with his garden, the main character, Maya, has a deep connection to and finds solace in nature. This contrast highlights the tension between humans and the environment in a rapidly changing world.

The exploitative relationship between humans and nature is also criticised in the story. The peacock, a symbol of the elegance and beauty of nature, is killed by Gautama in a fit of wrath. This incident is in line with the novel's larger critique of the detrimental effects of civilisation on the natural world and highlights how violent and destructive human interaction with the environment can be.

Desai also stresses the importance of comprehending the connections between environmental and social issues. The story's characters are impacted by environmental degradation, which disproportionately affects the weakest and poorest populations. As a result, the book emphasises the need for a more thorough approach to environmental issues, one that recognises the importance of protecting and valuing our natural surroundings.

Finally, by drawing attention to the complex relationships between humans and their surroundings as well as the detrimental impacts of civilisation on the natural world, *Cry the Peacock* is a powerful illustration of eco-criticism. The book emphasises the importance of comprehending the connections between social and environmental issues and the need for a more all-encompassing approach to environmental challenges that values and protects our natural world.

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