PREFACE TO THE EDITION

The forthcoming issue of the **International Journal of Arts and Liberal Studies (IJALS**) presents a rich and intellectually expansive collection of articles that collectively illuminate the evolving contours of the arts and liberal inquiry in a rapidly transforming global context. The contributions in this issue traverse disciplinary boundaries, engaging with pressing questions of creativity, identity, knowledge production, and social responsibility, while foregrounding the continued relevance of the arts and humanities in shaping critical and imaginative futures.

A central theme that emerges across several articles is the transformative impact of technology on artistic and intellectual practices. The exploration of artificial intelligence and creative authorship critically interrogates long-held assumptions about originality, agency, and ownership, proposing collaborative human–machine paradigms as the future of artistic production. Complementing this, the study on digital humanities demonstrates how computational methodologies are reshaping literary studies, expanding both the scale and scope of interpretive possibilities while raising important epistemological questions.

Equally compelling is the issue's engagement with the arts as instruments of social critique and transformation. The analysis of theatre as a medium of resistance highlights its enduring power to address contemporary challenges from climate crises to social inequities—through participatory and dialogic forms of performance. Similarly, the discussion of public art in multicultural societies underscores its role in negotiating collective memory, identity, and belonging, revealing how aesthetic expressions intersect with political and spatial dynamics in urban environments.

The issue also foregrounds the critical importance of education and curriculum in shaping inclusive and holistic societies. The examination of music education provides robust interdisciplinary evidence of its cognitive and emotional benefits, advocating for its recognition as a foundational component of learning. In parallel, the article on decolonizing liberal arts curricula challenges entrenched Eurocentric frameworks, calling for epistemic plurality and the integration of diverse knowledge systems to make education more globally responsive and socially just.

Adding a distinctive dimension to this collection is the investigation into the peopling of India through genetic data, which bridges the sciences and humanities by offering insights into human migration, identity formation, and historical continuity. This inclusion exemplifies the journal's commitment to interdisciplinary dialogue, demonstrating how scientific inquiry can enrich broader cultural and historical understanding.

Taken together, the articles in this issue reflect the vibrancy and diversity of contemporary arts and liberal studies scholarship. They invite readers to reconsider established paradigms, embrace methodological innovation, and engage critically with the social, cultural, and technological forces shaping our world. As IJALS continues to foster such interdisciplinary and globally relevant scholarship, this issue stands as a testament to the enduring significance of the arts and humanities in navigating complexity, nurturing empathy, and envisioning more inclusive futures.

Dr. Chitra P M

Chief Editor

CONTENTS

SL. NO	TITLE	AUTHOR	PAGE NO
1	Artificial Intelligence and The Future of Creative Authorship	Kochumol Abraham	31 - 35
2	Theatre as Resistance: Drama and Contemporary Social Justice	Moushami Mohammed Ali	36 - 40
3	Music Education's Role in Cognitive and Emotional Development	Sundaravally	41 - 45
4	Decolonizing Liberal Arts Curricula For a Global Era	Vincent	46 - 50
5	Peopling of India as Disclosed by Genetic Data	Anton Perdih	51 - 54
6	Digital Humanities and The Transformation of Literary Studies	Vinodkumar Kallolickal	55 - 59
7	Public Art and Urban Identity in Multicultural Societies	Manoj T R	60 - 64
8	Eco-Spirituality: the Perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi	Umesh K	65 - 70
9	Ecocritical Sensibility with a Feminine Twist in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things	Greeshma N P	71 - 76

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Artificial Intelligence and The Future of Creative Authorship

Kochumol Abraham

PG Department of Computer Applications, Marian College Kuttikanam Autonomous, India.

Article information

Received: 13th January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 5th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0012

Abstract

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence tools capable of generating visual art, literary text, and musical compositions has fundamentally challenged longstanding assumptions about creativity, authorship, and artistic originality. This article examines the philosophical, legal, and ethical implications of AI-generated creative works by drawing on scholarship from aesthetics, computer science, intellectual property law, and art criticism. It traces the debate over whether machines can be genuinely creative, interrogates the copyright and ownership challenges posed by generative algorithms, and evaluates the impact of AI on artistic practice and education. The analysis argues that the future of creative authorship lies not in a binary opposition between human and machine but in collaborative frameworks that leverage the distinctive strengths of both, requiring new legal, pedagogical, and aesthetic paradigms to navigate the transformative potential of AI in the arts.

Keywords: - Artificial Intelligence, Creative Authorship, Computational Creativity, Copyright, Generative Art, Human-AI Collaboration, Intellectual Property, Digital Art.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence has fundamentally disrupted longstanding assumptions about creativity, authorship, and artistic originality. Tools such as DALL-E, Midjourney, and ChatGPT have demonstrated an unprecedented capacity to generate visual art, literary text, and musical compositions that rival and sometimes surpass human-created works in superficial quality. These developments have ignited fierce debates across the arts and humanities regarding whether machines can truly be creative, who owns the outputs of generative algorithms, and what the proliferation of AI-generated content means for human artists and the creative economy. As Miller (2019) observes, the emergence of AI-powered creativity represents a paradigm shift that challenges centuries of aesthetic philosophy and legal frameworks built around the concept of human authorship.

This article examines the multifaceted implications of artificial intelligence for creative authorship in the contemporary moment. It traces the philosophical foundations of computational creativity, interrogates the legal and ethical challenges posed by AI-generated works, and considers the evolving role of human artists in an increasingly automated creative landscape. Drawing on scholarship from aesthetics, computer science, intellectual property law, and art criticism, the analysis argues that while AI tools represent powerful instruments for artistic exploration, the question of genuine creativity remains deeply entangled with human intentionality, cultural context, and embodied experience. The article further contends that the future of creative authorship lies not in a binary opposition between human and machine but in collaborative frameworks that leverage the strengths of both.

Literature Review

The question of whether machines can be creative has occupied scholars for decades. Boden (2004) provides one of the most influential frameworks for understanding creativity, distinguishing between exploratory, combinational, and transformational creativity. In her analysis, computational systems are capable of the first two modes but struggle with genuinely transformational creativity, which requires a fundamental restructuring of conceptual spaces. Boden's taxonomy has been widely adopted in subsequent research, though some scholars have questioned whether her categories adequately capture the emergent properties of modern deep learning systems.

Colton and Wiggins (2012) extend this line of inquiry by arguing that computational creativity represents the 'final frontier' of artificial intelligence research. They propose that a truly creative computer system must not only produce novel and valuable artifacts but also be capable of appreciating, reflecting upon, and explaining its own creative processes. This requirement for meta-cognition sets a high bar that most current AI systems fail to meet, despite their impressive generative capabilities. The authors suggest that achieving genuine computational creativity would constitute one of the most significant milestones in the history of artificial intelligence.

In the visual arts domain, Elgammal et al. (2017) introduced Creative Adversarial Networks (CANs), which are trained to generate art that deviates from established stylistic norms while remaining within the broader distribution of recognized art. Their experimental results demonstrated that human evaluators often could not distinguish CAN-generated images from works produced by human artists, and in some cases rated the AI works as more novel and aesthetically stimulating. Mazzone and Elgammal (2019) further explored these findings, arguing that AI art challenges conventional notions of artistic intention and raises fundamental questions about the nature of aesthetic experience.

Hertzmann (2018) offers a more skeptical perspective, contending that computers cannot create art in any meaningful sense because art is fundamentally a social activity that requires human intentionality, cultural context, and communicative purpose. In his view, AI-generated images are better understood as products of sophisticated tools wielded by human programmers and curators rather than as autonomous creative acts. This position resonates with Sawyer's (2012) comprehensive framework for understanding human creativity, which emphasizes the role of social interaction, domain knowledge, and cultural context in the creative process.

The legal dimensions of AI creativity have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Guadamuz (2017) examines the implications of AI-generated works for copyright law, noting that most legal systems require a human author as a condition for copyright protection. This creates a significant lacuna when AI systems produce works with minimal human intervention, potentially leaving vast quantities of creative output in the public domain or creating perverse incentives for humans to claim false authorship. Zeilinger (2021) extends this analysis by exploring the broader implications of AI art for intellectual property regimes, arguing that the rise of generative algorithms demands a fundamental rethinking of ownership, attribution, and creative agency.

Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) provide a nuanced analysis of GPT-3's capabilities and limitations, arguing that while the system demonstrates remarkable facility with language generation, it lacks genuine understanding, intentionality, and semantic comprehension. They characterize GPT-3 as a powerful tool for text manipulation rather than a genuine author, drawing an important distinction between the ability to produce linguistically coherent text and the capacity for meaningful communication. This distinction has significant implications for how we evaluate AI-generated literature and poetry.

The Philosophical Debate: Can Machines Be Creative?

At the heart of the AI authorship controversy lies a fundamental philosophical question: what constitutes creativity? If creativity is defined purely in terms of novelty and value the capacity to produce outputs that are both original and useful or aesthetically pleasing then contemporary AI systems arguably meet this threshold. Generative adversarial networks produce images that are statistically unique and often aesthetically compelling, while large language models generate text that can be engaging, informative, and stylistically sophisticated. By this measure, as Elgammal et al. (2017) demonstrate, AI systems are already creative in a functionally meaningful sense.

However, if creativity requires intentionality, self-awareness, and the capacity for genuine expression the ability to mean something by what one creates then AI systems fall far short. Boden (2004) acknowledges this tension in her framework, noting that computational creativity raises profound questions about the nature of consciousness and subjective experience. A CAN may generate a visually striking image, but it does not experience aesthetic pleasure, grapple with existential anxiety, or seek to communicate a particular vision of the world. Hertzmann (2018) argues that this absence of inner life renders AI art fundamentally different from human art, regardless of its surface qualities.

Sawyer (2012) offers a social-constructivist perspective that further complicates the picture. In his framework, creativity is not merely a property of individual minds but an emergent phenomenon that arises from social interaction, cultural dialogue, and collaborative meaning-making. By this account, AI systems are not creative agents but rather participants in a broader creative ecosystem that includes human programmers, curators, audiences, and cultural institutions. The creativity attributed to AI is, in this view, a distributed property of the human-machine system rather than an intrinsic quality of the algorithm itself.

Miller (2019) attempts to bridge these perspectives by proposing that AI creativity should be understood as a distinct category rather than measured against human creativity. He argues that the most productive approach is to recognize AI as a new kind of creative partner that operates according to different principles than human artists. This framework avoids the reductive question of whether machines 'really' create and instead focuses on the novel forms of artistic expression that emerge from human-AI collaboration. Colton and Wiggins (2012) similarly advocate for a pluralistic understanding of creativity that can accommodate both human and computational agents.

Copyright, Ownership, and Legal Challenges

The legal implications of AI-generated art represent one of the most pressing practical challenges in the field. As Guadamuz (2017) documents, existing copyright frameworks in most jurisdictions are predicated on the assumption of human authorship. The United States Copyright Office, for example, has consistently held that works must be created by a human being to qualify for copyright protection, a position reaffirmed in its 2023 guidance on AI-generated content. This creates significant uncertainty for artists who use AI tools in their creative process, particularly when the degree of human involvement varies along a continuum from minimal prompt engineering to extensive post-processing and curation.

Zeilinger (2021) argues that these legal challenges reveal deeper contradictions in the intellectual property system itself. He contends that the rise of AI art exposes the fiction of the autonomous author that has underpinned copyright law since the Romantic era, and that a more honest reckoning with the collaborative, iterative, and culturally embedded nature of all creative production is long overdue. In his view, AI art offers an opportunity to develop more equitable frameworks for recognizing and compensating creative labor, rather than simply extending existing property rights to cover machine-generated outputs.

The question of training data further complicates the ownership landscape. Generative AI systems are trained on vast corpora of existing human-created works, raising concerns about unauthorized use, style appropriation, and the dilution of individual artistic voices. Mazzone and Elgammal (2019) note that these concerns are particularly acute in the visual arts, where AI systems can replicate the distinctive styles of living artists without attribution or compensation. The resulting legal battlesexemplified by high-profile lawsuits against AI art platforms are likely to shape the regulatory landscape for years to come.

Impact on Artistic Practice and Education

The proliferation of AI creative tools is already transforming artistic practice across multiple domains. In the visual arts, AI-assisted creation has become a recognized medium, with AI artworks exhibited in major galleries and commanding significant prices at auction. Floridi and Chiriatti (2020) observe that this integration of AI into artistic workflows represents a continuation of the long history of technological mediation in art, from the camera obscura to Photoshop. However, the degree of autonomy exhibited by current AI systems distinguishes them from previous tools and raises novel questions about the role of the human artist.

In literature and creative writing, large language models have been used for everything from generating poetry and fiction to assisting with screenwriting and journalism. Miller (2019) documents numerous examples of AI-human literary collaboration, noting that the most successful outcomes tend to involve significant human curation and editing rather than unmediated AI output. This observation supports the broader argument that AI is most productively understood as a creative tool or collaborator rather than an autonomous author.

The implications for arts education are equally profound. As AI tools become more accessible and capable, art schools and creative writing programs must grapple with how to integrate these technologies into their curricula while maintaining a commitment to developing distinctively human creative capacities. Sawyer (2012) argues that creativity education should emphasize the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of creative practice that remain beyond the reach of current AI systems. This includes the capacity for empathic understanding, moral imagination, and critical reflection on the cultural and political contexts of artistic production.

The Ethics of AI-Generated Art

Beyond the legal questions, AI-generated art raises profound ethical concerns about labor, equity, and cultural value. The displacement of human artists by AI systems threatens livelihoods across multiple creative industries, from graphic design and illustration to music composition and copywriting. Hertzmann (2018) acknowledges this concern while arguing that historical precedent suggests technological disruption in the arts tends to create new opportunities even as it eliminates existing ones. However, the speed and scale of AI adoption may outpace the development of new creative niches, creating a period of significant economic dislocation for working artists.

Zeilinger (2021) raises additional ethical concerns about the concentration of AI creative tools in the hands of large technology corporations, which control both the training data and the platforms through which AI art is distributed. This concentration of power threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities in the creative economy and raises questions about cultural diversity, access, and representation. If the aesthetic norms embedded in AI training data reflect the biases and blind spots of dominant cultural traditions, the widespread adoption of AI creative tools could inadvertently homogenize global artistic production.

Colton and Wiggins (2012) suggest that addressing these ethical challenges requires interdisciplinary collaboration among technologists, artists, policymakers, and ethicists. They advocate for the development of ethical frameworks that recognize the legitimate interests of all stakeholders in the AI art ecosystem, including the human artists whose works form the training data, the users who interact with AI tools, and the broader public that consumes AI-generated content.

Future Directions: Toward Human-AI Collaboration

The most promising trajectory for AI in the creative arts appears to lie in collaborative rather than substitutive models. Rather than replacing human artists, AI tools can augment human creativity by expanding the range of possibilities available for exploration, accelerating the iterative process of artistic refinement, and enabling forms of expression that would be impractical or impossible through purely manual means. Boden (2004) anticipates this possibility in her framework, noting that computational tools can help human artists explore conceptual spaces more efficiently and discover unexpected connections between ideas.

Mazzone and Elgammal (2019) describe several examples of successful human-AI artistic collaboration, including projects in which human artists use AI-generated elements as raw material for further creative elaboration. In these cases, the AI system functions as a sophisticated generative tool that produces a range of options for the human artist to select, modify, and integrate into a coherent artistic vision. This collaborative model preserves the role of human intentionality and judgment while leveraging the computational power and generative capacity of AI systems.

Looking forward, Miller (2019) envisions a creative landscape in which human and artificial intelligence coexist as complementary forms of creativity, each contributing distinctive strengths to the artistic process. This vision requires not only technological innovation but also cultural and institutional adaptation, including new legal frameworks for recognizing collaborative authorship, new pedagogical approaches for training artists to work with AI tools, and new aesthetic criteria for evaluating works that emerge from human-machine collaboration. The future of creative authorship, in this view, is neither purely human nor purely artificial but genuinely hybrid.

Conclusion

The rise of artificial intelligence as a creative force represents one of the most significant cultural transformations of the twenty-first century. As this article has demonstrated, AI-generated art challenges longstanding assumptions about authorship, creativity, and artistic value, raising profound philosophical, legal, and ethical questions that remain far from resolution. The philosophical debate over whether machines can truly be creative reveals fundamental disagreements about the nature of creativity itself, while the legal challenges posed by AI-generated works expose deep contradictions in existing intellectual property frameworks.

What emerges most clearly from this analysis is that the future of creative authorship is unlikely to be defined by a simple binary between human and machine creativity. Instead, as scholars such as Miller (2019), Boden (2004), and Mazzone and Elgammal (2019) suggest, the most productive and ethically responsible path forward lies in developing collaborative frameworks that harness the generative power of AI while preserving the distinctively human dimensions of artistic expression: intentionality, emotional depth, cultural sensitivity, and moral imagination. The challenge for artists, educators, policymakers, and technologists is to navigate this transition in ways that promote both innovation and equity, ensuring that the creative possibilities opened by AI benefit not only those who control the technology but the broader human community that art serves.

References

Boden, Margaret A. *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Colton, Simon, and Geraint A. Wiggins. "Computational Creativity: The Final Frontier?" In *Proceedings of the 20th European Conference on Artificial Intelligence*, 21–26. Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2012.

Elgammal, Ahmed, Bingchen Liu, Mohamed Elhoseiny, and Marian Mazzone. "CAN: Creative Adversarial Networks, Generating 'Art' by Learning About Styles and Deviating from Style Norms." *arXiv preprint* arXiv:1706.07068, 2017.

Floridi, Luciano, and Massimo Chiriatti. "GPT-3: Its Nature, Scope, Limits, and Consequences." *Minds and Machines* 30, no. 4 (2020): 681–694.

Guadamuz, Andres. "Artificial Intelligence and Copyright." *WIPO Magazine* 5 (2017): 14–19.

Hertzmann, Aaron. "Can Computers Create Art?" *Arts* 7, no. 2 (2018): 18.

Mazzone, Marian, and Ahmed Elgammal. "Art, Creativity, and the Potential of Artificial Intelligence." *Arts* 8, no. 1 (2019): 26.

Miller, Arthur I. *The Artist in the Machine: The World of AI-Powered Creativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Sawyer, R. Keith. *Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Zeilinger, Martin. *Tactical Entanglements: AI Art, Creative Agency, and the Limits of Intellectual Property*. Lüneburg: meson press, 2021.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Theatre as Resistance: Drama and Contemporary Social Justice

Moushami Mohammed Ali

Assistant Professor, St.Josephs college (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda, India.

Article information

Received: 10th January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 6th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume:2
Issue:2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0013

Abstract

Theatre has long served as a powerful instrument for social critique, political resistance, and community mobilization. This article examines the role of drama as a form of contemporary social justice advocacy, tracing the theoretical lineage from Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed to present-day participatory and digital performance practices. Drawing on scholarship from applied theatre, performance studies, and community-based arts, the analysis evaluates how contemporary practitioners have adapted theatrical traditions to address twenty-first-century challenges including climate change, racial injustice, and mental health stigma. The article argues that theatre's unique capacity for embodied, dialogical engagement makes it an indispensable medium for advocacy in an era of political polarization and digital alienation, while acknowledging the ethical complexities and measurement challenges inherent in assessing theatre's social impact.

Keywords: -Theatre, social justice, applied drama, Theatre of the Oppressed, community-based performance, political theatre, digital theatre, advocacy.

Introduction

Theatre has long served as a powerful instrument for social critique, political resistance, and community mobilization. From the agitprop performances of the early twentieth century to the participatory theatre practices of the present day, dramatic arts have provided a unique space for marginalized communities to voice their experiences, challenge oppressive structures, and envision alternative futures. As Jayakumar (2025) observes, contemporary drama has emerged as a vital catalyst for advocacy around some of the most pressing issues of our time, including climate change, racial injustice, and mental health stigma. The theatrical space offers what no other art form can replicate with equal immediacy: the co-presence of performers and audience in a shared act of meaning-making that demands both intellectual engagement and emotional response.

This article examines the role of theatre as a form of social resistance in contemporary contexts. It traces the theoretical foundations of politically engaged theatre from Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, analyzes the ways in which contemporary practitioners have adapted these traditions to address twenty-first-century social justice issues, and evaluates the effectiveness of theatre as a tool for advocacy and social transformation. Drawing on a range of scholarly perspectives and practical examples, the article argues that theatre's unique capacity for embodied, dialogical engagement makes it an indispensable medium for social justice work in an era of increasing political polarization and digital alienation.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of socially engaged theatre are rooted in the work of Bertolt Brecht, whose concept of epic theatre sought to transform the audience from passive consumers of spectacle into critical observers capable of analyzing and challenging social conditions. Brecht (1964) argued that theatre should not merely entertain but should provoke audiences to think critically about the political and economic structures that shape their lives. His techniques of estrangement including direct address, visible stagecraft, and the disruption of narrative illusion were designed to prevent emotional identification and encourage rational analysis. Brecht's legacy continues to inform contemporary political theatre, particularly in works that address systemic inequality and institutional power.

Augusto Boal extended Brecht's project in a more participatory direction with his development of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal (1979) argued that traditional theatre reinforced social hierarchies by maintaining a rigid separation between performers and audience, and he proposed a series of techniques including forum theatre, image theatre, and invisible theatre that dissolved this boundary and empowered audience members to become active participants in the dramatic action. In forum theatre, for example, audience members are invited to stop the performance and replace the protagonist on stage, experimenting with different strategies for confronting oppression. This participatory approach has been widely adopted in community development, education, and social activism contexts around the world.

The field of applied theatre encompasses a broad range of practices that use theatrical techniques for purposes beyond aesthetic entertainment, including education, community development, conflict resolution, and health promotion. Nicholson (2005) provides a comprehensive overview of the field, arguing that applied theatre represents a distinctive form of gift-giving that creates opportunities for participants to explore their experiences, develop new perspectives, and build social connections. Thompson (2003) offers a complementary analysis, emphasizing the affective dimensions of applied theatre and arguing that its value lies not only in its capacity to raise awareness about social issues but also in its ability to create experiences of beauty, joy, and solidarity that sustain communities in the face of adversity.

Cohen-Cruz (2005) documents the rich tradition of community-based performance in the United States, tracing its development from the settlement house movement of the early twentieth century to the identity-based performance practices of the 1990s and beyond. Her analysis highlights the ways in which community-based theatre creates spaces for marginalized groups to tell their own stories, challenge dominant narratives, and build collective identity. Kuppers (2007) extends this analysis to include disability performance, environmental theatre, and digital community practices, arguing that community performance is fundamentally concerned with the politics of inclusion and participation.

Dolan (2005) introduces the concept of 'utopian performatives' moments in live performance when the audience collectively experiences a vision of a more just and equitable world. She argues that these ephemeral experiences of communal hope and possibility are not merely escapist fantasies but serve a vital political function by demonstrating that alternative social arrangements are imaginable and desirable. This framework has been influential in subsequent scholarship on the relationship between theatre and social change, providing a theoretical vocabulary for analyzing the affective and imaginative dimensions of political performance.

The question of how to assess the social impact of theatre has been a persistent challenge for practitioners and scholars alike. Etherton and Prentki (2006) address this challenge directly, arguing for the development of rigorous impact assessment methodologies that can capture both the immediate and long-term effects of theatrical interventions. They propose a framework that combines quantitative measures of behavioral change with qualitative analysis of participants' experiences, emphasizing the importance of attending to process as well as outcomes. Prentki and Preston (2009) provide additional theoretical and practical resources for understanding the relationship between applied theatre practice and social change.

Historical Roots of Political Theatre

The use of theatre as a vehicle for political expression and social criticism has ancient roots, from the satirical comedies of Aristophanes to the morality plays of the medieval period. However, the modern tradition of explicitly political theatre emerged in the early twentieth century in response to the social upheavals of industrialization, colonialism, and world war. Brecht (1964) was arguably the most influential figure in this tradition, developing a theatrical practice that combined aesthetic innovation with Marxist political analysis. His concept of Verfremdungseffekt—the alienation or estrangement effect sought to disrupt the audience's emotional absorption in the dramatic narrative and create a critical distance from which social conditions could be analyzed and questioned.

Boal (1979) built upon Brecht's foundation while challenging what he perceived as its limitations. Where Brecht sought to transform spectators into critical observers, Boal aimed to transform them into active agents of change. His Theatre of the Oppressed techniques were developed in the context of political resistance in Brazil and subsequently adapted for use in diverse cultural and political contexts around the world. The global dissemination of Boal's methods represents one of the most significant developments in the history of socially engaged theatre, demonstrating the transportability of participatory theatrical techniques across cultural boundaries.

Salverson (2001) complicates this narrative of empowerment by raising important questions about the ethics of representing others' suffering on stage. She argues that testimonial theatre performance based on the real experiences of marginalized individuals carries risks of re-traumatization, voyeurism, and the reduction of complex lived experiences to simplified narratives of victimhood. Her concept of an 'erotics of injury' draws attention to the ways in which audiences may derive problematic pleasure from witnessing others' pain, even in the context of ostensibly progressive political theatre. This ethical critique has had a significant influence on subsequent practice and scholarship in the field.

Contemporary Theatre and Social Justice Movements

In the twenty-first century, theatre has been deployed as a tool for advocacy around a wide range of social justice issues, including racial equality, climate action, gender justice, immigration reform, and mental health awareness. Jayakumar (2025) provides a valuable survey of contemporary drama that addresses climate change, racial justice, and mental health, arguing that theatre's capacity for emotional engagement and collective experience makes it uniquely suited to mobilizing audiences around these interconnected challenges. His analysis highlights several contemporary plays and performance projects that have successfully translated complex social issues into compelling theatrical experiences.

The Black Lives Matter movement has generated a significant body of theatrical work that addresses systemic racism, police violence, and the ongoing legacy of slavery and colonialism. Community-based performances, spoken word events, and professionally produced plays have all contributed to a theatrical landscape that both reflects and advances the movement's goals. Cohen-Cruz (2005) anticipated this development in her analysis of identity-based community performance, noting the capacity of theatre to create spaces for collective mourning, rage, and resistance in response to racial violence.

Climate change has emerged as another major theme in contemporary socially engaged theatre. From large-scale productions that dramatize the science of global warming to intimate community performances that explore the local impacts of environmental degradation, theatre artists have found innovative ways to make the abstract and overwhelming reality of climate change tangible and emotionally resonant. Dolan's (2005) concept of utopian performatives is particularly relevant here, as many climate-themed performances seek to inspire audiences not only with a sense of urgency but also with a vision of sustainable, equitable alternatives to the current social order.

Mental health advocacy has also found a powerful ally in contemporary theatre. Performances that address depression, anxiety, addiction, and trauma have helped to destigmatize mental illness and create spaces for open dialogue about psychological well-being. Nicholson (2005) notes that applied theatre practices have been increasingly adopted in mental health settings, where participatory performance can provide therapeutic benefits for participants while also raising broader public awareness about mental health issues. Jayakumar (2025) similarly emphasizes the potential of drama to serve as a catalyst for mental health advocacy, noting that theatrical representations of psychological struggle can foster empathy and understanding in ways that clinical or statistical accounts cannot.

Community-Based Theatre and Participatory Practice

Community-based theatre represents one of the most vibrant and diverse strands of contemporary socially engaged performance. Kuppers (2007) defines community performance as artistic practice that emerges from and is accountable to specific communities, and that is concerned with questions of inclusion, participation, and social justice. This definition encompasses a wide range of practices, from oral history performances and testimony-based plays to participatory workshops and site-specific installations.

The participatory dimensions of community-based theatre are central to its social justice potential. Drawing on Boal's (1979) legacy, many contemporary practitioners use forum theatre and related techniques to create performances in which audience members are active participants rather than passive observers. Thompson (2003) argues that this participatory approach has both instrumental and intrinsic value: it can be a means of raising awareness, building skills, and promoting social change, but it also has inherent worth as an experience of creative self-expression, collective solidarity, and aesthetic pleasure.

Prentki and Preston (2009) provide a comprehensive overview of the theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies that inform contemporary applied theatre practice. Their collection brings together diverse perspectives from practitioners and scholars working in education, community development, conflict resolution, and health promotion contexts, demonstrating the breadth and versatility of theatre as a tool for social engagement. The contributors emphasize the importance of ethical practice, cultural sensitivity, and genuine partnership with the communities in which theatre work takes place.

Etherton and Prentki (2006) address the crucial question of impact assessment, arguing that the social effects of community-based theatre are often diffuse, long-term, and difficult to measure using conventional research methods. They propose a mixed-methods approach that combines participant observation, interviews, and surveys with creative methods such as participatory evaluation and performance-based research. This methodological framework acknowledges the complexity of social change processes while insisting on the importance of evidence-based practice in the field.

Digital Theatre and Online Activism

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a transformation in theatrical practice that had been underway for years: the migration of performance into digital spaces. Lockdowns and social distancing requirements forced theatre companies around the world to experiment with live streaming, virtual reality, interactive video platforms, and social media-based performance. While some practitioners lamented the loss of co-presence that defines live theatre, others embraced the democratizing potential of digital platforms, which can reach audiences who are geographically, economically, or physically unable to attend traditional theatre venues.

Digital theatre has particular potential as a tool for social justice activism. Online performances can reach global audiences, transcend national boundaries, and engage participants who might never enter a conventional theatre space. Kuppers (2007) anticipated this development in her analysis of digital community performance, noting the potential of online platforms to create new forms of participatory art-making that are inclusive and accessible. The expansion of digital theatre during and after the pandemic has created new opportunities for socially engaged practitioners to reach diverse audiences and build transnational networks of solidarity and advocacy.

However, digital theatre also raises significant concerns about equity and access. The digital divide—the unequal distribution of technology and internet connectivity means that online performance may inadvertently exclude the very communities that socially engaged theatre seeks to serve. Salverson (2001) reminds us that ethical practice in socially engaged theatre requires careful attention to questions of power, representation, and access, and these concerns are amplified rather than diminished in digital contexts. The challenge for contemporary practitioners is to harness the potential of digital platforms while remaining committed to the principles of inclusion, participation, and justice that define the tradition of theatre for social change.

Evaluating Theatre's Effectiveness as Advocacy

A persistent question in the scholarship on socially engaged theatre concerns the effectiveness of theatrical interventions in producing measurable social change. Dolan (2005) argues that theatre's contribution to social justice should not be evaluated solely in terms of immediate policy outcomes or behavioral changes but should also encompass its capacity to create affective experiences of solidarity, hope, and collective imagination. These ephemeral experiences, she contends, have lasting effects on participants' sense of possibility and agency, even when they do not translate directly into political action.

Cohen-Cruz (2005) takes a more pragmatic approach, documenting specific examples of community-based performances that have contributed to tangible social outcomes, including policy changes, community organizing, and shifts in public discourse. Her case studies demonstrate that theatre can be an effective catalyst for social change when it is embedded in broader movements for justice and when it is developed in genuine partnership with affected communities. This finding is consistent with Jayakumar's (2025) argument that contemporary drama functions most effectively as an advocacy tool when it is connected to larger networks of activism and social engagement.

Nicholson (2005) offers a balanced assessment that acknowledges both the potential and the limitations of theatre as a tool for social change. She argues that the value of applied theatre lies not in its capacity to solve social problems single-handedly but in its ability to create spaces for dialogue, reflection, and imagination that complement and enrich other forms of social action. Thompson (2003) similarly cautions against instrumentalizing theatre by reducing it to a mere delivery mechanism for social messages, arguing that its aesthetic and affective qualities are integral to its transformative potential.

Conclusion

Theatre's enduring power as a medium for social resistance and advocacy lies in its unique combination of embodied presence, collective experience, and imaginative possibility. From Brecht's (1964) epic theatre to Boal's (1979) Theatre of the Oppressed, from community-based performances documented by Cohen-Cruz (2005) and Kuppers (2007) to the contemporary climate, racial justice, and mental health advocacy chronicled by Jayakumar (2025), the dramatic arts have consistently demonstrated their capacity to challenge injustice, amplify marginalized voices, and inspire collective action.

As this article has shown, the tradition of socially engaged theatre is characterized by a productive tension between aesthetic and instrumental values, between the desire to create beautiful and moving art and the commitment to producing tangible social change. Scholars such as Dolan (2005), Thompson (2003), and Nicholson (2005) have argued persuasively that these goals are not incompatible but mutually reinforcing: theatre is most effective as a tool for social transformation when it is also most fully realized as an art form. The challenge for contemporary practitioners and scholars is to sustain this creative tension while adapting to new contexts and technologies, including the digital platforms that are increasingly central to both artistic practice and social activism.

The expansion of theatre into digital spaces, the growing recognition of its therapeutic and educational applications, and the deepening engagement of theatre artists with urgent social issues such as climate change, racial justice, and mental health all suggest that the tradition of theatre as resistance is not only alive but evolving in dynamic and promising directions. As Salverson (2001) reminds us, this work must be undertaken with careful attention to ethics, power, and representation, ensuring that theatre remains a space of genuine solidarity and collective empowerment rather than a vehicle for the appropriation or exploitation of others' suffering. In an era of profound social and environmental crisis, the need for theatre that challenges, provokes, and inspires has never been greater.

References

Boal, Augusto. *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Translated by Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1979.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Edited and translated by John Willett. New York: Hill and Wang, 1964.

Cohen-Cruz, Jan. *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Dolan, Jill. *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Etherton, Michael, and Tim Prentki. "Drama for Change? Prove It! Impact Assessment in Applied Theatre." *Research in Drama Education* 11, no. 2 (2006): 139–155.

Jayakumar, J. "Theatre for Social Change: Contemporary Drama as Catalyst for Climate, Racial, and Mental Health Advocacy." *International Journal of Arts and Liberal Studies (IJALS)* 1, no. 1 (2025): 39–44. https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0006.

Kuppers, Petra. *Community Performance: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Nicholson, Helen. *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Prentki, Tim, and Sheila Preston, eds. *The Applied Theatre Reader*. London: Routledge, 2009.

Salverson, Julie. "Change on Whose Terms? Testimony and an Erotics of Injury." *Theater* 31, no. 3 (2001): 119–125.

Thompson, James. *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Music Education's Role in Cognitive and Emotional Development

Sundaravally

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Abhishekapatti, Tirunelveli, India

Article information

Received: 11th January 2026
Received in revised form: 17th February 2026
Accepted: 19th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0014

Abstract

The relationship between music education and cognitive development has been the subject of sustained and increasingly rigorous scholarly inquiry. This article provides a comprehensive examination of how musical training influences brain development, executive function, academic performance, and emotional regulation in children and adolescents. Drawing on neuroscience, developmental psychology, and education studies, the analysis synthesizes longitudinal and experimental evidence demonstrating that structured music education produces measurable enhancements in auditory processing, working memory, reading ability, and social-emotional competence. The article further addresses the equity and access challenges that shape the distribution of music education opportunities and argues that music instruction represents a fundamental component of holistic education rather than a peripheral enrichment activity, with significant implications for curriculum design and educational policy.

Keywords: - Music Education, Cognitive Development, Executive Function, Neuroscience, Auditory Processing, Emotional Regulation, Educational Equity, Curriculum Policy

Introduction

The relationship between music education and cognitive development has been a subject of sustained scholarly inquiry for more than two decades. As educational policymakers worldwide grapple with questions of curriculum design, resource allocation, and student well-being, the evidence base for the developmental benefits of musical training has grown increasingly robust and nuanced. Pauly (2026) provides compelling longitudinal evidence that musical training produces measurable improvements in executive function and academic achievement, contributing to a body of research that underscores the cognitive significance of arts education in school curricula.

This article provides a comprehensive examination of the relationship between music education and the cognitive and emotional development of children and adolescents. Drawing on research from neuroscience, developmental psychology, education studies, and music therapy, the analysis explores the mechanisms through which musical training influences brain development, executive function, academic performance, and emotional regulation. The article further considers the social benefits of ensemble music-making, the therapeutic applications of music in educational settings, and the equity and access issues that shape the distribution of music education opportunities. It argues that music education represents not a luxury or a frill but a fundamental component of a

holistic educational experience that nurtures the cognitive, emotional, and social capacities essential for human flourishing.

Literature Review

The scientific study of music's effects on cognitive development gained significant momentum in the early 2000s with a series of landmark studies that demonstrated measurable cognitive benefits of musical training. Schellenberg (2004) conducted a randomized controlled trial demonstrating that children who received music lessons showed significantly greater increases in IQ compared to children who received drama lessons or no arts instruction. This finding was replicated and extended in a follow-up study by Schellenberg (2006), which demonstrated long-term positive associations between music lessons and IQ that persisted into adolescence, even after controlling for family income and parental education.

Hallam (2010) provides one of the most comprehensive reviews of the evidence on music's impact on child development, synthesizing research on intellectual, social, and personal development. Her analysis demonstrates that musical engagement can enhance spatial-temporal reasoning, verbal memory, reading skills, and mathematical ability, while also promoting social cohesion, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Hallam's review is notable for its attention to the conditions under which these benefits are most likely to occur, including the quality of instruction, the duration and intensity of musical engagement, and the age at which training begins.

Neuroscience research has provided increasingly detailed accounts of the brain mechanisms underlying music's cognitive effects. Kraus and Chandrasekaran (2010) demonstrate that musical training enhances auditory processing at both subcortical and cortical levels, producing changes in brain structure and function that generalize to non-musical domains such as speech perception and language learning. Strait and Kraus (2014) extend this analysis across the lifespan, showing that the auditory expertise developed through musical training has lasting effects on neural processing that persist into adulthood and may help protect against age-related cognitive decline.

Moreno et al. (2011) provide direct evidence that even short-term music training can enhance verbal intelligence and executive function in children. In their study, children who received just twenty days of computerized music training showed significantly greater improvements in vocabulary knowledge and executive function compared to children who received visual art training. This finding suggests that the cognitive benefits of music are not solely attributable to the social and motivational aspects of music lessons but reflect genuine effects of auditory-motor engagement on neural development.

The question of whether music's cognitive benefits are specifically musical or reflect more general effects of enriched experience has been addressed by several research groups. Habibi et al. (2014) conducted a carefully designed study comparing children about to begin music training, sports training, or no extracurricular training, finding no pre-existing group differences in cognitive, social, or neural measures. This baseline equivalence strengthens the causal inference that subsequent cognitive differences between groups can be attributed to the music training itself rather than to pre-existing individual differences.

Neuroscience of Music and Brain Development

The neuroscientific evidence for music's impact on brain development is extensive and compelling. Musical training involves the simultaneous coordination of auditory perception, motor control, visual processing, memory, attention, and emotional regulation, making it one of the most cognitively demanding activities available to developing minds. Kraus and Chandrasekaran (2010) have shown that this multi-modal engagement produces measurable changes in brain structure and function, including increased gray matter volume in auditory and motor cortices, enhanced white matter connectivity between brain regions, and more efficient neural processing of complex acoustic signals.

Strait and Kraus (2014) provide a comprehensive review of the biological impact of auditory expertise across the lifespan, demonstrating that musicians show enhanced neural encoding of speech sounds, greater auditory attention, and more robust working memory compared to non-musicians. These differences are not merely correlational but appear to be causally related to musical training, as evidenced by longitudinal studies showing that neural processing changes emerge in parallel with the acquisition of musical skills. The authors propose that music training provides a form of auditory cognitive training that strengthens the neural circuits underlying attention, memory, and executive function.

Jaschke, Honing, and Scherder (2018) provide particularly relevant evidence from a longitudinal study of music education in primary school children. Their analysis demonstrates that children who participated in structured music education programs showed significantly greater improvements in executive functions—including inhibition, planning, and cognitive flexibility—compared to children who received standard arts curricula. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on music and executive function and provide

strong support for the inclusion of music education in school curricula as a means of promoting cognitive development.

Tierney and Kraus (2013) explore the specific mechanisms through which music training enhances reading ability, arguing that musical training strengthens the auditory processing skills that are fundamental to phonological awareness, a key predictor of reading success. Their analysis demonstrates that musicians show enhanced neural processing of the acoustic features of speech that are most relevant to phonological discrimination, including temporal fine structure and spectral composition. This finding has important implications for educational practice, suggesting that music education may serve as a complementary intervention for children at risk of reading difficulties.

Music and Emotional Regulation

Beyond its cognitive benefits, music education plays a significant role in the emotional development of children and adolescents. Musical engagement provides opportunities for emotional expression, self-regulation, and the development of empathetic understanding that are not readily available through other curricular activities. Hallam (2010) notes that participation in music has been associated with improved emotional well-being, reduced anxiety, and enhanced self-esteem, particularly among children from disadvantaged backgrounds who may have limited access to other forms of emotional support.

The emotional dimensions of music education are closely linked to its social dimensions. Ensemble music-making participating in choirs, orchestras, bands, and small chamber groups requires the development of empathy, cooperation, and mutual responsiveness that build emotional intelligence and social competence. Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) provide a thorough analysis of the evidence on arts education and social-emotional development, concluding that while the causal mechanisms are complex and not fully understood, there is sufficient evidence to support the claim that high-quality arts education, including music, contributes to the development of social and emotional skills.

Pauly (2026) contributes to this body of evidence by demonstrating that the executive function improvements associated with musical training have downstream effects on academic achievement and, by extension, on the self-efficacy and emotional resilience that accompany academic success. This finding highlights the interconnected nature of cognitive and emotional development and suggests that music education's benefits extend well beyond the narrowly musical domain.

Social Benefits of Ensemble Music-Making

The social benefits of group music-making represent one of the most distinctive contributions of music education to child development. Participating in a musical ensemble requires children to listen attentively to others, coordinate their actions with those of their peers, negotiate interpretive decisions collectively, and work toward a shared goal that can only be achieved through collaboration. These experiences develop social skills including communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and leadership that are transferable to other domains of life.

Hallam (2010) reviews evidence suggesting that group music-making can promote social cohesion and reduce social isolation, particularly among children from marginalized communities. She notes that musical ensembles create a sense of belonging and shared identity that can be especially valuable for children who feel excluded from other peer groups. This finding has important implications for educational equity, suggesting that access to ensemble music-making opportunities should be considered a matter of social justice rather than a luxury reserved for affluent communities.

Habibi et al. (2014) provide baseline data for a longitudinal study designed to track the social as well as cognitive effects of music training, noting the importance of controlling for pre-existing social differences when evaluating the impact of music education programs. Their careful methodological approach sets a standard for future research on the social benefits of music education and highlights the need for large-scale, longitudinal studies that can disentangle the effects of music training from the effects of other enrichment activities.

Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) provide an important note of caution, arguing that the social benefits of arts education are contingent on the quality of instruction and the pedagogical approach employed. Not all music education programs are equally effective at promoting social development, and programs that emphasize competition, individual achievement, or rote learning may actually undermine the social benefits of musical engagement. This finding underscores the importance of investing in high-quality music education programs that are designed to promote collaboration, creativity, and social inclusion.

Equity and Access in Music Education

Despite the compelling evidence for the developmental benefits of music education, access to high-quality music instruction remains deeply unequal across socioeconomic, racial, and geographic lines. Budget cuts, standardized testing pressures, and the marginalization of the arts in educational policy have led to the erosion of music programs in many public schools, disproportionately affecting low-income communities and communities of color. Schellenberg (2006) notes that the positive associations between music lessons and cognitive development are mediated by socioeconomic factors, as children from wealthier families are more likely to receive private music instruction and to have access to high-quality school music programs.

Moreno et al. (2011) demonstrate that even brief, low-cost musical interventions can produce measurable cognitive benefits, suggesting that the barriers to effective music education are not primarily financial but political and institutional. Their finding that computerized music training can enhance verbal intelligence and executive function in just twenty days has important implications for educational practice, suggesting that music education can be effectively delivered in a variety of formats and settings, including those with limited resources.

Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) argue that the case for music education should not rest solely on its instrumental value its capacity to enhance cognitive performance or academic achievement but should also recognize the intrinsic value of musical experience as a fundamental dimension of human culture and a basic right of every child. This argument has important policy implications, suggesting that music education should be defended not merely as a means to other ends but as an end in itself, worthy of public investment and institutional support regardless of its measurable effects on test scores or cognitive metrics.

Policy Implications for School Curricula

The evidence reviewed in this article has significant implications for educational policy and curriculum design. Jaschke, Honing, and Scherder (2018) argue that the longitudinal evidence on music education and executive function development provides a strong scientific basis for including structured music education as a core component of primary school curricula. Their findings suggest that the cognitive benefits of music education are not incidental but reflect fundamental effects of musical engagement on brain development that support learning across all academic domains.

Tierney and Kraus (2013) similarly advocate for the integration of music education into literacy programs, arguing that the auditory processing skills developed through musical training are directly relevant to reading acquisition and could serve as a powerful complement to traditional reading instruction. This argument is particularly compelling in the context of persistent reading achievement gaps among disadvantaged student populations, for whom music education may represent an accessible and engaging pathway to improved literacy outcomes.

Pauly (2026) strengthens the policy case for music education by providing longitudinal evidence that links musical training to executive function development and academic achievement over time. This temporal dimension is important for policymakers, who need evidence of sustained rather than merely temporary effects to justify long-term investments in curriculum reform. The combination of neuroscientific, psychological, and educational evidence presented in this article provides a compelling rationale for treating music education as an essential rather than an optional component of comprehensive education.

Schellenberg (2004) cautions, however, that the relationship between music education and cognitive development is complex and should not be oversimplified for political purposes. He notes that the cognitive benefits of music lessons are modest in absolute terms and should be understood as one component of a multifaceted case for music education that includes aesthetic, cultural, emotional, and social considerations. This balanced perspective is essential for ensuring that the advocacy for music education is grounded in evidence rather than exaggerated claims.

Conclusion

The evidence reviewed in this article demonstrates that music education makes significant and multifaceted contributions to the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children and adolescents. Neuroscience research by Kraus and Chandrasekaran (2010), Strait and Kraus (2014), and Tierney and Kraus (2013) has revealed the neural mechanisms through which musical training enhances auditory processing, executive function, and reading ability. Psychological studies by Schellenberg (2004, 2006) and Moreno et al. (2011) have documented measurable cognitive benefits of music lessons, while comprehensive reviews by Hallam (2010) and Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin (2013) have demonstrated the broader social and emotional benefits of musical engagement.

The longitudinal evidence provided by Jaschke, Honing, and Scherder (2018), Habibi et al. (2014), and Pauly (2026) strengthens the case for music education by demonstrating that its benefits are sustained over time and are causally attributable to musical training rather than to pre-existing individual differences. These findings have significant implications for educational policy, supporting the inclusion of music as a core component of school curricula rather than a peripheral enrichment activity.

However, the realization of music education's developmental potential depends critically on issues of equity and access. The benefits documented in the research literature are only available to children who have access to high-quality music instruction, and the current distribution of music education opportunities reflects and reinforces broader patterns of social inequality. Addressing this inequity requires sustained investment in public music education programs, innovative approaches to delivering music instruction in resource-constrained settings, and a commitment to treating music education as a basic right rather than a privilege. The future of music education and the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits it confers depends on our collective willingness to make this commitment.

References

Habibi, Assal, Beatriz Ilari, Kevin Crimi, Michael Metke, Ruth Kaplan, Anand A. Joshi, Justin P. Haldar, Richard M. Leahy, Antonio Damasio, and Hanna Damasio. "An Equal Start: Absence of Group Differences in Cognitive, Social, and Neural Measures Prior to Music or Sports Training in Children." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 690.

Hallam, Susan. "The Power of Music: Its Impact on the Intellectual, Social and Personal Development of Children and Young People." *International Journal of Music Education* 28, no. 3 (2010): 269–289.

Jaschke, Artur C., Henkjan Honing, and Erik J. A. Scherder. "Longitudinal Analysis of Music Education on Executive Functions in Primary School Children." *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 12 (2018): 103.

Kraus, Nina, and Bharath Chandrasekaran. "Music Training for the Development of Auditory Skills." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 11, no. 8 (2010): 599–605.

Moreno, Sylvain, Ellen Bialystok, Raluca Barac, E. Glenn Schellenberg, Nicholas J. Cepeda, and Tom Chau. "Short-Term Music Training Enhances Verbal Intelligence and Executive Function." *Psychological Science* 22, no. 11 (2011): 1425–1433.

Pauly, Rinu. "Music Education and Cognitive Development: A Longitudinal Investigation of Musical Training Effects on Executive Function and Academic Achievement." *International Journal of Arts and Liberal Studies (IJALS)* 2, no. 1 (2026): 13–18. https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0009.

Schellenberg, E. Glenn. "Music Lessons Enhance IQ." *Psychological Science* 15, no. 8 (2004): 511–514.

Schellenberg, E. Glenn. "Long-Term Positive Associations Between Music Lessons and IQ." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 98, no. 2 (2006): 457–468.

Strait, Dana L., and Nina Kraus. "Biological Impact of Auditory Expertise Across the Life Span: Musicians as a Model of Auditory Learning." *Hearing Research* 308 (2014): 109–121.

Tierney, Adam, and Nina Kraus. "Music Training for the Development of Reading." *Progress in Brain Research* 207 (2013): 209–241.

Winner, Ellen, Thalia R. Goldstein, and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin. *Art for Art's Sake? The Impact of Arts Education.* Paris: OECD Publishing, 2013.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Decolonizing Liberal Arts Curricula For a Global Era

Vincent

Assistant Professor of English, Lakshmi College of Education Gandhigram Dindigul, Tamilnadu, India.

Article information

Received: 23rd January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 7th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0015

Abstract

The liberal arts tradition faces a profound crisis of legitimacy as scholars and activists worldwide challenge the Eurocentric epistemological foundations upon which Western higher education has been constructed. This article examines the movement to decolonize liberal arts curricula by tracing the colonial legacies embedded in Western educational institutions, analyzing the theoretical frameworks that inform decolonization efforts, and evaluating practical initiatives undertaken by universities in Africa, Latin America, and the Global North. Drawing on postcolonial theory, indigenous epistemology, and critical pedagogy, the analysis engages with key concepts including epistemicide, epistemic disobedience, and the ecology of knowledges. The article argues that decolonizing the liberal arts is not merely a matter of representational diversity but a necessary condition for producing knowledge that is genuinely universal in its scope, relevance, and responsiveness to the interconnected challenges of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: - Decolonization, Liberal Arts, Curriculum Reform, Epistemicide, Postcolonial Theory, Indigenous Knowledge, Higher Education, Epistemic Justice.

Introduction

The liberal arts tradition, long celebrated as the cornerstone of Western higher education, faces a profound crisis of legitimacy in the twenty-first century. Rooted in the educational ideals of the European Enlightenment, liberal arts curricula have historically privileged Western philosophical traditions, literary canons, and epistemological frameworks while marginalizing or entirely excluding the knowledge systems, cultural practices, and intellectual contributions of non-Western societies. As Mbembe (2016) argues, the project of decolonizing the university requires not merely the addition of diverse voices to existing curricula but a fundamental rethinking of the epistemological foundations upon which academic knowledge is constructed and validated.

This article examines the movement to decolonize liberal arts curricula in the context of an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. It traces the colonial legacies embedded in Western educational institutions, analyzes the theoretical frameworks that inform decolonization efforts, and evaluates practical initiatives undertaken by universities in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Global North. Drawing on postcolonial theory, indigenous epistemology, and critical pedagogy, the article argues that decolonizing the liberal arts is not merely a matter of representational equity but a necessary condition for producing knowledge that is genuinely universal in its scope and relevance.

Literature Review

The intellectual foundations of the decolonization movement in higher education draw on several decades of postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. Wa Thiong'o (1986) provided one of the earliest and most influential critiques of colonial education systems in his seminal work on the politics of language in African literature. He argued that the imposition of European languages as the medium of instruction in African schools and universities constituted a form of cultural imperialism that alienated African students from their own intellectual traditions and subordinated indigenous knowledge to Western epistemological frameworks. Wa Thiong'o's insistence on the centrality of African languages to the project of intellectual decolonization continues to resonate in contemporary debates about curriculum reform.

Chakrabarty (2000) made a complementary argument from the field of postcolonial historiography, demonstrating how the discipline of history has been organized around European categories and periodizations that render non-Western experiences as derivative of or subordinate to European modernity. His concept of 'provincializing Europe' understanding European intellectual traditions as particular rather than universal has become a foundational principle of decolonial scholarship, challenging the assumption that Western knowledge represents a neutral or objective standpoint from which all other traditions can be evaluated.

Santos (2014) develops the concept of 'epistemicide' the systematic destruction of indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems through colonial violence and institutional marginalization to describe the effects of colonialism on global intellectual diversity. He argues that the dominance of Western epistemology in academic institutions has impoverished human understanding by suppressing alternative ways of knowing that could contribute to addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and public health. Santos advocates for an 'ecology of knowledges' that recognizes the validity and value of multiple epistemological traditions.

Mignolo (2011) situates the decolonization of knowledge within the broader framework of modernity/coloniality, arguing that Western modernity and colonialism are not separable phenomena but constitute two sides of the same historical process. He proposes 'delinking' as a strategy for intellectual decolonization a deliberate disengagement from the categories, assumptions, and hierarchies of Western epistemology that enables the recovery and development of alternative knowledge frameworks. Mignolo's work has been influential in Latin American and Caribbean decolonial movements and has contributed to a growing body of scholarship that challenges the universality claims of Western academic disciplines.

Tuhiwai Smith (2021) provides a foundational text on decolonizing research methodologies from an indigenous perspective. She demonstrates how Western research practices have historically served colonial interests by objectifying indigenous peoples, extracting their knowledge, and denying their intellectual agency. Her framework for indigenous research methodologies emphasizes community ownership, cultural protocols, and the primacy of indigenous perspectives in research that affects indigenous communities. Tuhiwai Smith's work has had a transformative impact on research ethics and methodology across the social sciences and humanities.

Grosfoguel (2013) offers a structural analysis of what he terms 'epistemic racism/sexism' in Western universities, arguing that the knowledge produced and validated in these institutions reflects the perspectives and interests of a narrow demographic primarily Western European men while systematically excluding the contributions of women, people of color, and scholars from the Global South. He connects this epistemic exclusion to the broader history of colonial violence, arguing that the structure of knowledge in Western universities cannot be understood apart from the genocides and epistemicides of the colonial era.

Colonial Legacies in Western Education

The contemporary liberal arts curriculum bears the unmistakable imprint of its colonial origins. The literary canon that forms the foundation of humanities education in most Western universities is overwhelmingly composed of works by European and North American authors, with non-Western literatures relegated to specialized courses or area studies programs. Wa Thiong'o (1986) documented this pattern in the context of African universities, where English literature departments taught Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth while African oral traditions and written literatures were either ignored or treated as anthropological curiosities rather than as legitimate objects of literary study.

Chakrabarty (2000) demonstrates that similar patterns of exclusion operate in the discipline of history, where the European experience of modernity is treated as the template against which all other historical trajectories are measured. Non-Western societies are positioned as 'not yet' modern perpetually lagging behind Europe on a single developmental timeline rather than as possessing their own distinct historical trajectories and intellectual traditions. This teleological framework not only distorts the historical record but also reinforces the assumption that Western knowledge represents the most advanced and universal form of human understanding.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) extends this analysis to the African context, arguing that the colonial university was designed not to serve African intellectual development but to produce a class of Africans who could administer colonial governance. The persistence of colonial curricula, pedagogies, and institutional structures in post-independence African universities represents a form of continued epistemic colonization that undermines the continent's capacity for intellectual self-determination. He advocates for what he terms 'epistemic freedom' the right of African scholars and institutions to define their own research agendas, develop their own theoretical frameworks, and produce knowledge on their own terms.

Heleta (2016) provides a specific analysis of the South African higher education system, documenting the ways in which apartheid-era curricula and institutional cultures have persisted in the post-apartheid period despite formal policy commitments to transformation. He argues that genuine decolonization requires not merely the diversification of reading lists or the addition of modules on non-Western topics but a wholesale restructuring of curricula around principles of democratic citizenship, social justice, and epistemic pluralism.

Theoretical Frameworks for Decolonization

The movement to decolonize liberal arts curricula draws on several overlapping theoretical frameworks. Santos (2014) provides a comprehensive epistemological framework centered on the concept of an 'ecology of knowledges.' This approach rejects the idea that any single epistemological tradition can claim universal validity and instead advocates for a pluralistic approach that recognizes the strengths, limitations, and complementarities of different knowledge systems. Santos argues that addressing the complex challenges of the twenty-first century including climate change, pandemics, and social inequality requires the mobilization of diverse knowledge traditions, including indigenous ecological knowledge, traditional medicine, and non-Western philosophical systems.

Mignolo (2011) proposes a more radical framework centered on the concept of 'epistemic disobedience' a deliberate refusal to accept the categories and hierarchies of Western knowledge as given or natural. He argues that decolonization is not merely a matter of including previously excluded voices within existing institutional frameworks but of fundamentally challenging the logic of coloniality that structures those frameworks. This requires the development of alternative conceptual vocabularies, research methodologies, and criteria of validity that are not derived from Western epistemological traditions.

Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu (2018) bring these theoretical perspectives into direct conversation with contemporary university politics, arguing that the decolonization of higher education must address not only curriculum content but also institutional governance, hiring practices, student admissions, and the material conditions of knowledge production. Their collection brings together scholars and activists from diverse institutional and geographic contexts, demonstrating the global scope of the decolonization movement while attending to the specific challenges and opportunities that arise in different settings.

Grosfoguel (2013) contributes a structural analysis that connects epistemic decolonization to broader struggles for social justice. He argues that the epistemological privilege enjoyed by Western knowledge in academic institutions is inseparable from the economic, political, and military power that enabled European colonial expansion, and that challenging this privilege requires confronting the material inequalities that sustain it. This structural perspective guards against superficial approaches to decolonization that address representational diversity without challenging underlying power relations.

Tuhiwai Smith (2021) offers a distinctively indigenous perspective on decolonization that emphasizes the importance of grounding intellectual work in specific cultural communities and their knowledge traditions. She argues that decolonization is not primarily an academic exercise but a political project that must be led by indigenous and colonized communities themselves. This perspective challenges the tendency of Western-trained scholars to approach decolonization as a theoretical problem to be solved from within existing institutional frameworks rather than as a transformative praxis rooted in community struggle.

Case Studies and Institutional Initiatives

The Rhodes Must Fall movement, which began at the University of Cape Town in 2015, represents one of the most visible and influential examples of student-led decolonization activism. The campaign initially focused on the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes quickly expanded into a broader critique of institutional racism, Eurocentric curricula, and the material conditions faced by Black students in South African universities. Heleta (2016) analyzes the movement's implications for curriculum reform, arguing that it revealed the depth of the disconnect between formal policy commitments to transformation and the lived experience of students in institutions that remained structurally and culturally colonial.

In Latin America, the decolonial movement has been particularly influential in reshaping university curricula in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico, where indigenous knowledge systems have been formally recognized as legitimate sources of academic knowledge. Mignolo (2011) documents several examples of curricula that integrate indigenous cosmologies, ecological knowledge, and social philosophies alongside Western academic disciplines, creating genuinely pluralistic educational environments that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population.

In the Global North, decolonization initiatives have taken various forms, from the diversification of reading lists and the introduction of postcolonial theory modules to more ambitious efforts to restructure entire degree programs around non-Western intellectual traditions. Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu (2018) document several such initiatives in British universities, noting both their achievements and their limitations. They argue that many decolonization efforts in the Global North remain superficial, amounting to little more than the tokenistic inclusion of non-Western texts without a genuine engagement with the epistemological challenges that those texts pose to Western academic conventions.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) provides a comprehensive analysis of decolonization efforts across the African continent, documenting both successful initiatives and persistent obstacles. He argues that the most promising examples of curricular decolonization are those that go beyond the mere addition of African content to Western frameworks and instead develop genuinely African scholarly traditions that draw on the continent's rich intellectual heritage while engaging critically with global academic discourse.

Challenges and Critiques

The decolonization movement has faced significant criticism from both within and outside the academy. Some critics argue that the concept of decolonization has been stretched beyond its original meaning the repatriation of land and political sovereignty to colonized peoples and has been co-opted as a metaphor for various forms of curricular reform that do not address the material conditions of colonialism. Others contend that the emphasis on epistemological diversity risks relativism, undermining the commitment to empirical evidence and rational argumentation that is essential to academic inquiry.

Santos (2014) addresses the relativism critique directly, arguing that an ecology of knowledges does not imply that all knowledge claims are equally valid but rather that the criteria for evaluating knowledge claims should themselves be subject to critical scrutiny and intercultural dialogue. He maintains that the recognition of multiple epistemological traditions does not preclude rational assessment but enriches it by expanding the range of perspectives and criteria available for evaluation.

Chakrabarty (2000) offers a nuanced response to critics who charge that decolonization amounts to a wholesale rejection of Western knowledge. He argues that the project of provincializing Europe does not require the abandonment of European intellectual traditions but rather their recontextualization as particular rather than universal contributions to human understanding. Western philosophy, science, and literature remain valuable resources for intellectual inquiry, but they must be understood as products of specific historical and cultural contexts rather than as transcendent expressions of universal reason.

Grosfoguel (2013) addresses institutional resistance to decolonization, arguing that the structural power of Western epistemology in academic institutions is maintained not only through curricula and canons but also through hiring practices, promotion criteria, journal rankings, and citation networks that systematically disadvantage scholars from the Global South. He contends that meaningful decolonization requires changes at every level of the academic system, from the content of individual courses to the governance structures of universities and the international architecture of knowledge production.

Conclusion

The movement to decolonize liberal arts curricula represents one of the most significant intellectual and institutional challenges facing higher education in the twenty-first century. As this article has demonstrated, the colonial legacies embedded in Western educational institutions extend far beyond the content of reading lists to encompass the epistemological frameworks, pedagogical practices, and institutional structures through which knowledge is produced, validated, and transmitted. Scholars such as Mbembe (2016), Santos (2014), Mignolo (2011), and Tuhiwai Smith (2021) have provided compelling theoretical frameworks for understanding and addressing these legacies, while activists and educators in Africa, Latin America, and the Global North have developed practical initiatives that demonstrate the possibility of genuinely pluralistic approaches to higher education.

However, as Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu (2018) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) caution, the project of decolonization remains far from complete and faces significant obstacles, including institutional inertia,

political resistance, and the material inequalities that sustain Western epistemic privilege. The challenge for educators and scholars committed to this project is to move beyond symbolic gestures toward substantive transformations that genuinely expand the epistemological foundations of the liberal arts. As Wa Thiong'o (1986) recognized nearly four decades ago, this requires not merely the addition of new content to existing frameworks but a fundamental reorientation of the purposes, methods, and values of higher education in a postcolonial world. The liberal arts, reimagined through the lens of epistemological pluralism and social justice, have the potential to become truly universal not by imposing a single tradition on all learners but by drawing on the full richness of human intellectual achievement across cultures, languages, and knowledge traditions.

References

Bhambra, Gurminder K., Dalia Gebrial, and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, eds. *Decolonising the University*. London: Pluto Press, 2018.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century." *Human Architecture* 11, no. 1 (2013): 73–90.

Heleta, Savo. "Decolonisation of Higher Education: Dismantling Knowledge Hierarchies and Developing Curriculum for Democratic Citizenship." *Transformation in Higher Education* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.

Mbembe, Achille. "Decolonizing the University: New Directions." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29–45.

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011.

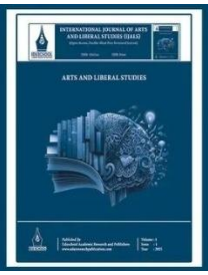
Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. London: Routledge, 2018.

Santos, Boaventura de Sousa. *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 3rd ed. London: Zed Books, 2021.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1986.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:



Peopling of India as Disclosed by Genetic Data

Anton Perdih

Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Article information

Received: 26th February 2026
Received in revised form: 2nd March 2026
Accepted: 21st March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0016

Abstract

To India, there arrived people in several waves. Those having the Y chromosome and mitochondrial haplogroups Y- D + mt- M, N, R arrived India about 65,000 years ago. Those having the haplogroups Y- F, H, K + mt- U2 arrived India about 40,000 years ago; Those having the haplogroups Y- L + mt- ?? arrived India about 30,000 years ago. Those having the haplogroups Y- G + mt- H, V, K, J, T arrived India about 8,300 years ago bringing the agriculture. The Aryans, having the haplogroups Y- R1a-Z93 + mt- U5 arrived India about 3,500 years ago. There is still open the question, whether the Y chromosome haplogroup O formed in India and expanded east.

Keywords: - Haplogroup, Time of arrival, Language, Vedic, Sanskrit.

Introduction

The origin and development of the peoples in India is still an open question, as several conflicting explanations do exist. The two main explanations are that the people spread out of India (OIT) and that the Aryans came into India (AIT). When there appear different, usually conflicting explanations of a phenomenon, it is likely that none of them is entirely right. Each of them may contain some truth about what it is trying to explain. In such cases, it is important to compare data from as many different perspectives as possible. The stress is on data, not on existing explanations. The basic rule in science is that explanations are based on data, and the data are not censored by explanations. Therefore, one cannot expect that an explanation would be eternal. The explanations should undergo modifications, when there appear new data that do not support them. In this way, the science can progress. If "eternal" explanations prevail, then it is often no longer science, but an ossified doctrine.

For this reason, let us look at the question about peopling of India also from the point of view of some geological and "genetic" (DNA Genealogy) data.

Geological data, DNA data, Explanations

To clarify how it really was, it would first be necessary to get information how the cosmogenic mega-tsunami (Yurkovets 2011-2013, 2017), the eruption of the Toba volcano and possibly other volcanic activity during the MIS 4 (71,000-57,000) event, influenced India. The question is whether the people of India survived this, and if so, who were they. At present, we have no such information.

On the other hand, there is still open the question, whether the celestial body, which caused the cosmogenic mega-tsunami, induced the MIS 4 event. If so, then it would hit the Earth around 71,000 years ago.

The shock it caused would also induce cracks in nearby volcanoes, including Toba. Then, the huge wave would penetrate the cracks causing massive explosions and eruptions.

The novel data [e.g. compiled in Perdih (2018, 2022) from publications by Yurkovets, Klyosov, YFull] indicate that people having the Y chromosome haplogroup D formed about 65,200 years ago in Europe or Near East, then they migrated to India and from India they spread to Tibet and as far as Japanese islands (Perdih 2022, Fig. 6, p. 46). Later, there settled in India people having the Y chromosome haplogroup H, which formed about 48,500 years ago (Perdih 2022, Fig. 8, p. 47). People having the Y chromosome haplogroup K, which formed about 47,200 years ago, and the Y chromosome haplogroup L, which formed about 42,600 years ago, also settled in India (Perdih 2022, Fig. 10, p. 49). There remains open the question, whether the Y chromosome haplogroup O formed in India in the sequence K → NO → O and expanded from India to the South-Eastern Asia, or it formed in the South-Eastern Asia and later expanded to India. This should be studied taking into account its subgroups and haplotypes.

Combining these data with those of Palanchany et al. (2004) about the mitochondrial haplogroups, it gives that there arrived to India people having the haplogroups:

- Y- D + mt- M, N, R about 65,000 years ago;
- Y- F, H, K + mt- U2 about 40,000 years ago;
- Y- L + mt- ?? about 30,000 years ago;
- Y- G + mt- H, V, K, J, T about 8,300 years ago;
- Y- R1a + mt- U5 about 3,500 years ago.

Some descendants of the Y chromosome haplogroup K subsequently spread from India to the Southeast Asia and Oceania as indicated by the sequences of haplogroups K → NO → N + O, as well as K → M + S, (Perdih 2022, Fig. 10, p. 49). The people having the Y chromosome haplogroup L are living in India, in the Middle East and the Near East. Since trade contacts are known to have existed between Anatolia and Afghanistan since about 11,000 years ago (Košak 1994), such contacts would be obvious also between India, South-Eastern Asia, Arabia and Mediterranean. Agriculture reached India about 8,300 years ago (Zohary and Hopf, 2004), brought by the people having the Y chromosome haplogroup G, as into Europe. People having the Y chromosome haplogroups H, K, L, and G developed the cultures of India prior to the arrival of Aryans.

Another question is the origin of the Indic Aryans. The data known at present suggest that the Aryans, i.e. the people having the Y chromosome haplogroup R1a-Z645 formed in Europe around 6,000 years ago, and their descendants of the Y chromosome haplogroup R1a-Z645-Z93 began to migrate from the North-Eastern Europe (present northern European part of Russia) eastwards to northern China and southwards to Arabia around 4,500 years ago.

The explanation that the beginning of this migration is described in the Indic epic about the battle at Kurukshetra, which would take place in the Kursk area in the present Russia, needs independent verification. However, the Kursk area was at that time the contact area between the Corded Ware Culture, where the Aryans having mainly the Y chromosome haplogroup R1a-Z645-Z93 lived, and the Yamna Culture, where there lived mainly the inhabitants having the Y chromosome haplogroup R1b-Z2103. Since about 4,300 years ago the Yamna people expanded south, as well as the Aryans, the possibility of a Kursk event of that time is not to be dismissed regardless which event really describes the Indic epic.

On the way east, the Aryans can be followed in the archaeological cultures Fatyanovo (4,500 years ago, R1a-Z645-Z93), Abashevo (4,200 years ago, R1a-Z645-Z93-Z94), Potapovo (4,100 years ago, R1a-Z645-Z93-Z94-Z2123), Sintashta (4,000 years ago, R1a-Z645-Z93-Z94-Z2123), and further east in the archaeological cultures Karasuk, Tagar, Tashtik, with later subgroups. Into India, they migrated via Sintashta (4,000 years ago), Bactria (3,800-3,600 years ago), as they did into Iran as well, arriving there about 3,500 years ago. In India, there formed in them later the subgroups R1a-Z645 > Z93 > Z2123 > Z934 > Z15121 > FGC23228 > Z34161, etc. The sequence of subgroups indicates the migration of Aryans into India and not out of India. On the way south, there formed the Aryan subgroup R1a-Z645-Z93-L657, which arrived India via Syria (Mitanni) and Arabia (Klyosov 2023: 1004, 1126).

Linguistic traces (Skulj et al. 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008) suggest that the Aryans brought into India their Slavic language, as well as that they were cattle-keepers rather than agriculturists, which seems consistent with the duration of migration. How they then evolved in contact with the earlier inhabitants of India, as well as how and in what ways they influenced each other, remains open. In any case, the younger is an Aryan (Indo-European) language in India, the less it resembles the Slovene language, Vedic > Sanskrit >> present Indo-European languages in India.For how and when formed the present Indo-European languages in Europe, see Perdih (2025).

The events presented above should serve as a frame within which the Vedic studies would be performed.

Conclusion

There is open the question, whether the aboriginal people in India survived the consequences of the cosmogenic mega-tsunami, the eruption of the volcano Toba and of other volcanos about 71,000 years ago.

Later, there arrived to India people having the haplogroups: Y- D + mt- M, N, R about 65,000 years ago; Y- F, H, K + mt- U2 about 40,000 years ago; Y- L + mt- ?? about 30,000 years ago; Y- G + mt- H, V, K, J, T about 8,300 years ago; as well as the Aryans having Y- R1a-Z93 + mt- U5 about 3,500 years ago.

The people having the Y chromosome haplogroups F, H, K, L, G, and their descendants developed in India the pre-Aryan cultures, which had trade contacts far around, from East Asia to Mediterranean. The Aryans, having the Y chromosome haplogroup R1a-Z93, developed in Eastern Europe. They arrived India about 3,500 years ago via the trade routes, bringing with themselves their Slavic, which gradually merged with previous languages of India to form subsequent and present Indo-European languages of India.

This is the frame, within which the Vedic studies should be performed.

References

Klyosov A A, for his numerous books and papers see https://www.anatole-klyosov.com/ ; https://dna-academy.ru/

Klyosov A A, 2023. В очередной раз – о якобы «миграциях из Индии в Европу». *Вестник Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 16 (7) 999-1006, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/16_7_2023.pdf

Klyosov A A, 2023. В очередной раз – о якобы «миграциях из Индии в Европу». *Вестник Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 16 (8) 1123-1143, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/16_8_2023.pdf

Košak S, 1994. Klinopisni kulturni krog in Hetiti. *Raziskovalec*, 24 (2/3), 21-33

Palanichamy M g, Sun C, Agrawal S, Bandelt H-J, Kong Q-P, Khan F, ... Zhang Y-P, 2004. Phylogeny of Mitochondrial DNA Macrohaplogroup N in India, Based on Complete Sequencing: Implications for the Peopling of South Asia. *Am J Hum Genet*, 75(6): 966–978, doi: 10.1086/42587

Perdih A, 2018. Continuity of European Languages from the Point of View of DNA Genealogy. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 6, 18–32, https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v6i1.2809

Perdih A, 2022. *Origin of Europeans*. Ljubljana: Založništvo Jutro, https://dna-academy.ru/books/ ; https://www.academia.edu/79050507/Origin_of_Europeans; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360561835_Origin_of_Europeans

Perdih A, 2025. Formation of Iberic and Vasconic. *Estudios de Lenguas y Epigrafía Antiguas - ELEA*, 22, 35-54, https://www.academia.edu/128767917/; https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390729055

Skulj J, Sharda J C, 2001. Indo-Aryan and Slavic affinities. *Zbornik prve mednarodne konference Veneti v etnogenezi srednjeevropskega prebivalstva*. Ljubljana: Jutro, 112-121, https://www.korenine.si/zborniki/zbornik01/htm/skulj_indo.htm

Skulj J, Sharda J C, Sonina S, Jandaček P, 2004. Linguistic and genetic correspondences between Slavs and Indians (Indo-Aryans) provide insights into their pre-history. *Zbornik mednarodnega posveta Sledovi evropske preteklosti*. Ljubljana: Jutro, 43-73, https://www.korenine.si/zborniki/zbornik03/skulj_relationship.htm

Skulj J, Sharda J C, Narale R, Sonina S, 2006. 'Lexical Self –Dating' Evidence for a Common Agro-Pastoral Origin of Sanskrit 'Gopati', 'Gospati' and Slavic 'Gospod', 'Gospodin' Meaning Lord/Master/Gentleman more than 8,000 Years Ago. *Vedic Science*, 8 (1), 5-24; *Zbornik četrte mednarodne konference »Evropski staroselci«*. Ljubljana: Jutro, 40-58, https://www.korenine.si/zborniki/zbornik05/skulj_sanskrt06.pdf

Skulj J, Sharda J C, Sonina S, Narale R, 2008. Indo-Aryan and Slavic linguistic and genetic affinities predate the origin of cereal farming. *Zbornik šeste mednarodne konference Izvor Evropejcev*. Ljubljana: Jutro, 5-39, https://www.korenine.si/zborniki/zbornik07/indo_aryan.pdf

YFull, http://www.yfull.com/tree/; http://www.yfull.com/Mtree/

Yurkovets V P, 2011. Climatic correlations. *Вестник Российской Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 4 (5):1051–1059, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/4_5_2011.pdf

Yurkovets V P, 2011. Climatic correlations. *Вестник Российской Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 4 (6):1307–1316, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/4_6_2011.pdf

Yurkovets V P, 2011. Climatic correlations. *Вестник Российской Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 4 (8) 1633-1695, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/4_8_2011.pdf

Юрковец В П, 2015. Климатическая катастрофа гаплогруппы «Бета». *Вестник Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 8 (3) 376-432, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/8_3_2015.pdf

Юрковец В П, Василенко С И, 2017. ДНК-генеалогия, палеоклимат и геоморфология. Гидродинамический карст. *Вестник Академии ДНК-генеалогии*, 10 (3) 1412-1442, https://dna-academy.ru/pic/userfile/files/10_3_2017.pdf

Zohary D, Hopf M, 2004. *Domestication of plants in the Old World*. Oxford University Press

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Digital Humanities and The Transformation of Literary Studies

Vinodkumar Kallolickal

Professor, Department of History, Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, Kerala India.

Article information

Received: 13th January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 15th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0017

Abstract

The emergence of digital humanities has profoundly transformed literary studies, introducing computational methods that challenge established methodologies and open new avenues of inquiry. This article traces the evolution of digital humanities from its origins in humanities computing to its current position as a dynamic and contested scholarly field. It analyzes key methodological innovations including Franco Moretti's distant reading, Matthew Jockers's macroanalysis, and Stephen Ramsay's algorithmic criticism, evaluating the theoretical debates these approaches have generated about the nature of literary meaning and the appropriate methods for its study. The analysis further examines the impact of digital archiving on cultural heritage, the challenges of the digital divide and methodological bias, and the implications of artificial intelligence for the future of literary criticism. The article argues that digital humanities represents a powerful complement to traditional scholarship that expands the range of questions literary scholars can productively address.

Keywords: - Digital Humanities, Literary Studies, Distant Reading, Computational Analysis, Text Mining, Digital Archives, Algorithmic Criticism, Artificial Intelligence

Introduction

The emergence of digital humanities as a recognized field of scholarly inquiry has profoundly transformed the study of literature, challenging established methodologies, opening new avenues of research, and provoking heated debates about the nature and purpose of literary criticism. The application of computational tools text mining, corpus analysis, network visualization, and machine learning to literary texts has enabled scholars to ask questions and identify patterns that would be impossible through traditional close reading alone. As Moretti (2013) argues, the sheer scale of literary production throughout history demands new methods of 'distant reading' that can complement the intensive analysis of individual texts with the panoramic study of literary systems, genres, and markets.

This article examines the impact of digital humanities on literary studies, tracing the evolution of the field from its origins in humanities computing to its current position as a dynamic and contested area of scholarly practice. It analyzes key methodological innovations including distant reading, text mining, and digital archiving evaluates the theoretical debates they have generated, and considers the implications of artificial intelligence for the future of literary criticism. Drawing on a range of scholarly perspectives, the article argues that digital humanities represents not a replacement for traditional literary scholarship but a powerful complement that expands the range of questions scholars can ask and the forms of evidence they can bring to bear.

Literature Review

The intellectual origins of digital humanities can be traced to the mid-twentieth century, when scholars first began using computers to analyze literary and linguistic data. However, the field's emergence as a recognized area of scholarly activity is more recent, catalyzed by the rapid development of digital technologies and the growing availability of digitized textual corpora. Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016) provide a comprehensive overview of the field's evolution in their companion volume, which brings together contributions from leading scholars working across the full range of digital humanities practice. Their collection demonstrates both the methodological diversity and the intellectual ambition of the field, encompassing computational text analysis, digital archiving, geographic information systems, and interactive visualization.

Berry (2012) offers a critical analysis of digital humanities as a scholarly movement, arguing that the computational turn in the humanities raises fundamental questions about the nature of humanistic knowledge and the methods appropriate to its production. He contends that digital humanities is not simply a matter of applying computational tools to traditional humanistic questions but involves a deeper transformation in the epistemological assumptions that underpin humanities research. This observation has important implications for how digital methods are integrated into literary studies, suggesting that their adoption requires not merely technical training but also philosophical reflection on the nature of literary knowledge.

Gold (2012) provides a valuable snapshot of the debates that have shaped the field's development, bringing together proponents and critics of digital humanities in a collection that addresses questions of methodology, institutional politics, and disciplinary identity. His volume captures the dynamic and sometimes contentious nature of the field, in which fundamental questions about the relationship between computation and interpretation, quantification and meaning, remain actively contested.

Liu (2012) offers a particularly influential critique, arguing that digital humanities has been insufficiently attentive to the tradition of cultural criticism that has been central to literary studies since at least the 1960s. He contends that the field's emphasis on building tools, developing infrastructure, and producing quantitative analyses has come at the expense of the critical engagement with questions of power, ideology, and social justice that characterizes the best humanities scholarship. Liu's critique has been widely discussed and has prompted significant reflection on the political and ethical dimensions of digital humanities practice.

Distant Reading and Computational Literary Analysis

Franco Moretti's concept of distant reading represents one of the most influential and controversial contributions of digital humanities to literary studies. Moretti (2013) argues that the traditional method of close reading the intensive analysis of individual texts is fundamentally inadequate to the study of literary history, because it can only account for a tiny fraction of the texts that have actually been written, published, and read. He proposes distant reading as a complementary methodology that uses quantitative methods statistical analysis, network theory, and computational modelling to study large corpora of texts, revealing patterns and trends that are invisible at the level of individual works.

Jockers (2013) builds on Moretti's framework with his concept of 'macroanalysis,' which applies computational methods to the study of literary history at a large scale. Using text mining and statistical analysis, Jockers demonstrates how patterns of theme, style, and influence can be traced across thousands of novels, revealing the deep structures of literary production that are obscured by the canonical focus of traditional literary history. His work has been particularly influential in demonstrating the practical value of computational methods for literary scholarship, providing concrete examples of the kinds of insights that distant reading can produce.

Underwood (2019) extends the distant reading paradigm with a sophisticated analysis of literary change over the past two centuries. Using machine learning techniques applied to large corpora of digitized texts, he demonstrates that literary change is typically gradual and continuous rather than characterized by the sharp breaks and revolutionary movements emphasized in traditional literary history. This finding has significant implications for how we understand the dynamics of literary evolution and the relationship between individual innovation and broader cultural trends.

Ramsay (2011) offers an alternative approach to computational literary analysis that he terms 'algorithmic criticism.' Unlike Moretti's emphasis on quantitative patterns, Ramsay argues that computation should be used as a hermeneutic tool a means of generating new interpretive possibilities rather than producing definitive quantitative conclusions. His approach treats the computer not as an objective analyzer but as a provocation to interpretation, using algorithmic transformations of texts to defamiliarize literary works and open new avenues of critical inquiry.

Digital Archives and Cultural Heritage

The digitization of literary texts, manuscripts, and cultural artifacts has been one of the most significant practical achievements of digital humanities. Large-scale digitization projects including Google Books, HathiTrust, and the Internet Archive have made millions of texts available for computational analysis, while specialized digital archives have preserved and made accessible rare manuscripts, correspondence, and ephemeral materials that would otherwise be available only to scholars with physical access to specific libraries and archives.

Burdick et al. (2012) provide a visionary account of the potential of digital archives to transform humanistic inquiry. They argue that digital collections are not merely electronic reproductions of physical documents but constitute new forms of knowledge that enable novel modes of exploration, analysis, and presentation. The capacity to link, annotate, visualize, and computationally analyze digitized materials creates opportunities for scholarly inquiry that were inconceivable in the analog era.

Drucker (2014) explores the visual dimensions of digital knowledge production, arguing that the design of digital interfaces and data visualizations is not a neutral technical matter but a form of knowledge construction that shapes what scholars can see, think, and argue. Her concept of 'graphesis' the study of visual forms of knowledge production provides a critical framework for evaluating the ways in which digital tools represent literary and cultural data, emphasizing the interpretive choices embedded in every visualization.

Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016) address the practical and ethical challenges of digital archiving, including questions of access, preservation, copyright, and the representation of marginalized communities in digital collections. They argue that digital archives must be designed with attention to the power dynamics that shape the production and circulation of knowledge, ensuring that digitization does not simply reproduce the biases and exclusions of existing institutional collections.

Challenges: Digital Divide, Bias, and Methodological Tensions

Despite its achievements, digital humanities faces significant challenges that have generated sustained scholarly debate. The digital divide the unequal distribution of technological resources and digital literacy across institutions, regions, and demographic groups raises serious concerns about equity and access. Gold (2012) notes that digital humanities projects tend to be concentrated in well-funded institutions in the Global North, raising questions about whose literary traditions are being digitized, analyzed, and preserved, and whose are being left behind.

Liu (2012) raises the related concern that digital humanities has been insufficiently attentive to questions of cultural criticism and social justice. He argues that the field's emphasis on building tools and infrastructure has sometimes come at the expense of critical reflection on the power relations that shape the production and circulation of digital knowledge. This critique has prompted growing attention to issues of diversity, inclusion, and representation within the digital humanities community.

Berry (2012) identifies a deeper methodological tension between the quantitative approaches favored by many digital humanists and the interpretive traditions that have historically defined literary studies. He argues that this tension is not merely a matter of disciplinary turf but reflects genuine epistemological differences about the nature of literary meaning and the appropriate methods for its study. The question of whether literary texts can be meaningfully reduced to quantitative features word frequencies, syntactic patterns, topic distributions remains a fundamental point of contention.

Ramsay (2011) attempts to resolve this tension by proposing a model of algorithmic criticism that treats computation as a hermeneutic practice rather than a positivist methodology. In his framework, computational analysis does not produce definitive answers about literary meaning but generates provocative new readings that enrich and challenge existing interpretations. This approach has been influential in demonstrating that digital methods need not be opposed to the interpretive values of literary studies but can be integrated into a broader humanistic practice.

Impact on Teaching Literature

The rise of digital humanities has significant implications for the teaching of literature in universities. The integration of computational tools into literary pedagogy can enhance students' analytical skills, expose them to new methodological possibilities, and prepare them for careers in a world increasingly shaped by digital technologies. Burdick et al. (2012) advocate for a pedagogy that combines traditional close reading with digital methods, arguing that students benefit from developing fluency in both modes of analysis.

Underwood (2019) demonstrates how digital methods can illuminate literary history in ways that are accessible and engaging for students, providing concrete examples of how computational analysis can

complement traditional approaches to teaching the history of the novel, poetry, and drama. His work suggests that digital humanities can revitalize literary pedagogy by providing students with tools for exploring large-scale literary patterns and testing their interpretive hypotheses against empirical evidence.

However, Drucker (2014) cautions that the integration of digital tools into literary pedagogy must be accompanied by critical reflection on the epistemological assumptions embedded in those tools. She argues that students should be taught not only how to use computational methods but also how to evaluate them critically, understanding the interpretive choices and limitations that shape the results of any digital analysis. Gold (2012) similarly emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between technical training and humanistic reflection in digital humanities pedagogy.

Future Directions: AI and Literary Criticism

The rapid development of artificial intelligence, particularly large language models and generative AI systems, opens new frontiers for computational literary analysis while raising profound questions about the future of literary criticism as a human intellectual activity. AI systems can now generate literary criticism, identify intertextual connections, and produce stylistic analyses at a scale and speed that far exceeds human capacity. Moretti (2013) anticipated some of these developments in his advocacy for distant reading, though the capabilities of current AI systems exceed what was conceivable when he first articulated his vision.

Jockers (2013) suggests that the future of computational literary studies lies in the integration of machine learning with traditional humanistic interpretation, creating hybrid methodologies that combine the pattern-recognition capabilities of algorithms with the contextual understanding and critical judgment of human scholars. Underwood (2019) exemplifies this approach in his use of machine learning to study literary change, demonstrating that computational methods can generate insights that are both empirically grounded and intellectually rich.

Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016) address the broader institutional and disciplinary implications of AI for literary studies, arguing that the field must develop new frameworks for evaluating and integrating AI-assisted analysis while maintaining its commitment to interpretive depth, ethical reflection, and cultural critique. Liu (2012) reminds us that these developments must be accompanied by sustained attention to questions of power, representation, and social justice, ensuring that the application of AI to literary studies serves democratic and emancipatory ends rather than reinforcing existing hierarchies of knowledge and cultural authority.

Conclusion

Digital humanities has transformed literary studies in ways that are both intellectually exciting and methodologically challenging. The innovations introduced by scholars such as Moretti (2013), Jockers (2013), and Underwood (2019) have expanded the scope of literary inquiry, enabling scholars to study literary production at scales that were previously impossible and to identify patterns and trends that are invisible to traditional close reading. The digital archiving projects surveyed by Burdick et al. (2012) and Schreibman, Siemens, and Unsworth (2016) have democratized access to literary and cultural materials, while the critical frameworks developed by Drucker (2014), Ramsay (2011), and Berry (2012) have ensured that the adoption of digital methods is accompanied by rigorous epistemological reflection.

At the same time, as Liu (2012) and Gold (2012) remind us, the field faces significant challenges related to equity, access, and the integration of cultural criticism into computational practice. The future of digital literary studies will depend on the field's ability to address these challenges while continuing to develop innovative methodologies that harness the power of artificial intelligence and computational analysis without sacrificing the interpretive depth, ethical sensitivity, and cultural awareness that define the best humanities scholarship. The transformation of literary studies by digital humanities is far from complete, but its trajectory suggests a future in which computational and humanistic approaches work in productive dialogue, each enriching and challenging the other in the pursuit of deeper understanding of literature and its role in human culture.

References

Berry, David M. *Understanding Digital Humanities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Burdick, Anne, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner, and Jeffrey Schnapp. *Digital_Humanities*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

Drucker, Johanna. *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Gold, Matthew K., ed. *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Jockers, Matthew L. *Macroanalysis: Digital Methods and Literary History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013.

Liu, Alan. "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?" In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, edited by Matthew K. Gold, 490–509. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. London: Verso, 2013.

Ramsay, Stephen. *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.

Schreibman, Susan, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth, eds. *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*. 2nd ed. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.

Underwood, Ted. *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673 ISSN Print:

Public Art and Urban Identity in Multicultural Societies

Manoj T R

Associate Professor, Department of History, Milad-E-Sherief Memorial College, Kayamkulam, Kerala, India

Article information
Received: 14th January 2026
Received in revised form: 27th February 2026
Accepted: 5th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0018

Abstract

Public art occupies a uniquely contested position at the intersection of aesthetics, politics, and urban life in multicultural societies. This article examines the role of public art in the construction and contestation of urban identity by analyzing its diverse functions—from place-making and community building to political resistance and cultural commemoration. Drawing on case studies from global cities and scholarship from art criticism, urban studies, and cultural geography, the analysis addresses contested monuments and the politics of public memory, community-engaged art practices, street art as democratic expression, digital and interactive public art, and the tensions between public art and gentrification. The article argues that public art is not merely decorative but constitutes a vital medium through which diverse communities negotiate questions of belonging, memory, and collective identity, requiring critical attention to power dynamics and social equity.

Keywords: - Public Art, Urban Identity, Multiculturalism, Monuments, Place-Making, Community Art, Street Art, Gentrification.

Introduction

Public art occupies a uniquely contested position at the intersection of aesthetics, politics, and urban life. Unlike art displayed in galleries and museums, public art inhabits shared civic spaces where it is encountered by diverse audiences who have not chosen to seek it out and who bring widely varying cultural references, political commitments, and aesthetic sensibilities to their encounters with it. As Kwon (2002) argues, the meaning and significance of public art are inseparable from its location, and the politics of site-specificity become particularly complex in multicultural urban environments where competing claims to space, identity, and memory intersect in the built environment.

This article examines the role of public art in the construction and contestation of urban identity in multicultural societies. It analyzes the diverse functions that public art serves from place-making and community building to political resistance and cultural commemoration and evaluates the tensions and opportunities that arise when art enters the public realm of diverse cities. Drawing on case studies from global cities and on scholarship from art criticism, urban studies, and cultural geography, the article argues that public art is not merely decorative but constitutes a vital medium through which multicultural societies negotiate questions of belonging, memory, and collective identity.

Literature Review

The scholarly study of public art has developed along several complementary trajectories. Deutsche (1996) provides a foundational analysis of the relationship between art and spatial politics, arguing that public art

is inextricably linked to struggles over urban space, social exclusion, and democratic participation. Her concept of 'evictions' the displacement of marginalized populations through urban development processes that are often accompanied by public art programs draws attention to the ways in which public art can serve both emancipatory and exclusionary functions, depending on the political and economic contexts in which it is produced and received.

Kwon (2002) builds on this foundation with her influential study of site-specific art and locational identity. She traces the evolution of site-specificity from its origins in minimalist sculpture to its contemporary manifestation in community-based and socially engaged art practices, arguing that the relationship between art and place has become increasingly complex in a globalized world characterized by mobility, displacement, and cultural hybridity. Her analysis raises important questions about the politics of place-making through art, particularly in multicultural urban environments where the meaning of 'community' and 'locality' is constantly negotiated.

Lacy (1995) coins the term 'new genre public art' to describe artistic practices that prioritize social engagement, community participation, and political activism over the creation of permanent aesthetic objects. She argues that the most significant public art of the late twentieth century is not the monumental sculptures and memorials that dominate civic spaces but the collaborative, process-oriented projects that engage communities in collective creative practice. This framework has been influential in shaping subsequent debates about the purpose and evaluation of public art in diverse urban contexts.

Miles (1997) provides a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between art, space, and the city, examining how public art contributes to the production of urban identity and the negotiation of social relations in contemporary cities. He argues that public art has the potential to transform urban spaces from mere sites of economic activity and transit into meaningful places that reflect the cultural values and aspirations of the communities that inhabit them. However, he also acknowledges the tensions that arise when public art is deployed as an instrument of urban regeneration, gentrification, or city branding.

Mitchell (1992) examines the relationship between public art and violence, using Spike Lee's film Do the Right Thing as a lens for analyzing the ways in which art in public spaces can both provoke and reflect social conflict. His analysis demonstrates that public art is never politically neutral but always participates in the power dynamics and cultural negotiations that characterize urban public life. This insight is particularly relevant in multicultural societies, where public artworks inevitably engage with questions of cultural representation, historical memory, and social inclusion.

Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison (2005) address the relationship between public art and social inclusion in the context of urban regeneration, arguing that public art programs are often justified in terms of their capacity to promote community cohesion and social equity. However, they demonstrate that the actual effects of public art on social inclusion are complex and context-dependent, and that well-intentioned art programs can sometimes reinforce rather than challenge existing patterns of social exclusion.

Public Art as Place-Making and Identity Construction

The concept of place-making the process through which spaces are transformed into meaningful places through cultural practice and social interaction is central to understanding the role of public art in urban identity construction. Miles (1997) argues that public art contributes to place-making by inscribing cultural meanings, historical narratives, and aesthetic values into the built environment, creating landmarks and gathering points that orient residents' sense of belonging and attachment to their neighborhoods and cities.

Kwon (2002) complicates this picture by examining the ways in which site-specific art can both create and disrupt place-based identities. She notes that in multicultural urban environments, the question of whose identity is being represented by public art is inherently political, as public artworks that celebrate one community's heritage may implicitly marginalize or exclude others. This tension is particularly acute in the context of contested monuments and memorials, where public art becomes a battleground for competing claims to historical memory and cultural legitimacy.

Cartiere and Willis (2008) provide a practical framework for understanding the diverse forms and functions of public art, distinguishing between art in public places, art as public spaces, and art in the public interest. This taxonomy helps clarify the different ways in which public art relates to questions of urban identity, from permanent sculptures that serve as civic symbols to temporary interventions that challenge dominant narratives and invite public dialogue about the meaning and future of shared urban spaces.

Young (2000) examines the specific role of memorials and monuments in the construction of public memory, analyzing how different cultures and communities use public art to commemorate historical events, honor the dead, and transmit collective narratives across generations. His analysis of Holocaust memorials

demonstrates the profound challenges of creating public art that adequately represents experiences of extreme violence and trauma, raising questions about the relationship between aesthetic form and historical truth that are relevant to memorial practices in diverse cultural contexts.

Contested Monuments and the Politics of Public Memory

The global wave of monument contestation that has swept through cities in recent years from the toppling of Confederate statues in the American South to the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa to the defacement of colonial monuments across Europe has brought the politics of public art into sharp public focus. These events demonstrate that public monuments are not inert aesthetic objects but active participants in ongoing cultural and political struggles over history, identity, and power. Mitchell (1992) anticipated this dynamic in his analysis of art in the public sphere, arguing that public art always carries the potential for provoking conflict because it makes visible the cultural values and power relations that shape shared civic spaces.

Deutsche (1996) provides a theoretical framework for understanding monument contestation as a democratic practice, arguing that the conflict generated by controversial public artworks is not a failure of public art but an expression of the democratic politics that public spaces are meant to enable. In her view, the demand to remove monuments that celebrate colonial violence or racial oppression is not an act of cultural vandalism but an assertion of the right of marginalized communities to participate in shaping the symbolic landscape of the cities they inhabit.

Young (2000) offers a more nuanced perspective, arguing that the relationship between monuments and memory is not straightforward, and that the removal of contested monuments does not necessarily resolve the historical conflicts they embody. He advocates for approaches to memorial practice that acknowledge ambiguity, multiplicity, and ongoing contestation, rather than seeking definitive resolution through the installation or removal of permanent artworks. His concept of the 'counter-monument' a memorial that challenges the very conventions of monumentality has been influential in contemporary public art practice.

Hall and Robertson (2001) examine the role of public art in urban regeneration contexts, noting that public art programs are often deployed as instruments of city branding and economic development. They argue that this instrumentalization of public art can undermine its democratic potential by subordinating cultural expression to market logic and reducing the complex cultural meanings of public art to promotional messaging. Zebracki and Ghose (2020) extend this analysis by examining the geographies of public art, arguing that the spatial distribution of public artworks in cities reflects and reinforces broader patterns of social inequality and cultural power.

Community-Engaged Public Art Projects

Community-engaged public art represents a significant departure from the traditional model of public art commissioning, in which a professional artist creates a work that is installed in a public space with minimal input from the community that will live with it. Lacy (1995) argues that new genre public art places community engagement at the center of the artistic process, treating the development of social relationships and collective creative practice as integral components of the artwork itself rather than as ancillary activities.

Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison (2005) examine the potential of community-engaged public art to promote social inclusion in the context of urban regeneration. They find that while public art programs can create opportunities for community participation and cultural expression, their effects on social inclusion depend critically on the quality of the engagement process, the degree of genuine community ownership, and the extent to which the project addresses the material as well as the symbolic dimensions of social exclusion.

Cartiere and Willis (2008) document numerous examples of community-engaged public art projects from around the world, demonstrating the diversity of approaches and outcomes that characterize this form of practice. Their collection includes projects that range from participatory mural-painting and community sculpture to digital storytelling and social media-based art, reflecting the growing range of media and technologies available to community-engaged artists.

Miles (1997) cautions that community-engaged public art is not without its own tensions and contradictions. He notes that the rhetoric of community participation can mask power imbalances between professional artists and community members, and that the outcomes of participatory processes do not always reflect the genuine priorities and aspirations of the communities involved. This critique underscores the importance of developing ethical frameworks for community-engaged practice that ensure genuine power-sharing and accountability.

Street Art and Graffiti as Democratic Expression

Street art and graffiti represent forms of public art that operate outside the institutional frameworks of commissioning, permitting, and curating that govern most public art programs. As unauthorized interventions in public space, street art and graffiti challenge the assumption that public art must be sanctioned by official bodies and raise important questions about who has the right to make marks on the urban landscape. Hall and Robertson (2001) note that while institutional public art programs tend to reflect the values and priorities of cultural elites and political authorities, street art and graffiti provide platforms for voices and perspectives that are excluded from official cultural spaces.

Zebracki and Ghose (2020) analyze the complex geographies of street art, examining how the spatial distribution of murals, graffiti, and other unauthorized interventions reflects the cultural dynamics of urban neighborhoods. They demonstrate that street art is not randomly distributed but is concentrated in particular types of spaces transitional zones, marginal neighborhoods, sites of cultural contestation where it serves both as a form of place-making and as a marker of cultural identity and resistance.

In multicultural cities, street art and murals have become important media for the expression of diverse cultural identities and for dialogue across cultural boundaries. Deutsche (1996) argues that the democratic potential of public art lies in its capacity to make visible the plurality of perspectives and interests that constitute the public sphere, and street art fulfills this function in ways that officially sanctioned public art programs often fail to achieve. However, Kwon (2002) notes the tension between street art's democratic aspirations and the processes of gentrification and commodification that can co-opt unauthorized art practices and transform them into instruments of real estate speculation and cultural tourism.

Digital and Interactive Public Art

The development of digital technologies has opened new possibilities for public art that is interactive, responsive, and participatory. Digital public art installations including projection mapping, augmented reality overlays, sensor-responsive sculptures, and networked media artworks create opportunities for audience engagement that go beyond passive contemplation to include active participation, co-creation, and real-time interaction. Cartiere and Willis (2008) document several examples of digital public art projects that use technology to create immersive experiences and foster community dialogue in urban spaces.

Mitchell (1992) provides a theoretical context for understanding digital public art by analyzing the relationship between art, technology, and public space. His analysis of the ways in which different media shape the politics of public art suggests that digital technologies have the potential to democratize public art by lowering barriers to participation and enabling forms of collective creation that are impossible with traditional media. However, he also acknowledges the risks of technological exclusion and the digital divide that may limit the accessibility of digital public art to technologically literate audiences.

Zebracki and Ghose (2020) examine the emerging geographies of digital public art, noting that the increasing prevalence of digital interventions in urban spaces raises new questions about the relationship between physical place and virtual experience. They argue that digital public art has the potential to create new forms of public space that transcend physical location, enabling dispersed communities to participate in shared artistic experiences. However, they also caution that the privatization of digital infrastructure may limit the democratic potential of digital public art by placing control over public artistic expression in the hands of technology companies and platform owners.

Gentrification and the Commodification of Public Art

The relationship between public art and gentrification is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary urban cultural politics. Public art programs are frequently deployed as components of urban regeneration strategies, with the expectation that artistic interventions will enhance the desirability and economic value of neighborhoods. Hall and Robertson (2001) critically examine this instrumental use of public art, arguing that while art can contribute to the aesthetic improvement of urban spaces, the use of public art as a tool for increasing property values and attracting investment can contribute to the displacement of the low-income communities and cultural practitioners who originally gave those neighborhoods their distinctive character.

Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison (2005) demonstrate that the relationship between public art and social inclusion in regeneration contexts is highly ambiguous. They find that public art programs can create short-term opportunities for community participation and cultural expression, but that these benefits may be offset by the long-term effects of gentrification, including rising rents, displacement, and the erosion of existing social networks. Their analysis underscores the importance of evaluating public art programs not only in terms of their immediate cultural outcomes but also in terms of their broader social and economic effects.

Deutsche (1996) provides a structural analysis of the relationship between art, urban development, and social exclusion, arguing that the deployment of public art in gentrifying neighborhoods serves an ideological function by aestheticizing the processes of displacement and social cleansing that accompany urban renewal. She contends that a critical approach to public art must attend not only to the aesthetic qualities of individual artworks but also to the political and economic contexts in which they are produced and installed, asking whose interests are served by the transformation of urban space through artistic intervention.

Lacy (1995) offers an alternative vision of public art that prioritizes community empowerment over economic development, arguing that the most significant public art is that which strengthens the capacity of communities to advocate for their own interests and resist the forces of displacement and gentrification. Her concept of new genre public art art that is defined by its social engagement rather than its aesthetic form provides a framework for evaluating public art programs in terms of their contribution to social justice rather than their economic impact.

Conclusion

Public art in multicultural societies operates at the intersection of aesthetics, politics, and urban life, serving as a vital medium through which diverse communities negotiate questions of identity, belonging, and collective memory. As this article has demonstrated, the functions and effects of public art are complex, contested, and deeply context-dependent, ranging from the place-making and community-building practices analyzed by Miles (1997) and Cartiere and Willis (2008) to the political contestation of monuments examined by Deutsche (1996), Young (2000), and Mitchell (1992).

The scholarly perspectives surveyed in this article from Kwon's (2002) analysis of site-specificity and locational identity to Lacy's (1995) advocacy for new genre public art, from Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison's (2005) examination of art and social inclusion to Hall and Robertson's (2001) and Zebracki and Ghose's (2020) analyses of the geographies of public art collectively demonstrate that public art is never merely decorative but always participates in the cultural and political dynamics that shape urban life. In multicultural societies, where competing claims to space, identity, and memory are particularly visible and contested, public art has the potential to serve as a medium of democratic expression, cross-cultural dialogue, and collective imagination but only when it is produced and received with critical attention to the power dynamics, economic interests, and social inequalities that shape the public realm.

The challenge for artists, policymakers, and communities in multicultural cities is to develop public art practices that genuinely reflect the diversity of urban populations, that engage meaningfully with questions of social justice and inclusion, and that resist the pressures of commodification and gentrification that threaten to reduce public art to an instrument of economic development. The future of public art in multicultural societies depends on our collective willingness to treat the public realm not as a space to be managed and marketed but as a democratic arena in which diverse voices, visions, and cultural traditions can coexist, interact, and mutually enrich one another.

References

Cartiere, Cameron, and Shelly Willis, eds. *The Practice of Public Art*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Deutsche, Rosalyn. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996.

Hall, Tim, and Iain Robertson. "Public Art and Urban Regeneration: Advocacy, Claims and Critical Debates." *Landscape Research* 26, no. 1 (2001): 5–26.

Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

Lacy, Suzanne, ed. *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.

Miles, Malcolm. *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures*. London: Routledge, 1997.

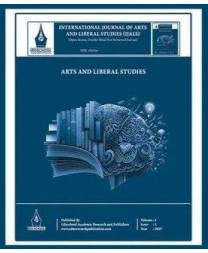
Mitchell, W. J. T. "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing." In *Art and the Public Sphere*, edited by W. J. T. Mitchell, 29–48. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Sharp, Joanne, Venda Pollock, and Ronan Paddison. "Just Art for a Just City: Public Art and Social Inclusion in Urban Regeneration." *Urban Studies* 42, nos. 5–6 (2005): 1001–1023.

Young, James E. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

Zebracki, Martin, and Rina Ghose. "Geographies of Public Art: Articles, Interventions and Reviews." *GeoHumanities* 6, no. 1 (2020): 1–17.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673



Eco-Spirituality: the Perceptions of Mahatma Gandhi

Umesh K

Assistant Professor, Government College, Madappally, Kozhikode, Kerala, India.

Article information

Received: 13th January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 15th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0019

Abstract

The green thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, rooted in the Hindu tradition and the Bhagavad Gita, offer a vision for harmonising nature with the needs of the people, and Gandhi has been described as the apostle of applied human ecology. His ideas of satyagraha, founded on truth and non-violence, of simple living and of need-based development show how progress is possible without harm to nature or to fellow beings, and his teaching that nature has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed provides an ethical foundation for modern environmentalism. Gandhi regarded the earth as a living organism and expressed his ecological thought through two fundamental principles, the cosmic law and the law of species. His call to go back to the villages, his swadeshi spirit and his support for small-scale and cottage industry all express a Gandhian environmentalism, while the methods of non-violence and tapasya that he taught were later taken up by environmental movements such as the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. Drawing on his notions of Advaita, Mother Nature, self-realisation and self-discipline, this paper sets out the philosophical foundations of Gandhi's eco-spirituality and its bearing on the search for a sustainable way of life.

Keywords: - Cosmic Integrity, Eco-Spirituality, Hindu Tradition, Sustainability, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Nishkama Karma.

Introduction

Eco-spirituality is a deeply felt connection between the inner spiritual life and the natural world, bringing together religion, philosophy and environmental awareness (Hettinger 1995; Gardner 2006). It holds the earth to be sacred and humanity to be not the master of nature but a small part of a great living organism, so that trees, rivers, animals and soil all carry value and a spark of life, and a sense of interconnectedness follows. For Gandhi, caring for the environment was not merely a political matter but a deep moral and spiritual duty, and he asked people to live simply, with less possession and more gratitude, finding joy in nature rather than in things. Eco-spirituality is not a new idea: it draws on many old traditions, honours indigenous cultures and treats Mother Nature with reverence, and the Eastern traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism teach that everything has life and that no living creature should be harmed (Bhandari 2021). Above all, eco-spirituality changes our orientation towards nature, teaching us to protect it not out of fear but out of love and respect (Crowe 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Achieving sustainability and sustainable development is acutely difficult in modern times (Ozili 2022). This study takes eco-spirituality, expressed through non-violence and satyagraha, to be a means of attaining

sustainability, and the inner purification of the mind to be its foundation (Lester & Böhm 2020; Dhiman 2016). Yet in a world shaped by science, technology and consumerism, that path faces serious challenges, and the problem this study addresses is how Gandhi's eco-spiritual vision can speak to the contemporary ecological crisis.

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the concept of eco-spirituality.
- To recognise the significance of sustainability.
- To find out the relevance of Advaita.
- To examine the concept of Mother Nature and the significance of forest satyagraha.
- To understand self-realisation and the significance of non-violence, or ahimsa.

Scope and Significance

The study sets out the significance of eco-spirituality, of natural healing, and of resilience against ecological anxiety and despair, and it offers a deeper understanding of the concept (Lester & Böhm 2020). Its significance is underlined by the growing international attention to non-violence, now marked each year by the International Day of Non-Violence on Gandhi's birthday.

Literature Review

Much of the writing on environmental philosophy traces a debt to Gandhi. One of the primary causes of the present environmental crisis, on this view, is the loss of the older perspective on the interrelationship of man, nature and cosmos, a perspective that Gandhian thought sought to recover (Dwivedi 1990). Different streams of environmental philosophy are held to have their origin in Gandhi, for whom the over-exploitation of natural resources in the name of development leads to serious harm, and a science that does not respect nature's needs, together with a development that does not respect people's needs, threatens both human survival and ecology.

A second strand connects Gandhi to the deep-ecology movement. Arne Naess, the pioneer of deep ecology, argued that ecological preservation is non-violent in nature, and read Gandhian philosophy as a philosophy of ecological balance (Naess 1973); some thinkers go further, regarding Gandhi as a man whose ecological view of life ran deeper even than deep ecology. Thomas Weber systematised the link between non-violence, self-realisation and the mutual dependence of all living beings (Weber 1999), and the Indian environmental movements, the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, are widely seen as living examples of Gandhian environmentalism (Shenoy 2016). Underlying all of this is the claim that every living thing has a right to life, which is the primary moral argument for a sustainable existence (Kothari 1990).

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, using descriptive, analytical and historical methods. The descriptive method sets out the concept of eco-spirituality and its Gandhian expression; the analytical method interprets Gandhi's ecological principles and relates them to contemporary environmental thought; and the historical method traces these ideas through the Hindu tradition, the Bhagavad Gita and Gandhi's own life and writings. The study relies on secondary sources, including the works of and about Gandhi and the scholarly literature on eco-spirituality and deep ecology.

Gandhi's Eco-Spiritual Philosophy

The Two Ecological Laws

Gandhi regarded the earth as a living organism and expressed his ecological thought through two fundamental laws, set out in Table 1. The cosmic law treats the entire universe, living and non-living alike, as a single entity informed by the cosmic spirit, so that, as Gandhi held, all life and all creation are one, an expression of the doctrine of Advaita, or non-duality, and of the essential unity of man and nature (Elayath 1992; Osho 2003). The law of species holds that evolution is impossible without the cooperation and sacrifice of all beings, human and non-human, so that it is the duty of rational humanity to respect the rights of fellow beings and to cherish diversity, and to take more than one needs is a theft from the environment that cannot be justified (Praveena & Raju 2023).

Table 1. Gandhi's two ecological laws.

Law	Principle	Ecological implication
Cosmic law	The universe, living and non-living, is one entity informed by the cosmic spirit (Advaita)	Humanity is part of, not master over, nature; the unity of man and nature
Law of species	Evolution depends on the cooperation and sacrifice of all beings	A duty to respect the rights of fellow beings and to cherish biodiversity

Source: compiled by the author.

Ahimsa, Satyagraha and the Ethic of Restraint

At the centre of Gandhi's ecology stands ahimsa, non-injury in thought, word and deed, whose ecological scope he held to be unlimited, and which, together with his vegetarianism, made him a votary for the conservation of all diversity of life, society, culture and religion. For Gandhi, truth was the end and non-violence the means, truth being the ultimate reality, which he equated with God (Gandhi 1959). Around these stand a family of disciplines of restraint, set out in Table 2, by which the individual limits his wants and so leaves room for the needs of others and of nature. To take more than one's share, Gandhi taught, is a kind of theft (Dwivedi 1990), and the remedy is the voluntary self-limitation expressed in aparigraha, asteya and the rest.

Table 2. Gandhian principles and their ecological significance.

Principle	Meaning	Ecological significance
Ahimsa	Non-injury in thought, word and deed	Reverence and protection for all forms of life
Satyagraha	Holding firmly to truth	Non-violent resistance to ecological harm, as in forest satyagraha
Aparigraha	Non-possession	Voluntary limitation of wants and restraint on consumption
Asteya	Non-stealing	Not taking more than one's share of natural resources
Swadeshi	Self-reliance	Local, small-scale production and a smaller ecological footprint
Sarira-srama	Bread labour	The dignity of manual work and living within one's means
Brahmacharya	Self-control	Conquering trishna, the greed at the root of over-consumption
Nishkama Karma	Selfless action	Acting in harmony with nature, without selfish motive
Anuvrat	Self-discipline (from the Jain tradition)	Personal restraint as the basis of ecological balance

Source: compiled by the author.

Self-Realisation, the Gita and Deep Ecology

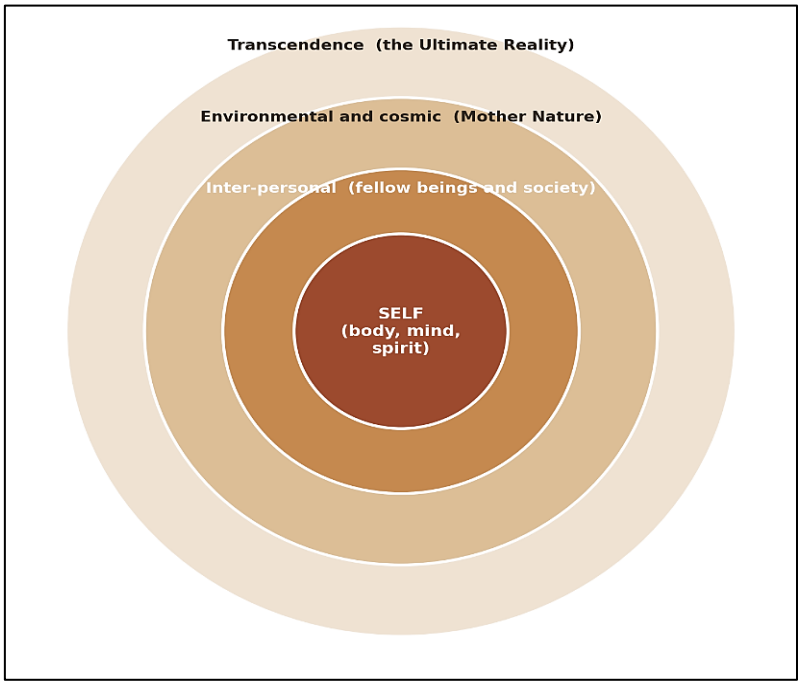
The Bhagavad Gita deeply influenced Gandhi, who drew from it the idea of self-realisation, and it is regarded as a source of deep ecological attitudes (Prabhupada 2016). Gandhi held the universe to be a part of the omnipresent Paramatma, so that every creature has its own rights, and he taught that the most important thing is to know oneself, since self-realisation reaches to the roots of human civilisation and is the ultimate object of deep ecology (Vivekananda 1893; Bodhasarananda 2012). The practice of brahmacharya disciplines mind and body and so helps to conquer the greed that is the root of all problems, while nishkama karma, selfless action, becomes possible through a spiritual enlightenment lived in harmony with nature. Thomas Weber set out the logic that connects these ideas: that self-realisation is possible only through the search for truth; that all living beings are

one; that violence against any living being is violence against oneself; and that such violence therefore makes complete self-realisation impossible (Weber 1999). From these premises Arne Naess built the broader philosophy of deep ecology, reading Gandhian thought as a philosophy of ecological balance in which non-violence has the power to resolve even the ecological crisis (Naess 1973).

Mother Nature, Scientific Spiritualism and the Triple Harmony

Gandhi's notion of Mother Nature drew on the Hindu Prithvi and the Greek Gaia, the earth long seen as the mother of all living beings (Ranganathananda 2002; Bhandari 2021), and he viewed ecology within a framework of what may be called scientific spiritualism, embracing the Jain idea of anuvrat, or self-discipline, and the principle of anasakti, non-attachment to material growth joined to deep affection for the earth. Believing that every economic activity carries an inherent violence, he held to a need-based economics of the kind later captured in the phrase small is beautiful. His vision of a healthy life rests on a triple harmony, shown in Figure 1: a harmony within the person, between body, mind and spirit; a harmony between the person and fellow beings; and a harmony between the person and the environmental and cosmic order, all of it opening, through a dimension of transcendence, towards the ultimate reality that is the source and goal of life. To neglect any one of these, allowing the intellectual to outgrow the physical and the spiritual, is to risk a disequilibrium in the individual that issues in conflict in society.

Fig 1. Gandhi's triple harmony, widening from the self to transcendence.



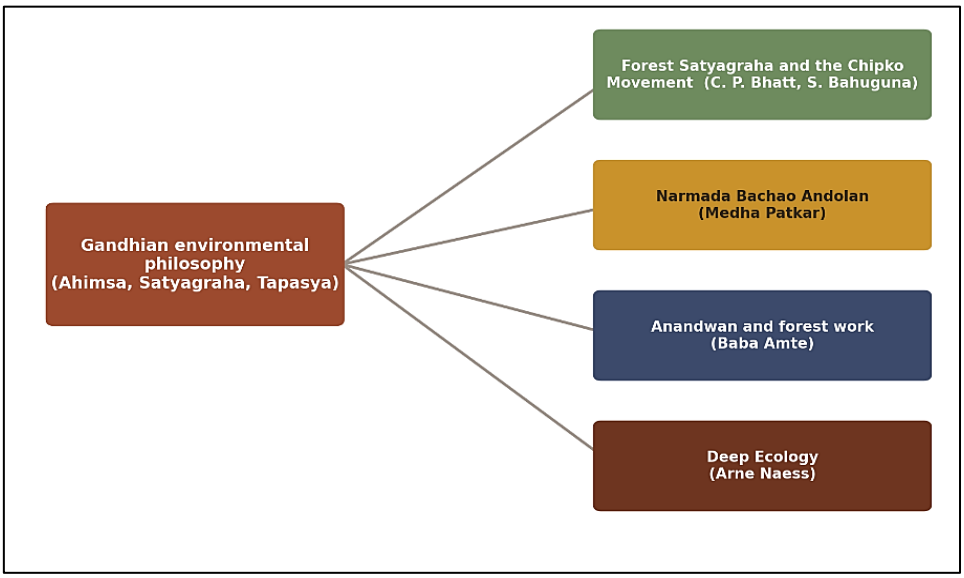
Source: compiled by the author.

On this view, the ancient practices of tree and cow worship are a reverential attempt to identify with the plant and animal levels of existence, and Gandhi's emphasis on cow worship in Young India expresses his faith in Advaita. Natural resources, he held, are not for human consumption alone but for all of God's creatures, and not for this generation only but for those to come; in this way Gandhi rejects anthropocentrism and puts a bio-centrism in its place, calling on us to reorient our lives from materialism to spirituality for the sake of ecological balance.

Gandhian Environmentalism in Practice

Where Western environmentalists urged a return to nature, Gandhi urged a return to the villages, in which he held the soul of India to lie (Paranjape 2013), and his swadeshi spirit and his support for small-scale and cottage industry gave that vision an economic form. The method he forged, forest satyagraha, was first used to effect in the Chipko Movement (Dwivedi 1990), and the techniques of non-violence and tapasya that he taught were carried forward by later environmentalists, as Figure 2 shows. Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sundarlal Bahuguna led the Chipko Movement, Medha Patkar the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and Baba Amte joined forest and community work at Anandwan, while Arne Naess built Gandhian non-violence into the philosophy of deep ecology.

Fig 2: Gandhi's influence on modern environmentalism.



Source: compiled by the author.

From Industrial Civilisation to a Gandhian Alternative

Gandhi's life and writings amount to a paradigm shift, offering a comprehensive and ecologically sound alternative to the unsustainable model of modern industrial civilisation. He would replace consumerism with conservation, mass production with production by the masses, private ownership with community ownership, and the obsession with quantity with a concern for quality, as Table 3 sets out. Because these features of deep ecology are fundamental to his philosophy and his way of life, many regard him as a founder of contemporary environmentalism (Shenoy 2016; Gardner 2006).

Table 3. Industrial civilisation and the Gandhian alternative.

Modern industrial civilisation	Gandhian alternative
Consumerism	Conservation
Mass production	Production by the masses
Private ownership	Community ownership
Dominating power	Enabling power
Reductionism	Holism
Centralisation	Decentralisation
Crass materialism	Genuine spirituality
Obsession with quantity	Concern with quality

Source: compiled by the author from Gandhi's writings.

Conclusion

Gandhi's eco-spirituality rests on a deep philosophical base: the conviction, drawn from the Bhagavad Gita and the Hindu tradition, that all life is one and that the earth is a living organism to be served rather than exploited. Self-realisation, for Gandhi, leads to an inner purification that issues outward as reverence for every creature, and his perception of ecology is, in the end, a philosophy of ecological balance grounded in non-violence and self-discipline. He earned the title of Mahatma for his pursuit of the triple harmony of body, mind and spirit, and of thought, word and deed, and it is this same harmony, widened to embrace all of nature, that his eco-spirituality offers to a world in ecological crisis. As an alternative to the consumerism and centralisation of industrial civilisation, Gandhi's vision of conservation, decentralisation and genuine spirituality remains, as he himself might have said, current and suitable for the soul of India and beyond.

References

Bhandari, K. P. "Eco-spirituality in *Bhumi Sukta*." *JODEM: A Peer-Reviewed Journal of Language and Literature* 10, no. 12 (2021).

Bodhasarananda, Swami. *Vivekananda: His Call to the Nation*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2012.

Crowe, J. L. "Transforming Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours through Eco-Spirituality and Religion." *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education* 3, no. 1 (2013): 75–88.

Dhiman, S. K. "Ethics and Spirituality of Sustainability: What Can We All Do?" *Journal of Values-Based Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2016): 1–13.

Dwivedi, O. P. *Satyagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism*. University of Arizona Press, 1990.

Elayath, K. N. N. *Advaita Dharma*. Thiruvananthapuram: State Institute of Languages, 1992.

Gandhi, M. K. *My Socialism*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1959.

Gardner, G. T. *Inspiring Progress: Religions' Contributions to Sustainable Development*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2006.

Hettinger, N. "Eco-Spirituality: First Thoughts." 81–95.

Kothari, R. "Environment, Technology and Ethics." *Journal of Business Ethics* (1990).

Lester, T., and S. Böhm. "Eco-Spirituality and Sustainability Transitions: Agency towards Growth." *Religion, State and Society* 48, no. 1 (2020): 1–26.

Naess, A. "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary." *Inquiry* 16, nos. 1–4 (1973): 95–100.

Osho. *Vedanta: The Ultimate Truth*. New Delhi: Diamond Pocket Books, 2003.

Ozili, P. K. "Sustainability and Sustainable Development Research around the World." *Managing Global Transitions* 20, no. 3 (2022).

Paranjape, M. R. "Tryst with the West." *Frontline* 30, no. 2 (2013).

Prabhupada, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami. *Bhagavad Gita As It Is*. Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2016.

Praveena, T., and R. L. N. Raju. "Achieving Environmental Harmony: An Analysis Based on the Narratives from the Mahabharata." *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 2 (2023): 441–446.

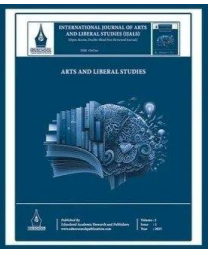
Ranganathananda, Swami. *The Indian Vision of God as Mother*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002.

Shenoy, V. V. *Eco-Spirituality: Case Studies on Hinduism and Environmentalism in Contemporary India*. Bucknell University, 2016.

Vivekananda, Swami. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 1893.

Weber, T. "Gandhi, Deep Ecology, Peace Research and Buddhist Economics." *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 3 (1999): 349–361.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS AND LIBERAL STUDIES (IJALS)
(Open Access, Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Journal)
ISSN Online: 3108-1673



Ecocritical Sensibility with a Feminine Twist in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Greeshma N P

Research Scholar, Vels Institute of Science, Technology & Advanced Studies, Tamil Nadu, India.

Article information

Received: 13th January 2026
Received in revised form: 12th February 2026
Accepted: 15th March 2026
Available online: 23rd April 2026

Volume: 2
Issue: 2
DOI: https://doi.org/10.63090/IJALS/3108.1673.0021

Abstract

This paper offers an ecofeminist reading of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) that locates the novel's environmental politics not merely in its themes but in its narrative form. Existing criticism has established the novel's ecological register the dying Meenachal River as an index of Kerala's development (Anand), nature's "muted revolt" alongside the subaltern (Kunhi and Kunhi), and the ecologies of uneven development (Mukherjee) but the formal device that fuses the novel's feminist and ecological critiques has received less sustained attention. This paper argues that the fusion is achieved through what may be called a poetics of the small: the same narrative attention that registers moths, beetles, darter birds, and a poisoned river also registers the crushed lives of Ammu, Rahel, and Velutha, so that woman and nature appear not as naturally akin but as co-victims of a single logic of domination. Reading the novel through the ecofeminist frameworks of Françoise d'Eaubonne, Greta Gaard, Karen Warren, and Vandana Shiva, the paper demonstrates this claim across three sites: the paralleled biographies of Ammu and the Meenachal; the entomological imagery that folds patriarchal law into the world of insects; and the caste and property relations that extend the same logic to Velutha. The novel, it concludes, dramatises the woman–nature association in order to indict the order that produces it.

Keywords: - Arundhati Roy, Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Kerala, Meenachal River, Patriarchy, Poetics of Scale, *The God of Small Things*.

Introduction

Ecocriticism is the result of a rising realisation that unless tremendous care is taken, there will soon be nothing safe or beautiful left in nature to discuss. The analytical approach known by that name took shape in the United States in the early 1990s, when literary criticism first turned systematically to environmental issues and green politics. Ecocritics broadly share the conviction that culture and nature are interwoven, and the relationship between literature and the environment is the movement's primary focus. The term gained its canonical formulation in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, where Glotfelty defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii). Among the approach's underlying objectives, she notes, is the restoration of professional respect to the long-undervalued genre of nature writing. In the three decades since, ecocriticism

has sought to revolutionise literary studies by integrating literary theory and criticism with wider ecological concerns including, crucially for this paper, the concerns of feminism.

The God of Small Things is by now one of the most heavily worked texts in Indian-English ecological criticism, and any new reading must say where it stands in that conversation. Divya Anand's early ecocritical study reads the Meenachal River as the novel's ecological barometer, its ebb and flow mapping the destinies of the characters and the transformation of Kerala's bioregion (Anand). Rukhaya M. Kunhi and Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi extend the reading through muted-group theory, showing how Roy gives voice to a silenced Nature alongside the human subaltern (Kunhi and Kunhi). Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee situates the novel within the environments of postcolonial "uneven development," where ecological damage and social injustice are two faces of the same economy (Mukherjee), and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin have made the novel a touchstone of postcolonial ecocriticism more broadly (Huggan and Tiffin). What this substantial body of work tends to assert rather than demonstrate, however, is *how* the novel binds its two critiques of environmental destruction and of patriarchy into one. The parallel between Ammu and the river, or between women and nature, is repeatedly noted as a theme; the formal mechanism that produces it is rarely examined. This paper asks, accordingly: by what narrative means does *The God of Small Things* fuse its ecological and its feminist arguments? It answers that the fusion is effected by a poetics of the small announced in the novel's very title: a disciplined narrative attention to minute lives insects, fish, birds, a river's slow death — that is identical in kind to the attention the novel pays to socially "small" human lives, the women and the untouchable whom the Big order crushes. The argument proceeds in four movements: a theoretical framework; a reading of the twinned biographies of Ammu and the Meenachal; an analysis of the novel's entomological imagery, in which patriarchal law itself is folded into the world of insects; and an extension of the ecofeminist logic to caste and property through Velutha, Mammachi, and Chacko.

Ecocriticism and Ecofeminism: A Critical Framework

The idea of ecofeminism arose from the confluence of several movements — environmental, anti-nuclear, labour, animal-liberation, and peace movements among them — as they intersected with feminism. The term *écoféminisme* was coined in 1974 by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in *Le Féminisme ou la mort*, to name both a method of thinking and a movement created by the blending of feminist and ecological concepts (d'Eaubonne). Its core premise has been stated most influentially by Greta Gaard: ecofeminism's "basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (Gaard 1). Karen Warren gives that shared ideology a name — the "logic of domination" — a value-hierarchical pattern of thinking that first constructs difference (man/woman, culture/nature, high caste/low caste) and then reads difference as entitlement to subordinate (Warren). On this account, the exploitation of nature and the subjection of women are not analogous accidents but products of a single conceptual structure; being a woman under patriarchy and being nature under extractive modernity are positions created by the same act of hierarchy.

Vandana Shiva historicises this structure for the colonial and developmental contexts that Roy's Kerala inherits. In *Staying Alive*, she argues that the scientific revolution's construal of nature as passive matter and the construction of femininity as passivity legitimated one another:

> As nature came to be seen more like a woman to be raped, gender too was recreated. Science as a male venture, based on the subjugation of female nature and female sex provided support for the polarisation of gender… While on the one hand the ideology of science sanctioned the denudation of nature, on the other it legitimised the dependency of women and the authority of men. Science and masculinity were associated in domination over nature and femininity, and the ideologies of science and gender reinforced each other. (Shiva 17)

Shiva's point is not that women are closer to nature but that a particular history colonial science, extractive "development" has positioned them together on the losing side of the same dualism. Sherry Ortner's classic anthropological analysis explains why the positioning proves so durable: "women are being identified or symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men, who are identified with culture. Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if women were considered part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, them" (Ortner 73). Ortner, it must be stressed, describes this association in order to expose it as a cultural construction, not to endorse it and, as this paper will show, Roy's novel operates in exactly the same register: it dramatises the woman–nature association with great intimacy precisely in order to indict the order that produces it.

Why should the novel literature at all matter to such a critique? Joseph Meeker's foundational answer in *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* remains the sharpest:

> Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. Is it an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it? (Meeker 3–4)

Meeker's question does literature adapt us to the world or estrange us from it? supplies this paper's test for Roy. A novel that merely aestheticised Kerala's landscape would estrange; a novel that trains its readers to attend to small lives, human and non-human, as bearers of value and of history, adapts. The readings that follow argue that *The God of Small Things* does the latter, and that its instrument is scale.

"More Rice, for the Price of a River": Ammu and the Meenachal

The novel announces its poetics of the small on its opening page. When Rahel returns to Ayemenem, the description that greets her is worth restoring in full, because its precision is the argument:

> It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem. Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, ploughing it up like gunfire. The old house on the hill wore its steep, gabled roof pulled low over its ears like a hat. The walls, streaked with moss, had grown soft, and bulged a little with dampness that seeped up from the ground. The wild, overgrown garden was full of the whisper and scurry of small lives. (Roy 1)

Three moves in this passage organise everything that follows. First, violence enters through simile before it enters through plot: rain ploughs the earth "like gunfire," so that the land is figured as a body under fire from the first sentence. Second, the house is personified it wears its roof "pulled low over its ears like a hat," its walls "grown soft" like ageing skin collapsing the boundary between built culture and organic nature that the novel will keep collapsing. Third, and decisively, the paragraph ends by directing attention downwards, to "the whisper and scurry of small lives": the narrative camera is calibrated, from the outset, to register what is small. That calibration is ecological (the garden's creatures are the sentence's protagonists) and it is political (the novel's human victims a divorced woman, two children, an untouchable are precisely those whom society deems small). The title's theology of "small things" is thus a theory of attention, and attention, in this novel, is where ethics begins.

Nowhere is the method more sustained than in the twinned biographies of Ammu and the Meenachal River. The river is introduced with a life of its own, remembered from twenty-three years earlier in a syntax of short, breathing fragments: "Greygreen. With fish in it. The sky and trees in it. And at night, the broken yellow moon in it" (Roy 202). The fragments matter: each is a frame in which the river holds another life — fish, trees, sky, moon the river as medium and mother of an entire world. It is this maternal river that has fed the fisherfolk of Ayemenem for generations, and it is on its banks that Ammu sits with her radio, seemingly at peace. But the pastoral is a façade on both registers at once, for Ammu carries within her "the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (Roy 44) Roy's most famous characterisation of her, and one whose two halves (nurture and detonation) map exactly onto the river's own doubleness, life-giver in the dry months and drowning force in the monsoon. The novel does not say that Ammu is like the river; it constructs the two out of the same materials and lets the reader discover that they share a grammar.

They also share a death, administered by the same order. Twenty-three years later the river that held the moon is a corpse in a hospital bed: "it greeted her with a ghastly skull's smile, with holes where teeth had been, and a limp hand raised from a hospital bed" (Roy 124). The simile deserves close reading, because Roy could have reached for any image of pollution and chose a terminally ill patient: the river is not merely damaged but *dying in an institution*, passive, attended, beyond cure which is, very nearly, how Ammu herself dies, alone in a lodge room, her body returned in a bundle. What killed the river is specified with documentary precision: "Downriver, a saltwater barrage had been built, in exchange for votes from the influential paddy-farmer lobby… So now they had two harvests a year instead of one. More rice, for the price of a river" (Roy 124). The zeugma of that final sentence rice and river weighed in the same ledger is the novel's indictment of developmental economics in nine words: the sentence performs the very act of accounting it condemns. And the consequences are rendered, characteristically, through the senses and the small: the river now "smelled of shit, and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died. The ones that survived suffered from fin-rot and had broken out in boils" (Roy 13). Shiva's analysis is here made narrative: colonial-developmental science, arriving

as World Bank credit and saltwater engineering, subjugates "female nature" (Shiva 17) the mother-river while the same social order breaks the novel's actual mothers.

Ammu's biography is constructed to run parallel, wound for wound. Because her father, Pappachi — the novel's Imperial Entomologist believed that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl, Ammu was denied one (Roy 38); the man who would lash out at little Ammu in his rage and disappointment reserved his investment for his son. Her attempt to escape through marriage collapses when her alcoholic husband tries to lend her to the sexual appetite of his English manager; when she returns to Ayemenem with her twins, she must endure her relatives' regard for them as unwelcome burdens, without claim or standing. Like the barraged river, Ammu is dammed at every point where she might have flowed — education, marriage, home, love — and, like the river, she is then blamed for her own stagnation. The parallel is completed at the level of narrative structure: the novel gives the river a before and an after separated by twenty-three years, and gives Ammu exactly the same temporal architecture, her vitality in the "before" chapters and her expulsion and death in the "after." Anand is right that the river maps the characters' destinies (Anand); the present reading adds that the mapping is bidirectional — Ammu's fate is also the reader's instrument for grasping the river's, each biography making the other legible.

Small Lives: Moths, Insects, and the Poetics of Scale

The novel's second great ecofeminist device is entomological. Its insects are never decorative; they carry the plot's deepest injuries. The founding instance is Pappachi's moth. As Imperial Entomologist, Pappachi discovers a new species of moth; the discovery is credited to another man, and the denial of the *name* the patriarch's form of immortality curdles into the household's heirloom of bitterness. The moth thus enters the novel as a small life onto which a man's thwarted ambition has been displaced, and it is the women and children who inherit the displacement: "a cold moth with unusually dense dorsal tufts landed lightly on Rahel's heart. Where its icy legs touched her, she got goosebumps. On her careless heart" (Roy 112). The taxonomic detail "unusually dense dorsal tufts" is doing precise work: fear arrives in Rahel's body wearing the exact scientific description of her grandfather's loss, so that patriarchal grievance is transmitted down the generations *as an insect*, landing on the heart of a girl whenever she feels unloved. It is difficult to imagine a more compact image of intergenerational patriarchy, and it is constitutively ecological: the instrument of transmission is a specimen from the colonial archive of nature.

The law itself receives the same treatment. When Chacko wishes to remind Ammu that the family's property is his, he reaches for legal Latin: Ammu, as a divorced daughter, has no *locus standi* — no standing to claim. But the novel refuses to transcribe the phrase in the language of the courts. Filtered through the twins' ears, it becomes "Locusts Stand I" (Roy 57): the Latin of dispossession is misheard into an insect. The malapropism is one of Roy's most brilliant small things. At the surface it is a child's error; underneath, it converts the legal machinery that disinherits women into a plague-insect the locust, devourer of harvests standing where Ammu should stand. Patriarchal law, the novel suggests, is a kind of infestation, and the joke lodges the suggestion more deeply than any editorial could. That the phrase recurs in the twins' private language, capitalised like a title, shows Roy building her critique into the novel's smallest linguistic organisms exactly the scale at which, this paper argues, her ecofeminism operates.

Even the novel's ecological pedagogy is gendered and Roy makes sure we notice. It is Chacko, the Oxford Rhodes scholar and the family's self-appointed intellectual, who gives the twins their lesson in deep time:

> he told them about the Earth Woman. He made them imagine that the earth four thousand six hundred million years old was a forty-six-year-old woman… It had taken the whole of the Earth Woman's life for the earth to become what it was. For the oceans to part. For the mountains to rise. The Earth Woman was eleven years old… when the first single-celled organisms appeared. The first animals, creatures like worms and jellyfish, appeared only when she was forty… The whole of human civilization as we know it, began only two hours ago in the Earth Woman's life. (Roy 53–54)

The passage performs the classic ecocritical decentring: measured against the Earth Woman's forty-six years, human civilisation shrinks to a two-hour drive from Ayemenem to Cochin the human is revealed as the smallest thing of all. But the vehicle of the lesson repays attention as much as its tenor. The earth is figured, once again, as a woman — and the figuration is voiced by the novel's most articulate patriarch, the man who will shortly dispossess his sister with "Locusts Stand I" and dismiss his mother as a "sleeping partner." Chacko can imagine the earth as a woman and revere her age; he cannot extend standing to the women at his own table. Roy thus stages, within a single character, the central ecofeminist contradiction that Ortner and Shiva anatomise: the same culture that sentimentalises Mother Earth/Mother Nature subordinates actual mothers, actual women (Ortner

73; Shiva 17). The Earth Woman passage is not the novel endorsing the woman–nature equation; it is the novel showing who profits from making it.

Against these freighted insects and figures, Roy sets passages of pure attention, in which the non-human world is catalogued with a naturalist's precision: "tall grass… Brown millipedes… Wet mud parted under their feet as they squelched through the swamp… darter birds on the tops of trees, drying their sodden wings spread out like laundry against the sky… egrets… a banana flower sheathed in claret bracts" (Roy 296). The catalogue form is significant: each creature receives its own clause, its own moment of narrative regard, exactly as the novel's marginal humans receive theirs. The darter birds' wings "like laundry" domesticate the wild at the same time as the opening page's house grew moss like skin the two realms are continuous. Life in all its forms is honoured, and the honouring is technical, patient, and specific. This is Meeker's adaptive literature in action (Meeker 3–4): the reader trained by such sentences leaves the novel more able, not less, to see the small lives around them.

Patriarchy, Property, and Caste: The Logic of Domination

If the novel stopped at women and rivers, it would be an ecofeminist text of a familiar kind. Its distinction is that it extends the same analysis to caste and property, vindicating Warren's claim that sexism, casteism, and the exploitation of nature share one "logic of domination" (Warren). The masculine characters embody that logic in complementary modes. Pappachi's is the violence of the thwarted patriarch, beating his wife with a brass vase and his daughter with riding crops of rage. Chacko's is subtler and therefore more instructive: he expropriates through language and law. Mammachi founds and runs the pickle factory; Chacko, returning from Oxford, informs her that she is merely the "sleeping partner" and refers to the factory as "my factory, my pineapples, my pickles" (Roy 57) possession performed in pronouns before it is enforced in law. His declaration that Ammu has no *locus standi* completes the pattern: within a single family, women's labour is absorbed, women's claims are voided, and both operations are dressed in the neutral vocabulary of partnership and standing.

The same ledger that records "more rice, for the price of a river" records Velutha. A Paravan and an "Untouchable," Velutha is the factory's most skilled worker carpenter, mechanic, the man who actually makes things run and Mammachi pays him less than she would pay a Touchable carpenter for identical work (Roy 77), reasoning from caste as the barrage-builders reasoned from votes. Mukherjee's account of uneven development names the economy at work here: in the postcolonial ecologies Roy describes, the cheapening of nature and the cheapening of subordinated human labour are one process, not two (Mukherjee). Velutha's fate confirms the identification at the level of plot. The novel's transgressive love affair Ammu and Velutha, the disinherited woman and the untouchable man is consummated by the river and destroyed by the social order; the History House on the river's far bank, where the lovers meet and where Velutha is beaten to death, later becomes a five-star heritage hotel, its lawn manicured, its river already dying. Every element of the novel's ending is thus ecofeminist in construction: the woman, the untouchable, and the river are broken by the same hands in the same season, and the site of their breaking is redeveloped for tourism. What the Kunhis call nature's muted voice (Kunhi and Kunhi) speaks here through structure: Roy does not need to state the identity of the three victims' oppressor, because the plot has already demonstrated it.

It is in this light that the novel's women–nature associations must be read. Rahel is shadowed by her grandfather's moth; Ammu shares her biography with a river; the earth itself is offered to the twins as a woman. A naïve reading would conclude that Roy essentialises that she, too, sees women as nature. The structure of the novel forbids the conclusion. Every association between a woman and a natural thing in *The God of Small Things* is either produced by a patriarch (Pappachi's moth, Chacko's Earth Woman) or produced by shared victimhood (Ammu and the Meenachal, broken by the same order). The novel dramatises Ortner's cultural equation while exposing its machinery, and in doing so it performs the precise task Gaard assigns to ecofeminist critique: revealing that the ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature and the ideology which authorises oppressions of gender, caste, and class are the same ideology (Gaard 1).

Conclusion

This paper set out to answer a specific question: by what narrative means does *The God of Small Things* fuse its ecological and its feminist critiques? Three findings emerge. First, the fusion is formal before it is thematic. The novel's poetics of the small announced in its title, calibrated on its opening page, and sustained in its naturalist catalogues applies one and the same quality of attention to non-human lives and to socially diminished human lives, so that the reader learns to perceive moths, rivers, women, and untouchables within a single economy of value. Second, the novel's central parallels are constructed as shared biographies rather than asserted resemblances: Ammu and the Meenachal are given the same temporal architecture, the same doubleness of tenderness and rage, and the same death by administration, so that each renders the other legible. Third, the novel consistently attributes the woman–nature association to its patriarchs Pappachi's moth, Chacko's Earth Woman,

the misheard law of "Locusts Stand I" thereby dramatising the association as an instrument of domination rather than an essential truth. Read against the frameworks of d'Eaubonne, Gaard, Warren, and Shiva, *The God of Small Things* emerges not simply as a novel that contains ecofeminist themes, as prior criticism has amply shown (Anand; Kunhi and Kunhi; Mukherjee), but as a novel whose narrative technique *is* an ecofeminist argument: an education, sentence by sentence, in attending to the small and an indictment, plot line by plot line, of the Big order that prices rivers in rice, women in standing, and men in caste. To Meeker's question — whether literature adapts us to the world or estranges us from it Roy's novel returns an answer that is also a demand: adaptation begins when the small things become visible, and visibility is precisely what her prose refuses to let the reader withhold.

References

Anand, Divya. "Inhabiting the Space of Literature: An Ecocritical Study of Arundhati Roy's *God of Small Things* and O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak*." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2005, pp. 95–108, https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/12.2.95.

d'Eaubonne, Françoise. *Le Féminisme ou la mort*. Pierre Horay, 1974.

Gaard, Greta, editor. *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*. Temple University Press, 1993.

Glotfelty, Cheryll, and Harold Fromm, editors. *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, 2010.

Kunhi, Rukhaya M., and Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi. "An Ecocritical Perspective of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *SAGE Open*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017712767.

Meeker, Joseph W. *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974.

Mukherjee, Upamanyu Pablo. *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 67–87.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. 1997. Penguin Books India, 2002.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*. Zed Books, 1988.

Tickell, Alex. *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*. Routledge, 2007.

Warren, Karen J. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1990, pp. 125–146.