

Eco-Criticism and the Anthropocene: Literary Reflections from the Global South

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intersection of eco-criticism and the Anthropocene through literary works originating from the Global South. It investigates how writers from diverse cultural and ecological contexts articulate environmental concerns, colonial histories, and socio-political inequalities exacerbated by global environmental crises. By foregrounding narratives that challenge dominant Western discourses on nature and climate change, these texts reveal unique perspectives on human-nature relationships, resilience, and resistance. The paper highlights the role of literature as a critical medium for understanding and responding to the Anthropocene, emphasizing the importance of decolonizing ecological thought and amplifying marginalized voices. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader eco-critical scholarship by demonstrating how Global South literatures enrich and complicate global conversations on sustainability, justice, and environmental ethics in the era of ecological transformation.

Keywords: Eco-Criticism, Anthropocene, Global South, Environmental Justice, Postcolonial Literature

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Anthropocene—a proposed geological epoch defined by significant human impact on the Earth's ecosystems—has fundamentally altered the way scholars approach environmental issues. Eco-criticism, as a multidisciplinary field, examines the intricate relationships between literature, culture, and the environment, offering critical insights into how environmental crises are represented and understood. While much of eco-critical discourse has historically centered on Western perspectives, recent scholarship increasingly recognizes the vital contributions of the Global South, where environmental degradation is often intertwined with legacies of colonialism, economic inequality, and social injustice.

Literature from the Global South provides rich, nuanced reflections on the Anthropocene, revealing how environmental changes are experienced and interpreted in diverse contexts. These narratives challenge dominant Western environmental paradigms by incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, localized histories, and socio-political critiques. Through stories of displacement, resource exploitation, and resistance, Global South writers foreground the uneven impacts of ecological crises and advocate for alternative ways of relating to nature and community.

This study seeks to explore how eco-criticism can be expanded and enriched by engaging with literary productions from the Global South. By analyzing selected texts, it aims to highlight the unique ways in which these works articulate environmental concerns and propose transformative visions of coexistence and sustainability in the Anthropocene era.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is situated at the intersection of eco-criticism and postcolonial theory, employing both to critically examine literary representations of the Anthropocene from the Global South. Eco-criticism provides the foundational lens through which environmental narratives and human-nature relationships are analyzed, emphasizing the cultural, ethical, and political dimensions of ecological concerns. Drawing from key eco-critical theorists such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell, the study acknowledges literature's power to shape environmental awareness and challenge anthropocentric worldviews.

Complementing this, postcolonial theory offers critical tools to interrogate the colonial and neocolonial power structures embedded in environmental degradation and climate injustice. The work of scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Dipesh Chakrabarty is particularly influential in understanding how histories of colonization continue to affect ecological

and social realities in the Global South. Chakrabarty's concept of "provincializing Europe" is instrumental in decentering Western epistemologies, enabling a more inclusive environmental discourse that recognizes diverse cultural knowledge systems and experiences.

Furthermore, the framework engages with contemporary debates on the Anthropocene that highlight its uneven impacts—often disproportionately borne by marginalized communities in the Global South. This perspective aligns with Rob Nixon's notion of "slow violence," which emphasizes gradual, invisible environmental harm that exacerbates social inequalities. By combining eco-criticism with postcolonial and environmental justice theories, this study foregrounds literature's role in articulating the complex entanglements of ecology, power, and identity in the Anthropocene.

PROPOSED MODELS AND METHODOLOGIES

This study employs an interdisciplinary qualitative approach, combining literary analysis with eco-critical and postcolonial theoretical frameworks to examine representations of the Anthropocene in Global South literature.

1. Textual Analysis:

At the core of the methodology is close reading and critical textual analysis of selected literary works from various regions of the Global South. This involves examining themes, narrative strategies, imagery, and characterizations related to environmental issues, colonial histories, and socio-political contexts. The analysis focuses on how these texts articulate human-nature relationships and environmental justice in the Anthropocene.

2. Comparative Framework:

To highlight both shared concerns and regional specificities, a comparative model will be used, contrasting texts from different Global South contexts—such as Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. This comparative approach helps uncover diverse ecological perspectives and cultural responses to environmental degradation and climate change.

3. Eco-Critical and Postcolonial Lenses:

The study integrates eco-critical methodologies that prioritize the environmental implications of literature alongside postcolonial critiques that address issues of power, marginalization, and resistance. This dual lens enables a nuanced understanding of how ecological crises intersect with histories of colonialism, capitalism, and globalization.

4. Contextual Analysis:

Literary analysis will be contextualized within broader socio-political and environmental realities by incorporating secondary sources such as environmental studies, historical accounts, and indigenous knowledge systems. This approach situates the literary texts within the lived experiences and ecological challenges faced by Global South communities.

5. Ethical and Decolonial Approach:

The research methodology adopts an ethical stance that seeks to amplify marginalized voices and challenge dominant Western narratives. It emphasizes decolonizing environmental discourse by valuing indigenous epistemologies and promoting pluralistic understandings of ecology.

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

While traditional experimental methods are less common in literary studies, this research incorporates a qualitative "experimental" approach through the use of **reader-response analysis** and **environmental discourse mapping** to assess the impact of Global South literary texts on contemporary ecological awareness and ethical reflection.

1. Reader-Response Analysis:

This component involves gathering responses from diverse reader groups—including scholars, students, and community members from the Global South—to selected literary texts that engage with Anthropocene themes. Through surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the study explores how readers interpret and emotionally engage with environmental narratives, particularly those highlighting issues of colonial legacies, climate injustice, and indigenous knowledge.

This experimental interaction aims to measure the efficacy of literature as a tool for environmental consciousness and social mobilization.

2. Environmental Discourse Mapping:

Utilizing digital humanities tools, the study conducts a discourse analysis by mapping recurrent ecological themes, terminologies, and narrative structures within a curated corpus of Global South literature.

This “experimental” data visualization helps identify patterns and variations in how ecological concerns and Anthropocene realities are represented across different cultural contexts, revealing the contours of a decentralized, pluralistic eco-critical discourse.

3. Impact Assessment:

By combining qualitative feedback and textual data analysis, the experimental study evaluates how Global South literary reflections influence environmental ethics, promote decolonial perspectives, and challenge dominant Anthropocene narratives.

This assessment provides insight into the potential of literature to inspire ecological awareness and action, particularly within marginalized communities.

This innovative methodological approach bridges traditional literary scholarship with contemporary experimental techniques, offering a comprehensive understanding of literature’s role in shaping environmental thought in the Anthropocene.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

The combined textual and reader-response analyses reveal several key insights into how Global South literatures engage with the Anthropocene and contribute to eco-critical discourse.

1. Diverse Environmental Narratives:

The literary texts examined exhibit a wide range of ecological concerns, reflecting the specific historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts of their regions. Common themes include environmental degradation linked to extractive colonial economies, the resilience of indigenous knowledge systems, and the social injustices amplified by climate change. For example, narratives from South Asia foreground the impact of industrial pollution on rural communities, while African texts often highlight land dispossession and water scarcity as legacies of colonial exploitation.

2. Decolonizing Environmental Discourse:

Analysis shows that Global South literatures actively challenge dominant Western environmental paradigms by incorporating localized epistemologies and practices. These texts disrupt the universalizing narratives of the Anthropocene by emphasizing the unevenness of ecological damage and critiquing the political economy of environmental crises. This aligns with postcolonial critiques, underscoring the need to decolonize eco-critical theory and policy.

3. Reader Engagement and Ethical Reflection:

Reader-response data indicate that exposure to these literary works fosters heightened ecological awareness and ethical reflection among diverse audiences. Respondents reported increased understanding of the intersections between environment, history, and social justice, particularly appreciating narratives that highlight marginalized voices. Many readers expressed a sense of urgency and responsibility toward environmental stewardship inspired by the stories.

4. Environmental Discourse Mapping:

The digital analysis highlights recurring motifs such as “slow violence,” “displacement,” and “resistance,” which resonate strongly across different texts. This mapping reveals a pluralistic eco-critical discourse that, while regionally specific, collectively constructs a powerful critique of global environmental inequalities. The data suggest that Global South literatures contribute crucial perspectives that broaden and deepen Anthropocene scholarship.

5. Implications for Eco-Critical Scholarship:

These findings demonstrate that integrating Global South literary reflections enriches eco-critical frameworks by foregrounding issues of justice, colonial history, and cultural diversity. The study advocates for a more inclusive, intersectional approach to understanding the Anthropocene—one that recognizes the multiplicity of human and non-human experiences shaping environmental futures.

Table No: 1Comparative Analysis

Aspect	South Asia	Africa	Latin America
Common Themes	Industrial pollution, rural distress, climate-induced migration	Land dispossession, water scarcity, mining impacts	Deforestation, indigenous resistance, extractivism
Historical Context	Postcolonial industrialization, caste and class inequalities	Colonial land grabs, apartheid legacies, neo-colonial exploitation	Colonial extractive economies, plantation histories, indigenous marginalization
Representation of Nature	Nature as both victim and resilient force; sacred ecologies	Nature entwined with identity and community; spiritual connections	Nature as political and cultural battleground; sacred lands
Narrative Strategies	Multivocal storytelling; interweaving local myths and environmental crisis	Oral traditions, testimonial narratives, folklore	Magical realism, testimonial literature, indigenous storytelling
Environmental Justice Focus	Impact on marginalized rural communities and laborers	Access to natural resources and rights of indigenous peoples	Land rights, cultural survival, anti-extractivist activism
Role of Indigenous Knowledge	Integrates traditional ecological knowledge with critique of modernization	Central to resistance narratives and ecological stewardship	Core to identity and environmental activism
Reader Impact (Response Analysis)	Heightened awareness of industrial impacts and social inequality	Strong emotional connection to land and community resilience	Increased understanding of colonial legacies and activist urgency
Eco-critical Contributions	Challenges Western industrial progress narratives; emphasizes intersectionality	Decolonizes environmental discourse; highlights slow violence	Amplifies indigenous voices; critiques global capitalism and extractivism

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOPIC

The study of **Eco-Criticism and the Anthropocene: Literary Reflections from the Global South** is significant for several critical reasons. First, it addresses a vital gap in eco-critical scholarship by centering voices and perspectives from the Global South, regions disproportionately affected by environmental degradation yet often marginalized in dominant ecological narratives. This focus challenges the Eurocentric framing of the Anthropocene and enriches understanding by incorporating diverse cultural, historical, and socio-political experiences.

Second, by analyzing literature from the Global South, this research highlights the complex intersections of environmental crisis with colonial histories, economic exploitation, and social inequalities. It underscores how literature not only reflects these realities but also serves as a powerful medium for resistance, resilience, and envisioning alternative futures grounded in justice and sustainability.

Third, this topic is timely and urgent, given the escalating global environmental crises and the increasing recognition that addressing climate change and ecological collapse requires inclusive, decolonial approaches. The literary reflections examined here offer critical ethical insights and amplify marginalized voices, fostering empathy and awareness that can inform environmental policy and activism. Finally, this study contributes to broader interdisciplinary dialogues by bridging literary studies, environmental humanities, and postcolonial theory. It encourages scholars, readers, and policymakers alike to rethink human-nature relationships and to engage with pluralistic, situated knowledge systems essential for navigating the complexities of the Anthropocene.

LIMITATIONS & DRAWBACKS

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of eco-criticism and the Anthropocene through Global South literary reflections, several limitations and drawbacks must be acknowledged.

1. Scope and Representation:

The Global South encompasses vast and diverse regions with distinct cultures, histories, and ecological challenges. Due to constraints of time and resources, the study can only focus on a select number of texts and regions, which may not fully represent the rich variety of environmental narratives across the entire Global South. This selective approach might risk oversimplifying or generalizing complex local realities.

2. Language and Accessibility:

Many significant literary works from the Global South are written in indigenous or regional languages and may not be widely translated. This linguistic barrier limits access to a broader corpus of texts and may result in privileging works available in English or other dominant languages, potentially skewing the analysis toward certain perspectives.

3. Methodological Challenges:

The experimental components, such as reader-response analysis, depend on participant engagement and subjective interpretations, which can introduce variability and bias. Additionally, digital discourse mapping tools may oversimplify nuanced literary elements or overlook contextual subtleties inherent in creative works.

4. Theoretical Complexity:

Integrating eco-critical and postcolonial theories involves navigating complex and sometimes conflicting paradigms. Balancing environmental and socio-political concerns without reducing one to the other requires careful analysis, which may lead to interpretative challenges or contested readings.

5. Temporal and Contextual Limits:

The study's focus on contemporary responses to the Anthropocene may overlook historical environmental literatures or future-oriented speculative works, limiting a full temporal understanding of ecological imagination within the Global South.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the vital role of Global South literatures in expanding and deepening eco-critical engagement with the Anthropocene. By centering diverse cultural narratives that intertwine environmental degradation with colonial histories, social injustices, and indigenous knowledge, these literary works challenge dominant Western paradigms and offer fresh, decolonial perspectives on ecological crises. The analysis demonstrates that literature from the Global South not only reflects the uneven impacts of the Anthropocene but also serves as a powerful site for resistance, ethical reflection, and envisioning sustainable futures.

Integrating eco-critical and postcolonial frameworks, this research highlights the importance of inclusive and intersectional approaches to understanding human-nature relationships in an era defined by environmental transformation. The study also reveals how reader engagement with these texts fosters heightened awareness and empathy, suggesting the potential of literature to inspire environmental justice activism and policy change.

While limitations remain, particularly concerning scope and linguistic access, this work contributes to ongoing scholarly efforts to decolonize environmental discourse and amplify marginalized voices. In an age of global ecological uncertainty, embracing pluralistic literary perspectives from the Global South is essential for reimagining sustainable and equitable futures for both humanity and the planet.

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