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Eco-Crime and Waste Politics: An Ecocritical Analysis of Sacred Games

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Abstract

This article analyzes the novel *Sacred Games* using ecocritical perspectives to investigate the connections between environmental damage, urban waste, and ecological harm with crime, authority, and post-colonial contexts. Situated in the expansive city of Mumbai, *Sacred Games* uncovers a metropolis influenced equally by its harmful infrastructures and contaminated sacred areas as by its illegal activities and spiritual imitations. By featuring characters such as Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde, the story highlights the ecological repercussions of rampant urbanization, corruption, and ritual exploitation, providing a fertile ground for exploring “slow violence” and the politics surrounding environmental apathy. By framing the city as a living, polluted entity, the paper adds to a developing ecocritical conversation that highlights environmental injustice as crucial to modern literary narratives.

Keywords: Urban ecology, Eco-crime, Toxic environments, Waste politics

Introduction: Mapping Ecological Decline in Postcolonial Mumbai

In *Sacred Games*, Vikram Chandra presents a striking depiction of Mumbai as a city facing ecological disaster, where modernity clashes with deterioration and the urban expanse stands as a tangible representation of waste, toxicity, and environmental disregard. Rob Nixon observes that “the violence wrought by climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills, and the environmental aftermath of war takes place gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction” (Nixon 2). Rather than serving merely as a backdrop for crime, the city acts as a pivotal figure, with its roads, impoverished areas, and drainage systems creating an ecological structure characterized by exploitation, aggression, and deterioration.

Slow Violence and the Urban Ecology of Sacred Games

In *Sacred Games*, Mumbai represents an ecosystem influenced by what Nixon describes as “slow violence,” a form of environmental damage that is gradual, unnoticed, and unevenly distributed. Slum regions such as Gopalmath and Dharavi are portrayed as hazardous areas inundated with waste, open sewage, and polluted air. These spaces, primarily inhabited by the urban poor, showcase the expendability of specific groups and the environments they occupy.

Chandra’s story employs physical deterioration as a symbol of ethical and institutional decline. The roads that Sartaj Singh patrols are filled with leaking sewage lines, chemical waste, and piles of trash. Urban planning is corrupted, and the infrastructure that exists favors elite consumption instead of ecological harmony.

Sacred Spaces and Contaminated Environments: Religion as Environmental Allegory

Religious and cultural sites are equally affected by environmental destruction. Temples and shrines, enclosed by trash and contaminated water, symbolize the merging of the sacred with the mundane. Through this, Chandra critiques ritual purity amid material contamination, revealing how religious displays mask environmental negligence.

By framing the sacred within decay, *Sacred Games* exposes how the pursuit of spiritual transcendence coexists with and even perpetuates material pollution.

Eco-Crime and State Complicity in Environmental Degradation

The novel examines how state neglect and criminal governance shape Mumbai's harmful landscapes. Politicians, criminals, and builders collaborate to divide Mumbai into zones of control, often endangering the environment. Construction debris, harmful runoff, and factory waste are not anomalies—they are sanctioned by corrupt systems that commercialize land and obscure ecological harm. "The garbage piles were already smoking, the day's heat pulling stink up into the sky... plastic, banana peels, crushed offerings to the gods" (*Sacred Games* 295).

By portraying the city as a site of ecological harm, *Sacred Games* evolves noir fiction into eco-noir, where dirt and dysfunction become political truths.

Gendered Ecologies: Ecofeminism and the Politics of Vulnerability

Chandra's novel also exposes how environmental degradation is gendered. Female figures such as Jojo Mascarenas and the trafficked women inhabit dangerous spaces filled with refuse and pollution. Their bodies become metaphors for ecological vulnerability. As Greta Gaard notes, "Women's bodies are often the first sites to bear the consequences of ecological destruction, due to both biological and sociopolitical vulnerabilities" (Gaard 293).

Through an ecofeminist lens, these depictions reveal how patriarchal systems exploit both women and nature, reinforcing hierarchies of power, class, and gender.

Narrative Form as Ecological Expression: Noir Aesthetics and Structural Decay

Sacred Games uses fragmented narration and noir aesthetics to mirror environmental decay. The nonlinear structure, alternating between Sartaj's investigation and Gaitonde's monologue, reflects ecological disintegration. As Timothy Clark observes, "Narrative fragmentation reflects ecological disintegration; the structure of the novel itself becomes a register of planetary crisis" (Clark 75).

This fragmented storytelling transforms the novel into a literary ecosystem of waste and disorder—its form embodying the environmental chaos it critiques.

Conclusion: Ecocritical Resistance and the Future of Urban Ecology in Fiction

Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* offers a complex portrayal of Mumbai as a city defined by ecological decline, infrastructural corruption, and spiritual decay. By combining noir aesthetics with ecocritical and ecofeminist perspectives, the novel reveals that environmental degradation is central—not peripheral—to postcolonial urban experience. Through its polluted cityscapes and fragmented narrative, *Sacred Games* transforms ecological harm into a literary language of resistance and revelation.

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