Engendering Eco-cosmopolitanism: Anthropocene and Environmental Sustainability in Rupi Kaur’s Select Poems

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Abstract — The world is no longer a lonely place. All living and non-living organisms are interconnected. Especially global crises like climate change alarm people to be united and make them realise that the world is one despite the existence of individual nations. Thus, the climate crisis needs to be tackled through global solidarity. If not, the earth will dwindle and diminish soon. The Anthropocene is a critical crisis that needs to be tackled soon. This literature paper examines the ecological poems of the Indo-Canadian writer Rupi Kaur and her ecological poems are taken as they are not only aesthetic in nature but easily accessible, and any common man can understand the poems. It is analysed through the theoretical framework of eco-cosmopolitanism, and how they contribute to a deeper understanding of the Anthropocene and environmental sustainability is seen. By analyzing Kaur’s use of language, imagery, and themes in her poetry, this paper argues that her work fosters an eco-cosmopolitan perspective that acknowledges the interconnectivity between human and non-human entities, and the need for collective action towards ecological preservation. Moreover, this paper explores how Kaur’s poetry challenges dominant anthropocentric narratives that have led to environmental degradation, and instead highlights the agency and subjectivity of the natural world. Through this analysis, this paper seeks to engender a renewed sense of eco-cosmopolitanism that can inspire a more sustainable future for all.

Key Words — Anthropocene, Earth, Eco-cosmopolitanism, Rupi Kaur, Ecological poems.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Anthropocene, a new geological epoch, has been marked by significant human intervention in the Earth's natural systems, resulting in the current environmental crisis. The ecological catastrophe that the world is currently facing has brought about a renewed interest in environmental sustainability and the need to develop an eco-cosmopolitan worldview that embraces diversity, interconnectivity, and a sense of global responsibility. Literature has the potential to create awareness and bring about change in society. Poetry, in particular, can express emotions and thoughts in a concise and powerful manner, making it a valuable tool for creating environmental awareness. This research paper aims to explore how the works of Rupi Kaur, a contemporary Canadian poet of Indian descent, contribute to engendering eco-cosmopolitanism and promote environmental sustainability through her ecological poems. Kaur's poetry is known for its feminist and social justice themes, but her work also addresses environmental concerns in a way that is relatable and accessible to a wide audience. This paper will analyze Kaur's poetry, focusing on how her use of language and imagery connects human experiences to environmental issues, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living things.

The paper will begin with a brief overview of eco-cosmopolitanism and its relevance in the Anthropocene. It will then introduce Rupi Kaur and her poetry and provide a context for her work within the larger framework of contemporary poetry. The paper will analyze selected poems from Kaur's poetry collections and examine the ways in which she uses poetic devices to articulate environmental concerns, such as climate change, pollution, and the destruction of natural habitats. Furthermore, the paper will explore how Kaur's poetry emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting the diversity of living beings and the interconnectedness of all life. The research paper will conclude by summarizing the main findings of the analysis and evaluating the significance of Rupi Kaur's poetry in engendering eco-cosmopolitanism and promoting environmental sustainability. This paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on eco-poetry and the role of literature in addressing environmental concerns, highlighting the potential of poetry as a tool for creating environmental awareness and inspiring action.

Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is a geological epoch that is defined by significant human impact on the Earth's natural systems, including climate change, deforestation, species extinction, and pollution. The term "Anthropocene" was first proposed by geologists in the early 2000s and has gained widespread acceptance in the scientific community. The Anthropocene is characterized by the scale and speed of human activity, which has surpassed the capacity of the planet to absorb and regenerate resources. The impact of human activity on the Earth's systems is so significant that it is considered to be the most profound and pervasive influence on the natural world in recent history. The concept of the Anthropocene emphasizes the need for global action to mitigate the environmental crisis and preserve the planet for future generations. The Anthropocene is an urgent call to action, a reminder that human activity has consequences, and that we must take responsibility for our impact on the Earth's systems. The rapid and unprecedented climate change that we are experiencing today is a direct result of anthropogenic activities, such as the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrialization. The concept of eco-cosmopolitanism provides a theoretical framework for understanding and addressing the challenges posed by the climate crisis and Anthropocene. In this paper, we will examine the ecological poems by Rupi Kaur through the lens of eco-cosmopolitanism, with a particular focus on the ecological crisis and Anthropocene.
II. RUPI KAUR

Rupi Kaur is an Indo-Canadian illustrator and a poet. She is born to a Sikh family in Punjab, India. Her father is a truck driver and they permanently settled in Canada. Kaur was at the age of four when his parents moved there. She drew her inspiration to draw and paint from her mother. She has published three poetry books, Milk and Honey (2014), The Sun and Her Flowers (2017), Home Body (2020) and Healing Through Poetry (2022). This second work has been much talked about for the concept of love, relationships and sexual trauma but it also depicts the roots of what it takes to be an immigrant lucidly which is often much underrated. Kaur is an sensational poet who has been acclaimed world wide after her collection of the poetry book, ‘Milk and Honey’ which sold more than two million copies worldwide. Kaur is the most recent and popular poet in South Asia who writes not to show off that she has a lot of publications in journals or to get included in the graduate level literature syllabus but she writes for the masses; to connect hearts with her simple language rather than being pompous and using jargons and garish language to impress people. One of the reasons why people read her work is for its simplicity. She is also called an ‘Instapoet’ as she derives her fame mainly from the social media platform-- Instagram, where she initially posted all her poems and instantly got famous. Her poetry has been read by millions world wide. Her poetry often deals with the concept of love, sexuality, feminism, immigration etc. She has recently published her fourth poetry book, Healing Through Poetry which is a best seller too just like her previous books.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ECO-COSMOPOLITANISM

Ursula K. Heise created the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism in her 2008 novel Sense of Place and Sense of Planet. It focuses on the globalisation of local ecological and cultural systems as well as the relationship between one's sense of place and the ideas of environmental fantasy, deterrioralization, and globalisation. It is a critique of how localism fails to adequately describe how people interact with the natural world, how they perceive their surroundings, and what should be done to protect the environment in the long run. It is important to consider “Indigenous traditions, local knowledge, or national law” in the context of the entire planet rather than thinking about environmental issues and one's position in the world through the lens of one's community. It can also be seen as a potential replacement for grassroots, regional groups that oppose globalisation. Heise contends that any workable solution must fundamentally take into consideration the fact that we are all inextricably linked in the modern era. The theory supports the notion that ecosystems do not exist as isolated systems but rather overlap because they experience similar, if not identical, issues on a global scale. Heise postulates that, because of this, people have a responsibility to all ecosystems, not just the one they are a part of.

The words "eco" and "cosmopolitan," which refer to thinking of people as individual citizens of the world rather than having obligations only within state boundaries, are the terms sources. Moraru, Christian in the article "Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global," says that by changing its name, Heise hopes to set her framework apart from previous criticisms of cosmopolitanism as being linked to "Western, elitist" methods of thinking (Moraru 179). The concepts of eco-cosmopolitanism can also be linked to general theories about traditional ecological knowledge, according to which local knowledge, myths, and expertise have always been methods of comprehending how universal systems operate. Senior (2014) discovered evidence that some traditional ecological knowledge is rooted in the idea that communities owe support to one another as well as a defence for life-sustaining systems beyond the local scale. This comes from studying a broad range of Indigenous knowledge (Lioi 2014).

IV. ANALYSIS

Rupi Kaur's poem "Blue and Green" can be analyzed through the theoretical framework of eco-cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings and ecosystems on the planet. She portrays the earth lamenting to the moon asking them to look at what human beings have done to the earth. And says, they’ve made me into a trash.

Now, all the green Earth has turned blue, indicating sadness. Eco-cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the violence and trauma that the Earth has experienced, suggesting that humans have been responsible for causing this harm. Through the lens of eco-cosmopolitanism, this poem can be seen as a call to action for humans to take responsibility for their impact on the environment. The interconnectedness of all living beings and ecosystems is emphasized through the personification of the Earth and the moon, highlighting the fact that humans are not separate from nature but are integral parts of it. The poem suggests that we need to recognize our interconnectedness with the environment and take steps to protect and preserve it, rather than causing further harm.

Overall, Rupi Kaur's poem "look at what they have done" highlights the urgent need for humans to take responsibility for their impact on the environment and emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and ecosystems. It encourages us to embrace a more eco-cosmopolitan worldview, one that recognizes the inherent value of all living things and seeks to create a more sustainable and just world for all.

look at what they have done
the earth cried to the moon
they’ve turned me into one entire bruise

"Green and blue," The Sun and Her Flowers (Kaur).

In another poem, she addresses to the earth, she talks about the Anthropogenic activities, which impacts the earth where humans and non-humans inhabit. The first line, "i'm sorry this world/could not keep you safe," suggests a sense of regret and mourning for the lack of safety and protection that the world offers. This can be interpreted as a reflection of the global environmental crisis, where the natural world is increasingly threatened by human activities such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation. The line can also be interpreted as a commentary on social injustice and inequality, where some individuals and communities are...
disproportionately affected by violence, poverty, and discrimination. The second line, "may your journey home," implies a belief in the cyclical and interconnected nature of life and death. The concept of home can be interpreted as a metaphor for the natural world, where all living beings are interconnected and share a common home. The line suggests that the deceased person is returning to this shared home, and implies a sense of respect and reverence for the natural world.

The third line, "be a soft and peaceful one," can be interpreted as a wish or a prayer for a gentle and peaceful transition to the afterlife. The use of the word "soft" suggests a desire for a painless and comfortable journey, while "peaceful" implies a sense of tranquility and harmony. This can be seen as a reflection of eco-cosmopolitanism's emphasis on compassion and respect for all living beings, including those who have passed away.

Overall, Rupi Kaur's poem can be interpreted as a meditation on the interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of compassion and respect for the natural world. It reflects the core values of eco-cosmopolitanism and highlights the need for global responsibility and action to protect the environment and its inhabitants.

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I'm sorry this world
Could not keep you safe
May your journey home
Be a soft and peaceful one
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"Rest in peace," *The Sun and Her Flowers* (Kaur).

In another poem called "rest in peace," she says that human beings have destroyed our mother earth for their profit and continence, but once it reaches its limit, the earth will be completely destroyed and there will come a point where human beings will not be able to survive on this earth. Then she asks, what’s use of this money, profit? All will be in vain. After all, one day, everyone has to leave this earth. Eco-cosmopolitanism emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life on earth and advocates for environmental sustainability through a global and inclusive perspective. Rupi Kaur's poem reflects this perspective by highlighting the destructive impact of human actions on the environment, and the urgent need for collective action to address these issues.

The first line of the poem, "we have ruined our only home," emphasizes the extent of the damage that human activities have caused to the planet. This line suggests that humans have been careless and irresponsible in their treatment of the earth, which is the only home that we have. The word "ruined" implies that the damage is severe and irreversible, which underscores the urgency of the situation. The second line of the poem, "for convenience and profit," identifies the motivations behind human actions that have caused the environmental degradation. This line suggests that humans prioritize their own convenience and financial gain over the well-being of the planet. This sentiment is echoed in the eco-cosmopolitan perspective, which emphasizes the need for a global shift in values and priorities to prioritize the long-term sustainability of the planet. The third and fourth lines of the poem, "neither of which will be useful once the earth can't breathe," further emphasizes the short-sightedness of prioritizing convenience and profit over the health of the planet. These lines suggest that the pursuit of short-term gains will ultimately be meaningless if the planet is no longer able to sustain human life. This sentiment is consistent with the eco-cosmopolitan perspective, which emphasizes the importance of taking a long-term and global perspective on environmental sustainability.

Overall, Rupi Kaur's poem reflects the eco-cosmopolitan perspective by highlighting the interconnectedness of all life on earth and the urgent need for collective action to address environmental degradation. By emphasizing the short-sightedness of prioritizing convenience and profit over the health of the planet, the poem underscores the need for a fundamental shift in values and priorities to prioritize the long-term sustainability of the planet.

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We have ruined
Our only home for
Convenience and profit
Neither of which will be useful once the earth
Can't breathe
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- *Home Body* (Kaur 102).

By analysing the following poem by Rupi Kaur using the theoretical framework of eco-cosmopolitanism, which advocates for the recognition and protection of the interdependence of all living and non-living beings on earth. The poem starts by emphasizing the fallacy of human superiority, as being the loudest on the earth's playground doesn't make humans any more important than the dirt they crush beneath their feet. This highlights the importance of humility and recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings, including non-human ones. The next lines, "we are nothing except air and fire and water and soil," further emphasize the interdependence of humans and the natural world. These elements are not just essential for human survival but are also fundamental building blocks of the earth's ecosystem. The poem then challenges the idea of human exceptionalism, highlighting how humans often forget what they are made of and take the natural world for granted. The lines "a people who talk about the weather as if it's mundane and not magic, as if the oceans are not holy water, as if the sky is not a vision" point towards the idea of humans' disconnect from nature, which is the foundation of eco-cosmopolitanism. The poem also draws attention to the importance of recognizing the sentience and inherent value of non-human beings, including animals and nature itself. The line "as if the animals are not our siblings" evokes a sense of kinship with non-human beings, which is a crucial aspect of eco-cosmopolitanism. The final lines of the poem "and rain is not god's tears and we are not god's children, as if god is not the earth itself" reinforce the idea that humans are not separate from nature, but rather a part of it. This idea is central to eco-cosmopolitanism, which posits that all beings on earth are interconnected and that human well-being is dependent on the well-being of the natural world. Overall, in this poem, Rupi Kaur highlights the importance of eco-cosmopolitanism and challenges the idea of human superiority and dominance over the natural world. The poem emphasizes the need for humility and recognition of the interdependence of all beings, including non-human ones, in order to ensure a sustainable and just future for all.

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Being the loudest on earth's playground
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as if the oceans
are not holy water
as if the sky
is not a vision
as if the animals
are not our siblings
as if nature is not god
and rain is not god's tears
and we are not god's children
as if god is not the earth itself.
- Home Body (Kaur 103).

V. CONCLUSION
Rupi Kaur's environmental poems demonstrate her commitment to eco-cosmopolitanism, as she explores the relationships between humans and the natural world. Through her poetry, Kaur highlights the negative impacts of human actions on the environment and the importance of acknowledging the interconnectedness of human and non-human life. Her work reminds us of the need to take responsibility for our actions and work towards a more sustainable and equitable relationship with the environment. Overall, Kaur's environmental poetry offers a compelling perspective on the importance of eco-cosmopolitanism in our contemporary world.

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