

## **Dialectical Interplay of Anthropocentric and Eco-centric Worldviews in Allan Sealy's The Everest Hotel: A Calendar**

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### **Abstract:**

The Himalayan ecosystem, with its beautiful mountain ranges and Valleys captivate the imagination of many creative writers. Most of the writers among these use this natural setting just as a backdrop for the aesthetic appeal, while in many literary works, these natural components find more value. This ongoing study is an investigation of the values imparted on the ecological world and the interplay between anthropocentric and eco-centric perspectives as manifested in Allan Sealy's fiction, *The Everest Hotel*. The anthropocentric viewpoint prioritizes human needs and values. Anthropocentrism believes that humans are the most important or central entity in the world. It places humans above nature, viewing the environment mainly in terms of how it benefits humans, in contrast to the eco-centric viewpoint which highlights the inherent value of all life forms and ecosystems. Eco-centrism is the belief that nature has intrinsic value, independent of its usefulness to humans. It places the ecosystem as a whole (plants, animals, water, land, and humans) at the centre of moral concern. Literature acts as a dialogic arena where these contrasting ideologies engage, critique, and evolve, and this research presents the argument that environmental literature operates dialectically, not simply opposing these worldviews but rather synthesizing them into a more comprehensive ecological awareness that harmonizes humans and non-humans world.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Anthropocentrism, Eco-centrism, Dialectical interplay, Interconnectedness.

## Introduction

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established in 1995, provided a summary and articulated that, ‘The evidence indicates that there is a noticeable human impact on global climate’ (McKibben, 2003). The extraordinary influence of humanity on the climate has profoundly changed the ecological conditions of the planet, resulting in what is referred to as “the end of nature” (McKibben, 2003). The end of nature signifies the de-natured state of the Earth, recognizing the profound effects of human activity on the biosphere. Human interference is apparent in the rising levels of carbon dioxide and other harmful greenhouse gases, driven by “the quest for warm homes, perpetual economic growth, and agricultural productivity that would liberate most of us from farming” (McKibben, 2003, 48). These activities have led to a dramatic increase in global temperatures, resulting in unstable climatic conditions. Bill McKibben (2003) perceives this process of terminating nature not as an ‘impersonal event,’ but as a consequence of “conscious and unconscious choices made by us humans.”

The above study clearly imparts that we are in the age of “Climate Crisis” and this global environmental crisis has intensified debates between anthropocentric exploitation and ecocentric conservation. Literature offers a unique space for representing this conflict and envisioning alternatives. This proposed study will explore the dialectical interaction of this research’s two main thematic concerns: anthropocentric exploitation and ecocentric preservation, in Allan Sealy’s *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998). Situated in a fictional town named Drummondganj, within the delicate Himalayan ecosystem, the novel illustrates the complex relationship between humanity and the natural world, wherein ecological vulnerability reflects a deterioration in moral and spiritual values. The Himalayan ecosystem is very famous for its flora, fauna, and natural components and there remains a constant interaction between humans and them. The study, then, is an attempt to unpack the attitude of humans towards the natural world as both anthropocentric and eco-centric, not merely in

opposition, but in dialectical relation, which synthesises the oppositions leading to a comprehensive ecological awareness and sustainable development.

Literary criticism, in general, explores the relationship between texts, authors, and the world, and the world is closely linked to society and its social structures. In the same way, ecocriticism looks at the entire world and its ecosystems, focusing on how literature connects with the earth, culture, and nature. It studies both the biological aspects of the planet and the cultural dimensions of writing, showing how literature reflects and shapes our understanding of the environment and ecological life. Ecocriticism developed as a discipline in reaction to environmental issues. It assesses literature and concepts based on their responses to ecological emergencies. It takes an earth-centred approach that examines the treatment of nature in literature. “Ecological criticism shares the idea that human culture is connected to the physical world, which is affecting it and being affected by it... as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman (Glotfelty).”

Researchers have conducted various studies on the interplay of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. Gautama Karmakar et al., in their research paper (2017), make readers understand the ongoing relationship between humanity and the environment and allow one to observe the state of nature and the environment within a transitional ecological equilibrium. Xue Ye, in his paper (2020), talks about how human beings must recognize the interconnectedness between the world’s biotic and abiotic components, thereby developing appropriate attitudes towards them. Consistently recalling human beings’ dialectical role as both the master and servant of the universe at once: as the master, they guide the world, and as the servant, they contribute to it, aiming for the improvement of both themselves and others. By understanding their integral role within the world, individuals perceive the eco-centric reality and view the world with a sense of balance, existing within it while ensuring they do not harm nature.

Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and polyphony describe the novel as a space of multiple interacting voices. In a dialogic text, meaning arises through the interaction of diverse perspectives, rather than from a single, controlling authorial view. Polyphony literally means "many voices," and refers to the presence of numerous independent characters who express their own worldviews and moral positions. In his 1996 paper 'The Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight', M. McDowel asserts that "applying a dialogic approach to landscape literature can facilitate an examination of the ecological relationships among all elements of the landscape, including humans." The research explores and analyses how literary texts portray and reconcile the interplay between nature and culture, nature and humanity, as well as nature and the environment.

One of the prevalent environmental ethical dilemmas in developing nations concerns the dialectical tension between anthropocentrism and eco-centrism. Influenced by certain religious and socio-political ideologies, segments of society tend to assert dominance over nature, disregarding the intrinsic worth of flora, fauna, and ecological systems. Conversely, there exists an emerging consciousness that upholds a nature-centric worldview, recognizing the inherent value of all non-human entities, independent of their utility to human civilization. Allan Sealy's novel *The Everest Hotel* (1998) explores this duality, simultaneously portraying the anthropocentric tendencies of their culture while advocating for a more ecocentric and harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. The study will show how the novel engages in a dialectical interplay between anthropocentric and eco-centric worldviews, fostering an evolving ecological consciousness that transcends binary oppositions.

### **Defining Anthropocentrism and Eco-centrism**

'Anthropocentrism' refers to those ideologies that fundamentally consider humanity as the

pivot of the whole existence. It is also very much understood that the backbone of Western culture and modern Western science rests on the concept of anthropocentrism. According to this view, man is the most important as well as the most precious creature in the whole world. Environmentalists argue that the deterioration of the environment occurs as a fitting consequence of this concept. Anthropocentrism is derived from ancient Greek, in which the word 'Anthropos' is the equivalent of 'human being' while 'Kentron' stands for 'Centre'. Anthropocentrism is that viewpoint of nature whereby nature is mainly measured in terms of human utility (instrumental value), that is, it is an object of study, control, and subsequent utilization for the benefit of humanity. Anthropocentrism is deeply entwined in the evolution of Western philosophy, religion, and industrialization. It has been established that this viewpoint is one of the major causes of the exploitative nature of mankind towards nature. In reaction to the destructive aftermaths of such an anthropocentric worldview, a profound critique has been initiated by deep ecology, asserting that the problem of the environment is rooted, not in industrial or economic systems as such, but in the underlying philosophical base of human thought itself. This implies a shift towards a radically different worldview, that is, 'eco-centrism', the translocation of values from man to nature as a whole.

In eco-centrism, the emphasis is put on the intrinsic/inherent value of all components of the ecosystem, be it plants, animals, or other nonhuman forms of life in the environment. Every ecological life form is considered equal and given the same value as humans. The value of all such entities is acknowledged regardless of human use or awareness of them. Such a shift towards a nature-centered and nonhuman-centered system of values represents a radical attempt by deep ecology to change human attitudes and perceptions of nature from one of domination and exploitation to a humble coexistence and reciprocity with nature.

**Observation of Anthropocentric Worldviews in *The Everest Hotel***

Irwin Allan Sealy is an Anglo-Indian writer and novelist born in Allahabad and residing currently in Dehradun. His fourth novel, *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar*, was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1998. Written against the backdrop of logging and deforestation, the construction of a huge dam, the Chipko movement, the novel is about a young woman, Ritu, a nun, making a new life at Drummondganj, a small town in the foothills of the Himalayas. She moves to this town, Drummondganj, where people live in co-existence with nature, to work as a caretaker to look after the people living in a hotel now turned into a shelter home named 'Everest Hotel', especially ninety-year-old Immanuel Jed, the owner of the hotel. Life of Ritu, along with the sisters Perpetua, Cecilia, Neha, etc and other inhabitants of the shelter home, such as Goongi, Brij, Jed, Miss Sampson, etc., are in constant interaction with the non-human world. In the anthropocentric perspective, humans are regarded as subjects, while nonhumans are viewed as objects. This viewpoint positions humans as the central or normative reference point. The natural environment is perceived as existing solely in relation to humans, aimed at fulfilling their requirements. It argues that the value of others, such as animals and plants, should be recognized only on the functional and instrumental basis that they are useful to humans:

“Clay pits surround a brick kiln whose furnace will shortly make a hot day hotter. The scrubby acacias that overhang the ditch are too few to warrant cutting down and carrying to the furnace” (Sealy 15).

The description of the landscape with a kiln and furnace that uses tree logs as its fuel reflects the attitude of humans and their policies of neo-liberal development, which counts non-humans(trees) as objects to be used as instruments. This neo-liberal economic development paradigm, grounded in an anthropocentric and economically driven worldview, fails to recognise the intrinsic value of nature—that is, the inherent worth of ecosystems, species, and

natural processes independent of their usefulness to humans. It overlooks the life-supporting functions that natural systems perform, such as oxygen production, water purification, soil fertility, and climate regulation, all of which sustain life on Earth. By excluding these ecological values from the economic valuation system, the model reduces nature to a mere instrument for human profit and consumption.

The reference to a built dam that has displaced Brij and his family, along with several villagers of a low-lying area: "... And they have built a big dam in the hills; you must have heard" (Sealy 36), indicates how this paradigm values nature as a source to be extracted.

This research also investigates the extensive employment of animal imagery in *The Everest Hotel* and their study in order to unveil the relationship between humans and nature, as the physical world collectively includes plants, animals, and landscapes. The novel meticulously provides a multi-dimensional portrayal of animals to highlight the anthropocentric viewpoint inherent in this narrative. The analysis encompasses various animal references, such as ants, dogs, goats, birds, and others. The detailed depiction of animals within the text illustrates numerous traits of anthropocentrism through the application of animal imagery:

They stop at the byre to greet Thapa's Buffalo, a black hulk with great glistening eyes and patches of pink around its nostrils. Our milk supply, Perpetua says (Sealy 41)

While people recognise the significance of animals in their daily lives, they often regard them as mere commodities. The mention of buffalo as a provider or supplier of milk to humans reflects an anthropocentric worldview in which the natural world is seen as something entirely in relation to humans to serve their needs. This portrayal of buffalo within *The Everest Hotel* throws light on the question of domesticity. The domestication of animals primarily serves human interests. Also in the novel, some of the other characters are in constant interaction with animals, and their interaction with the animals (a part of the environmental/natural world)

depicts the inequity between human and non-human worlds.

Cruelty towards animals also expresses the anthropocentric attitude of human beings in extremity. There is an incident of the sacrificial ritual of a goat in the cemetery which is adjacent to the Everest Hotel building, where Sealy, through the ritual, portrayed the self-centred egoism of humans. Inge, a German woman coming to Drummondganj to inquire about his dead uncle, finds him buried in Everest cemetery and decides to build a tombstone for his grave. The mention of Inge and sacrificial ritual of goat for tomb reflects human precedence and superiority over the non-human world:

He winces at the memory of it. The great black beast clambering of the perch, curious, even eager [...] Disappointed at his fellow conspirators. Humans after all. (Sealy 204)

### **Observation of Eco-centric impulses in The Everest Hotel**

The pressing environmental crisis we face today necessitates a more profound interaction with nature that transcends anthropocentric views. Anna Grear, an American human rights activist and environmentalist, in her work (2015) employs a deconstructive critique of anthropocentrism by examining the foundational structure of the human subject (Anthropos). Grear argues that to dismantle anthropocentrism effectively, it is crucial to scrutinize not only its explicit assumptions but also the underlying hierarchical and structural presuppositions (such as prioritizing humans over non-humans and associating legal subjectivity exclusively with humanity) that sustain it. The objective is to achieve an ethical re-structuring that transcends human-centred law and recognises nonhuman agency. Eco-centrism thus refers to the view that the world is constituted as ‘an intrinsically dynamic interconnected web where there are no completely separate entities and no definitive boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, or the human and the nonhuman.’ It also becomes evident that an eco-centric

viewpoint entails a deeper comprehension of both human and nonhuman objects and their interrelations, thereby questioning humanity's ingrained beliefs regarding its superiority and the distinctions between human and nonhuman.

The novel presents characters by exploring their formative relationships or connections with non-human entities, thereby positioning these entities not merely as background elements but as dynamic agents that influence human identity and consciousness. For example, when Ritu introduces Sister Neha as “a young nun of her tribe from the village up in the line of forest” (Sealy 18), it clearly imparts that the humans are not a separate category but are intertwined with non- humans as a coexisting category.

Additionally, the dichotomy between nature and culture is challenged by Deep Ecology, a branch of environmental philosophy which critiques this dualistic framework present in Western thought (such as Culture/Nature, Signifier/Signified, Self/World, Subject/Object, and Internal/External) for their role in exacerbating environmental crisis. Instead of these binary oppositions, proponents of Deep Ecology call for a profound reconceptualisation and re-identification of humanity in relation to the biosphere that promotes an eco-centric framework of values and rights. An eco-centric value system would treat all forms of life as equal, thereby dissolving the distinctions between humans and nonhumans, which are accurately represented as binaries. In Allan Sealy's *The Everest Hotel* (1998), the delicate balance between humans and non-humans unfolds within the quiet slopes of Drummondganj, where the natural world is not merely a backdrop but a living participant in the story. The novel blurs the line between sentience and silence, between human ambition and the stillness of the non-human realm. The decaying hotel becomes a microcosm of a world where plants creep and grow; birds echo songs; and time(year) itself moves at the rhythm of cyclical seasonal mist and wind rather than human clocks and calendar. Sealy's narrative suggests that humans are not masters of this space but co-dwellers having the same value, sharing the same fragile environment:

Everest stretches below her. The gate with its bougainvillea, put back by Thapa, the gravel drive the portico. Bamboo creaking in the corner by other gate as the sun clear the topmost leaves. She follows [...] lychee groove, the old mango, a row of Chinese orange trees. At the boundary mature silver oaks, jacaranda, rosewood. A majestic silk cotton with upstart eucalyptus crowding it. (Sealy 58)

In the novel, Sealy locates the narrative in non-anthropocentric, arboreal time where every plant, animal, mountain, forest, river etc., holds as much agency as the human characters who struggle to make sense of their own impermanence. Through the intermingling of human frailty and non-human endurance, *The Everest Hotel* reminds us that equality in coexistence is not a matter of dominance or intellect, but of shared belonging within the vast, breathing continuity of life.

The novel also reveals how the agencies of nature are at work in human lives, which shape human emotions, decisions, and destinies. Nature is not a passive background or a mere decor for human narratives but a living and breathing entity that reacts with human consciousness. Therefore, it is the duty of writers to represent nature as a separate entity that exists independently, with its own tempo, will, and modes of expression, which cannot be easily accessed by human Understanding. In the novel, Sealy brings out how nature itself becomes a source of resistance and transformation. The mist that surrounds the mountains, snow that covers all human presence there, and cyclic seasons that establish human moods in a particular place, all this brings out how nature denies being bound by human definitions. The novel thus becomes a dialogue between human and non-human realms, where nature itself undermines human efforts to define and assign meaning to it.

Within the discipline of ecocriticism, Queer Ecology offers a fascinating and broad viewpoint on eco-centric principles that transcends its foundational elements. At its inception, Queer

Ecology arose as a movement designed to contest traditional views of sexuality in relation to the natural environment, while also striving to dismantle the erroneous separation between nature and culture. Nevertheless, Queer Ecology goes beyond this initial foundation; it establishes a framework for comprehending ecocentrism as a conceptual system that highlights processes, connections, and contextuality. Considering that identity is in the eye of the beholder, Queer Ecology effectively obscures the lines between human and nonhuman entities. Consequently, living organisms are perceived as an intricate network, a web of connections that defy traditional limits. These connections are fundamentally rooted in interdependence, closeness, and the 'touchy-feely ideologies' of embeddedness and relationality. As human beings navigate this network, they become decentered entities, and due to the nature of interdependence, differences arise. Each entity brings unique contributions; nothing is completely self-identical. This perspective encourages humans to embrace strangeness and promote ecological coexistence. In the novel (Sealy 76-77), the description of singing of bird from the bamboo clumps along with the description of humans labouring their way and description of cemetery and graveyard around the settlement with streams, trees and forests in same contextual perspective does show the entanglement and connection of human and non-human life forms in a shard web of existence in an ecosystem.

The novel of Sealy upsets the human-centric view of the world, which positions humanity as the focal point of existence. The novel also makes clear just how provisional and limited human language and thinking really are when it comes to grasping the full extent of the experience of the other, or rather, the otherness of nature. In giving agency to nature, or rather, to let nature do what it does best, namely act, transform, and shift the course of events, it is possible to come up with new ways of storytelling, not as an act of human dominance over otherness, but as part of a collaborative process, wherein otherness leads, or even sometimes leads the way. This is because there is agency, history, and identity to nature, which is beyond human

comprehension, and only when we admit to its power to transform our stories, our very own being, does ecological consciousness begin.

### **Interplay of binaries and ecological consciousness**

Australian ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood characterizes anthropocentrism as linked to a largely benign human-centeredness, which she terms 'inevitable anthropocentrism.' She argues that humanity is 'rooted' in human experiences that see the world differently from non-human species. Rob Boddice, furthering Plumwood's argument, proposes to critique the anthropocentric worldview as it is a political and ethical problem that needs to be rethought. From the above arguments, we can infer that anthropocentrism is inevitable in human experiences, and by critiquing anthropocentrism and exploring eco-centrism in the novel and through their very profound interconnectedness of value systems which will allow humans to achieve a more profound ecological comprehension of environment.

### **Conclusion**

Anthropocentrism, to a large extent, is very much ingrained in the materialistic human culture and experiences. Human beings cannot part away from this systemic thinking as it has become a common feature of our lived reality. Eco-centric literary text, on the other hand, with the help of imagination, tries to create a space for an alternate value system which identifies a contact; relationship; and interconnectedness between human and non-human components of an ecosystem. By portraying non-humans as a separate, independent category, this value system(world view) attaches an agentic quality to the component, giving it a value(self) on its own. The novel of Allan Sealy *The Everest Hotel* in a very subtle way is a precursor to the genre of nature writing in creative literary fiction. Sealy, with its unique narrative technique and formal structure(the novel is in cyclical form, similar to the cycle of seasons), portrays the

ecocentric value system. The Everest Hotel shows the connection, contact, and relationship between humans and nature in everyday life. The novel beautifully describes the contrast between anthropocentric and eco-centric views. To sum up, the selected novel, in a way, tries to solve the binary opposition and depicts a logical interplay of both the value systems, creating a space for humans to understand their duties and responsibilities towards nature, allowing for sustainable living and development.

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