



ENGLISH LITERATURE &
CULTURE JOURNAL
(JCREL)

VOLUME-2 ISSUE-8 AUGUST 2026

*Exploring Voices.
Celebrating Culture.*



A Platform for
Critical Thought,
Creative Expression &
Cultural Dialogue



DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Bringing together
scholarly work from
varied lenses.



GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

Engaging with ideas
across cultures
and borders.



IDEAS THAT INSPIRE

Encouraging original
thinking and literary
exploration.



RESEARCH WITH REAL IMPACT

Promoting research
that contributes to
society and academia.

Contact us



+91-7665235235



www.jcrelc.com



info@jcrelc.com



Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-2, Issue-8, August 2026** of the **Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

English Literature:

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

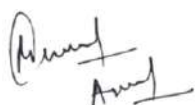
Cultural Studies:

Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.



Mukesh Arora
(Managing Editor)



Dr. Punit Shukla
(Chief Editor)

Fields of Interests

English Literature	
British Literature	American Literature
Postcolonial Literature	Commonwealth Literature
Indian Writing in English	African Literature
Canadian Literature	Caribbean Literature
Australian & New Zealand Literature	World Literatures in Translation
Literary Genres & Forms	
Poetry Studies	Prose and Fiction Studies
Drama and Theatre Studies	Autobiography & Memoir
Short Story & Novella Studies	Children's & Young Adult Literature
Fantasy, Gothic, and Science Fiction	Digital Literature & Hypertext Narratives
Critical Theories & Approaches	
Literary Criticism & Theory	Structuralism & Post-Structuralism
Marxist Criticism	Feminist & Gender Studies
Psychoanalytic Criticism	Postcolonial Criticism
Eco-criticism	Queer Theory
Reader-response Theory	Cultural Materialism
Linguistics & Language Studies	
Applied Linguistics	Sociolinguistics
Psycholinguistics	Historical Linguistics
Discourse Analysis	Translation Studies
Computational Linguistics	Semiotics and Stylistics
Second Language Acquisition	Language Pedagogy
Culture & Interdisciplinary Studies	
Cultural Studies & Popular Culture	Media, Film & Performance Studies
Comparative Literature	Folklore and Mythology
Diaspora & Migration Studies	Identity, Race & Ethnicity Studies
Philosophy & Literature	Religion & Literature
Visual Arts & Literature	Music and Literature
Historical & Contextual Studies	
Medieval & Renaissance Studies	Enlightenment & Romanticism
Victorian Literature	Modernism & Postmodernism
Contemporary Literature	Literature of War & Conflict
Colonial & Postcolonial Histories	Nationalism & Literature
Globalization & Literature	Digital Age Literature
Specialized & Emerging Areas	
Literature & Technology	Environmental Humanities
Disability Studies	Memory & Trauma Studies
Literature & Law	Literature & Medicine
Gender & Sexuality Studies	Urban Studies in Literature
Narrative & Storytelling Studies	Digital Humanities

Board Members

Dr. Punit Shukla (Chief Editor)

Professor, Department of English, Stani Memorial Public School, Jaipur, India

A senior professor with extensive experience in teaching, research, and academic administration (including roles as Registrar and Exam Controller). He holds a Ph.D. on *Raag-Darbari* from Jaipur National University, has supervised multiple Ph.D.s in Diasporic Literature and EFL, authored four books, and holds a patent on language learning through literature.

Research Areas: English Language & Literature, Diasporic Studies, Communication Skills, Intercultural Communication.

Mr. Mukesh Arora (Managing Editor)

Managing Editor

Holds an M.Tech in Digital Communication and a BE in Electronics & Communication. With 6 years of engineering research experience, he has published and presented numerous papers in India and abroad.

Expertise: Photonic Crystal Fiber, Image Processing, Sensors, Wireless Networks.

Dr. Ashok Singh Rao (Professor & Head)

Professor of English & Head, Department of Arts, Mody University, Rajasthan, India

A distinguished professor and departmental head with extensive expertise in literary studies and leadership. His scholarly work focuses on feminist studies, ecological criticism, and comparative literature.

Research Areas: English Literature, Feminism, Ecocriticism, Gender Studies, ELT, Literary Theory, Comparative Literature.

Dr. Gabriel Julien (Ph.D.)

Graduate Research Supervisor & Course Facilitator, Educational Leadership and Management, University of the West Indies, Global Campus

Holds a Ph.D. in Education from the University of Sheffield. He has supervised 22 Ph.D. students, examining 13. His research and advocacy focus on special/inclusive education and street-connected children. Author of 53 articles and several books.

Research Areas: Special & Inclusive Education, Street-Connected Children, Educational Advocacy, Self-Concept Development, Qualitative Research, Child & Adolescent Psychology.

Dr. Mariam Anana (Associate Professor)

Associate Professor, Department of Languages, Mountain Top University, Ogun State, Nigeria

A senior lecturer with extensive expertise in English literature and applied linguistics. Her research bridges discourse analysis, cultural studies, and innovative language pedagogy.

Research Areas: English Literature, Applied Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Cultural & Communication Studies, Language Pedagogy.

Professor Dr. Luisa María Arvide Cambra (Full Professor)

Full Professor (Catedrática), Arabic Studies / Medieval Literature, University of Almería, Spain
Director of Research Group HUM113. A pioneer in medieval Arabic literature and science with a 44-year career.
Author of 17 books and over 100 articles, including seminal Spanish translations of classical Arabic texts.

Research Areas: Medieval Arabic Literature, Comparative Literature, Arabic Philology, History of Medicine, Translation Studies.

Professor Mithilesh Kumar Pandey (Professor)

Professor, Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India
Coordinates the Departmental Quality Assurance Cell and holds editorial roles. His research focuses on modern/contemporary literature, gender studies, and Indian English literature. Author of numerous publications, including *"Centring the Margins: Six Recent Indian Women Poets."*

Research Areas: Modern British Poetry, Gender Studies, Contemporary Literature, Indian English Literature, Feminist Literary Criticism.

Dr. Zehrabi (Professor)

Professor, Department of English, Swarnandhra College of Engineering & Technology, Andhra Pradesh, India
A professor with over two decades of experience, specializing in Diasporic Literature (particularly Rohinton Mistry). Ph.D. from Acharya Nagarjuna University. Author of books and research papers, and editor of academic publications.

Research Areas: Diasporic Literature, English Language Teaching, Post-colonial Studies, Multicultural Literature, English for Specific Purposes.

Uerimanga Tjijombo (Lecturer & Researcher)

Lecturer, English and Applied Linguistics, Namibia University of Science and Technology
An educator and linguist pursuing a Ph.D., with expertise in instructional technology and multilingual education. His work focuses on integrating ICT into language pedagogy and curriculum development.

Research Areas: Applied Linguistics, Instructional Technology, English Language Teaching, Multilingual Education, Curriculum Development.

Dr. Sanjay Arora (Professor)

Professor, Department of English, Central University of Rajasthan, India
A professor with over 30 years of experience, holding a Ph.D. on 'The English of Advertising in India'. Has supervised 17 Ph.D. scholars and is an active resource person for international academic bodies. Author of multiple books on advertising and ELT.

Research Areas: English Language Teaching, Applied Linguistics, Advertising Discourse, Indian Writing in English, Digital Humanities, Language Pedagogy.

Dr. Kaushal Desai (Assistant Professor)

Assistant Professor of English, Department of Applied Science and Humanities, ITM Vocational University, Vadodara, India

Ph.D. in English with a focus on New Historicism in graphic novels. Active in academic committees and editorial review. Holds a patent (2025) for an AI-powered voice platform for EFL communication skills.

Research Areas: Graphic Novels, New Historicism, ICT in ELT, Literary Theory, Artificial Intelligence in Education, Cultural Studies, Environmental Literature.

Dr. Onkar Nath Upadhyay (Professor & Former Head)

Professor & Former Head, Department of English and MEL, University of Lucknow, India

With over 30 years of service, he coordinates the Centre of Indian Diaspora and Culture Studies, having supervised 27 Ph.D. scholars. A leading authority on Girmitiya literature and the Indian diaspora.

Research Areas: Indian Diaspora Studies, Girmitiya Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Indian Writing in English, Comparative Literature, Cultural Studies.

Dr. A. Satya Phani Kumari (Associate Professor & Head)

Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Anil Neerukonda Institute of Technology, Visakhapatnam, India

With nearly 30 years of experience, her research focuses on ELT, digital humanities, and cognitive strategies. Awarded by NPTEL for online learning excellence. Has 39 journal publications and 11 book chapters.

Research Areas: English Language Teaching, Digital Humanities, Cognitive Strategies in Language Learning, AI in Education, Pragmatic Language Practices, Contemporary Literature.

Dr. Shraddha Mishra (Assistant Professor)

Assistant Professor, Department of English Communication, ITM Vocational University, Vadodara, India

Holds an M.A. in English Literature. Brings interdisciplinary expertise in teaching communication skills across Engineering, MBA, and Sciences. Experienced in curriculum development, student mentorship, and organizing skill enhancement programs.

Expertise Areas: English Literature, Communication Skills, Business Communication, Curriculum Development, Interdisciplinary Teaching, Student Mentorship.

Dr. Jasbir Singh (Teacher)

Teacher, Directorate of Education, Govt. Sarvodya Bal Vidyalaya, New Delhi, India

Focuses on integrating educational technology and AI into teaching practices. His research interests include curriculum design and applying psychological principles to enhance learning outcomes.

Research Areas: Educational Technology, Artificial Intelligence in Education, Research Methodology, Psychology in Education, Curriculum Design.

Dr. Syed Damsaz Ali Andrabi (Historian & Researcher)

Former College Lecturer, Higher Education Department, Jammu & Kashmir, India

A historian with 18+ years of teaching and 19 years with IGNOU. Ph.D. in Medieval and Modern Indian History. Author of 33 research papers and serves on editorial boards of 9 international journals.

Research Areas: Medieval & Modern Indian History, Kashmiri History, Sufism Studies, Socio-Economic History, Cultural Studies.

Michael Sachdeva (Co-Founder & CEO)

Co-Founder & CEO, UNIFOEDU LLP | Director, Motion Kuwait

Holds an M.A. and M.Phil. in English Literature, complemented by a B.Ed. and MBA. Applies literary analysis and critical thinking to educational leadership, international test preparation, and global curriculum development.

Expertise Areas: English Literature Studies, Educational Leadership, International Test Preparation, Global Education Systems, Curriculum Development, Literary Pedagogy.

Dr. Likhan Chandra Doley (Anthropological Researcher)

Anthropological Researcher, Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India

Researcher focused on tribal studies and socio-cultural anthropology at the Sub-Regional Centre, Jagdalpur.

Conducts ethnographic studies on indigenous religions, ethnic identity, and women in tribal societies.

Research Areas: Tribal Studies, Disaster Anthropology, Migration & Displacement, Ethnic Identity, Women in Tribal Societies, Indigenous Religion, Socio-Cultural Anthropology.

Razieh Baktashian (TEFL Educator and Researcher)

TEFL Educator and Researcher, Department of English, Isfahan University, Iran

Specializes in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, teacher education, and the psychology of language acquisition. Focuses on integrating educational technology with language pedagogy.

Research Areas: Teacher Education, Psychology of Education, Teaching English as a Foreign/Second Language, Team Leadership, Educational Technology.

Dr. Abbas Eqbal Mehran (Literary Editor & Researcher)

Secretary of History, Education of Khuzestan Province, Iran | Literary Editor

Ph.D. in History of Islamic Iran. A poet, writer, and managing editor of academic journals. Author of poetry collections and children's literature, with research in cultural studies and Armenian-Persian literary relations.

Research Areas: Literary Editing, Poetry, Cultural Studies, Historical Literature, Armenian-Persian Literary Relations, Translation Studies.

Prakash Qattari (Assistant Professor)

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Madhesh University, Nepal

Specializes in English Literature and Translation Studies. Explores the intersections of literature, culture, and society, focusing on how language shapes social structures.

Research Areas: English Literature, Translation Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Language and Society.

Malihe Charkhab (Director of Research)

Director of Research, Research Institute of Education and Training, Education Department of Khuzestan Province, Iran

Her work focuses on educational theory, philosophy, and comparative systems, with a particular interest in the economics of education and its role in promoting global peace.

Research Areas: Educational Theories, Philosophy of Education, Comparative Education, Economics of Education, Education and World Peace.

Kosar Adibankhah (Motor Behavior Specialist)

Motor Behavior Specialist, Physical Education, Payam Noor University, South Tehran, Iran

Holds a Master's degree in Motor Behavior. Research encompasses sports history, sociology, diplomacy, and the nutritional aspects of physical performance.

Research Areas: Motor Behavior, Sports History, Sports Sociology, Sports Diplomacy, Physical Education & Nutrition.

Table of Contents

Volume-2, Issue-8, August 2026

S.No	Title	Page No.
1	Postcolonial Narratives and the "Crisis of Imagination" in the Anthropocene Authors: Dr. Divya Singh  DOI: https://doi.org/10.25125/jcrelc-aug-2026-1  Digital Identification Number: JCRELC-AUG-2026-1	01-07
2	Gender, Power, and Patriarchy in <i>The God of Small Things</i>: A Critical Study of Arundhati Roy's Work Authors: Dr.  DOI: https://doi.org/10.25125/jcrelc-aug-2026-5  Digital Identification Number: JCRELC-AUG-2026-5	08-13
3	William Shakespeare as an Ecologist in His Comic Plays Authors: Purvie Singh; Ashok Singh Rao  DOI: https://doi.org/10.25125/jcrelc-aug-2026-11  Digital Identification Number: JCRELC-AUG-2026-11	14-19

Postcolonial Narratives and the "Crisis of Imagination" in the Anthropocene

Dr. Divya Singh

Associate Professor, Department of English, C.M.P. Degree College, Prayagraj 211002 UP, India

Email: divyasinghcmp@gmail.com

Received:- 01 August 2026/ Revised:- 12 August 2026/ Accepted:- 19 August 2026/ Published: 31-08-2026

Copyright © 2026 Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture

This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution

Non-Commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>) which permits unrestricted

Non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract— Climate change poses a problem that fiction has struggled to address. Amitav Ghosh names this failure the "Great Derangement," a civilizational blindness built into the modern novel itself. This paper examines how postcolonial narrative, and Ghosh's own fiction in particular, responds to what he calls a crisis of imagination in the Anthropocene. The essay begins with Ghosh's diagnosis in *The Great Derangement*: the realist novel's commitment to probability and the ordinary pushes catastrophic weather into genres it treats as lesser, such as science fiction. The novel's inherited focus on individual consciousness, developed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, cannot easily encompass a crisis that is collective, planetary, and slow. Modern rationalism resists a world where nonhuman forces act with an apparent intention, and this resistance is cultural at root, not merely scientific. The paper then reads *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh's novel of the Sundarbans, as an attempt to write climate crisis differently. Its shifting tidal islands, its cyclone, and its account of the Morichjhapi refugee settlement show ecological catastrophe and political displacement as inseparable. Drawing on postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly the work of Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Rob Nixon, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, the paper argues that climate change cannot be understood through meteorology alone. It is a problem of colonial history, uneven carbon responsibility, and power. The conclusion asks what kinds of art might address a submerged future, one where the Sundarbans, Bangladesh, and other low-lying regions of the Global South face the earliest and harshest consequences of a crisis they did least to cause. Postcolonial narrative does not solve the crisis of imagination. It offers a place to begin.

Keywords— Anthropocene; postcolonial ecocriticism; climate fiction; crisis of imagination; *The Hungry Tide*; environmental justice.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Amitav Ghosh made an uncomfortable claim. Serious fiction, he argued, has mostly failed to take climate change as its subject. Novelists write about love, ambition, and family, but rarely about the flood outside the window. Ghosh calls this failure *The Great Derangement*, and he means it as a collective diagnosis, not an insult aimed at individual writers. If future generations judge this era as a time of madness, he suggests, they will point first to its imaginative failure, and only second to its carbon output (Ghosh 2016). This paper takes that claim as a starting point and asks what postcolonial narrative can do with it.

This paper reads that failure alongside a body of postcolonial writing that has quietly been working on parts of the problem for decades. Writers working from the Global South rarely had the luxury of treating environmental catastrophe as an occasional plot device. Drought, flood, and displacement already sat close to the center of the histories they were telling. The argument moves in four steps. It first lays out Ghosh's diagnosis of *The Great Derangement* across the four difficulties named below. It then looks closely at how the problem of scale plays out in the ordinary distinction between literary fiction and genre fiction. It reads *The Hungry Tide* as a sustained answer to that problem—one built directly out of the Sundarbans and its history of displacement. And it closes by asking what postcolonial ecocriticism, as a field, contributes once the climate crisis is understood as a matter of culture and power rather than weather alone.

This paper argues that postcolonial narrative, and Ghosh's own fiction in particular, offers a way through the crisis of imagination by refusing to separate ecological catastrophe from histories of colonial power, displacement, and uneven responsibility. Why turn to postcolonial narrative specifically, rather than climate fiction in general? This is partly because the difficulties Ghosh names were never evenly distributed. Writers from formerly colonized regions inherited literary conventions built in and for societies that had long treated the climate crisis as a distant future, a problem to be modeled and managed rather than lived. Postcolonial societies, by contrast, have long histories of living with ecological instability as an ordinary condition of colonial and postcolonial rule, from famine policy under empire to development-era dam building and forced resettlement. Narrative traditions shaped by that history start from a different set of assumptions about how much control any character, or any government, actually holds over the land beneath them.

II. THE PROBLEM OF SCALE AND GENRE

Ghosh's argument rests partly on the history of the novel form. The realist novel, as it developed in Europe, trained readers to expect the ordinary. A storm might open a book or close one, but it could rarely organise an entire plot without the book sliding into another genre. Improbable events—the freak cyclone, the flash flood, the once-in-a-century storm—were pushed to the margins of serious fiction and left to romance, adventure writing, and eventually science fiction (Ghosh 2016). This exclusion was not an accident of taste. It reflected an assumption that nature is a stable backdrop against which human drama unfolds, not an actor with a will of its own.

2.1 The Focus on Individualism

The novel also inherited a habit of individualism. Its central device, going back to Defoe and Richardson, is the portrait of a single consciousness working through moral choice. Climate change resists that scale. It is not one person's decision but the accumulated effect of billions of small acts, carried out over centuries, by societies with very different histories of extraction and consumption. Dipesh Chakrabarty makes a related point in his own field. He argues that climate change forces us to think of humanity as a species, a geological agent, a category that sits uneasily beside the older categories of class, nation, and individual rights on which postcolonial thought has relied (Chakrabarty 2009). Fiction built to trace one life's growth struggles to hold a subject that belongs, properly, to a species.

2.2 Resistance to Modern Thinking

Modern thought resists this kind of imagining for a further reason. Enlightenment rationality separated the human subject from a passive natural world. Weather could be measured and predicted, but not credited with intention. Ghosh describes the sense that something more is happening, that the nonhuman world is acting with a kind of purpose, as an uncanny feeling, and he notes that colonial modernity trained people to treat that feeling as backward, a relic of animist or so-called primitive belief (Ghosh 2016). Many non-Western and indigenous traditions never abandoned this sense of a world with its own forms of agency. The Anthropocene has started to make that older sense look less like superstition and more like an accurate account of a planet that answers what is done to it.

2.3 A Crisis of Culture

For Ghosh, the deepest failure is cultural rather than technical or political. Politics and economics draw on a society's available stock of stories, images, and assumptions. If literature can represent climate change only at its margins, in genre fiction that serious critics have historically dismissed, then the wider culture is left without the resources to treat the crisis as a central, ordinary fact of life rather than an exceptional one. That is what the phrase "crisis of imagination" is meant to capture. It is not that individual writers lack skill. It is that the conventions handed down to them make certain subjects hard to hold. These four difficulties—of scale, of individualism, of the uncanny, and of culture—set the terms for the rest of this essay, which asks whether postcolonial narrative, and Ghosh's own fiction in particular, offer a way through them by refusing to separate ecological catastrophe from histories of colonial power.

III. THE PROBLEM OF SCALE: WHY FREAKISH TORNADOES AND HUNDRED-YEAR STORMS ARE RELEGATED TO SCIENCE FICTION

Take the freak tornado, or the storm that statisticians once called a once-in-a-century event. In 1978, a tornado struck Delhi, an occurrence so rare for the region that meteorologists struggled to explain it. Ghosh witnessed it, and he later admitted that he found the event almost impossible to write about directly. When he tried, the tornado kept slipping out of the novel and into memoir, into essay, into anything but fiction (Ghosh 2016). He came to see this difficulty as a symptom rather than a personal

failing. The realist novel runs on a quiet contract with its reader: strange things may happen, but not too many, and not without a slow build toward them. A tornado that arrives without warning and levels a neighborhood breaks that contract. To a reader trained on realism, it reads as contrived, more suited to the loose rules of fantasy or science fiction than to a novel that wants to be taken seriously.

Timothy Clark makes a related argument from a different angle. He describes the Anthropocene as producing scale effects—moments where an individual, everyday action—driving to work, running an air conditioner—turns out to carry consequences at a scale no single life can register (Clark 2015). One flight is nothing. Ten billion flights across a century help destabilize a planet's weather systems. Realist fiction, built around characters who can grasp the consequences of their own choices, has no easy way to narrate an effect that exists only in aggregate, invisible at the level where any one person actually acts.

Ursula Heise identifies a version of this same difficulty from the standpoint of environmental imagination generally. She argues that most inherited literary forms teach readers a strong sense of place, an attachment to a specific valley, river, or neighbourhood, but offer much weaker tools for imagining a sense of planet—the more abstract, systemic connections that link a melting glacier to a flooded delta thousands of miles away (Heise 2008). Climate fiction has to work at both scales simultaneously—the intimate and the planetary—without losing either one. Realist fiction is good at the first task and poor at the second, which is another way of stating Ghosh's complaint about scale in more general terms.

This also explains why so much of the strongest writing about climate change now comes from genres the literary establishment has historically looked down on. Science fiction was never bound by the realist contract in the first place. It can jump centuries, follow a planet instead of a person, and treat weather as a character with its own logic. What looks like a weakness of the form—its willingness to be improbable—turns out to be exactly what a warming world requires of a narrative. Critics have started to give this expanding body of writing its own name, climate fiction, sometimes shortened to cli-fi, treating it as a loose genre rather than a stray theme inside other genres. The label is new, but the underlying move is not. Genre fiction has always given writers permission to break the realist contract when the subject demands it. What is new is the seriousness with which criticism has begun to take that permission, now that the improbable events realism once excluded—the hundred-year flood and the unprecedented heat—have become annual occurrences rather than rare exceptions.

There is an irony worth naming here. Postcolonial literature has itself often been read through a lens that prizes realism and interiority, the very qualities that make the novel ill-equipped to handle planetary-scale weather. Critics rewarded postcolonial novelists for psychological depth and historical fidelity, for portraying colonized subjects as fully realized individuals rather than types. That work was, and remains, necessary. However, it means postcolonial fiction inherited many of the same formal habits that Ghosh finds wanting. A literature built to prove the interior life of the colonized subject does not automatically possess the tools to narrate a cyclone that has no interest in anyone's interior life at all. There is a historical reason for this emphasis, too. Much of the postcolonial novel's early energy went into narrating nation-building, the assertion of political will against colonial rule and its aftermath. A genre invested in human agency and historical self-determination has its own reasons to resist a story in which the weather, not any government or movement, decides who lives where.

Postcolonial writers face a further complication that Ghosh's largely metropolitan frame does not fully address. Freak weather is not new to most of the Global South. Monsoon failure, cyclone, and flood have shaped agrarian life in South Asia for centuries, long before anyone spoke of the Anthropocene. What the current era adds is not the weather itself but its frequency, and the widening gap between who causes it and who suffers from it. *The Hungry Tide*, published two years before Ghosh set out this argument in essay form, can be read as an early attempt to solve the problem in practice rather than in theory. The next section turns to that novel directly.

IV. THE HUNGRY TIDE: FICKLE LANDSCAPES AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF ECOLOGICAL REFUGEES

Ghosh's 2004 novel gives the difficulties named above a concrete shape. Its setting is the Sundarbans, the tidal archipelago where the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers meet the Bay of Bengal, straddling the border of India and Bangladesh. Ghosh's characters call it the tide country, and the name is exact. Islands here are not fixed. Tides submerge and expose land twice a day, currents carve new channels overnight, and a shoreline that exists in the morning can vanish by evening. The novel's landscape refuses to sit still behind its characters the way a conventional setting usually does. It acts (Ghosh 2004).

Cartography struggles with a landscape like this. A map fixes a coastline at the moment it was drawn, but the tide country keeps redrawing itself, and the novel returns more than once to the gap between the delta on paper and the delta underfoot. Naming becomes an act of some presumption in this setting, since the island a name refers to may not exist in the same shape

by the time the name reaches print. This is a small but telling detail. It shows the novel treating even its own descriptive tools—maps, names, the ordinary apparatus of realist setting—as provisional rather than authoritative.

This matters for the argument about scale and genre made above. A conventional realist setting supplies continuity, a stage that stays in place while people move across it. The tide country will not perform that role. Land here is a temporary arrangement between river, sea, and silt, and the humans who live on it hold their ground only provisionally. Ghosh builds this instability into the novel's structure as well as its geography. The narrative alternates between the present, where the American-based cetologist Piya Roy arrives to study the rare Irrawaddy dolphin, and the past, recovered through a notebook left by Nirmal, a former schoolteacher and committed leftist. Piya depends on Fokir, an illiterate fisherman who reads the tides, the fish, and the dolphins with a precision her instruments cannot fully match. Kanai, Nirmal's nephew, arrives from Delhi to retrieve his uncle's notebook and finds himself translating between languages, classes, and ways of knowing that do not sit easily together.

Language poses a related problem, and Kanai carries most of its weight. He runs a translation business in Delhi and prides himself on moving between English, Hindi, and Bengali with ease, but the tide country tests that confidence. Nirmal's notebook is written in a Bengali dense with allusion and political feeling that resists easy transfer into English, and Kanai's own fluency does little to help him read Fokir, whose knowledge of the tide country has no equivalent vocabulary in any of Kanai's languages. Translation here works less as a solved problem than as a standing reminder of how much gets lost, or simply cannot travel, between one way of knowing a place and another.

Nirmal's notebook carries the novel's most direct engagement with displacement. It recounts the settlement, and then the violent eviction, of refugees on the island of Morichjhapi in 1978 and 1979. The refugees were mostly Bengali Hindus who had been relocated after Partition to Dandakaranya, an inland resettlement site far from the delta they knew. Many made their way back toward Bengal and settled on Morichjhapi, an island within the Sundarbans, hoping to rebuild a life near the water and soil they understood. The West Bengal government, newly led by the Left Front, ordered the settlement cleared, citing the island's status as protected forest and tiger reserve. The eviction that followed involved blockade, starvation, and violence, and it remains one of the most disputed episodes in the state's postcolonial history. Kusum, who becomes Fokir's mother, survives Morichjhapi in the novel, and her story carries its memory into the present-day narrative (Ghosh 2004).

The episode carries a particular sting for Nirmal because of who ordered it. A government that called itself the Left Front, heir to the same political tradition Nirmal had spent his life within, authorized the eviction and the violence that followed. His notebook does not resolve this contradiction. It sits inside it, recording a lifelong socialist watching his own political family choose a tiger reserve over the people who had nowhere else to go. That unresolved sting matters for the argument of this paper. It shows that the crisis of imagination Ghosh describes is not only a problem for novelists working at a remove from catastrophe. It reaches the people living through it too, including those, like Nirmal, whose entire political vocabulary was built to explain exactly this kind of injustice but proved inadequate.

This episode does real work for the novel's larger argument. It refuses to let ecological catastrophe and political violence stay separate. The refugees were displaced first by Partition, then by an inland resettlement scheme indifferent to their skills and history, then by a conservation policy that valued tigers over the people it displaced, and finally by the government's own use of force. Each displacement carried an environmental dimension and a political one, and the novel does not let its readers pull the two apart. This is exactly the kind of narrative Ghosh later argues literary fiction has trouble producing—one where weather, water, and land carry as much causal weight as human decisions, without losing sight of who profits and who suffers.

Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence helps name what the novel is doing. Nixon describes a violence that is gradual, attritional, and largely invisible to media cycles built to reward spectacle. Cyclones make the news. The decades-long attrition of a coastline, or a resettlement policy carried out in bureaucratic stages, rarely does. *The Hungry Tide* holds both kinds of violence in view at once—the sudden storm and the slow erosion of Morichjhapi's residents through blockade and starvation—and it insists that a reader who notices only the storm has missed half the story (Nixon 2011).

The mangrove forest itself becomes part of the novel's argument. Mangroves do not resist the tide. They are built to survive being submerged and exposed twice a day, and their roots hold the shifting silt together just long enough for new land to form before the water claims it again. Nirmal, trained in an older political idiom of struggle and permanence, finds this landscape hard to think with. His notebook keeps circling back to the difference between a politics built on stable ground—land to be won and defended—and a delta that offers no such stability to anyone, revolutionary or otherwise. Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee reads this kind of tension, between inherited political frameworks and the environments they are supposed to explain, as a

recurring feature of the contemporary Indian English novel, one that pushes fiction to rethink categories like class and community alongside ecology rather than replacing them (Mukherjee 2010).

The novel also stages an encounter between different kinds of knowledge. Piya's science is careful and rigorous, but it depends on equipment, funding, and a vocabulary developed elsewhere, far from the tide country. Fokir cannot read a page, but he can read a river, and his knowledge repeatedly proves the more reliable guide, reading a shift in current or a pattern of birds long before Piya's instruments register anything unusual. The novel does not romanticize this contrast into a simple lesson about wisdom versus technology. It shows both kinds of knowing as partial, and both as necessary, and it structures the plot so that the two people carrying them depend on each other for survival, not just for the success of a research project.

That dependence is tested directly when a cyclone strikes near the novel's end. The storm arrives with the suddenness the earlier sections of this paper associate with genre fiction rather than realist plotting, and the novel does not soften that abruptness for the reader's comfort. Neither Piya's instruments nor Fokir's inherited knowledge of the tide country can fully protect them once the storm is upon them. Fokir dies shielding Piya with his own body, and the moment refuses any easy reading. It is not a sacrifice that resolves the novel's argument about knowledge, since Fokir's expertise did not, in the end, save him. It is closer to a demonstration that no single register of knowing, however careful or however local, can fully master a landscape built on instability. Piya survives, and the manner of her survival changes her. She stays on in the tide country afterward, setting up a research trust in Fokir's name and trying to build a way of working that does not simply extract knowledge from a place and its people without giving something back. Her science does not disappear from the novel's ending. It is folded into an ongoing relationship with the place and the people who taught her to see it, rather than concluded as a finished study to be published and left behind.

When read against the concerns of the previous section, *The Hungry Tide* answers the problem of scale by refusing to treat the delta as scenery. It answers the problem of individualism by braiding together several ways of knowing rather than resting on one protagonist's growth. And it answers the difficulty of seeing displacement as a single connected phenomenon—from land loss to state violence—stretching from the Partition era to a climate-changed present, in which the Sundarbans now rank among the regions most exposed to sea-level rise anywhere in the world. Ecological refugees, in other words, are not a future problem the novel forecasts. They are already present in its historical layer, and the novel asks its readers to notice that continuity.

V. GREENING POSTCOLONIALISM: MOVING THE CLIMATE CRISIS OUT OF METEOROLOGICAL SCIENCE INTO THE PRECINCTS OF CULTURE AND POWER

Huggan and Tiffin gave this project its clearest statement. Postcolonial studies and ecocriticism developed for the most part apart from each other. Postcolonial critics were often wary of nature writing, suspicious that celebrating landscape might slide back into a colonial pastoral that erased the people working that land. Ecocriticism, for its part, grew largely out of a North American and British tradition centered on wilderness, one that had little to say about empire, plantation economies, or the uneven history of who got to call a place wild in the first place. Colonial writing had already put landscape to political use long before either field existed as a discipline. Colonized land appears in much of that writing as either an untouched paradise awaiting appreciative eyes or a wasteland awaiting improvement through plantation agriculture and extraction. Both images served the same end—justifying appropriation by describing the land as empty of any prior claim worth respecting. Huggan and Tiffin argue that neither field, postcolonial studies nor ecocriticism, can do without the other. Environmental crisis, on their account, is never simply an environmental fact. It carries the weight of who extracted what from whom, and for how long (Huggan and Tiffin 2010).

This reframing changes what counts as evidence. A drought is a meteorological event, but a famine is a political one, produced by decisions about food distribution, trade, and who gets to eat when supply runs short. The same is increasingly true of climate change more broadly. Chakrabarty's essay tries to hold both registers at once. He accepts that climate change makes humanity into something like a single geological agent, a species capable of altering the planet's chemistry. But he does not let that species-level language erase the fact that some parts of humanity burned far more carbon than others, and that the parts burning the least now face the earliest and hardest consequences (Chakrabarty 2009). The atmosphere does not care about the history of colonial extraction that filled it with carbon. The distribution of harm across the planet's surface does.

This argument has since moved from seminar rooms into international negotiation halls. Developing nations have pushed the language of loss and damage into United Nations climate talks, demanding that countries responsible for the largest historical share of emissions bear some responsibility for harms now falling on countries that contributed comparatively little. The

demand echoes Chakrabarty's point in blunter, more practical terms. Geological agency may be collective, but liability, in any language courts or treaties recognize, is not.

Guha and Martinez-Alier describe a related divide inside environmentalism itself. Wealthy nations built an environmental movement largely around preservation—saving wilderness for its own sake or for future recreation. Movements in the Global South have more often organized around subsistence, defending the forests, rivers, and land that poor communities depend on to survive from one season to the next. Guha and Martinez-Alier call this the environmentalism of the poor, and it does not always look like environmentalism to observers trained on the wilderness model (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997). It looks like a fight over rice, or fish, or firewood.

The Morichjhapi episode inside *The Hungry Tide* belongs to exactly this second tradition, and it shows how easily the first tradition can be turned against the poor. The West Bengal government evicted the Morichjhapi settlers in the name of conservation, protecting a tiger reserve from human encroachment. Whatever the ecological merits of that policy, its human cost fell on refugees who had almost nowhere else to go. Postcolonial ecocriticism gives this pattern a name: conservation policy, however well-intentioned, can function as another instrument of state power, one that decides whose presence on the land counts as natural and whose counts as trespass. Moving climate change out of meteorology and into this kind of analysis does not mean ignoring the science. It means refusing to treat the science as the whole story, when the history of who gets displaced, and in whose name, is just as material to the crisis as the rising temperature itself.

DeLoughrey and Handley extend this argument across the wider postcolonial world, from Caribbean plantation ecologies to Pacific Island nations now negotiating their own submersion. Their collection insists that the environmental humanities cannot treat the Global South as a passive site where climate change merely happens. It has to treat these regions as places with their own long environmental histories, shaped by slavery, indenture, and extraction—histories that set the terms for how climate change is now experienced there (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011). The Sundarbans fit this pattern precisely. Islands in the delta are already disappearing under rising seas, and the Bangladeshi and Indian sides of the region are expected to produce some of the largest populations of climate-displaced people anywhere in the coming decades. A crisis often narrated in the Global North through images of melting ice and future risk is, in the tide country, already a present and repeating fact of eviction, migration, and loss.

None of this makes meteorology irrelevant. It makes meteorology insufficient on its own—a partial account of a crisis that is also, and just as urgently, a crisis of history and power.

VI. CONCLUSION: FINDING NEW FORMS OF ART FOR A SUBMERGED FUTURE

Where does this leave literature now? Ghosh's own answer, sketched at the end of *The Great Derangement*, is not a set of rules for a better climate novel. It is closer to a wish that writers find ways to let the improbable back in, to let landscapes act, and to let stories move across scales that do not fit inside one lifetime. *The Hungry Tide* had already tried some of this before Ghosh named the problem directly. Its most telling formal choice may be its use of the Bon Bibi legend, the local story of a forest goddess who protects the honest from Dokkhin Rai, the tiger demon, but only if they take no more from the forest than they need. The legend sits inside the novel next to Piya's field notes and Nirmal's political notebook, three different registers of knowledge that the book refuses to rank. Myth here is not decoration. It is a working theory of limits, developed by people who had to live with a landscape that could kill them, long before anyone called that landscape an ecosystem under threat.

Western environmental writing, from Thoreau onward, mostly kept myth and science in separate rooms, treating the mythic as a metaphor for feeling rather than a genuine claim about how a landscape works. *The Hungry Tide* declines that separation. Bon Bibi's story functions inside the novel as something closer to local ecological law—a codified limit on how much a person may take from the forest, dressed in the language of the sacred because that is the language the tide country's residents actually use to talk about limits. A submerged future will need exactly this kind of hybrid form, one willing to treat non-scientific knowledge as a source of working truth rather than folklore to be admired and then set aside.

This suggests one direction for the art a submerged future will need. It will probably not come from choosing science over story, or local knowledge over global data. It will come from forms willing to hold several kinds of knowing at once, the way the tide country's residents already do, without pretending any single one is sufficient by itself. Postcolonial narrative has practice at this. It has spent decades working out how to tell stories across languages, cosmologies, and unequal histories that refuse to sit still. That practice turns out to be useful training for a crisis that will not remain static either, and it shows up in

small formal choices as much as large ones—in a willingness to let a legend share a page with a field report, or to let a delta's shifting geography set the terms of a plot rather than simply hosting it.

None of this addresses the crisis of imagination that Ghosh describes in the sense of solving it. Bangladesh and the Sundarbans are not waiting for a better novel. Islands are disappearing on a schedule set by physics, not literature. But culture shapes what a society can see as urgent, and what it allows itself to act on. A literature that keeps freak weather, displaced people, and nonhuman agency at its margins will keep producing readers unprepared for a century that has already arrived. A literature willing to let the tide into the narrative, the way *The Hungry Tide* does, offers something smaller than a solution and more useful than despair. It offers practice in imagining a world that does not hold still, which may be the only kind of world left to imagine.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Chakrabarty, D. (2009). The climate of history: Four theses. *Critical Inquiry*, *35*(2), 197-222.
- [2] Clark, T. (2015). *Ecocriticism on the edge: The Anthropocene as a threshold concept*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- [3] DeLoughrey, E., & Handley, G. B. (Eds.). (2011). *Postcolonial ecologies: Literatures of the environment*. Oxford University Press.
- [4] Ghosh, A. (2004). *The hungry tide*. HarperCollins.
- [5] Ghosh, A. (2016). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. University of Chicago Press.
- [6] Guha, R., & Martinez-Alier, J. (1997). *Varieties of environmentalism: Essays North and South*. Earthscan.
- [7] Heise, U. K. (2008). *Sense of place and sense of planet: The environmental imagination of the global*. Oxford University Press.
- [8] Huggan, G., & Tiffin, H. (2010). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: Literature, animals, environment*. Routledge.
- [9] Mukherjee, U. P. (2010). *Postcolonial environments: Nature, culture and the contemporary Indian novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [10] Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Harvard University Press.

Gender, Power, and Patriarchy in *The God of Small Things*: A Critical Study of Arundhati Roy's Work

Dr. V.M. Anusheya^{1*}; Dr. R. Sumathi²

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Agni College of Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.

Orcid: 0009-0005-2172-9161

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Kongunadu Arts and Science College, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Orcid: 0000-0003-2691-8808

*Corresponding Author Email: vmanusheya1999@gmail.com

Received:- 03 August 2026/ Revised:- 13 August 2026/ Accepted:- 20 August 2026/ Published: 31-08-2026

Copyright © 2026 Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture

This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution

Non-Commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>) which permits unrestricted

Non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract— Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) has attracted three fairly distinct strands of feminist and postcolonial criticism: readings that catalogue the forms of gender oppression the novel depicts, readings that foreground the intersection of gender with caste, and readings that foreground the intersection of gender with race and colonial history. What these strands rarely do together is connect the novel's content-level critique of patriarchy to the formal strategies, particularly its non-linear, fragmented narrative structure, through which Roy stages that critique. This article addresses that gap through a close reading of four female characters who occupy structurally distinct positions relative to patriarchal power—Ammu, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Rahel—read alongside Velutha as a case where caste and gender-based punishment converge. The analysis draws on a defined set of selection criteria and coding categories adapted from existing feminist and postcolonial scholarship on the novel, and it deliberately engages a published counter-reading that questions whether gender is in fact the primary axis of subordination in the text. The discussion finds that patriarchy in the novel operates simultaneously as a family practice, a property regime, and a caste-linked disciplinary system, and that Roy's fragmented narrative form is best read not as ornamental but as a formal correlate of this critique, restoring narrative authority to characters the plot itself silences. The article closes by situating these findings against comparative and more recent scholarship on the novel and by identifying which of its claims remain interpretive rather than empirically demonstrated.

Keywords— Arundhati Roy; *The God of Small Things*; patriarchy; gender and caste; postcolonial feminism; narrative form.

I. INTRODUCTION

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* examines how social, familial, and colonial histories converge to shape individual lives in postcolonial Kerala. Among its many concerns, the novel offers a sustained critique of patriarchal authority: it shows how institutionalized gender hierarchy, operating at both the family and the community level, determines who is permitted intimacy, inheritance, mobility, and voice within the Ayemenem household and beyond it.

Patriarchy in the novel is not confined to isolated acts of male domination in the household. It works as a structure distributed across institutions, families, and individuals at once, so that a single act, such as Ammu's relationship with Velutha, draws consequences from family, caste hierarchy, and the state simultaneously. This layered quality is central to why the novel continues to reward feminist and postcolonial analysis nearly three decades after publication, and it is also what makes a single-axis reading of the text—gender alone, or caste alone—difficult to sustain without leaving something out.

Research gap. Existing scholarship on the novel's treatment of gender divides along three lines that rarely meet. One line documents the forms of gender oppression the novel depicts—marginalization, subordination, and violence—largely at the level of theme and character (Jose 159–166; Mardiyani and Tawami 165–174). A second line reads gender specifically through

its intersection with caste, showing how Ammu's punishment and Velutha's murder are two faces of one disciplinary system (Mandal; Saeed; Al-Quaderi). A third and more recent line reads gender through its intersection with race and colonial history, extending the intersectional frame beyond caste and class (Ansari, Ahmed, and Anjum). A separate comparative study places Roy's resistant women from two different novels side by side without focusing specifically on how patriarchy itself is structured within either text (Sharma). What is comparatively rare is a study that keeps patriarchy, rather than any single axis of intersection, as its organizing focus, while tracing that patriarchy across family structure, property law, caste discipline, and Roy's own narrative technique within a single, defined method—and rarer still is one that puts a counter-reading, such as Al-Quaderi's argument that gender is not the primary determinant of subalternity in this novel, into direct conversation with its own conclusions rather than citing only supporting scholarship.

This gap matters because a reading of patriarchy that stops at cataloguing its effects on individual characters risks treating the novel's formal choices—its refusal of linear chronology, its withholding and delayed release of information—as incidental rather than as part of the same critique. This article treats the two as connected and asks three questions: (1) how does patriarchal power operate across the family, property, and caste structures the novel depicts; (2) how does Roy's narrative form relate to that critique; and (3) how do these findings hold up against comparative scholarship and against a published counter-reading that questions gender's centrality to the novel's account of subordination. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, Section 3 states the novelty and objectives of the study, Section 4 sets out the method and selection criteria, Sections 5 and 6 present the findings, and Section 7 discusses their implications and limitations before the conclusion in Section 8.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cataloguing Gender Oppression

The earliest and most direct strand of scholarship on the novel's gender politics documents the forms oppression takes. Jose reads Ammu's and Mammachi's experiences as instances of a broader Indian patriarchal mindset in which political leadership, moral authority, and property ownership are reserved for men, leaving women's social value tied to their proximity to a father, brother, or husband (159–166). Mardiyani and Tawami extend this documentary approach across the novel's female cast, concluding that subordination, marginalisation, and violence recur as the novel's principal categories of gender inequality, and arguing that the text implicitly calls for a more balanced and mutually respectful relationship between men and women (165–174). This strand is valuable for establishing what forms of oppression the novel depicts, but it tends to treat those forms as parallel examples rather than as parts of one interlocking system.

2.2 Gender and Caste

A second strand reads gender through its intersection with caste, which is where much of the most influential scholarship on the novel sits. Mandal compares Roy's Ammu with Meena Kandasamy's protagonist in *The Gypsy Goddess* to argue that caste hierarchy is not simply layered on top of gender hierarchy in Indian patriarchal society but structurally bound to it, with the concept of purity operating as the link between the two systems. Saeed reads the psychological toll of this bound system on Roy's female and child characters, arguing that the novel's central achievement is its portrait of the inner cost of living under overlapping social and religious constraint. Al-Quaderi's reading of subalternity in the novel is the most direct challenge to a gender-centred account: he argues that gender is not, in fact, the primary determinant of subordination in the text, and that the more accurate model is a general power structure—a grid rather than a simple hierarchy—in which caste and class as much as gender determine who dominates and who is dominated. This is a genuine and citable disagreement in the secondary literature, and Section 5 returns to it directly.

2.3 Gender, Race, and Colonial History

A third, more recent strand widens the intersectional frame further. Ansari, Ahmed, and Anjum argue that prior intersectional readings of the novel have concentrated on caste and class while leaving the intersection of race and colonial history comparatively unexamined, and they read the marginalization of Roy's women as inseparable from the colonial histories that shaped Kerala's Syrian Christian community. This strand is useful for the present study because it confirms that the novel's patriarchy cannot be fully explained by family structure alone; colonial history supplies part of the vocabulary through which that patriarchy is expressed, most visibly through Chacko's Oxford education and the value the family places on English fluency and manners.

2.4 Comparative Scholarship

Comparative work on Roy's fiction remains limited relative to single-novel studies. Sharma's recent analysis of resistance across *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* places Ammu and Rahel alongside Anjum, Tilotama, and Revathy from the later novel, arguing that Roy's female and gender-nonconforming characters resist dominance in different registers depending on the structural position each occupies. This comparative approach demonstrates that Roy's treatment of resistance varies with context even within her own body of work, which is a useful check against treating any single character, Ammu included, as representative of Roy's model of resistance generally.

2.5 Summary of the Gap

Read together, this scholarship establishes that the novel's patriarchy has been well documented, that its intersection with caste and, more recently, with race and colonial history has been carefully theorized, and that at least one influential reading disputes gender's centrality altogether. What remains comparatively underexamined is the relationship between this patriarchal content and the novel's narrative form, and a systematic account that puts these strands, including the dissenting one, into direct conversation within a single analytical framework.

III. NOVELTY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study differs from the scholarship reviewed above in three respects. First, it treats patriarchy itself, rather than any single axis of intersection, as the organizing category, and traces it across family structure, property and inheritance, and caste discipline within one framework rather than three separate ones. Second, it connects this content-level analysis to the novel's narrative form, reading Roy's fragmented, non-linear structure as a formal strategy that restores narrative authority to characters the plot itself marginalizes, rather than treating form and theme as separate objects of study. Third, it deliberately incorporates Al-Quaderi's counter-reading, which questions whether gender is the primary determinant of subordination in the novel, so that the study's conclusions are presented as contestable claims rather than as a settled consensus.

The specific objectives are to (a) identify how patriarchal power operates across four structurally distinct female characters and one intersectional case; (b) assess how the novel's narrative form relates to its critique of patriarchy; and (c) test these findings against comparative scholarship and against the strongest available counter-reading.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative literary study using close reading, informed by feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. The analysis is interpretive: it works from the published text and from secondary scholarship rather than from new empirical data, and conclusions about the novel's effects on readers are attributed to cited scholarship rather than presented as findings of this study.

4.2 Character Selection Criteria

Rather than surveying the novel's full cast, the analysis concentrates on four female characters and one male character, selected because each occupies a structurally distinct position relative to patriarchal power and because each has independent support in the secondary literature reviewed in Section 2: Ammu (a woman punished for transgressing the novel's "Love Laws"), Mammachi (a woman who has internalized patriarchal authority after decades of domestic abuse), Baby Kochamma (a woman who defends patriarchal norms she herself was constrained by), and Rahel (the narrating heir whose adult perspective structures the novel's fragmented timeline). Velutha, a Dalit man executed for his relationship with Ammu, is included as an intersectional case because his fate cannot be explained by caste or by gender alone, and because his inclusion allows the analysis to test claims about gender's primacy, including Al-Quaderi's counter-claim, directly against a case where caste and gender-based punishment coincide.

4.3 Analytical Framework and Procedure

Each character's relevant episodes were coded into four categories developed from the literature reviewed in Section 2: family-level patriarchal authority, gendered property and economic exclusion, caste-gender intersection, and narrative form as a site of resistance. Passages were selected using the same three-part test applied consistently across characters: the passage stages a concrete instance of the coded category, the narrative attaches a visible consequence to it, and the reading has independent support in at least one secondary source. Findings were then checked against the intersectional and comparative scholarship in

Sections 2.3 and 2.4, and, specifically for the claim that gender operates as the novel's primary disciplinary axis, checked against Al-Quaderi's dissenting account rather than left unexamined.

4.4 Limitations

The analysis is interpretive and was conducted by the research team alone, without a second coder, so inter-rater reliability cannot be reported. It draws no new data from readers, so any claim about the novel's real-world effect on readers rests on cited scholarship rather than on evidence generated here. Purposive character selection, even against explicit criteria, cannot fully rule out selection bias; requiring independent secondary support for each coded episode was intended to reduce, though not eliminate, this risk.

V. FINDINGS: PATRIARCHY AS FAMILY, PROPERTY, AND CASTE DISCIPLINE

5.1 Patriarchy as Family Structure

Pappachi and Chacko occupy different generations but the same structural position within the Ayemenem family. Pappachi's domestic violence against Mammachi is presented not as an aberration but as behavior the surrounding social order treats as unremarkable, which is precisely how Jose's account of Indian patriarchal norms describes the everyday normalization of male authority within the family (159–166). Chacko's position complicates a simple picture of male dominance as uniformly conservative: he speaks the language of progressive politics while retaining, unquestioned, the sexual and economic freedoms denied to Ammu and Mammachi. This gap between stated belief and lived privilege is itself a form of patriarchal power, one that does not require open hostility toward women to remain effective.

5.2 Gendered Property and Economic Exclusion

Ammu's position in the family illustrates how patriarchy operates through property and inheritance rather than only through direct control of behavior. She has no claim on the family's property, and her return to Ayemenem after her marriage's collapse is treated as tolerance rather than entitlement. Mardiyani and Tawami's broader account of gendered subordination in the novel identifies exactly this pattern: institutional exclusion from ownership operating alongside more visible forms of control (165–174). Mammachi's case shows a related but distinct mechanism: her factory, which she built, is gradually taken over by Chacko once he returns from England, and she accepts this transfer as natural rather than as a loss, which suggests that internalized patriarchal norms can be as effective as external enforcement in maintaining gendered economic exclusion.

5.3 Caste, Gender, and the "Love Laws"

The novel's central act of transgression, Ammu's relationship with Velutha, activates gender and caste discipline simultaneously rather than sequentially. Roy's own term for the social code this relationship violates, the "Love Laws" that decide "who should be loved, and how much," frames the prohibition as operating along both caste and gender lines at once. Ammu is punished through exile and early death; Velutha is punished through public, state-sanctioned violence. Mandal's comparative reading argues that caste and gender hierarchies in the Indian context are not separable systems layered on top of each other but a single structure organized around the concept of purity, and the novel's treatment of Ammu and Velutha supports this reading directly: neither character's punishment makes sense without reference to the other.

It is at this point that Al-Quaderi's counter-reading deserves direct engagement rather than dismissal. His claim that gender is not the primary determinant of subalternity in the novel rests on a defensible observation: several of the novel's most powerful characters, Baby Kochamma chief among them, are themselves women, which complicates any account in which gender alone predicts who dominates and who is dominated. The textual evidence in this study does not fully overturn that observation. Baby Kochamma's power within the family is real, and it is exercised specifically against other women, Ammu most of all. What the evidence does suggest is that Baby Kochamma's power is bounded in ways Chacko's is not: it operates only within the domestic sphere the family permits her, and it depends on her active enforcement of patriarchal and caste norms rather than on any independent authority of her own. Gender, on this reading, is not the only axis of power in the novel, but it does condition how power is available to a character to begin with, which is a narrower and more defensible claim than the stronger version this study's earlier drafts assumed without argument.

5.4 Family as Microcosm

The Ayemenem household functions as a small-scale version of the wider social order the novel depicts. Men occupy positions of nominal or actual authority, Pappachi and Chacko as heads of household in succession, while women's roles are consistently

defined relative to that authority rather than independent of it. This mirrors the intersectional account offered by Ansari, Ahmed, and Anjum, who argue that the family in the novel functions as the site where colonial, caste, and gender hierarchies are first learned and then reproduced across generations.

5.5 Resistance, Its Cost, and Rahel's Narrating Voice

The novel does register resistance, but consistently attaches a cost to it rather than treating it as redemptive on its own terms. Ammu's relationship with Velutha is the clearest instance: a genuine act of self-determination that the surrounding social order answers with exile and violence. Rahel's adult narrating voice offers a different, quieter form of resistance: her non-chronological retelling of the family's history refuses the surrounding society's preferred, tidier account of what happened and why, and in doing so keeps Ammu's and Velutha's perspectives available to the reader even though both characters are dead by the novel's opening pages. Sharma's comparative reading of resistance across Roy's two novels supports treating this kind of narrating authority as a form of resistance in its own right, distinct from and less costly than Ammu's direct transgression, which helps explain why Rahel survives the novel's world in a way Ammu does not.

VI. NARRATIVE FORM AS A SITE OF PATRIARCHAL CRITIQUE

Roy's fragmented, non-linear narrative structure is not simply a stylistic choice layered on top of a conventional plot; it is where the novel's critique of patriarchy becomes visible at the level of form rather than only content. By withholding the details of Velutha's death and Ammu's exile until late in the novel, while opening with Rahel's adult return to Ayemenem, Roy forces the reader to encounter the consequences of patriarchal and caste violence before encountering their causes. This ordering denies the reader the comfort of a linear moral arc in which transgression leads cleanly to consequence, and instead makes the reader assemble that arc backward, in the same fragmented way memory and trauma are shown to work for the characters themselves. Read this way, the novel's famous attention to "small things" is not a retreat from its political argument but a formal enactment of it: the large structures of caste and patriarchy are shown operating through small, cumulative domestic details, precisely because that is how Roy suggests they actually function.

VII. DISCUSSION

Two conclusions follow from the analysis. First, patriarchy in the novel is not a single mechanism but an overlapping set of them, operating through direct violence, through property exclusion, through internalized acceptance, and through caste discipline, and these mechanisms reinforce rather than substitute for one another across the four characters examined here. Second, the novel's narrative form is not separable from this critique; the delayed, fragmented disclosure of Ammu's and Velutha's fates is itself a way of dramatizing how patriarchal and caste violence are experienced, absorbed, and only belatedly understood.

These conclusions should be read against their limits. Section 5.3's engagement with Al-Quaderi's counter-reading narrows rather than eliminates this study's claims about gender's centrality: Baby Kochamma's example shows that women can hold and exercise real power within the novel's world, even as that power remains structurally bounded in ways men's power is not. A fuller test of this question would require comparing all named characters' access to power systematically rather than the five examined here, which is a natural extension for future work. The claim that Rahel's narrating voice constitutes resistance is also interpretive rather than demonstrated; it rests on how the novel is structured, not on evidence of how actual readers experience that structure, and testing it would require the kind of reader-response methodology used in empirical studies of literature and moral or political engagement rather than close reading alone. Future research could extend the comparative frame used here beyond Roy's own two novels to other South Asian women writers working with caste and gender together, such as Meena Kandasamy, whom Mandal already places alongside Roy, to test how much of this study's account of patriarchy and narrative form is specific to Roy rather than characteristic of a wider body of postcolonial women's writing.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Read across four structurally distinct female characters and one intersectional case, *The God of Small Things* presents patriarchy as a layered rather than a singular system: a family practice, a property regime, and a caste-linked disciplinary order operating together rather than in isolation. Roy's fragmented narrative form is best understood as part of this critique rather than as separate from it, restoring narrative authority to characters—Ammu and Velutha above all—whom the plot itself silences. At the same time, the novel does not support a simple, uncontested claim that gender is the sole or even the primary axis of power it depicts; Baby Kochamma's case, and Al-Quaderi's reading of it, place a real limit on that claim which this study has tried to state rather than avoid. The framework developed here is intended to connect strands of scholarship on the novel that have

generally run in parallel, and to identify, specifically, where its own conclusions remain open to the kind of empirical and comparative testing outlined above.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

FUNDING STATEMENT

No funding was received for this study.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors contributed to the conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, writing, and revision of the manuscript, and approved the final version.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Quaderi, G. G. (2022). Gender and subalternity in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *The Arts Faculty Journal*, *12*(17), 29-50.
- [2] Ansari, M. R., Ahmed, I., & Anjum, T. (2025). Colonialism, race and gender: An intersectional analysis of women's marginalization in Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Social Science and Humanity Research Review*, *3*(3).
- [3] Gómez, A. M. C. (2019). *Gender roles and power relations between Indian male and female characters in The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy: A postcolonial feminist approach* [Doctoral dissertation, Universidad de Almería].
- [4] Hariharasudan, A., & Gnanamony, S. R. (2017). Feministic analysis of Arundhati Roy's postmodern Indian fiction: *The God of Small Things*. *Global Journal of Business and Social Science Review*, 159-164.
- [5] Jose, S. E. (2021). The trauma of being a woman: Oppression of women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *The Creative Launcher*, *6*(1), 159-166. <https://doi.org/10.53032/TCL.2021.6.1.18>
- [6] Mandal, M. (2023). Dismantling caste and gender hierarchy: Female-Dalit alliance in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess*. *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2455328X221149302>
- [7] Mardiyani, R., & Tawami, T. (2022). Gender inequality and feminism in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Mahadaya: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, dan Budaya*, *2*(2), 165-174.
- [8] Roy, A. (1997). *The God of Small Things*. IndiaInk.
- [9] Saeed, B. M. (2021). Caste and gender in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. *Journal of University of Zakho – Humanities*, *9*(4). <https://doi.org/10.26436/hjuoz.2021.9.4.769>
- [10] Sharma, K. P. (2024). The defiant faces: Intersectionality in Arundhati Roy's resistance narratives. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, *16*(4).

William Shakespeare as an Ecologist in His Comic Plays

Purvie Singh^{1*}; Ashok Singh Rao²

¹Research scholar, Mody University of science and Technology, Laxmangarh

²Mody University of Science and Technology, Laxmangarh

Email: purviesingh25.slas@modyuniversity.ac.in | asrao.slas@modyuniversity.ac.in

Received:- 05 August 2026/ Revised:- 14 August 2026/ Accepted:- 26 August 2026/ Published: 31-08-2026

Copyright @ 2026 Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture

This is an Open-Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>) which permits unrestricted Non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract— William Shakespeare is widely known for his drama and poetry, but his work also shows an early understanding of the relationship between people and the natural world. Even though the word "ecology" was not used in the 16th and 17th centuries, Shakespeare's comic plays carry clear environmental ideas. In these plays, nature is not just a place for entertainment. It influences human choices, emotions, and the way society functions. In *As You Like It*, the forest of Arden provides an alternative to the corrupt court. It is a place where characters discover truth, simplicity, and compassion. Duke Senior's observation that he "finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks" shows nature as a source of wisdom. The play also raises early concerns about habitat when Jaques criticizes hunting deer in "their native dwelling places." *A Midsummer Night's Dream* connects human disorder directly with environmental disorder. Titania explains that the quarrel between her and Oberon has caused floods, failed crops, and disturbed seasons. When human relationships are restored, balance returns to nature as well. *The Tempest*, though a romance, shares the comic concern for renewal. The island represents a fragile ecosystem where control over nature becomes a question of power and justice. Caliban's knowledge of "every fertile inch" of the island challenges Prospero's claims of ownership. These comic plays suggest that humans cannot be separated from nature. Shakespeare presents a vision where respect for the environment leads to personal growth and social harmony. At a time when environmental problems are increasing, these ideas from Shakespeare's comedies remain meaningful and important.

Keywords— Shakespeare, Ecocriticism, Ecology, Comic Plays, Nature, Environment, Human-Nature Relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is widely regarded as the most influential writer in English literature. For more than four hundred years, readers and scholars have returned to his tragedies, histories, and comedies for their insight into human nature, and his characters, language, and stories continue to speak across different times and cultures. When modern readers hear the word "ecologist," however, they picture something quite different from a Renaissance playwright: a scientist with a clipboard, tracking population curves or measuring carbon in soil. Shakespeare, writing between roughly 1590 and 1613, had access to none of the conceptual apparatus of modern ecological science: no theory of ecosystems, no Darwinian framework, no climate models. Ecology as a formal discipline would not exist for another two hundred years. It would therefore seem, on its face, absurd to describe him as an "ecologist" at all.

And yet, over the last three decades, a substantial body of scholarship has argued that Shakespeare's plays repeatedly stage the kind of thinking that ecology would later formalise: an attentiveness to the reciprocal, often precarious relationship between human communities and the nonhuman environments that sustain, threaten, and transform them. Even without the vocabulary of science, Shakespeare shows a persistent awareness of how human beings are bound up with plants, animals, weather, forests, and land, and nowhere is that awareness more concentrated than in his comedies.

This paper argues that Shakespeare's comic plays are unusually rich sites for this kind of reading, precisely because comedy as a genre repeatedly relocates its characters from court or city into "green worlds": forests, islands, pastoral estates where social order dissolves and is eventually remade. Northrop Frye long ago observed that Shakespearean comedy characteristically

moves its characters out of a repressive society and into a natural space of transformation before returning them, changed, to the ordered world. What ecocritical scholarship adds to this older formalist observation is the recognition that the green world is never simply a backdrop or a convenient metaphor. It is populated by trees that carry political and ecological histories, weather systems that respond to human folly, animals that resist becoming mere symbols, and rural economies whose survival depends on forces beyond human control. In these plays, nature does not just decorate the story; it works as teacher, healer, and moral guide, shaping human behaviour and, ultimately, the shape of the societies characters return to.

The comedies chosen for close analysis here—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*—sit alongside two later plays, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, that are generically classified as "romances" but share so much of comedy's underlying structure (exile, transformation in a natural or supernatural space, reconciliation, marriage) that ecocritical scholarship regularly treats them within the same conversation. Read together, these plays reveal Shakespeare returning obsessively to a small set of ecological concerns: deforestation and the politics of timber; the vulnerability of agrarian life to weather and season; the ethics of hunting and human dominion over animals; and the fantasy—and the danger—of imagining nature as infinitely available for human use. The Forest of Arden, the woods outside Athens, and the island of *The Tempest* are not neutral settings for these concerns; they function as teachers, judges, and healing spaces in their own right, actively shaping the moral and social outcomes of the plays.

This paper takes ecocriticism as its methodological foundation. Ecocriticism reads literature with sustained attention to environmental issues: it asks how texts represent nature, and how they shape human attitudes toward the nonhuman world. Applying that method to Shakespeare's comic drama, this paper argues that Shakespeare presents an early, unsystematic but recognisable ecological vision—one that criticizes the exploitation of nature, values the interdependence of human and nonhuman life, and suggests that harmony with the natural world is a precondition for social and personal renewal. The paper proceeds in four stages. First, it reviews the critical tradition of ecocritical Shakespeare studies. Second, it lays out a working definition of the ecological imagination this paper attributes to Shakespeare, and addresses directly the anachronism built into the paper's own title. Third, it offers close readings of the comic plays, organized around the specific ecological motifs outlined above. Finally, it draws these motifs together into a broader argument about what Shakespeare's comic drama can and cannot tell us about early modern environmental consciousness, and about our own.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between Shakespeare and nature has been discussed for decades, but the rise of ecocriticism in the 1990s gave this topic new direction and vocabulary. Ecocriticism reads literature with attention to environmental issues and asks how texts shape human attitudes toward the non-human world (Garrard 3). Within this field, Shakespeare has become an important figure because his plays show sustained engagement with forests, weather, animals, and land.

2.1 Jonathan Bate and the Foundations of Ecocritical Shakespeare

Jonathan Bate is the scholar most closely associated with Shakespeare and ecology. In *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Bate first called Shakespeare "the first environmentalist writer." He argued that Shakespeare saw nature as a living presence rather than as property to be owned. Bate expanded this argument in *The Song of the Earth* (2000), where he gave detailed readings of *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*. For Bate, the forest of Arden represents a green world that heals people damaged by court politics. He also suggests that Shakespeare understood what it means to live "in" nature rather than "on" it (Bate 72). Bate's work established the foundation for all later ecocritical readings of Shakespeare.

2.2 Greg Garrard and Ecocritical Theory

Greg Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2004, revised 2012) provides the main theoretical framework used in this study. Garrard defines ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. He identifies key concepts, such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and environmental ethics. Garrard argues that literary texts can either reinforce human dominance over nature or challenge it. He reads Shakespeare's plays as texts that often challenge anthropocentrism by showing humans as part of larger natural systems (Garrard 89).

2.3 Karen Raber and Human-Animal Boundaries

Karen Raber in *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture* (2013) focuses on how animals appear in early modern drama. Raber examines scenes of hunting, animal sympathy, and human-animal boundaries. Her reading of Jaques's encounter with the deer in *As You Like It* is important for this paper. Raber argues that Jaques's sadness shows an early awareness of animal suffering

and questions the ethics of treating animals as resources (Raber 145). This suggests something about animals' treatment in his own time.

2.4 Robert N. Watson and Environmental Change

Robert N. Watson's *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (2006) examines how Renaissance writers responded to environmental change. Watson connects literature to historical events such as deforestation and enclosure. He reads *The Tempest* as a play about colonization of both people and land. For Watson, Prospero's control over the island reflects early modern ideas about mastering nature through knowledge and technology (Watson 210).

2.5 Simon Estok and Ecophobia

Simon Estok developed the concept of "ecophobia" to explain fear and hatred of nature in literature. In *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare* (2011), Estok argues that some Shakespeare plays show anxiety about wild nature. The comedies often move beyond fear toward acceptance and harmony. Estok's work helps explain why Shakespeare's forests are both dangerous and healing spaces.

2.6 Edited Collections and Indian Scholarship

Lynne Bruckner and Danielle Glassmeyer in *Shakespeare and the Natural World* (2014) edited a collection that looks at plants, weather, and ecology in Shakespeare. Several essays in this volume focus on comedy. They argue that comic endings often depend on natural cycles of renewal and fertility.

In the Indian context, scholars have begun applying ecocriticism to Shakespeare in postcolonial classrooms. Nivedita Sen in "Green Shakespeare in India" (2016) argues that Shakespeare's nature imagery can be used to discuss environmental justice in South Asia. Rimi B. Chatterjee in *Empires of the Mind* (2013) shows how Shakespeare was taught in colonial India with a focus on nature and Empire. Indian journals like *The Shakespeare Association of India Journal* have published articles connecting Shakespeare to local environmental issues such as water scarcity and deforestation.

Despite this growing scholarship, most studies focus on tragedies like *King Lear* or on *The Tempest* alone. There is still a need for a focused study of Shakespeare's comic plays as a group. Comedies offer a unique space where nature enables reconciliation, marriage, and social renewal. This paper aims to fill that gap by reading *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest* together through an ecocritical lens.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: WHAT WOULD IT MEAN TO CALL SHAKESPEARE AN "ECOLOGIST"?

Before proceeding to close analysis, it is necessary to be precise about the claim this paper is making. Ecology as a scientific discipline dates to the late nineteenth century; the term itself was coined by the German biologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, more than two hundred and fifty years after Shakespeare's death. Shakespeare had no access to concepts such as trophic levels, carrying capacity, or anthropogenic climate change. To call him an "ecologist" in the disciplinary sense would be a straightforward anachronism.

What this paper instead argues is that Shakespeare's comedies display what might be called an ecological imagination: a recurring dramatic interest in the ways human wellbeing, social order, and individual identity are entangled with, dependent upon, and vulnerable to nonhuman systems—forests, weather, animals, seasons, and land. This is not the same claim as saying Shakespeare held modern environmentalist values. Following Estok's caution about ecophobia, this paper remains alert to moments where the comedies imagine nature as a resource for human use, a wilderness to be tamed, or a threat to be neutralised, alongside moments that stage more reciprocal or humble relationships between people and their environments.

The comedies, in other words, are not simple green parables; they are ambivalent texts that repeatedly return to environmental questions without settling on a single, consistent environmental ethic. It is precisely this ambivalence, this paper suggests, that makes the comedies valuable ecocritical objects: they dramatize the tensions of early modern environmental thought rather than resolving them.

Greg Garrard's concept of anthropocentrism versus biocentrism provides a useful framework for reading this ambivalence. Anthropocentrism places human beings at the center of the universe, treating nature as a resource for human use. Biocentrism, by contrast, recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and ecosystems. Shakespeare's comedies oscillate between these positions, sometimes celebrating nature's bounty and at other times questioning the ethics of human dominion. This oscillation, rather than indicating inconsistency, reflects the genuine tensions in early modern environmental thought.

IV. NATURE, POWER, AND RENEWAL IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

4.1 *As You Like It*: The Forest as Teacher

As You Like It opens on a court already corrupted by usurpation: Duke Frederick has seized power from his brother, and exile, not choice, drives Duke Senior and his followers into the Forest of Arden. The contrast Shakespeare draws is not simply between two locations but between two systems of value. The court prizes appearance, hierarchy, and political calculation; Arden prizes simplicity, endurance, and direct experience.

Duke Senior articulates the play's ecological premise most directly when he claims to find "tongues in trees, books in the running brooks" (2.1.17–18). The line proposes an alternative epistemology: understanding need not come solely from texts and institutions but can be read off the natural world itself. Arden also disciplines those who enter it. Because life in the forest is governed by weather and season rather than by decree, it teaches patience as a practical necessity rather than an abstract virtue.

The forest's suspension of social hierarchy extends to gender as well. Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, gains a freedom of movement and speech unavailable to her at court, using her disguise to test Orlando's affections and to speak with a candour the court would not permit. Arden functions here as more than scenery; it is a space that loosens rigid social roles and makes experimentation and honesty possible.

The play's ecological attentiveness extends beyond human characters to animal life. When Jaques encounters a deer wounded by hunters, he does not simply note the image and move on; he lingers on the animal's suffering, reading its isolation from the herd as a kind of grief (2.1.34–35). Karen Raber identifies this moment as an early instance of sympathy extended toward nonhuman creatures, one that resists reducing the deer to pure allegory (Raber 145). The animal remains, in this scene, a being with its own stake in its habitat, not merely a figure for human meaning.

By the play's close, marriage and reconciliation restore social order, but that restoration is prepared, not undone, by the time spent in the forest. Arden does not offer an escape from society so much as a correction of it. The play's underlying suggestion is that immersion in the natural world—its rhythms, its vulnerabilities, its demands—can repair what political ambition has broken.

4.2 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Linking Human and Natural Disorder

A Midsummer Night's Dream moves between two contrasting spaces: Athens, governed by law and paternal authority, and the wood outside it, governed by magic, desire, and metamorphosis. The play's most explicit statement of ecological interconnection comes from Titania, who tells Oberon that their marital conflict has thrown the natural world itself into disorder: seasons have become confused, rivers have overflowed their banks, and disease has followed in the wake of this environmental disturbance (2.1.111–113). The speech does more than lend cosmic weight to a domestic quarrel; it proposes that human and natural systems are causally linked, so that discord among the fairies registers directly as damage to weather, crops, and health. This is, in miniature, an early articulation of systemic thinking about the environment.

Within the wood, the four Athenian lovers lose their bearings almost as soon as they enter it. Lysander and Demetrius quarrel over affections scrambled by the love potion, and certainty dissolves along with social decorum. Simon Estok's concept of ecophobia is useful here: the forest is figured as simultaneously alluring and threatening, a space that draws people in and then strips them of the confidence and order they arrived with.

Yet the wood that disorders also restores. By the play's end the lovers are correctly matched, and Oberon and Titania reconcile, a peace that is immediately followed by the return of natural order to the world outside their quarrel. The mechanicals' play in the final act, performed in celebration of the newly settled marriages, stages art itself as a response to and a celebration of this restored harmony. Taken together, these episodes argue that human relationships and the nonhuman environment are not separate domains but interdependent ones: disorder in one produces disorder in the other, and healing in one enables healing in the other.

4.3 *The Tempest*: Island, Control, and Limits

The Tempest unfolds entirely on an island with its own weather, creatures, and spirits—a closed system in which every disturbance is traceable to human intervention. Prospero rules this system through books and magic, commanding Ariel and

the storms alike, and he extends the same logic of command to Caliban, who was born on the island and whose subjection reflects an early modern conviction that knowledge entitles its possessor to mastery over both land and its inhabitants.

Caliban offers a counter-model of knowledge grounded not in command but in familiarity. He knows where to find "fresh springs" and can distinguish "barren place and fertile" (1.2.337–338), a practical, embodied understanding built from living within the island's limits rather than presiding over them. Robert Watson reads the play's colonial logic as operating on two registers simultaneously, seizing both land and the people native to it (Watson 210), and Caliban's dispossession makes that double seizure explicit.

The play poses its ethical question plainly: should nature be owned, or respected? Prospero's mastery isolates him even as it empowers him, and the play's resolution turns on his renunciation of that power. When he vows to "drown my book" (5.1.57), the gesture can be read as an acceptance of limits, a recognition that dominion carried too far comes at a cost to the one who holds it. The island, meanwhile, has tested every character who lands on it, exposing Antonio's ambition and Ferdinand's capacity for love in equal measure. When the human characters finally depart, the island itself remains, untouched by their departure. The implication is that human power over the natural world is not without boundaries, and that recognizing those boundaries is not a defeat but a necessary condition for reconciliation.

4.3.1 Ecological Motifs Across the Comedies

Read together, these three plays reveal a consistent pattern of ecological concern. In each play, a natural space—forest, wood, or island—functions as a site of transformation where characters are forced to confront their relationship with the nonhuman world. In each case, the natural space is not passive but active, shaping human behaviour and social outcomes. And in each case, harmony with nature is presented as a precondition for personal and social renewal.

This pattern is not limited to the three plays examined here. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the Windsor forest serves as a space of comic punishment and reconciliation. In *Twelfth Night*, the sea and the coast of Illyria shape the play's themes of loss and reunion. In *The Winter's Tale*, the pastoral world of Bohemia provides a space of healing and renewal after the tragedy of the first half. These plays, taken together, suggest that Shakespeare's ecological imagination was not confined to a single work but was a recurring concern throughout his comic writing.

V. DISCUSSION: SHAKESPEARE'S ECOLOGICAL VISION AND ITS LIMITS

The analysis above suggests that Shakespeare's comic plays display a consistent ecological imagination: an awareness of the interdependence of human and nonhuman life, a critique of the exploitation of nature, and a vision of social renewal through harmony with the natural world. However, it is important to acknowledge the limits of this vision.

First, Shakespeare was not a systematic environmental thinker. His plays do not present a coherent ecological philosophy but rather a series of dramatic explorations of environmental questions. The comedies are ambivalent texts that sometimes celebrate nature's bounty and at other times treat nature as a resource for human use.

Second, Shakespeare's ecological imagination is shaped by the assumptions of his time. The early modern period was a time of increasing exploitation of natural resources, and Shakespeare's plays reflect both the anxieties and the opportunities of this era. His comedies sometimes imagine nature as a space of freedom and healing, but they also reflect early modern assumptions about human dominion over the natural world.

Third, the comedies' resolution through marriage and social integration can be read as a conservative gesture that restores the very social order the natural space had temporarily suspended. The return to society, in other words, may undercut the radical potential of the green world.

Despite these limits, the comedies remain valuable ecocritical objects. They dramatize the tensions of early modern environmental thought rather than resolving them, and in doing so they offer insights into how people in Shakespeare's time understood their relationship with the natural world.

VI. CONCLUSION

William Shakespeare's comic plays present an early ecological vision. Through *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare shows that natural spaces are not a passive background but active participants in human life. The forest of Arden teaches moral lessons and heals social wounds. The woods in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* link human

conflict to environmental disorder and show that harmony in one requires harmony in the other. The island in *The Tempest* raises questions about power, colonization, and the limits of human control over nature.

Shakespeare challenges anthropocentrism and values interdependence between humans and the non-human world. His comedies suggest that reconciliation, marriage, and social renewal are possible when humans align themselves with natural cycles rather than trying to dominate them. Shakespeare wrote before the development of modern environmental science, but his plays anticipate many concerns that are central today.

As we face climate change and ecological crisis, returning to Shakespeare's imagination can help us rethink our relationship with the environment. His work reminds us that literature has long been a space for thinking about how humans should live with nature. The comedies, in particular, offer a vision of renewal through harmony with the natural world—a vision that remains meaningful and important in the twenty-first century.

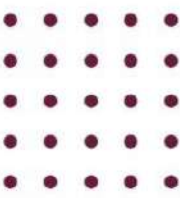
Future research could extend this reading to Shakespeare's tragedies and histories, or compare his ecological vision with that of other early modern writers. Comparative studies with non-Western literary traditions could also illuminate how different cultures have imagined the relationship between humans and nature.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

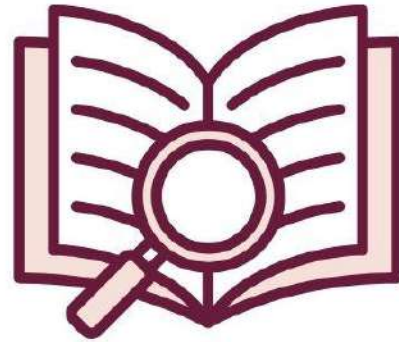
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bate, J. (2000). *The song of the earth*. Harvard University Press.
- [2] Bruckner, L., & Glassmeyer, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Shakespeare and the natural world*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [3] Chatterjee, R. B. (2013). *Empires of the mind: A history of the Oxford University Press in India*. Oxford University Press.
- [4] Estok, S. C. (2011). *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading ecophobia*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- [5] Frye, N. (1957). *Anatomy of criticism: Four essays*. Princeton University Press.
- [6] Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- [7] Raber, K. (2013). *Animal bodies, Renaissance culture*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [8] Sen, N. (2016). Green Shakespeare in India. *The Shakespeare Association of India Journal*, *3*(1), 45-62.
- [9] Shakespeare, W. (2003). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (H. F. Brooks, Ed.). The Arden Shakespeare. (Original work published 1600)
- [10] Shakespeare, W. (2006). *As You Like It* (J. Dunsinberry, Ed.). The Arden Shakespeare. (Original work published 1623)
- [11] Shakespeare, W. (2011). *The Tempest* (V. M. Vaughan & A. T. Vaughan, Eds.). The Arden Shakespeare. (Original work published 1611)
- [12] Watson, R. N. (2006). *Back to nature: The green and the real in the late Renaissance*. University of Pennsylvania Press.



ENGLISH LITERATURE & CULTURE JOURNAL



Published By
SPARC Institute of Technical
Research

