

BOOK REVIEW

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Environmental Ethics, Cross-Species Empathy, and Cultural Symbolism: A Review of *The Adventures of Rocksa*

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Mitra, Amrita. *The Adventures of Rocksa*. Vidya Publishing, 2025, pp. 121, ₹150, ISBN 978-1-998475-94-0.

The Adventures of Rocksa (2025) occupies a significant place within contemporary Indian children's ecofiction. In this book, Amrita Mitra presents a narrative that unites ecological learning, mythic symbolism, and adventures in childhood. The novel follows a young boy who survives a tsunami and finds a new life within a multispecies world, where turtles, birds, monkeys, dolphins, and other creatures shape his understanding of care, danger, and interdependence. Through these relationships, the book introduces young readers to the idea that ecological life depends on cooperation and shared responsibility. Its interplay of environmental themes, cultural motifs, and moral questions speaks to ongoing work in children's literature and environmental humanities.

The Adventures of Rocksa introduces ecological concepts in ways that remain closely connected to the movement of the story. When the

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mother turtle speaks and says “We should all help him” (Mitra 24), Rocksā enters a world in which interdependence forms the basis of all life. The narrative teaches ecological principles through concrete experience rather than through explicit explanation. Rocksā learns about turtle nesting through direct observation of buried eggs, the presence of predators, and the vulnerability of hatchlings. He also learns how predators are real threats. This provides an accessible introduction to food chains and species survival. The book returns to similar environmental rhythms throughout the narrative. These include tidal cycles that trap dolphins, storms that disturb marine life, nocturnal hunting in the forest, and the constantly changing conditions of rock pools. Rocksā’s empathy across sea, forest, and shore becomes the emotional centre of the book’s ecological message. He rescues a baby dolphin who pleads, “Please someone help me!” (82). He protects turtle hatchlings from eagles. He also saves a rabbit from Mahiraj. These acts show that his instinct to protect the vulnerable expresses an environmental ethic rooted in care rather than control. The narrative, therefore, presents ecological consciousness not as technical knowledge but as a lived relationship shaped by attention, compassion, and responsibility.

The integration of Indian mythology and folklore into the ecological world is an important aspect of the book. The Shiva temple, situated deep within the forest, adds a cultural and spiritual dimension to Rocksā’s environment. The carvings of the Dashavatar, the sound of the bells, and the priest’s rituals place the natural surroundings within a culturally resonant landscape. The narrative frequently blurs the boundary between myth and reality. When pearls and gems fall from Rocksā’s shell, the priest exclaims, “Oh my Lord! You appear again!” and mistakes Rocksā for the Kurma Avatar (92). This moment, although humorous, shows how natural events may take on symbolic meaning within a cultural framework. The priest’s belief that the gems are divine offerings illustrates a process of interpretation that enriches the narrative while allowing the ecological concerns to remain clear and central. The mythic scope of the story becomes more pronounced in the portrayal of Mahiraj, the two-headed serpent whose “Mani diamond” illuminates the forest at night (72–73). The history of Mahiraj, which involves fire, conflict, and a lingering curse, resembles oral folklore that has become part of

the ecological world in the book. Rocksa's confrontation with Mahiraj, which ends with his use of Shiva's trishul (120), reinforces the symbolic link between ecological protection and mythic responsibility. The novel does not reduce mythology to a simple allegory. Instead, it presents myth and environment as coexisting forces that shape how humans and animals understand the world. Through this approach, *The Adventures of Rocksa* creates a culturally grounded ecological imagination that encourages children to see nature as both a physical environment and a space of story, spirit, and memory.

Rocksa's emergence as an eco-hero is noteworthy. The book traces his growth from a frightened child washed ashore to a figure who can defend entire communities across diverse ecosystems. His agency develops gradually and is shaped by experience, empathy, and increasing moral clarity. The early moments of heroism, such as saving turtle hatchlings from an eagle, establish courage as a relational quality that arises from care for others. Later rescues, including nursing an injured monkey with sweet mango juice (68) or comforting the stranded dolphin, further demonstrate that his bravery is closely connected to acts of compassion. His strategic thinking becomes most evident when he infiltrates Mr Rao's boat and begins pushing turtles through the window into the sea (98). This scene presents Rocksa not only as a brave figure but also as a thoughtful and resourceful leader who can coordinate action across different species. The climax of his heroism occurs in the temple when he confronts Mahiraj in order to protect the priest and Lata. Even in this moment of extreme danger, Rocksa acts from a sense of responsibility rather than aggression. After defeating Mahiraj with the trishul, he refuses to kill her. He instructs her to return to the ocean and to avoid harming weaker creatures (120). This moment shows a sophisticated understanding of justice that is restorative rather than punitive and is consistent with the ecological ethics presented in the book. The novel portrays heroism as a form of care that is grounded in relationships. This approach shows a strong alternative to the conquest-driven models that often dominate adventure fiction. It also situates child agency within a broad network of interspecies bonds and highlights cooperation, empathy, and moral resilience as central qualities of the eco-heroic ideal.

Human intrusion emerges as the major source of ecological disruption in the fiction. While natural predators such as eagles, snakes, and octopuses act from instinct, human actors, particularly Mr Rao and his men, operate from motives of greed and exploitation. Their plans to capture turtles for illegal trade and to kidnap Rocksas for profit show how economic desire can damage ecosystems. The animals recognise this danger with clarity, as seen in the warning “Toot...Toot...Toot,... they are our enemies” (52). The contrast between animal cooperation and human exploitation is intentionally sharp. Mr Rao’s actions repeatedly disturb ecological balance, whether he is capturing turtles, pursuing Rocksas, or moving through the sea without regard for the environment. The theft of gems by his workers, taken secretly from Rocksas’s earlier discoveries, further reveals the multiple forms that human greed can take. The narrative does not portray humans as entirely beyond redemption. Mr Rao’s transformation after he witnesses Rocksas’s bravery is an important moment. His expression of shame and his realisation that he cannot catch the turtle-boy again suggest that human characters are capable of moral change when they confront ecological and ethical truth. This treatment prevents the story from falling into simplistic oppositions between good animals and bad humans. It also allows space for the idea of reconciliation.

The formation of alternative communities based on cross-species kinship is significant in the book. From the moment Rocksas receives his name from the animals, he begins to enter a world in which belonging is defined not by biological ties but by mutual care and collective responsibility. The turtles become his first family and offer him guidance and affection. Birds warn him of danger and assist him when he searches for lost companions. Squirrels play with him and hide him from human intruders. Monkeys welcome him into their forest activities, and dolphins later repay his earlier act of compassion by rescuing him. These relationships show that community in this novel is presented as an ecosystemic concept. Species share space not only in physical terms but also in emotional terms, and they shape one another’s chances of survival. Rocksas’s identity as “turtle-boy” symbolises this hybrid sense of belonging and challenges anthropocentric ideas about family, home, and care. The celebratory scenes at the end, where “birds, squirrels, rabbits, and monkeys”

gather around Rocksá (121), present a utopian image of interspecies harmony. Although this vision is idealised, it serves an important pedagogical purpose. It introduces young readers to the emotional possibilities of ecological solidarity in a manner that is both imaginative and accessible.

The strengths of *The Adventures of Rocksá* lie in its thematic richness, its ability to combine ecological and mythic storytelling, and its emotionally compelling portrayal of a child hero shaped by empathy. The accessible language and episodic structure make the fiction suitable for young readers, and the symbolic and cultural dimensions offer material that supports deeper academic analysis. The ecological pedagogy of the book is effective because it is grounded in lived experience rather than formal instruction. Rocksá learns through feeling, responding, acting, and making mistakes. This experiential approach represents current theories of child-centred eco-literature that emphasise relational forms of learning and the development of environmental understanding through emotional and ethical engagement.

Placed within the wider field of Indian children's ecofiction, *The Adventures of Rocksá* fits into a growing body of writing that introduces young readers to ecological vulnerability, multispecies kinship, and environmental responsibility. Authors such as Lavanya Karthik (2018) and Venita Coelho (2017) also use animal perspectives, environmental crises, and child protagonists to build ecological awareness; however, *Rocksá* stands apart through its use of mythic symbolism within an intertidal landscape. In a global context, the novel participates in the eco-hero tradition seen in Piers Torday's *The Last Wild* (2013) and in the juvenile fiction of Carl Hiaasen (2002), where children act as ethical agents who resist ecological harm. Mitra's narrative is distinctive because it presents care-based rather than conquest-based heroism, a model that resonates with Donna Haraway's (2016) idea of multispecies thinking, Affrica Taylor's (2013) concept of common worlds and kin-making, and recent scholarship in childhood ecocriticism that stresses relational learning and embodied encounters with the more-than-human world. Through these connections, *The Adventures of Rocksá* can be read not only as a standalone ecological narrative but also as a meaningful contribution

to the wider field of children's eco-literature that seeks to redefine how young readers understand agency, ethics, and environmental belonging.

The Adventures of Rocksa presents an optimistic model of ecological storytelling for young readers. Through its combination of environmental learning, mythological resonance, and adventure, the fiction imagines a world in which interspecies solidarity forms the basis of ethical action. As previously noted, Rocksa's development from a vulnerable child to an empathetic protector illustrates a form of eco-heroism that is grounded in care rather than conquest. The book encourages readers to understand the natural world as a network of relationships and contributes in a meaningful way to contemporary children's eco-literature. Although the narrative contains occasional simplifications, its central message remains strong. Environmental responsibility appears as a shared and collective practice that depends on courage, empathy, and a deep sense of belonging within the more-than-human world.

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