**Ecological Consciousness in Postcolonial Bangladesh: Ahmed Sofa’s 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. However, beneath the surface lies an emotional response to human-nature relationships that conveys a deeper, existential connection to everything involved. 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 keeps the reader enthralled till the end of this novel. Performing postcolonial ecocriticism, we see that “environmentality [is] a common and foundational feature of postcolonial literature” (Mount, 2012, p. 45)—which resonates with Sofa’s embodied ecological consciousness in a postcolonial Bangladeshi setting.

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. “Sofa’s intellectual resistance remains one of the most influential cultural forces in post-liberation Bangladesh” (Rahman, 2021, p. 44). He was a fearless critic, unafraid to challenge the Bangladeshi intelligentsia. “His interventions were aimed at dismantling both political authoritarianism and cultural complacency” (Kabir & Sultana, 2020, p. 67). 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. “Sofa’s fiction demonstrates a distinctly Bangladeshi articulation of ecological consciousness” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 102). Most existing studies on his works provide general commentary rather than close readings of this particular novel. “Critical engagement with *Pushpa Brikkha Ebong Bihongo Puran* remains surprisingly sparse in Bangladeshi literary scholarship” Chowdhury, 2022, p. 58).

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. “The environmental ethic of the novel is grounded in an intimacy that transcends species boundaries” (Haque, 2020, p. 211). According to Das (2016), no other novel in Bangla literature has perhaps dissected the bond between human and nature better than Mouchak. According to Mazhar (2010), the book is exceptional; it acts not as a direct lecture on environmentalism but as a thought-provoking philosophy in the form of a wake-up call for mankind to stand responsible toward the universe. “This is environmental literature that works through affective storytelling rather than didacticism” (Bose, 2021, p. 89).

The pairing shows the racism and class struggle in birds, with Sofa drawing striking comparisons between avian and human universes. “Animal characters in Sofa’s work serve as mirrors to human social hierarchies” (Khan, 2024, p. 14). Sofa is considered by Khan (2013) to be the most significant Bengali Muslim writer since Mir Mosharraf Hossain and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Elias (2013) praises Sofa's storytelling as striking a deep chord with the youth. “His prose style blends humour, melancholy, and political urgency in ways that appeal to younger generations” (Saha, 2019, p. 134). 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” (Anwar, 2022, p. 51).

**Theoretical Framework**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). Instead, each becomes an interlocutor, This teaches us how stories can restore moral accountability to landscapes that have been ravaged by human indifference. “Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). As Lawrence Buell famously put it, the success of environmentalist efforts finally hinges not on “some highly developed technology, or some arcane new science” but on “a state of mind”: on “attitudes, feelings, images, narratives” (Buell, 2001, p. 1).

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. 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. Rueckert describes his project as an effort to “experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (Rueckert, 1996, p. 107). 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. Rob Nixon’s term “slow violence” clarifies how such urban neglect operates as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space” (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). Contemporary urban-ecology scholars likewise describe a shift from “ecology in the city” to “ecology of the city” and further toward an “ecology for and with the city” that links knowledge directly to action (Frantzeskaki et al., 2024, Introduction). 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). As Nixon asks of long‑duration harms, “How can we turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention?” (Nixon, 2011, p. 3). Recent work in environmental humanities similarly urges forms of storytelling and collaboration adequate to planetary crisis (Robin, 2018, p. 2; Ginn, 2018, p. 213). 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. In South Asian literary and cultural criticism, scholars have emphasized how environmental injustice in the region is entwined with global neoliberal processes and long afterlives of empire (Rahman, 2021, p. 2; Khan, 2024).

**Analysis**

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). 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. As postcolonial environmental humanities argues, literary texts can translate uneven, attritional harms into legible forms, mediating “the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges” posed by slow, distributed damage (Nixon, 2011, pp. 2–3). 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). 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. Environmental‑justice oriented ecocriticism has increasingly traced these links between human rights and ecological rights, especially in the global South (Ginn, 2018, pp. 213–215; Khan, 2024).

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. As Rueckert urged, the task is “to discover ways of using this renewable energy‑source [literature]” to help sustain the larger life‑systems on which we depend (Rueckert, 1996, p. 109). Recent urban‑ecology research similarly calls for “a more involved, even activist” mode that continuously links “knowledge → action → knowledge” to co‑produce just, livable cities (Frantzeskaki et al., 2024, Introduction). When discussing postcolonial ecological narratives in South Asia, Sofa’s Tales of Flowers, Trees and Birds mirrors concerns found in contemporary diasporic fiction. According to Mondol (2015), “Lahiri’s fiction locates ecological consciousness within the intimate human relationships that are reshaped by environmental disruptions” (p. 191). This perspective resonates with Sofa’s use of personal anecdote to frame environmental critique. 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. 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 verify that my heart’s ozone layer has been leaked?” (Sofa, 1996, p. 59). When large ravens circle his rooftop, Sofa wonders, “A question arose in my mind: why are these ravens coming a lot? All the villages are in famine?” (Sofa, 1996, p. 78). 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. Nixon’s question remains salient here: how to make the “long emergencies” of attritional harm legible enough to compel response (Nixon, 2011, pp. 3–4).

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). 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). 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 recent literary‑environment scholarship, this turn toward everyday urban ecologies and justice‑oriented praxis has accelerated (Frantzeskaki et al., 2024; Trexler, 2020; Dlodlo, 2024).

**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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