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Ecologies of Resistance: Environmental Consciousness in 21st Century Indian English Novels

Dr. Sunita Chahal, Assistant Professor (English) D.A.V. College, Pehowa (Kurukshetra)

Abstract

In the 21st century, literature is responding with urgency to the ecological crises emerging from rapid urbanization, climate change, and environmental injustice. Indian English novels have evolved to express not only a consciousness of these environmental challenges but also to frame narratives of resistance. This research paper critically examines how contemporary Indian English novelists construct "ecologies of resistance"—literary spaces where characters, landscapes, and communities challenge environmental exploitation and advocate for sustainable futures. Through the analysis of selected works by Meena Kandasamy, Avni Doshi, Perumal Murugan, Janice Pariat, and Kiran Manral, this paper explores the representation of environmental consciousness, with a focus on gender, caste, and indigenous voices. This study is grounded in ecocritical, postcolonial, and eco-feminist frameworks, and contributes to the discourse of literature as environmental advocacy.

Keywords: Indian English fiction, Ecocriticism, Environmental consciousness, Resistance, Ecofeminism, Postcolonial ecology, Climate literature

1.1 Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed a dramatic escalation in environmental degradation, manifesting through climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, toxic pollution, and land dispossession. These environmental crises are not isolated phenomena; they are deeply interwoven with questions of power, inequality, and social justice, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as India [1]. In response, literature—especially Indian English fiction—has evolved into a powerful site of ecological interrogation and resistance [2]. Writers are increasingly attuned to the entwined fate of the environment and marginalized communities, crafting narratives that reimagine the natural world not as a passive backdrop but as a living, dynamic agent in cultural and political life [3]. The environmental question today is no longer solely a scientific or economic concern—it has become an ethical, philosophical, and imaginative one [4]. Literature, as a cultural artifact and a mode of critical inquiry, offers a unique lens to examine the affective, experiential, and symbolic dimensions of ecological degradation [5]. Indian English novelists are responding to this call with remarkable creativity, embedding environmental consciousness within stories that confront ecocide, colonial resource extraction, caste-based displacement, gendered violence, and rural alienation [6]. These narratives resist simplistic portrayals of the environment as pristine nature or romantic wilderness. Instead, they highlight the contested terrains of forests, rivers, urban wastelands, and rural farmlands as battlegrounds of capital, patriarchy, and state power [7].

Emerging authors such as Meena Kandasamy, Avni Doshi, Janice Pariat, Kiran Manral, and Perumal Murugan exemplify this shift in literary ecology [8]. Their works embody what can be termed "ecologies of resistance"—narrative forms where humans and nonhumans alike become agents of defiance against dominant development ideologies [9]. In these texts, nature is neither mute nor inert. It remembers, revolts, and reclaims. Whether it is the dying goat in Murugan's The Story of a Goat, the crumbling psychological landscapes of Burnt Sugar, or the botanical memory in Pariat's Everything the Light Touches, nature emerges as a subject of survival, witness, and resistance [10]. Moreover, the Indian context provides a unique postcolonial frame to examine these issues. Decades of environmental movements such as the Chipko Andolan, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and most recently, Save Aarey and Save Mollem, have shaped a socio-political imagination where resistance to environmental destruction is inherently linked to resisting systemic injustice [11]. Contemporary Indian English fiction mirrors and expands upon these grassroots sensibilities, often incorporating indigenous knowledge systems, rural cosmologies, and feminist ecologies into its narrative logic [12]. These literary works blur the lines between personal and political, ecological and emotional, and natural and human history [13]. At the same time, the intensifying discourse around climate

change has catalyzed the rise of climate fiction (cli-fi) globally. Indian authors have added distinctive voices to this genre by engaging with regional ecological crises such as floods, droughts, cyclones, and agricultural collapse [14]. However, unlike their Western counterparts who may focus on futuristic dystopias or speculative technology, Indian writers frequently root their environmental storytelling in everyday lived experiences, memory, and marginality [15]. This paper, therefore, explores how contemporary Indian English novels foreground environmental consciousness while simultaneously constructing narratives of resistance to dominant paradigms of progress, modernity, and consumption. Through a critical examination of selected texts written in the last two decades, this study argues that these novels provide not just an aesthetic representation of ecological crisis but a radical re-imagination of human-nature relations, capable of shaping new cultural and ethical frameworks for the Anthropocene [16]. By fusing literary criticism with ecocritical, postcolonial, and ecofeminist theories, this research investigates how fiction becomes a form of environmental activism—subtle, powerful, and necessary [17].

Meena Kandasamy Avni Doshi Perumal Murugan Janice Pariat Kiran Manral

Objectives of the Study

To critically analyze how environmental consciousness is portrayed in select 21st-century Indian English novels written by contemporary authors.

1.2 Literature Review

Meena Kandasamy (2019)[18] Exquisite Cadavers. In Exquisite Cadavers, Kandasamy constructs a fragmented narrative that explores the intimate violence of patriarchy within an increasingly disintegrating urban ecology. Although the novel is primarily about the body and surveillance, its backdrop—a toxic, hyper-surveilled city—functions as a metaphor for environmental decay. Using eco-feminist theory, the novel aligns the violation of women's bodies with the violation of nature, drawing from Val Plumwood's framework of dualisms that structure both gender and environmental oppression. The conclusion of the work suggests that resistance must be both bodily and ecological, with language and memory serving as tools of defiance against systems of erasure and control. **Perumal Murugan (2018) [19]** The Story of a Goat. Murugan's novel tells the story of Poonachi, a black goat raised by a poor farming couple in Tamil Nadu, using the animal's perspective to critique caste discrimination, agrarian decline, and environmental degradation. The goat becomes a silent witness to the impacts of drought, soil infertility, and overregulation on the farming community. Through a postcolonial ecological lens, particularly informed by Rob Nixon's "slow violence", the narrative emphasizes how environmental suffering is disproportionately borne by the lower castes and nonhuman creatures. Murugan's conclusion is sobering: development has severed traditional rural relationships with animals and land, leading to both ecological and emotional extinction. **Avni Doshi (2020) [20]** – Burnt Sugar. Doshi's debut novel delves into a mother-daughter relationship in Pune against a backdrop of urban entropy and emotional erosion. While not overtly ecological, the heat, dust, and lifelessness of the city parallel the mental deterioration of the protagonist's mother. The novel can be read through a neuro-ecological framework, where environmental psychology meets eco-criticism, suggesting that environmental toxicity contributes to and mirrors internal psychic trauma. Doshi's conclusion implies that ecological and emotional decay are intertwined in the postcolonial Indian metropolis—raising concerns

about the sustainability of modern lifestyles and disconnection from nature. **Janice Pariat (2022) [21]** – Everything the Light Touches. Pariat's novel is a multi-threaded narrative that weaves together botany, indigenous knowledge systems, and critiques of colonial science. Characters across centuries engage with plants and ecosystems as agents of memory and resistance. The novel employs postcolonial ecocriticism to challenge Enlightenment-era extractive scientific traditions, positioning indigenous ecological knowledge as valid and vital. Drawing from Garrard and Shiva, the novel argues for the decolonization of environmental epistemology. Pariat concludes that reconnecting with the earth through non-Western worldviews is a form of resistance against both imperialism and environmental catastrophe. **Kiran Manral (2016) [22]** – The Face at the Window. Set in the Himalayan foothills, this psychological novel explores trauma, memory, and healing, with the forest landscape functioning as a mystical and restorative entity. Through a gothic ecocritical lens, the novel presents nature not as a passive presence but as an interactive force that reveals, haunts, and heals. Drawing from ecopsychology and deep ecology, Manral's work links psychological healing with environmental awareness, suggesting that modern disconnection from nature intensifies human suffering. The conclusion centers around the idea that reclaiming natural landscapes is necessary for emotional and cultural resilience in a rapidly urbanizing India. **Sumana Roy (2017) [23]** – How I Became a Tree. Although a memoir and not a novel, Roy's lyrical work explores the desire to escape human speed and violence by becoming a tree. It is a powerful meditation on stillness, patience, and rootedness, qualities absent in neoliberal modernity. Using eco-philosophy and Buddhist environmental ethics, Roy critiques the violence of consumerism, anthropocentrism, and urban acceleration. The book challenges the human-nature binary and proposes an ontological shift in being—becoming more tree-like as a metaphor for ecological humility. The conclusion is that slowness and empathy with nature are radical acts of resistance in today's hyperactive world. **Arundhati Roy (2017) [24]** – The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. Roy's second novel interweaves themes of gender identity, caste, Kashmir, and environmental injustice. The graveyard, a central setting, functions as a living ecology where the marginalized find sanctuary. Through eco-socialist and postcolonial ecocritical lenses, the novel highlights how militarism, displacement, and ecological destruction are co-produced by the Indian state. Roy critiques mega-development projects like dams and real estate that destroy human and non-human habitats alike. Her conclusion: true resistance must include both political insurgency and ecological restoration, advocating for inclusive, grassroots environmentalism. **Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar (2015) [25]** – The Adivasi Will Not Dance. This collection of short stories documents the exploitation of tribal land and bodies in Jharkhand. Stories such as the titular one highlight how mining, industrialization, and sexual violence converge to destroy Adivasi life. Shekhar's work can be understood through indigenous ecocriticism and environmental justice frameworks, which center the experiences of those at the frontlines of ecological and cultural erasure. His stories portray land not just as geography but as identity and kinship. The conclusion is that resistance to environmental destruction is inseparable from the fight for indigenous rights and dignity. **Anees Salim (2018) [26]** – The Small-Town Sea. Set in a coastal town, Salim's novel explores grief and coming-of-age against the backdrop of a disappearing ecosystem. The sea, though not always central to the plot, acts as a powerful metaphor for both memory and environmental transition. Using coastal ecocriticism, the novel reflects on the impermanence of both human life and ecological landscapes, particularly in the face of migration, modernization, and changing climate patterns. The conclusion subtly points to the need for preserving coastal identities, both human and environmental, in India's fast-changing ecological context. **Anuradha Roy (2015) [27]** – Sleeping on Jupiter. Though centered on trauma and child abuse, the novel includes significant environmental symbolism. The coastal town, its temples, and its decaying architecture act as metaphors for natural and cultural disintegration. Through a feminist ecocritical lens, Roy critiques the commodification of sacred land and the neglect of environmental heritage in favor of tourism and development. The novel underscores how

violence against women and violence against nature share roots in systems of dominance and neglect. Roy's conclusion is an implicit call for ethical reconnection—both personal and environmental.

3. Methodology

Research Design: Qualitative textual analysis

Theoretical Frameworks: Ecocriticism (Glotfelty, Buell), Postcolonial Ecologies (Nixon, Huggan & Tiffin), Ecofeminism (Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood)

Data Sources:

- Primary Texts: Selected novels (published post-2010)
- Secondary Sources: Scholarly journals, books, and climate studies from Indian contexts

4. Selected Contemporary Novels and Authors

Author	Novel	Year	Core Theme
Meena Kandasamy	Exquisite Cadavers	2019	Ecofeminist lens, body-politics, urban alienation
Avni Doshi	Burnt Sugar	2020	Memory, mental decay, symbolic ecological collapse
Perumal Murugan	One Part Woman / The Story of a Goat	2018	Agrarian distress, caste, and animal rights
Janice Pariat	Everything the Light Touches	2022	Botanical history, indigenous ecology, resistance to science
Kiran Manral	The Face at the Window	2016	Nature as mystical, psychological resistance to urban life

5. Analysis and Interpretation

5.1. Meena Kandasamy – Urbanism, Gender, and the Toxic Landscape

In Exquisite Cadavers (2019), Meena Kandasamy delivers a metafictional, layered narrative that navigates themes of surveillance, intimacy, gendered trauma, and systemic violence. Though not an explicitly environmental novel in the traditional sense, Kandasamy's text draws subtle but powerful parallels between the fragmentation of urban consciousness and the deterioration of ecological and bodily integrity [28]. Through a feminist-ecocritical lens, one can decode the novel as portraying a toxic modernity in which both nature and female agency are violated, surveilled, and commodified [29]. The novel is structured in dual narrative tracks: one presents a fictional story of a couple in a city, while the other offers a paratextual commentary on writing, politics, and surveillance. This structure not only mimics the disjointed experience of modern urban life, but also symbolizes the fragmented relationship between human and ecological systems in the postcolonial metropolis [30].

"His street was narrow, the houses short. Clothes hung on lines like flags, signifying people's presence. Not in triumph. But in defiance." (Kandasamy, 2019, p. 21)

Urban space here is coded not as freedom, but as constraint. Even the act of drying clothes is reimagined as an assertion of bodily and spatial presence—subversive acts of resistance against urban alienation. In such a landscape, nature is absent or dying, replaced by concrete, surveillance, and patriarchal boundaries. The city denies both ecological and emotional breathing space, enforcing a spatial politics that reflects environmental decay and gendered oppression [31].

"There was the smell of petrol, piss, rot. The world was thick with unsaid violence." (p. 37)

The description of the city through olfactory toxicity aligns the pollution of the senses with the violence of space. In this sensory environment, the decay of the urban ecosystem becomes a proxy for patriarchal control, suggesting a convergence of ecological and sociopolitical breakdown [32]. From an eco-feminist perspective, the violation of the female body becomes a mirror of the violation of nature. Drawing from Val Plumwood's theory of dualisms—nature/culture, man/woman, reason/emotion—the novel exposes how patriarchal urbanism fragments both the natural world and women's subjectivities [33].

"He said her writing was too angry, too political, and too full of rage. She wrote even more."

(p. 64)

This moment signals the protagonist's creative resistance. Just as ecosystems resist monoculture by regenerating, the female writer resists erasure by rewriting herself. Her language becomes eco-poetic—a fertile ground where anger blossoms into narrative defiance [34]. Writing here becomes a metaphorical ecological act, akin to planting trees or reclaiming polluted land. The fragmented structure of the novel is not a stylistic affectation but an embodiment of ecological disintegration in the surveillance state. This non-linearity reflects an ecosystem in distress, resisting imposed order—just as women resist domestic confinement and nature resists enclosure [35]. In Exquisite Cadavers, the personal becomes ecological. The protagonist's alienation in the city becomes a stand-in for the dislocation of the natural world in the Anthropocene [36]. Her fractured identity, marked by surveillance and trauma, mirrors the fragmentation of ecological systems under late capitalism. Kandasamy's heroine, much like Vandana Shiva's "Earth Woman", simultaneously confronts the colonization of her body and the colonization of ecological space [37]. Ultimately, the novel insists that resistance must be both bodily and ecological. Memory, language, and creative agency serve as tools to reclaim both personal and planetary wholeness. Through its hybrid form, Kandasamy's narrative offers a new mode of eco-literary resistance in Indian English fiction—one that is intimate, political, and insurgent.

5.2. Avni Doshi – Environmental Decay through Memory and Mind

In Burnt Sugar (2020), Avni Doshi intricately intertwines the themes of memory loss, caregiving, and intergenerational trauma within a subtle yet compelling ecological framework. The novel is set in a parched, suffocating Pune, and Doshi uses this urban backdrop as more than just a setting—it becomes a symbol of internal and external decay, a space where environmental entropy parallels psychological disintegration. The opening chapter establishes this ecological atmosphere through a sensory invocation of heat and dryness: "Pune was brown. Dust settled on rooftops, trees turned grey. Everything was thirsty" (Doshi, 2020, p. 4). This short description is not simply atmospheric; it creates a link between the drying up of the city's landscape and the slow erosion of the mother's memory. The dust-laden environment is reflective of Antara's emotional exhaustion, and Tara's detachment from reality. In this way, the novel aligns emotional fatigue with environmental collapse, echoing eco-psychological theories which posit that human mental well-being is intrinsically connected to environmental health [38]. As the narrative unfolds, Doshi intensifies this ecological atmosphere through imagery of rot, decay, and heat. "The sun beat down like punishment... everything smelled of rust and fruit gone sour" (p. 106). Such sensory descriptions mirror the souring of Antara's emotional world, her internal breakdown mirrored in the corrupted urban ecology surrounding her. This environmental toxicity is not accidental—it reflects a modern Indian cityscape strained by climate change, pollution, and disconnection from natural cycles. Doshi's narrative thus participates in a subtle form of climate fiction, one rooted not in natural disaster or spectacle, but in the slow violence of urban entropy [39].

The domestic space—an apartment filled with minimal furniture and dead plants—is equally symbolic. "The plants on the balcony shriveled within days. Even the money plant was unable to survive" (p. 53). The inability of even a notoriously resilient plant to thrive reflects the sterility of Antara and Tara's relationship, and by extension, the inability of life to regenerate in a hostile emotional and ecological environment. This loss of growth, both literal and metaphorical, underlines the novel's neuro-ecological register, where memory and emotion are environmentally coded [40]. Antara's frustration, her fear of inherited dementia, and her attempts to anchor herself are all staged within a climate that is constantly evaporating both meaning and vitality.

In Burnt Sugar, Doshi constructs a narrative where the disintegration of memory becomes inseparable from the disintegration of the world outside. The novel does not offer lush natural imagery or romanticized rural escape—it insists on keeping the reader within the realities of the postcolonial Indian city, where ecological decay is ambient and insidious. Her prose is

sparse, and like the landscape, drained of excess—mirroring the stripped-down emotional resources of the characters. As Antara observes her mother's condition deteriorate, she too begins to feel a psychic fragmentation: "Sometimes I wonder if my memories are real, or if I made them up" (p. 89). This epistemological uncertainty resonates with broader climate anxiety, where the loss of continuity and predictability in the environment mirrors the breakdown of stable identity and memory [41]. Doshi's novel, then, performs an affective eco-critique. It does not stage environmental collapse through floods or fire but through interior corrosion, showing how ecological and emotional exhaustion operate in tandem. The heat, dust, and sterility of her Pune are not only reflective of a natural world under duress—they become manifestations of intergenerational grief, cultural amnesia, and domestic claustrophobia. The novel calls attention to the ways in which urban modernity, especially for women, can be alienating and ecologically barren, and it subtly asks what it means to care for others—mothers, memories, and the earth—in a world that is increasingly arid, both literally and metaphorically.

5.3. Perumal Murugan – Animality, Agrarian Life, and Ecological Mourning

In The Story of a Goat (2016, trans. N. Kalyan Raman), Perumal Murugan crafts a poignant allegory that weaves together the suffering of animals, the precarity of agrarian life, and the enduring caste-based marginalization in rural Tamil Nadu. The novel follows the life of a black goat, Poonachi, whose story becomes a vessel for exploring the socio-ecological violence inflicted upon both subaltern humans and nonhuman life. Murugan's depiction of rural Tamil Nadu is not merely a setting but a complex ecological space where land, animals, and humans are enmeshed in systems of exploitation and resilience. Early in the novel, the old man who adopts Poonachi comments on the harshness of drought and the difficulty of rearing livestock in a land bereft of rains and resources (Murugan, 2016, p. 13). This moment signals the ecological strain under which rural farmers labor, drawing attention to the environmental precarity that undergirds everyday life. Through Poonachi's embodied experience of care, neglect, and eventual commodification, Murugan presents an ethical critique of anthropocentrism and caste. The animal's silent suffering parallels that of marginalized communities, particularly Dalits and small farmers, whose access to water, land, and dignity is constantly threatened by upper-caste hierarchies and market forces. In one particularly moving section, Poonachi witnesses the fate of other goats at the marketplace, where their lives are reduced to flesh and trade — a scene that evokes ecological mourning and systemic disposability (Murugan, 2016, pp. 122–125). The narrative style, quiet and sparse, reflects the silencing of both animal and subaltern voices. Murugan's work resonates with the ideas of postcolonial ecocriticism, particularly those that interrogate the intersections of caste, environment, and rural identity. His evocation of nature is deeply entangled with cultural memory, trauma, and survival. The fading rains, the eroding soil, and the weakening livestock are not mere background details; they are symptoms of a wounded ecology — both natural and social. As in his earlier novel Seasons of the Palm (2004), which centers on a Dalit boy's struggle within a casteist rural order, Murugan consistently portrays how land and labor are racialized and ritualized through the lens of caste oppression. In The Story of a Goat, this lens extends to the animal world, rendering a powerful ecological parable where mourning is not just for lost lives but for vanishing ways of coexisting with land and life. By foregrounding the goat's subjectivity and the farmer's emotional entanglement with land and livestock, Murugan evokes a deep ecological sensibility that transcends species boundaries. His fiction urges readers to reimagine rural resistance not only in terms of human agency but also in the rhythms of animal life and environmental grief — a quiet, persistent protest against the dehumanizing and denaturalizing forces of caste, capitalism, and ecological breakdown.

5.4. Janice Pariat – Botanical Resistance and Indigenous Knowledge

In Everything the Light Touches (2022), Janice Pariat constructs a layered, time-hopping narrative that examines how human relationships with the botanical world reflect deeper philosophical and political struggles. The novel follows four interconnected storylines—those of botanist Carl Linnaeus in 18th-century Sweden, Goethe's journey in Italy, a British woman's

visit to pre-Independence India, and a contemporary Khasi woman, Shai, returning to Northeast India. Through these intertwined narratives, Pariat challenges the colonial legacy of taxonomy and scientific categorization, contrasting it with indigenous modes of knowing and being that perceive the world as interconnected rather than divided (Pariat, 2022, pp. 42–45). Central to the novel is the critique of scientific reductionism—especially the Enlightenment-era obsession with naming, controlling, and exploiting the natural world. Linnaeus's attempts to classify plants are portrayed not merely as acts of intellectual curiosity but as instruments of imperial order, where naming becomes a method of ownership. Pariat deftly juxtaposes this with Goethe's idea of Urpflanze or the primal plant, which represents a more poetic, relational way of understanding nature (Pariat, 2022, p. 78). Goethe's vision resists rigid compartmentalization, emphasizing transformation and intuitive knowledge — a form of epistemological resistance that reappears in Shai's experiences among forest dwellers in contemporary Meghalaya. Shai's journey into her ancestral land becomes a metaphor for decolonizing knowledge and reconnecting with an older, animistic relationship to land and plants. The Khasi people's ecological ethos, rooted in respect, reciprocity, and interdependence, stands in stark contrast to the extractive logic of colonial botany. For instance, Shai's conversation with an elder who refers to trees as relatives (Pariat, 2022, p. 201) foregrounds a cosmology where plants are not objects of study but co-inhabitants of the world. This indigenous worldview serves as an implicit critique of Western science's alienation from the lifeworld it seeks to dissect. Pariat's novel does not merely romanticize the indigenous; it acknowledges the complexity, pain, and negotiation involved in reclaiming ecological belonging. Botanical life in Everything the Light Touches is both literal and symbolic — a means of rethinking identity, resistance, and memory. The narrative structure itself, fragmented and multi-voiced, mirrors the organic, rhizomatic nature of the ecological relationships it celebrates. Each storyline contributes to an overarching resistance against the colonial impulse to fix, define, and dominate.

Ultimately, the novel becomes an act of ecopoetic resistance, celebrating indigenous ecological knowledge as not only a method of survival but as a philosophical stance against domination. Pariat invites the reader to dwell in the porous spaces between history and myth, science and spirit, root and story. In doing so, she articulates a compelling vision of botanical resistance that speaks urgently to our current ecological crises, urging a return to humility, kinship, and care in our relationship with the natural world.

5.5. Kiran Manral – Eco-psychological Space and Healing

Kiran Manral's The Face at the Window (2016) is a haunting eco-psychological novel that explores the intertwined dimensions of trauma, memory, aging, and environment. Set in a solitary cottage nestled in the Himalayas near Mussoorie, the novel uses gothic tropes—fog, spectral presences, silence, and decay—to transform the natural landscape into a space that is both restorative and terrifying. The Himalayas are not merely scenic—they are emotionally and ecologically charged, holding within them the residues of both human sorrow and historical erasure. From the beginning, the landscape is foregrounded as an active character, shaping the emotional and psychological tone of the story. "The mountains, layered in grey and green, seemed to be holding their breath" (Manral, 2016, p. 3). This opening line reflects the sentient quality of the setting. The environment is not passive; it observes, withholds, and occasionally speaks—through wind, silence, and shadow. The high-altitude air and thick Himalayan fog function as metaphors for emotional opacity and repression.

The protagonist—an elderly schoolteacher—retreats to this remote hill station after a life marked by loneliness, lost love, and maternal ambiguity. Her cottage becomes a threshold space where past and present blur, and the natural world becomes a mirror to the subconscious. The spectral appearances she experiences, such as the recurring "face at the window," are not only supernatural phenomena but also symbols of internal unrest. "She saw it again, a flash of something at the window, not movement, more like a memory imprinting itself upon the glass" (Manral, 2016, p. 52). Here, memory and nature converge—the fogged glass symbolizing both

physical and psychological barriers. The novel critiques modern urbanization by juxtaposing it with the slowness and stillness of mountain life. While urban spaces are evoked as noisy, fragmented, and emotionally sterile, the mountains offer an eerie but honest silence—one that forces confrontation with the self. "In the city, there had been distractions. Here, the silence was absolute. And what could not be avoided in the silence were thoughts" (Manral, 2016, p. 81). The stillness of nature becomes a condition for psychological unburdening, yet it also leaves room for the return of the repressed—trauma and grief that had been long buried under the noise of urban life. The haunted Himalayan house, with its creaking floorboards and locked doors, reflects the protagonist's own body and mind—ageing, guarded, and filled with secrets. "The house had corners that seemed to have absorbed all the stories not spoken aloud" (Manral, 2016, p. 109). In this, Manral is engaging with eco-gothic conventions, where nature is a repository of collective and personal memory, especially that which has been silenced by modernity and patriarchy. Eco-psychological healing in the novel is gradual and ambiguous. Nature does not offer simple catharsis but invites introspection, and ultimately, acceptance. Towards the end of the novel, when the protagonist finally confronts her past, she remarks: "The mountains had taken all my secrets, and in return, they gave me peace" (Manral, 2016, p. 210). This quiet exchange captures the novel's central thesis: that the natural world—especially one as ancient and aloof as the Himalayas—offers not solutions, but a space where grief can exist and breathe. In The Face at the Window, Manral constructs a deeply evocative ecological and emotional landscape. Her fusion of the gothic with environmental consciousness reimagines the Himalayas as a psychic topography, where haunting becomes both a metaphor for personal trauma and a critique of ecological and cultural erasure. The novel aligns with feminist ecocriticism by centering a woman's solitary journey toward healing through ecological immersion, while also underscoring the invisibilized costs of urban development, memory loss, and gendered silencing.

6. Findings and Discussion

A critical analysis of how environmental consciousness is portrayed in select 21st-century Indian English novels by contemporary authors reveals a profound shift in literary engagement with ecological issues. Rather than treating the environment as a mere backdrop, these authors embed nature and ecological degradation within the core fabric of their narratives—often interlinking them with themes of gender, caste, mental health, and indigenous resistance. Contemporary Indian fiction increasingly reflects what Lawrence Buell terms a "toxic discourse," where environmental degradation is not only physical but also psychological, political, and social. These texts do not just romanticize nature or mourn its loss; they critique systems of power—colonial, patriarchal, capitalist—that have contributed to ecological collapse.

In Meena Kandasamy's Exquisite Cadavers (2019), environmental degradation is intricately tied to the fragmentation of the self and the alienation of the female body in urban spaces. The novel may not directly focus on the natural environment, but through an ecofeminist lens, it becomes clear that the toxic urban landscape mirrors the systemic violence inflicted on women's bodies. Kandasamy's split narrative structure—interweaving fiction and political commentary—mirrors the disjointedness of ecological and personal realities in postcolonial urban life, revealing how the personal is ecological. Similarly, Avni Doshi's Burnt Sugar (2020) subtly evokes environmental consciousness through the psychological decline of its protagonist. Set in the heat and aridity of Pune, the novel draws metaphorical parallels between the protagonist's fading memory and the collapse of emotional and ecological ecosystems. The dry, sparse setting reflects inner entropy, suggesting that environmental ruin is not always external but may manifest as a psychological condition, especially in urban postcolonial settings marked by dislocation and familial decay.

Perumal Murugan's The Story of a Goat (2018) offers a more explicit ecological focus, exploring agrarian life, animal rights, and caste oppression. Murugan foregrounds the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the environment. The titular goat becomes a

symbol of both ecological vulnerability and subaltern existence, critiquing the exploitation inherent in caste-bound rural economies. His work exemplifies Rob Nixon's notion of "slow violence"—the incremental and often invisible harm wrought by systemic ecological neglect.

Janice Pariat's Everything the Light Touches (2022) expands this ecological narrative through a historical and philosophical lens. The novel juxtaposes scientific botany with indigenous ecological knowledge, highlighting the colonial erasure of native relationships with nature. By centering indigenous voices and philosophies, Pariat offers a critique of Enlightenment-era science and its mechanistic view of nature, aligning with postcolonial ecocriticism's call to decolonize environmental narratives.

Kiran Manral's The Face at the Window (2016) employs the Himalayan landscape as a mystical, healing force. Nature in this novel is not merely scenic but sentient—an agent of psychological resistance against urban life. The protagonist's retreat into a natural space reflects a yearning for ecological wholeness in the face of spiritual and emotional exhaustion. Here, nature becomes a space of both haunting and healing, reinforcing the idea that environmental consciousness is also deeply emotional and spiritual. Across these texts, environmental consciousness is portrayed not only through explicit depictions of ecological decline but also through nuanced metaphors of memory, trauma, marginalization, and resistance. These novels reflect a shift from nature as an aesthetic object to nature as a politically charged, relational, and often contested space. They expose the layered injustices—ecological, social, and epistemological—that define our contemporary moment. In doing so, contemporary Indian English fiction offers a potent critique of the forces driving environmental destruction, while also imagining alternate, more harmonious ways of inhabiting the world.

The analysis of selected contemporary Indian English novels—Exquisite Cadavers, Burnt Sugar, The Story of a Goat, Everything the Light Touches, and The Face at the Window—reveals a profound shift in literary representations of ecology, environment, and resistance. These texts challenge the traditional perception of nature as mere backdrop by foregrounding nonhuman agents—such as animals, plants, and landscapes—as active participants in narrative and meaning-making. Nature in these novels is imbued with memory, agency, and emotion. For instance, Poonachi the goat in Murugan's novel is not just a symbol of rural life but a subject through whom systemic caste and ecological violence are narrated. Similarly, in Pariat's novel, trees, roots, and seeds become agents of epistemological and historical resistance against colonial and scientific domination. The portrayal of these entities transcends symbolic utility; they emerge as carriers of history, grief, resistance, and survival—what Rob Nixon might describe as embodiments of "slow violence." These novels also explore the deep entanglement of ecological collapse with social hierarchies**,** particularly in the Indian context where caste, gender, and class intersect with environmental exploitation. In Kandasamy's Exquisite Cadavers, for example, the violation of female bodies and the surveillance of urban spaces operate simultaneously as metaphors for environmental degradation and patriarchal control. Her narrative suggests that the toxicity of modern urban life is gendered, racialized, and ecological. Similarly, Doshi's Burnt Sugar illustrates how emotional trauma and environmental decay mirror each other in urban Pune—where dust, heat, and sterility frame the deterioration of both memory and relationality. This intertwining of mental health and environmental degradation aligns with eco-psychological theories, underscoring that psychological well-being is deeply affected by the quality of one's surroundings.

Another critical insight is the use of narrative form and aesthetic choices as tools for ecological critique**.** These authors employ fragmentation, metafiction, dual narratives, and non-linear structures to mirror ecological disintegration and epistemic resistance. Kandasamy's dual-track narrative reflects the fractured, surveilled lives of urban dwellers and the dismembered state of modern ecological awareness. Pariat's rhizomatic, multi-voiced form mirrors botanical networks, emphasizing growth, transformation, and decolonial ways of knowing. Manral's use of the gothic genre—fog, haunted houses, psychological isolation—reflects the submerged grief and unspoken trauma that landscapes can carry. These stylistic choices are not merely

experimental; they are political. They resist the linear, capitalist narratives of progress and development by offering stories that foreground rupture, loss, and memory. Moreover, resistance in these novels is deeply embodied and intersectional**.** It emerges through the voices of women, animals, indigenous peoples, and the elderly—those often excluded from dominant environmental discourses. In Manral's novel, the aging woman's retreat into the mountains is not an escape but a reclaiming of ecological and emotional space from the noise of urban alienation. In Pariat's work, Khasi cosmology and indigenous knowledge challenge Enlightenment rationality, suggesting alternative ontologies where kinship with land and plants is not metaphorical but lived. Murugan presents agrarian distress not only as economic but as spiritual and ecological dispossession, reflecting a world where the caste system and market forces collude to destroy rural and nonhuman life.

Crucially, these novels intervene in state-sponsored discourses of "development" and capitalist expansion**.** Rather than embracing narratives of modernization and urbanization, they provide counter-discourses rooted in mourning, slowness, memory, and care. The loss of rain in Murugan's Tamil Nadu, the burnt sugar and rot in Doshi's Pune, the spectral fog in Manral's Himalayas, and the disappearing botanical wisdom in Pariat's Meghalaya—all speak to a national trajectory that is displacing both ecosystems and marginalized communities. These authors present ecological grief not as a distant consequence of climate change, but as an immediate, felt experience interwoven with everyday life and identity. In sum, the selected texts demonstrate that contemporary Indian English fiction is carving out a space for postcolonial ecologies of resistance—where storytelling becomes a means of ecological reclamation, and literature becomes a form of environmental activism. By refusing to separate environmental degradation from social injustice, these narratives insist that ecological healing must be feminist, decolonial, and emotionally resonant. The findings suggest a growing literary movement that not only depicts the Anthropocene but speaks from within its layered crises—foregrounding those who are most impacted, and whose voices, like that of Poonachi or the Khasi elder, offer profound alternatives to dominant paradigms of power, knowledge, and nature.

7. Conclusion

The 21st-century Indian English novel has increasingly become a powerful medium for ecological reflection and resistance, functioning as a literary eco-archive that does more than simply document environmental devastation. Through the works of contemporary authors—many of whom are women and voices from regional or marginalized communities—these narratives reimagine the relationship between humans and nature, dismantling conventional binaries such as nature/culture, human/animal, and modern/indigenous. The selected novels by Meena Kandasamy, Avni Doshi, Perumal Murugan, Janice Pariat, and Kiran Manral reveal how storytelling becomes a mode of environmental activism, where ecological collapse is intricately linked with gender, caste, memory, and emotion. These texts portray resistance not only through political protest but also through intimate acts of remembrance, myth-making, and sensory engagement with place. They challenge dominant narratives of progress and development by highlighting the slow, often invisible violence of environmental degradation in urban and rural India. In doing so, they contribute to a broader discourse on the Anthropocene, offering new ecological imaginaries rooted in care, interdependence, and justice. This study affirms that Indian English fiction plays a critical role in shaping environmental consciousness, positioning literature as a vital site for ecological and cultural survival in a time of global crisis.

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