

Entangled Identities: A Posthumanist Reading of *How I Became a Tree* by Sumana Roy

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Due to our unique capacity for reasoning, humans perceive themselves as sovereigns in the ecosystem. This is the belief that humans are the most important entities in the universe. Humans have taken on a custodial or master role over ecosystems due to their capacity for reasoning, planning, and environmental manipulation. The birth of environmental literature, particularly as a response to this worldview, is largely attributed to the anthropocentric conviction in human sovereignty over nature. However, Environmental literature, designed to arouse a critical sense of the relationship between human and the non-human world, critiques the anthropocentric viewpoint which prioritizes human beings over everything. It is developed to challenge anthropocentrism and undermine human sovereignty. Environmental literature or Eco literature is ever evolving because of its interdisciplinarity. Many regions of the world, including Asia, South America, and other developing nations, experience deforestation, land grabbing and contamination. This is based on how businesses and the government interact. Such heinous practices lay a path of environmental degradation, human impact on nature and the continual exploitation of the living nature to generate maximum profit. It critiques the long-established human dominance on nature which is the key aspect of anthropocentric literature. The Anthropocene raises several questions about the future of earth and humanity. At this juncture, posthumanist literature comes to redefine what it means to be human by highlighting the influence of other living and non-living entities on human existence. The recent explorations of posthuman theory have emerged as a direct response to the political, societal and ecological crises which affect the entire world. The dominant anthropocentric elucidation of human beings are deconstructed by posthumanist thought. According to humanism, human beings are always exceptional as they have distinguishing quality from animals and other non-human entities.

With the emergence of posthumanist culture, there is a sharp need for a paradigm change that could substitute a non-anthropocentric set of ideologies for the humanist way of thinking. It is evidently incorrect to promote Man as the single unitary autonomous model of human identification. Human exceptionalism begins to erode with posthumanism, which also promotes a more dispassionate evaluation of the relational, discursive, and performative aspects of power. Wider perspectives on the cosmos are made possible by challenging anthropocentric orthodoxies. As a new field in the twenty-first century, posthumanism offers a critical analysis of the traditional interpretations of humanist principles. It proposes an all-encompassing framework that includes both living and non-living beings, as well as nonhuman and human beings.

The exploration of entangled identities in Sumana Roy's *How I Became a Tree* lays the groundwork for a nuanced understanding of the posthumanist perspective, which seeks to transcend the traditional binary between humanity and nature. By blurring the boundaries

between selfhood and ecological existence, Roy invites readers to reconsider their embeddedness within the natural world, positing that our identities are not merely individualistic but are intricately woven into the lives of nonhuman entities, particularly trees. Roy's narrative illustrates this symbiotic relationship, wherein the experiences of trees are not only depicted but are positioned as vital components of her own identity. This interconnectedness challenges prevalent anthropocentric views that prioritize human experience over nonhuman existence, suggesting instead a more relational approach to understanding identity that is resonant with posthumanist ideals (Gnanambigai, 2022).

Central to the posthumanist discourse is the idea that the human experience must be reconsidered in light of ecological realities. Roy's narrative operates effectively within this framework, as it embodies a shift from human exceptionalism to an acknowledgment of the agency and subjectivity present in nonhuman life. Roy's articulation of her bond with trees illuminates how ecological existence can encompass and inform personal identity. This shift in perspective not only resonates with contemporary ecological criticism but also poses a significant challenge to entrenched notions of selfhood. As evidenced by Banga (2024), the movement towards decolonizing narratives within literature encourages a deeper interrogation of our relational ties with nonhuman entities. Such a decolonial turn suggests that by realigning our understanding of identity through symbiotic narratives, we can confront and dismantle the hierarchical structures that have historically marginalized both nature and non-Western modes of being.

In *How I Became a Tree* the act of assuming an arboreal identity serves as a metaphor for the reconciliation between the self and the wider ecological web. This is strikingly conveyed through Roy's lyrical prose, where her introspective journey reveals how aspects of her human experience are rooted in the natural world. The trees in her narrative become conduits for exploring themes of identity, belonging, and existence, allowing for a richer discourse on selfhood that accommodates more than just human life. Through this lens, the act of becoming a tree is emblematic of a broader epistemological shift, where the boundaries of identity are expanded to include nonhuman perspectives and experiences.

Moreover, this interplay between human and nonhuman identities fosters a profound sense of responsibility towards the ecological fabric that sustains us. It prompts a critical evaluation of how societal constructs of individuality often neglect the interconnectedness inherent in our relationships with the environment. By embracing a posthumanist approach, Roy's narrative not only illuminates the complexities of identity formation but also urges a reorientation of our value systems regarding nature.

In summation, Roy's portrayal of entangled identities fundamentally alters our conceptualization of selfhood, urging a reconciliation with the nonhuman world. The text serves as a compelling

testament to the need for refreshed discourse surrounding identity and ecology, one that recognizes the inherent interconnectedness of all living beings. Through her innovative narrative techniques and thematic concerns, Roy contributes significantly to the ongoing dialogue within posthumanist scholarship, advocating for a relational understanding of identity that is deeply rooted in ecological awareness. In Sumana Roy's *How I Became a Tree*, the narrative intricately weaves personal interconnectedness with ecological empathy, profoundly illustrating the relationship between human emotions and the natural world. This connection signals a departure from traditional perspectives that view nature predominantly as a resource, advocating instead for a conception of trees as sentient beings replete with emotional resonance. The anthropomorphism of trees serves not merely as literary device; it constructs a relational bridge that facilitates a deeper understanding of both human and arboreal experiences. Gnanambigai (2022) highlights this intersection through the lens of chremamorphized humans, suggesting that the emotional landscapes occupied by the protagonist can foster a sympathetic bond with trees, fostering a shared experience of vulnerability and resilience.

Central to Roy's narrative is the portrayal of trees as entities that mirror human sentiments. The protagonist's affinity for trees encapsulates the need for individuals to cultivate an environment-centric identity that champions interconnectedness with nature (Eruysal, 2025). This perspective emphasizes that selfhood extends beyond the confines of human identity, integrating the lived experiences of non-human entities. By emphasizing qualities such as resilience and fragility that trees exhibit in the face of external pressures, Roy provides a poignant commentary on the struggles of both human and non-human life forms in navigating their respective environments.

This empathetic stance represents a crucial intervention in contemporary discourse surrounding posthumanism, which seeks to deconstruct anthropocentric paradigms by including the agency and experiences of non-human entities. The protagonist's solace in the company of trees not only emphasizes their sentience but also posits a re-evaluation of identity through an ecological lens. This is particularly significant when considering that the protagonist's introspection often parallels the rhythms and life cycles of the trees they cherish, underscoring a

fundamental interconnectedness that challenges traditional Cartesian divides between human and nature.

Further supporting this notion, Nitzke (2025) discusses the implications of cultivating an environment-centric identity, suggesting that such an identity fosters not merely a sense of belonging but a broader awareness of ecological interdependence. In Roy's work, the evolving relationship between the protagonist and trees encourages readers to reconsider their own roles within ecological systems and to acknowledge the intrinsic value of non-human life. Rather than existing merely as passive backgrounds for human activity, trees are depicted as active participants in the narratives of life, thereby enriching the protagonist's perception of selfhood and connection to the world.

Through her lyrical and poignant prose, Roy effectively articulates the complexities of personal identity entangled with ecological consciousness. By immersing readers in a narrative that blurs the boundaries between human and tree, she advocates for a paradigm shift that recognizes the ethical imperative of empathy toward non-human entities. This synthesis of personal narratives and ecological awareness calls for a transformative understanding of selfhood that aligns with posthumanist philosophies, thus fostering a collective responsibility towards nature. Roy's exploration of these themes ultimately contributes to a vital discourse on identity, community, and the shared vulnerabilities of all beings within the ecological tapestry of existence. In navigating the complex interplay between selfhood and nature, Sumana Roy's *How I Became a Tree* adopts a distinctive stylistic approach that significantly enriches the narrative landscape. The work engages readers' sensory perceptions, allowing them to experience the protagonist's metamorphosis into a tree viscerally. Adami (2024) emphasizes the evocative sensory depictions embedded in Roy's prose, asserting that these stylistic choices effectively dismantle traditional hierarchies of human supremacy. By immersing readers in the tactile and emotional landscapes of nature, Roy fosters a sense of interconnectedness between the self and the ecosystem, thereby challenging anthropocentric perspectives that often dominate environmental discourse.

The protagonist's journey towards embodying a tree becomes a metaphor for exploring the entangled identities that emerge from establishing connections between human beings and their environment. These identities are not merely individualistic; they are deeply rooted in communal experiences and shared ecological fate. Karmakar (2025) notes that as the protagonist learns to inhabit her new form, the narrative presents a platform for examining the fluidity of identity shaped by ecological relationships. Here, we see a rich interplay among personal identity, collective responsibility, and a renewed concept of kinship that extends beyond humans to include non-human entities. The protagonist's transformation symbolizes an awakening to the profound interdependency that exists among all living things, fostering a sense of collective belonging that transcends individual self-conceptions.

Further complicating the narrative tapestry is the notion of 'holding spaces' introduced by Hunter (2024), wherein tree spaces are defined as environments that facilitate interspecies interactions and foster relationality among diverse entities. This concept enhances our understanding of the relational dynamics at play in Roy's text, suggesting that the protagonist's melding with the tree is not merely an act of becoming but rather an act of 'being with'—a communion that recognizes and values the agency of non-human life. The sensory experiences navigated by the protagonist serve as catalysts for redefining selfhood, wherein individual identity begins to assimilate the rhythms and essences of the natural world.

Moreover, the narrative challenges readers to confront the implications of ecological neglect and exploitation, thus addressing broader themes of environmental activism that align with this entangled identity formation. Roy's stylistic richness encourages a reconsideration of the urgent need for re-establishing connections with the natural world. As the protagonist loses herself in the embodied experience of being a tree, the text speaks to the possibility of eco-centric identities that are integrative rather than fragmented. It urges a shift in perspective toward a collective ethos that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world.

In summary, the sensory, experiential dimensions of Roy's narrative weave a complex tapestry that reveals the entanglement of identities in the context of posthumanism. The protagonist's transformation—an enactment of kin-making—is not only a personal evolution but also a symbolic gesture that invites readers to reflect on their interconnectedness with the ecological systems surrounding them. This multidimensional interplay between selfhood and ecological responsibility underscores the urgent need for a redefined understanding of identity that embraces the non-human and celebrates the interconnected web of life in which we all reside. The entangled identities presented in Sumana Roy's *How I Became a Tree* facilitate a profound exploration of selfhood through the lens of posthumanism, inviting a reevaluation of the relationships between human and non-human entities. The text serves as a narrative apparatus through which Roy articulates the complexity of identities that are not strictly human but rather situated within a matrix of ecological and communal existence. This approach foregrounds the argument that selfhood, as traditionally conceived within human-centric frameworks, must be reconsidered in the context of broader ecological entanglements.

Roy's portrayal of her longing to become a tree evokes a sense of transformation that challenges anthropocentric boundaries and emphasizes an ecological consciousness that sees human identity as inextricably linked to the natural world. By invoking notions of symbiosis and interdependence, the narrative illustrates a move towards understanding identity as plural, fluid, and inclusive of non-human perspectives. The protagonist's desire to

embody a tree suggests a deeper yearning for ecological kinship, wherein personal identity becomes aligned with the essence of nature. This blurring of identities compels readers to situate human narratives within the ecological realm, compelling a consideration of the ethical implications of our relationships with the non-human.

In examining this entanglement, it is crucial to engage with Srinivasan's (2022) analysis of postcolonial narratives in the Anthropocene, which advocates for an acknowledgment of diverse voices that resonate within environmental discourses. Roy's narrative aligns with Srinivasan's call by incorporating elements that reflect the nuanced experiences of individuals whose identities are shaped by environmental degradation and climate crises. This focus highlights the importance of narratives that arise from marginalized perspectives, allowing for a richer understanding of ecological interconnectedness.

Furthermore, aligning with Ashwinkumar's (2025) discourse on multiplicity in eco-civilizational thought, Roy's work foregrounds the understanding of identity as inherently relational. Rather than existing in isolation, identities are enacted through the interactions between human and non-human actors. This multiplicity challenges conventional notions of singularity in selfhood, particularly in a posthuman context, where identity is not fixed but rather fluid and dynamic, defined by interactions with the biophysical world.

Moreover, *How I Became a Tree* reframes the act of becoming—an open-ended engagement with existence that privileges relationality over individualism. This reflects a shift towards recognizing the agency of non-human entities, advocating for a perspective in which trees, animals, and landscapes are seen as active participants in the narrative of identity formation. By embodying a tree, the protagonist engages in a reclamation of self that dissolves hierarchical distinctions between human and non-human, facilitating a reimagining of ecological identity that is deeply interwoven with humanity.

In sum, Roy's exploration of entangled identities within *How I Became a Tree* serves as a compelling commentary on the necessity of recognizing the complex interplay between selfhood and ecological existence. These narrative challenges readers to confront their positions within these intricate relationships, emphasizing that a true understanding of identity in the contemporary era must incorporate ecological perspectives. In doing so, Roy not only illuminates the profound intricacies of being but also advocates for embracing the collective vibrancy of life that transcends traditional boundaries of what it means to be human.

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