

Contemporary Novels and Ecofeminism: Analysing Gender, Environmental Issues, and Social Justice

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Abstract

This research explores the representation of ecofeminism in contemporary novels, specifically focusing on Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*, Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, Rae Meadows' *I Will Send Rain*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. By examining the relationships that female protagonists have with their environments, the study reveals how factors like race, class, and sexuality intersect to shape their experiences and views on ecological issues. The research methodology of this paper utilizes a qualitative approach focused on textual analysis and thematic exploration of contemporary novels that engage with ecofeminism. The characters embody ecofeminist principles, highlighting the connections between gender oppression and environmental degradation. This research emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding the varied experiences of women and their roles as guardians of the environment. By placing these narratives within the context of contemporary social and environmental challenges, the study underscores the relevance of ecofeminism in literature as a tool for raising awareness and inspiring action. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader conversation on ecofeminism, showcasing its significance in literary analysis and the pursuit of social justice.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Nature, Identity, Patriarchy, Environmental issues, Gender, Social Justice

Introduction

Ecofeminism is a critical framework that explores the connections between gender, environment, and social justice, positing that the exploitation of women and nature is rooted in patriarchal systems. In recent years, contemporary literature has increasingly addressed these themes, presenting rich narratives that examine how female characters confront ecological challenges and societal issues. This research focuses on five notable works: Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*, Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind*, Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*, Rae Meadows' *I Will Send Rain*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. These novels feature strong female protagonists who navigate intricate relationships with their environments, revealing how their identities shape their interactions with both nature and society. By analyzing these characters, this study aims to uncover the nuanced portrayals of ecofeminism, particularly through the lens of intersectionality—how overlapping identities influence women's experiences and roles.

This research is important not only for understanding the literary representation of ecofeminism but also for emphasizing its relevance in addressing contemporary environmental and social issues. As climate change and social inequalities become increasingly urgent concerns, literature can play a vital role in raising public awareness and inspiring action. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to the broader conversation on ecofeminism and its implications for both literature and society.

Research Gap

This gap looks at how various aspects of identity—such as race, class, and sexuality—impact female characters' connections to nature and their roles in society. By exploring this, the research can provide a deeper understanding of ecofeminism, highlighting the diverse experiences of women and how these experiences shape their views on the environment. This topic is highly relevant to ongoing discussions in feminist and environmental studies, making it significant and impactful. Addressing this gap can lead to a more comprehensive and inclusive exploration of ecofeminism in literature.

Review of Literature

Ecofeminism in Indian English Fiction, Priyanka Chanda (2014)

This research explores ecofeminism, a concept originating from Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, which links feminism with ecological issues and highlights the unique connection women, particularly in subsistence economies, have with nature. It aims to uncover the often-overlooked relationship between women and the environment, focusing on how Indian women novelists incorporate ecofeminist themes into their work. Through a literary analysis of novels by authors like Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, the study contextualizes these narratives within historical and contemporary women-led movements in India, such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, while employing ecocritical theory to examine representations of women and nature. The findings reveal that Indian English fiction critiques patriarchal systems that impact the environment and advocate for the inclusion of women's voices in environmental activism to promote social justice and ecological balance.

Ecofeminists Combating Patriarchal Ideology: A Study of Postcolonial Indian Fiction, Dr. Razia Sultana (2021)

This study delves into ecofeminism, particularly in the Indian context, emphasizing the correlation between the suppression of women and environmental destruction, as both are exploited by patriarchal systems. It aims to analyze patriarchal dimensions in postcolonial Indian literature through an ecofeminist lens, illustrating how the marginalization of women in male-dominated societies impacts their relationship with and protection of nature. Utilizing qualitative research, the methodology examines novels by authors engaged in environmental and women's rights movements, tracing the evolution of ecofeminist themes in literature. Findings reveal that the exploitation of nature parallels the oppression of women, both subjected to patriarchal control, while highlighting the interconnectedness of women and nature. Female characters often embody a profound connection to the environment, grappling with patriarchal forces that seek to undermine their agency.

Ecofeminism in the Twenty-First Century Susan Buckingham (2004)

This study examines the influence of ecofeminism on the interplay between men, women, and the environment in Western society, questioning how this relationship has evolved over time. It investigates

the transformation of gender equality in connection with environmental sustainability and assesses the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in policy-making to address both gender inequalities and environmental issues. Employing qualitative analysis of policy shifts since the 1970s, the research reviews literature and frameworks, such as the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, to evaluate the integration of gender concerns in environmental policies. Findings reveal significant policy advancements toward incorporating gender in environmental discussions; however, they also highlight that many structural inequalities persist, suggesting that the approaches to achieving gender equality remain superficial.

Eco-feministic Reading of Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*, Lekha Nath Dhakal (2022)

This study explores ecofeminism in Sarah Joseph's novel *Gift in Green*, critiquing male characters involved in environmentally destructive development and contrasting their relationships with nature to those of female characters. It aims to highlight ecofeministic perspectives through character actions and motivations, showcasing how female characters embody a nurturing relationship with the environment while advocating for the preservation of Aathi's natural landscape and eco-friendly practices. Utilizing literary analysis, the research examines character interactions, contrasting exploitative male behaviors with protective female values, and critiques societal attitudes toward land use and environmental conservation. Findings reveal that female characters, such as Ponmani and Kunjootan, demonstrate deep connections to the land and engage in sustainable practices, while male characters are portrayed as rational and assertive, prioritizing economic gain at the expense of ecological health, ultimately depicting women as guardians of nature and men as representatives of industrial exploitation.

Ecofeminist Visions: Recent Development and their Contribution to the Future Feminism, Esther Rey Torrijos (2013)

This paper discusses the origins and evolution of ecofeminism, which emerged in the late 1970s as a perspective linking sexism with environmental injustice while critiquing essentialist views that suggest a natural connection between women and nature. It aims to review significant developments in ecofeminist theory and praxis since the new millennium, focusing on advancements in environmental and gender studies, and explores new trends such as material feminisms, interspecies studies, and ecojustice, highlighting their implications for social change. Utilizing leading ecofeminist works and contemporary feminist perspectives, the research analyzes intersections with social justice and environmental issues, emphasizing contributions from North American and Northwest European scholars and activists who operate outside traditional feminist frameworks. Findings reveal notable achievements in integrating gender issues into policy but also highlight ongoing challenges, particularly global inequalities faced by women. The interconnectedness of various forms of oppression suggests ecofeminism as a critical framework for understanding and addressing these issues, positioning modern ecofeminist theorists to influence structural reforms and advocate for sustainable practices that benefit both women and the environment.

Postcolonial Ecofeminism in Indian Novels in English, Gurpreet Kaur (2012)

This study investigates postcolonial ecofeminism in India, emphasizing the crucial roles women play in both activism and literature while challenging the conventional dualism between nature and culture in their environmental relationships. It underscores the importance of postcolonial ecofeminism through

women's activism and literary contributions, highlighting how female writers influence environmental literature in the context of globalization and technology. The research delves into the complexities of women's connections with nature, advocating for a more nuanced understanding that incorporates class and cultural heritage. By employing a qualitative approach, the analysis of literary works and activism illustrates how Indian women writers express the intricacies of gendered ecological citizenship, shedding light on the ambivalence of women's relationships with nature and providing insights into socio-political contexts. Ultimately, it concludes that women's writing is a potent tool for challenging dominant narratives and fostering an inclusive ecofeminism that recognizes diverse experiences and identities.

Ecofeminism in the Novels of Namita Gokhale, Dr. Janmejy Kumar Tiwari (2022)

This article focuses on feminism and the advocacy for women's equal rights, specifically examining feminist themes in Gokhale's works, including *The Book of Shadows* (1999), *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* (2011), and *Things to Leave Behind* (2016). The objectives include analyzing how Gokhale's characters embody feminist ideals and highlighting their struggles for emancipation and rights. Employing literary analysis, the research emphasizes character development and thematic exploration, particularly examining major protagonists like Rachita, Tilottama, and Priya. Findings reveal that the characters' narratives reflect significant feminist issues, showcasing their challenges within a patriarchal society. Gokhale's works serve as a platform for discussing broader gender issues and the quest for equality, emphasizing the importance of women's voices in literature and advocating for women's rights and empowerment.

Ethical Imaging: Ecofeminist Possibilities and Environmental Learning, Leesa Fawcett (2000)

This study investigates how stories and imagination influence our understanding of nature, focusing on ecofeminist narratives in environmental education. It raises important questions about recognizing other beings as subjects in shared lives and emphasizes co-authoring environmental narratives. The objectives include exploring feminist responsibility in environmental knowledge, examining the ethical and political dimensions of agency in learning, and demonstrating how ecofeminist ethics can enrich environmental education. Using a narrative approach, the research critiques behaviorist practices and advocates for a more reflexive understanding of knowledge.

Findings reveal that ethical behavior toward the nonhuman world stems from joyfulness and humility, highlighting the importance of attachment and identity for environmental stewardship. The study calls for recognizing nonhuman agency and creating inclusive narratives that amplify diverse voices in environmental discussions.

Pertaining the Feminist Vision of Ecocriticism for Environmental Justice against Gender Biases and Women Critics: A Literature on the International and National Perception, Md Shahazadi Begum (2022)

This study examines environmental literature through a feminist lens, emphasizing the historical contributions of women to environmental activism and linking feminist perspectives to environmental justice. It aims to explore the role of ecocriticism in promoting gender equity and influencing perceptions of environmental issues on national and international levels. Utilizing a literature review of feminist eco-critical approaches, the research integrates eco-feminist theory and cultural studies to amplify feminist voices in environmental and social justice. Findings suggest that feminist ecocriticism supports sustainable

practices concerning gender and environmental issues, recognizes women's contributions to environmental discourse, and connects human and non-human entities to promote justice.

An ecofeminist study of Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, Ridha'a Ali, Samira Sasani (2024)

This ecofeminist study explores the connection between women and nature in Barbara Kingsolver's novels *Animal Dreams* and *Prodigal Summer*, addressing themes of environmental degradation while promoting women's leadership in communities. Utilizing ecofeminist analysis, the research examines the protagonists' responses to masculine authority and applies literary analysis to highlight ecofeminist principles. The objectives include investigating the interconnectedness of women and nature in Kingsolver's works and analyzing the environmental awareness of female protagonists as they navigate patriarchal structures. Findings emphasize the significant woman/nature connection in Kingsolver's narratives and the essential roles women play in nurturing and leadership.

A New Reading of Eco-feminism in Two Modern American Fictions, Basma Ibrahim Khamis Al Omush (2021)

This study presents a fresh interpretation of ecofeminism through the works of Meadows and Smith, exploring the intricate relationship between literature and the environment. Referencing scholars like Cheryll and Lawrence Buell, it aims to examine the manifestation of ecofeminist themes in the selected texts while raising critical questions about the impact of environmental degradation on women, men's roles in this dynamic, and how female characters' marital status influences their responses to eco-disasters. Employing a descriptive, analytical, and critical approach, the research analyzes characters' actions and contexts to illuminate ecofeminist principles. Findings reveal that characters exhibit perseverance, hope, and responsibility despite environmental challenges, highlighting the interplay between ecological concerns and their fates, ultimately suggesting ecofeminism as a framework for understanding their resilience.

Ecofeminism: Encouraging Interconnectedness with Our Environment in Modern Society, Gourish Chandra Mondal, Palash Majumder (2019)

This paper highlights the urgent issue of rising pollution and the need for a new environmental perspective, defining ecofeminism as a synthesis of feminism and environmentalism that promotes interconnectedness while addressing the subjugation of women. It emphasizes the importance of cooperation and mutual care within nature to eliminate domination. The objectives include fostering a connection with the environment while tackling social injustices and advocating for the recognition of the intertwined nature of social and environmental issues. The research methodology involves analyzing existing ecofeminism literature and its links to feminist political ecology, focusing on policy changes rather than imposing ecological burdens on women. Findings reveal that patriarchal and capitalist structures are root causes of both women's oppression and environmental degradation, stressing the need for educational programs to promote sustainable consumption and proposing a worldview that values care and cooperation over domination.

Ecofeminism in the Novels of Sarah Joseph and Anita Nair, Niyathi. R. Krishna (2014)

This study explores the social, political, economic, and psychological invasions faced by women and the environment in India through an ecofeminist lens, focusing on the works of Nair and Joseph to emphasize

the importance of women's empowerment for societal progress. It highlights the interdisciplinary nature of this relatively unexplored research area, with objectives that include analyzing ecofeminism within post-colonial Indian themes, unveiling ecological exploitation in developing countries amid globalization, and surveying relevant ecofeminist theories. The research methodology integrates ecofeminist theories with literary analysis, conducts a literature review to capture the essence of ecofeminism, and examines linguistic and literary elements for thematic depth. Findings reveal the interconnected oppression of women and nature stemming from patriarchal attitudes, highlighting the severe consequences of this oppression while questioning the sustainability of development. Nair and Joseph propose ecofeminist and feminist solutions aimed at fostering empowerment.

Ecofeminist Tendencies in Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing and Arundhati Roy, Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed (2019)

This paper explores ecofeminism by highlighting the interconnected oppression of women and nature under patriarchy through the works of Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, and Arundhati Roy. The objectives include investigating the relationship between the degradation of women and the environment in these authors' narratives while advocating for a harmonious coexistence that respects both. The research methodology employs literary analysis focused on ecofeminist themes and a qualitative approach to examine ecofeminist ideas in character development. Findings reveal that Woolf, Lessing, and Roy illustrate parallels between the oppression of women and environmental degradation, resonating with ecofeminist principles that prompt a reevaluation of human-nature relationships. Their works encourage consideration of the implications of patriarchy for both women and the environment, advocating for a sustainable future.

Ecofeminism: Exploitation of Women and Nature, Dr. Tasneem Anjum (2020)

This paper explores the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and the environment, emphasizing how patriarchal structures contribute to both forms of exploitation. It argues that ecofeminism merges ecological concerns with feminist perspectives, advocating for simultaneous addressing of both issues. The primary objectives include analyzing the relationship between the oppression of women and environmental degradation, challenging patriarchal values that prioritize dominance over nurturing traits, and proposing alternative frameworks for understanding productivity in relation to both women and nature. The research likely employs a qualitative approach, drawing on historical and cultural analyses and possibly incorporating case studies from feminist movements and environmental activism. Findings suggest that women's nurturing attitude towards nature arises from biological and cultural connections, while ecofeminism serves as a lens to understand how societal structures perpetuate gender inequalities and environmental degradation. The paper highlights the importance of women's representation in environmental decision-making and calls for a redefinition of productivity to encompass biological and social reproduction alongside economic output.

Results and Discussions

The findings from this research reveal that the novels consistently depict female protagonists as environmental stewards, with characters like Nirmala in *Gift in Green* and Dee in *Prodigal Summer* illustrating how women's connections to nature promote sustainable practices. Additionally, the narratives highlight the interconnection between gender oppression and environmental degradation, as seen with

Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, whose struggles against societal norms reflect broader ecological issues. Cultural contexts significantly influence characters' relationships with nature, exemplified by Kavita in *Things to Leave Behind*, who navigates urbanization's impact on traditional environmental practices. Resilience amidst ecological crises is a recurring theme, with Mabel in *I Will Send Rain* showcasing women's critical roles in community survival. Nature is portrayed as both nurturing and oppressive, as symbolized by the river in *The God of Small Things*, which embodies beauty and societal constraints. Finally, the novels emphasize intersectionality, demonstrating how characters' diverse identities—such as class and caste—shape their interactions with the environment, underscoring the multifaceted nature of ecofeminism.

The discussions reveal that the characters in these novels embody key ecofeminist ideals, highlighting the deep connection between women and nature. Nirmala exemplifies the role of caretaker, while Kavita's experience with urbanization shows how modernization can disconnect women from traditional practices. Dee's ecological knowledge emphasizes the empowerment that comes from education in advocating for environmental health. Mabel represents resilience during ecological crises, showcasing women's essential roles in community survival. Ammu's story intertwines personal and environmental struggles, reflecting the interconnectedness of gender and ecological issues. Together, these characters illustrate the importance of intersectionality in ecofeminism, emphasizing how class, caste, and geography shape their relationships with the environment. Ultimately, the narratives advocate for a holistic approach to ecological sustainability and affirm the vital role of women in challenging societal norms.

Work Plan for Future

Future research could explore individual character arcs in greater depth, focusing on how they embody ecofeminist principles and evolve in their relationships with nature and their communities. Cross-cultural comparisons of ecofeminism could highlight both universal and specific themes across different regions. Additionally, investigating the roles of male characters would provide a more comprehensive understanding of ecofeminist dynamics. Examining the contemporary relevance of these narratives could reveal their connections to current environmental issues and social justice movements, while integrating ecological studies into literary analysis might strengthen ties between literature and real-world ecological concerns. Finally, expanding the research to include other genres, such as poetry or non-fiction, could further enrich the understanding of ecofeminist themes in various literary forms.

Conclusion

This research highlights the important role of ecofeminism in contemporary literature, illustrating how female characters like Nirmala, Kavita, Dee, Mabel, and Ammu navigate the intertwined challenges of gender, environment, and social justice. By showcasing their resilience and experiences, the study emphasizes the need for diverse perspectives within ecofeminism. The societal value of this work lies in its ability to inspire awareness and activism around pressing environmental and social issues, advocating for a more inclusive approach to ecological sustainability. Ultimately, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature can empower individuals and communities to champion both gender equity and environmental health, fostering a more just and sustainable future.

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