



Toxic Matters and Marginalized Bodies: Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice in the Fiction of Arundhati Roy

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Article Info

Article History:

Published: 25 Sept 2026

Publication Issue:

Volume 3, Issue 9
September-2026

Page Number:

439-442

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Abstract:

This research paper deals with the subject of ecofeminism and environmental justice in the fictional work of Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017). The study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach based on an ecofeminist theory and an environmental justice framework to examine the intersections of the marginalized human body (namely, women, lower-castes, and gender non-conforming communities) and the natural ecosystem in Roy's work as a product of globalized capitalism and patriarchal nationalism. It is suggested that Roy's narrative approach can be correlated with environmental deterioration and vulnerable bodies, thus showing that environmental degradation is directly connected to social hierarchy and corporate developmentalism. The results show that Roy's literature is an intervention against the environmental policy of the upper class by focusing on "small things" and survival strategies of subalterns.

Keywords: Arundhati Roy, Ecofeminism, Environmental Justice, Post-colonial Literature, Subalternity

1. INTRODUCTION

An ecological crisis and a social inequality have combined to change the literary critique of the modern era, and thus the way imaginative prose reacts to the degradation of the environment. Ecofeminism claims that the past understanding of nature and women in a patriarchal framework of reference allows this mutual exploitation (1). Alongside this, the environmental justice paradigm also highlights how environmental harms, such as industrial pollution, the extraction of resources, and displacement of land are disproportionately borne by marginalised communities on the basis of class, race, caste and gender (2).

Arundhati Roy has been a constant critic of the developmentalist state practices and oppressive social hierarchies in South Asian postcolonial literature. Though there are many scholarships on Roy's political essays on mega-dams and militarization, her fictional narrative prose offers a different structural space to look at the systemic crises. In this paper, the author will explore the way that Roy incorporates ecofeminism and environmental justice into her two novels, *The God of Small Things* (1) and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2). The study proposes to test a hypothesis that Roy is using the narrative geography and the materiality of the body to explore how environmental injustice and the violence of patriarchy and caste are co-constitutive phenomena.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology rooted in literary analysis and theoretical synthesis. The primary materials consist of Roy's primary fictional texts: **The God of Small Things** (3) and **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** (4). The analytical procedure follows a three-stage textual interrogation:

Spatial Mapping: Studying the changes in physical geography such as Ayemenem's Meenachal River, due to industrialization and urban growth over the narrative time, and the graveyard and landfills of Delhi.

Bodily Materiality: Analyzing cases of suffering bodies (caste violence, gender oppression, transphobia, etc.) on the one hand, and ecological deterioration (pesticide run-off, toxic waste, animal deaths, etc.) on the other.

Subaltern Agency: Reading the process of imagining alternative habitats for disenfranchised characters in the context of state sanctioned violence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Aquatic Realm is an essential companion to The God of Small Things. The Aquatic Realm is a vital aid to The God of Small Things.

The God of Small Things is an ecological landscape and a symbolic register of social boundaries in the Meenachal River. Roy helps readers understand how the river's ecology is tied to the enforcement of the "Love Laws, the rules on "who should be loved, and how. And how much?" that are based on patriarchy and caste (3).

The river's degradation is a result of the polluting effects of industrial effluents and hotel constructions, as well as the subjugation of its ecosystem and of non-normative bodies. Ammu, a woman who is divorced and challenging the status of her husband, and Velutha, a craftsman of the Paravan caste who is an intimate friend of Ammu, are given temporary refuge along the banks of the river, where their relationship is against the grain of caste mores.

Roy makes a clear link between environmental degradation and corporate encroachments. The river then goes from being an ecologically important resource into a polluted and dead sewer lined by a luxury hotel (3). The violence against Velutha is physical destruction and, like the ecosystem of the river, a commodity that is destroyed by a system that is based on purity and profit.

The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' toxic Urban Landscapes and Marginal Communities" is just that. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness' toxic Urban Landscapes and Marginal Communities" is just that? In The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017), Roy moves away from her rural riverscapes to the urban and the militarized, charting environmental injustice in modern India. The novel chronicles "slow violence," the "invisible" and "delayed" harm resulting from ecological abuse, urban pollution, and toxic pollution (5). Table 1 summarizes how Roy maps specific environmental harms onto vulnerable social groups across both works.

Text	Environmental Site	Environmental Harms	Affected Marginalized Groups	Socio-Political Mechanism
The God of Small Things	Meenachal River (Ayemenem)	Chemical run-off, industrial damming, untreated sewage	Untouchables (Paravans), non-normative women	Caste-based purity enforcement, commercial tourism
The Ministry of Utmost Happiness	Bhalswa Landfill / Old Delhi Graveyard	Toxic fumes, chemical leeching, loss of avian biodiversity	Hijras (transgender), religious minorities, urban poor	Neoliberal development, state militarism, majoritarian nationalism
The Ministry of Utmost Happiness	Kashmir Valley	Deforestation, chemical weaponry, land militarization	Rural populace, indigenous fauna	Military occupation, ecological displacement

Table 1. Mapping of environmental degradation and socio-political marginalization in Roy's fiction

Anjum, a hijra (transgender woman), creates a space for sanctuary (Jannat Guest House) in an old graveyard beside a city dump. This spatial decision emphasizes environmental racism and class segregation – marginalized bodies are forced to polluted, unlivable spaces.

Roy represents the killing of vultures by poisoning with diclofenac and socio-political marginalisation of religious and gender minorities (4). What happens to the scavengers when they die is the decay of the urban area, which directly impacts human populations living in the area in a vulnerable way.

Ecofeminist Resistance and the "Small Things"

The narrative structure of Roy's book is a critique on the top-down approach to environmentalism that tends to focus on the conservation efforts of the state and the neglect of indigenous and subaltern livelihoods (6). Instead, she is interested in the "small things": those practices of survival daily lived by marginalized people that build alternative communities in degraded space.

When people, animals and plants find refuge in the Jannat Guest House, they are all outcasts and beyond the control of the state. Roy shows this collective as a blueprint of an environmental justice model, because ecological restoration must be done with the dismantling of patriarchy, casteism and nationalism

4. CONCLUSION

Through his fiction, Arundhati Roy provides a critique of ecological degradation and social injustice in postcolonial India from an intersectional perspective. In *The God of Small Things* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, Roy demonstrates that the degradation of the environment is a political and not a neutral or technical problem, one that has a definite link with patriarchal power, caste violence, and state sponsored capitalism. Her narratives focus on subaltern bodies (women, untouchables, transgender people, and the urban poor) as a central part of ecological crisis, thereby securing environmental justice only if social oppression is taken into account. Her works promote small, local, caring, and survivalist gestures, rather than destructive developmentalist agendas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges the institutional support provided by the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, The ICFAI University Raipur, during the preparation of this research manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no competing interests, financial or personal, regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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