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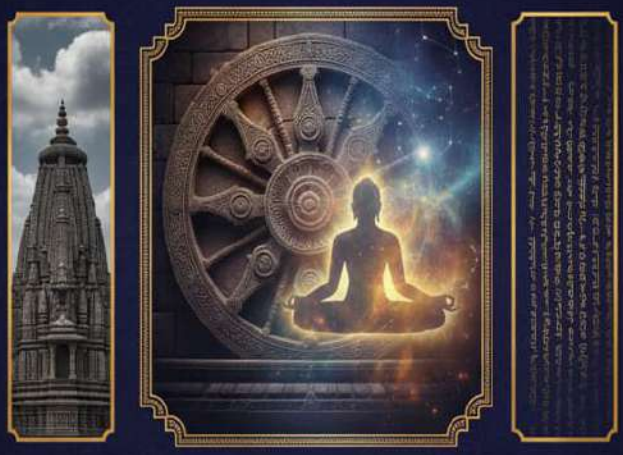

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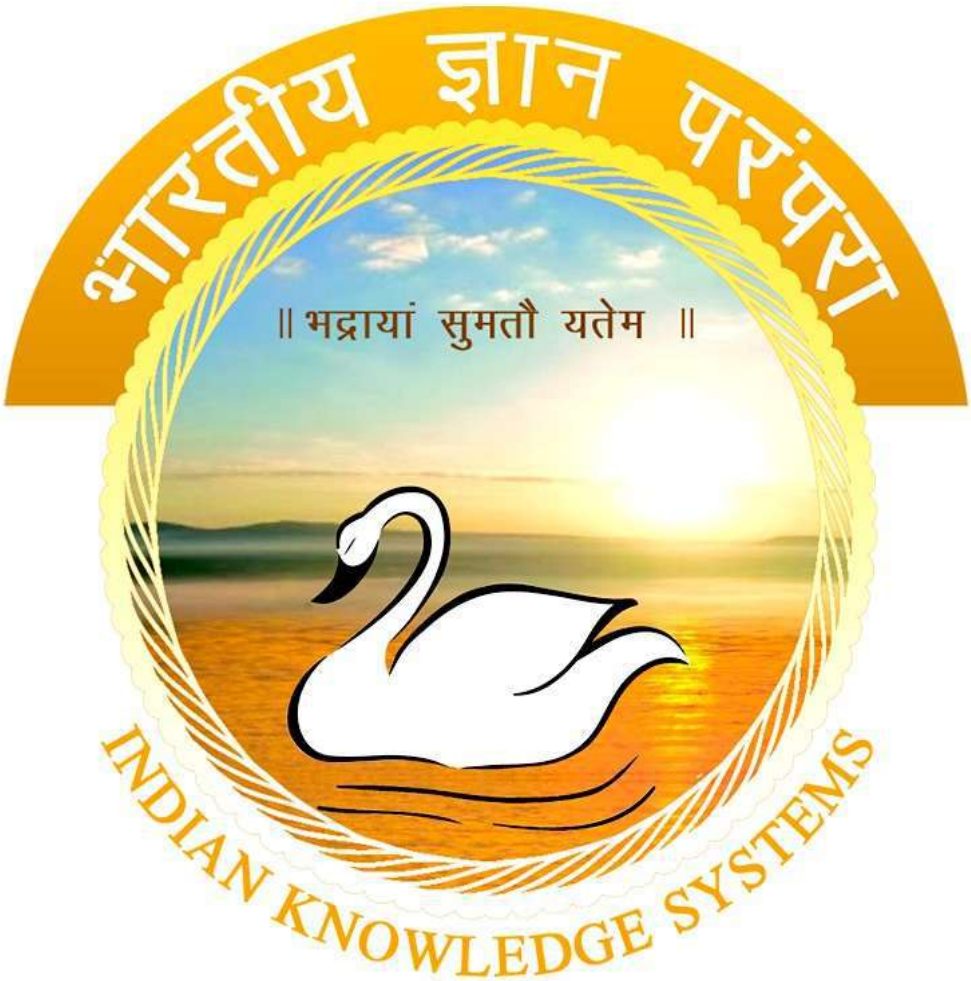
भारतीय ज्ञान परंपरा
॥ भद्रायां सुमतौ यतेम ॥
INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

PREFACE

The book **"Indian Knowledge System"** is a humble yet profound attempt to present the timeless wisdom, intellectual depth, and spiritual legacy of India. This volume stands as a collective academic endeavor, bringing together research contributions from eminent professors, distinguished scholars and dedicated researchers from various disciplines. Their thoughtful studies and analytical perspectives have enriched this work, transforming it into a significant contribution to contemporary academic discourse.

The book encompasses a wide spectrum of themes that reflect the essence and vitality of India's ancient and modern intellectual heritage including Indian Learning Traditions, Vedic Science, Indian Philosophy, The Human Art of Living, Vedanta Philosophy, Social Sciences in the Light of Indian Knowledge System, Yoga and Traditional Games, The Indian Knowledge System and National Education Policy 2020, Indian Painting, Vedic Literature and the Domain of Global Cultural Heritage. Each chapter embodies the confluence of deep-rooted Indian values with rational inquiry, providing readers with an opportunity to explore India's holistic and integrated approach to knowledge.

We take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to all the academicians and contributors who have shared their scholarly work, insights and reflections for this volume. Their intellectual commitment and sincere participation have given shape and meaning to this collective vision.

The Indian Knowledge System is not merely a subject of study it is a living tradition that continues to guide humanity towards harmony, sustainability, and self-realization. Through this publication, we aspire to rekindle awareness of India's indigenous wisdom and promote its integration with modern educational paradigms, in alignment with the vision of holistic learning articulated in the National Education Policy 2020.

We sincerely hope that this book will serve as an invaluable reference for students, teachers and researchers, inspiring further exploration into India's profound and ever-relevant knowledge traditions.

Editor

Dr. Usha Kumari, Anil Natthu Patil

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6

Ecological Consciousness and Indian Knowledge System in Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things

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ABSTRACT

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things offers a powerful portrayal of the ecological disruptions caused by human negligence and rapid urbanization. This paper explores how the novel reflects an urgent environmental consciousness rooted in Indian indigenous knowledge and the principles of sustainable living. Through close reading, the study highlights how Roy weaves together the natural world with the emotional and spiritual lives of her characters, showing that environmental degradation is not just a physical crisis but also a cultural and psychological one. The novel presents the Kerala landscape not merely as a backdrop, but as a living presence threatened by industrial encroachment and misguided human actions. It draws attention to how traditional ecological practices and beliefs—part of India's cultural heritage—are being displaced by modernization, resulting in a broken relationship between humans and nature. By examining this breakdown, the paper emphasizes the need to re-engage with Indian ecological wisdom to restore balance and harmony. In doing so, The God of Small Things becomes a literary response to the Anthropocene, urging readers to recognize the consequences of ignoring the environment and to imagine paths toward sustainable futures.

Keywords:*The God of Small Things,* Indian Knowledge System, eco-criticism, Arundhati Roy, indigenous knowledge, nature, Kerala.

Introduction:

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary mode of literary and cultural analysis that focuses on the relationship between literature and the physical environment. With the global ecological crisis becoming increasingly urgent, this literary approach seeks to reevaluate the role of literature in shaping, responding to, and interrogating the human relationship with the natural world. Literary criticism has historically prioritized human concerns such as race, gender, and class. However, ecocriticism attempts to shift the lens towards the non-human, contesting the anthropocentric frameworks embedded in both cultural practices and critical theory.

Greg Garrard, in his book *Ecocriticism*, writes, "Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology." According to him, "the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (Garrard). These statements highlight ecocriticism's interdisciplinary nature, bridging the gap between the humanities and environmental science. Unlike other literary theories that focus solely on human culture, ecocriticism emphasizes the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world.

In the Indian context, traditional ecological wisdom is deeply embedded in indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual philosophies, and cultural practices. Concepts such as Prakriti (nature), Dharma (righteous duty), and the worship of rivers, trees, and animals reflect a worldview in which nature is sacred and inherently interconnected with human life. These ideas form a critical counterpoint to Western anthropocentrism, offering models of coexistence, respect, and sustainability. Exploring literary texts through this lens helps uncover how Indian knowledge systems contribute to ecological consciousness and alternative environmental ethics.

One of the central questions in ecocriticism is: How is nature represented in literature? Literary texts are examined for whether they reinforce anthropocentric worldviews or encourage ecological wisdom. In many texts, nature is rendered passive, objectified, and subjugated to human will. This tendency aligns with the long-standing

cultural devaluation of the natural world.

For this rare beauty, it was an act of violation of her natural rights because she believed that she belonged on the earth, untrammelled by the confines of a pot, no matter how beautiful or ornate it was (Ao).

TemsulaAo's quote from *The Tombstone in My Garden* offers a powerful challenge to such devaluation. The act of putting the "rare beauty" into a pot, no matter how ornate, symbolizes a violation of her "natural rights." The metaphor reveals the tension between human attempts to control nature and nature's inherent independence. Here, Ao echoes the Eco critical stance that nature cannot be confined or domesticated without consequence.

Moreover, William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* represents the destructive potential of human beings, particularly in relation to their environment. The boys on the island not only descend into savagery but also devastate the landscape—a symbolic warning about the consequences of unchecked anthropocentrism. As Thapliyal and Kunwar observe, Golding portrays "the insatiable thirst to conquer and to tame the external anyhow," which ultimately "leads to the destruction of both nature and the order and harmony provided through it." The island, though "a place which is far from corruption," becomes a site of chaos as "the beast residing within soon overpowers all order and wisdom." Through characters like Ralph, Simon, Piggy, and Samneric, who "signify the code of nature," Golding suggests that the ecological balance and moral compass offered by nature are ignored and destroyed by human beings driven by domination and fear (Thapliyal and Kunwar 85–90).This paper aims to examine how *The God of Small Things* reflects ecological consciousness through Indian indigenous knowledge and critiques the environmental impact of modernization.

Analysis:

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the natural world is not merely a backdrop to human activity but a living, breathing presence that mirrors the emotional and cultural ruptures experienced by the characters. A poignant example of this is the transformation of the Meenachal River, a once-pristine water body that deteriorates over time, echoing the growing ecological crisis faced by Ayemenem

and its people. Estha and Rahel, the twin protagonists, serve as witnesses to this decline, and their emotional dislocation is deeply tied to the loss of the natural landscape they once knew.

Initially, the river represents a site of innocence and natural beauty. When Rahel and Esthe along with their family members went to receive Chacko's former wife Margaret and his daughter Sophie Mol, the children dream of "their river," Meenachal. The river, described with tenderness, is "warm…Grey green…. With fish in it. With the sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it" (Roy 123). This vivid imagery reflects an intimate bond with nature, where the river is alive with memory, reflection, and vitality. The fish, the mirrored sky, and the moon together symbolize harmony between the human world and the natural one.

However, Roy does not allow this nostalgia to remain untouched. Years later, when Rahel returns to Ayemenem, the river is unrecognizable—shrunk, contaminated, and lifeless. "It greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand rose from a hospital bed," writes Roy. "It had shrunk" (124). The river, once a symbol of life and continuity, is now depicted as a corpse, suggesting the irreversible damage done by unchecked human intervention. Even the monsoon rains, once vital to replenishing its depth, are no longer enough. As Roy notes: "Despite the fact that it was June, and raining, the river was no more than a swollen drain now. A thin ribbon of thick water that lapped wearily at the mud banks on either side, sequined with the occasional silver slant of a dead fish" (124).

This image—a "swollen drain" choked with "a succulent weed, whose furred brown roots waved like thin tentacles under water"—is a grim reminder of how natural ecosystems have been suffocated by anthropogenic waste. Lily-trotters walk across the water "splay-footed, cautious," as if navigating a dying body (124). The river, once a source of fear and respect, is reduced to "a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried fetid garbage to the sea" (124). Industrial waste, open defecation, and misuse of natural resources are key contributors to this deterioration. Roy's scathing depiction warns against the consequences of severing our connection to traditional, sustainable relationships with the environment—relationships often preserved

through indigenous knowledge and practices.

In Indian traditions, rivers are personified and worshipped as living goddesses—symbols of life, fertility, and purification. The degradation of the Meenachal River in the novel parallels the loss of this sacred bond. By showing how the river becomes toxic and lifeless, Roy dramatizes the cultural severance from a once-revered life force, echoing the disruption of India's eco-spiritual worldview.

Population explosion and better financial conditions are two major factors which lead to the conversion of agricultural and pastoral land into residential and commercial areas. Population explosion is universally a threat to the ecosystem. With more people, more space for accommodation is to be found. The city limits are extended and new suburban areas are formed at the cost of the natural environment. More areas are urbanized. With less number of trees and minimal greenery, air pollution increases drastically. Breathing impure and polluted air leads to a number of health issues. Roy refers to these newly promoted residential areas and urbanization, when she writes, "the new, freshly baked, iced, Gulf-money houses built by nurses, masons, wire-benders and bank clerks who worked hard and unhappily in faraway places" (13). On the main road, behind the Ayemenem house, several houses have been constructed. Roy brings out how Ayemenem was and how it is at present through the following lines: Here too, houses had mushroomed, and it was only the fact that they nestled under trees, and that the narrow paths that branched off the main road and led to them were not motorable, that gave Ayemenem the semblance of rural quietness. In truth, its population had swelled to the size of a little town (128).

She makes it clear that population explosion is a problem even in a village like hers. Roy speaks about the adverse effects of modernization on animals as well. When the family returns to Ayemenem after receiving Margaret Kochamma and Sophie Mol from the airport, they see a dead elephant. Roy writes, "Near Ettumanoor they passed a dead temple elephant, electrocuted by a high tension wire that had fallen on the road. An engineer from the Ettumanoor municipality was supervising the disposal of the carcass" (153). Generally, high tension wires are laid a little away from residential areas. When such a thing is done, care for human beings is taken, but

safety of animals is out of question. And this elephant had become a victim for it. This reflects how animal safety is an ignored area. She brings out the irony of the situation. High tension wires which are laid for the sake of having certain facilities for human beings have harmful effects on animals and at times, the lives of animals are at stake. But Chacko stops the car to inquire whether the dead elephant is KochuThomban, which is the "Ayemenem temple elephant" (154). When they learn that the dead elephant is not the elephant that they know, in a way, they are relieved of the tension. When the "engineers of the concerned municipality" cremated the electrocuted elephant, they carefully "sawed off the tusks and shared them unofficially" (219–220). Roy presents the sympathetic and empathetic stand of the modern people as far as animals are concerned.

This environmental collapse is paralleled by the transformation of Karri Saipu's estate—once a colonial mansion, now converted into a tourist hotel named "Heritage." Roy critiques the commodification of both history and nature, observing that while the hotel brochures present the place as "God's Own Country," the reality is far from idyllic. "The view from the hotel was beautiful; but here too the water was thick and toxic. They had built a wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Karri Saipu's estate. There was not much they could do about the smell… they knew those clever Hotel people's poverty was merely a matter of getting used to it" (125–126). This commercialization ignores the human and ecological costs of such developments and highlights how tourism often romanticizes degraded environments while concealing their lived realities.

The twenty-three-year gap between Rahel's childhood and her return renders the environmental and psychological transformations more striking. Rahelgrapples with the irreversible changes in both nature and self. Roy uses this transformation to underline the emotional toll of ecological degradation and to prompt a reflection on what has been lost.

Ammu's character, often discussed in the context of gender and social oppression, also embodies resistance against environmental decay. Her symbolic struggle mirrors a deeper concern about the ecological imbalance caused by modernization. Similarly, Baby Kochamma's story provides insight into the cultural shift away from

sustainable practices. Once a devoted gardener who pursued a diploma in ornamental horticulture and curated a lush garden in Ayemenem, she abandons her passion for gardening after a television dish antenna is installed. Her earlier love for local flora and her efforts to cultivate even exotic species are described with admiration: "Like a lion–tamer she tamed twisted vines and nurtured bristling cacti, she limited bonsai plants and pampered rare orchids. She waged war on the weather. She tried to grow edelweiss and Chinese guava" (26–27).

Baby Kochamma's earlier gardening practices may be read as remnants of an older ecological sensibility tied to tending to the land—though more ornamental than subsistence-based, it still reflects an indigenous orientation to plant life, seasonal rhythms, and micro-ecosystems. Her later neglect of the garden parallels society's larger neglect of indigenous eco-practices.

Yet the same garden, years later, is "knotted and wild, like a circus whose animals had forgotten their tricks," overrun by weeds known as "communist patcha" (27). Her shift from an active relationship with nature to passive consumption of media reflects the extensive societal abandonment of ecological wisdom and sustainable living.

Roy also uses the character of Velutha, the untouchable carpenter and the so-called "God of Small Things," to reflect the marginalization of both subaltern human lives and the natural world. Velutha's creativity—he makes "tiny windmills, rattles, minute jewel boxes out of dried palm reeds; he could carve perfect boats out of tapioca stems and figurines on cashew nuts" (74)—reflects a deep, intuitive harmony with nature, a skillset rooted in indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable use of resources. His fate in the novel becomes a tragic reminder of how society brutalizes both its marginalized people and its natural landscapes.

Velutha's intuitive craftsmanship using natural materials reflects a form of ecological wisdom rooted in India's artisanal traditions. His sustainable, respectful use of local flora mirrors ancient practices where artisans and nature coexisted symbiotically. This embodied knowledge stands in stark contrast to the destructive modernity around him.

Even Pappachi, with his fascination for moths, symbolizes the contradictory human relationship with nature: a desire to control and

categorize, coexisting with disregard and violence. Chacko's failed pickle factory similarly mirrors the collapse of traditional, small-scale, local industries that once coexisted with nature. The inability to sustain these practices in the face of urban expansion and capitalist ambition further reflects the erosion of ecological and cultural balance.

Conclusion:

Through these narratives, Roy critiques the exploitation of natural resources and calls attention to the need for a deeper engagement with indigenous ecological knowledge. *The God of Small Things* thus becomes a literary meditation on environmental degradation and a call to return to a more balanced, sustainable way of living—where nature is not just a backdrop to human drama but a co-participant in the story of survival. Roy's novel presents a poignant and layered response to the Anthropocene, reminding us that ecological consciousness must go hand in hand with cultural memory and ethical responsibility.

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