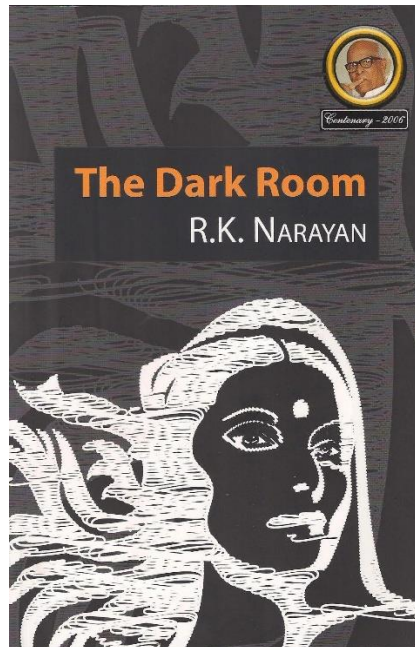


**Novelists as Eco-Entrepreneurs:  
A Comparative Study of R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* and  
Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things***

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Courtesy: [https://www.amazon.in/Dark-Room-R-K-Narayan/dp/8185986029/ref=as\\_sl\\_pc\\_tf\\_til?tag=betthelin-21&linkCode=as1&creativeASIN=8185986029](https://www.amazon.in/Dark-Room-R-K-Narayan/dp/8185986029/ref=as_sl_pc_tf_til?tag=betthelin-21&linkCode=as1&creativeASIN=8185986029)

**Abstract**

Eco-Entrepreneurs are those whose business efforts are not only driven by profit, but also by a concern for the environment. In the same way, in literature, there are authors whose motive is not in the salability of their works but, in the way, they can also become eco-entrepreneurs thereby creating an awareness in protecting nature and environment. They show their Eco critical scholarship through their writing. Ecocriticism has emerged to become one of the foremost and

vibrant fields of academic research in the recent years, especially after the 1980s. In literary studies, the theoretical concepts and innovative ideas of ecocriticism have been applied to unravel some of the complex questions surrounding the texts and their contexts. In this line, this paper makes an attempt to analyse two pertinent Indian English writers of eminence, R. K. Narayan and Arundhati Roy, by applying the theory of ecocriticism. For this purpose, one important novel authored by each of these two writers is taken. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and R. K. Narayan's *The Dark Room* are the two novels to be taken for analysis in this paper. Through this analysis, the paper intends to bring out how both the novelists have assumed the role of eco-entrepreneurs in the process of writing these novels.

**Keywords:** Eco-entrepreneurs, Environmental Ethics, eco-criticism, eco-cosmopolitanism

### **Eco-Entrepreneurs**

Eco-Entrepreneurs are those whose business efforts are not only driven by profit, but also by a concern for the environment. In the same way, in literature, there are authors whose motive is not in the salability of their works but in the way they can also become eco-entrepreneurs thereby creating an awareness in protecting nature and environment. They show their Eco critical scholarship through their writing.

In *Protectors of the World: Phoebe Comes Home* the author introduces a group of teenagers who save the world from climate change. *The Dragon Keeper* tells the everlasting relationship between a human and a ferocious Komado dragon. *The Tourist Trail* tells the story of a person who grows up with the crying of the penguins at a penguin research station.

It is clear that these contemporary writers announce new eco-cosmopolitanism. Their friendly call is to return to nature before it is too late. Their aim is to make the possibilities of an environmentalism without borders.

## Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics being part of environmental philosophy is the study of moral relationship between human beings. It also deals with the ethical relationship between human beings and the environment. Human beings form an integral part of our environment and environment is also associated with human beings in framing their moral and ethical values. Environment Ethics stresses the fact that all the living things on Earth have the right to live. The ethical values of our life should guide our approach to other living things in the environment. In our society the original historical form of domination was that of women by men. Human exploitation of nature meant oppression of women and this associate nature with the female. Men were regarded as rational and superior and so they were entitled to dominate the inferior, the less rational female. The character of the individual changes according to the environment they live in. R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi* is traditionally routed whereas Ayemenen of Arundhati Roy changes character according to environment. Ammu when with her husband in North follows tradition but when she comes away from her husband to Aymenem, the History House supports her to go astray, protects and encourages her.

## Narayan's Fiction

In Narayan's fiction, we can see to be a gallery of men and women characters. Women characters play an important part in his fiction. Also, family and family relationships are given remarkable importance. Women are representative of the customs and the orthodox principles. In his fiction we see the Hindu tradition being followed very intimately and sincerely by the women. A variety of women characters like unmarried girls, widows, deserted wives, working women and grannies are portrayed by Narayan. Also, when seen chronologically the sociological march of Indian women from Sita-Savitri tradition is seen. Acceptance of valued traditions and their submission to it becomes their daily routine. Savitri of *The Dark Room* shows extreme patience and endurance even at times of extreme hardship she faces. She is a typical and traditional Indian woman who lives within the confines of home. According to M.K. Naik, "*The Dark Room* is ... a wholly serious tale of silent suffering and abject surrenders" (Naik,161). The commitment and fidelity she shows to her erring husband gives her fulfillment in the sphere of her family

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relationship. At times she opposes her husband openly but still she is too weak a soul who cannot cherish those rebellions. Savitri, the female protagonist shown as sensitive and intelligent female set against the backdrop of South India, echoes the frustration of a tormented wife. We see how the domineering husband, Ramani expects perfection in his house and his dutiful wife Savitri unable to cope up with this faces his bad temper. The novel opens with a dispute between Ramani and Savitri.

Ramani is not ready to listen to his wife. He shouts, “Mind your own business, do you hear?” ... Go and do any work you like in the kitchen but leave the training of a grown-up boy to me. It is none of a woman’s business” (DR:1). He is contemptuous. “I don’t know when I shall have a little decent food to eat. I slave all day in the office for this mouthful. No lack of expenses, money for this and money for that. If the cook can’t cook properly, do the work yourself. What have you to do better than that?” (DR:2). This outburst of Ramani shows how domineering he is. This becomes a daily routine and Savitri accepts his rage with conventional submission of an Indian women and performs her duties as a mother and wife uncomplainingly. “ .... This was almost a daily lament as regular as her husband’s lecture, Savitri ceased to pay attention to it and ate in silence” (DR:5). She keeps thinking about her son Babu, “How impotent she was, she thought; she had not the slightest power to do anything at home, and that after fifteen years of married life” (DR:5). She also feels, “..... she ought to have asserted herself a little more at the beginning of her married life and then all would have been well” (DR:5). But Savitri’s meek submission is revealed by the comment passed by her autocratic husband.

“After undressing and changing, Ramani came very quickly towards the dining-hall and said to Savitri, “Hope you have finished your dinner.”

“Not yet.”

“What a dutiful wife! Would rather starve than precede her husband. You are really like some of the women in our ancient books (DR:11).

To him she is still a child, “You have to learn a lot yet. You are still a child, perhaps a precocious child, but a child all the same” (DR:12). Savitri’s throat went dry at the sight of her

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husband. He was pacing the front veranda; he had changed his coat and was wearing a blue blazer. He looked fixedly at her as she came up from the gate and said, “you have made me wait for half an hour.” He added, “a fellow comes home from the office, dog-tired, and he has only the doors and windows to receive him. Where is ever body gone? Anyone could walk in and walk out with all the things in the house” (DR:20).

Ramani’s harshness does not stop with Savitri alone. When the children wishes to go out with him, he refuses them, “It is very bad for the children to be taken out every time their elders go out” (DR:21). His short-temperedness and arrogance is explicit by the following event.

If I hear you squeal, I will thrash you, remember. Be a good girl.” He shouted a moment later, “Savitri, I will count sixty. You must dress and come out before that.” .....  
“Women are exasperating. Only a fool would have anything to do with them. Hours and hours for dressing! Why can’t they put on some decent clothes and look presentable at home instead of starting their make-up just when you are in a hurry to be off? Stacks of costly sarees, all folded and kept inside, to be worn only when going out. Only silly looking rags to gladden our sight at home. Our business stops with paying the bill. It is only the outsider who has the privilege of seeing a pretty dress (DR:21-22).

When Babu plays some mischief resulting in power-cut, Ramani’s short-temperedness is revealed. Also, he blames her for, “holding a stage – show. I can’t stand here and watch you. Are you coming in for food or not?” (DR:39). Savitri unable to cope up with his arrogant behavior retires into the dark room next to the store, “Savitri rose, went to the dark room next to the store, and threw herself on the floor” (DR:39). Ramani feels that, “It is no business of a wife to butt in when the father is dealing with his son. It is a bad habit. Only a battered son will grow into a sound man” (DR:40). Even the cook in Ramani’s house is of the idea that, “Women are terrible” (DR:40). When the servant maid says, “What do you know of the fire in a mother’s belly when her child is suffering?” (DR:41), the cook comments that, “Women must be taught their place” (DR:41). Savitri’s friend tells her,

It is a wife's duty to feel so. .... Men are impetuous. One moment they will be all temper and the next all kindness. Men have to bear many worries and burdens, and you must overlook it if they are sometimes unreasonable.... After all they are better trainers of children than we can be. If they appear sometimes harsh, you may rest assured they will suffer for it later (DR:46).

But soon another complication arises with the appointment of Shantabai in Engladia Insurance Company. Shanta Bai's guts and candour excites the passion of Ramani and this works out great chaos and disorder in his family set-up. His craze towards her makes him oblivious of his duties towards his wife and children. Ramani's endearment with Shanta Bai grows day by day and he begins to worry when even after one month she exhibits no aptitude for canvassing work. Ramani's infatuation for Shanta Bai and his eccentric behavior brings out the wreck of his family.

For the last few days disturbing doubts and a dull resentment had been gathering in her mind, and she hated herself for it. She felt angry with him and unhappy at being angry. It sapped all her energy. She would have given anything to lighten her mind of its burdens and to be able to think of her husband without suspicion. Just a word from him would do, just an angry word; even a lie, a soothing lie. Unpleasant thoughts seemed to corrode her soul (DR:72-73).

She, being a typical Indian house-wife, consoles herself saying:

The poor man was perhaps pouring over account-books all night, and now without a moment's rest he would have to be rushing back once again in the hot day after heavy food. All for whose sake? She despised herself for listening to gossip. After all these years of life together, this was not the way to judge him. She was not going to let her foul mind spoil their life. She resolved not to ask him about the bench. She resolved to re-establish peace (DR:75).

But when she hears from Gangu about her husband's visit to the movie with Shanta Bai she becomes furious and the growing estrangement between them leads to revolt on the part of Savitri.

Don't touch me!" she cried, moving away from him. "You are dirty, you are impure. Even if I burn my skin I can't cleanse myself of the impurity of your touch." He clenched his teeth and raised his hands. She said, "All right, strike me. I am not afraid," He lowered his hands and said, "Woman, get away now." ..... We are responsible for our position: we accept food, shelter, and comforts that you give, and are what we are..... No I'll starve and die in the open, under the sky, a roof for which we need be obliged to no man (DR:87-88).

When Ramani's says, "I'm very sleepy. I'm waiting to bolt the street door and go to bed" (DR:88), she gets furious and walks out of her house and even, "Before she reached the gate she heard the sound of the bolting of the front door... It was very nearly midnight. She walked down the silent street" (DR:89). Walking along she moves towards the north end of the town and reaches the river Sarayu in an hour. Resolved to live independent, Savitri finds a petty job in a temple with the aid of Mari, Ponni's husband, who saves her when she was about to drown in the Sarayu river. Savitri's exile reminds us of the mythological characters of Sita and Shakuntala. Savitri is closer to Sita. She is submissive and dedicated, but unlike Sita, she revolts against male domination. Though she hopes to find a peaceful life and starts work in the temple, she finds herself molested and eyed by other men and is constantly at odds with the temple priest

Savitri decides to stay in the dark room in the temple which stinks of burning oil and smoke. But soon realization dawns on her. She was furious with herself, "What despicable creations of God are we that we can't exist without a support. I am like a bamboo pole which cannot stand without a wall to support it..." (DR:146). She agrees to stay alone in the dark lonely shade. But her stay in the dark, loneliness excites nostalgia and her pitiful condition melts her determination and she makes her way home.

Savitri returns back but Ramani doesn't question his wife about her absence in the house. He is unrepentant. One afternoon she hears the loud call of, "Locks repaired..... umbrellas repaired!" (DR:161). She wants to, "give him food, water, and a magnificent gift, and inquire about her great friend Ponni; perhaps Ponni had sent him along now, Savitri almost called him through the window, but suddenly checked herself and let him pass, " ..... She felt that it was very mean and unjust" (DR:161).

The rebel in Savitri dies. Fear returns and the traditional women reborn. She realizes that all her attempts to escape were useless. As a woman she has no place elsewhere except her family, whether she likes it or not. Nothing changes. And we see that Savitri who regarded family as a sacred unit in the beginning of the novel is same as Savitri in the end. R.K. Narayan shows the futility of marriage with the profound statement of Savitri towards the end, "A part of me is dead" (DR:160). The torture that she faces all through brings out her inner strength and courage but very soon they get suppressed. Narayan portrays her character in such a way that it creates a great impact on the readers. From seeing off her husband to the office, to opening his car shed, Savitri performs the duty of a true wife sincerely. But Ramani keeps on taunting her, giving no freedom as an individual. But being so humble Savitri feels that Ramani ought not to be blamed. And as any mother she feels guilty for abandoning her children. So, she returns back to Malgudi. Savitri a quintessential homemaker and loyal wife who is very down to earth, continues to tolerate everything as she always used to.

### ***The God of Small Things***

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy tells the sad tale of a mother and her daughter, abused and ill-treated by their men folk. It presents a realistic picture of social, historical and psychological truth of a typical Indian Society. The daily routine, rites and customs, rituals and habits are portrayed clearly. Also, the problem plaguing women in a male dominated society is unveiled in the novel. The agony of a helpless mother is perceived through the eyes of her seven-year old child. An observation by Maitreyi Mukhopadhyay is as follows.

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It should be emphasized that the poor status of women, then oppression and exploitation, cannot be examined as an isolated problem in Indian Society. Although the status of women constitutes a problem in most societies in the rigidly hierarchical and inequitable social structure which exists in India, the relative inferiority and superiority of various roles is much more clearly defined. The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument or function of the social structure (Desai 1985:182).

In a society the dual standard of morality between men and women, the passive role of a wife to her husband and the prolonged suffering of a woman towards ignominy of another woman by a male is all unmasked in the novel. In *The God of Small Things* the suffering and torture starts with the protagonist the central female character, Ammu, who accompanies her parents to Ayemenem after her father's retirement. She is not only deprived of college education but also marriage too becomes a remote possibility as dowry could not be provided. Hence she becomes gradually domesticated. According to Virginia Woolf domestic life spares no breathing place for women:

The son of my house may be granted freedom to develop his mind, he may have a room of his own, but the daughter is expected to be at everyone's beck and call ... for domestic life cultivates the irrational side of a woman's nature; it is distinguished by the primacy of intellect. The domestic arts involve mainly the fine discrimination of feelings and the ability to bring about adjustments in personal relations (Marder 1968:34-35).

Very soon Ammu is laid down by the restrictive atmosphere at home. Worst of all was the cruelty inflicted on her mother, Mammachi by her father, Pappachi. So viciously jealous of his wife, Pappachi stopped her from continuing her violin classes just because her teacher had praised her exceptional talent'. He used to beat her every night for no fault of hers until Chacko interferes and stops it forever, "Every night he beat her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new. What was new was only the frequency with which they tookplace. One night, Pappachi broke the bow of Mammachi's violin and threw it in the river" (GST:47-48). Mammachi being a woman of

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indomitable strength bears all physical and mental tortures inflicted by her husband and never rebels against his cruelty. When she cries at her husband's death Ammu remarks that, "... Mammachi was crying more because she was used to him than because she loved him" (GST:50).

Ammu was devoid of higher education because her father felt that it would corrupt a woman. The uncongenial atmosphere at home and her frustration at not being able to continue her higher studies strangled her. She felt like a prisoner in the Ayemenem house and wanted to break free from the antipathy of her family members, "All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother. She hatched several wretched little plans. Eventually, one worked. Pappachi agreed to let her spend the summer with a distant aunt who lived in Calcutta" (GST:38-39).

At Calcutta she meets the Hindu Bengali from the tea-estates in Assam and consents to marry him, "Ammu didn't pretend to be in love with him. She just weighed the odds and accepted. She thought that *anything*, anyone at all, would be better than returning to Ayemenem. She wrote to her parents informing them of her decision. They didn't reply" (GST:39). As Simone de Beauvoir puts it,

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband .... Or in some cases a 'protector' ... is for her (woman) the most important of undertakings.... She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother's hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of a new master.... (Simone 1961:352).

Ammu soon realizes the blunder she has committed as she becomes a victim of her husband's drunken rage. She gives birth to twins and thinks it proper to desert him. Mr. Hollick, her husband's boss nurses a filthy intention towards Ammu. He says, "You're very lucky man... such an attractive wife....." (GST:41). Her husband too urges Ammu to consent to his boss's wish fearing he might lose his job. Unable to bear up with this extreme humiliation Ammu

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abandons him and returns reluctantly to her parents' home. The stifling atmosphere, her idle confinement at home and a strong confidence about herself, prompts her to marry the wrong person. But she shows no regret on leaving him. In fact she carries no memories of the past, "She was twenty-seven that year, and in the pit of her stomach she carried the cold knowledge that for her, life had been lived. She had had one chance. She made a mistake. She married the wrong man" (GST:38).

As far as marital status in concerned both Ammu and Chacko find themselves in the same position. But in Ayemenen Chacko not only enjoys all the legacy and becomes the caretaker of the house but also asserts his position and bluntly tells Ammu, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (GST:57). Ammu faces all these problems because of her broken marriage. She, being very meek and gentle, fails to assert her place at home. As Colette Dowling explains,

It has to do with dependency: the need to lean on someone... Those needs stay with us into adulthood, Clamouring for fulfillment right alongside our need to be self-sufficient.... Any woman who looks within knows that she was never trained to feel comfortable with the idea of taking care of herself, standing up for herself, asserting herself.... (Dowling 1982:13).

Ammu moves about in her own house being unnoticed. The male tyranny takes vicious turns, "She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank with her little plastic transistor shaped like a tangerine. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims" (GST:44). Being alienated from family and society and having no right on anything she becomes dejected and turns for love and affection outside the family. She falls in love with Velutha, an untouchable which is termed illicit, untraditional and sinful. Whereas Chacko who flirts with low class women, is encouraged by Pappachi in the name of "Man's needs" (GST:268).

Ammu loved the fiery spirit of revolt in Velutha as she too nursed the feelings of protest and anger within herself, "She hoped that under his careful cloak of cheerfulness, he housed a

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living, breathing anger against the smug, ordered world that she so raged against” (GST:176). Ammu’s relationship with Velutha moves beyond boundaries and her love for him makes her cross all limits, “She had defiled generations of breeding... and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, *forever* now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals. At baptisms and birthday parties.... It was all finished now” (GST:258).

Ammu unlike Savitri of *The Dark Room* dares to demolish all restrains and barriers and escapes into the world of Velutha where she would get warmth and sincerity. She had faced worst things in her life and so she cares least about the consequences she has to face. But the entrenchment of caste inhibitions was so profound in the minds of people that the affair between Velutha and Ammu created a mass condemnation in the locality. Their bitterness towards her was such that she was discouraged from meeting Rahel lest she might pollute her mind. Even when she dies alone in a filthy room of Bharat Lodge in Allepey, she is denied the dignity of a funeral, “The church refused to bury Ammu. On several counts. So, Chacko hired a van to transport the body to the electric crematorium. He had her wrapped in a dirty bedsheet and laid out on a stretcher” (GST:162), and only Rahel attends it, “No one else from the family was there” (GST:163).

Ammu too, like Savitri, faces lots of sufferings and lives a life of emptiness. She undergoes the pangs of practical life in Ayemenem and the pathetic treatment meted out to her makes her the most tragic character and her attraction towards Velutha pushes her into endless darkness. But Ammu unlike Savitri being educated goes independent and has guts to take decision on her own. As Ranga Rao says, “the story is about an Indian village, authentic India, but the sensibility is urban, Westernised and modern” (Rao 1997:23-27).

Urbanization, capitalism, colonialism, revived skepticism and optical technologies conspired to alienate people from both earth and reality. Shakespeare’s comedies. Marvell’s pastoral lyrics, Dutch paintings—all illuminate what love of nature has to do with perception of reality. Therefore, the contemporary writers have taken up the difficult task of becoming Eco-

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Entrepreneurs in order to establish the fact that without a proper environment, man's future existence will become an issue of concern----not to speak of literature.

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### Notes and References

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