

## Anthropocentrism and Nature in an Atlas of Impossible Longing by Anuradha Roy\*

Anuradha Roy'un *İmkânsız Özlemler Atlası*'nda İnsan merkezilik ve Doğa

### ABSTRACT

This paper includes the analysis of *An Atlas of Impossible Longing* by Indian writer Anuradha Roy from a postcolonial ecocritical perspective. It studies the anthropocentric discursive construction of the contrast between humans and nature by Western culture and Roy's reflection on the anthropocentric attitude introduced by colonialism and practiced by Indians. Anthropocentrism takes its roots from the idea that rational white Western man is free to shape and exploit the non-human world. The subordination of nature in Western culture has become the root of all human dominance; it has been extended to include the dominance of different kinds of races, ethnicities, genders, religions, and classes. Roy portrays the turbulent historical three periods of British rule on the Indian subcontinent extending from 1907 to 1947 and three generations of experiences during these periods from Indians' perspective. During these periods, British colonialists exploited the land, the environment, and cultural structures of the Indians. They introduced their politics, modern ideas, techniques, industrialization, progress, and capitalism and exported the idea of nature being a discursive product, a resource, a material object. The importance of the pre-colonial idea of nature's being a sacred place disappeared and the Indians' cultural ties with it were disrupted. Roy writes a story in which India and the Indian people share a common fate because of anthropocentrism. She presents how western introduced anthropocentrism has moved beyond the problem of separation of human beings and nature to articulate all kinds of exploitations and discrimination.

**Keywords:** Anuradha Roy, Nature, An Atlas Of Impossible Longing, Anthropocentrism, Postcolonial Ecocriticism

### ÖZET

Bu makale, Hintli yazar Anuradha Roy'un *İmkânsız Özlemler Atlası* adlı eserinin sömürgecilik sonrası ekoeleştirel bir bakış açısıyla analizini içerir. Batı kültürü tarafından insan merkezli, insanlar ve doğa arasındaki karşıtlığın söylemsel inşasını ve Roy'un sömürgeciliğin getirdiği ve Hintliler tarafından uygulanan insan merkezli tutumu nasıl yansıttığını inceler. İnsan merkezilik, köklerini akılcı beyaz batılı insanın, insan olmayan dünyayı şekillendirmede ve sömürmede özgür olduğu fikrinden alır. Batı kültüründe doğanın hüküm altına alınması, batılı olmayan insanların hâkimiyet altına alınması fikrinin temelini oluşturarak, farklı türdeki ırkların, etnik kökenlerin, cinsiyetlerin, dinlerin ve sınıfların egemenliğini kapsayacak şekilde genişletilmiştir. Roy, Hindistan yarımadasındaki İngiliz yönetiminin 1907'den 1947'ye kadar uzanan çalkantılı tarihsel üç dönemini ve bu dönemlerdeki üç kuşağın deneyimini Hintlilerin bakış açısından tasvir eder. Bu dönemlerde, İngiliz sömürgecileri Hindistan topraklarını, çevresini ve kültürel yapılarını sömürmüşler. Politikalarını, modern fikirlerini, tekniklerini, sanayileşmeyi, ilerlemeyi ve kapitalizmi tanıtmışlar ve doğanın söylemsel bir ürün, bir kaynak, maddi bir nesne olduğu fikrini ihraç etmişlerdir. Sömürge öncesi doğanın Hindistanlılar için kutsal bir yer olduğu düşüncesinin önemi ortadan kalkmış ve onların doğayla olan kültürel bağları bozulmuştur. Roy, eserinde insan merkezilik anlayışı nedeniyle Hindistan ve Hint halkının ortak bir kaderi paylaştığını anlatan bir hikâye yazmıştır. Yazar, Batının getirdiği insan merkeziliğin, her türlü sömürü ve ayrımcılığı ifade etmek için insan ve doğa ayrımı sorununun ötesine nasıl geçtiğini sunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Anuradha Roy, Doğa, İmkânsız Özlem Atlası, İnsan Merkezilik, Sömürgecilik Sonrası Ekoeleştiri

### INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyse Anuradha Roy's reflection on the anthropocentric discursive construction of the contrast of humans and nature, and the extension of the dominance and exploitation of nature to human beings from different races, religions, castes, and classes. Roy tells a story in which India and the Indian people share a common

Derya Biderci Dinç<sup>1</sup> 

### How to Cite This Article

Biderci Dinç, D. (2023). "Anthropocentrism and Nature in an Atlas of Impossible Longing by Anuradha Roy" International Social Sciences Studies Journal, (e-ISSN:2587-1587) Vol:9, Issue:115; pp:8249-8255. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/sssj.72378>

Arrival: 10 August 2023

Published: 30 September 2023

Social Sciences Studies Journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

\* Bu çalışma, Erciyes Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalında ve Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İfakat Banu AKÇEŞME danışmanlığında 2018 yılında yürütülen "A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Sea Of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh, An Atlas of Impossible Longing by Anuradha Roy and A River Sutra by Gita Mehta" başlıklı doktora tezinden üretilmiştir.

<sup>1</sup> Asst. Prof. Dr., İstanbul Topkapı University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, İstanbul, Türkiye. ORCID: 0000-0002-9443-7136

fate due to European anthropocentrism. British colonialists' existence in India disrupted the environment and the traditional, cultural, and economic lives of the Indians. It explores how Roy deals with the social, cultural, and ecological results of colonial policies and actions.

Anthropocentrism (human centrism) of the European worldview inspired the domination of nature. In European thought, from the Judeo-Christian tradition to Cartesian thinking and modern science, human beings and nature have always been considered distinct, different, and separated. They have been separated from each other in a hierarchical dualistic arrangement that has influenced the cultural construction of the European "self" and "the other." European human beings' definition of humanity depends on the presence of "the other," and they have produced their self from the reflections of "the other". Dualism regards human beings as the center of the world due to their having spirit, mind, intellect, and speech. "Dualistic reason/nature polarization naturalizes radical inequality between sharply distinct but collaborating groups and justifies the privilege of the winners, as more rational" (Plumwood, 2002: 17). Anthropocentric assumptions have created a mechanistic conception of nature, and they have reduced nature to the position of an object and perceived it as an infinite resource that exists to satisfy humankind's various desires.

Anthropocentrism refers to the ways in which European human beings have defined their relationships with nature. In their relationship with nature, human beings' anthropocentric vision has let them "conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate and exploit every natural thing" (Glotsfelty and Fromm, 1996: 113). European human beings have lacked concern for nature; they have enjoyed hegemony over it and acted as masters of it. The absolute prioritization of one's own species' interests over those of the silenced majority is still regarded as being 'only natural'" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: 5). In the novel, Roy reverses the prioritization of the powerful one's interests over the silenced and dominated ones.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, an evolving interdisciplinary field of study, emerged to address the complex entanglement of postcolonial and environmental issues. It explores the intricate relationships between colonialism, imperialism, and the environment. It challenges the traditional narratives of Western domination and exploitation of non-Western lands, people, and ecosystems. It tries to deconstruct the Western discourses and explores the ways in which colonial powers imposed their perceptions of nature on the colonized lands, which led to environmental degradation and the dispossession of indigenous people.

This scholarly perspective recognizes that colonialism and imperialism weren't only about political and economic dominance but also about reshaping the landscapes, exploiting natural resources, imposing new resource extraction practices, disrupting indigenous knowledge systems, and sustainable environmental practices. Moreover, postcolonial ecocritics emphasize the importance of centering indigenous voices and perspectives in discussions about environmental justice and sustainability. They uncover hidden power dynamics and question dominant environmental ideologies.

Postcolonial ecocritics assert that the subordination of nature in Western culture is the root of all human dominance. It has been extended to include other species related to the notions such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and class. Different kinds of centric structures in the Western tradition such as androcentric and Eurocentric structures have taken their roots from the idea that the rational human race is free to shape and exploit the non-human world. Postcolonial ecocritics move beyond the problem of separation of human beings and nature by the European dualist project to articulate all kinds of exploitations and discriminations. DeLoughrey and Handley state

Enlightenment dualisms of culture/nature, white/black, and male/female were constituted through the colonial process, and postcolonialists (and ecofeminists) have long been engaged in dismantling the hierarchies that derive from these interpellations of non-European nature. Thus the "cultivation" that presumably constituted the post-enlightenment European male subject was increasingly distanced from women, the poor, and people of color. (2011: 24-25)

They expand the scope of ecocriticism to deal with the issues of race, gender, and class. They question the domination and exploitation of non-white and lower-class people and women. They intend to provide a response to the anthropocentric rationalist constructions of the European that are constituent of race, class, and gender discrimination and their related practices such as industrialization, capitalism, colonialism, and development. This article studies Roy's engagement with the ecological issues and social issues and injustices including gender, race, class, caste, and other categories of discrimination.

## POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AN ATLAS OF IMPOSSIBLE LONGING



As a postcolonial writer, Roy portrays the oppressive power structures of the political changes in the history of India. Roy uses India's history as the theme of *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. She recovers the turbulent historical period of British rule on the Indian subcontinent extending from 1907 to 1947 from the Indians' perspective. During this period, the British colonialists were in India with their dominant administration, and India was British Raj. British colonialists in India committed offenses against the Indians, the cultural structure of the Indian society, and the environment in India. They introduced their politics, science, industrialization, progress, and capitalism, and the idea of nature's being a resource. The rural and urban environments were made the material and discursive products of the power in the colonial past. Roy responds to the European anthropocentric rationalism and also to the ideological construction of nature "outside the fallen world of human politics and greed" (DeLoughrey and Handley, 2011: 82). She presents nature and human history as interlocking entities. Rural and urban places including a plundered former British mining town, downsides of the country, a dangerous forest, and old buildings are not settings or a bystander to human experience in the novel. The rural and urban environments have experienced the effects of social changes and turbulent political times including conflicts, revolts, wars, and partitions. They are parts and agents of the colonial historical process. She is one of the

[p]ostcolonial writers [who] lack the luxury of an ahistorical landscape. The landscapes that they write about are necessarily politicized: their subjectivities are intimately implicated in both natural beauty as well as the traumatic history of the place; they confront and engage to varying degrees the history of their postcolonial geographies, the history of diaspora, of slavery, of the capitalist commodification of the landscape, and yet devastating consequences this history has on the individual. (Kamada, 2010: 3)

Through the story of the first generation of a mid-class Indian family who moved from Calcutta to Songarh in about 1907, Roy presents a portrait of social and environmental injustices during the British Raj. The postcolonial and ecocritical issues of colonial domination of the natives and exploitation of their natural worlds are relational in the novel. The ideological formation of nature as the other, as a limitless resource and raw materials for human use, encouraged them to penetrate, dominate, and exploit Indian resources. They introduced the capitalist utilization of nature. The British rule allowed many British capitalists to come to India to take part in the trade. The British colonial history has affected and distorted Indian's traditional relationships with their environments in addition to the intensification of their subjugation. One of these British capitalists was Digby Barnum, who commoditized Indian land while maintaining the subjugation of the Indians.

British colonialism, one of the examples of the dominative power, is guided by two related discourses; anthropocentrism and euro-centrism. "The very ideology of colonization is thus one where anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism are inseparable" (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: 5). Anthropocentrism and Eurocentrism have functioned together to oppress natives and their natural environments. Racism is the offshoot of them; European colonialists used racial difference as justification to abuse the non-Europeans and their lands. Their justification has proceeded from their construction of non-European people and lands as inferior, wild, unused, empty, and uninhabited.

The structure of reason/nature dualism and its variants is the perspective of power; it represents... 'a way of looking at the world characteristic of the dominant, white, male Eurocentric ruling class, a way of dividing up the world that puts an omnipotent subject at the center and constructs marginal Others as sets of negative qualities.' (Plumwood, 1994: 44)

The Europeans consider themselves superior to non-Europeans. "The others" of white European males, that is nature, non-European, non-white, and females have been seen in need of mastery of white male European.

Roy reflects on the intersections of the racial treatment of Indians and environmental exploitation. British Empire kept its control over the native people and their land through their racial ideology. The real intention of the British in India behind their mission of civilizing the inferior race was to exploit natural resources and destroy native culture. Roy presents various implications of racial discrimination by the British colonialists. She reveals that the gap between the British and Indians was deep, as the Indian race was disliked by the British. Digby Barnum was one of the administrative staff of the mining company in Songarh and lived in one of the bungalows in Amulya's neighborhood. He represents the imperial power and pride, the active and dominant white community, and masculinity in Songarh. His relationship with Indians represents the hierarchized relationship between the British colonialists and the Indians in which the colonialists usually considered themselves as superiors. Roy gives voice to his sense of racial superiority and his prejudices against Indians. Digby Barnum called his watchman "you black bastards" (Roy, 2008: 50). Nobody in the neighborhood had ever caught his eye. One of them was Amulya who was the patriarch of the first generation in the novel. Digby Barnum did not give any implication of being aware of his neighbour Amulya's presence. This means that the Indians were insignificant, unimportant objects to his British authority. He dictated how the Indians had to behave and live. While Amulya's house was being built, he uttered

curses, and unspeakable words, and casted an irritable glance at the laborers, and yelled at them. He forbade their work in the afternoon and timed their work. Amulya felt a sense of humiliation and subjection in his own country. However, he felt that he had to obey his British authority. He knew the segregation between British neighbors and the Indians. When his wife, Kananbala, intended to call her British neighbors to their home, Amulya said this was not possible, “[h]ave you forgotten they’re British? To them, we’re no more than uncouth jungles” (Roy, 2008: 16). At one night, Digby Barnum banged on the gate by shouting and swearing his Indian servant and did not mind disturbing people. Amulya criticized his authorial and ignorant behavior, and said “Bloody sahibs; think they own the whole country” (Roy, 2008: 51). Kananbala wanted to explain the reality of their managing, and mastering the whole country.

Lawrence Buell states that places “are not stable, free-standing entities but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside” (2001: 67). The British colonial history of environmental stewardship, sovereignty, exploitation including mining, and forest clearing had changed and re-shaped the surface of India. Due to being a resource-rich area, Songarh town was vulnerable to the commercial greed of capitalist colonials and Indian elites. Roy depicts the results of the exploitation of natural resources by British colonial projects which threatened the natural life of the countryside and the tribal life of people on it. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, Huggan and Tiffin discuss that European imperialist powers not only took control over indigenous human beings in many places in the world but also “instigat[ed] widespread ecosystem change under conspicuously unequal power regimes” (2010: 6). They damaged the places that the indigenous people sustained their physical, cultural and spiritual lives. Their exercising mastery over these places resulted in social injustices. Postcolonial ecocriticism defines social issues and environmental issues as inseparable. The racial, social, and economic underclasses have been affected negatively by environmental degradation.

Roy describes the effects of British colonialism on India’s forest communities at the beginning of the novel. From an anthropocentric perspective, wilderness is seen as the resources of material and wealth. To satisfy the demand for timber and mica during the world wars, Indian forests were devastated by capitalist timber trade and mica mining. Shiva states that

When the British colonized India, they first colonized her forests. Ignorant of their wealth and of the wealth of knowledge of local people to sustainably manage the forests, they displaced local rights, local needs, and local knowledge and reduced this primary source of life into a timber mine. (1989: 61)

Mining areas were created in the forests that had been used by the native people to collect water, food, and wood and to carry out their traditional agricultural activities in order to sustain their lives. The primary source of natives’ physical and spiritual lives was reduced to a mining area. British colonialists’ arrival to the tribal region to exploit natural resources as commodities interrupted tribal peoples’ traditional rights of holding the land. Their disregard for tribal inhabitants’ socio-economic relations with their environments resulted in the sufferings of the local people and their removal of them from their land. She examines the social and cultural results of being uprooted from the wilderness. After the mines destroyed their forest, they remained very poor, and some of them were forced to move to the town where they had to live in poor conditions in makeshift shanties and work at whatever they could find. Amulya employed many of them in his factory. They collected wildflowers or honey for Amulya’s factory. Amulya exploited their knowledge of nature for profit. On the other hand, the British or Indian capitalists enjoyed the prosperity of the forest by indulging in parties, teas, and gossip.

Roy undermines the anthropocentric perspective of wilderness as an uninhabited place that is full of unknown and dark images. The forest ended where the coal mines began. It was constructed as wilderness, it was green and dark, and it was unsafe that nobody dared to go into it. “It was well known that leopards wandered its unknown interior. There were stories of tigers and jackals drinking together from streams that ran through it over round, grey, and brown pebbles. Cows and goats disappeared, and sometimes dogs. It was useless looking for their remains” (Roy, 2008: 12). However, the forest was inhabited by the tribal people who had nature-related traditions such as the celebration of the cyclical renewal of nature with festivals and parties, etc...They lived with the non-human world in the forest harmoniously. For native people, as well as supplying their physical survival, the forest was seen as the source of their collective identity, the meaning of their lives, and a guide for their spiritual needs. Thus, they felt intrinsically related to their land and their forest. Their familial relationship with them encouraged the natives to feel deep respect for nature. For postcolonial ecocriticism, living together without difference or discrimination is significant.

Roy also addresses the cultural imperialism of the British rule in India where environmental injustice resulted in cultural transformations. The degradation of land inevitably comes with the loss of the moral and spiritual perspectives in the lives of the inhabitants. When India was a part of the British Empire, some modern ideas and

techniques, introduced to the Indians, disrupted their cultural ties with their lands. The importance of its pre-colonial epistemologies as the sacred place disappeared. The forest surrounding Songarh was believed to be one of the centers of Buddhist learning in the ancient past. On one of his journeys, Buddha rested there under a banyan tree. This tree had a knot on its main trunk that was similar to the face of a meditating man. After the imperial geologists discovered ores of lucrative materials including mica and coal below the forests, Songarh lost its significance as one of the centers of Buddhist learning. It became a center of the colonial exploitation of landscape through mining. It was changed into a private property and a colonial landscape. The British colonialists defined the land as their property rather than as the lands of the natives. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin wrote that the incursion of Europeans into other parts of the world “transformed not only the land but reconstitutes the ways in which ‘land’ could be apprehended. Instead of an intrinsic part of the human ‘being’ and at least partially constituted of human identities, it became the inert background for profit making and taking” (1995: 491). The British modernity that lacked moral and spiritual values failed to accept the natives’ spiritual integrity with their land, trees, rivers, etc. Their disregard for the land was extended to the destruction of cultural heritage and values.

In addition to the exploitation of land for human use in capitalist terms, Roy presents how British colonialists reordered the British lifestyle in a pastoral mode in India. With the presence of British colonialists, the surface of the landscape was made an aesthetically ideal pastoral place. Songarh represented a small-town life where the British who supervised the coal mines and the mica ores built a white area and formed a compact society of their own. It was similar to the hill stations that were developed during the colonial age as a result of the needs of British trading companies and the government. In *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, Dane Keith Kennedy studies the hill stations in the British Raj and she presents how the hill stations were made in the physical and moral image of England. In the same way, the British recreated Songarh according to the British-style places. “[T]he British in India could construct there a community that resembled the one whence they had come” (Kennedy, 1996: 88). They asserted their own values and identity in a distant land they colonized. They “comfort[ed] the familiarity of an environment that replicated the social institutions and the cultural norms of their homelands” (Kennedy, 1996: 88). They constructed their familiar built environment such as shops, public buildings, and leisure facilities to satisfy their bourgeois lifestyles and desires. Songarh acquired the main street with a few shops that sold the exotic: coffee, fruit, fish in tins, lace and lingerie, treacle and suet, cigarettes, and cheese for expatriates. And the railway arrived in the town. Songarh town became a reminder of a familiar place. Their recreations were seen as “a matter of memories and desires as of brick and mortar” (Kennedy, 1996: 88). They established their national identity away from their motherland.

The British colonialists sought the cold and rainy weather of the tropical mountain climate in India that was familiar to England’s climate. The geographical position of Songarh offers them an escape from the summer heat of the plains; Songarh’s climate was chilly enough for them to settle there. Moreover, its geographical position offers them a panoramic view of the hills and the ruined fort.

The town perched on a rocky plateau, at the edge of which he could see, even from the house, a dark strip of forest and the irregular shadows of hills beyond. In the distance were broken-down walls of medieval stone- the ruined fort, the garh [fortress] from which the town took its name. (Roy, 2008: 11)

This provided a sense of security and the British romantic discursive criterion of the sublime and picturesque. British colonialists intended to transform the wilderness that was seen as threatening and untamed into a pastoral place.

While controlling Indians, the colonialists carefully maintained a boundary between themselves and Indians. Residents in Songarh such as officers, businessmen, miners, and other migrants, and their families remained socially segregated from Indian society. The wilderness appeared as a source of estrangement; it set apart from the coal mines and the men who labour there. It prevented the residents’ contact with the local people as much as possible. The number of Indian inhabitants was very low in the white areas. Amulya took his family from Calcutta to Songarh. He was the only Indian to build his home in the white town near the miners’ dwellings, so he was considered an outsider in that area. His relationships with his white neighbors symbolically represent their different positions as colonizers and colonized, with which they defined each other unjustly. The separation and inequality between the colonizer and the colonized reflect the relationship between power and communication. There was always a lack of communication and interaction between them.

The colonizers created gardens that were conventionally associated with the control of nature and ordering life. Their pastoral recreation was the embodiment of the aesthetic confines of wilderness within their private gardens, and this was “the celebration of the landed estate or ordered productive countryside” (Garrard, 2012: 43). Mr. Barnum’s garden functioned as a boundary that symbolizes human fracture from nature and the separation of the

British from the native or other Indians. Roy reflects that the anthropocentric attitude introduced by colonialism is practiced by Indians, “[w]ithin many cultures – and not just western ones – anthropocentrism has long been naturalized” (Huggan and Tiffin, 2010: 5). In addition to colonialists’ capitalist interests in nature, there was also an increase in Indians’ capitalist interest in it. The spread of trade and industrial activities of the British in India enabled commercial growth; some of the Indians took part in this commercial growth. As a result of the development of economic and educational activities, the middle class emerged as a new class that consisted of traders and educated people who possessed knowledge-based skills and expertise. This class became a significant section of the society under the patronage of the British colonial rule. The members of the Indian mid-class became familiar with a different understanding of culture and nature that was introduced by colonialism. They learned how to control and commoditize nature through technology and industrialization. Along with the changes in technology and economy, many Indian elites, businessmen, and mid-class Westernized merchants and traders moved to white areas in towns and cities for a luxurious life where they built large mansions and increased their wealth.

Roy presents a clear picture of the middle class in the British Raj and its approach to class, caste, and gender differences. Amulya represented the members of the mid-class. He was the embodiment of Western-oriented rationalization that informed the racial, gender, and class divisions and the commodification of nature. He was a business owner who commoditized and traded nature to hold economic power. He ran a factory producing perfumes, fragrances, medicine paste, and oil from wild herbs, flowers, and leaves. His town was adjoining to the forest so he learnt from the people of the forest about plants to expand the range of his products. The natives had more knowledge about nature than Amulya. They lived in the jungle as a part of it. They knew where to find wild hibiscus flowers for fragrant and red oil, flowers of the night for perfumes, and the minute herbs for smelly green pastes, and they collected honey. The natives became his workforce; he attended their local parties and harvest festivals in the jungle, as he found a chance to see their lives out of work and to make himself closer to the local society. In the party, he exercised an instrumentalist view and searched for natural products; “Concerned more with efficacy than with ends, it is to the good that everything is rationalized and qualified so that we might manage it better for human ends” (King, 1989: 120). He identified a flower that a village girl gave to him as “passiflora of course, but incarnate? I’ve never this vine in Songarh” (Roy, 2008: 10). Passiflora incarnate has been a medicinal plant since early colonial times; he became happy that he could use this flower as a product in his drug factory.

The British introduced their rural image of Englishness to their colonial subjects. Amulya created a world under the influence of English pastoral ideas and a privileged sense of place. Near the wilderness, he intended to recreate a world characterized by the British concept of pastoralism that has been “deeply entrenched in Western culture” (Garrard, 2012: 37) for himself and his family. He attempted to construct a sense of place as a landowner in a man-made pastoral landscape. He shaped the landscape rather than leaving it natural. He was “redrawing a pattern that had already been perfected” (Roy, 2008: 13) by the sahibs. His control of nature was reflected in his creation of a garden where there had been wilderness. His garden within his estate was confirmed within the norms of mid-class arrangement, organization, and management. He had cleared weeds and planted fruit trees, flowering shrubs, and creepers. He planted his garden with only white flowers. This pastoral mode offered a “situation of rural escape” (Garrard, 2012: 39) to him. The garden had been a sanctuary where he retired from the evil of the world. He thought of the garden as a remedy to the social, political, and moral corruption in Calcutta. His relatives regarded his embarkment on a new life with amused puzzlement and some irritation, but he did not care about them and scorned their lives with his departure. He intended to cure his spiritual and moral ills through activities such as country walks, reading in addition to gardening.

Moreover, in the novel, the narrative extends beyond the central characters to explore the actions and motives of other mid-class patriarchs like Shanti’s father, Bikash Babu, and Ashwin Mullick. Like their counterparts in many postcolonial settings, they used the economic and social power that enabled them to commoditize and control nature, often ignoring the consequences. They imitated the British’s privileging sense of place and created their pastoral landscapes. They had properties with well-organized gardens in their village. Mullick’s house was on high ground, so he watched the progress of the Ganga with amused compliance. Bikash Babu’s magnificent house had a splendid garden. It was surrounded by fields of rice as it had a riverside setting. He was proud of the strong architect of his house and he believed that the current rate of the river would not endanger the house, so he did not think that it was in danger. Bikash Babu intended to stop the progress of the Ganga by building a dam, his involvement in building dams is emblematic of his aspirations for modernization and progress, reflecting the broader development narratives of their time. However, in their quest for economic growth, the mid-class patriarchs disrupted the delicate ecological balances and displaced communities dependent on the natural resources that these dams affect. Ashwin Mullick, too, exploited the land for profit, he had a coconut oil enterprise that exemplified the commoditization of nature. Through these characters, the novel explores the complexity of the mid-class patriarchs’ roles in shaping the landscape and social fabric of rural India, highlighting the dualities of ambition and

exploitation, progress, and environmental degradation that often accompany their actions. This also provides insights into how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the interactions between people and their environment, even in situations where dam construction is seen as essential for development. In doing so, Roy's narrative underscores the need for a more holistic and sustainable approach to development that prioritizes both human well-being and the preservation of the natural world.

As the narration explores the lives of the central characters, their interactions with the natural world reflect broader postcolonial narratives of domination and exploitation. The novel vividly portrays how characters like Shanti's father, Bikash Babu, and Ashwin Mullick prioritize human-centric goals, often at the expense of the environment. Whether it is the construction of dams, the commodification of land, or the exploitation of natural resources, these actions underscore the enduring consequences of human-centrism in the postcolonial era.

## CONCLUSION

This article examines the anthropocentric domination of nature in *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*, in a broad sense, it deals with Roy's concern with power relations that are characterized by the domination of Indians by English based on aspects such as race, gender, religion, class, and culture. It explores how Roy affirms that the idea of dominance, stemming from varying degrees of imagined or perceived differences between European human beings and nature, has negatively affected nature, women, and the poor, and indigenous people and resulted in painful events. It analyses the novel from the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism. Through the lens of postcolonial ecocriticism, the novel presents the intersections of power, privilege, and environmental degradation. It exposes how certain classes of society continue to control nature, leading to environmental imbalances and the marginalization of vulnerable communities. In doing so, the novel reinforces the idea that the ecological and social injustices of colonialism persist, even in an ostensibly postcolonial world.

The novel is set in a fictional town in Bengal, India, it weaves together the stories of three generations of characters to reflect the profound impact of colonialism and its ecological consequences on the landscape and its inhabitants. It presents a rich tapestry of landscapes and environments, from wild forests and rivers to urban developments and farmlands. These settings are not only backdrops but are tied to the characters' identities and their experiences of longing, loss, and displacement. Roy portrays the transformation of the natural world over time, reflecting the encroachment of colonial and postcolonial forces on the land. Postcolonial ecocritical analysis of the novel makes the reader consider how the novel portrays the interconnectedness of colonial legacies, the environment, and human experiences, and how the characters' lives are shaped by historical and environmental factors. By underlining the conflict between modernization and the preservation of cultural and ecological heritage, Roy's novel functions as a call to rethink our relationship with nature and to challenge the deeply ingrained human-centric ideology. It emphasizes the urgent need to embrace an ecocentric perspective that prioritizes the well-being of the natural world alongside human interests. The novel indicates thinking about the interconnectedness of all life forms and a harmonious co-existence with the environment.

## REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B., & Griffiths G, Tiffin H. (1995). *The post-colonial studies reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Buell L (2001). *Writing for an endangered world*. England: Harvard University Press.
- DeLoughrey E., & Handley, G. B. (2011). *Postcolonial ecologies: literature of the environment*. NY: Oxford UP.
- Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Glotfelty C., & Fromm, H. (1996). *The Ecocriticism reader: landmarks in literary ecology*. GA: U of Georgia P.
- Huggan G., & Helen, T. (2010). *Postcolonial ecocriticism: literature. animals, environments*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kamada, R. O. (2010). *Postcolonial romanticism: landscape and the possibilities of inheritance*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.
- Kennedy, D. (1996). *The magic mountains: hill stations and the British Raj*. USA: University of California Press.
- King, Y. (1989). *Healing the wounds: feminism, ecology, and nature/culture dualism*. In: Alison M J, Susan Bordo (Eds), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*. Rutgers University Press, pp.115-141.
- Plumwood, V. (2002). *Environmental culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge.
- Plumwood, V. (1994). *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Roy, A. (2008). *An Atlas of Impossible Longing*. London: MacLehose Press.