**Ecological Consciousness in Postcolonial Bangladesh: Reading *Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds***

**Abstract***Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* is a novel by Ahmed Sofa that explores the symbiosis between the human world and the natural environment, drawing from the writer’s personal experiences. The novel responds to pressing questions about the environmental crisis and proposes a mature philosophy of mutual respect that could greatly benefit Mother Earth. Sofa, deeply connected with nature and passionate about history, possessed a clear understanding of contemporary global events. His compassion for the nurturing elements of the environment is evident throughout his writing. But in a way, a delicate soul like his could not ignore the kind of carnage brought about by some material-driven world that was ravaging earth after industrialization with its indiscriminate felling of forests and the forgetting of natural harmony. The resulting imbalance leaves humanity in a state of confusion, unable to determine the path to prosperity. In this novel, Sofa ambitiously constructs a saga that explores the natural world in multiple dimensions while remaining conscious of the negative forces of modernity. In particular, this paper does a close reading of the text, drawing on existing scholarship while exploring how Sofa goes beyond creating a simple human-nature common ground to one that is productive for both humanity and nature.

**Keywords**: symbiosis, crisis, imbalance, nature, advocate, environmentalism, biophilia

**Introduction**Ahmed Sofa (1943–2001), in his fifty-eight-year life, authored eight novels addressing diverse themes such as national history, revolutionary ideals, and contemporary societal challenges in Bangladesh. Among these, *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* stands out as one of his most significant contributions to Bangla literature. Sofa also weaves a deeply philosophical exploration of environmental concerns that come from her own lived experience. But beneath is an emotional response to human-nature relationships, that communicates a weightier, existential relationship to everything there of. The way Sofa tells stories strays from classic storytelling devices by mixing strong intellectual grounds tempered with an approachable original manner. His writing manner is exceptional and it maintains the reader enthralled till the end of this novel.

Regarding Sofa’s work, National Professor Abdur Razzaq remarked that Sofa’s writings are a treasure trove, capable of creating a distinctive world in which readers can immerse themselves (Khorshed, 2001). In *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds*, Sofa connects human life to the environment through emotional, humorous, and idiosyncratic portrayals. The novel begins with Sofa’s change of residence in 1993, and its plot reflects real-life events from his middle age. These events are presented with a humorous tone that accentuates the sorrow caused by environmental degradation and human domination over nature. This humor effectively conveys the consequences of anthropogenic environmental destruction. The novel seeks to establish itself as a work of environmental literature. Mazhar (2010) confirms this in his article where he recalls that Sofa had explicitly told him that the book would be an environmental novel. The narrative explores the symbiosis between humans and the environment, and ecocriticism serves as its primary theme, subject, and agenda. This paper seeks to analyze the connection between ecocriticism and Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds through ecocritical perspectives.

Literature Review

Ahmed Sofa is primarily recognized as a rebellious, politically conscious writer and an outspoken intellectual who selflessly advocated for human rights. He was a fearless critic, unafraid to challenge the Bangladeshi intelligentsia. This paper investigates the ecocritical dimension of his environmentally focused novel, Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds, arguing that Sofa is also an ecocritical writer—a perspective that has received limited scholarly attention. Most existing studies on his works provide general commentary rather than close readings of this particular novel. Khorshed (2001) describes Sofa as "a veritable powerhouse of infinite passion and creative energy," noting his mastery over every literary field in Bangladesh—a rare accomplishment. Kamal (2009) identifies the novel as a text that portrays a bond extending from the smallest creatures to the stars, suggesting that civilization may damage this affinity, but the novel has the potential to restore it. Das (2016) observes that no other novel in Bangla literature so thoroughly explores the relationship between humans and nature. Despite being only 72 pages long, the novel vividly depicts this connection, making it a landmark work among Bangla novels of the 1990s. Mazhar (2010) regards the novel as unique, not a direct lecture on environmentalism but a philosophical call for human responsibility toward the universe. By depicting racial discrimination and class struggle among birds, Sofa draws powerful parallels between avian and human worlds. Khan (2013) calls Sofa the most important Bengali Muslim writer after Mir Mosharraf Hossain and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Elias (2013) praises Sofa’s storytelling as deeply resonant with the youth. Sharif (2013) noted Sofa’s uncompromising moral stance, asserting that bold truth-tellers like him could have made contemporary Bangladesh a better place. Ahmed (2009) described Sofa as an incredibly powerful writer and mentor, while Iqbal (2008) called him a “hundred percent literary person from head to toe.”

**Theoretical Framework**Ahmed Sofa’s *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* unfolds like a whispered confession between a troubled human and the living Earth. From the opening pages, Sofa situates us amid the concrete canyons of urban life, noting that “buildings after buildings and buildings beside that” press so closely upon the treetops that, seen from below, “trees do not seem much” (Sofa, 1996, pp. 9–10). In this inversion of perspective, Sofa signals the central tension of his narrative: the marginalization of nature in a world bent on human expansion. To read Sofa as an ecocritic is to follow Cheryll Glotfelty’s instruction that ecocriticism is not only “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” but also “an attitude of commitment to environmental praxis” (as cited in Barry, 2009, p. 239). Sofa’s novel embodies this dual mandate: it registers the wounds inflicted upon trees and birds while simultaneously modeling small, radical acts of care and attention. Throughout the 72-page text, Sofa refuses to treat flowers, trees, and birds as ornamental décor or mere symbols. Instead, each becomes an interlocutor, This teaches us how stories can restore moral accountability to landscapes that have been ravaged by human indifference.

William Rueckert had been lobbying ecological insight to literary critics long before Glotfelty ever gave the term its final form. “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism,” a A 1978 essay by Rueckert claimed that “the ecological approach demands that literature be viewed in a broader context than the literary” (Rueckert, 1978, p. 74). It is in this larger context that Sofa's story resonates: the life of an orange sapling on the edge of a Kolkata housing complex offers a window into deforestation, urban development, and what Rueckert calls “the interdependence of all living things” (Sofa, 1996, p. 74). However, Sofa is not a mere imitator of Western wilderness tropes. In this novel, we may begin to confront a space that feels especially South Asian, marked by postcolonial memory and industrial progress but also collective mourning. The living monument to the childhood friend in rural Spain, the orange tree, grows again on a city balcony—one more martyr to the spread of cement. The touching tale of Sofa, who sold his apartment for pennies to a man who promised to never harm the saplings, only to come back nearly a month later and find evidence that it had been felled in cold blood. Lawrence Buell, one of ecocriticism’s foundational figures, insists that environmental literature must emerge “in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis,” challenge anthropocentrism, and advocate for ecological justice (Buell, 2001, p. 20). Sofa’s text enacts this commitment in miniature. When he plants vegetables on his balcony and is mocked by his neighbors—only for those same neighbors to later covet his ripe tomato—he exposes our collective hypocrisy: we admire nature’s products but refuse to do the work of stewardship (Sofa, 1996, p. 15). That gentle irony carries Sofa’s ecological message without becoming didactic. He invites readers into scenes charged with humor and pathos, allowing us to recognize our own complicity. The image of a caged bird, born into captivity and incapable of feeding itself when released, reflects what Mishra (2016) calls deep ecology—“a worldview that upholds the intrinsic worth of all living beings regardless of their utility to human needs” (Sofa, 1996, p. 168). Sofa’s caged sparrow becomes a moving emblem of how human domination severs the instincts of other species—an injury not easily healed.

Unlike Romantic poets who praised unspoiled wilderness, Sofa confronts the gritty realities of urban ecosystems. He catalogs the detritus littering his courtyard—“leaf, feather-coated whole wing of hen, half rotten mouse, broken glasses, rusted metal pin, teapot’s handle, limbs broken doll—what is not there” (Sofa, 1996, p. 10). In that grotesque inventory, he forces us to reckon with our environmental negligence. This attention to the everyday junk of human life echoes Peter Barry’s (2009) observation that ecocriticism values “the non-pristine, the everyday environment, and the representations that give it meaning” (p. 254). Sofa’s prose, candid and unvarnished, contests any notion that environmental literature must dwell only in pastoral idylls.

At the same time, Sofa cultivates moments of genuine transcendence, suggesting that renewed connection with nature can heal both land and soul. When he describes an injured plant rising again under his care, he writes: “If this injured plant can rise up, then there is no reason for me to be frustrated… There is still hope. I can start my life again with a new vibe” (Sofa, 1996, p. 20). This declaration animates what Buell (2001) calls ecocriticism’s “utopian dimension,” the conviction that literature can inspire environmental recovery (p. 150). By framing the plant’s revival as a metaphor for human resilience, Sofa bridges ecological and existential renewal.

Crucially, over two decades ago, in 1996, when Bangladesh faced the often associated 'twin pressures' of liberalization and increasing climatic vulnerabilities—*Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds* came out. This fragility taught us a cosmic lesson: cyclones in the Bay of Bengal deconstructed human communities and natural systems, demonstrating how intricately interdependent they truly are. Sofa's novel does not mention these storms, but there is an urgency to his writing—an urgency that relates to the collective anxiety of a time when rising tides and falling forests are no longer abstract concepts. In his study of quotidian urban scenes, he emphasizes a key realization: environmental crises do not manifest as just some far-flung event; they are intimate, local encounters that penetrate onto balconies, backyards, and birdcages.

By localizing ecological concern, Sofa's contrary stance towards Western wilderness paradigms falls loosely in line with a more recent and emerging cadre of South Asian ecocriticism. Scholars, including Kanwar Dinesh Singh, have claimed that postcolonial ecocriticism is able to focus on land as cultural memory and a battleground. (Sofa, 1996, p. 263). Sofa's novel does not explicitly acknowledge agrarian insurgencies or environmental movements; however, it resonates with the psyche of hundreds of thousands in the country by addressing themes of encroachment and loss, which reflect their shared memory of land dispossession. That is probably also why, to a degree, Sofa's ecological story is laced with post-colonial parlance, helping to show how such capitalist development might actually stifle the native connection to land (Singh, 2019). When Barry (2009) refers to ecocritical modes, he points out that nature as a dominant theme means challenging anthropocentrism and environmental writing are considered non-fiction across creative texts. Sofa’s work exemplifies each. In Couch, nature is not so much a backdrop as the subject of this novel; anthropocentrism is continually exposed through scenes of waste, neglect, and dark comedy; and while Jesus Sofa might be a piece of fiction, his tale sounds like the truth behind the spirit of a declaration or an environmental pamphlet. The book's spare language and episodic structure contributes to the stuff of documentary urgency, reminding us that works of literary imagination have a role to play alongside science and journalism in documenting ecological injury.

Especially since it is quite possibly the very modern incarnation of Wordsworth's more romantic claim that “Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege.” (Wordsworth, n.d., ll. Which sofa 5–6 echoes the respect of Sofa, though Sofa does not want to get lost in reminiscence. Rather, he bases his spiritual practice in doing: planting, nurturing, grieving, and seeing. A balcony garden the size of a postage stamp is a tiny vignette of world care, for environmental fairness starts in one small corner with the smallest love-acts. This, Sofa intuits, precedes Val Plumwood's concept [2002] of "the everyday ethics of ecological citizenship," the notion that ethical conduct around environmental issues for her is part and parcel to quotidian acts & obligations (p. 112). Sofa does not provide neat resolutions by the novel's conclusion. The second-to-last image shows a bird in the air, reminding us that despite our own actions nature will always survive. Thus his final thought is that “a man can achieve liberation only through others” (Sofa, 1996, p. 79). and this idea includes all other beings too. So, in the self-proclaimed ranks of flowers, trees, and birds demanding release from ecological chains, Sofa introduces the quest for liberation as indistinguishable from human rights. Sofa takes a strong, non-mainstream position in that he juxtaposes romanticism with environmentalism when representing nature. It is a mechanism through which environmentalism can be communicated through his storytelling, context framing, and narrative structure. In his evocations of nature, he resonates an emotional and imaginative romanticism, pretty unimpressive to awe and even quasi-religious reverence. His environmentalism becomes apparent with his concern about ecological destruction and his support for anti-anthropocentrism.

Another of its many benefits is that at the core of it, Walkabout displays nature as what nature is. Sofa contrasts how nature is perceived by humans with the way in which nature operates on its own. We mechanize nature, using what we want and never healing/replenishing the damage. Sofa unmasks this consumerist and dominating mentality throughout the novel. He shows how people primarily consider nature in terms of its utility, revealing an unconscious disregard for the rights of the environment itself. Sofa repeatedly critiques this human-centered worldview, also known as anthropocentrism. His sorrow over environmental destruction, such as deforestation and human interference, is poignantly captured in several scenes. One notable example is when he sells his apartment at a discount to a buyer who promises to protect an orange tree—only for the tree to be cut down shortly afterward (Sofa, 1996, p. 12). In another episode, Sofa plants vegetables and is mocked by educated neighbors. However, when the vegetables thrive, these same neighbors covet the produce (Sofa, 1996, p. 15). These examples reveal the prevailing consumerist mindset: people desire nature’s products but avoid nurturing it.

Sofa vividly illustrates urban encroachment and its effects on greenery. Describing his surroundings, he writes, “There is a road beside my house. The skyline is dotted with building after building. Trees largely obscure the presence of these high-rise buildings. It's a completely different picture if it is seen from the bottom. Buildings are main here; trees do not seem much” (Sofa, 1996, pp. 9–10). This spatial inversion mirrors environmental marginalization. Sofa also critiques human luxury and sensuality as causes of environmental degradation. From deforestation to the destruction of animal habitats, Sofa mourns the exploitation of nature. Recalling the cutting down of his beloved childhood tree, “Ravi-brikhsha,” he writes, “Now everybody is afraid of the leakage of the ozone layer, but did anyone check that my heart’s ozone layer has been leaked?” (Sofa, 1996, p. 59). The emotional pain of losing a tree becomes a metaphor for broader environmental trauma. He further explores ecological displacement through bird imagery. When large ravens circle his rooftop, Sofa wonders, “A question arose in my mind, why these Ravens are coming a lot? All the villages are in famine?” (Sofa, 1996, p. 78). The imagery points to deforestation and habitat loss driving birds to urban areas in search of food. The novel also critiques the capturing and caging of birds as a form of ecological violence. Sofa notes that birds raised in captivity lose their survival instincts: “The owner caged him since his birth. It did not have to think about collecting food. Now that it is free, it cannot collect food. It did not acquire the lesson to collect food” (Sofa, 1996, pp. 66–67). Such practices, he warns, could lead to species extinction.

Sofa critiques wasteful urban life, describing the garbage found in his new home as “leaf, a feather-coated whole wing of hen, half rotten mouse, broken glasses, rusted metal pin, teapot’s handle, limbs of a broken doll—what is not there” (Sofa, 1996, p. 10). This image emphasizes human neglect of cleanliness and nature. Despite these concerns, Sofa also celebrates the healing and inspirational power of nature. In one instance, disillusioned with society’s slow progress after the Liberation War, he finds hope in a recovering plant: “If this injured plant can rise up then there is no reason for me to be frustrated. All opportunities are not closed yet. There is still hope. I can start my life again with a new vibe” (Sofa, 1996, p. 20). Nature becomes a metaphor for personal renewal. Sofa champions afforestation and ecological harmony. He plants trees and vegetables wherever he lives and believes that environmental nurturing is essential to human liberation. “Man can gain his freedom only by freeing others,” he concludes (Sofa, 1996, p. 79). He often portrays this connection in sacred terms. Observing the sky from his balcony, he writes, “I feel I have come so close to the God standing from this balcony” (Sofa, 1996, p. 10). He continues, “From here to see the earth, I have seen myself again. To see myself, I have embraced the earth” (Sofa, 1996, p. 10). This spiritual tone reflects a transcendental reverence for nature.

He believes trees carry divine energy: “This is why man has to take the help of trees one day. If man does not come to seek help from a tree, then his vitality will plot against life” (Sofa, 1996, p. 15). Nature, for Sofa, becomes both sanctuary and savior. With its exacting portraits of urban detritus, its tender accounts of green shoots pushing through concrete cracks, and its wry commentary on human hypocrisy, *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* refuses complacency. It asks us to reimagine our cities as ecosystems of mutual dependence and to treat every act of planting or protecting as an act of profound solidarity. In Sofa’s hands, a novel becomes an ecological manifesto, calling us to awaken to the living Earth beneath our feet—and to discover, in the song of a bird and the bloom of a flower, the promise of our renewal. Sofa’s novel stands as a pioneering South Asian contribution to ecocritical literature, inviting readers to inhabit a small balcony garden as if it were the whole world. By portraying trees, birds, and flowers not as metaphors but as agents of life, *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* revives what Glotfelty (as cited in Barry, 2009) calls the “undervalued genre of nature writing” (Barry, 2009, p. 239). Even in a crowded, industrialized city, Sofa suggests that literature can nurture an ethic of environmental care.

In his writing, marginalized ecological entities—trees without anyone to mourn their falling, birds losing their instincts due to domestication, plants that can recover with very little assistance—are placed at the center of literary narrative. In the process, he implicitly damns his contemporaries for their lack of environmental awareness, championing a move from anthropocentrism to an ecologically more inclusive perspective. Sofa is not idealizing nature but is respectful, curious, and reverent towards it. He reminds us of nature interfused into every ethical, emotional, and spiritual encounter and not a thing set apart from human life. This meshes perfectly with her aim of using elegant, heartfelt oral accounts to encapsulate the ecological paranoia that surged across Bangladesh in the 1990s. The novel vividly portrays the ecological dislocation against the backdrop of post-Liberation disillusionment. Instead of ends in themselves, he includes flowers, trees, and birds as active creatures with their own volition and proper standing, a quality referred to by deep ecology as intrinsic value (Mishra 2016). In a broader sense, Sofa’s *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds* provides for an environmentally critical narrative that imagines an ethical and sustainable coexistence between humans and nature. It speaks to the depths of Sofa’s environmental compassion and his annoyance with consumerist indifference, as well as his conviction that care, attention, and reciprocity form the basis of both ecological and human salvation.

Conclusion

With humans taking over, it is tempting to ignore the needs of wild creatures and environments. Ahmed Sofa resorted to a reverse process in his *Tales of Flowers, Trees, and Birds*. His observations exude beauty, life, biophilia, and symbiosis. He refuses to be passive and writes in an evocative, active language as a concerned citizen shares his message of environmental awareness with the world. He makes kings out of the flowers, trees, and birds: those natural creatures that are in fact unsung heroes of the ecosystem. As much as Sofa talks about their worth, it criticizes the current environmental concern and even appeals for a transition from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. The book deals with the environmental disaster and the importance of living in peace with nature, all told in a very original, personal way. Sofa, in turn, documents environmentalist concerns of the time in 1990s Bangladesh with a poignant narrative taking place amongst flowers, among trees, beside birds. Sofa's impassioned love for the world and her reflexive eco-critical story describe an ethical, sustainable pact that brings humanity close to earth.

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