

# Eco-Critical Perspectives in Indian English Literature

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 16 Jun 2025; Received in revised form: 09 Jul 2025; Accepted: 18 Jul 2025; Available online: 22 Jul 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> Eco-criticism, Indian English literature, postcolonial ecology, indigenous wisdom, environmental justice.</p>	<p><i>This article explores the evolving field of eco-criticism in Indian English literature, analyzing how literary texts address environmental issues within postcolonial and cultural frameworks. By examining works by authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Das, the study reveals how Indian English literature critiques environmental degradation, promotes sustainability, and integrates indigenous ecological wisdom. Using a postcolonial eco-critical lens, the article investigates key environmental themes including climate change, deforestation, and the ethics of development. It highlights how these literary works foster ecological awareness and ethical responsibility while challenging anthropocentric worldviews. Additionally, the article emphasizes the need for inclusive and decolonized eco-critical approaches, recognizing indigenous voices and advocating for a sustainable literary future in a globalized world.</i></p>

## I. INTRODUCTION

Eco-criticism, an interdisciplinary approach examining the relationship between literature and the environment, provides a vital lens for analyzing Indian English literature. Defined as the study of literature's engagement with the physical world (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996), eco-criticism highlights how texts reflect environmental concerns. In India, with its diverse ecosystems and colonial history, eco-criticism intersects with postcolonial theory to address ecological legacies of colonialism and globalization (Mukherjee, 2010). Indian English literature, spanning novels, poetry, and essays, engages with issues like deforestation, pollution, and climate change while incorporating cultural and indigenous perspectives. Writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Kamala Das explore tensions between modernization and ecological preservation, critiquing anthropocentric attitudes. This article analyzes how Indian English literature articulates environmental

crises, integrates indigenous ecological wisdom, and promotes sustainability, drawing on postcolonial eco-critical frameworks to underscore its contribution to global ecological discourse (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; Nixon, 2011).

### Eco-Criticism: A Theoretical Framework

Eco-criticism explores how literature represents nature and critiques human-centered worldviews, as outlined by Cheryll Glottfelty (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996). In the Indian context, it aligns with postcolonial theory, addressing environmental degradation rooted in colonial exploitation and capitalist policies (Mukherjee, 2010). Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's postcolonial eco-criticism highlights how colonial histories have shaped ecological crises in the Global South (Mukherjee, 2010). Indian English literature, with its bilingual and bicultural sensibilities, provides a unique platform for these intersections. Scholars like Greg Garrard argue that eco-criticism challenges

anthropocentrism by emphasizing non-human perspectives (Garrard, 2012). Indian philosophies, such as Advaita Vedanta, which stress interconnectedness, resonate with eco-critical principles (Naess, 1989). By blending eco-critical and postcolonial lenses, Indian writers critique industrialization's ecological impact and advocate for ethical human-nature relationships, contributing significantly to global environmental narratives (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011).

### **Environmental Themes in Indian English Literature**

Indian English literature vividly portrays environmental crises, intertwining them with social and political issues. Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) is set in the Sundarbans, a fragile ecosystem threatened by climate change, exploring human-nature conflicts and critiquing conservation policies that displace indigenous communities (Ghosh, 2004). Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) uses the polluted Meenachil River as a symbol of ecological and cultural decay due to industrialization (Roy, 1997). Kamala Das's poetry, such as *An Introduction*, employs nature imagery to challenge patriarchal and urban constraints, aligning with eco-feminist principles (Das, 1973; Merchant, 1996). Contemporary poets like Tishani Doshi address climate change in works like *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods* (Doshi, 2017), advocating collective responsibility. These texts critique anthropocentric attitudes and promote ecological harmony, reflecting a commitment to environmental awareness (Buell, 2005; Clark, 2011).

### **Amitav Ghosh and the Anthropocene**

Amitav Ghosh's works, notably *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Great Derangement* (2016), offer profound eco-critical insights into the Anthropocene. *The Hungry Tide* portrays the Sundarbans as a dynamic ecosystem where human and non-human lives intersect, highlighting climate change's impact on vulnerable regions (Ghosh, 2004). The novel critiques conservation efforts that prioritize wildlife over indigenous communities, reflecting postcolonial eco-critical concerns (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010). In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh argues that modern literature has neglected climate change, urging writers to reimagine narrative forms to address ecological crises (Ghosh, 2016). His eco-critical perspective

emphasizes the need for stories that confront Anthropocene challenges, such as rising sea levels and habitat loss (Chakrabarty, 2009). Ghosh's works encourage a rethinking of literary responsibility, fostering narratives that promote environmental awareness and ethical engagement with the natural world (Heise, 2008; Morton, 2010).

### **Arundhati Roy and Environmental Justice**

Arundhati Roy's fiction and non-fiction intertwine environmental and social justice, critiquing development-driven ecological destruction. In *The God of Small Things* (1997), the polluted Meenachil River symbolizes the erosion of ecological and cultural integrity due to industrialization (Roy, 1997). Her essays in *The Cost of Living* (1999) critique mega-dams like the Narmada, exposing their environmental and human costs (Roy, 1999). Roy's work aligns with environmental justice movements, emphasizing the disproportionate impact of ecological crises on marginalized communities (Nixon, 2011). Her eco-critical stance challenges capitalist models of progress, advocating for sustainable development and indigenous rights (Shiva, 1993). By blending narrative and activism, Roy highlights literature's role in resisting environmental exploitation and fostering ethical responsibility (Guha, 2000; Martinez-Alier, 2002). Her works remain a powerful call for ecological and social equity in a postcolonial context.

### **Kamala Das and Eco-Feminism**

Kamala Das's poetry, including *An Introduction* and *The Old Playhouse*, reflects an eco-feminist perspective, portraying nature as a refuge from patriarchal and urban constraints (Das, 1973). Her imagery of trees, rivers, and seas evokes ecological interconnectedness, challenging anthropocentric and patriarchal ideologies (Merchant, 1996). Das's work aligns with eco-feminism, linking the exploitation of nature with the oppression of women (Warren, 2000). Her poetry critiques urbanization's alienation from nature, advocating for a spiritual reconnection with the environment (Plumwood, 1993). By celebrating nature's agency, Das reimagines human-nature relationships as symbiotic rather than exploitative (Mies & Shiva, 1993). Her eco-critical contributions highlight the emotional and cultural dimensions of environmental consciousness, inspiring readers to rethink their relationship with the natural world in a

rapidly urbanizing India (Braidotti, 1994; Gaard, 1993).

### **Indigenous Ecological Wisdom**

Indian English literature draws on indigenous ecological wisdom, rooted in traditional practices and philosophies. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) portrays the village's sacred grove as a symbol of ecological and spiritual harmony, disrupted by colonial exploitation (Rao, 1938). Mahasweta Devi's *Pterodactyl*, *Puran Sahay*, and *Pirtha* highlights tribal communities' ecological knowledge, contrasting it with modernization's destructive impact (Devi, 1995). These texts emphasize the sustainability of indigenous practices, which prioritize coexistence with nature (Gadgil & Guha, 1995). Indigenous perspectives offer alternative models for addressing environmental crises, challenging Western-centric eco-critical frameworks (Adamson, 2012). By foregrounding tribal voices, Indian English literature advocates for inclusive environmentalism that respects cultural diversity (Banerjee, 2014). These narratives underscore the relevance of indigenous wisdom in shaping sustainable futures in a postcolonial context (Crosby, 2003; LaDuke, 1999).

### **Postcolonial Ecology and Globalization**

Postcolonial eco-criticism examines how colonial legacies and globalization exacerbate environmental degradation. R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* critiques the erosion of rural landscapes due to urbanization, reflecting the ecological costs of modernization (Narayan, 1943). Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof* celebrates the Himalayas' beauty while lamenting their exploitation (Bond, 1956). These narratives highlight the tension between development and ecological preservation in a postcolonial context (Mukherjee, 2010). Global capitalism's impact on India's ecosystems, from deforestation to pollution, is a recurring theme in Indian English literature (Shiva, 2005). Writers critique the commodification of nature, advocating for localized, sustainable practices (Escobar, 1995). By addressing globalization's environmental toll, Indian English literature fosters critical awareness of the need for ethical and ecological balance (Guha, 2006; O'Brien, 2017).

### **Sustainability and Ethical Responsibility**

Indian English literature advocates for sustainability and ethical responsibility toward the environment.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) explores ecological and cultural disruptions in the Himalayas, emphasizing sustainable practices (Desai, 2006). Tishani Doshi's poetry, such as *Girls coming Out of the Woods*, addresses climate change and environmental loss, urging collective action (Doshi, 2017). These works align with global sustainability discourses, advocating for responsible resource use and ecological justice (Sachs, 1999). Indian writers draw on cultural narratives to promote environmental ethics, blending traditional wisdom with modern challenges (Kothari, 2014). Their works inspire readers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and challenge exploitative systems, contributing to a broader environmental movement (Slovic, 2010). By foregrounding ethical responsibility, Indian English literature plays a crucial role in shaping environmentally conscious futures (Heise, 2016).

## **II. CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Eco-critical scholarship in Indian English literature faces challenges, including the dominance of Western frameworks that may marginalize indigenous perspectives (Mukherjee, 2010). The urban bias in Indian English writing often overshadows rural and tribal voices, necessitating a more inclusive approach (Banerjee, 2014). Future studies should explore untranslated regional literature to enrich eco-critical discourse (DeLoughrey & Handley, 2011). Integrating digital humanities with eco-criticism could provide new insights into environmental narratives, leveraging technology to analyze texts and their ecological contexts (Cohen & LeMenager, 2016). Collaborative research with indigenous scholars can decolonize eco-critical frameworks, ensuring cultural sensitivity (Adamson, 2012). By addressing these challenges, eco-critical studies can amplify marginalized voices and foster a holistic understanding of India's environmental narratives, contributing to global ecological discourse (Slovic, 2016).

## **III. CONCLUSION**

The exploration of eco-critical perspectives in Indian English literature reveals a rich and multifaceted engagement with environmental concerns deeply

rooted in India's cultural, historical, and ecological landscapes. Through novels, poetry, and essays, writers like Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Das, and others articulate the urgent realities of climate change, deforestation, pollution, and ecological imbalance. Their works transcend mere environmental description, offering nuanced critiques of development, industrialization, and globalization, while foregrounding the ethical and emotional dimensions of human-nature relationships.

Indian English literature not only exposes the environmental injustices faced by marginalized communities but also brings forth indigenous ecological wisdom as a viable alternative to exploitative systems. By blending postcolonial theory with eco-criticism, these literary texts challenge dominant anthropocentric and Western paradigms, proposing culturally rooted, sustainable practices. The integration of eco-feminist and environmental justice perspectives further enriches this discourse, highlighting the intersectionality of gender, class, and ecology.

However, challenges remain—particularly the underrepresentation of rural and tribal voices, and the dominance of Western theoretical frameworks. Future scholarship must address these gaps by incorporating regional literatures, translating indigenous voices, and adopting interdisciplinary approaches such as digital eco-criticism and collaborative research with indigenous communities.

In a world increasingly threatened by ecological crises, Indian English literature plays a vital role in cultivating environmental consciousness. By imagining sustainable futures and advocating ethical responsibility, these literary works contribute meaningfully to global environmental thought. As eco-critical studies evolve, Indian literature will continue to serve as a powerful medium for environmental reflection, resistance, and renewal.

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