



## **ECO-CRITICISM AND THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC AGE IN THE MINISTRY OF UTMOST HAPPINESS: TRIBAL CONNECTIONS WITH NATURE AND WATER**

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**\*Suma K.**

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Assistant Professor, Seshadripuram First Grade College, Yelahanka, Bangalore.

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**Article Revised: 11 July 2025      Assistant Professor, Seshadripuram First Grade College, Yelahanka,**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research essay examines the intersection of eco-criticism and the Anthropocentric Age in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) and explores how the novel reshapes the tribal societies' interaction with nature and water under climate change. Examining the environmental and social problems and its portrays the alienation of marginalized tribal groups, such as water rights, land displacement, and ecologic degradation, the paper begins the critique of modernity, cultural displacement and the loss of their connection to nature in the Anthropocene by Roy and its devastating impact on native cultures. Water is introduced in the novel both as a necessity for survival and as a symbol of loss, representing the broader environmental crises characteristic of the Anthropocene. Through an Eco-critical view, this essay demonstrates how Roy uses her narrative to advocate to rethinking about human-nature relations and giving primacy to indigenous knowledge systems as a way out of the 21st century's environmental conundrums. Focusing on the cultural, ecological and political struggles of the tribal communities, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* presents a vision of resistance, survival and the potential for ecological renewal in the context of the climate crisis.

**KEYWORDS:** Eco-criticism, Communities, Anthropocene, alienation, Modernization.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Anthropocene its refers to a new geological age is characterized by human control over the Earth's climate and ecosystems. It has again put the complex interdependence between the man and the nature into focus. As like industrialization, deforestation and global warming

pose a growing threat to ecological balance. And literature has proven to be an effective tool to challenge for these changes and shed light on the plight of marginalized groups. Among the most impacted communities are in such a scenario are indigenous and tribal societies. Those existence, culture, and spirituality are inextricably linked with nature. Literary responses are to such ecological catastrophes tend not only to reflect ecological concerns but also become arenas of resistance to the forces of modernity and environmental injustice.

**Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** (2017) is an important work within this eco-critical context, especially in how it represents tribal communities and their engagement with nature and water within the Anthropocene. Roy adopts a multi-level narrative structure in order to unveil the cultural, ecological and political consequences on fast modernization, and particularly on vulnerable tribal populations. Through evocative descriptions of displacement, deforestation, and ecological destruction, the novel critiques systemic exclusion of indigenous populations in the cause of national development. Roy places these groups not only as victims of ecological violence but also as bearers of rich indigenous knowledge systems that disrupt dominant epistemologies of progress and consumption.

Water, in Roy's novel, also serves as both a literal giver of life and a powerful metaphor for ecological and cultural loss. The privatization and contamination of water sources stand as symbolic representations of the overall environmental crisis within the Anthropocene. At the same time, water has sacred meaning for indigenous societies, symbolizing spiritual, ritualistic, and communal aspects of their world. Roy's portrayal of water then becomes the overriding motif through which to investigate the alienation and dispossession that these groups undergo.

This essay discusses the ways in which *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* uses eco-criticism to question the ruination brought by modernity and industrialization upon tribal communities. Through a scrutiny of the junctures among environmental degradation, cultural displacement, and indigenous resistance, the study emphasizes the novel's appeal to a reworked relationship between humanity and nature. In so doing, Roy not only deconstructs the anthropocentric vision that prevails in the Anthropocene but also presents a vision of ecological renewal based on indigenous ethics and environmental justice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecocriticism is a multidisciplinary approach that highlights the interaction between literature and nature, serves as the theoretical underpinning for such analysis. Scholars have discussed how literature intersects with environmental concerns, especially among oppressed groups. The Anthropocene, a nomenclature describing an age defined by human agency, is at the centre of today's Eco critical discussions. As climate change, biodiversity loss, and degradation of ecosystems define the Anthropocene, authors such as Arundhati Roy have increasingly reflected on the impacts of these shifts on indigenous people.

In Indian literature, Eco critical research has increasingly studied the environmental struggle of indigenous populations. Researchers such as Rob Nixon and Vandana Shiva have pointed out the ways in which environmental degradation overwhelmingly impacts marginalized communities, especially within post-colonial settings. Nixon's *Slow Violence* and the *Environmentalism of the Poor* highlights how environmental degradation is usually slow, imperceptible, and affects poor, native communities. Likewise, Shiva's work on water rights and natural resource privatization highlights the ecological injustice done to tribal communities in India.

In Roy's writing, tribal communities tend to have a profound, spiritual connection with their land and natural resources. This connection illustrates the story *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, where water needed as a resource and symbol both signifies life and the ever-looming ecological destruction. Experts are arguing that Roy laments the modern impacts of industrialization, state-sponsored violence, and globalization. All of these forces contribute to the displacement and the subsequent marginalisation of certain groups.

In this research, I will be focusing on the alienation in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* written by Arundhati Roy (2017), particularly in this connection with the destruction of nature, cultural alienation and the struggles of tribal people in the Anthropocene age. Roy underscores tribal societies, paying particular attention to their nature and waterways. The modernity, industrialization, and state-sponsored development with their merciless march brings nature headlong into the wasteland. The deportation of people from their communities and their local lands, as well as the commoditization of their cultural identity through natural resources, results in total alienation.

This essay argues that environmental alienation is experienced primarily through the cultural lens of the community and through the dislocation of people from their land and traditional practices. It shows a more profound failure of cultural and ecological systems coming apart at the seams. The imposition of forced displacement and the devastation of their natural resources also make them lose a sense of belonging, demonstrating how modernization serves as an agent of alienation. Furthermore, the symbolic representation on water in the novel is both literally as a natural resource and metaphorically as a sign of loss and further amplifies the loss of connection, emphasizing the emotional and existential disconnection that arises from environmental and cultural ruin.

Through the analysis of the alienation is on the tribal community within the horizon of ecocriticism and the Anthropocene. This essay reveals Roy's criticism of modernity and its catastrophic effect on the subaltern. It also highlights the manner in which the novel responds not only to the alienation is brought about by ecological as well as cultural violence but also promotes a reimagined relationship of humans and nature based on indigenous knowledge systems.

### **Ecocriticism and the Anthropocene**

Ecocriticism is being an interdisciplinary literary criticism and its analyses how texts are interacting with the environment, ecological concerns and the intricate human-nature relationships. It not only focusing on interprets literary representations of nature but also questions the cultural presuppositions that govern the human relations with the non-human world. In this research, literature is a place for reflecting, resisting and reimagining environmental realities are especially during ecological crises.

The Anthropocentrism age is a kind of term that is being used more and more on the scientific and the humanities literature. It defines the geological era on particular area like human activity is the driving force behind the planet's climate and the ecosystems. It represents a fundamental transformation from the humans as part of nature to becoming its most influential disruptor. Industrial growth, large-scale resource extraction and uncontrolled developments are having resulted in extensive deforestation, loss of biodiversity and disruption of natural cycles. But the effects of this human-centred age are not evenly distributed. In this such a way this research historically oppressed by some groups, including indigenous and tribal communities, it tends to suffer from environmental degradation.

In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* Arundhati Roy uses the methods of fiction to critique for this age of humanity. She narrates starkly about how state policy, corporate interests and developmental agendas are ravage the environment and displace people whose existence is deeply intertwined with nature. Roy's novel does not provide a nature as passive background but as living presence, damaged, commodified and contested. Her versions of on environmental injustice is a narrative that takes place through the lived experiences of the marginalized community, those whose traditional knowledge systems and spiritual relationships with the land are systematically erased.

Roy's writing is on ground breaking in the way that it bridges ecological destruction and concerns of identity, belonging and resistance. Her story highlights the cultural and emotional trauma is faced as a result of environmental degradation. Compelling readers to acknowledge the price of unbridled progress. From an eco-critical perspective, her book is an extending critique of the moral culpability of the Anthropocene and the imperative need to for adopt alternative and sustainable forms of existence based on indigenous knowledge.

### **Tribal Communities and Nature in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness***

**The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** offers a weave of interconnected stories and one of the strongest strands is on that of the Indian tribal communities. The tribal people are complexly connected to their territories and environments and their interaction with nature is both way of material and religious. Roy emphasizes that how modernization and the industrialization. This kind of state interventions are that go with it, disturbs these relations and dislodging tribal peoples from their native homelands and resources.

Roy's main characters are especially Anjum is symbolize the larger struggles of tribal communities amidst a fast-changing world. The experiences of Anjum resonate with the disempowerment of these communities. Whose homes are being alienated for so-called development work like factories, dams and urbanization. These kinds of developments are in the name of progress result in displacement and the loss of their cultural heritage, its only intensify environmental degradation. Water is a key element of in Roy's novel, both as a literal and symbolic form of survival, its highlights loss and ecological crisis. Water is the necessary for the survival of tribal communities, but it is being controlled and privatized by the state and corporations. This is the larger theme in the Anthropocene. The exploitation of natural is the resources at the expense to the marginalized groups.

Roy's illustration of water also invokes its cultural relevance for native communities. For most tribal societies, water is holy and embedded with rituals and customs. Water is utilized as a metaphor for survival and adversity in the novel—survival, since it is a prerequisite for survival, and adversity, since its unavailability and pollution signify the larger environmental destruction resulting from industrialization and urbanization. Through this portrayal, Roy critiques the economic and political systems that locate profit and corporate interests above indigenous peoples' basic needs.

### **Modernization, Displacement, and the Loss of Connection to Nature**

Modernization in **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** is depicted as a force of devastation that displaces tribal groups from their homes. Mega-development projects like dams and industrial units are legitimized in the name of economic prosperity and national advancement but lead to environmental degradation and displacement of indigenous peoples. Roy questions these developments by revealing the social and ecological prices of such progress.

The role of the state in allowing this displacement is articulated within a post-colonial framework. Roy brings out how modernity creates a neo-colonialism that allows the dispossession of native people from their land in the interest of development. The displacement for marginalized people and it is not only for material but also loss of cultural identity and spiritual bonding with the land. Through these themes are kind of challenges for Roy and the idea that modernity equates to progress is instead presenting it as a force of ecological and cultural violence.

### **Reimagining Tribal Connections to Nature and Water**

In addition to the forces of dislocation and ecological destruction, Roy's novel also imagines resistance and rebirth. In the lives of characters such as Anjum and others, Roy suggests that indigenous knowledge systems hold the potential for resolving the environmental problems of the Anthropocene. Such knowledge systems, which prioritize sustainable and ecologically aware modes of living, contrast with the exploitative nature of modernity.

Roy does not idealize native ways of being but acknowledges their richness and toughness. She presumes that ecological renewal in the future is tied to the imaginative reconstruction of human-nature relationships based on indigenous wisdom. The novel promotes an environmental justice reconsideration, situating the experiences of marginalized people at the

fore and foregrounding their potential leadership in addressing climate change and ecological destruction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the way Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* addresses eco-critical concerns in the framework of the Anthropocene. Particularly, the research attempts to examine the way the novel represents the ecological alienation, displacement, and cultural disintegration of tribal societies as a result of modernization, industrialization, and state-led development. By placing at the centre the importance of water as a symbol and material imperative, the research seeks to accentuate the critique of modern environmental policies and support for indigenous epistemologies in the novel as a model of ecological rebirth and justice.

### **Scope of the Research**

This research is concentrated on the overlap of eco-criticism, post colonialism, and indigenous environmental epistemology as embodied in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The scope entails

- A literary critique of the way Arundhati Roy depicts tribal communities and their relationship with nature and water.
- An eco-critical reading of environmental degradation, water shortages, and cultural displacement in the Anthropocene.
- The material and symbolic functions of water in symbolizing ecological loss and spiritual disconnection.
- A critique of modernization and industrialization as depicted in the novel, especially with regard to development-induced displacement.
- The study of indigenous ecological knowledge and its possible contribution to resisting environmental crises.
- Comparative perspectives from researchers like Rob Nixon and Vandana Shiva to place Roy's work in the broader environmental justice discourses.

This research does not try a detailed analysis of all characters or subplots of the novel, but rather centres on aspects that are directly related to eco-critical issues, tribal identities, and environmental symbolism—specifically water.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, Eco critical method of examination of The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. The novel's representation of tribal communities and their association with nature and water, particularly in terms of environmental justice and the Anthropocene, are the main focus. The methodology involves the following steps:

**Eco critical Analysis:** The essay employs ecocriticism in analysing how water and nature are presented in the text and for marginalized and tribal characters, especially their experiences. The symbolism and material value of water for the indigenous population during ecological disruption will be explored in the analysis.

**Character and Symbolic Textual Analysis:** This involves close reading of important characters, including Anjum, and the symbolic construction of water in the novel. Through close readings of passages that discuss water scarcity, ecological disintegration, and displacement, the paper will examine how Roy is critical of the environmental and cultural aspects of modernity.

**Interdisciplinary Approach:** The study draws upon interdisciplinary materials, integrating Eco critical theory with post-colonial studies and environmental justice. The works of Rob Nixon, Vandana Shiva, and others will place the ecological concerns of Roy's novel within perspective.

**Fixing Roy's Work in the Anthropocene:** The essay is fixing Anthropocene in Roy's novel in the context. It is exploring the ways in which the characters receive environmental violence and how the novel is adding to the international discourses on climate change and environmental justice.

**Comparative study Analysis:** This study compares the other books with Roy's novel to discuss the ecological challenges of indigenous people. Through this comparison, it will emphasize how The Ministry of Utmost Happiness adds to the international discourse on sustainability and indigenous rights.

## CONCLUSION

Arundhati Roy's **The Ministry of Utmost Happiness** condemns the destructive impacts of the Anthropocene on tribal communities, water bodies, and the environment. Using an Eco critical approach, this paper illustrates how Roy refigures the interaction between nature and tribal societies, placing strong emphasis on the role of indigenous knowledge systems in responding to climate change. With a concentration on the predicament of the subaltern classes and the displacement of water and land, Roy's novel promotes ecological regeneration

and environmental justice, compelling a rethink of human-nature relations in the Anthropocene era.

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