

An Ecopsychological Analysis of Shabnam Minwalla's *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*

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Abstract

This paper proposes to apply Theodore Roszak's ecopsychological framework which includes the traits of the ecological unconscious and ecological ego to *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street* written by Indian author Shabnam Minwalla. The novel is set in contemporary Mumbai, where a group of children form an emotional alliance to protect two ancient Bimbli trees, which were about to be cut down for urban development. Theodore Roszak's concept of the ecological unconscious describes the emotional connection between human beings and nature, while the ecological ego signifies further nurturing this connection into ecological responsibility and action.

This study analyses that the children's initial emotional bond with the trees reflects the workings of the ecological unconscious, which gradually develops into an active, cooperative defence of their natural environment that signifies the emergence of the ecological ego. The novel shows children's love for green spaces as they use spells and magic to protect nature. This novella is an example of story set in city that motivates the children to care of their environment. This paper explores the use of such stories act as Eco pedagogical tool in children's fiction. This children's fiction helps young readers develop a strong sense of responsibility toward nature.

Keywords: Ecopsychology, Children's literature, Ecopedagogy, Shabnam Minwalla, Ecocriticism, *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*.

Shabnam Minwalla is an acclaimed Indian author of urban fantasy for children. She weaves ecopsychological themes along with her storytelling. In her works like *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*, Minwalla portrays deep emotional and imaginative bonds of children with elements of their local environment, especially trees and green spaces that are threatened by urban development. This mirrors the Theodore Roszak's ecopsychological idea of the *ecological unconscious*, where individuals and especially children have an instinctive, emotional connection to the natural world. Her narrative style highlights urban children gaining ecological agency through empathy and magical thinking, despite the artificiality of city life. Her fiction becomes a space where the child's voice becomes a moral counterpoint to adult indifference, making her work a compelling one for ecopsychological inquiry and environmental pedagogy.

Shabnam Minwalla is a contemporary Indian writer whose contributions to children's and young adult literature are notable for their urban settings, strong young protagonists, and engagement with social and ethical themes. As a former journalist with *The Times of India*, Minwalla draws richly from her

experience in Mumbai, a city that frequently serves as the backdrop for her narratives. Her fiction often blends the real and the magical, making complex themes accessible to young readers. Her works include *What Maya Saw*, *The Strange Haunting of Model High School*, *Murder at Daisy Apartments*, *When Jiya Met Urmila*, and *The Shy Supergirl*. These novels combine elements of mystery, fantasy, and everyday realism to explore issues such as identity, courage, justice, and social awareness. In *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*, she constructs a narrative that invites ecocritical interpretation where children attempt to save two ancient Bimbli trees using magical spells and collective participation. This story reflects an emotional and ethical engagement with nature that aligns with Theodore Roszak's concepts of the ecological unconscious and ecological ego. This fiction contributes meaningfully to Indian children's literature by offering stories that are not only imaginative but also pedagogically valuable. Her portrayal of empowered children acting in defence of their environment supports the idea that children's literature can be a vehicle for ecological education and consciousness.

The novella *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street* penned by Shabnam Minwalla carries ecological themes with magical elements, making the book an urban fantasy. The book consisted is set in Mumbai of the children who becomes the eco warriors to prevent the bimbli trees from felling down. The kids had a belief that the supernatural elements would be of great help to them in preventing the chopping. The tree had a special place in the hearts of the kids who resided in the cosy castle in the Dorabji Street. The two girl Sarit and Nivi believed in the fairies that made the mysterious arrival of Paritosh Makhija who gave the magical substances such Mostly Ghostly and Ghosty Misty for scaring the Kotadias and Braganza. The kids persuaded Mr. Dinyar to write the horoscope in favour of them that terrified Mrs.Kotadia. This book takes up the subgenre of urban fantasy which is a blend of urban setting along with the supernatural usage.

The children's strong emotional attachment to the Bimbli trees in *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street* reflects the ecopsychological belief that nature plays a critical role in psychological well-being. As Janine Ungvarsky explains, ecopsychology "posits that a connection to the natural world is essential for emotional and psychological well-being" (Ungvarsky). In *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*, the children's fight to protect the Bimbli trees is not merely an act of physical conservation, but also an emotional and psychological one. Their sense of belonging, imagination, and community is rooted in this small natural space. This aligns with ecopsychological theory, which posits that connection to the natural world is essential for emotional and psychological well-being. When the trees are threatened by urban development, the children experience deep distress, a reaction that illustrates the psychological damage that environmental degradation can inflict, especially on those still closely bonded with nature.

Theodore Roszak's theory of *ecopsychology* helps us understand closely that the human mind is connected to nature. He believed that human beings share a natural bond with the environment that was innate in them, which he called the ecological unconscious. This bond is weakened due to leading to stress and environmental damage. Roszak also introduced the idea of the ecological ego, which means humans will have sense of care towards the environment. In this view, it is understood that emotional health comes not only depends upon the good relationships with people but also from a strong, respectful relationship with nature. This theory is useful in studying children's fiction set in cities, where nature is often hidden or in danger. The children's efforts to protect the two Bimbli trees within the Cosy Castle illustrates both the reawakening of the ecological unconscious and the emergence of an ecological ego grounded with care and responsibility. Ecopsychology thus offers a powerful lens to understand stories that reflects the trauma of ecological disconnection and the imaginative possibilities of establishing harmony with nature.

Children's literature holds immense potential to serve as a site for ecological awakening, especially when rooted in the emotional experiences of young protagonists. Greta Gaard, in her foundational work on ecopedagogy, states that environmental literature for children fosters affective engagement, critical inquiry, and ethical action (Gaard 325). This perspective aligns with Theodore Roszak's concept of the

ecological unconscious, which proposes that children's natural emotional bond with the environment can lead to a deeper sense of ecological responsibility. In *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*, Shabnam Minwalla draws on this emotional depth by portraying children who form a meaningful connection with the Bimbli trees. Their sorrow, vivid dreams, and strong emotional resistance to environmental destruction reflect Gaard's understanding of ecopedagogical fiction as a space where the ecological ego begins to take shape. The novel becomes an example for the urban fantasy which can serve as an important medium for environmental awareness and emotional reconnection with the natural world.

Lawrence Buell, in his influential work *The Environmental Imagination*, highlights the power of literature in shaping environmental awareness and ethical response to nature. He argues that "if a work is environmentally oriented, the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 7). This framework aligns closely with Shabnam Minwalla's *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street*, where the Bimbli trees are not just background elements but vital to the children's emotional lives and moral actions. The trees are central to the story's imaginative and ethical energy, driving the characters to create spells, summon fairies, and resist adult apathy. Buell further asserts that environmentally oriented works tend to encourage ethical response to the environment by awakening sensibility through imaginative experience. Minwalla's blend of urban realism and fantasy invites young readers to see trees not just as objects but as beings worthy of care and defence. By placing the natural world at the centre of the children's adventure and emotional growth, the novel reflects Buell's idea of environmental imagination, the use of narrative to reshape human perception of and relationship with the natural world. This work entertains and educates, helping young readers develop ecological identity and ethical concern in the following incidents stated below.

When Sarita comes to know that trees will cut down by the people, she wailed louder, "How can they?" she cried. "The bimbli trees are lovely. They are our friends. I know they have feelings. It would be murder, it really would" (Minwalla 52). Sarita's outcry reflects a profound moment of eco psychological insight within the narrative. According to Theodore Roszak's theory, this moment showcases the awakening of the ecological unconscious. A deep and suppressed emotional affinity between humans and the natural world. Sarita's words show that she does not view the trees merely as objects or scenery, but as sentient companions possessing feelings and deserving of moral consideration. Her use of the term "murder" suggests that harming the trees is akin to an act of violence against living beings, indicating a rupture in the natural order that her psyche intuitively resists. This intense emotional response marks the beginning of an eco psychological journey from recognising nature's value to a deeper, ethical commitment.

Sarita once said that, "Whenever I'm upset or confused, all I have to do is to go to the garden and I feel calm. Venu, you're not like the other boys. If you just try, you will see it," (Minwalla 65). She exemplifies the ecological insight that aligns closely with Theodore Roszak's concept of the ecological unconscious. According to Roszak, the ecological unconscious is a buried psychological connection between the human psyche and the natural world a source of emotional balance and identity. Sarita's ability to find calm and clarity simply by being in the garden suggests that nature functions as an emotional regulator and healer. This reveals a subconscious bond of Sarita with green spaces that goes beyond utility and beauty. Her invitation to Venu suggests that this ecological awareness is accessible to others if they are willing to reconnect with the natural world through presence and sensitivity. This scene marks a key moment of eco psychological awakening, illustrating that emotional well-being and ecological connection are interdependent.

The incident which shows Nivi's recurring nightmare "She dreamt of the garden gate opening in the middle of the night and black shadows sneaking inside, carrying sharp and shining axes. Then she dreamt of a wand floating above the bimbli trees" (Minwalla 80). can be interpreted through the lens of Theodore Roszak's ecopsychological theory. According to Roszak, the ecological unconscious represents often the

repressed emotional and psychological bond between humans and the natural world. Nivi's dreams reflect not only anxiety about the physical destruction of the Bimbli trees, but also a psychic disturbance triggered by the threat to a space that has emotional and spiritual significance. The black shadows and axes symbolize the destructive forces of urbanization and human disconnection from nature, invading their place that is otherwise a safe and sacred space.

The appearance of the wand floating above the trees introduces a counter-force of an intuitive, magical response that aligns with children's growing sense of ecological agency. This element foreshadows the emergence of the ecological ego, where emotional connection to nature transforms into imaginative and moral action. Nivi's subconscious recognizes both the threat and the possibility of resistance, suggesting that nature is not only under siege but also has allies willing to defend it. Her nightmare becomes a psychological battleground between environmental degradation and ecological hope, reflecting Roszak's idea that healing the psyche and healing the planet are interconnected processes.

The line "I'm just so glad we came here. To Mumbai, to Colaba and most of all to No. 13 Cosy Castle. Sarita returned her smile. 'Me too', she said. 'Life would be perfect if we could only save our trees and ditch that dull party this evening.'" (Minwalla 121). illustrates the early emergence of the ecological ego in the child characters. According to Roszak, the ecological ego represents a stage of psychological development where one's identity expands to include a sense of moral responsibility for the natural world. In this moment, Sarita and her friend Nivi reveal that their emotional priorities are shifting from conventional urban pleasures like a party toward an ethical connection with nature. Their desire to save the trees rather than attend a social event reflects a conscious valuing of ecological well-being over societal norms and desires. This decision marks a movement beyond passive appreciation of nature into active ecological agency, which is a key characteristic of the ecological ego. The trees are not just objects in the background but are treated as companions whose fate is deeply tied to the children's sense of joy, purpose, and right action. Their identity is not formed in isolation but through interconnectedness with the living environment. This shows that the urban children can still cultivate ecological maturity within limited green spaces.

Shabnam Minwalla's *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street* is an engaging tale with children's imagination and adventure, it acts as a unique tool for ecological education. The actions of the characters were fuelled by care and moral responsibility. Crucially, the story presents these values in a language that is accessible and engaging for young readers. Through humor, fantasy, and mystery, Minwalla communicates important ecological messages without being didactic. This supports the hypothesis that *The Six Spellmakers of Dorabji Street* serves as an effective medium for conveying ecological values to the younger generation. In a world where children are increasingly distanced from the natural environment, this story reminds readers that even small urban green spaces can be sacred and worth protecting it. By empowering child protagonists to take environmental action, the novella encourages young readers to develop empathy for nature and a sense of ecological responsibility. Therefore, Minwalla's urban fantasy becomes not only a tale of magic and mischief but also a subtle ecological guide that kindles the love for the mother Earth and a belief that even children can make a difference. In line with Eco psychological theory, the novella proves that reconnecting with nature can be both a healing act and a path toward a more sustainable future.

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